

Scottish Women's Convention response to:

The Scottish Government:

Consultation on Free Bus Travel for People Resident in Scotland Aged Under 19

December 2020

Introduction

The Scottish Government intends to launch a new statutory national concessionary travel scheme providing free bus travel for young people resident in Scotland up to their 19th birthday. They anticipate that legislation to underpin the scheme would be required to be laid in Parliament in early 2021 and the scheme would come into effect later in 2021.

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded to engage with women throughout Scotland in order that their views might influence public policy. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of Parliamentary, Governmental and organisational consultation papers at both a Scottish and UK level.

The Scottish Women's Convention engages with women using numerous communication channels including Roadshow events, Thematic Conferences and regional contact groups. This submission provides the views of women and reflects their opinions and experiences in a number of key areas relevant to women's equality.

The SWC is currently engaging with women through digital roadshows, online surveys, asking women to comment by email and by telephoning those who want to talk. We are also using our wide network to ask women to collate views in their local communities and forward these to us on a regular basis. We are continuing to review innovative ways of engaging with women throughout Scotland using whichever medium is appropriate to them.

Do you think extending national concessionary travel to include free bus travel for under 19s in Scotland will contribute towards our objectives to increase opportunities and reduce inequalities?

Women are on the whole supportive of the introduction of a young person's concessionary scheme. It is hoped that this can be used in a way that goes beyond simply accessing employment and education but heightens self-esteem and wellbeing.

Any extension of concessionary travel that will benefit young women in Scotland works towards a reduction in inequalities. Before the onset of Covid-19, young people faced a number of barriers in direct consequence of their age including lower wages and precarious workplace conditions with little rights. This has become even more pertinent during this time, given the host of opportunities that have been taken away from young people due to the current pandemic. In light of this, consideration of a further extension to young people over the age of 19 in recognition of the disproportionate economic toll that the past year has had would be useful.

Implementation of such a scheme must be mindful of the ways in which young people access transport both now and in future. Issues such as the climate crisis and loss of income and job opportunities will influence the ways in which both public and private modes of transport are utilised. Scotland will also see a growing number of more diversified and differentiated public transport needs across the country and this must be incorporated into thinking about this and future concessionary schemes.

Many women noted that this scheme should not be looked upon as a sole solution to tackle some of the most pressing issues. It is of the utmost importance that consideration is given to how transport can work proactively to suppress inequalities in other areas. A major focus for many women at SWC events, for instance, concerns the safety and availability of public transport, particularly for those working unsociable hours until late at night. All strategies should seek to ensure flexibility and take account of this when designing such plans. It should thus be seen as a targeted incentive as part of a much larger commitment that aims to invest in a young person's whole future and mental health and wellbeing. This would include:

- Increased independence for young people.
- Further job and economic prospects.
- Tackling inequality,
- Encouraging localism and local connections within communities.

Do you think there are any disadvantages to introducing free bus travel for under 19s in Scotland?

For young persons in more ruralised localities, bus travel may be highly impractical due to lower frequency and less demand. This may also mean access to areas such as employment and education are easier by train. Given this and the continuous rise in all public transport fares to unaffordable amounts, bus travel should not be seen as the sole solution but must work in cooperation with other Government means to suppress these inequalities.

Other issues may include:

- Buses which join up local towns and villages rather than just providing services to main towns can often be lengthy in terms of timescales.
- Long bus waiting times, most notably in the evenings with many services stopping after 6pm, which does not fit with the sectors young people tend to work in.
- Transport can often lead to difficulties for women due to unreliability.
- The unsuitability of much public transport for disabled passenger's access.

Are there any likely impacts the proposals contained within this Consultation may have on particular groups of people, with reference to the 'protected characteristics' listed above? Please be as specific as possible.

Young women with disabilities continue to tell the SWC about the issues they face in accessibility to public transport, despite statutory duties. This tends to be unconscious but can also filter down into discrimination which may make them feel singled out. A particular feature women have noted is the idea of being treated as a "pain or nuisance" to others which must be remedied. This should include increasing information about the needs of all and not seeing those presenting as "disabled" as one homogenous entity. Women would also encourage the use of public consultation methods in designing new products and guides for all relevant stakeholders in collaboration with real lived experiences of women who present with disabilities.

Other issues may include:

- Young people who have underlying health conditions and who may be wary of bus travel for the foreseeable future due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Difficulties in reading bus guidelines and timetables due to sight impairment where no adjustments have been made.
- Those living in rural areas with restricted mobility may find bus travel difficult due to the lack of joined up approaches to bus frequency and availability.

Conclusion

The SWC is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government's Consultation on Free Bus Travel for People Resident in Scotland Under the Age of 19. As an organisation, we will continue to work with women from across Scotland to gather voices and experiences relating to such legislation and the effect of this on women's equality.

For further information, please contact

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