

Motion to Kent County Council: Extension of Free Bus Travel for Concessionary Pass Holders Before 9:30am

Proposed by: Cllr Oliver Bradshaw

Seconded by: Cllr Robert Ford

Motion

This Council Resolves:

1. To request that the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport commission a feasibility study into extending free concessionary bus travel for eligible pass holders before 9:30am on local bus services within Kent.
2. That the feasibility study should assess:
 - a) The anticipated financial implications for Kent County Council;
 - b) The impact on bus operator capacity and service provision;
 - c) Potential health and wellbeing benefits, including improved access to healthcare and reduced social isolation;
 - d) Potential economic benefits to town centres, local businesses and the voluntary sector;
 - e) Potential environmental benefits arising from increased public transport use.
3. That the study should involve appropriate engagement with relevant stakeholders, including bus operators, NHS partners, district and borough councils, Age UK, Healthwatch Kent and other community organisations to gather necessary information.
4. That the Cabinet Member be asked to report the findings and recommendations of the feasibility study to the appropriate Committee within six months, including outlining any options for implementation and funding should a viable proposal be identified.

Background Information – Provided by the Restore Britain Kent Group

The Restore Britain Kent Group notes that:

1. The English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) provides free bus travel for eligible older and disabled residents from 9:30am on weekdays and throughout weekends and bank holidays.
2. That local transport authorities have discretionary powers to enhance these arrangements and provide additional concessionary travel benefits beyond the statutory minimum.

3. That many older and disabled residents rely on public transport to attend healthcare appointments, undertake caring responsibilities, volunteer within their communities, participate in employment, and access essential services.
4. That Kent faces ongoing challenges relating to social isolation, transport accessibility, public health, congestion, air quality and carbon emissions.
5. That barriers to travel before 9:30am can disproportionately affect older and disabled residents who need to travel early in the day.

The Restore Britain Kent Group Believes:

1. That accessible and affordable public transport plays an essential role in enabling older and disabled residents to remain independent, active and connected within their communities.
2. That reducing barriers to early morning travel could improve access to healthcare, employment, volunteering opportunities and family responsibilities.
3. That enhanced concessionary travel may contribute to reducing loneliness and social isolation and support wider health and wellbeing objectives.
4. That encouraging greater use of public transport can support local high streets, reduce dependence on private vehicles and contribute towards environmental objectives.
5. That any proposal to extend concessionary travel must be supported by robust evidence regarding costs, demand, operational impacts and potential benefits.