

PE1549/D

Petitioner Letter of 28 May 2015

Public Petitions Clerk
Room T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Dear Clerk,

Public Petition PE1549 - Concessionary Travel Passes for War Veterans

I am writing in response to your letter dated 5 May 2015 following the Public Petitions Committee's consideration of my petition PE1549 at its meeting on 31 March. I thank you for providing me with the responses received following the Committee's letters to various organisations.

It is evident from the responses that Poppyscotland are broadly supportive of the petition. They cite research they commissioned in 2014 which estimated that the approximate number of veterans living in Scotland being 260,000 with the average age of 67 years. Given this it is evident that the vast majority of veterans already qualify for concessionary travel as the majority are over 60 years old. It also states that some 36% of the veterans population are of working age and as such would benefit greatly from concessionary travel pass to help them access the jobs market.

As for the figures of veterans under 60 years of age which there is between 3000 and 4000 in Scotland. It shows that my proposal is unlikely to have any significant impact on Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government as the cost implementation would ultimately be borne indirectly by the Scottish public and we are not advocating for concessionary travel for all veterans. Not to mention that it will help eligible veterans to have better access the jobs market, housing market and help them reintegrate with civilian life.

If we look at the case of free bus passes for everyone over 60 there is a case in which a universal benefit is provided to people regardless of circumstance. Of course the Scottish Government will argue that this is a universal benefit and incorporates all people in Scotland of a certain age without discrimination. Similarly to this example I am campaigning for all those who are in receipt of a War Disablement Pension to receive concessionary travel passes. At the moment a section of those veterans in receipt of a War Disablement Pension but are not entitled to concessionary travel passes are disadvantaged in comparison to their colleagues who are entitled.

It is irrelevant to compare veterans with civilians as their experiences are completely different. Veterans have been injured serving their country in the armed forces either at home or abroad. Their experiences have often led them to being away from family networks and without access to the housing market on their return to civilian life. By providing concessionary travel passes it would increase their opportunities for accessing the job market, avoid homelessness, access the housing market and reintegrating with civilian life.

I am disappointed in the response from the Scottish Veterans Commissioner who outlined he did not support the petition. It is also disappointing that Mr Fraser has not met any of the many veterans like myself who support the issue of concessionary travel passes for former service personnel. It is evident that Mr Fraser is following the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland's policy on concessionary travel for war veterans which excludes a number of veterans who are entitled to a War Disablement Pension and are within the 20-40% level of disability.

In my research I have discovered that Scotland is lagging behind when it comes to concessionary travel passes for war veterans in comparison with London. In London if you receive payments under the War Pension Scheme, or Guaranteed Income Payment under the Armed Forces Compensation Schemes, you are eligible for concessionary travel. With a Veterans Oyster card Transport For London (TFL) allow veterans to travel free on the bus, Tube, tram, DLR, London Overground and most National Rail Services in London. This was introduced by the Greater London Authority in November 2008 and more than 4,500 Veteran Oyster photocards have been issued. As such the Greater London Authority are making the most of their efficient and effective transport system by providing access to veterans for free which in turn allows them to access employment across the city.

I believe that overall the Scottish public would be supportive of my petition and the sentiment of helping all veterans in receipt of War Disablement Pension receive concessionary travel passes in order to help them have an easier access to the workplace. By changing policy to provide concessionary travel passes to war veterans the Scottish Government would lead the way ahead of other devolved powers in the UK when it comes to providing support for veterans and would allow veterans more opportunities for accessing the jobs market, housing market and reintegrating with society.

As such I would urge the Public Petitions Committee to take forward my petition to urge the Scottish Government to provide concessionary travel passes for all veterans in receipt of a War Disablement Pension.

Alan Clark Young