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Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee Report on The National Bus Travel Concession Scheme for Young Persons (Scotland) Amendment Order 2021



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Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport.



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Introduction

1. The Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee reports to the Parliament as follows-
2. The National Bus Travel Concession Scheme for Young Persons (Scotland) Amendment Order 2021 was laid before the Parliament on 23 August 2021 and is subject to the affirmative procedure. It was referred to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee for consideration.
3. [The Policy Note](#) accompanying this Order explains that the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 enables Scottish Ministers to make national travel concession schemes. The instrument amends the National Bus Travel Concession Scheme for Young Persons (Scotland) Order 2021 No.175, which provides Scottish Ministers with powers to create and operate a statutory National Concessionary Travel Scheme for Young Persons aged 18 and under (Young Persons Scheme).
4. The purpose of the instrument is to raise the upper age limit for eligibility for the Young Persons Scheme to include 19-21 year olds and to establish separate reimbursement rates for journeys made by under 16 year olds and journeys made by 16-21 year olds. The instrument will come into force on 12 November 2021.

Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee Consideration

5. The Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee considered this instrument at its meeting on [31 August 2021](#) and determined that [it did not need to draw the attention of Parliament to the instrument on any grounds within its remit.](#)

Consideration by the Committee

6. At its meeting on 28 September 2021, the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee took evidence on the instrument from Graeme Dey, Minister for Transport and officials.ⁱ
7. In his opening statement, the Minister said the draft amendment order will raise the upper age limit for travel under the scheme from age 18 to age 21 and amend the reimbursement terms for bus operators carrying concessionary passengers under the scheme, establishing a rate of 43.6% of the adult single fare for journeys that are made by under-16s and 81.2% for journeys that are made by 16 to 21-year-olds.
8. The Minister also said that free bus travel for people under the age of 22 will strengthen the Government's response to the climate emergency and will support a green recovery by embedding sustainable travel habits in young people.
9. He said that preparations are under way to get the new young persons scheme to launch on 31 January 2022, including a communications plan to build up awareness of the scheme's launch with a soft introduction during COP26.
10. The Minister was asked what success for the scheme would look like. The Minister said the scheme is about embedding bus travel as a preferred means of transport for the under 22 age group but because we are coming through the pandemic, it is only possible to estimate the levels of uptake and possible success of the scheme at this stage. He also said he expected a clearer picture of the opportunities arising from the scheme in terms of sustainability of bus services a year from now.
11. The Minister was asked about the possible impact of the cost the scheme on other fares. He said he did not expect the scheme to cause adult bus fares to increase to compensate for lost revenue or cause cuts to the over-60s scheme. He said the scheme is and will remain fully funded.
12. When asked about the possibility of extending the scheme to everyone under 25 and people in receipt of benefits in future, the Minister said a fair fares review looking at a range of transport fares and discounts is under way and a proper review is needed to make such decisions.
13. The Minister explained that delivery partners, Improvement Service and NECPO—the national entitlement card programme office - are working with local authorities to make sure they are ready for the launch of the scheme and are developing an online application portal and a face to face application procedure to make the process as smooth as possible. He added that people will not be invited to apply for the scheme until January because the process has not yet been fully tested.
14. On concerns about the impact on local authorities, the Minister said that the Scottish Government is working very closely with local authorities on a variety of issues, such as:

ⁱ Collette Stevenson MSP has substituted for Natalie Don for the duration of the scrutiny of this instrument.

- Supporting bus operators if the reimbursement is too low to ensure that they are not put in that position.
 - Monitoring the impact of the scheme on procurement frameworks for school transport and private transport providers.
15. The Minister explained that a baseline study is being commissioned and the scheme will be reviewed a year after the launch with further reviews after 3 and 5 years. He said the policy has enormous potential. Unintended consequences were possible, but the policy had been developed closely with partners to avoid them.
 16. After questions were concluded, the Minister moved motion S6M-00962.
 17. That the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee recommends that the National Bus Travel Concession Scheme for Young Persons (Scotland) Amendment Order 2021 [draft] be approved.
 18. After the motion was moved, there was short debate. There were expressions of welcome for the scheme and for its likely positive impact in terms of supporting young people and encouraging use of public transport. It was also noted that the sustainability of bus companies and alignment with local authorities needed to be considered and reviewed as part of the overall picture.
 19. The motion was agreed to without division.

Conclusion

20. **The net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee recommends that the National Bus Travel Concession Scheme for Young Persons (Scotland) Amendment Order 2021 be approved.**

