
Concessionary Bus Travel in England

Bus Users

Concessionary Bus Travel In England

1. What does the Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007 offer?
2. Who benefits?
3. What do they get?
4. When were the measures introduced?
5. What are the eligible categories of disability?
6. How can eligible people get a concessionary travel pass?
7. Is there a charge for the pass?
8. Will I be issued with a ticket?
9. What is the definition of a 'local' bus?
10. What about coach travel?
11. What about ferries, trams and other forms of transport?
12. Can residents of England travel in other parts of the UK?
13. What happens when a bus service starting in England reaches the border with Scotland or Wales?
14. Why do time restrictions apply?
15. Why doesn't Westminster administer concessionary travel centrally?
16. Why do some passes have different expiry dates?
17. Are the passes smartcards?
18. What safeguards are there to ensure privacy is not infringed?
19. How much should operators be paid for providing concessionary travel?

1. What does the Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007 offer?

In 2000 the Government introduced a guarantee of half-fare travel for eligible England residents within their local authority area. The Concessionary Bus Travel Act implemented the Chancellor's announcements in the 2006 Budget that people aged 60 and over and eligible disabled people in England would get free off-peak travel on all local buses anywhere in England (rather than just within their local authority area of residence) from 1 April 2008.

The age at which people now qualify for free travel is increasing in line with the female retirement age. For full details, go to www.gov.uk/calculate-state-pension/y/age. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have their own separate schemes.

2. Who benefits?

Around 11 million older and disabled people in England are eligible for the concession.

3. What do they get?

Those eligible get free travel on local buses from 9.30am until 11pm on weekdays, and all day weekends and bank holidays, across England. They may also receive further concessions from their local authority, but usually only within their home area.

4. When were the measures introduced?

1 April 2008.

5. What are the eligible categories of disability?

You should qualify for an English National Concessionary Bus Pass if

- you receive the Higher Rate Mobility Component of Disability Living Allowance (HRMCDLA),
- you have been awarded at least eight points against either the 'Moving around' and/or 'Communicating verbally' activities for Personal Independence Payment (PIP)
- you receive War Pensioner's Mobility Supplement (WPMS).

Under the 2000 Transport Act you are eligible for a disabled person's pass if you live in England and are 'eligible disabled'. This means you:

- are registered as sight impaired or severely sight impaired;
- are profoundly or severely deaf;
- are unable to make clear basic oral requests or are unable to ask specific questions to clarify instructions (eg: 'Does this bus go to the High Street?');
- have a long term and substantial disability that means you cannot walk or which makes walking very difficult;
- don't have arms or have long-term loss of the use of both arms;
- have a learning disability, which must have started before adulthood and have a lasting effect on development;

You're also an eligible disabled person if your application for a driving licence would be refused under section 92 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 (physical fitness). However, you won't be eligible if you were refused because of persistent misuse of drugs or alcohol.

6. How can eligible people get a concessionary travel pass?

Eligible residents should contact their county council or unitary authority for more details and an application form. These are often available in libraries. Residents of Greater Manchester, Merseyside, South Yorkshire, Tyne and Wear, West Midlands or West Yorkshire should contact their Passenger Transport Executive (PTE). To find out where you can get your bus pass, go to www.gov.uk/apply-for-elderly-person-bus-pass.

Residents of Greater London should contact their borough council or go to the Freedom Pass website at www.freedompass.org

7. Is there a charge for the pass?

Passes offering the statutory minimum entitlement are free. Where local authorities offer more generous schemes — for example a scheme covering travel on trams — they may charge for passes to help pay for the extra entitlement, although they still have to offer a free pass providing the statutory minimum.

Local authorities may recoup the cost of replacing lost cards.

8. Will I be issued with a ticket?

An eligible person is entitled to concessionary bus travel on the production of a valid pass.

In some areas bus drivers issue zero-priced tickets. Some bus companies choose to do this as a way of recording concessionary trips. However, the issuing of tickets to concessionary travellers is not a legal requirement and has no bearing on an eligible person's entitlement to free travel.

9. What is the definition of a 'local' bus?

The concession entitles pass holders to free travel on off-peak local bus services in England. Qualifying services will be self-evident in most cases. They don't usually include sightseeing tours and other tourist-related services, or services where the fare includes payment for another service such as car parking in the case of Park-&-Ride. Local authorities have the discretion to enable passes to be used on such services if they wish. If in doubt, check with your bus operator or local authority.

10. What about coach travel?

Scheduled coach services are not generally included, even for short journeys. National Express offers a card to people over 60 giving a one-third reduction on most fares. For more information, go to www.nationalexpress.com/waystosave/senior-coachcard.aspx

11. What about ferries, trams and other forms of transport?

Other modes such as ferries or trams are outside the national concession, but local authorities retain the ability to offer concessions that go beyond the statutory minimum as an additional benefit to their eligible residents. Such wider concessions are funded from local authorities' own resources.

Generally, any additional concessions a local authority chooses to offer will only be available to eligible residents of that area, unless there are special arrangements with a neighbouring authority. Pass holders can contact their local authority for details.

12. Can residents of England travel in other parts of the UK?

No. Eligible English residents can travel on any off-peak local bus service in any area of England, Scottish residents within Scotland and Welsh residents within Wales. There are local arrangements for cross-border journeys; England residents may be able to travel from, say, Chester to Wrexham, but wouldn't then get free travel within Wales.

In Northern Ireland the 60+ SmartPass is available for residents to travel within Northern Ireland, but Northern Ireland residents aged over 65 are entitled to a Senior SmartPass which is valid throughout Ireland.

13. What happens when a bus service starting in England reaches the border with Scotland or Wales?

The national concession guarantees free off-peak local bus travel for eligible England residents within England, but not within Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

Local authorities do, however, have the discretion to make special arrangements (to be funded locally) where they feel they are appropriate. This could, for example, include free travel on short cross-border journeys. However, any such arrangements will only apply locally.

14. Why do time restrictions apply?

The cost of offering the statutory concession during peak times across the whole country is prohibitive and could also raise capacity issues for operators in some areas. Local authorities can offer additional benefits such as earlier start times, taking account of their particular area and circumstances. These extra benefits are not usually available to people from outside the local authority area.

15. Why doesn't Westminster administer concessionary travel centrally?

The Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007 contains a power which would allow Ministers, in the future, to administer the English concessionary travel scheme centrally. Any such change would be subject to consultation and parliamentary scrutiny. Already Ministers have used their powers to transfer responsibility for concessionary travel to County Councils and Unitary Authorities rather than District/Borough Councils.

Administering concessionary travel centrally may reduce administrative costs and save money, but Westminster considers it could also raise some very difficult practical issues, especially concerning local benefits. The Government has no immediate plans to make use of this power. However schemes in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are provided centrally by devolved Government.

16. Why do some passes have different expiry dates?

The Department for Transport specifies that the expiry date must be no more than five years from the date of issue, but local authorities are free to set their own expiry dates within that time.

Many local authorities have chosen to issue passes with different expiry dates in order to stagger their card re-issue. Some may also wish to use shorter expiry times in order to reduce the potential for fraud.

17. Are the passes smartcards?

Yes, passes are issued in smartcard format. A smartcard is a plastic card containing a microchip, which can store information electronically. In addition to its use as a concessionary travel pass, the smartcard could be used for additional services at local discretion, such as allowing access to leisure or library services.

The smartcards are ITSO-compliant. ITSO is a national smartcard specification, which has been developed by industry and the Government.

In areas where buses do not have smartcard readers, passengers simply show their passes to the bus driver. London buses currently have a different Smartcard system (Oystercard); if you are an English resident living outside London show your card to the driver if you are travelling on London buses.

18. What safeguards are there to ensure privacy is not infringed?

Local authorities need to ensure that all data on individuals is collected and processed in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998, which provides strong safeguards on privacy.

19. How much should operators be paid for providing concessionary travel?

Bus operators are entitled to fair reimbursement for carrying concessionary travellers. This covers both fare revenue foregone and any additional costs that may result (for example where additional services need to be operated).

Reimbursement is made by local authorities on a 'no better, no worse off' basis, so operators should neither gain nor lose money as a result of carrying concessionary travellers. Where a bus operator believes that a local authority's reimbursement arrangements are unfair, they are able to appeal to the Secretary of State for Transport for an impartial assessment of the case.

Based on DfT FAQs updated April 2008; updated by Bus Users UK June 2009, June 2011 and October 2013.
