



A Submission by WRVS to the Scottish Government's Review of the National Concessionary Travel Scheme

August 2008

WRVS is grateful for the opportunity afforded to us by the Scottish Government to make a short submission to its review of the National Concessionary Travel Scheme (NCTS).

WRVS wants every older person to have the opportunity and choice to get more out of life. We enable older people to do so by delivering practical support through the power of volunteering and working to publicise and address the issues that affect older people.

WRVS is a major service provider and we are entirely reliant on our 56,000 local volunteers, 11,500 of whom volunteer in Scotland. These dedicated men and women of all ages and backgrounds deliver the full range of our services with support from a small number of paid staff.

Our operations in Scotland are broadly split into three main types of service; Community, Emergency and Hospitals and it is within the ambit of Community that travel and transport fall.

Our Submission

Introduction

WRVS generally supports any sensible measure designed to ensure the well-being of older people in Scotland and, indeed, in the UK. Therefore, we have no hesitation in reiterating our support for all of the key objectives of the policy behind the National Concessionary Travel Scheme (NCTS) as set out by the Scottish Government's current review of the NCTS (at the time of writing we refer to those available at www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Transport/concessionary-fares). In particular we support the following objectives of the Scheme:

- To allow older and disabled people (especially those on low incomes) improved access to services, facilities and social networks by 'free' scheduled bus services; and so promote social inclusion
- To improve health by promoting a more active lifestyle for the elderly and disabled

However, we indicate below how at least one of these objectives needs to be changed for the better.

We agree that the remit of the review is appropriate but we are not in a position to comment upon every strand of it. Instead we wish to take up issues associated with:

◇ Seventy Years of Service: 1938-2008 ◇

WRVS is a practical charity focusing on helping older people live independently and get more out of life. One of the largest voluntary organisations in Britain, it has nearly 60,000 men and women helping older people to stay independent at home and active in their community; supporting patients and visitors in hospital; and helping people caught up in disasters. www.wrvs.org.uk

- How the present scheme is meeting the needs of particular groups of bus users, including disabled people
- How the practical operation of the scheme can be improved
- The implications of any extension to the scheme
- Whether the scheme is delivering value for money to the taxpayer

Demand Responsive Community Transport (DRCT)

However commendable it is to enable ‘older people... (especially those on low incomes)’ to enjoy free travel on ‘scheduled bus services’ this does not directly address the needs of older people (on low incomes or otherwise) who currently make extensive use of the more flexible DRCT services on offer or those older people who wish to make use of such services but for whom cost is an issue.

WRVS is a significant provider of such services hence our interest in the review. We operate DRCT services where the provision of transport itself is the primary funded activity and we also operate services such as ‘good neighbours’, which contain a significant element of DRCT but whose primary purpose is, for example, tackling social isolation.

While the criteria by which an individual may make use of a DRCT service can vary between local authorities or health boards or because of differing funding arrangements they are typically related to health, age, disability or a combination of the three. This naturally shapes our service user profile.

The following figures for WRVS in Scotland for the accounting year **2007/08** provide an idea of the scale of our services:

Community Transport Services

- Over 1100 people used our services on 13,500 separate occasions
- Of over 36,000 tasks undertaken on these occasions reasons included

Day Care	23%
GP Visits	14%
Support Groups	14%
Personal Business	12%
Hospital Visits and Appointments	10%
Leisure	10%
Dentist	1%
School / Nursery	1%

- Over 480 volunteers contributed over 58,000 volunteer hours which is equivalent to over 30 years of full time work for an individual on a 35 hour week

Good Neighbour Schemes

- Over 1300 people used our services on 17,000 separate occasions
- Of over 43,000 tasks undertaken on these occasions reasons included¹

¹ Currently we possess a more detailed breakdown of Good Neighbour tasks than Community Transport tasks

Befriending	14%
Shopping	13%
Social Outings & Leisure	12%
Hospital Visits and Appointments	10%
Personal Business	7%
Support Groups	4%
Day Care	2%
Respite Breaks	2%
GP Visits	2%
Pension Collection	1%
Dentist	1%
School / Nursery	1%

- 460 volunteers contributed over 31,000 volunteer hours which is equivalent to over 17 years of full time work for an individual on a 35 hour week

The ratios of 'individual service user' to 'occasions of use' to 'tasks undertaken' illustrate the high levels of need that our service users have. This high level of need is only what one would expect to see in a client group accessing a service largely because of reasons to do with age, health or disability and yet the *range* of tasks undertaken are comparable to that of any active citizen, as opposed to being focused only on, for example, health issues.

While many of us take it for granted that we can hop on a bus and go shopping, attend a medical appointment or simply go out and enjoy ourselves we should never forget that this is not true for everyone. Many people are simply unable to do so without the proper assistance and, with the best will in the world, these same people are unable to make extensive (or in some cases any) use of scheduled bus services. This can be for all sorts of reasons, from the difficulty associated with getting to a bus stop or onto a bus to the fact that services are too infrequent to be of practical use.

Given that we have not experienced any 'abuse' of our services (in the sense that any user has turned out to 'not really need them'), we can reasonably conclude that the level and type of use of our DRCT services is in itself sufficient evidence that there is an obvious need for such services, which is distinct from any need met by scheduled bus services.

Addressing the Focus of the Review

Enabling older people to get out and about was one of the main reasons why the Scottish Executive, as was, introduced free bus travel for older people under the National Concessionary Travel Scheme (NCTS). Yet DRCT services are not included. This must change. In saying this we can address the focus of the review as follows:

- How the present scheme is meeting the needs of particular groups of bus users, including disabled people
 - The problem with this phrasing is that it does not account for the difference between actual and potential bus users or types of 'bus'. Even if the scheme works perfectly at present for those whose needs are met by scheduled bus services this does nothing to meet the needs of those for whom scheduled bus services are not appropriate but for whom DRCT services are or would be.

- How the practical operation of the scheme can be improved
 - Use of DRCT services should be included in the National Concessionary Travel Scheme as soon as possible
- The implications of any extension to the scheme
 - We are not aware that anyone is seriously questioning the value of demand responsive community transport *per se*, just as they are not questioning the value of scheduled bus services *per se*, in which case we imagine that most people would agree that the implications of an extension are all positive: namely that greater access to DRCT services through there being no cost to the user allows greater freedom and mobility for older people and results in their increased participation in society, active citizenship and general well-being.
- Whether the scheme is delivering value for money to the taxpayer
 - We cannot comment on this issue with respect to the current operation of the NCTS as we do not possess detailed knowledge of the method by which the bus operators are reimbursed by the Scottish Government or the criteria by which the Scottish Government chooses to measure value for money. We are curious to know whether it is possible to place a meaningful monetary value on the well-being of older citizens, particularly one filtered through the prism of bus usage. Since both wages and pensions are taxable and the NCTS is aimed at over-60s (i.e. it includes those still in work and those in receipt of a pension) we suggest perhaps it would be appropriate to ask those taxpayers who possess a National Entitlement Card what they think. We suspect the answer might be 'yes' with the proviso that a significant number of them would like to see demand responsive community transport services included in the scheme in future.
 - As far as the ultimate cost to the Scottish Government might be of agreeing to our proposal, this is extremely difficult for us to calculate as the rates that service users pay to use our services and the funding arrangements in place differ between local authority areas. In theory it may be possible to provide an aggregate figure which, when multiplied by instances of use, would give some sort of 'national total' but this would be fairly meaningless when attempting to calculate an accurate future cost to the Government. We prefer to argue that the increased well-being of older people is of sufficient intrinsic value to us all to account for itself in much the same way as the Government's abolition of prescription charges is seen as intrinsically valuable to the health of the nation without requiring a crude analysis of, for example, how free medicine contributes to the ultimate tax-take from a healthier workforce.
 - We trust that the ongoing commitment from the Scottish Government to the strategy 'All Our Futures: Planning for a Scotland with an Ageing Population' is indicative of the value placed by the Government on the wellbeing of older people in Scotland and their active participation in Scottish society. In particular we note the Government's vision is that:
 - Older people have access to public services which are people-centred, accessible and joined up; and can access quality services appropriate to their needs, when and where they are required.

- Houses, Buildings, communities, transport services are well designed and accessible and can be used by older people in safety and with confidence.

It is hard to think of a service that meets these aspirations as readily as DRCT does.

Conclusion

Consequent to the above **WRVS urges the Scottish Government to revise the National Concessionary Travel Scheme so as to include free travel for older people on demand responsive community transport services.**

This is a single, simple highly effective measure that will demonstrate that the Scottish Government is serious about the well-being of older Scots and about creating the stronger, safer and healthier society that it so ardently aspires to.

WRVS was recently invited to make a submission to the enquiry by the Equal Opportunities Committee of the Scottish Parliament into 'leisure and age'. This submission touched on issues related to demand responsive community transport. Since this submission is not yet complete we are unable to append it here. However, we will forward it to the Review once it has been received by the Committee.

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