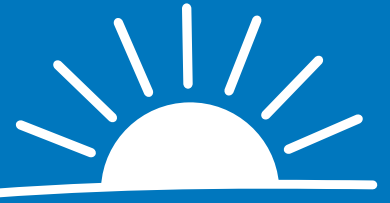


Fair fares

Calling for freedom of travel for older people in the UK



Help the Aged

A mapping and policy report on the provision and take-up of concessionary travel for older people.

Summary

All pensioners across the UK should enjoy the same freedom of access to public transport. In some areas, helpful steps have made it cheaper and easier for them to travel. But it is still a matter of where you live as to the concessions you may receive. In England in particular, provision is a postcode lottery.

Help the Aged is calling for a nationwide scheme in each of the four nations so that older people can enjoy their hard-won leisure and travel freely, across boundaries, where they wish, when they wish. It is time that we paid our senior citizens the respect they deserve by providing public transport that is safe, accessible, reliable and affordable.

Help the Aged is campaigning to stop pensioner poverty: both to end the scandal of low income and to address the problems that blight later life and the freedom to enjoy a precious retirement. This report looks at the provision and take-up of travel concessions in the UK. It makes firm proposals to Government and local managers of travel concession schemes.

We hope that the evidence in this report may help groups across the country to campaign locally for much-needed improvements.

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 older age. Older women drive less and use buses more. Older people on low income 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.

Public transport concessions vary hugely across the country. Some authorities are far less inclusive than others in terms of the value of concessions they offer as well as the time and boundary restrictions they impose on concessionary travel.

Low take-up of concessions is another major problem. Just as other pensioner benefits – totaling £1.9 billion a year – go unclaimed, so with travel concessions; indeed take-up is decreasing. 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 work by some local councils, there is still a long way to go.

**STOP
PENSIONER
POVERTY
NOW**

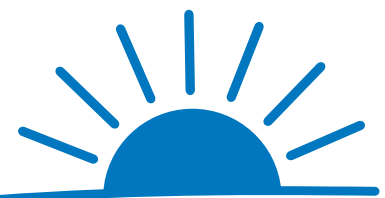
The costs of travel concessions, set against public expenditure as a whole, are relatively small. A little more spending would bring disproportionate benefit, helping poorer pensioners most. Some local authorities have, rightly, taken this challenge seriously, as shown in our West Midlands case study.

There are also golden opportunities provided by bus pass distribution systems for agencies to connect with pensioners, including hard-to-reach groups, to provide information and advice.

We urge the four national governments and all local authorities, to work together to:

- allocate sufficient funding for full fare ‘freedom passes’ for everyone over 60 years of age;
- ensure that all public transport is safe, comfortable, accessible and reflects the needs of older people; and
- 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.

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Help the Aged

Working for a future where older people are highly valued, have lives that are richer and voices that are heard.