

Relaxation of 60+ concessionary bus fares for residents of South Somerset only. (Not visitors to the District)

The reasons for the research

Through my regular travel across parts of the nation by bus I have noticed that a number of Local Authorities have no concessionary fare restrictions for the 60+ age group living in that district or borough. I was eager to identify a selection of local authorities implementing a 'no restriction' 60+ concessionary bus fare scheme and investigate –

- The reasons for its introduction
- The additional funds allocated
- Take up and any over crowding problems
- Benefits

The purpose of the research is to establish

- whether relaxation of the concessionary bus fare scheme for the 60+ age group residing in South Somerset would be of benefit to that group
- whether it could benefit the environment by contributing to an oil consumption and green house gas reduction
- whether it would be feasible to introduce it
- the approximate cost

Recommendation

For a relatively small cost a relaxed 60+ concessionary fare scheme should be introduced for residents (25% of the population) in South Somerset for the following reasons -
It could potentially

- Reduce dependence on a car and car miles, fossil fuel consumption and green house gas emissions (conforming to SSDC's 'countering global warming' and 'transition status' policies)
- Reduce the need to own a car, change travel habits and traffic congestion.
- Reduce poverty.
- Promote the use of regular bus travel
- Intensify demand for improved bus services
- Enlarge the pensioner voluntary employment pool and relieve the cost of travel for those already in voluntary employment
- De-restrict hospital and GP appointment systems (Many of the 60+ group are asking for none urgent appointments that can be accessed through the concessionary bus fare travel scheme.)

Research method

Stage one

Establishing from passengers and bus drivers where I travel by bus what 60+ bus travel restrictions (if any) exist in that locality.

Stage two

Contact respective District and Borough Council public transport officers by telephone and

1. Seek answers to my questions:

- The reasons for its introduction
- The additional funds allocated
- Take up and any overcrowding problems
- Benefits

2. Through these conversations identify other neighbouring local authorities which have adopted a similar relaxed policy.

Six local authorities operating a relaxed 60+ concessionary fare scheme were contacted and their responses are listed below.

The reasons for its introduction

- benefiting those needing early morning doctors or hospital appointments,
- To enable and encourage pensioner volunteer workers starting work before or at 0900 hours to travel without depending on a car.
- To encourage 60+ pensioners to take on voluntary work starting at or before 0900 hours.
- Other benefits - reduction in oil consumption, greenhouse gases, traffic congestion, car use, relieving poverty.
- Continuation from previous relaxation of 60+ schemes.

The additional Funds Allocated

No officer consulted considered that there was or would be excessive use of the relaxed concessionary scheme their area. The extra funds set aside for the relaxation of these conditions ranged from nothing, where an existing scheme was in place, to between £20K to £50K where the scheme was newly introduced. Officers expected these extra funds to exceed what was required.

Take up and any overcrowding problems

As a consequence of this schemes being introduced no local authorities experienced problems of overcrowding before 0930 hours nor a need for extra bus services nor higher passenger seating capacity vehicles.

Benefits

Please see individual council responses under Background Information below.

Method of operation

The logo on the bus pass determines the issuing District or Borough Council. The bus driver is instructed only to allow passengers free travel before 0930 hours who live within that zone. **N.B. At the moment any 60+ English bus traveller can travel in South Somerset between 0900 and 0930 hours Monday to Friday using their bus pass. This policy would be discontinued making a modest saving.**

An unknown number of local authorities across England have relaxed the concessionary bus fare regulations in their area. (The 60+ age group within that District or Borough can travel at any time within their District or Borough. Visitors to the area do not have this privilege.)

Background Information



Council extends concessionary travel scheme to all day operation

June 4, 2008

New Forest District Council is extending its concessionary travel scheme to provide free, **all-day** travel on registered bus services commencing in the district for those aged over 60 and disabled residents.

The decision to extend the scheme from off-peak travel to an all-day operation was agreed at cabinet today.

This is good news for the 30,000 residents who currently benefit from the scheme. The extended benefit will come into force on Monday 23 June, giving bus operators time to communicate the changes to their drivers.

Planning and Transportation portfolio holder Cllr Chris Treleaven said: "Our assessment of the costs to the council of operating the concessionary fare scheme was more favourable than originally anticipated. This has allowed us to extend the statutory off-peak scheme to an all-day operation for our qualifying residents, which no doubt will be particularly welcomed by disabled or over-60 residents who have a need to travel before 9.30am."

Leader of the council Cllr Mel Kendal added: "Residents do not need to apply to the council for a new permit. Residents can use their existing passes which will permit them to travel for free all day starting from Monday 23 June."

-ends-

Notes to editors

1. Since the introduction of a national concessionary scheme on 1 April 2008, people aged 60 and over and the disabled have been statutorily entitled to free **off-peak** travel on registered bus services anywhere in England. This means 9.30am – 11.00pm Monday-Friday and all day at weekends and public holidays. Local authorities can offer extra benefits to their residents as part of their concessionary scheme such as starting the concession from 9.00am or providing free travel all day.

For more information on the work of New Forest District Council visit:
www.newforest.gov.uk

Contacts:

New Forest District Council

- The estimated cost of us moving from off-peak to all-day is approx £30K.
- We hope to absorb this within the overall budget.
- The reasons for its introduction – explained above but would also benefit those needing early morning doctors or hospital appointments (e.g. fasting blood sugars and cholesterol), pensioner volunteer workers.
- Other benefits - reduction in oil consumption, greenhouse gases, traffic congestion, poverty
- The additional funds allocated £30K recommended by consultant.
- Take up and any over crowding problems. No problems of overcrowding so far – excessive use not expected

Davina Staples, Corporate Communications Officer
 Tel: 023 8028 5153 Email: davina.staples@nfdc.gov.uk

Middlesbrough Borough Council (including Hartlepool, Stockton –on – Tees, Redcar and Cleveland)

- The reasons for its introduction - continuation from previous scheme and would also benefit those needing early morning doctors or hospital appointments (e.g. fasting blood sugars and cholesterol, all day appointments.) pensioner volunteer workers.
- Other benefits - reduction in oil consumption, greenhouse gases, traffic congestion, poverty, dependency on car
- The additional funds allocated - none
- Take up and any over crowding problems – none, minimal take up before 0900 hours.

Contact: Alistair Bolton 01642 728176 alistair_bolton@middlesbrough.gov.uk

Gosport Borough Council (Population 80K) Very pleased with scheme.

- The reasons for its introduction – benefiting those needing early morning doctors or hospital appointments, pensioner volunteer workers.
- Other benefits - reduction in oil consumption, greenhouse gases, traffic congestion, car use, relieving poverty.
- The additional funds allocated £23K recommended by consultant.
- No problems of overcrowding. No extra services required.

Contact: Phil Reynolds 02392 545331

Kennet District Council

- The reasons for its introduction - continuation from previous scheme in partnership with other District Councils across Wiltshire except Swindon

- Other benefits - reduction in oil consumption, greenhouse gases, traffic congestion, poverty, dependency on car
- The additional funds allocated - none
- Take up and any over crowding problems – none, minimal take up before 0900 hours.

Contact: andrew.hart@kennet.gov.uk
Carol Butler 01380 724911

Salisbury District Council

- The reasons for its introduction - continuation from previous scheme and would also benefit those needing early morning doctors or hospital appointments pensioner volunteer workers. Some buses in rural parts left before 0900 hours with no service after that. 'No restrictions' much simpler.
- Other benefits - reduction in oil consumption, greenhouse gases, traffic congestion, poverty, dependency on car
- The additional funds allocated - £50K.
- Take up and any over crowding problems – none, minimal take up before 0900 hours.

Contact: Eric Teagle 01722 336272 ETeagle@salisbury.gov.uk

West Dorset District

- The reasons for its introduction - continuation from previous scheme and would also benefit those needing early morning doctors or hospital appointments pensioner volunteer workers. Some buses in rural parts left before 0900 hours with no service after that time. 'No restrictions' much simpler.
- Other benefits - reduction in oil consumption, greenhouse gases, traffic congestion, poverty, dependency on car
- The additional funds allocated - £20K
- Take up and any over crowding problems – none, minimal take up before 0900 hours. No extra bus services required.

Contact: Ken Brake 01305 252287 k.brake@westdorset.gov.uk

Southern and Northern Ireland No restrictions for pensioners either side of the border and pensioners can take a friend or partner!

Councillor Andrew Turpin