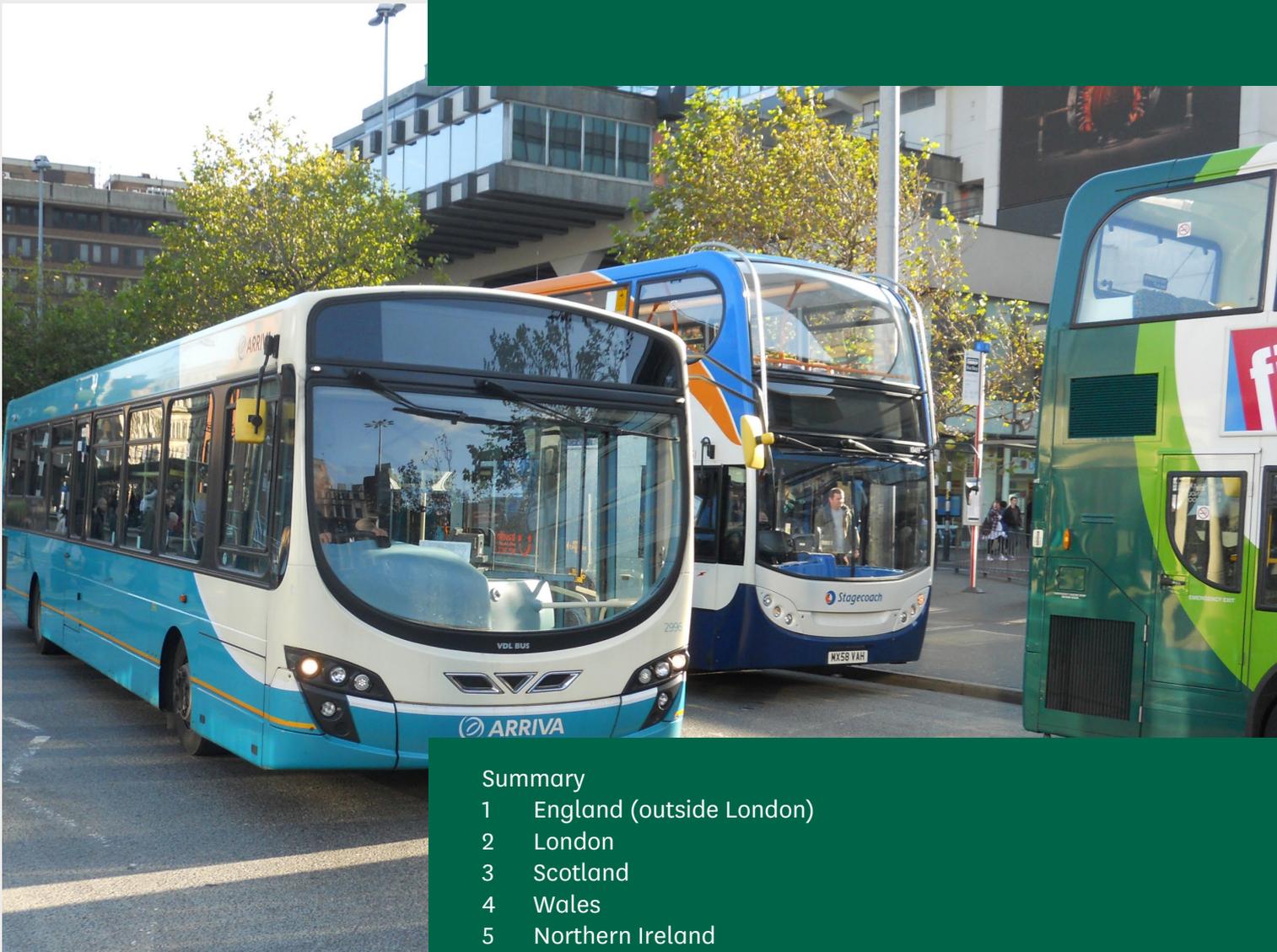


Research Briefing

9 August 2024

By Dr Roger Tyers

Concessionary Bus Travel



Summary

- 1 England (outside London)
- 2 London
- 3 Scotland
- 4 Wales
- 5 Northern Ireland
- 6 Long distance coach services
- 7 Reciprocal arrangements between devolved parts of the UK

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Summary

Concessionary travel policy is devolved, and arrangements differ between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Arrangements are also slightly different between London and the rest of England.

There are two types of concessionary bus fares:

- statutory concessions which local authorities must provide in accordance with national legislation
- non-statutory, discretionary concessions which local authorities can provide from their own funds if they choose to.

England outside London

The [English National Concessionary Travel Scheme \(ENCTS\)](#) provides for free bus travel for people over state pension age, and people with an eligible disability. ENCTS bus passes can be used on all eligible local bus services anywhere in England from 0930 until 2300 on weekdays, and all day at weekends and on Bank Holidays. Local authorities must fund this provision under [Section 146 of the Transport Act 2000](#).

Local authorities can – and often do – also offer non-statutory, discretionary concessions. These apply only within the local authority area borders, unless a cross-border agreement has been reached with a neighbouring authority. For example [some authorities extend concessionary travel](#) to other modes of transport, to travel during peak hours, or to companions of disabled passengers.

In the year ending [March 2023 there were 8.7 million concessionary travel passes](#) in England. 90% of these were for older people and 10% for disabled people. An average of [65 bus journeys were made per pass](#) in England, a figure which rose to 173 in London. [£877 million was spent](#) on concessionary travel in England in the year ending March 2023.

London

In London the ENCTS is folded into a more generous concession known as the [Freedom Pass](#), legislated by the [Greater London Authority Act 1999](#). The Older Person's Freedom Pass permits free travel on Transport for London (TfL)

services between 0900 and 0430 on weekdays and all day weekends and bank holidays. The Disabled Person's Freedom Pass permits free travel at all times.

The [Freedom Pass is funded](#) by London borough councils who reimburse TfL, who administer the scheme. Since 2012 the Mayor of London has directly funded an additional discretionary pass, the [60+ London Oyster photocard](#). This bridges the gap between the age of 60 and pensionable age (currently 66), when someone would become eligible for the Freedom Pass instead.

There is also a range of discretionary fare schemes for [younger people](#), [apprentices](#), [veterans](#) and [job seekers](#) in London.

Reimbursement

Local authorities are responsible for [reimbursing bus operators](#) for journeys made by passengers with a bus pass. The UK Government funds English local authorities for the reimbursement of journeys made under the ENCTS, as part of the [main revenue support grant](#) to local authorities.

In [June 2023 the Local Government Association said](#) central government funding of the ENCTS did not cover the amount local authorities had to pay to bus operators, meaning that councils were having to plug the financial gap from their “own stretched budgets”, which was “completely unsustainable”.

Scotland

The Scottish [National Concessionary Travel Schemes \(NCTS\)](#) provide free bus travel for those aged under 22, over 60, and eligible disabled people. It is administered and funded by Transport Scotland, although responsibility for the issue of National Entitlement Cards (NECs) lies with individual local authorities and [Strathclyde Partnership for Transport \(SPT\)](#). Residents of some Scottish islands can use their [NECs for free ferry vouchers](#) travel too.

Wales

Concessionary travel for older people in Wales was introduced under the same legislation as in England. The main difference is that people can access it at the age of 60, unlike in England where eligibility was [changed in 2010](#) to be tied to the state pension age, currently 66. The [16-21 mytravelpass](#) gives younger people a 30% discount on buses.

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, [free Translink bus and rail travel](#) is available to people aged 60 and over, those who are registered blind, and war disablement pensioners. Half-price travel is available to people with eligible disabilities.

Reciprocal arrangements between devolved parts of the UK

Bus pass use is limited to within the geographical area of the relevant devolved administration, meaning that English passes can only be used in England, Scottish passes can only be used in Scotland, and so on. There are limited exceptions to this rule on [cross-border bus routes](#).

Powers exist in [UK and Welsh legislation](#), and in [Scottish legislation](#), to create Great Britain-wide bus pass recognition. However, [in 2008, the UK Government said](#) UK-wide recognition of passes would be “a highly complex undertaking and not without cost”, and [in February 2024](#) said it had “no plans at present to introduce such an arrangement”.

Information on other aspects of bus policy can be found in the Library briefing [Buses and Taxis FAQs](#).

1 England (outside London)

1.1 English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) – the statutory scheme

Overview and legislation

Under [sections 145 to 150](#) of the Transport Act 2000, as amended, the statutory concession provides guaranteed free travel for people over state pension age, and people with an eligible disability, on all eligible local bus services anywhere in England from 0930 until 2300 on weekdays and all day at weekends and on bank holidays.¹

The scheme is administered by Travel Concession Authorities (TCAs). In England outside London these are county councils, unitary authorities, and city regions.²

The English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) is the statutory concessionary bus travel scheme in England. It was introduced in 2001.³ It was to be provided to “an elderly or disabled person residing in [a local authority] area”.⁴ At the time, an “elderly person” was defined as “a person who has attained pensionable age”.⁵

¹ Eligible bus services are defined by the [Travel concessions \(eligible services\) order 2002](#) as amended by the [Travel concessions \(eligible services\) \(amendment\) order 2009](#). This defines eligible services as ‘local services’, which are buses carrying passengers at separate fares locally, other than on private trips. The definition was originally wider, but several types of services were removed by the 2009 order, following consultation, see: DfT, [Consultation on the definition of eligible services for the statutory bus concession in England](#), October 2008; and DfT, [Government response to consultation on clarifying the definition of which services are eligible for the statutory bus concession in England](#), March 2009

² TCAs are defined in [Section 146 of the Transport Act 2000](#), as amended. Guidance for the new TCAs was published in December 2010, see: DfT, [Guidance for Travel Concession Authorities on the England National Concessionary Travel Scheme](#), December 2010. TCAs were created under the [Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007 \(Variation of Reimbursement and Other Administrative Arrangements\) Order 2010](#). This was preceded by a consultation, in which the Government argued that removing the responsibility from non-metropolitan district councils would improve efficiency and transparency, see DfT, [Consultation Response Document: Consultation on possible changes to the administration of concessionary travel](#), December 2009, paras 12&18

³ Made under [sections 145 to 150](#) of the Transport Act 2000. There followed a consultation on the introduction of the scheme, see: DETR, [Implementation of statutory minimum concessionary fares commitment](#), 20 December 1999 and it was then implemented via the [Transport Act 2000 \(Commencement No. 1 and Transitional Provisions\) Order 2000](#)

⁴ [Transport Act 2000, s145\(2\)](#)

⁵ [Transport Act 2000, s146](#)

It was originally a half-fare concession for travel on local buses all day on weekends or bank holidays, or from 0930 to 2300 on any other day.⁶

The concession was gradually extended over the following five years:

- From 1 April 2003 the definition of “elderly person” for the purposes of the concession was extended to “persons who have attained the age of 60”.⁷
- From 1 April 2006 the concession was extended from a half-fare concession on local bus services to free travel on local services throughout England.⁸

In April 2010 a further change was made, one that has proven somewhat controversial ever since. Travel Concessions (Eligibility) Act 2002 (which equalised the eligibility age for men and women at 60) included a power for the Secretary of State for Transport to make an Order replacing references to age 60 with a formula that would increase the eligible age alongside changes to the state pension age.⁹

The Travel Concessions (Eligibility) (England) Order 2010 made this change.¹⁰ It increased the qualifying age for the ENCTS in England in line with the planned rise in the women’s state pension age.¹¹ The state pension age is currently 66 and is expected to rise to 67 between 2026 and 2028.¹²

Eligibility

The ENCTS bus pass is available to people with specified disabilities or who are in receipt of particular benefits and for those over state pension age.

People with a disability

The eligible conditions for people with a disability are set out in [section 146](#) of the 2000 Act, as amended. They refer to someone who:

- is blind or partially sighted;
- is profoundly or severely deaf;

⁶ [Section 146 of the Transport Act 2000](#)

⁷ [Section 1 of the Travel Concessions \(Eligibility\) Act 2002](#); this followed a legal challenge based on the different state pension age for men and women. The changes in the Act were estimated to benefit approximately one million men, see: DTLR press release, “[One million extra men to get cheaper fares](#)”, 27 February 2002. The background to the Act is given in Commons Library briefing paper RP 01/80, [Travel Concessions \(Eligibility\) Bill \(HL\) \(Bill 38 of 2001-02\)](#), 30 October 2001

⁸ [Travel Concessions \(Extension of Entitlement\) \(England\) Order 2005](#)

⁹ [Section 1\(4\) of the Travel Concessions \(Eligibility\) Act 2002](#)

¹⁰ [Travel Concessions \(Eligibility\) \(England\) Order 2010](#)

¹¹ DfT, [Statement on Changes to Concessionary Travel announced in Pre-Budget Report](#), 9 December 2009; and: [Guidance for Local Authorities on the change in the age of eligibility for Concessionary Travel](#), March 2010

¹² DWP Press release, [State Pension Age Review published](#), 30 March 2023

- is without speech;
- has a disability, or has suffered an injury, which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to walk;
- does not have arms or has long-term loss of the use of both arms;
- has a learning disability, that is, “a state of arrested or incomplete development of mind which includes significant impairment of intelligence and social functioning”; or
- would, if they applied for the grant of a licence to drive a motor vehicle, have their application refused for reasons of physical fitness.¹³

Anyone in receipt of the following benefits is automatically eligible for a concessionary bus pass:

- Higher Rate Disability Living Allowance (DLA) Mobility Component;
- Personal Independence Payment (PIP) with at least 8 points against either the PIP ‘Moving around’ and/or ‘Communicating verbally’ activities; or
- War Pensioner’s Mobility Supplement.¹⁴

It is for TCAs to determine whether someone meets the eligibility criteria or not, based on the definitions in the legislation and the guidance issued by the Department for Transport (DfT), to which they must have regard when assessing eligibility. The DfT recommends that, where TCAs have a doubt about an applicant’s eligibility, they seek independent medical evidence.¹⁵

Older people

Eligible older people are defined in the legislation as follows:

- In the case of a woman, her pensionable age; and
- In the case of a man, the pensionable age of a woman born on the same day.¹⁶

As a result of the policies of successive governments going back to 1995, the women’s state pension age (and latterly the state pension age for both men and women) has been increasing, and now stands at 66. Accordingly, the age

¹³ Pursuant to [section 92 of the Road Traffic Act 1988](#), as amended, otherwise than on the ground of persistent misuse of drugs or alcohol. DfT, Guidance, [Managing the English national concessionary travel scheme \(ENCTS\)](#), updated 10 July 2024

¹⁴ DfT, [Guidance to local authorities on assessing eligibility of disabled people in England for concessionary bus travel](#), April 2013, p11-12

¹⁵ DfT, [Guidance to local authorities on assessing eligibility of disabled people in England for concessionary bus travel](#), April 2013, p12-13

¹⁶ [Travel Concessions \(Eligibility\) \(England\) Order 2010](#), Regulation 2

at which older people have been able to claim a free bus pass has increased in tandem.¹⁷

This is one of the most controversial features of the scheme in England, largely because the devolved governments in Scotland and Wales have kept the eligibility age for their free bus passes at 60 (see [section 3](#) and [section 4](#), below for more details of these schemes).

Successive governments have been asked on multiple occasions whether they will bring the eligible age in England ‘into line’ with that of its neighbours and have always resisted such a change. Reasons for not reducing the age to 60 include the cost and intergenerational fairness.¹⁸

Costs and funding

TCAs are responsible for reimbursing bus operators for journeys made by passengers with a bus pass. Central government provides funding to local authorities for the ENCTS through the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government’s Local Government Finance Settlement.¹⁹

In the year ending March 2023:

- there were 8.7 million concessionary travel passes in England. 90% of these were for older people and 10% for disabled people.
- An average of [65 bus journeys were made per pass](#) in England, a figure which rose to 173 in London.
- [£877 million was spent](#) on concessionary travel in England in the year ending March 2023. Most of this, £715 million, went on reimbursing bus operators by TCAs²⁰

There have long been concerns that the amount of money TCAs receive from the Government does not adequately match what they pay out to bus operators to reimburse them. Local authorities must make up any shortfall from other sources.²¹

In June 2023 the LGA said there was a £452 million gap in the funding councils receive from government compared to the actual number of ENCTS journeys made in 2022. This meant that councils were having to plug the financial gap from their “own stretched budgets”, which was “completely unsustainable”.²²

¹⁷ For more information see Commons Library briefing paper CBP-6546, [State Pension age review](#)

¹⁸ PQ 26010 [[On Bus Services: Concessions](#)], answered 21 May 2024

¹⁹ DfT Guidance, [Managing the English national concessionary travel scheme \(ENCTS\)](#), Updated 10 July 2024

²⁰ DfT Official Statistics, [Concessionary travel statistics: year ending March 2023](#), 30 November 2023

²¹ LGA press notice, [“Nearly half of all bus routes under threat because of funding cuts to local government”](#), 21 June 2018

²² LGA, [Future of local buses at risk as councils face £450 million bill to prop up national free bus pass scheme – new LGA analysis](#), 29 June 2023

In its May 2019 report into the bus market, the Transport Committee also observed that this funding gap was unsustainable and recommended that the government review how it finances concessionary bus passes.²³ In its reply to the committee the government disagreed that this was needed and argued that as local funding is not ringfenced it gives councils the flexibility to manage their finances appropriately.²⁴

Bus operator reimbursement

TCAs are responsible for reimbursing bus operators for journeys made by passengers with a bus pass. The DfT provides guidance to TCAs on how to calculate such reimbursements, and an appeals process for bus operators if they think their reimbursement is too low.²⁵

1.2

Discretionary schemes

Local authorities have discretion to offer other concessionary travel schemes in addition to the ENCTS. These concessions are funded by local authorities from general spending and are limited to travel within those authorities unless agreements between neighbouring authorities are in place.

Legislation

Under [section 93](#) of the Transport Act 1985, as amended, local councils and city regions in England outside London can provide, at their discretion, travel concessions such as:

- to under 16s
- free travel before 9:30am
- a 50% (or other) discount before 9:30am
- free travel for any person travelling as the companion of a disabled person²⁶

²³ Transport Committee, [Bus services in England outside London](#) (Ninth Report of Session 2017–19), HC1425, 22 May 2019, para 45

²⁴ Transport Committee, [Government response to the Committee's Ninth Report of Session 2017–19](#) (First Special Report of Session 2019–20), HC 110, 18 October 2019, p3

²⁵ DfT Guidance, [How to reimburse bus operators for concessionary travel](#), updated 27 March 2024; DfT Guidance, [How bus operators can appeal concessionary fare scheme reimbursement levels](#), updated 9 April 2024

²⁶ [Transport Act 1985, s93](#); Guidance, [Managing the English national concessionary travel scheme \(ENCTS\)](#), updated 10 July 2024

Local authorities often offer such non-statutory, discretionary concessions too. The most common one is extending the time a bus pass can be used to earlier than the statutory 0930 start-time (see table below).

Top 6 discretionary concessions offered by TCAs, England outside of London, year ending March 2023

Discretionary concession	Number of TCAs	Proportion of TCAs (%)
Extensions to the beginning of the statutory time period (9:30am) during weekdays	66	79%
Companions to disabled people	53	63%
Extensions to the end of the statutory time period (11:00pm) during weekdays	52	62%
Allowing the use of discretionary companion passes issued by other TCAs	37	44%
On-demand transport services (Dial-a-Ride)	37	44%
Park and Ride services	32	38%

Source: DfT, [Concessionary travel statistics: year ending March 2023](#), 30 November 2023

Young people

Discretionary concessions for young people can be offered by TCAs directly, meaning the concession would apply to all bus operators in their area, or by individual bus operators offering concessions on a commercial basis.²⁷

In the year ending March 2024, youth concessions are offered by 20 out of 84 TCAs in England outside London. A youth concession is offered by at least one commercial bus operator in 71 out of 84 TCAs in England outside London.²⁸

The last government said in 2023 it estimated that “providing free travel on buses for 16-18 –year-olds across England (outside London) would cost

²⁷ DfT, [Concessionary travel statistics: year ending March 2023](#), 30 November 2023

²⁸ DfT, [Concessionary travel statistics: year ending March 2023](#), 30 November 2023

around £500m per year”, and it had no plans to make such provision a statutory requirement.²⁹

Transport and education

The main statutory provisions on home-to-school transport, including transport for those in full time education between the ages of 16 and 19, are contained in Part 9 of and Schedules 35B and 35C to the [Education Act 1996](#), as amended.

The Department for Education has published [statutory guidance on home-to-school travel and transport](#), which has further information.³⁰

The rules as they apply to post-16 students in full time education are explained in [Commons Library briefing paper CBP 8413](#).³¹

²⁹ PQ 191838 [[On Bus Services: Concessions](#)], answered 7 July 2023

³⁰ Department for Education [statutory guidance on home-to-school travel and transport](#), updated 25 January 2024

³¹ Commons Library research briefing CBP-8413, [Transport provision for post-16 students in England](#), 26 March 2021

2 London

The English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) in London is folded into a more generous concession known as the [Freedom Pass](#).³²

In London there is also a wide array of other [discretionary fare schemes](#) for younger people, those aged over 60 but under state pension age, apprentices, veterans and job seekers.³³ Funding settlements since the Covid pandemic in 2020 have meant the Freedom Pass for older people can no longer be used in morning peak times.³⁴

2.1 Freedom Pass for older people and those with a disability

Overview and legislation

The London statutory concession, the [Freedom Pass](#), is provided for under the Greater London Authority Act 1999, as amended.³⁵ Section 242 of the 1999 Act sets out the statutory times that concessions must be offered as 0930 – 0430 weekdays (plus all day weekends and bank holidays) but the actual Freedom Pass hours have always been more generous than this.³⁶

There are two kinds of statutory Freedom Passes:

- The Older Person's Freedom Pass permits free travel on TfL services between 0900 and 0430 on weekdays and all day weekends and bank holidays.
- The Disabled Person's Freedom Pass permits free travel on TfL services at all times.³⁷

Within these times, the Freedom Pass permits free travel on TfL buses, trams, Tube, DLR, London Overground and Elizabeth line. The Freedom Pass can also be used for free travel on national rail services in London anytime except

³² Greater London Authority Act 1999, [Sections 240 to 244](#) and [Schedule 16](#)

³³ TfL, [Free and discounted travel](#), [Accessed 2 August 2024]

³⁴ Mayor of London, [Proposed permanent changes to free travel arrangements for older Londoners](#), 18 January 2023; Mayor of London, [Mayoral Directions to Transport for London \[PDF\]](#), March 2024

³⁵ Greater London Authority Act 1999, [Sections 240 to 244](#) and [Schedule 16](#); Formerly [sections 50-53](#) of the London Regional Transport Act 1984

³⁶ Greater London Authority Act 1999, [Section 242](#)

³⁷ TfL, [Freedom Pass](#), [Accessed 2 August 2024]

between 04:30-09:30 Monday to Friday.³⁸ It cannot be used on certain intercity train services.³⁹ It also allows for discounts on river services, Santander bicycle hire, and the IFS Cloud Cable Car.⁴⁰

Prior to the Covid pandemic, the Freedom Pass could be used at any time. However, due to conditions applied by central government's emergency funding to TfL since June 2020, Older Person's Freedom Pass use was temporarily restricted to after 0900 on weekdays.⁴¹ This temporary change was made permanent in January 2023.⁴²

Eligibility

The eligibility age for London's Older Person's Freedom Pass is in line with the women's state pension age, which is currently 66, the same as the ENCTS.⁴³

However, in London since 2012 the Mayor of London has directly funded an additional discretionary pass, the [60+ London Oyster photocard](#).⁴⁴ This bridges the gap between the age of 60 and pensionable age (66), when someone would become eligible for the Freedom Pass instead.

Eligibility for the Disabled person's Freedom Pass is the same as for the ENCTS in the rest of England (See Section 1.1 of this briefing).⁴⁵

Funding

The scheme is run by Transport for London (TfL) and the costs of the scheme are charged back to each of the 33 London borough councils (co-ordinated by [London Councils](#)) under an agreed formula, based on the number of permits issued to the residents of each Borough.⁴⁶

³⁸ Note that on other transport modes, the Freedom Pass can be used from 9am on weekdays, but on national rail it can be used from the slightly later time of 9.30am. See TfL, [Freedom Pass](#), [Accessed 2 August 2024]

³⁹ London Councils, [Freedom Pass – National Rail](#), [Accessed 2 August 2024]

⁴⁰ TfL, [Freedom Pass](#), [Accessed 2 August 2024]; TfL, [IFS Cloud Cable Car fares](#) [Accessed 8 August 2024]

⁴¹ TfL Press Release, [Temporary changes to Older Person's Freedom Pass and 60-plus Oyster card](#), 4 June 2020; Secretary of State for Transport, [Transport for London Extraordinary Funding and Financing: Written statement - HCWS240](#), 18 May 2020

⁴² Mayor of London, [Proposed permanent changes to free travel arrangements for older Londoners](#), 18 January 2023; Mayor of London, [Mayoral Directions to Transport for London \[PDF\]](#), March 2024

⁴³ [Greater London Authority Act 1999, s240\(5\)](#)

⁴⁴ TfL, [60+ London Oyster photocard](#), [Accessed 2 August 2024]

⁴⁵ [Greater London Authority Act 1999, s240\(5\)](#); DfT, [Guidance to local authorities on assessing eligibility of disabled people in England for concessionary bus travel](#), April 2013

⁴⁶ London Councils, [Who We Are](#), [Accessed 2 August 2024]; London Councils' Transport and Environment Committee [PDF], [Item 6: Concessionary Fares 2022/23 Settlement and Apportionment](#), 8 December 2022

2.2

Discretionary schemes for young people and others

For more than a decade London has been one of the most generous authorities when it comes to [discretionary fare schemes](#). It funds free and discounted travel for younger people, apprentices, veterans and job seekers.⁴⁷ These concessions were introduced by both Labour and Conservative mayors between 2005 and 2012.⁴⁸ TfL provides these commercial concessions under [section 155](#) and [section 174](#) of the 1999 Act.

⁴⁷ TfL, [Free and discounted travel](#), [Accessed 2 August 2024]

⁴⁸ TfL press notice, "[Free travel on buses and trams for under-16s](#)", 14 June 2005; [TfL press notice. "Under 18s free travel rules begin"](#), 1 June 2008; "[Free London travel for veterans](#)", *BBC News*, 27 June 2008; "[Half-price bus fares for unemployed](#)", *Metro*, 14 January 2009; and TfL press notice, "[Mayor restores free travel for 60-year-old Londoners with the 60+ London Oyster photocard](#)", 1 October 2012

3 Scotland

The Scottish Government offers free bus travel for disabled people, people aged over 60, and people aged under 22.

3.1 Overview and legislation

The Scottish Government has powers to create national travel concession schemes under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005.⁴⁹ Under these powers, it launched a Scotland-wide national concessionary travel scheme, the [National Entitlement Card \(NEC\)](#) for older and disabled people.⁵⁰ In 2021 it also introduced a free NEC scheme for people aged 5 to 18.⁵¹ It later extended this to include 19-21 year olds, starting from 31 January 2022.⁵²

The NEC is administered and funded by Transport Scotland, although responsibility for the issue of entitlement cards lies with individual local authorities and [Strathclyde Partnership for Transport \(SPT\)](#).⁵³

Unlike the concessionary schemes in England and London, NEC concessions can be used at all times of day, including on bus services running in morning 'peak' times. The NEC can be used across all of Scotland including on cross-border bus services running to Berwick-upon-Tweed and Carlisle. Only a few services, such as premium-fare night buses and City Sightseeing buses, will not accept the NEC.⁵⁴

As well as free bus travel, residents of the Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland who have a 60+/disabled NEC can also get two free return ferry journeys to the mainland each year.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ [Transport \(Scotland\) Act 2005, s40](#)

⁵⁰ [The National Bus Travel Concession Scheme for Older and Disabled Persons \(Scotland\) Order 2006; The National Bus Travel Concession Scheme for Older and Disabled Persons \(Eligible Persons and Eligible Services\) \(Scotland\) Order 2006](#)

⁵¹ [The National Bus Travel Concession Scheme for Young Persons \(Scotland\) Order 2021](#)

⁵² [The National Bus Travel Concession Scheme for Young Persons \(Scotland\) Amendment Order 2021](#)

⁵³ The SPT area comprises of the following council areas: East Dunbartonshire, East Ayrshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow City, Inverclyde, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire and the Helensburgh and Lomond area of Argyll and Bute. See Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT), [History & background](#). [Accessed 2 August 2024]

⁵⁴ Transport Scotland, [Concessionary Travel: 60+ or disabled](#). [Accessed 5 August 2024]; Transport Scotland, [Concessionary Travel: Young Persons' \(Under 22s\) Free Bus Travel](#). [Accessed 5 August 2024]

⁵⁵ Transport Scotland, [Concessionary Travel: 60+ or disabled](#). [Accessed 5 August 2024]

3.2 Eligibility

To be eligible for the 60+ NEC, a person must be resident in Scotland, and aged 60 or more.⁵⁶

To be eligible for the Young Persons' (Under 22s) Free Bus Travel Scheme, a person must be resident in Scotland for the majority of the year (at least six months). Asylum seekers and refugees aged between 5 and 21 can access the scheme too. Children under 5 already travel for free.⁵⁷

To be eligible for the disabled NEC, someone must be resident in Scotland and meet one of the following criteria:

- receive a qualifying DWP benefit - Attendance Allowance, Personal Independence Payment, War Pension Constant Attendance Allowance, or the higher rate of the mobility component or the higher or middle rate of the care component of Disability Living Allowance.
- receive a qualifying Social Security Scotland benefit - Pension Age Disability payment, Adult Disability Payment, or receive the higher rate of the mobility component or the higher or middle rate of the care component of Child Disability Payment.⁵⁸

3.3 Funding

There has been some debate in Scotland over several years about the ongoing financial viability of the current NEC, in particular the eligibility at age 60.⁵⁹ In 2017 the Scottish Government issued a consultation, seeking views as to whether the eligible age for the NEC should be increased to state pension age.⁶⁰ In the end it decided not to make a change given the balance of opinion provided in response to the consultation.⁶¹

Transport Scotland has estimated the young persons' free bus scheme will have a total annual cost of around £130 million.⁶²

⁵⁶ Transport Scotland, [Concessionary Travel: 60+ or disabled](#), [Accessed 5 August 2024]

⁵⁷ Transport Scotland, [Concessionary Travel: Young Persons' \(Under 22s\) Free Bus Travel](#), [Accessed 5 August 2024]

⁵⁸ Transport Scotland, [Concessionary Travel: 60+ or disabled](#), [Accessed 5 August 2024]

⁵⁹ For example, as far back as 2010 Audit Scotland was calling for a review, see: Audit Scotland, [National Concessionary Travel](#), October 2010

⁶⁰ Transport Scotland, [Consultation on Free Bus Travel for Older and Disabled People and Modern Apprentices](#), August 2017, section 2

⁶¹ Transport Scotland, [No change to bus pass age of eligibility](#) and [Free Bus Travel for Older and Disabled People and Modern Apprentices: Analysis of Responses to the Consultation](#), 25 August 2018

⁶² [The National Bus Travel Concession Scheme for Young Persons \(Scotland\) Amendment Order 2021](#) Policy Note, Page 4

3.4 Discretionary schemes

Individual local authorities and SPT can offer discretionary concessions to specified groups under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001.⁶³ For example, the City of Edinburgh Council extends free travel on Edinburgh Trams to NEC holders resident in the city.⁶⁴

⁶³ [Transport \(Scotland\) Act 2001, s68](#)

⁶⁴ Edinburgh Trams, [Scottish National Entitlement Card](#), [Accessed 5 August 2024]

4 Wales

The Welsh Government offers free bus travel for disabled people, and people aged over 60.

4.1 Overview and legislation

The development of a statutory concessionary travel scheme for older and disabled people developed under the same legislation as England, the Transport Act 2000.⁶⁵ It substantially diverged in 2010 when the Welsh Government decided not to increase the eligibility age from 60 to state pension age, in line with England.⁶⁶

Unlike the concessionary schemes in England and London, the Wales concessionary travel card provides free travel on all local buses in Wales, at all times of day.⁶⁷

The Wales concessionary travel card can be used on all bus services across Wales, including those starting/ending in England, provided that the cross-boundary journey doesn't involve a change of bus in England.⁶⁸ It can also be used for free or reduced travel on some rail services in Wales.⁶⁹

4.2 Eligibility

People aged 60 or over or with an eligible disability are eligible for free bus travel. They must be resident in Wales. The full eligibility criteria for disabled people is set out in legislation and Welsh Government guidance, but is the same as for the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) – see section 1.1 of this briefing.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ [Transport Act 2000, s145-150](#) (as amended)

⁶⁶ Welsh Government press release, “Free bus pass plans remain the same in Wales”, 15 March 2010

⁶⁷ Transport for Wales, [Concessionary travel card: Terms and conditions](#), [Accessed 5 August 2024]

⁶⁸ Transport for Wales, [Concessionary travel card: Travel Card FAQ](#), [Accessed 5 August 2024]

⁶⁹ Transport for Wales, [Rail concessionary travel](#), [Accessed 5 August 2024]

⁷⁰ [Transport Act 2000, s146](#); Welsh Government guidance, [Concessionary bus travel scheme guidance](#), 1 April 2019

4.3

Funding

There have been concerns about the financial viability of continuing to provide free bus travel from the age of 60.⁷¹ In 2017 the Welsh Government consulted on a number of possible reforms to the statutory concession, including increasing eligibility to state pension age.⁷² This was followed in December 2018 by a White Paper, which again sought views on the same proposal.⁷³

On 24 July 2019 the Minister for Economy and Transport, Ken Skates, announced the Government's intention to legislate to "amend the eligibility age for the mandatory concessionary fares scheme so that over time it will align with a person's state pension age".⁷⁴ However, the Welsh Government changed its mind in December 2019, meaning the 60+ age eligibility has been maintained ever since.⁷⁵

4.4

Discretionary schemes

In Wales, residents aged between 16 and 21 can apply for 'mytravelpass' through the Welsh Young Persons Discounted Travel (WYPDT), which reduces bus travel by a third.⁷⁶ In 2019, Audit Wales estimated the scheme cost the Welsh Government around £1 million per year for the years 2017/18 and 2018/19.⁷⁷ More information can be found at the Welsh Government [mytravelpass page](#).⁷⁸

⁷¹ Wales Online, "[Can Wales justify free bus passes in the face of a £187m budget cut?](#)", , 26 May 2010

⁷² Welsh Government, [Mandatory Concessionary Fares Scheme in Wales: Maintaining free bus travel for older people, disabled people and injured service veterans](#), 10 October 2017

⁷³ Welsh Government, [Improving public transport](#), 10 December 2019, pp34-35

⁷⁴ [Written Statement: Update on the Public Transport \(Wales\) Bill and wider bus reform agenda](#), 24 July 2019

⁷⁵ BBC News, [Free bus pass age increase for over-60s in Wales axed](#), 20 December 2019

⁷⁶ Welsh Government [Welsh Young Persons Discounted Travel \(WYPDT\) Scheme Terms and Conditions](#) [Accessed 13 January 2023]

⁷⁷ Audit Wales [Discounted bus travel for young people](#) 10 January 2019

⁷⁸ Welsh Government [MyTravelPass](#) [Accessed 13 January 2023]

5 Northern Ireland

A concessionary fares scheme for Northern Ireland was established in 1978, under Article 5 of the Transport (Northern Ireland) Order 1977 ([NISI 1977/599](#)), with the intention of extending existing concessions available on public transport in Belfast to cover services throughout Northern Ireland.⁷⁹ Free travel was introduced for those registered as blind. Half fare travel was introduced for those aged 65 and over; people in receipt of a regular war disablement pension; and children between the ages of six and 16.⁸⁰

Those over 65 have had free travel on scheduled buses and trains since 1 October 2001 on production of a pass, obtainable free of charge; this was lowered to age 60 from 1 October 2008.⁸¹

The following concessions are provided on eligible scheduled services operated by [Translink](#) and other participating operators across Northern Ireland:

Free travel for:

- everyone aged 60 and over;
- people who are registered blind; and
- war disablement pensioners

Half fare travel for people:

- in receipt of the mobility component of Disability Living Allowance (DLA);
- in receipt of the mobility component of Personal Independence Payment (PIP);
- who have had a driving licence refused or revoked on medical grounds;
- who have a learning disability; or
- who are partially sighted.⁸²

⁷⁹ Article 5 of the [Transport \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1977](#)

⁸⁰ For background information see Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service, [Background to the Free Travel Scheme for People Aged 60-64](#) [PDF], October 2012

⁸¹ DRDNI, [Policy review of the Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme](#), January 2007

⁸² NIDirect, [Free and concessionary bus and rail travel](#), [Accessed 5 August 2024]

To be eligible for any of the above concessions, people must apply for and receive a concessionary travel card, called a SmartPass.⁸³

In 1995 the Irish Government introduced free cross-border travel for those eligible for concessionary fares resident anywhere on the island of Ireland. This concession was paid for by the Irish Government and did not form part of the Northern Ireland scheme. Since April 2007 there has been an [all-Ireland scheme](#) providing free travel on public transport throughout the island of Ireland for those aged 65 (resident in Northern Ireland) and 66 (resident in the Republic of Ireland).⁸⁴

⁸³ NIDirect, [Free and concessionary bus and rail travel](#), [Accessed 5 August 2024]

⁸⁴ Irish Government, [Free Travel Scheme](#), [Accessed 5 August 2024]

6 Long distance coach services

Since 2011 coach operators have provided commercial concessions for older people and those with a disability. For example, National Express, the country's biggest long-distance coach provider, has a [Senior Coachcard](#) for the over 60s and a [Disabled Coachcard for people with a disability](#).⁸⁵ Both cards give holders a third off all coach travel across the UK at a cost of £15 per year for the card, including postage.

Between 2003 and 2011 coach operators provided a half-fare concession for pensioners and people with a disability in return for fuel subsidy payments from the Government.

Travel concessions on coaches did not come under the general bus concessions legislation. The half fare concession was introduced in 2003⁸⁶ following work by the [Commission for Integrated Transport \(CfIT\)](#) on fuel duty rebate (FDR).⁸⁷ The Coalition Government announced its intention to abolish the grant from October 2011, also ending the requirement on coach operators to provide concessionary travel.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ National Express, [Coachcards](#), [Accessed 5 August 2024]

⁸⁶ Via the Bus Service Operators Grant (amendment) (England) Regulations 2003 ([SI 2003/1036](#))

⁸⁷ FDR is now known as [Bus Service Operators' Grant \(BSOG\)](#); see: CfIT, [Advice to Ministers ULSD duty and fuel duty rebate for express coach services](#), March 2001, para 30; the Prime Minister gave his approval in 2001 and there followed a consultation by the DfT in 2002, see: [HC Deb 4 July 2001, c259](#) and DfT, [Review of bus subsidies](#), July 2002

⁸⁸ Via the Bus Service Operators Grant (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 ([SI 2011/2448](#)); see also: DfT, [EqIA Screening Proforma: end to BSOG payments \(from October 2011\) for operators of long distance coaches offering half price concessions](#), November 2010

7

Reciprocal arrangements between devolved parts of the UK

Concessionary travel is a devolved policy, and currently there is no mutual or reciprocal recognition of bus passes between devolved administrations. This means that English passes can only be used in England, Scottish passes can only be used in Scotland, and so on. There are very limited exceptions to this rule on cross-border bus routes.⁸⁹

Powers exist in UK and Scottish legislation to potentially create Great Britain-wide bus pass recognition.⁹⁰ However, in 2008, the UK Government said UK-wide recognition of passes would be “a highly complex undertaking and not without cost”,⁹¹ and in February 2024 said it had “no plans at present to introduce such an arrangement”.⁹²

⁸⁹ Transport for Wales, [Concessionary travel card: Travel Card FAQ](#), [Accessed 5 August 2024]; Transport Scotland, [Concessionary Travel: 60+ or disabled](#), [Accessed 5 August 2024]; DfT, Guidance, [Managing the English national concessionary travel scheme \(ENCTS\)](#), updated 10 July 2024

⁹⁰ [Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007, s10](#) (note this Act applies to England and Wales); [Transport \(Scotland\) Act 2005, s40](#)

⁹¹ [HC Deb 18 December 2008 c1001WA](#)

⁹² PQ 11716 [[On Travel: Concessions](#)], answered on 6 February 2024

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