

Agenda Item	11
Report No	ECI/08/2023

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Economy and Infrastructure

Date: 2 February 2023

Report Title: Free Bus Travel for Persons Aged Under 22

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Following a Notice of Motion agreed at the Council meeting on 22 September, this report updates Members on the rate of uptake of the free bus travel scheme for persons aged under 22, and the actions taken by the Council to promote the scheme.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:-
- i. **Note** actions already taken to promote the scheme; and
 - ii. **Note** further actions as described in the report.

3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** – Some staff time is involved in promoting the free bus scheme and processing applications.
- 3.2 **Legal** – There are no legal implications.
- 3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island)** – The free travel scheme benefits all Highland residents in the eligible age group. Inevitably the greatest use is made in the more densely populated areas where bus services are more frequent. Availability of free travel helps to address issues of poverty.
- 3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever** – by encouraging bus travel the scheme contributes to a potential reduction in car use.

- 3.5 **Risk** – There are no risk implications.
- 3.6 **Gaelic** – There are no Gaelic implications.

4 Background

- 4.1 The Scottish Government's free bus travel scheme for persons aged under 22 was introduced on 31 January 2022. It provides for free travel on local bus services throughout Scotland.
- 4.2 A Notice of Motion was agreed by the Council on 22 September as follows:-

“Hundreds of thousands of young people across Scotland have signed up for free bus travel since the Young Persons Free Bus Travel Scheme launched in April this year. Registration is higher in some local authority areas than others, and Highlands ranks very low with a registration rate of only 28%, compared to a high of 91% in Inverclyde, and 78% in Western Isles (data from 20th June). This Council wants to ensure that all young people under 22 in Highland can access their right to free bus travel and has identified that more young people are accessing free bus travel in areas where local authorities are working closely with schools and public libraries to facilitate registration. This Council recognises that many young people and families need help to register, especially if they do not have easy access to the required ID documents to apply for free bus travel. This Council recognises it needs to provide information and support for young people and their families to apply online and offline, and will work further with schools, Council support services and public libraries to help facilitate registration so that all young people, including refugees and those seeking asylum, can access the free bus travel scheme. This Council undertakes to encourage greater take-up rates of the under 22s free bus passes in Highland”.

- 4.3 Transport Scotland have stated that the rate of uptake in Highland at 30 November 2022 was 41.6% compared with a figure for Scotland as a whole of 58.9%.

5 Application Process

- 5.1 The application process is defined by Transport Scotland. Applications can be made on-line, by phone, email (all of these being direct to the Improvement Service which processes applications from all of Scotland) or via the Highland Council. Applications through the Council can be made in person at a Service Point or by post. Applications for persons aged 5 to 15 must be made by a parent or legal guardian; for those aged 16 to 21 the application is made by the young people themselves.
- 5.2 Evidence of entitlement is required, including, for those aged under 16, proof of the parent's or guardian's identity. Evidence required differs according to the age of the young person, but includes proof of age and identity, a photograph, and proof of address.
- 5.3 No separate statistics are available of applications processed through Service Points or the Service Centre.

6 Involvement of schools

- 6.1 Secondary schools are asked at the start of the academic year to collate names of pupils who wish to apply for National Entitlement Card / Young Scot card, including the free bus pass function. Responses are then fed into a bulk application process. Around 2000 applications have been processed in this way. In general, these are done for pupils starting S1, but applications may also be made for others, such as those who have recently moved into the area.

7 Promotion on social media

- 7.1 Action following the Notice of Motion was taken forward by the Corporate Communications Team and a series of messages were programmed to run weekly from 21 November 2022 through to Christmas. The campaign has so far returned some encouraging results as initial posts on Facebook generated a reach of over 30,000 views and one link which directed people to the application page was accessed 829 times. On Twitter, one of the tweets promoting the free bus pass was our third most popular tweet in November 2022 with a reach of 2,200 impressions and a total of 95 engagements (likes, retweets, comments, link clicks) with the message on the platform.

8 Scope for further promotion

- 8.1 Staff of Education & Learning have suggested a number of possible actions to develop further engagement with school pupils, through parent councils, Chromebooks, in-school promotion and the Highland Youth Parliament. Education colleagues will take these suggestions forward, liaising with the Public Transport team as required, and regular progress reports will be provided to Members.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

Date: 9 January 2023

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