

England-wide Concessionary Bus Travel: **The Passenger Perspective**

In preparation for our new role as the bus passenger champion we have recently undertaken research into the impact of nationwide concessionary bus travel for older and disabled passengers. In the research we spoke to both pass holders and non pass holders to understand the effects of concessionary bus travel from their perspective and explore their views of the new scheme. A full report of the findings from the research will be published in May 2009.



Background

- From 1st April 2008 all people aged 60 and over or with an eligible disability have been entitled to free off-peak bus travel anywhere in England. This replaced the previous entitlement to free off-peak journeys within the pass holder's local area, introduced in 2006¹.
- The concession entitles pass holders to free bus travel after 9:30am on weekdays and at any time on weekends. In some areas the statutory entitlement has also been enhanced to include free bus travel before 9:30am and free travel on other forms of local public transport.

The Research

The research was undertaken by Integrated Transport Planning Ltd on behalf of Passenger Focus in January and February 2009. There were two main components to the research:

- A survey of 2000 pass holders and non-pass holders, undertaken in Birmingham, Bath, Scarborough and Newark-on-Trent.
- Eight focus groups (four with pass holders and four with non-pass holders) undertaken in Manchester, Bournemouth, Norwich and Hartlepool. Three of the pass holder focus groups were with people who qualified for the concession due to their age and one was with people who qualified due to disability.

Key Findings

- There is strong evidence that concessionary bus travel has encouraged greater bus use by pass-holders, particularly in their local area. In the survey over a third (39%) said they travel more by bus within their local area since they obtained a concessionary pass.

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94% of non pass holders thought it was right that **older and disabled people were entitled to free national off-peak bus travel** through the current concessionary scheme

¹ Older and disabled passengers in the West Midlands, Merseyside and some other parts of England were entitled to free local bus travel prior to the introduction of the statutory concession in 2006, through local concessionary schemes.

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- In comparison, about one in eight (13%) of pass holders reported making more journeys by bus outside of their local area following the introduction of the free national bus travel entitlement.
- In the focus groups, pass holders reported a number of barriers to travelling by bus outside their area, despite this now being free under the new concession. These included:
 - general anxiety about travelling on unfamiliar bus services
 - a perceived lack of information on bus timetables, service frequencies and stops
 - longer journey times by bus in comparison to car
- It should also be noted that the survey was undertaken in February, and less than a year after the introduction of the new concession. Subsequent research, carried out in summer, may indicate greater use of buses by pass holders outside their local area.



- Amongst pass holders who were using their pass to travel outside their local area, 35% were undertaking journeys by bus that they had previously made by car. 12% were making journeys by bus that they had not previously made by any means, prior to the new concession.

Research reveals some interesting statistics

The most common reasons pass holders travelled by bus outside their local area were to visit family and friends (46%), make shopping journeys (46%) and to access sport, recreation and leisure facilities (18%). 10% of pass holders travelling outside their local area by bus had done so for holiday purposes or while away on holiday.

Around one in five of all passengers (21%) perceive bus services to have

become more crowded since the introduction of the new concession. However, 94% said they were usually or always able to get a seat on the bus services they regularly use, while 3% said they usually had to stand due to levels of crowding.

In three of the four survey areas this overcrowding was generally seen by passengers as a year-round issue, while in Scarborough there was more evidence of

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overcrowding being a specific issue during the summer months of May to August.

There was limited evidence that overcrowding linked to the introduction of free national bus travel has impacted on the perceived quality of bus services. 76% of passengers felt the quality of bus services had stayed about the same since the introduction of the new concession, while 12% felt it had improved and 8% thought it had got worse.

There was strong support for the concessionary scheme, amongst both pass holders and non-pass holders. Overall, 95% of passengers in the survey (96% of pass holders and 94% of non pass holders) thought it was right that older and disabled people were entitled to free national off-peak bus travel through the current concessionary scheme.

Views were more mixed on the idea of extending the scheme to free bus travel at all times of the day, including the morning peak. 58% agreed with this potential change while 33% disagreed.



For further information on this research please contact

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