

Item:

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Report to Partnership Meeting 17 September 2021

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

Fair Fares Appraisal

Purpose of Report

To invite Members to consider a proposal for HITRANS to undertake a Fair Fares Appraisal.

Background

The Scottish Governments Programme for Government outlines a commitment to commission a Fair Fares Review to ensure a sustainable and integrated approach to transport fares.

In support of this commitment this report invites Members to consider a proposal for HITRANS to undertake early work to consider a number of issues and supporting information relating to fair fares in the context of the Highlands and Islands.

Members will be aware that legislation was approved by the Scottish Parliament enabling the introduction of a new statutory scheme to allow 5-18 year olds resident in Scotland to access free bus travel through the National Entitlement Card (NEC) and the Young Scot branded NEC. Following a further commitment made, legislation to allow the scheme to be extended to include those aged under 22 was introduced to the Scottish Parliament on 23 August 2021.

Subject to Parliamentary approval of the extension, around 930,000 young people in Scotland aged between 5-21 will be eligible for free bus travel from 31 January 2022.

In many parts of the HITRANS area, the local ferry service either provides the equivalent form of public transport to that fulfilled by a bus service in other parts of the country or forms part of a multi-modal journey that includes the local bus and with it enables access to key services, the ability to attend events or visit family and friends. For some remote mainland locations, the rail network or community transport provides a similar function.

The HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy therefore highlights that in our islands and remotest mainland communities, passengers should have the same entitlements as those benefitting from the National Concession Travel Scheme where regular bus services provide the core local public transport network. Such an approach is needed to ensure that eligible people in all areas have equality of access to at least the public transport that is available in their area regardless of their location.

In addition, HITRANS report on Rural Bus Service Support and Funding outlines a number of impacts pertaining to the National Concessionary Travel scheme for older and disabled people (NCT). This sets out several areas where the NCT Scheme has unintended consequences that disadvantages rural and island communities for a variety of reasons that are set out in the report (https://www.hitrans.org.uk/Documents/Rural_Bus_Service_Support_and_Funding_Case_for_Change.pdf). The extension of the free bus travel to Under 22's is likely to exacerbate many of these

unintended consequences, further disadvantaging the operation and provision of bus services in the rural Scotland.

HITRANS supports the policy objectives behind concessionary travel but believes that recognition should be given to the unintended outcomes and full consideration of it applying on to other modes where they perform the same function of local bus services.

RTS Delivery

Impact - Positive

Comment – Establishing Fair Fares is a key priority identified within the RTS

Policy

Impact - Positive

Comment – This commission will support the Scottish Governments welcome commitment to undertake a fair fares review in its 21/22 Programme for Government.

Financial

Impact – Positive

Budget line and value – An allocation of £10,000 from within the 2021/22 Research and Strategy programme budget is proposed for supporting this commission.

Equality

Impact – Positive

Comment – Reducing Inequalities is one of the key priorities of the updated National Transport Strategy.

Members are invited to:

1. Consider the scope of the proposed appraisal
2. Approve the recommended budget to undertake the work and ask officers to prepare a detailed specification and procure the services of a transport consultant with suitable experience to undertake the appraisal

Report by: Neil MacRae
Designation: Partnership Manager
Date: 7th September 2021