

Policy Position Paper

Public transport (England)

March 2016

Wherever they live, older people should be able to reach key services, friends and family at reasonable cost, in reasonable time and with reasonable ease.

Key issues

Responsibility for transport crosses national and local government, the private and the community sector, which means that it can be difficult to implement improvements. Yet access to transport, or the lack of it, can have a profound impact on the quality of life, health and wellbeing of those in later life – for example, 1.45 million of people aged 65+ in England find it difficult to travel to hospital and 630,000 find it difficult or very difficult to get to their GPⁱ. Transport is vital to leading an active and independent life and for those without access to a car, reliable public transport or community transport is essential.

All areas and means of transport should also be ‘age-friendly’ so that older people can remain active for as long as possible (see ‘Age-friendly neighbourhoods’ and ‘Older drivers’ positions). The most frequent reason people at 65 and over say they do not use public transport is because it’s inconvenient and does not go to where they want it to go.ⁱⁱ There may also be barriers to access caused by the attitudes and behaviour of transport staff and other passengersⁱⁱⁱ.

Buses are the most popular form of public transport for older people - 32 per cent of people over 60 take a bus at least once a week. In 2013, 76 per cent of eligible older people in England had a concessionary pass^{iv}, but use and ownership of a bus pass is lower among older people with higher incomes^v. Research has found that each £1 spent on concessionary bus fares generates at least £2.87 in benefits^{vi}.

The quality of the bus service differs significantly between rural and urban communities: in urban areas 95 per cent of people live within 13 minutes of a regular (hourly) bus, but in rural areas this falls to 61 per cent^{vii}. The Campaign for Better Transport found that 496 bus services were cut, altered or withdrawn in 2014–15^{viii}, despite the Government protecting subsidies for bus service operators. Flexible alternatives to the free bus concession such as Taxicards or free community transport differ widely between local authorities but can be a lifeline in rural areas.

The Government will be tabling the Buses Bill in 2017. This is linked to the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016, which will give places like Manchester, which will have newly elected mayors, additional powers. Local authorities, if they choose, will be able to follow the Transport for London model to deliver more integrated services. It will promote partnerships between local authorities and the bus companies that will allow them to agree the frequency of services, routes and ticketing over a wider geographical area. Although the Bill is likely to bring many benefits there are still concerns about on-going cuts to bus services, particularly in rural areas. The Government is currently evaluating several pilots based on the 'total transport' model. This is designed to make better use of existing resources including community transport, hospital transport and school buses. Although this could lead to improvements in local services for older people the transport select committee^{ix} said that the scheme should not be a substitute for properly funded bus services.

We have seen significant progress on the accessibility of trains and railway stations for older and disabled people. 255 stations in Britain carry almost two thirds of the entries and exits on the rail network and over 8 in 10 interchanges. A report by the Papworth Trust^x found that only 67 of these stations do not meet all 4 accessibility criteria (step free access, audio announcements, visual display boards and station staffing). However, cuts in transport staff will impact on the assistance available to older passengers. There are also problems with consistency across the rail network. According to the Papworth Trust, *'Much comes down to the staff and how well they have been trained and, in some cases, their attitudes towards disabled people.'*

Public policy proposals

- The Government needs to make reducing social isolation and loneliness a priority in public transport policy and funding, alongside their priorities of economic growth and cutting carbon emissions. They should encourage greater co-ordination across public, private and community transport providers.
- The Buses Bill should require local authorities to measure and address the transport needs of older people – especially those in living isolated rural areas.
- Older people should be offered greater influence over changes to local transport services as the result of the Buses Bill. It should offer directives on consultation and engagement with the local community to develop agreed transport solutions that work for older and disabled people.
- When deciding whether to centralise or close services, the bodies responsible must take account of what transport is available to help people reach alternative services, and take responsibility for negotiating transport solutions where necessary.
- Local authorities need to ensure that older people are aware of the transport options and services in their area such as community bus services and dial a ride services.
- Local authorities should learn from the 'total transport' model and consider how they can pool and share transport resources to help fill gaps in local transport services. This is particularly important in places without regular bus services.
- Where private travel is not possible and the public transport system does not fully serve the needs of older people, local authorities should provide flexible alternatives such as financial support towards community transport or taxis.

- The health sector should consider transport when planning services, such as linking hospital appointments to the availability and scheduling of local transport.
- Health and Wellbeing Boards should be involved in strategic planning to deliver accessible local transport.
- Transport operators need to ensure that smart ticketing and information provided by smart phone apps, do not exclude older people
- All public transport needs to be physically accessible for more older people. Local transport authorities should work with transport operators to improve the physical accessibility, safety and reliability of the journey as a whole. This should cover leaving the house to arriving at a destination to include buses, trains and other transport connections.
- There should be increased investment to help visually impaired people on buses and at bus stops, including next stop and destination announcements.
- Transport staff should be provided with specific training to ensure the implementation of accessibility policies and dementia awareness.
- The national bus concession must remain free and universal.
- The Government should carry out a comprehensive review of bus funding that takes into account the vital role buses play economically, socially and environmentally, putting in place a long term funding settlement.
- Rail companies need to push for continued improvements in the accessibility of trains and stations and ensure that passenger assistance is available and consistent across the rail network.

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ⁱ Holley-Moore, G and Creighton, H. (2015) The Future of Transport in an Ageing Society. ILC

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Age UK London and Transport for All, On the buses: Older and disabled people's experiences on London buses. Available online at:
<http://www.ageuk.org.uk/brandpartnergloball/londonvpp/documents/id111566%20london%20transport%20report%20final%20lr.pdf>

^{iv} Department of Transport (July 2014). National Travel Survey 2013

^v *Getting out and about*, Age UK, 2012

^{vi} *The Case for the Bus Pass*, Greener Journeys, 2014

^{vii} National Travel Survey, 2012

^{viii} Buses in crisis Campaign for Better Transport 2015.

^{ix} House of Commons Transport Committee (2015) Passenger transport in isolated communities

^x Papworth Trust (2015) Improving Rail Services for Disabled Passengers. Available online at:
<http://www.papworthtrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/Improving%20rail%20travel%20for%20disabled%20passengers%20in%20Britain.pdf>