

# Mobility and Transport



## **Help the Aged Policy Statement 2007**

## Summary

### **‘Now that the local bus service is free, why aren’t the buses full of pensioners?’**

Although the Government now offers free local bus travel to people of pensionable age, and has plans to extend this to free national bus travel from April 2008, there are still many barriers preventing older people from using transport and getting out and about.

The current review of government policy on buses seeks to reverse the decline in use outside London and increase the use of public transport by more than 12 per cent by 2010. However, unless public transport becomes safer, more accessible and more reliable, it is unlikely that this target will be achieved and current figures actually confirm that use of public transport has in some areas been decreasing (Department for Transport *Public Transport Bulletin: Great Britain, 2006* edition).

Transport has a fundamental impact on older people’s lives. It is a lifeline to friends and family as well as to local amenities and services. Statistics show that transport is vital in helping older people to stay active and independent.

*‘Let’s face it, you wouldn’t go out, you’d just stay in if you didn’t have one [Freedom pass].’*

(woman, Tulse Hill)

Currently 12 per cent of older people feel trapped in their own home, with 13 per cent of older people not going out more than once a week and 3 per cent never venturing out. Older people face indirect discrimination in the design and delivery of public transport, as well as the financial and cultural barriers to access. It is vital to explore to what extent the needs of older people are being considered in local transport planning as well as the barriers that prevent them from using buses more, or even at all.

## Background

Free national bus travel for older people will be an important step forward in making public transport accessible to older people. The Concessionary Bus Travel Bill will extend the current legislation and enable the implementation of a statutory minimum

concession of free off-peak travel for pensioners and disabled people on local buses anywhere in England from April 2008. Under the current system older people and other qualifying groups are entitled to free bus travel, but only in their local area.

Help the Aged recently published *Local Bus Travel and Transport Concessions (2007)*, which sets out how public transport and travel concessions are perceived by older people, particularly those with mobility problems and those who rely solely on public transport. Notably, the report highlights how older respondents welcome proposals for a nationwide scheme for travel concessions to be introduced in 2008, but that they also strongly favour choices being offered by way of tokens for use on taxis, community transport and other alternatives to bus travel to meet their differing needs.

For many, even free bus services are of little or no use because they find it difficult, if not impossible, to use public transport. Yet the survey reaffirms what previous surveys have stated: that there are some key perceived barriers to greater use of public transport by older actual and potential passengers. Punctuality and reliability are vital but so are a range of other factors, such as bus drivers’ behaviour, information, comfort and safety.

## Issues and evidence

### **Take-up of concessionary fares**

The Help the Aged report *Fair Fares (2003)* made the case for a national system of concessionary fares and we are delighted that the Government has taken this on. However, the report also highlights the need to improve, as a matter of urgency, the levels of take-up of senior citizen travel concessions, with particular attention to disadvantaged and ethnic minority groups.

The fact that there remains a low take-up of concessions in some areas and for some groups is a major problem. Some older car drivers do not need public transport, and some older people feel that they are not up to using it. But many others, including many ethnic minority elders, are unaware of their entitlements. Despite energetic take-up



Rebecca Flounders

work by some local councils, there is still a long way to go. The Department for Transport has published statistics showing that only 77 per cent of respondents aged 60 or over said they knew what concessionary fare schemes were available in their local area (Department for Transport *Public Transport Bulletin: Great Britain, 2006* edition). Central and local government should work together to ensure all older people use and benefit from concessionary fares.

A national scheme would merit national promotion, which could help raise awareness.

### **Flexible travel**

Of course, the solution is not just about free travel. If the Government's strategy is to succeed we need a transport system for older people which is safe, accessible, reliable and affordable, as proposed in a report (SARA, 1998) published early on in Help the Aged transport campaigning. The report showed how lack of these qualities creates barriers to the use of public transport by older people.

While there has been some progress in the intervening years, older people continue to

complain that local transport services fail to meet their needs. The latest *Spotlight on Older People* report, to be published in May 2007, shows that of those respondents who agreed that their life is not as full as they would like it to be, one in five said that better public transport would help them be more active.

There is a call for widespread recognition of the diversity of need and a great deal of support for choice in provision of travel concessions. Respondents to our survey in Portsmouth (*Local Bus Service and Travel Concessions*) were adamant that tokens should remain, even when free bus passes were introduced. The evidence from this survey points to the need for additional funding for alternative forms of travel concession for use on taxis, community transport and dial-a-ride schemes, especially for those who cannot physically use local buses.

There is a risk that insisting in statute on free bus passes will impact on the flexible provision provided by local authorities. In many local authorities concessionary fares are available in a more flexible form, with the extra cost borne by

local taxation. The Concessionary Bus Travel Bill will not do anything to remove this postcode lottery or to provide the same high standard of flexible concessions for all.

In 2006, the Social Exclusion Unit report *A Sure Start to Later Life* reinforced the need for flexibility in the provision of transport services for older people. It found that 'older people have told us clearly that they value flexible, individualised transport services which can allow them to retain their independence within their local community'. In the report, problems accessing transport came out as an underpinning factor that contributed to every type of isolation of older people.

At present any 'enhancements' to the basic free off-peak local bus schemes, such as tokens which can be used for taxis, trains or community transport have to be paid for by local councils. Evidence from a study that Help the Aged undertook in Portsmouth (*Local Bus Service and Travel Concessions*) suggests that for a large minority of older people such a scheme meets their needs more effectively than a simple bus pass. Help the Aged wants local authorities to offer alternative concessions (e.g. tokens for taxis) for those who cannot use or do not have access to buses. At the least, the Department for Transport should be providing guidance for local authorities on how to offer a flexible system of concessionary fares.

### **Barriers to bus use**

Many older people face barriers that prevent them from using bus services, particularly those registered disabled or with limited mobility. Thirty-seven per cent of people in Great Britain aged 65–74 and 47 per cent of those aged 75+ have a limiting long-standing illness. Research has shown that the numbers of trips taken by people in Great Britain, by any means, declines with age. *Local Bus Service and Travel Concessions* identified the following reasons for older people avoiding bus use:

- difficulty in carrying shopping on and off the bus
- difficulty getting to, and waiting at, bus stops in bad weather
- unreliability of service

- difficulty in getting to/from bus stops serving home or destination
- anxiety over anti-social behaviour
- difficulty in getting to a seat before the bus moves off
- buses run at inconvenient times, or infrequently
- timetables difficult to read.

Some barriers resulted from personal health circumstances. However, other barriers could be overcome by low-cost, easily implemented measures, such as bus drivers ensuring that passengers have sat down before moving off, and providing shelter at all bus stops. Bringing back bus conductors may not be feasible, but given that many older people say that fear of crime greatly affects their quality of life, perhaps bus staff could supervise selected routes at certain times to help and reassure.

Seven per cent of over-60s report 'great' fear of crime affecting their lives, compared to 3 per cent of those aged 16–29. Sixty-four per cent of women and 32 per cent of men aged 60+ say they never walk alone at night in their local area owing to their fear of crime, which is a statistic that needs to be considered when planning the location of bus stops. Many older people feel that better lighting should be provided at all bus stops and stations, and that all bus stops and stations should provide adequate shelter. Any review of bus routes and timetables should pay close attention to the residential location as well as the problems. All bus stops and stations should have live information on waiting times as well as up-to-date timetables that are easy to read and at an adequate height for older people with disabilities and wheelchair users.

Help the Aged is also extremely concerned that the Government's Bill restricts itself to providing free travel on buses alone. Bus passes are of no use in areas where there are no or poor bus services.

### **Planning of local transport services and communities**

The Help the Aged report *In the Right Place* (2005) details a series of recommendations and key issues to be considered by local authorities as they

develop their local transport accessibility plans. If we want older people to be active citizens within thriving communities we need to ensure that the communities themselves are delivering the right services in the right places.

There is an obvious need for consultation and constant engagement with older people, particularly those who have mobility impairments. Their needs should be given due weight in public transport services and concession arrangements and not sidelined as a small disability problem. An example of this is the difficulty older people experience in reaching the nearest hospital. Thirty-one per cent of people without a car have difficulty travelling to their local hospital, compared to 17 per cent with a car.

More than half of older people travelling to hospitals and dentists in London experience difficulties in getting there, as do a third of those attending GP surgeries or health centres (Department of Health, *Accessibility Planning*, 2004). Following on from this, there is a need for more research and rural coverage through surveys. A transport survey should be completed for each village or parish to provide evidence of the transport needs of older residents.

Our follow-up report to *In the Right Place*, entitled *Travel Access and Older People* (2006), examined a random selection of local transport plans in order to find out how well the recommendations of the initial report had been implemented and to what extent the needs of older people are being met. We found that although much has been done, there is still much to do. The importance of accessibility, particularly with regard to key services, has been widely noted. Local authorities are keen to demonstrate their recognition of the main problems, recognising the importance of public consultation and the need to bring about improvement in certain key areas. However, a lack of real action often lies behind the fine words.

While key services such as healthcare centres and food shops are being factored into local transport planning, equally critical destinations such as post offices and banks are being largely ignored.

Between 1986 and 1997 the number of out-of-town shopping centres increased four-fold. In 2002–3 86 per cent of people lived within a 6-minute walk of a bus-stop, down 1 per cent from 1998–2000. In metropolitan built-up areas this figure was 90 per cent, while for rural areas it was 74 per cent. (*Public Transport Statistics Bulletin: Great Britain*, 2004)

The 2006 *Help the Aged* report revealed that of 31 local councils surveyed, only 10 had actually made any effort to speak to older people or their representatives when designing a local transport plan.

### **Restriction to off-peak travel**

The Bill going through Parliament provides only for a mandatory free local off-peak bus pass. Restricting concessions to off-peak times prevents older people from travelling to an early medical appointment, morning adult education courses, or leisure activities with an early start time. While the Government's Bill will remove the barrier for older people travelling to a hospital appointment on the far side of a county/district boundary, the failure to remove the peak-time restriction for all means that older people who need to be at hospital for early appointments may still be forced to pay.

### **Disability Living Allowance**

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) is a non-means-tested benefit for disabled people with care or mobility needs. People who become disabled and claim DLA before their 65th birthday can continue to receive it after the age of 65. However, people whose disability arises at or after the age of 65 (or who do not claim help until after 65) can only claim the much more limited Attendance Allowance (AA). There is no mobility component to AA, which means that those aged 65 and over cannot receive help with mobility costs. For these people, a free bus pass is of no use whatsoever.

*'I have difficulty with my legs but because I'm 66 years old I'm too old for the Disability Living Allowance. But I still have the desire to live life to the full and I still want to be able to go out and about to enjoy the countryside. I'm told I'm not allowed a vehicle to make life easier. I could get a motorised scooter, but this isn't*

*practical for getting to the shops when I live about 8 miles from the closest grocery store.'*

## Transport safety

Road safety initiatives tend to focus on young people, yet statistics show that 45 per cent of pedestrians in the United Kingdom who were killed on the roads were over 60 years of age. In 2001, of 826 pedestrian fatalities on the road, 330 (40 per cent) were people aged 60 and over. Every year some 9,000 pensioners are killed or badly injured by motor vehicles.

## Car drivers

The Department for Transport published statistics that showed that 69 per cent of people aged 65+ do not have a car (DfT Transport Survey 2005). Other research shows that only 12 per cent of the poorest single-pensioner households and 54 per cent of the poorest pensioner couples own a car, compared to the national average of 71 per cent of households. Seventy-five per cent of single people and 28 per cent of couples over the age of 65 do not have a car (ONS Online, 2004).

Significantly, those older people who own or have access to a car travel twice as far as those who do not. When considering their future situation as 75-year-olds, two factors are cited as important to their mobility by the newly retired: first, a reliable car which they could afford to run; and second, public transport which is safe, accessible, reliable and affordable.

Many older people become very isolated if they suddenly lose access to a car. They may have recently been forced to give up driving through disability, or through being unable to renew their driver's licence after reaching 70. They may have relied on a recently deceased friend, partner or family member to do the driving. More should be done to ensure these older people can continue to get out and about. There should be increased fund allocation for community transport services, as well as further development of services and the creation of more flexible schemes. Services can be unreliable and there is a lack of adequate information about them. Although there is good information on the internet, provision is of course exclusively for those with access to it.



John Cobb

## The Help the Aged position

Clearly Help the Aged wholeheartedly supports the government decision to fund a nationwide bus pass scheme. However, all local authorities should respond to the public's needs and offer transport concessions based on flexibility and choice, presenting a choice of bus passes or travel tokens. The call for recognition of diversity of need and the high level of support for choice in provision of travel concessions should be heeded. The evidence from *Local Bus Service and Travel Concessions* points to the need for additional funding for alternative forms of travel concession for use with taxis, community transport and dial-a-ride schemes, especially for those who cannot physically use local buses.

Help the Aged believes that all local authorities should go beyond the statutory minimum of free bus travel and offer alternatives for those who cannot use buses or do not have them. This should take the form of a flat-rate system of tokens, taxi vouchers, and vouchers for use on community transport for everyone over the age of 60. At the least, the Department for Transport should also issue guidance for local authorities on how to offer a flexible system of concessionary fares, highlighting best practice in local authority-funded concessionary fares

### Other policy calls

#### Safe

- More bus staff should be on duty to supervise selected routes at certain times to help (one of the key barriers to bus use was having to carry heavy shopping) and reassure.
- Better lighting should be provided at all bus stops and stations.
- Bus stops and stations should provide adequate shelter.
- The Government should continue to provide properly resourced, organised and staffed neighbourhood and street wardens as they have enormous potential, in partnership with the police, to combat fear of crime. Their activities,

including patrolling, should be purposeful in seeking out and assisting older people who are in poor health, live on low income, and who are isolated, anxious or depressed.

- Help the Aged urges the police to concentrate their efforts on the high crime/high fear areas identified by the Home Office Fear of Crime team and in local crime audits. In areas where crime is relatively low but fear of crime remains high, programmes of reassurance should be initiated.

#### Accessible

- A free bus pass is of no use if there are no buses or if an older person cannot use them owing to mobility problems. Help the Aged believes that all local authorities should go beyond the statutory minimum of free bus travel and offer alternatives for those who cannot use buses or for whom no service is available. This should take the form of tokens, and vouchers for use with taxis, community transport etc. The Department for Transport should issue guidance highlighting best practice on concessionary fares by local authorities.
- Any review of bus routes and timetables should pay close attention to the needs of older people.
- Consultation and constant engagement with older people, particularly those who have mobility impairments, needs to be mandatory for all transport planners.
- Simple obligations on bus companies to address the issues raised in the report *Local Bus Service and Travel Concessions (2007)* would overcome some of the barriers older people experience to using buses. For example:
  - (1) buses should wait for people to sit down before pulling off, as well as waiting when stopped for older people to stand up to leave the bus.
  - (2) bus drivers should always ensure that they stop in the appropriate space, not leaving too much space between the entrance and the kerb, and not moving off before they have

reached the allocated bus stop (where there is a queue of buses at a bus stop, older people may not otherwise be able to reach their bus in time to board).

- Local authorities should strive for excellence in public toilet provision, and involve older people in monitoring standards to ensure that their needs are being met. Help the Aged recommends that the Government should commission a regular mapping exercise to ascertain where toilet facilities are declining. Under no circumstances should public toilets be closed without consultation with local residents.

## Reliable

- There is a distinct lack of a door-to-door, integrated system of transport: for example, buses should connect with trains and taxis/buses to take people home from the station.
- Bus stops and stations should have live information on waiting times as well as up-to-date timetables that are easy to read and at an appropriate height for older people with disabilities and wheelchair users.
- Many older people are very isolated because, for example, they have recently been forced to give up driving through disability, or are unable to renew their driver's licence after reaching 70, or if the person who regularly acted as their driver has died. More should be done to ensure that these older people can continue to get out and about. Formal buddying schemes should be in place for when people suddenly lose access to transport (through disability, loss of driver's licence on grounds of age, or death of a partner/relative/friend who acted as driver). This could be implemented by the provision of relevant information on transport and community transport services which is automatically mailed out when people reach a certain age (with their pension) and/or as part of the potential bereavement package from the Department for Work and Pensions. This initiative should aim to learn from and build on informal buddying networks.

- Funding allocation for community transport services, as well as further development of services and the creation of more flexible schemes, should be increased.
- All community transport (and public) services should be entitled to reimbursement of the concessions they offer to individuals. This will ensure they fulfil their aim to provide access, mobility and choice to excluded older people. All local authorities should have sufficient community transport to serve the needs of older people living in that area.
- Government-supported websites and information booklets, regularly updated for all and tailored to each local authority, should be available.

## Affordable

- Without adequate information on transport services and adequate alternatives to bus passes for older people, many people are forced to pay for taxis. This cost is a huge burden to those on low incomes and can result in social isolation because it obliges people who cannot afford taxis to stay at home.
- Central and local government should work together to ensure all older people use and benefit from concessionary fares. A national scheme would merit national promotion, which could help raise awareness.

## Economic justification

Access to the goods and services needed by older people is often reliant upon access to good-quality public and private transport. Because of the problems older people have with transport, they face problems getting to the post office, GP surgery, health centre, shopping centre, places of worship, evening classes and social clubs.

Another consideration is that older people contribute £24 billion to the economy through voluntary work: this figure could be higher with better transport provision.

## Help the Aged publications

Help the Aged runs a service called SeniorMobility which provides grants for groups and projects to buy urgently needed vehicles, scooters and mobility equipment. The SeniorMobility campaign aims to restore independence and reduce isolation by increasing older people's access to special vehicles and local transport schemes.

The Charity has a fine record of working to improve public transport for older people in the community. It has funded hundreds of minibuses, consistently consulted older users of public transport, mounted surveys and commissioned research, submitted expert comment on Government proposals and campaigned effectively in both urban and rural settings.

Help the Aged has published extensively in relation to transport and older people, including:

- *Local Bus Service and Travel Concessions: experiences and views of older people (2007)\**
- *Travel, Access and Older People: a review of local transport accessibility planning (2006)*
- *In the Right Place: accessibility, local services and older people (2005)*
- *Fair Fares: calling for freedom of travel for older people in the UK (2003)\**
- *Help the Aged Transport Council Report: SARA: the four top issues (1998)\**

We have also supported older people's forums to do their own transport research. In 2004 the Eastleigh Southern Parishes Older People's Forum published *Sic transit . . . Hamble to Hospital: the hospital travel needs of older people in Hamble le Rice (2004)*.

\*Summaries of these reports are available on our website. For hard copies please contact our Publications department on 020 7239 1946.

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Fighting for disadvantaged older people in the UK and overseas,  
**WE WILL:**

**COMBAT POVERTY** wherever older people's lives are blighted by lack of money, and cut the number of preventable deaths from hunger, cold and disease

**REDUCE ISOLATION** so that older people no longer feel confined to their own home, forgotten or cut off from society

**CHALLENGE NEGLECT** to ensure that older people do not suffer inadequate health and social care, or the threat of abuse

**DEFEAT AGEISM** to ensure that older people are not ignored or denied the dignity and equality that are theirs by right

**PREVENT FUTURE DEPRIVATION** by improving prospects for employment, health and well-being so that dependence in later life is reduced