

ANGUS COUNCIL

PLANNING AND TRANSPORT POLICY COMMITTEE

28 JANUARY 1999

**SUBJECT: PROPOSED CONCESSIONARY TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS FOR BLIND
AND PARTIALLY SIGHTED PERSONS**

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND TRANSPORT

Abstract: This report outlines a proposal for the setting up of National Concessionary Fare arrangements for Blind and Partially Sighted Persons.

1 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Committee -

- 1 Note various operational issues arising and welcome the principle of establishing National Concessionary Fare arrangements for Blind and Partially Sighted Persons.
- 2 Agree that this report be submitted to CoSLA confirming Angus Council's willingness to participate in the proposed arrangements subject to the budgetary contribution from the Authority being within the figures outlined in this report.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This report outlines proposals by CoSLA for the establishment of a National Concessionary Travel Arrangement which will allow free travel by bus and train for blind and partially sighted persons across the whole of Scotland.
- 2.2 The establishment of a National Concessionary Fares Scheme for the Blind and Partially Sighted is an agreed objective of both the Government and CoSLA and is highlighted in the Government's recent Transport White Paper "Travel Choices for Scotland" which was reported to this Committee on 27 August 1998 (Report 878/98 refers).
- 2.3 Angus Council fully supports the introduction of National Concessionary Fare Schemes and has lobbied both the Scottish Office and CoSLA for the introduction of such Schemes not only for the Blind and Partially Sighted but also for Senior Citizens and Disabled Persons.

3 ANGUS COUNCIL'S CURRENT CONCESSIONARY TRAVEL SCHEME FOR THE BLIND

- 3.1 At present Angus Council operate a Travel Concession Scheme for the Blind (the Blind being defined under the 1985 Transport Act as being "so blind as to be unable to perform any work for which sight is essential" and thus includes partially sighted).

- 3.2 This current Scheme is operated under The Transport Act 1985 and permits passholders to travel free of charge on all local bus and train services within Angus and to designated destinations outwith Angus.
- 3.3 The Travel Concession Scheme Regulations 1986 require that the Council adopt reimbursement arrangements which are formulated so that the costs to the Operator of providing the Concessions are met by the Local Authority with the objective being that Operators should be "no better and no worse off" as a result of their participation in the Scheme. The regulations also indicate that due allowance is to be made for traffic generated by the Travel Concession Scheme.

4 THE CONCESSIONARY FARE ARRANGEMENTS PROPOSED

- 4.1 The proposals put forward by CoSLA do not constitute a formal Scheme under the 1985 Transport Act but a voluntary agreement by Operators to provide free national travel on the basis of local authorities agreeing to guarantee an agreed level of financial support for three years. The local authorities would also administer the issue of standardised concession passes.
- 4.2 It is hoped that the arrangements will start in June 1999.
- 4.3 Eligibility as blind or partially sighted will be determined by local authorities as for the current local schemes.

Operating Principles

- 4.4 The principles for operating the arrangements are as follows:
- The arrangements will cover both bus and rail travel
 - There should be one national card covering both bus and rail
 - The design of the card will be agreed with Operators but should include a local identifier, validity dates and security features
- 4.5 It will be the decision of the Authority whether or not to make an administration charge for the issue of the pass, but if it is decided to do so then the maximum charge should be £5 in any year (for example if a pass is valid for three years then the maximum charge should be £5 or the payments phased to be no more than £5 in any year).
- 4.6 There will be no local card only option, i.e. individual Authorities cannot opt out and only operate their own scheme.
- 4.7 In addition to the bus and rail proposals the Scottish Office are pursuing with Calmac and P.O. Scottish Ferries the scope for their inclusion in the proposed arrangements.

Participation

4.8 The basis of the agreement is that :

- each Council shall separately establish the value of the “local reimbursement pool” for bus and train services and shall distribute the pool, in the case of bus services to the local transport operators operating services in their area and, in the case of rail services to ScotRail
- Councils will commit to paying these “pools” for three years (with an RPI allowance)
- Councils will agree to administer the issue of a standardised concession card with a local identifier

4.9 In return, all the bus and rail operators will voluntarily agree to carry Blind and Partially Sighted cardholders free of charge on all services.

4.10 A management group will be established to oversee the working arrangements. This group will comprise of representatives from Operators, CoSLA, Councils, Strathclyde Passenger Transport and the National League for Blind and observer status for the Scottish Office. This group will oversee the development of the proposals, it will deal with implementation and post implementation issues (including determining the annual inflation adjuster) and will consider and make recommendations on matters referred to it by the Authorities or transport operators in the event of a failure to agree at a local level.

4.11 All operators (bus and rail) and all Councils should participate.

4.12 Berwick and Carlisle in addition to all Scottish locations accessible by bus and train should be included.

4.13 To date the Scottish Office have secured support from ScotRail, First Group and Stagecoach for the proposals. No agreement has yet been reached with any of the bus operators in Angus. While it is hoped that they will wish to fully participate it should be noted that the proposals do not constitute a formal Travel Concession Scheme under the terms of the 1985 Transport Act and as such participation cannot be made compulsory.

5 FUNDING FOR THE BUS ELEMENT OF THE SCHEME

5.1 Base budgets will be established in each local scheme area by the Authority based on the cost of the existing schemes. These base budgets should be agreed between the Authority and the local transport operators. In the event of a failure to agree then the matter should be referred to the management group (see paragraph 4.10 for details).

5.2 The agreed base budget will be the “local reimbursement pool” and shall be distributed to operators on the basis of the general concessionary fare distribution to operators in each year. This base budget will be guaranteed by the Authority for three years and will be increased each year in line with the Retail Price Index.

- 5.3 It should be noted that the exact costs for travel by current Blind passholders in Angus cannot be established as these passholders are issued with a Scheme B pass which is also issued to the severely disabled. It is however estimated that the costs are approximately £10,000 per annum.
- 5.4 The proposed Scheme does not require that Operators are re-imbursed so that they are "no better and no worse off" through their participation unlike the current arrangements which are required to fulfil this requirement under the Travel Concession Regulations 1986. It should be noted that under the proposed arrangements passengers will be able to make longer distance trips than previously was the case and many journeys may also be made by passholders from outwith Angus, this is particularly likely bearing in mind the presence of the Guide Dog Centre in Forfar. It may therefore be the case that Operators query the proposed re-imburement arrangements and may suggest that either the local re-imburement pool should be increased or that they are fully compensated as under the existing Travel Concession Scheme Regulations.
- 5.5 It should also be noted that in Angus, as is the case in the majority of Scottish Authorities, Scottish CityLink have never claimed any concessionary monies, however, with a recent change of ownership to Metroline it is considered that this situation is unlikely to continue. Should CityLink submit claims then these would have to be met from the local re-imburement pool and therefore the re-imburement to the other Operators in respect of the Blind and Partially Sighted would be reduced.
- 5.6 Should Operators choose not participate in the National arrangement then they would still be required to participate in the local scheme as operated under the 1985 Transport Act. In the local Scheme they would still be required to be re-imbursed so that they were "no better or no worse off" through participating. Such re-imburement would further dilute the monies to be re-imbursed to operators participating in the National agreement. Dependant on the number of operators who choose not to participate in the National agreement then it may be necessary to formalise it as a Scheme to achieve compulsory participation.

6 FUNDING FOR THE RAIL ELEMENT OF THE SCHEME

- 6.1 It is proposed that the rail element of the scheme is funded differently from the bus element. What is proposed is that an average national cost per passholder per year should be established, this has been calculated based on the five schemes which currently have specific blind and partially sighted concessions. For 1997/98 this figure was approximately £5.30. While this figure has not been finalised the Council have been advised verbally by CoSLA that it will be no more than this. It is intended that this average cost should be used to derive the "local reimbursement pool" for the Authority.
- 6.2 The number of passholders resident in Angus is currently 313, therefore this number multiplied by the average cost per year of approximately £5.30 will be the agreed base budget for the "local reimbursement pool" which will be passed on to ScotRail who in turn will be responsible for agreeing its further distribution to other passenger rail operators.

- 6.3 As is the case for the costs of bus travel, the exact costs for travel under the existing Blind Concession Scheme in Angus cannot be defined. At present Blind, Disabled, Severely Disabled and Taxicard pass holders are all entitled to travel free of charge by rail and the cost for each individual category cannot be ascertained. However, it is currently estimated that the cost to Angus Council for re-imbusement to ScotRail for the Blind Concession Scheme is £600 per annum. Under the new proposal this figure will increase to £1,700 approximately.
- 6.4 The agreed base budget for each area is required to be guaranteed for three years and be increased each year in line with the Retail Price Index.

7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Under the proposed Travel Concession Arrangements for the Blind and Partially Sighted the costs to the Council for the bus element will remain at the present budgetary level of £10,000, however, this expenditure must be guaranteed for three years and an allowance made for inflation in line with the RPI. For rail re-imbusement the current cost to the Authority is £600 per annum approximately. Under the proposed arrangements it is estimated that the cost will increase to £1,700 per annum.
- 7.2 It is possible however, dependent upon budgetary pressure, to charge up to £5.00 per pass per annum, therefore the Authority need not incur any additional expenditure in respect of re-imbusement costs or the administrative costs required for the procurement and issue of new passes. This will be an issue for the Committee to decide should the proposals be approved Nationally.
- 7.3 The costs of the proposed Transport arrangements for the blind and partially sighted during the first planned year of operation can be met from the Transport Policy revenue budget for 1999/2000 for which the budget setting process is underway. A commitment in principle can also be given at this stage to maintaining the proposed level of subsidy for a further two years up to 2001/2002.

8 CONSULTATION

- 8.1 The Chief Executive, Director of Finance and Director of Law and Administration have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

9 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The proposal for the National Travel Concession Agreement for the Blind and Partially Sighted is welcomed, the Council having previously lobbied both the Scottish Office and CoSLA for the introduction of such a Scheme.
- 9.2 It is hoped that all Scottish local authorities support the proposals which are the first step towards the introduction of a National arrangement. The voluntary nature of the proposed agreement is however noted, and the possible difficulties of ensuring support from operators acknowledged. It is hoped nonetheless that local bus service operators will be willing to participate in the Agreement without the need to formalise it as a Travel Concession Scheme under the 1985 Transport Act.

NOTE

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above Report.

AA/LEM/KW
18 January 1999

Alex Anderson
Director of Planning and Transport