



PORTFOLIO: ECONOMY & PLANNING

CABINET - 3 APRIL 2002

CONCESSIONARY TRAVEL SCHEME

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The report explains the position regarding the granting of free travel under the Transport Act 2000.
- 1.2 The report gives details of the pass entitling some disabled residents to free travel on public transport which is available under the current Farepass scheme. This scheme is operated by Hampshire County Council on behalf of the participating District Councils.
- 1.3 The report also looks at alternatives outside the Farepass scheme.

2 THE TRANSPORT ACT 2000

- 2.1 The above sets a mandatory minimum scheme that allows half price travel within an authority's area to those that qualify. Those qualifying under the Act are residents;

Of state retirement age (60 for women and 65 for men)

- Or** a resident of any age who is suffering from one or more of the following disabilities;

Blind or Partially sighted;

Without hearing;

Without speech;

Suffering from a disability or injury which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on your ability to walk;

Without arms or have long term loss of the use of both arms;

Suffering from a learning disability, that is a state of arrested or incomplete development of the mind which includes significant impairment of intelligence and social functioning;

A person who, if they applied for the grant of a licence to drive a motor vehicle under Part 111 of the Road Traffic Act 1988, would have their application refused on the grounds of physical fitness. (This does not include applications refused on the grounds of misuse of drugs or alcohol).

- 2.2 The Transport Act 2000 allows local authorities to exceed this minimum scheme or offer alternative concessions, such as tokens, as long as the half-fare pass is offered as an option without charge.

3 FREE TRAVEL OPTION UNDER THE FAREPASS SCHEME

- 3.1 The Council is a participating authority in the Farepass scheme and that scheme offers a half-fare pass that exceeds the minimum scheme in as much that it offers half-price travel not only in its own area but also throughout Hampshire.
- 3.2 The scheme also offers a free-travel pass, which is available to some disabled residents. The pass known as a 'red pass' can be made available to residents who are

blind (not partially sighted), people without arms, people with severe mental handicap and people who cannot hear and speak.

- 3.3 This option was set up within the Farepass scheme to provide practical assistance to people who have difficulty in handling money and consequently impairs their ability to use public transport.
- 3.4 The offer of free travel to people in the above groups is not intended to provide them with additional financial assistance, which could be seen as discriminating against people with other disabilities. The aim is simply is to offer practical help by removing the need to handle money.
- 3.5 The cost of the 'red pass' is 1.5 times the cost of the half-fare pass. However, as this exceeds the minimum prescribed in the Transport Act 2000 councils can make a charge for the pass.
- 3.6 If a pass giving free travel to residents other than those shown in 3.2 (e.g. partially sighted) was considered this would have to be done in one of two ways. Firstly the council could offer its own pass alternative to that currently offered under the Farepass scheme. Or alternatively through agreement with the other authorities participating in the Farepass scheme increase the scope of the current 'red pass'. The later option could significantly increase the cost of the 'red pass' and at a special meeting of the Hants and I.O.W. Chief Officers group in January of this year it was agreed by participating authorities that the current criteria should not be altered.

4 FREE TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE FAREPASS SCHEME

- 4.1 If Members wish to issue an alternative pass the Council would be responsible for the administration and re-imburement arrangements with all local bus companies who may lose revenue as a result of its introduction.
- 4.2 Currently no District Councils in Hampshire operate such a scheme but some in Dorset do. Enquiries with some of these Council has shown that the basis of re-imburement is a flat rate fee for each pass issued and the cost to the issuing Council being in the region of £65 to £80 a pass. This is based on travel made to and from within the Council's area only and not countywide as offered by the Farepass scheme
- 4.3 Wilts & Dorset Bus Company the main service providers in the west of the District have been contacted for a price for free-travel Countywide. At the time of deadline for this report they had not responded.
- 4.4 The issuing of an alternative pass will add to the cost of administration of the scheme, in particular designing and printing secure passes. The introduction could also lead to pressure from other disabled groups to extend the free travel option to their members.

5 STATISTICS

- 5.1 The Hampshire Association for the Blind have been consulted and have informed us that there are 229 residents who are registered blind and 299 registered as partially sighted. They were keen to point out that a large number of these were elderly residents who were unlikely to use buses.
- 5.2 The concessions currently granted are recorded under a number of categories including those who are blind and partially sighted. However, this distinction is only

made where that is the sole criteria for qualification and the figures do not therefore include someone who qualifies because they have reached retirement age. The total currently receiving a concession on grounds that they visually impaired is 229.

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 If Members choose to offer the 'red pass' to all those eligible under the Farepass scheme the additional costs are estimated at £1,890. This is calculated as follows;

135 @ £28 (anticipated cost of half-fare pass)	= £ 3,780.00
Cost of 'red pass'	
135 @ £42 (1.5 times cost of half-fare pass)	= £ 5,670.00

In view of the comments made regarding the age and likely usage of a free travel option it has been assumed that similar percentages would opt for tokens as at present. The figure of 229 has been used this being the number of registered blind plus 100 who may qualify under the other criteria set out in 3.2 of this report is. This equates to approximately 135 who may wish to opt for a free pass.

6.2 If Members decided to offer the 'red pass' to only those residents who are registered as blind the additional costs are estimated to be £1,350.

6.3 If Members wished to offer a free travel option to the blind, and partially sighted who are not included in Farepass scheme, there are two options. First the council could offer the 'red pass' to those registered blind and issue its own pass to the partially sighted. Or secondly not issue the 'red pass' but issue its own pass to all who would qualify for free travel under the criteria set by Members.

6.4 If the first option is adopted the additional costs have been estimated as £6,550. This is £1,350 for the 'red pass' and assumes a further 100 residents who are partially sighted opt for the Council's pass at a additional cost of £52 a pass. This option could cause problems with the bus operators and Farepass scheme administration, as there would be two forms of free travel pass in circulation.

6.5 If the second option was adopted the costs could be in the region of £10,000 but would have the advantage of being the only free pass available and the costs of producing passes would be proportionality lower.

8.1 As all the options outlined in this paragraph exceed the minimum concessionary scheme prescribed in the Transport Act a charge of up to but not exceeding the difference between the cost of a half-fare concession and a free travel pass could be made.

7 CRIME ORDER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None arising directly from this report.

8 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None arising directly from this report

8 CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 The current Farepass scheme already has an option to offer a free travel pass the rationale for its existence is clear and appropriate in trying to encourage and simplify the use of public transport. This is the option adopted by a number of District Councils in Hampshire.
- 8.1 To extend the scheme to the partially sighted could open the possibility of challenge from other disabled groups which may be hard to defend and lead to increased expenditure on the scheme.
- 8.1 The introduction of a third form of concession will lead to confusion on behalf the applicants, operators and be more expensive to administer.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 That if Members decide to offer a free travel pass that this be the 'red pass' currently provided within the Farepass scheme.
- 8.1 That the 'red pass' be offered at no charge to all those defined in 3.2 of this report and not just those residents who are registered blind.
- 8.1 A supplementary estimate of £1,890 be approved in light of Members decision regarding recommendation 10.2.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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