

P07-09
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POSSIBLE CHANGES TO THE ADMINISTRATION OF CONCESSIONARY TRAVEL

The Department for Transport has published the consultation paper 'Possible changes to the administration of concessionary travel' which looks at options for possible changes to two aspects of the administration of concessionary travel in England.

Free off-peak concessionary bus travel was introduced throughout England from 1 April 2008. Whilst funded by Central Government, at present this statutory minimum concession is administered by local authorities known as Travel Concession Authorities (TCAs). The majority of TCAs are currently 'lower-tier' local authorities: non-metropolitan district councils (also known as 'shire' districts), but the responsibility also rests with unitary authorities, the London boroughs and Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs).

TCAs are also able to offer discretionary concessions over and above the statutory minimum, reflecting each authority's own specific financial, demographic and transport circumstances. Such discretionary elements must be funded from the TCAs own resources.

Local authorities, stakeholder groups and operators have identified a number of issues with the current arrangements. These include: scheme variations across TCA boundaries; too many negotiations with bus operators; lack of capacity in some TCAs; difficulty of accurately funding TCAs; and the non-alignment of TCA and Transport Authority responsibilities. The Government is therefore considering what improvements can be made to the current arrangements. This consultation is part of that process.

The options for change to the statutory minimum concession include: leaving things as they are now (i.e. largely with district councils); moving responsibility to upper tier authorities only; or centralising administration completely. A further option would be to administer the concession at a regional level, although this would require primary legislation and would require a longer timescale to implement.

The Government's initial view is in favour of a shift of responsibility from district to county councils.

The Government welcomes the views of consultees as to whether they agree with the conclusion that moving both statutory and discretionary responsibilities to upper tier authorities is the right way forward.

The aim of this consultation is to inform a decision in principle on how concessionary travel should be administered, thereby enabling certainty to be provided at the earliest opportunity on who will be responsible for concessionary travel in the longer term. Communities and Local Government (CLG) will consult separately on the funding

implications of any proposed changes. This will be undertaken as part of the formal consultation on the next three-year local government finance settlement.

There are eleven consultation questions listed below which should be considered alongside the consultation document. However the consultation document states 'Alternatively, you can ignore these questions and formulate a response in your own way';

Question 1: Are there other problems, stemming from current administrative arrangements, that are not covered by this list?

Question 2: Do you think that the current level of administration is the most appropriate?

Question 3: Do you think a system of 'higher-tier' administration would be the most appropriate?

Question 4: Do you think a centrally administered statutory minimum concession would be most appropriate at this time?

Question 5: Do you think a regional tier of administration might ultimately be most appropriate?

Question 6: Are there other options for administering the statutory minimum concession that are missing from this list?

Question 7: Should all local authorities retain the ability to establish discretionary travel concession schemes using powers under the 1985 Transport Act as now?

Question 8: Should the ability to establish discretionary travel concessions using powers under the 1985 Transport Act be limited to upper tier authorities only?

Question 9: Should lower tier authorities ability to establish discretionary travel concessions using powers under the 1985 Transport Act be limited to circumstances where they had to act jointly with upper tier authorities only?

Question 10: Do you have any relevant data that could inform the cost/benefit estimates that will be used in the final Impact Assessment?

Question 11: Bearing in mind that there would be a separate consultation on the funding implications of any changes to the administration of concessionary fares, are there any

other issues around funding that are not considered here?

For a copy of the consultation document and consultation response form go to:
<http://www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/open/concessionarytravel/>

The consultation closes on **Tuesday 21 July 2009**. Responses to inform a possible NALC submission should be sent to dave.mahon@nalc.gov.uk by **Friday 10 July 2009**.

Alternatively you may wish to respond directly, although we would welcome a copy of your response. The Department for Transport request that responses are submitted on the response form accessible at the link above. Relevant response addresses are below;

Comments can be emailed to; concessionaryfares@dft.gsi.gov.uk .

or for postal responses;

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