

PE1549/B

POPPYSCOTLAND SUBMISSION TO THE PUBLIC PENSIONS COMMITTEE OF THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT IN CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE01549

Petition Under Consideration

1. Public Petition PE01549 calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to ensure that all war veterans who are in receipt of a War Disablement Pension can get Concessionary Travel passes.

2. It should be noted that for the purpose of this submission to the Committee, the term 'war pension' should be understood as denoting payments under the War Pensions Scheme (for those with conditions sustained on or before 5 April 2005) or under the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (for those with conditions sustained on or after 6 April 2005).

Poppyscotland View of the Petition

3. Poppyscotland is broadly supportive of the petition. As the petitioner points out, all members of the Scottish public are entitled to concessionary travel on public transport after reaching 60 years of age. Research commissioned by Poppyscotland (*Health & Welfare of the Ex-Service Community in Scotland 2014 – a Poppyscotland supplement to the 2014 Royal British Legion report A UK Household Survey of the ex-Service Community*) estimated the number of veterans resident in Scotland as being 260,000. There is no specific data available on what proportion of this figure is made up of veterans under the age of 60. It has however, been projected in the same research that the average age of the adult ex-Service community is 67 years, compared to 49 years for the Scottish adult population. Some 36% of the ex-Service community are of working age, which for the purpose of the research was taken to 16–64, notwithstanding the fact that there is no longer any mandatory age for retirement. On this basis, an estimated 93,600 veterans under the age of 64 live in Scotland. The proportion of these aged 60-64 (and thus already eligible for concessionary travel) is likely to be a higher percentage of that total than those of in younger 5-year age bands, reflecting progressive reductions in the size of the Armed Forces since the 1960s. (As an illustration, the Regular Army numbered 315,000 in 1960, 174,000 in 1970, 159,000 in 1990 and stood at 91,000 in 2014). The overall veterans' community in Scotland is forecast to fall from its current estimated all-categories (veterans, adult dependents and dependent children) total of 515,000 to 325,000 by 2025. If this comes to pass, the number of veterans under 64 years of age is likely to fall to c.59,000.

4. Since the end of the World War II there has only been one year, 1968, in which UK Armed Forces have not sustained fatalities on operations. The Armed Services have been engaged on a wide variety of operations, ranging from active combat operations to emergency relief provision, from providing aid to the civil power to conducting anti-piracy patrols. These have frequently entailed considerable hazards for serving personnel. To be a veteran and under the age of 60 would at the time of writing mean one would have to have enlisted at the very earliest during or after 1972; the years since then have witnessed the protracted campaign in Northern

Ireland, the Falklands War, the Gulf War of 1991, NATO operations in the Balkans and the more recent campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as other lesser actions and operations. These operations have inevitably involved fatalities and injuries. Data on UK Armed Forces Operational Deaths Post World War II (MOD Defence Statistics (Health) #6028, November 2014) shows that since the conclusion of World War II, 7,145 UK Armed Forces personnel have died as a result of operations in campaign-medal earning theatres. Compared to the losses sustained in the two world wars, these losses have been relatively light, though there was of course, a corresponding, and larger, number of wounded or injured in the same campaigns.

5. Definitive figures for the wounded and injured of post-1972 operations are difficult to establish. A written response in February 2015 to a question submitted to the Secretary of State for Defence (War Pensions: Written Question 223822) listed the total number of war disablement pensioners in Scotland as being 11,890. Not all of these receive pensions occasioned by physical or psychological injuries sustained on active service; a significant proportion will have sustained injuries in all forms training. Regular and demanding training is essential for the maintenance of operational readiness and can, by its very nature, be hazardous. The Armed Forces Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire commemorates post-World War II fatalities of all kinds, incurred both in training and on operations; it currently bears 16,111 names.

6. If one applies the overall demographic data to the figures for war pensioners in Scotland, the number of working age may be estimated as 4,280, a proportion of whom will be 60 or over. A reasonable assumption, factoring in the higher proportion of older veterans in the cohort, might be that there are c. 3,500 war pensioners under 60 who would be eligible for the concessionary travel proposed. That equates to c.110 per local authority area in Scotland, though their residential distribution is not spread evenly across the country; there are larger concentrations in Moray, Fife, the Central Belt and elsewhere. Their numbers are, as regards the possible impact of the petitioner's proposal and given their geographical distribution, nonetheless unlikely to impose any undue burden in any specific area, or lead to a significant loss in income to bus and rail companies. The petitioner's point that there are not many war pensioners under 60, and accordingly that his proposal would not cost a lot of money if implemented, is thus in our view a valid one.

7. There is also however, a similarly valid counter-argument that the very purpose of a war pension is to compensate the recipient in all respects for the material and physical loss and disadvantage he or she has sustained because his or her disability or condition. The Armed Forces Covenant seeks to ensure that Armed Forces Veterans are not disadvantaged by virtue of their service. It might reasonably be argued that those awarded war pensions have been awarded ongoing payments which are intended *inter alia* to cover all areas for which they are due compensation for their disability, and thus offset any disadvantage, including in relation to the cost of their using public transport. The proposal could be argued to in effect propose adding to the monetary offset which their war pensions were intended to provide. Indeed, it might be contended that the scheme proposed would actually confer *advantage* on eligible war pensioners relative to their civilian counterparts with comparable conditions, unfairly exceeding the aims of the Armed

Forces Covenant. That view might however, be construed by many as an unreasonably harsh and doctrinaire interpretation of the scope of such compensation and the effect the proposal would have. It is also ungenerous in relation to a group whose circumstances and condition are in part a consequence of their military service, service given to maintain the security of us all. Their conditions often impose upon them restrictions and impairments which must be borne life-long; these cannot be remedied or in every sense adequately compensated for. Careful thought would however, need to be given to the issue of precedent: how would this be regarded by for example, a separate category of war pensioner, war widows, of whom over 1,600 of all ages of whom reside in Scotland? They sustain enduring loss for which they receive a war pension intended to cover their material needs. Should they too receive the additional gain of concessionary travel if under the age of 60?

8. We are however, aware of a precedent which the Committee might wish to take into account. Veterans under the age of 60 are eligible for a Transport for London Veterans Oystercard, which allows veterans to travel free on bus, underground, train, Dockland Light Railway, London Overground and most National Rail services in London, if they

a. are in receipt of ongoing payments under the War Pensions Scheme (this includes widows, widowers and dependants in receipt of such payments);

or

b. are in receipt of Guaranteed Income Payments under the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (this also includes widows, widowers and dependants in receipt of such payments).

For both categories of war pensioner, appropriate documentary proof of eligibility must be submitted. Details of the Transport for London Veterans Oystercard Scheme may be found at <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/fares-and-payments/adult-discounts-and-concessions/veterans-oyster-photocard>. If such a scheme were introduced in Scotland, some costs would be incurred in adding a veterans card of the kind proposed to the current concessionary scheme for over-60s, notably in verifying the eligibility of applicants. We are not in a position to estimate the extent of such additional costs, but do not expect they would be unacceptably large. We suggest that Transport for London might be able to provide guidance on this specific point.

9. Our conclusion is therefore on balance that

a. the petition presents a fair proposal;

b. the proposal is unlikely to have any significant adverse affect on the incomes of Scottish public transport providers, though it should be noted that a system for its implementation and operation would impose some additional cost to either Government or transport providers, which would ultimately be borne indirectly by the Scottish public;

c. the scheme proposed would not confer a significant unfair or unreasonable advantage on recipients, relative to the rest of population and is unlikely to be regarded as unfair or unreasonable by the Scottish public;

d. the Transport for London scheme presents a workable and well-established precedent for Scotland to follow.

10. Future significant active operations and their consequences could of course, add to the level of costs involved. We believe both these consequences and these costs would however, have to exceed significantly those resulting from post-World War II operations, generating greatly increased numbers of eligible war pensioners, before that might be reasonably regarded as a deterrent factor.

11. Though concessionary travel for war pensioners has not been an issue on which Poppyscotland has to date judged it necessary, amid competing priorities, to campaign, we do consider the petitioner's submission to be a fair and justified proposal. It has our support accordingly.

I M McGregor
Chief Executive
Poppyscotland (The Earl Haig Fund Scotland)

Scottish Registered Charity No: 014096

4 May 2015