

## Transport infrastructure

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Age UK believes that being able to get out and about, whether by public transport or driving, is a vital way for older people to continue to be connected, to work, to access local services and to participate fully in their communities.

### Key arguments

- National and local government must take into account the needs and views of older people in all transport planning
- Free local bus travel is a lifeline for many older and disabled people, who use it to get to their GP or hospital appointments, to go shopping and visit friends. However, we need to ensure frequent and reliable public transport is maintained and grown

### Background

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 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 GP.

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. Benefits of good local transport option include:

- Preventing social isolation
- Getting involved in the community: Some older people felt it was harder for them to keep up their voluntary work or charitable activities as a result of transport issues.
- Accessing healthcare
- Accessing finance, food and shopping

All areas and means of transport should be 'age-friendly' so that older people can remain active for as long as possible. 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. There may also be barriers to access caused by the attitudes and behaviour of transport staff and other passengers.

### Trains and railway stations

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 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".

## Buses

A regular and reliable bus service is essential to older people. It supports their health and well-being and reduces pressure on the NHS and care services.

Buses are the most popular form of public transport for older people – 32% of people over 60 take a bus at least once a week. In 2013, 76% of eligible older people in England had a concessionary pass, but use and ownership of a bus pass is lower among older people with higher incomes. Research has found that each £1 spent on concessionary bus fares generates at least £2.87 in benefits. Half of the benefits accrue directly and immediately to concessionary travellers themselves, around 20% of the benefits to other bus passengers and other road users from transport network improvements, and the remaining 30% to the wider community from wider economic and social impacts and in particular from improvements in health and wellbeing.

The quality of the bus service differs significantly between rural and urban communities: In urban areas 95% of people live within 13 minutes of a regular (hourly) bus, but in rural areas this falls to 61%. The Campaign for Better Transport found that 496 bus services were cut, altered or withdrawn in 2014–15, 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 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 said that the scheme should not be a substitute for properly funded bus services.

*“When the Olympic torch went through the next village they said ‘please come and support’ but how could we? It was on a Sunday and there weren’t any buses. We couldn’t go; we just had to watch it on the telly... I mean, it’ll never happen again.”* Female, 75+

*“You’re bored to tears on a Sunday when you can’t go out. I mean you can’t even go to a church service.”* Female, 75+, with mobility and sensory difficulties

*“To do shopping like this week, I have a job to carry it so I have to have a taxi home which puts money on your shopping bill that you can’t really afford.”* Female, 65+

*“We’re restricted because of times and buses. I think we’ve missed out on a lot of social life, more so now that we’re retired.”*

*“I’ve got friends that will give us a lift if it’s a time where I need it, like a major appointment up at the hospital... but you don’t want to keep asking folks for a lift, you know? You don’t like asking people all the time. I’d rather get there myself.”* Male, 65+, with mobility difficulties

## **Bus Services Bill**

The Bus Services Bill is currently being debated in parliament. This is linked to the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016, which will give additional powers to places like Manchester with newly elected mayors. 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.

## **Age UK Recommendations for the Bus Services Bill**

### **Consultation of older people**

- An audit of transport needs, required by the Bill, must consider the older population and the way they use buses to get to key services.
- There should be a requirement to consult older people on any cuts or reductions to local bus services – as part of funding alternative transport solutions.

### **Addressing gaps in services**

- Local authorities should be obligated to address gaps in services that are likely to have a detrimental impact on the health and wellbeing of older people, especially in rural places.
- More attention should be paid to improving accessible bus services to hospital treatment, as well as medical and dental appointments.
- Bus operators need to recognise in their communication strategies that many older people do not have a smart phone and are not online.

### **Age-friendly transport**

- There should be improvements in the availability of age friendly transport information – particularly for local community transport services.
- Older people need better connections between buses and other modes of local transport. This would facilitate the delivery of ‘complete journeys’ that take older people comfortably and conveniently from door to door.
- There should be improvements in infrastructure planning so that bus stops and bus shelters are in the right locations with better access to public toilets.

### **Addressing disability**

- All bus services should set targets for the deployment of audio visual displays on bus and at bus shelters.
- Bus operators should enforce designated spaces for wheelchair users. Targets should be set to increase the capacity of buses to take wheelchairs and mobility scooters.
- Disability awareness training for bus drivers should be a key Government priority for implementation as soon as possible. There should be a consistent approach to offering assistance to older people with reduced mobility or a disability.

## **Age UK public policy proposals**

### **National Government**

- The Government needs to make reducing social isolation and loneliness a priority in public transport policy and funding, alongside their priorities for economic growth and cutting carbon emissions. They should encourage greater coordination across public, private and community transport providers.
- The Bus Services 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 Bus Services 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.
- 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.

### **Local authorities**

- When deciding whether to centralise or close services, the bodies responsible must take account of what alternative transport is available to help people reach 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.
- 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, including buses, trains and other transport connections.

### **Transport companies/providers**

- 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.
- 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.
- Transport operators need to ensure that smart ticketing and information provided by smart phone apps, do not exclude older people many of whom might not be online.

### **The health sector**

- Health and Wellbeing Boards should be involved in strategic planning to deliver accessible local transport.
- The health sector should consider transport when planning services, such as linking hospital appointments to the availability and scheduling of local transport.

## **Facts and figures on older people and transport**

- 40% of people aged 60 or over in GB use local bus services at least once a week.
- In 2013, the take-up rate of concessionary fares by people aged 60+ in Great Britain was 76% (79% of females and 73% of males).
- In 2013, the concessionary bus pass scheme delivered more than 1.2 billion trips to 12 million pass holders in Britain (both disabled and older people).
- A cost-benefit analysis on the concessionary travel for older and disabled people shows that the scheme delivers excellent value for money with each £1 spent generating at least £2.87 in benefits.
- 57% of rural households are within 13 minutes' walk of an hourly or better bus service.
- Around 25% of bus journeys taken by people aged 65+ are for medical appointments.
- 18% of adults aged 60-69 have a mobility difficulty, and 38% of adults aged 70+ do. This is compared to 12% of everyone aged 16 and over.
- In the UK, 11% of those aged 65+ say they find it difficult to access a corner shop; 12% find it difficult to get to their local supermarket; 14% to a post office; 12% to their doctor's surgery; and 25% to their local hospital.

**If you have any questions or would like further information please contact Angela Kitching, Head of External Affairs, at [angela.kitching@ageuk.org.uk](mailto:angela.kitching@ageuk.org.uk).**