

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

Dear Chris,

PE01549: Concessionary Travel Passes for War Veterans

I am writing to you to you in response to your letter, dated 5th January, updating me on the response from Transport for London.

I would like to thank the Public Petitions Committee for considering my petition and for writing to Transport for London (Tfl), for a second time, to seek further information regarding the Veterans' Oyster Card scheme.

Policy

Transport for London started the Veterans' Oyster Card Scheme in 2008, honouring a commitment made by the Mayor, to show solidarity not only to those who have been injured serving in the Armed Forces, but also to their widows, widowers and dependents.

The Scottish Government via Transport Scotland are able to offer the same commitment as Transport for London by providing concessionary passes in support of injured veterans and their widows, widowers and dependents that are in receipt of a War Disablement Pension, but they choose not. Transport Scotland believe that to replicate the scheme would go well beyond what is provided under the National Concessionary Travel Scheme for Older and Disabled People (NCTS) and it would be unfair to civilians who have similar injuries.

Transport for London's Veterans' Oyster Card goes well beyond other schemes currently in place in England, and is valid on all forms of transport in London. The Scottish Government are making a policy choice not to implement a similar scheme in Scotland.

Scheme Cost after Implementation

Transport Scotland raised concerns over the cost of funding a scheme similar to the Veterans' Oyster Card. According to Transport Scotland, 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 scheme in 2015-16 with a cost of around £490,000.

In doing research for the VoC, Transport for London did not undertake any detailed financial modelling for the scheme, given the small numbers of people involved and the limited impact on services. Currently just under 8,000 people use the veterans' Oyster Card scheme.

The cost to implementing the VoC is negligible, there is just a small cost incurred to cover smartcards and photocards, administering the scheme and managing customer queries.

Transport Scotland's position on the matter is hard to justify as upon writing to Transport for London for further clarification, TfL state that under 8,000 currently use the scheme, therefore Transport Scotland's claim that 3,600 would use the scheme seems questionable.

According to Transport for London the cost to run the scheme is negligible, which counteracts Transport Scotland's claim that to run a similar scheme in Scotland would cost too much.

Legal Challenges

Transport Scotland stated that they could not replicate the 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."

The Committee wrote to Transport for London for information over any legal challenges. Thus far Transport for London has had no legal challenges to the scheme, and reiterated this in their most recent letter, dated 18th December 2015.

The position of the Scottish Government is, once again, vastly different from that of the experiences of Transport for London. Throughout the 8 years the scheme has been running, there have been no legal challenges, and it is therefore difficult to see why a similar scheme in Scotland would invite legal challenges.

I am sure that you agree that our service men and women who have been injured whilst on duty should be supported in any way possible. The Veterans' Oyster Card Scheme shows from a policy perspective that it is affordable to the taxpayer and that there are no legal challenges at present. The Scottish Government could set up the scheme in Scotland, but they choose not to.

With the NCTS up for discussion in 2017, I hope that the possibility to replicate Transport for London's Veterans' Oyster Card would be considered and ultimately implemented.

Concessionary travel across Scotland would make a real difference to those who have served in the Armed Forces.

If you have any questions regarding my petition or would like more information please do not hesitate to contact my advisers on 0141 212 7222 or contact Katie Alexander at katie.alexander@invictapa.co.uk.

Yours Sincerely,

Alan Young