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

23 September 2015

Dear Chris

**Public Petition PE1549 - Concessionary Travel Passes for War Veterans**

I am writing in response to your letter dated 24 August 2015 with regards to my public petition PE1549 - concessionary travel passes for all war veterans (that are in receipt of a War Disablement Pension).

I have read the letter from Nancy Woodhead of Transport Scotland dated 13 August 2015. Before I comment on the merits of her response it is worth comparing the situation in London with Scotland to get a better feel for whether the Scottish Government's position is reasonable.

As of 31 March 2015, there were 479,460 recipients of an occupational pension either under the Armed Forces Pension Scheme, the War Pension Scheme or through compensation under the Armed Forces and Reserve Forces Compensation Scheme. Of this total, 446,505 were war veterans and 404,830 were found to be living in the UK. Over a third of the UK recipients were located within the South West or South East of England in 2015.

Given that the majority of occupational pension recipients are located in the South of the England, this indicates that these local authority areas - in particular London, which has a population of 8.6 million - are under greater pressure than Scotland when it comes to providing for war veterans. Indeed, Scotland has a population of 5.3 million and will be home to far fewer veterans. Thus, the burden of providing for our war veterans in Scotland is significantly less than that of the South of England and London. London will be dealing with greater numbers of veterans than local authority areas in Scotland, and is both willing and able to support them.

Transport for London are to be commended for making the most of their effective public transport system, by providing free access to all modes of transport for all war veterans that are in receipt of a war disablement pension with a disability graded at 20% and above. This policy is being fully funded and delivered effectively in a city under great pressure to deliver

public services to an ever increasing and diverse population. As a non-London resident veteran I have just received my free oyster card which means that when in London I can also make use of the extensive public transport network. Sadly this is not the case in Scotland.

If you contrast the policy adopted by TfL with the Scottish Government / Transport Scotland it comes down to the choices they wish to make. In the second last paragraph of Nancy Woodhead's letter she effectively concedes that Scot Govt / TS could provide the same benefits as TfL but they choose not to because:

"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."

The entire opposition to this change appears to be based on two arguments:

1. We did not think of this so it must not be a good idea
2. If we did this for veterans we would have to do it for everyone with a disability

Both of these arguments are wrong. Just because this policy has emerged in London does not mean it could and should not be applied to Scotland. If this policy contravenes equal opportunity provisions then why has it been adopted in London and as yet remains unchallenged by anyone in the civilian disabled community. With respect to Scotland the disability lobby has greater visibility and strength in London, especially given the location of the UK Parliament and the Mayor of London. It is simply the case that, for whatever reasons, the Scot Govt / Transport Scotland do not want to provide this benefit for those who risked their lives for their country and who need it in order to adjust to life in their communities.

Let Scotland show the rest of the devolved powers in the UK that it cares for its Service Personnel, by changing the NCTS to include all war veterans that are in receipt of a war disablement pension. I understand this may not be possible until the NCTS is renewed in 2017, and believe that adoption of the same policy as TfL at this time would be a reasonable compromise for all parties.

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

Your sincerely,

Alan Young