



Concessionary Fares: Policy Paper January 2023

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1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme¹ (the Scheme) provides free and half fare travel on public transport for several groups of people, including children, senior citizens and some people with disabilities. The Scheme is funded by the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) and administered by Translink.
- 1.2 Providing subsidised access to public transport is crucial in helping to reduce social isolation and supporting people to access wider economic and educational opportunities, as well as helping people access a wider range of goods and services.
- 1.3 The importance of the Concessionary Fare Scheme now also needs to be seen in the context of protecting the environment with the need to take action against climate change and encourages modal change from private car ownership to public transport. Improving access to public transport can encourage more people to travel sustainably.
- 1.4 In recent years there has been a public debate about extending the Scheme, for example by extending free travel on public transport to those currently in receipt of half fare travel, and introducing free travel for young people as has been the case in some other countries, such as Scotland.
- 1.5 There has also been discussion amongst stakeholders regarding changes to the way the Scheme is administered e.g. introducing the ability to apply online to the Scheme.
- 1.6 In this paper we make a number of recommendations. These are:
- 1) Extend the scope of the Scheme to provide free travel for children aged between 6 and 16 who currently pay half fare.
 - 2) Consider extending free travel to all young people up to the age of 22 and as a first step extend the half fare concession for children to young people aged 16 and 17.
 - 3) Extend the Scheme to provide free travel for people with disabilities who currently receive a half fare discount.
 - 4) Extend the Scheme to provide concessionary fare travel for carers.
 - 5) Consider introducing free public transport for families on low incomes at less busy times of the day.
 - 6) Run an awareness raising campaign so people eligible for half fare travel are aware of their current entitlement.
 - 7) Make the eligibility criterion for people who have been refused a driving licence due to their medical condition less restrictive. In addition, extend this eligibility to those who have not applied for a driving licence because they know their application would be refused on medical grounds.
 - 8) Remove the requirement for applications for senior citizen passes to be made in person i.e. it should be possible to make applications by post, online or by telephone.
 - 9) Provide guidance materials to aid applications online and in different formats to aid accessibility.
 - 10) Offer assistance to complete applications by telephone.

¹ <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/articles/concessionary-travel-northern-ireland>

- 11) Reword the messaging around the “half fare” Smartpass as the concession is in many cases not the equivalent of 50% off.
- 12) Tackle the anomaly that currently exists between Glider and Metro/Ulsterbus passengers, whereby half fare Smartpass holders travel free on the Glider as there is no mechanism to charge them a concessionary fare.

2 About us

2.1 The Consumer Council is a non-departmental public body (NDPB) established through the General Consumer Council (Northern Ireland) Order (The Order) 1984. Our principal statutory duty is to promote and safeguard the interests of consumers in Northern Ireland.

2.2 We are an insight-led, evidence based organisation:

- Providing consumers with expert advice and confidential guidance.
- Engaging with government, regulators and consumer bodies to influence public policy.
- Empowering consumers with the information and tools to build confidence and knowledge.
- Investigating and resolving consumer complaints under statutory and non-statutory functions.
- Undertaking best practice research to identify and quantify emerging risks to consumers.
- Campaigning for market reform as an advocate for consumer choice and protection.

We have specific statutory duties in relation to energy, postal services, transport, water and sewerage, and food affordability and accessibility. These include considering consumer complaints and enquiries, carrying out research, and educating and informing consumers. Our non-statutory functions educate and empower consumers against unfair or discriminatory practices in any market from financial services to private parking charge notices. Across all our areas of work, we pay particular regard to consumers:

- who are disabled or chronically sick;
- who are of pensionable age;
- who are on low incomes; and
- who live in rural areas.

2.3 The Consumer Council uses a set of eight core principles that are commonly used by consumer organisations for considering how particular issues or policies are likely to affect consumers.

These are:



3 Background

3.1 The Scheme was established in 1978² to provide free transport to people who were registered blind and half fare travel to children between the ages of 6 and 16, senior citizens and war disabled pensioners. Free travel for senior citizens (65+) was introduced in 2001, and in 2002 this was extended to war disabled pensioners. The Scheme was extended in 2004 to provide half fare concession for people with certain categories of disability (these are set out in detail in Section 3.4).

Since 2008 the Scheme has been extended to include free travel for all men and women over 60 years old.

The full list of concessionary fare categories is set out in Table 1 below:

Table 1 Current Concessionary Fare Categories

Category	Fare
People over 60 years old in NI	Free travel
People over 65 years old in NI and RoI	Free travel
Children aged 5 and under	Free travel
Children aged between 6 and 16	Half fare travel
War disabled pensioners	Free travel
People who are registered blind	Free travel
People who are registered as partially sighted	Half fare travel
People who have been refused a driving licence on medical grounds	Half fare travel

² Transport (Northern Ireland) Order 1977, Article 5

People known to have a learning disability	Half fare travel
People in receipt of the mobility component of Disability Living Allowance	Half fare travel
People in receipt of the standard or enhanced mobility component of Personal Independence Payment (PIP)	Half fare travel

3.2 The aim of the Scheme was:

*'To promote social inclusion by improving public transport accessibility through free and concessionary fares for members of the community who are most vulnerable, or liable to social exclusion.'*³

3.3 Section 4 sets out the current concessionary fare categories and the issues surrounding them.

4 Current concessionary fare categories

4.1 Children and Young People

4.1.1 Children aged 4 and under travel for free on all services in Northern Ireland. Children aged between 5 and 16⁴ qualify for child fare concession which is usually 50% of the standard adult single fare.⁵

4.1.2 Whilst not part of the Scheme, Translink have other discounted fares in place to encourage young people to use public transport. For example anyone aged 16-23 can apply for a free yLink smartcard⁶ which gives one third off Translink bus and rail travel⁷ in Northern Ireland and up to 50% off cross-border Enterprise services. Anyone who is 24 years of age or over and in full-time education can apply for a free 24+ Student Railcard, valid for the academic year (September to August). This entitles pass holders to a third off cash and mLink singles, day return,⁸ weekly and monthly tickets on NI Railways and up to 50% off Enterprise fares.

4.1.3 Recent research carried out by the University of the West of England and the charity Sustrans recommended that young people should be offered free public transport or at least set at low, flat rates.⁹ It found that people aged 16-24 use buses far more than older age groups, have less access to cars, and that costly bus travel is harming the life chances of some in this age group by reducing opportunities to access education, training and employment. Young people also report transition points, such as moving into further or

³ Equality Impact Assessment on The Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme, Department for Regional Development, April 2004

⁴ The half fare is applicable until 30th June following their 16th birthday

⁵ <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/free-and-concessionary-bus-and-rail-travel>

⁶ <https://www.translink.co.uk/ylink>

⁷ 1/3 off NI Railways day return applies to the peak adult full fare day return ticket only. yLink cards do not receive any additional discount on the off-peak (after 9.30am) NI Railways Day Return ticket.

⁸ 1/3 off NI Railways day return applies to the peak adult full fare day return ticket only. yLink cards do not receive any additional discount on the off-peak (after 9.30am) NI Railways Day Return ticket.

⁹ https://www.sustrans.org.uk/media/10857/220719-fair-bus-fares-for-young-people-v14_d.pdf

higher education or accessing employment as financial pressure points in their use of public transport.¹⁰ Children and young people have been identified as being at relatively high risk of poverty and social exclusion.¹¹ Many are likely to be living on low or no income and often will not have access to a private car.¹²

- 4.1.4 All residents in Scotland under the age of 22 have been eligible for free bus travel from 31 January 2022 with the Minister for Transport stating that “free bus travel helps with transport affordability; it helps our young people access education and leisure destinations – all while helping us meet our net zero targets by encouraging a shift away from cars.”¹³
- 4.1.5 There have been calls to extend the Scheme in Northern Ireland. For example, in January 2022 Belfast City Council passed a motion calling upon the Minister for Infrastructure and Translink to introduce a pilot of free public transport for young people in Belfast.¹⁴ It also provides alternative options for their parents, who may otherwise have found public transport too expensive for family travel and encourage them to use buses or trains instead of relying on private cars. Research also indicates that free travel normalises behaviour towards public transport from a young age.¹⁵
- 4.1.6 Estimating the likely cost of this option is difficult. Children aged 6 to 16 are not required to obtain a SmartPass to avail of half fare travel, therefore a probable take up rate cannot be determined.¹⁶ Statistics from DfI show that, in 2016/17, 9,175,053 journeys were taken by children using half fare travel with an associated expenditure of £7,212k.¹⁷ Adjusted for inflation, this expenditure figure in October 2022 is £8,806k.¹⁸ Extending this to fully free travel for this age group would therefore expect to cost an additional £8,806k.
- 4.1.7 Extending half fare travel for children in full time education e.g. to include all those aged 16 and 17 could be expected to benefit these individuals by addressing financial barriers to accessing public transport.¹⁹ In 2020 there were 43,236 young people aged 16-17 living in Northern Ireland.²⁰

4.2 Senior Citizens

- 4.2.1 Permanent residents of Northern Ireland between 60 and 64 (you must have been resident in Northern Ireland for a minimum of 3 months), are eligible for a 60 Plus SmartPass for free

¹⁰ <https://www.povertyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Transport-and-Child-Poverty-Beyond-the-Pandemic.pdf>

¹¹ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5802/cmselect/cmworpen/188/report.html>

¹²

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/784685/future_of_mobility_access.pdf

¹³ <https://www.transport.gov.scot/news/21-million-free-bus-trips-for-scotland-s-under-22s/>

¹⁴ <https://minutes.belfastcity.gov.uk/documents/s96211/Motion%20-%20Cllr%20Smyth%20-%20Free%20Public%20Transport%20for%20Young%20People.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/phr/phr02010/#/abstract>

¹⁶ [Policy-review-of-concessionary-fares.pdf \(assemblyresearchmatters.org\)](#)

¹⁷ [NI Concessionary Fares Scheme \(infrastructure-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁸ [Inflation calculator | Bank of England](#)

¹⁹ [Policy-review-of-concessionary-fares.pdf \(assemblyresearchmatters.org\)](#)

²⁰ See reference 13

travel throughout Northern Ireland.²¹ Senior citizens who are 65 years of age or over are eligible for a Senior Smartpass which also entitles them to free cross border travel and travel within the Republic of Ireland.

4.2.2 Research conducted by the University of Glasgow²² indicates that access to free travel increases bus use and access to services among older people, potentially improving mobility, social participation and health.

4.3 Free travel for certain categories of disability

4.3.1 People who are registered blind,²³ and those with a war disablement pension,²⁴ are eligible for free travel on eligible services.

4.3.2 Consumer Council research indicates that awareness around these entitlements is not as high as for other forms of concessionary fares. For example, whilst 90% of consumers were aware that people aged over 60 were entitled to free travel, only 56% knew that people who are registered blind are entitled to free travel on eligible services and this fell to 46% for the war disablement pass.²⁵ Consideration should therefore be given to running an awareness campaign to ensure people are aware of their entitlements.

4.4 Half fare Smartpass

4.4.1 Concessionary travel is available for people aged between 16 and 64, resident in Northern Ireland for at least the last three months, and who fall into one of the five categories below:²⁶

- People who have been awarded the higher or lower rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance for a period of at least 12 months.
- People who have been refused a driving licence on medical grounds.
- People who are registered as partially sighted with a Health and Social Services Trust.
- People who are known to a Health and Social Services Trust as having a learning disability.
- People who are in receipt of the Mobility Component of Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

4.4.2 Holders are entitled to 50% off the standard adult single fare on scheduled bus and rail services operating within Northern Ireland. In addition local Day Return rail tickets are now available for DFI half-fare SmartPass holders for travel between stations within Northern Ireland only. Half-fare SmartPass holders can avail of the cost of a full single fare for a day return.

²¹ <https://www.translink.co.uk/usingtranslink/ticketsandtravelcards/concession>

²² [S0144686X19000692jra 2480..2494 \(cambridge.org\)](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/transportation-research-part-a/article/S0144686X19000692jra/2480..2494)

²³ <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/registered-blind-smartpass>

²⁴ <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/war-disablement-smartpass#:~:text=To%20qualify%20for%20free%20fares,permanently%20resident%20in%20Northern%20Ireland.>

²⁵ [2 \(consumercouncil.org.uk\)](https://www.consumercouncil.org.uk)

²⁶ <https://www.translink.co.uk/usingtranslink/ticketsandtravelcards/concession>

- 4.4.3 On average those with a mobility difficulty make 596 journeys per year, 39% less than those without a mobility difficulty (978 journeys per year).²⁷ This indicates that a further discount could be used to motivate those with disabilities to use public transport more.
- 4.4.4 Recent research for the Consumer Council²⁸ shows that awareness around half fare Smartpasses is not high. For example, only 29% of consumers were aware that those who have a recognised learning disability are eligible for half fare travel and only 17% were aware that those who have had a driving licence refused / revoked on medical grounds are eligible.
- 4.4.5 In January 2022, then Infrastructure Minister Nichola Mallon signalled her intention to extend the Scheme to provide free travel for people with disabilities who currently pay half fare and to widen the range of services facilitating concessionary fares by extending the Scheme to new operators who have already indicated or expressed an interest in joining.²⁹
- 4.4.6 In 2018-19, 17,301 smart passes were held by people with a disability, with 12,786 of these being used at least once.³⁰ Statistics from DfI show that, in 2016/17, 663,076 journeys were taken by passengers using half fare concessionary travel with an associated expenditure of £957k.³¹ Adjusted for inflation, this expenditure figure in October 2022 is £1,168k.³² Extending this to fully free travel for this group would therefore expect to cost an additional £1,168k.
- 4.4.7 The Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC) published a research paper in 2019 on concessionary fares with a number of recommendations around the concessionary-fare Smartpass,³³ mainly focussing on the limited eligibility compared with the rest of the United Kingdom. For example, one major difference in eligibility criteria for disabled people relates to people who have a medical condition that prevents them from driving. In Northern Ireland this relates to people *who **have been** refused a driving licence due to a medical condition*. In Great Britain this relates to people *who **would be** refused a licence due to a medical condition*.
- 4.4.8 People who have been refused a driving licence due to a medical condition must send their application first to the DVA and have it signed and stamped before posting to Translink. Some people who know they have a medical condition which means they are unable to drive may never have applied for a licence. To obtain the SmartPass these people must first make an application for a licence (with an upfront cost), declaring their condition. On receiving their refusal (with cost refunded) the applicant then completes the SmartPass application form, sends it to the DVA to have it signed and stamped before finally sending it to Translink.

²⁷ <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/news/northern-ireland-transport-statistics-2018-2019-statistical-report-has-been-published-today>

²⁸ [2 \(consumercouncil.org.uk\)](https://www.consumercouncil.org.uk)

²⁹ <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/news/mallon-signals-her-intention-seek-approval-extend-concessionary-fares-scheme>

³⁰ <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/infrastructure/northern-ireland-transport-statistics-2018-2019-publication.pdf>

³¹ [NI Concessionary Fares Scheme \(infrastructure-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk)

³² [Inflation calculator | Bank of England](https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/inflation-calculator)

³³ [Con Fares Application Renewal paper \(Final Version\).pdf \(imtac.org.uk\)](https://www.imtac.org.uk)

- 4.4.9 We support the view of IMTAC that this criterion, which means that people must make an application for a licence in the knowledge that it will be refused, is not reasonable and urge the Department to make this less restrictive.
- 4.4.10 The Consumer Council has received complaints regarding the wording and information provided on the half-fare Smartpass which is ambiguous regarding what an eligible person is entitled to. Whilst it is called a “half fare” pass, this is not actually the case as the entitlement is to 50% of a standard adult single fare – it does not apply to returns or to any special offers which may already apply e.g. cheaper travel after 9.30 am. This may mean, for example, that a special offer or off-peak day pass may be cheaper than using the half-fare Smartpass. Clarity on this is important to ensure that pass holders obtain the lowest fare. This is particularly important given the impact the cost-of-living crisis is having on consumers incomes and the fact that pass holders are likely to be at higher risk of vulnerability, including financial vulnerability.
- 4.4.11 There is no mechanism on Glider services to give the half fare concession, therefore these pass holders are entitled to free travel. This leads to a discrepancy between those passengers who can travel on Glider services and those on other Translink services.

4.5 Carers

- 4.5.1 There are no concessionary fares in place for carers in Northern Ireland. In Scotland, carers can get free travel on buses if they are travelling with someone who has a National Entitlement Card and need someone to travel with them to keep them safe.³⁴ Elsewhere in the United Kingdom, depending on the local authority where they live, carers can qualify for extra financial assistance to help them take the person they are caring for to health appointments and other engagements. For example, in London and Bristol anyone with a Disabled or Older Person's Freedom Pass can also apply for a companion pass if they need help travelling.³⁵ In the Republic of Ireland anyone in receipt of Carer's Allowance, Prescribed Relative's Allowance or are a specified carer for a person getting Constant Attendance Allowance, or if a person is medically unfit to travel alone, is entitled to free travel.³⁶
- 4.5.2 There are currently estimated to be around 220,000 carers in Northern Ireland.³⁷ The lack of any concessionary travel for carers could lead to cases where a person with a disability may not be able to take public transport, because the carer cannot afford the travel. Given its availability elsewhere, we believe the Scheme should be extended to provide carers with a concessionary fare.

³⁴ <https://www.careinfoscotland.scot/topics/care-at-home/transport/national-entitlement-card/>

³⁵ <https://www.express.co.uk/finance/personalfinance/1563752/free-bus-pass-carers-allowance-state-pension>

³⁶ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ba6e26-operational-guidelines-free-travel-scheme/#appendix-1-eligibility-for-companion-free-travel>

³⁷ <https://www.assemblyresearchmatters.org/2018/07/26/carers-in-northern-ireland-key-statistics/>

5 Application Process

- 5.1 Applications for the Senior Citizen's Smartpasses must be made in person at a Translink station. This has the potential to disadvantage people who are unable to travel to a station e.g. because of illness or disability or those in rural areas. We agree with IMTAC's recommendation that an option be made available for these applications to be posted.³⁸
- 5.2 There is currently no option to apply for, or renew, concessionary fares online. Whilst hard copy forms should be retained, consideration should be given to introducing an online application process. Forms should also be available in alternative formats e.g. large print and guidance documents should be widely available. Consideration should also be given to improving the support available for people who may require assistance to complete the form e.g. a telephone helpline.

6 Poverty

- 6.1 Research has shown that transport can be integral to improving equality, by increasing access to jobs, education and services. Policies that improve the accessibility and affordability of transport can therefore help promote equality. Cost is a key obstacle to the use of transport. Policies that make transport more affordable (such as concessionary fares) can be an effective way to help people living in poverty to access and maintain work.³⁹ This could include free public transport for families on low incomes at less busy times of the day or affordable combined tickets for journeys requiring multiple forms of transport.⁴⁰
- 6.2 The Consumer Council's Household Expenditure Tracker⁴¹ shows that Northern Ireland's lowest earning households have only £24 left each week after bills and other essential living costs are paid. A recent Consumer Council survey on the cost of living crisis⁴² revealed that 66% of consumers believed the financial position of their household was worse now than compared with twelve months ago.
- 6.3 However, just as important in promoting public transport to those on lower incomes is improving investment in public transport serving more rural areas to ensure equal access to services. Consumer Council research found that just 45% of those surveyed believed there were good bus routes across Northern Ireland.

³⁸ [Con Fares Application Renewal paper \(Final Version\).pdf \(imtac.org.uk\)](#)

³⁹

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/953951/Transport_and_inequality_report_document.pdf

⁴⁰ <https://www.povertyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Transport-and-Child-Poverty-Beyond-the-Pandemic.pdf>

⁴¹ <https://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-11/Consumer%20Council%20-%20NI%20Household%20Expenditure%20Tracker%20Q2.pdf>

⁴² [Northern Ireland Consumers & the Cost of Living - Pulse Survey | Consumer Council](#)

7 Climate Change

- 7.1 The transport sector is the second largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in Northern Ireland. Analysis shows Belfast is the most car-dependent city in the UK, with more than 70% of journeys in Northern Ireland taken by car; above the UK average of 63%.⁴³ Research conducted by the Department for Infrastructure shows that, between 2017 and 2019, just 5% of all journeys taken in Northern Ireland were on public transport.⁴⁴ Incentivising consumers to use public transport is one of the most effective ways of reducing congestion and a reliance on private cars, and of reducing air pollution.⁴⁵
- 7.2 Consumer Council research shows that just 28% of consumers say that climate change / protecting the environment influences their decisions on type of transport to use and they believe the responsibility for tackling climate change lies with government rather than with them as individuals.⁴⁶ Therefore consumers need to be provided with incentives by government to make sustainable choices. Our research also shows that if action was taken to lower fares consumers would be more encouraged to switch to public transport. 82% of consumers most commonly used a private car for transport but 61% would use their car less if public transport was free or heavily subsidised. This highlights the importance of using concessionary fares as a means to encourage more people to use public transport.
- 7.3 Regarding support for change in relation to climate change and transport, our research found that 65% of consumers are supportive of free public buses and trains paid for completely by NI government funding. Translink has set ambitious actions and targets of a 50% reduction in current emissions by 2030, net zero by 2040 and to be climate positive by 2050.⁴⁷ The Department for Infrastructure recently announced £88 million funding for 100 new zero emission buses and EV charging infrastructure.⁴⁸
- 7.4 Making public transport free or with significant concessions has been shown to make an impact. In the city of Tallinn in Estonia, the decision to make public transport free increased public transport usage by 14% in the first year and greatly benefitted lower income households in and around the city.⁴⁹ In Luxembourg, around 40% of households were set to benefit from their policy of country-wide free mobility.⁵⁰
- 7.5 However, while price is an important factor in deciding to use public transport it is not the only factor. Quality, frequency and safety of public transport provided is also fundamental to facilitate transition away from the private car. This is particularly important in more rural

⁴³ [Decarbonising Transport in Northern Ireland](https://niassembly.gov.uk) (niassembly.gov.uk)

⁴⁴ [Travel Survey for Northern Ireland In-depth Report 2017-2019](https://infrastructure-ni.gov.uk) (infrastructure-ni.gov.uk)

⁴⁵ [Free public transport: the new global initiative clearing the air, roads and helping keep climate targets on track | Rapid Transition Alliance](#)

⁴⁶ https://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-05/Research_Report_Future_of_Transport.PDF

⁴⁷ <https://www.translink.co.uk/Corporate/TranslinkSpiritinAction/goeco>

⁴⁸ <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/news/odowd-announces-investment-ps88million-new-zero-emission-buses#:~:text=Infrastructure%20Minister%20John%20O'Dowd,week%20between%20Translink%20and%20Wri ghtbus.>

⁴⁹ [The prospects of fare-free public transport: evidence from Tallinn | SpringerLink](#)

⁵⁰ [Free passenger transport - exploring the benefits and disadvantages | Eltis](#)

areas, where Consumer Council research found that just 54% of consumers felt there was a good local bus service where they lived.⁵¹

8 Conclusion and Recommendations

8.1 Concessionary travel has vital role in not only reducing social isolation and ensuring as many people as possible have appropriate access to educational and economic opportunities, but also in encouraging more people to make the switch from private car use to public transport.

8.2 Consideration should be given as to how the Scheme can be extended to ensure maximum use of public transport. Awareness raising programmes should also be implemented so that people know if they are eligible for reduced fares. The administration of the Scheme should also be investigated to make it more streamlined and accessible. Our specific recommendations are outlined below:

- 1) Extend the scope of the Scheme to provide free travel for children aged between 6 and 16 who currently pay half fare.
- 2) Consider extending free travel to all young people up to the age of 22 and as a first step extending the half fare concession for children to young people aged 16 and 17.
- 3) Extend the Scheme to provide free travel for people with disabilities who currently receive a half fare discount.
- 4) Extend the Scheme to provide concessionary fare travel for carers.
- 5) Consider introducing free public transport for families on low incomes at less busy times of the day.
- 6) Run an awareness raising campaign so people eligible for half fare travel are aware of their current entitlement.
- 7) Make the eligibility criterion for people who have been refused a driving licence due to their medical condition less restrictive. In addition, extend this eligibility to those who have not applied for a driving licence because they know their application would be refused on medical grounds.
- 8) Remove the requirement for applications for senior citizen passes to be made in person i.e. it should be possible to make applications by post, online or by telephone.
- 9) Provide guidance materials to aid applications online and in different formats to aid accessibility.
- 10) Offer assistance to complete applications by telephone.
- 11) Reword the messaging around the “half fare” Smartpass as the concession is in many cases not the equivalent of 50% off.
- 12) Tackle the anomaly that currently exists between Glider and Metro/Ulsterbus passengers, whereby half fare Smartpass holders travel free on the Glider as there is no mechanism to charge them a concessionary fare.

⁵¹ https://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-05/Research_Report_Future_of_Transport.PDF

9 Contact information

- 9.1 The Consumer Council would be pleased to discuss this issue further. Please contact Michelle Kelly, Policy and Research Officer at michelle.kelly@consumercouncil.org.uk or by telephone on 028 9025 1674, for further information.



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