

# Consultation Response

## Ticketing on Public Transport

March 2007

Help the Aged wants a world where older people are free from the disadvantages of poverty, neglect and isolation, so they can live with dignity as valued, respected and involved members of society

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# Introduction and Summary

## Summary

- Free national bus travel for older people will help us take an important step forward in making public transport accessible to older people.
- Whilst we have welcomed the plans for free national bus provision, Help the Aged believes that there is a need for flexibility in provision of concessionary fares by local authorities.
- Help the Aged want local authorities to offer alternative concessions (e.g. tokens for taxis) for those who cannot use, or do not have access to, bus services.
- The Department for Transport should be providing guidance for local authorities on how to offer a flexible system of concessionary fares.
- Help the Aged would like to see provision made in the Government's Bill for concessionary passes to be used for community transport in areas where the bus service is inadequate and for those who are unable to use public transport due to disabilities.

## Introduction

Transport has a fundamental impact on older people's lives and access to safe, accessible, reliable and affordable transport for older people is a key concern for Help the Aged. Public transport is vital to older people. It is a lifeline to friends and family but it also helps people to stay active and independent. If it was free to travel more people would enjoy a richer old age.

*"Everyone in the country should have a free bus pass. We are very lucky to have such a good scheme in London"* **Male, Aylesbury Estate, London**

*"I have to go shopping nearly every day – I just can't carry it all for the week"* **Female, London**

*"Let's face it, you wouldn't go out, you'd just stay in if you didn't have one (Freedom pass)".* **Female, Tulse Hill**

One in five older people live in poverty, and those on low incomes depend on cheaper public transport. Yet older people face indirect discrimination in its design and delivery, as well as financial and cultural barriers to access.

Help the Aged recently published 'Bus Travel and Transport Concessions' (2006, HTA) 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. The report highlights how older respondents welcome proposals for a nationwide scheme for travel concessions to be introduced in 2008, but 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 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 drivers' attitudes, information, comfort and safety.

## Demography

In 2002, there were 9.5 million people aged 65 and over in the UK. The number of older people in our population has increased over the past few decades and is projected to continue to grow in the future. During the fifty years from 1971 to 2021, the number of people in the UK aged 65 and over is expected to have increased nearly 70 per cent, from 7.3 million to 12.2 million. The section of the older population which has increased most rapidly, both in actual size and in relation to the total population, is that of people over 75. The proportion of people in this age-group is projected to increase from 4.5 per cent in 1971 to 9 per cent in 2021.

## About Help the Aged and our work on Transport

Help the Aged is a charity fighting to free disadvantaged older people in the UK and overseas from poverty, isolation and neglect. It campaigns to raise public awareness of the issues affecting older people and to bring about policy change. The Charity delivers a range of services: information and advice, home support and community living, including international development work. These are supported by its fundraising activities and paid for services. Help the Aged also funds vital research into the health issues and experiences of older people to improve the quality of later life.

In preparing this response, Help the Aged has drawn on our extensive research and experience of working with and talking to older people. We have published widely in relation to transport and older people including:

- *Local Bus Services and Travel Concessions. Key findings of a survey into the experiences and views of older people (2007)*
- *Travel, Access and Older People (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: SARA (Safe, Accessible, Reliable and Affordable) (1988)*

We have also supported older people's forums to do their own research on transport and 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)

# Concessionary fares - the right strategy?

## Is the Government's concessionary fares strategy, including the proposed scheme for concessionary bus travel, adequate?

- 12% of older people (1.2 million) feel trapped in their own home
- 13% of older people (1.26 million) don't go out more than once a week
- 3% of older people never go out
- 17% of older people have less than weekly contact with family, friends and neighbours
- 11% have less than monthly contact
- 1.2 million pensioners have no other source of income than the state benefits (GB)

Free national bus travel for older people will help us take an important step forward in making public transport accessible to older people. The Bill currently going through Parliament 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. Under the current system older people and other qualifying groups are entitled to free bus travel only in their local area.

Help the Aged has warmly welcomed the Bill, which will allow older people to use local bus services nationwide. However, we have a number of concerns:

### Takeup of concessionary fares

Help the Aged's 'Fair Fares' (2003) made the case for a national system of concessionary fares and we are delighted that the Government have 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 particular groups is a major problem. Despite energetic take-up work by some local councils, there is still a long way to go. Central Government and Local Government should work together to ensure all older people use and benefit from concessionary fares. A national scheme may well help facilitate national promotion which could help in this area.

### Concessions are important but only part of the solution.

Of course the solution isn't 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. Early on in Help the Aged's transport campaigning, a report (SARA 1998) was published which highlighted the four fundamental elements of older people's transport needs: Safe, Accessible, Reliable and Affordable (SARA), and how failures in these four areas combine to create barriers to transport use for older people.

Whilst there has been some progress, older people continue to complain that local transport services fail to meet their needs. A survey to be published in Spring 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.

### And communities and services within them must be better “planned” to meet the needs of an ageing population

Help the Aged's '*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.

Our follow-up report ('Travel Access and Older People' 2006) examined a representative selection of local transport plans in order to find out how well the recommendations of the initial report have 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.

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. The report revealed that of 31 local councils surveyed, only 10 actually made any efforts to speak to older people or their representatives when designing a local transport plan.

### Restriction to Off Peak Travel

The Bill going through Parliament only provides 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. Whilst the Government's Bill will remove the barrier for older people travelling to a hospital appointment on the “other” 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.

### **Are concessionary fares schemes sufficiently integrated across different modes of transport and different geographical areas?**

No. Whilst we have welcomed the free national bus provision, Help the Aged believes that there is a need for flexibility in provision of concessionary fares by local authorities.

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

**Help the Aged would like to see provision made in the Bill for passes to be used for community transport in areas where the bus service is inadequate and for those who are unable to use public transport due to disabilities.**

Bus passes are also of limited use for the significant proportion of older people, who, due to disability or mobility problems (or because the services are not accessible enough) cannot use bus services.

Many older people face barriers that prevent them from using bus services. A recent survey carried out by Help the Aged in Portsmouth 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

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

For some people who may not be registered disabled, and therefore not have access to the mobility components of benefit packages that those who become disabled before the age of 65 are entitled to, but nonetheless experience mobility difficulties, buses can be impractical and impossible to use.

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 65<sup>th</sup> 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 don't claim help until after 65) can only claim the much more limited Attendance Allowance (AA). There is no mobility component to AA, meaning those aged 65 and over cannot receive help with mobility costs. For these people, a free bus pass is of no use whatsoever.

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. This Bill will not do anything to remove this postcode lottery and provide the same high standard 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 offering tokens which can be used on taxis, trains or community transport schemes, have to be paid for by local councils. Evidence from a study that Help the Aged undertook in Portsmouth suggests that for a large minority of older people, such a scheme better meets their needs than a simple bus pass. **Help the Aged want local authorities to offer alternative concessions (e.g. tokens for taxis) for those who cannot use or don't have access to busses. At the least, the DFT should be providing guidance for local authorities on how to offer a flexible system of concessionary fares.**

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