

Scottish Government Consultation: Free bus travel for people resident in Scotland under 19

The National Carer Organisations welcome the opportunity to respond to Scottish Government's consultation on extending free bus travel for children resident in Scotland aged under 19. There are seven National Carers Organisations in Scotland: Carers Trust Scotland; Carers Scotland; Coalition of Carers in Scotland; Crossroads Caring Scotland; MECOPP (Minority Ethnic Carers of Older People Project); Shared Care Scotland; and the Scottish Young Carers Service Alliance. Together we have a shared vision that all Scotland's unpaid carers will feel valued, included, and supported as equal partners in the provision of care. The National Carer Organisations aim to achieve this through the representation of carers and giving them a voice at a national level.

1. Do you think extending national concessionary travel to include free bus travel for under 19s in Scotland will contribute towards our objectives to increase opportunities and reduce inequalities?

Yes. Introducing free bus travel for under 19s in Scotland will help to tackle the poverty related gap for many young carers in low income households who may struggle to pay for public transport. It is important to note that many more young carers are living in the most deprived areas in Scotland on the SIMD scale than the least deprived areas¹:

"Travel is often a huge barrier to young carers participating in activities and opportunities outside their home. Often for young carers we have seen that family income can be limited especially if the parent is ill or disabled. We see that young carers often do not prioritise themselves and their needs - so would spend money on travel as it would take away from their family."

(Carers Service – Dundee)

Extending the national concessionary travel to include free bus travel for under 19s also gives young carers more chances to take part in leisure, social, education and employment opportunities which they may struggle to take forward if they did not have free bus travel. It is vital that young carers are able to have a life alongside caring and free bus travel should help to break down some of the barriers that they experience and give them a fairer chance to be children and young people first and foremost:

¹ Scotland's Carers, 2015, Scottish Government: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-carers/pages/2/>

“Travel is a barrier for young carers and this scheme will provide new opportunities beyond school without the concerns of how they will travel there.”
(Carers Service – Glasgow)

For many children and young people with caring responsibilities, access to free bus travel will positively impact on their wellbeing. Many young carers run errands for their cared for person which requires travel, such as picking up prescriptions and undertaking shopping. If their cared for person is in hospital or a resident in a care home, the young carer may frequently require to travel for visiting and providing care:

“I also know in my first year of uni I would travel on the bus to and from the hospital to see my mum if my dad was at work and couldn't drive me! So yes I'd say it would have been a great thing when I was younger!”
(Young Adult Carer)

Carers Trust Scotland's recent survey² about young carers' experiences during the pandemic also found that young carers felt isolated. It is important to note that young carers who live in a rural area may feel further isolated and experience additional barriers to accessing transport. Young carer services are vital for maintaining positive wellbeing for many young carers and young adult carers across Scotland. Free bus travel will help young carers to more readily access the support that is available to them.

For some young carers, even funding travel costs to get to school is a substantial financial expense in the household. Many young carers may not be eligible for school transport and this new scheme will benefit these children and young people especially. Many young carers have limited time to take part in activities outside of education and their caring responsibilities, but free bus travel may help some young carers to have more time to participate:

“We, young carers, need to get up really early to possibly help the person we look after and not everyone's parent /guardian can drive. Free bus travel would help a lot.”
(Young Carer)

2. Do you think there are any disadvantages to introducing free bus travel for under 19s in Scotland?

Yes. Unpaid carers of all ages have been calling for free bus travel for many years and may feel disadvantaged as national concessionary travel has not been extended to include all unpaid carers. It also will create further divergences amongst different age groups of carers. Although outside of the scope of this consultation, the National Carer Organisations would encourage Scottish Government to consider widening free bus travel to all ages of unpaid carers to

²2020 VISION: HEAR ME, SEE ME, SUPPORT ME AND DON'T FORGET ME; The impact of Coronavirus on young and young adult carers in Scotland, and what they want you to do next.
<https://carers.org/downloads/scotland-pdfs/2020-vision.pdf>

help tackle barriers that they may experience; such as social isolation, financial challenges and ultimately supporting them to live their own life alongside their caring roles.

Arguably many young adult carers aged 19 to 25 may experience similar challenges to young carers. Free bus travel could improve their health and wellbeing and combat the poverty related gap, reduce inequalities and be a catalyst to provide more opportunities for independence as a young person:

"My only thought would be that most young adult carers are often in a very similar position, e.g. still in education, haven't yet managed to find a job as are juggling caring and college/ university/ apprenticeships."

(Carers Service – Glasgow)

Providing free bus travel for under 19s creates disadvantages for those who are not entitled to this.

Clarity is also required around the meaning of resident in Scotland and how this may impact children and families who have no recourse to public funds. We believe any child or young person under 19 living in Scotland should receive free bus travel regardless of their residency status.

One consideration that some of our stakeholders have highlighted as a concern, is whether bus services have the capacity to meet the potential additional demand:

"It might also cause the buses to become much busier."

(Young Carer)

3. Should a smart card, such as the widely used Young Scot card, be used to establish eligibility for free bus access?

Yes.

"Yes, or a specific travel card similar to that of an oyster card in London. Young people should also be able to show ID to show they are under 19 to qualify for free transport if they don't have the specific card with them."

(Carers Service – Glasgow)

We would like further information about the application process for receiving the free bus travel entitlement and encourage that the process be as accessible as possible:

"A couple of young carers questioned whether it should be a Young Scot card, as not all young people have Young Scot cards and a few said it was complicated to sign up for one. Issues such as schools running out of forms or libraries being closed at the minute."

(Carers Service – Edinburgh)

We believe that there needs to be smooth and efficient mechanisms in place for replacement cards and interim solutions in cases where children or young people misplace, lose, or have their card stolen. Perhaps a digital application where children and young people are able to use their mobile phones, similar to the 16-25 Rail Card, should be endorsed. Particular consideration is required for children of primary school age regarding the responsibilities of having a high value card and the logistical issues where these children may be less likely to use wallets and purses to safely store their card.

We would like further information about whether the travel smart card would have photographic identification and whether this will be frequently updated. As individuals may phenotypically change as they get older.

Also, to ensure smooth transition into the introduction of the scheme, we would encourage there to be a national awareness raising campaign so that all children and young people who are entitled could benefit from this support.

4. Should children under a certain age need to have their application for a travel card approved by a parent or guardian?

Yes. We agree with this in principle. One carer service noted:

"Parental consent would be appropriate as it lets parents/carers understand their children/young people's ability to travel."

(Carers Service – Midlothian).

However many young carers undertake tasks often associated as adult responsibilities. This may include household budgeting, shopping, collecting and administering medication, and being responsible for preparing meals. Some young carers may feel disempowered if they are required to obtain parent or guardian approval, especially in circumstances where there can be a perceived role reversal of the guardian and child relationship.

For young people providing care for a person with addiction issues or mental health problems, their ability to gain approval may be limited. We would recommend for Scottish Government to consider widening the approval list to include trusted adults such as teachers, GPs, social workers, carers services or other trusted professionals. This is in line with how the Young Scot Young Carers Package operates where other trusted adults are able to approve their applications for this support.

5. If you answered 'yes' to question 4, at what age should parental or guardian approval be required?

In line with the Young Scot National Entitlement Card, we would support for children under 12 years old to be required to have parental, guardian or trusted adult approval for their application for a travel card. However, for those aged 12 or over they should be able to self-certify.

6. Are there any likely impacts the proposals contained within this Consultation may have on particular groups of people, with reference to the 'protected characteristics' listed above? Please be as specific as possible.

Age: We recognise that this has a direct benefit to young carers aged under 19 years old. However, it does create inequality for everyone who is not eligible for the support, including unpaid carers aged 19-59 years old who do not meet the conditions of free bus travel schemes.

Disability: This scheme will help break down barriers and make it easier for young carers to undertake responsibilities independently that may benefit their cared for person. For example, collecting prescriptions and reducing costs to be able to visit their cared for person if they are in hospital for a period or a resident in a care home. Some unpaid carers may already be able to access free bus travel when accompanying their cared for person, but this scheme will also allow young carers to undertake caring tasks independently.

Gender reassignment: Some consideration should be given for young people to be able to apply for the scheme using their acquired gender and name, whether this has been legally changed or not. This may be most appropriate for any young person in the process of underdoing or considering gender reassignment.

Race and ethnicity: To ensure accessibility for all children and young people who are eligible, Scottish Government should translate and promote this information in multiple languages and introduce additional translation services if requested. Therefore helping to ensure that all children and their families are well informed about the free bus travel scheme where English is not their first language.

7. Do you think the proposals contained within this Consultation may have any additional implications on the rights, wellbeing and safety of children and young people that is not picked up above?

As noted previously, the National Carer Organisations welcome the extension of free bus travel to under 19s. We believe that it will help progress children's rights and will break down some barriers that many young carers experience. The scheme will provide more opportunities for young carers to have fun and socialise, to take part in out of school activities, provide more flexibility for older young carers to go to a college outside of their local area and make it easier for all young carers to access and attend health appointments etc.

It is important to note that by providing free bus travel to under 19s, it is fair to expect that more children and young people will access this mode of public transport. Therefore, as part of the roll out of the scheme, we would urge that it should be compulsory for all bus drivers and wider bus staff to be required to undertake Child Protection Training as part of their Professional Learning.

Safeguarding must be a key consideration of this scheme, as children will be responsible for a high value travel card. Also noting that children will have easier

access to travel nationally through this scheme and this may come with some risks. Scottish Government should take appropriate steps to ensure children and young people's safety is paramount when accessing the benefits of being entitled to free bus travel.

8. Do you think the proposals contained in this Consultation are likely to increase or reduce the costs and burdens for bus companies, public bodies, third sector organisations or businesses? Please be as specific as possible.

We see numerous advantages for bus companies, predominantly the financial gains as a result of the scheme. However, consideration must be given to the demand of existing services and whether bus companies have the capacity to meet additional demand – especially if social distance measures continue longer term on buses. If this scheme is administered locally, then there is an additional burden on local public bodies to deliver this support.

There may be added expectations for schools, youth services, young carer services and the wider third sector to promote and support children and young people under 19 years old to be informed and access this scheme.

9. Are there any other issues you wish to raise which are not covered in the points or questions above?

We would like more information about whether this scheme is intending to complement or replace local authorities providing bus travel for children to attend school within their catchment areas. This is important as the direct school bus route would be more time efficient for many young carers, who may have caring responsibilities to undertake in the morning and immediately after school. Replacing the school bus service with this scheme could therefore place added burden on young carers and affect their ability to attend school on time.

We would like to share with you how a local travel scheme has successfully been working for young carers in Fife. This scheme allows for young carers and young adult carers up to the age of 25 to have free bus travel with two bus companies. Below is feedback from some young carers about how this has impacted their lives:

"Free transport has allowed me to collect essentials and prescriptions for my Dad. It allows me to easily travel to my young carer support group."
(Young Carer)

"Without this pass I would struggle with my daily lifestyle, getting to and from work and helping my Mum out. I don't know what I would do without it."
(Young Carer)

"Having free transport allows me to get around to appointments easily and have the freedom to not worry about communicating with bus drivers about my caring role. Allows me to accompany my cared for person whenever needed with no stress."

(Young Carer)

This local scheme demonstrates the benefits of free bus travel for young carers and how this can be transformational for some children and young people's lives. Therefore, the National Carer Organisations welcome the Scottish Government's consultation on extending national concessionary travel to include free bus travel for under 19s in Scotland, so that all young carers in Scotland can benefit in this way from this support.

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