

**PE1549/E**

Bus and Local Transport Policy Team  
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Mr Ned Sharratt  
Assistant Clerk  
c/o Public Petitions Clerks Room T3.40  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

Your ref:

Our ref:

Date:  
13 August 2015

Dear Mr Sharratt

## **CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE1549**

*Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to ensure that all war veterans that are in receipt of a War Disablement Pension can get Concessionary Travel passes.*

Thank you for your letter of 10 June 2015 seeking further comment from Transport Scotland following the Committee's second consideration of the petition on 9 June. The Committee has asked whether the eligibility criteria for Transport for London's (TfL) Veterans Oyster Card (VOC) could be replicated in Scotland and whether this affects Transport Scotland's view that having a separate and specific scheme for veterans could attract a legal challenge.

### **National Concessionary Travel Scheme for Older and Disabled People (NCTS)**

The NCTS provides free travel throughout Scotland only on buses except for very limited ferry travel to the Scottish mainland for eligible islanders. Free travel is available at any time of day on local and long distance registered bus services to people aged sixty and over and eligible disabled people who live in Scotland. The scheme provides for a number of injured veterans through its existing eligibility criteria as previously explained in my letter of 5 May.

### **Travel Concessions in London**

In London, TfL provides travel concessions to older and disabled London residents through its Freedom Pass. It is available to London residents of either sex who have reached the women's state pension age or those who satisfy the scheme's disability eligibility criteria. The pass provides free off peak local bus travel in London and throughout England under the statutory English National Concessionary Travel Scheme.



Local authorities in England have discretionary powers to offer additional local concessions for their residents if they wish. TfL working with London Boroughs have similar powers. Under these arrangements TfL has provided additional travel concessions for London residents as part of its Freedom Pass. These include free travel at any time in London on buses, tube, tram, Docklands Light Railway, London Overground, TfL rail and some National Rail Services in London. It also provides discounted fares on most river services and Emirates Airline Boarding Pass Fare. TfL also provides discretionary concessions in London to other groups of people, for example, 18 plus, 60 plus, Apprentice and Veterans Oyster Cards.

TfL's discretionary travel concessions for its older and disabled people go considerably further than the extent of the Scottish NCTS and indeed the English NCTS in that they provide concessions on several modes of travel, and separate schemes for other groups including the VOC.

### **Veterans Oyster Card (VOC)**

TfL's VOC provides travel benefits in London for eligible armed forces veterans who live anywhere in the UK and beyond. It provides free travel on buses, tube, tram, Docklands Light Railway, London Overground, TfL rail services and some National Rail Services in London at all times. It also provides free off peak travel on other National Rail services in London and discounted fares on most river services and Emirates Airline Boarding Pass fare.

The eligibility criteria for the VOC are agreed with the MOD. It is available to those who receive:-

- ongoing payments under the UK War Pensions Scheme (those assessed under the scheme as 20% or more disabled as a result of their service) and includes widows, widowers and dependants; or
- a Guaranteed Income Payment under the UK Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS) (those whose injuries, as a result of their service, are assessed as being within tariffs 1-11 of the AFCS injuries table) and includes widows, widowers and dependants.

Although there is no age restriction for the VOC, veterans living in London who are eligible for a Freedom Pass or 60+ Oyster card are not eligible as these schemes provide the same concessions as the VOC.

### **Costs**

We estimate that to replicate the eligibility criteria of the VOC as part of the Scottish NCTS to include veterans, their widows, widowers and dependents resident in Scotland could add around 3,600 people to the scheme in 2015-2016 at a cost of around £490,000. If widowers, widows and dependents were not included these numbers would reduce to around 3,400 additional people at a cost of £470,000 in 2015-2016. These estimates are for free bus travel only and are based on the latest Armed Forces Compensation Scheme and War Pension Scheme Statistics published by the Ministry of Defence.

Information about the number of veteran visitors to Scotland that could be eligible is not known, neither is information about their travel behaviours upon visiting Scotland. It is, therefore, difficult to estimate the likely cost of extending the scheme to veterans who are resident outwith Scotland.

The cost of extending the scheme to other modes of transport is unknown as, unlike for bus, there is currently no agreed national reimbursement model in place for other transport modes.

At present local authorities in Scotland can, if they wish, provide local concessions for their residents on modes of transport other than bus.

Although the estimated number of additional card holders and costs of extending the NCTS to replicate the eligibility criteria of the VOC for free bus travel for veterans living in Scotland is relatively small in percentage terms, it could necessitate changes to the agreement reached with the bus industry earlier this year which safeguards the scheme until March 2017. The agreement reflects expected growth in demand, fares and costs and fuel prices and is based on the current eligibility and benefits under the scheme.

As explained in my earlier letter the scheme's eligibility criteria were developed after an extensive public consultation and discussion with stakeholders including medical professionals. It is felt that the extensive disability criteria are fair and inclusive in that they provide access to transport concessions for those whose ability to travel is **most** impaired by their condition or disability. The benefits of the VOC go well beyond what is provided under the NCTS. To replicate the scheme in Scotland would be unfair to civilians who are not eligible under the NCTS and have disabilities similar to eligible VOC veterans.

While the Scottish Government recognises and greatly values the commitment of those who have served in the armed forces and the sacrifice that many have made in the service of their country, it does not plan to replicate TfL's Veterans Oyster Card in Scotland as it considers that it would be fairer to maintain similar levels of entitlement for similarly disabled people irrespective of the cause of their disability. We have therefore not explored the legal issues which may be involved.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely

**NANCY WOODHEAD**