



# Concessionary Bus Pass Research

Report

November 2010  
Older People's Commissioner for Wales



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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

Mott MacDonald (MM) was appointed by the Older People's Commissioner for Wales (OPCW) in July 2010 to undertake research investigating the impact of the concessionary bus travel scheme on older people in Wales, with emphasis on obtaining the views of older people themselves.

The purpose of our research has been to provide an evidence base to demonstrate the effects of the scheme and to establish what, if any, positive impacts the scheme can have on other budgets, such as health and social care, as well as other user groups, notably young people.

Our methodology has combined original and secondary research techniques to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact that the introduction of concessionary bus travel has had on older people in Wales and the potential value it adds to their lives and to the wider community. The work undertaken has incorporated desk research, quantitative research (questionnaire interviews with 666 older people across Wales), qualitative research (two focus groups in Carmarthen and Wrexham) and interviews with various stakeholders.

## Policy Context

The concessionary bus travel scheme was introduced in April 2002 for residents aged 60 and over as well as qualifying disabled people of all ages, giving travel across local authority boundaries to make it an all-Wales scheme. Passes can be used at any time of the day, unlike in England where passes are restricted to the off-peak period and where the scheme is in the process of being limited to those aged 65 and over. Welsh pass holders are able to use cross-border services if their bus journey starts or ends in Wales, although they are generally unable to transfer between bus services in England.

The scheme has proved enormously popular in Wales, with local authorities managing in excess of 650,000 passes annually. The popularity of

concessionary bus travel amongst older people has increased the costs to the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) of the scheme. Reimbursement payments made by WAG to bus operators have more than doubled in six years, to £66m in 2008-09.

WAG has indicated that there is no intention to amend the entitlement or eligibility criteria for the concessionary bus travel scheme but, in response to rising costs, it has capped the concessionary fare reimbursement budget for 2010-11 at £69m. Nevertheless, challenges still remain. Changing demographics (i.e. an ageing population) means that the eligible cohort is increasing and demand for concessionary bus travel could therefore grow over time. It is possible that a progressively reducing rate of reimbursement for local bus operators may lead to the deregistering of some commercial bus journeys and changes in service patterns (e.g. lower frequencies and shorter operating hours).

The budget for WAG's Economy and Transport department will be reduced from £1,035m in 2010/11 to £888m in 2013/14<sup>1</sup>. Revenue spending will be reduced by 8.1% in real terms, while capital spending will be reduced by 35.5%. WAG has restated its commitment to retaining the concessionary bus pass scheme in its current form, although it is possible that this position may change following the National Assembly elections in May 2011.

It is therefore critical that a robust evidence base is assembled to test the benefits of the concessionary travel scheme, for older people themselves and the longer term savings to other departmental budgets (such as health and social care) and to other user groups (notably young people) who may have benefited from the public transport improvements delivered as a result of the scheme.

Various documents have been reviewed as part of our research, including:

- Strategic Plan 2010-2013 (OPCW, 2010)
- Response to National Transport Plan – One Wales: Connecting the Nation (OPCW, October 2009)

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<sup>1</sup> Business leaders dismayed by deep transport cuts'. Western Mail, 18 November 2010.

- England-wide Concessionary Bus Travel: The Passenger Perspective (Passenger Focus, July 2009)
- Opportunities and Challenges, our ambition for public policy in Wales (Age Cymru, November 2010)

## Questionnaire Interviews

### Use of the Concessionary Bus Pass

The Concessionary Bus Pass was used extremely frequently by the survey sample with three quarters (76%) of the sample using their pass more than once a week. Frequency of use was higher among respondents interviewed in urban locations and among respondents who did not own a car.

The pass was used for a wide range of trip types, but was used most widely for essential shopping trips, such as, *food* (88% use it for this purpose) and *clothes* (79%). In addition to this, the pass was also widely used for *days out* (59%) and for maintaining social networks (*visiting friends* 43%; *visiting relatives* 39%).

A large group of respondents also used the pass for accessing health care services (*visiting GPs* 38%; *hospital appointments* 52%).

In terms of frequency of use by trip, the pass was used most frequently for *food shopping trips*.

Travelling distances to access services were relatively large and, for most types of trip, approximately half of respondents had to travel 25 minutes or more to access services. Trips for *food* and *visits to the GP* had the shortest average journey length of all trip types.

### Method of transport used if no longer had Concessionary Bus Pass

If respondents no longer had the Concessionary Bus Pass, essential trips, such as, *shopping for food* or *shopping for clothes* would still be made. However, discretionary trips, such as, *days out/sightseeing* (41% would no

longer make trip), *visiting friends* (17%) and *visiting relatives* (12%) would be more likely to be stopped.

For most types of trip, if respondents no longer had the pass just under a half would continue using the bus on a paid basis, with approximately a third switching to cars.

The method of transport that respondents would use as an alternative to the bus varied considerably by car ownership. The majority of car owners would switch from bus to car, while non car owners would continue to use the bus.

### **Attitudes towards the Concessionary Bus Pass**

There was almost universal agreement that having the bus pass made it easier for respondents to make trips.

There was a strong feeling among respondents that *without a bus pass their quality of life would suffer* (81% agreed) and that they *would be more lonely and housebound* (78% agreed).

There was also a strong perception among respondents that their independence would suffer if they did not have the pass: *having a bus pass allows me to be independent* (92% agreed) and the *bus pass allows me to do things more easily* (93% agreed).

The majority of respondents felt that removal of the bus pass would negatively affect their economic circumstances. Two thirds (67%) disagreed that *I don't need the concessionary bus pass to afford the bus*, with four out of ten (40%) disagreeing strongly. Similarly, two thirds (66%) agreed that *I would find it hard to make ends meet without the bus pass*.

There was widespread opposition to changes to the current system: *replacement with half price travel* (88% disagreed) and *use only when off peak* (79% disagreed). A key driver behind this opposition was widespread disagreement that *the bus pass was an unnecessary burden on taxpayers* (76% disagreed).

## **Satisfaction with the Concessionary Bus Pass and bus services**

Satisfaction with the bus pass was virtually universal with over nine out of ten (93%) respondents *very satisfied* and a further one in five (6%) *fairly satisfied*. There was little difference in satisfaction between respondents interviewed at urban locations and those interviewed at rural locations.

When asked what were the main benefits the Concessionary Bus Pass offered them (apart from financially), spontaneous responses centred on *the freedom to get out of the house* (29%). This confirms the benefits of the bus pass on the independence of pass holders.

Satisfaction with specific aspects of the bus service was also high, with satisfaction highest for *ease of getting a seat* (70% very satisfied) and *the bus driver* (69% very satisfied) being the highest. Satisfaction was also high for *ease of getting on and off the buses* (67% very satisfied) indicating relatively few accessibility issues with the bus service.

## **Effect of car ownership on opinion of the Concessionary Bus Pass**

The beneficial impact of the concessionary bus pass was found to be greater among those respondents who did not own a car compared to those who do own a car.

Non car owners were found to use the Concessionary Bus Pass for a wider range of trip types. Not only this, but non car owners were also found to use the pass more frequently for each trip type than car owners (who use the pass for that purpose).

Responses to attitude statements showed that non car owners were more likely to feel that:

- their quality of life would suffer if the bus pass were withdrawn
- they would become less independent and reliant on family and friends without the bus pass
- they would find it hard to make ends meet without the bus pass

Non car owners were also slightly more resistant to any changes to the current system.

The profile of non car owners showed that they were more likely to be: older, female, disabled and from low income households. The removal of the Concessionary Bus Pass or a move towards charging would therefore have a greater impact on more vulnerable groups in society.

## **Focus Groups**

To add depth to the face to face interviews and to explore issues arising from the questionnaire survey, two focus groups were conducted in Carmarthen and Wrexham on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2010. These towns were selected to obtain a cross-section of participants from urban and rural areas in north and south Wales. Focus group participants were selected from those who had indicated during the questionnaire survey that they were willing to take part.

The focus groups were semi-structured against a topic guide (**Appendix B**) which enabled older people to raise issues of importance to them, whilst probing their underlying attitudes and obtaining an understanding of the issues affecting them most.

### **Carmarthen**

The Carmarthen focus group were passionate that the concessionary pass scheme should not be removed as it provided them with a lifeline to activities that helped to improve the quality of their life. Being independent was of great importance to participants and the group felt that this provided mental health benefits as it encouraged them to remain active avoiding isolation. The group felt that isolation was a major contributor towards depression in older people and many participants considered themselves to be at risk if they were unable to take part in activities or have an active social life. A number of participants were not in a financial position to afford to pay for the number of bus trips they are currently making. Therefore, if the scheme was removed they would be drastically affected both financially and also socially,



as they would not be able to make the non-essential trips which give a sense of purpose to their lives.

## **Wrexham**

All members of the group stressed the value of the bus pass. It plays a valuable role in giving them a level of freedom and independence they would otherwise be unable to achieve without the pass. They do not want to be reliant on friends or family for transport. The pass also enables holders to have a full and active social life; the group were particularly conscious of issues surrounding depression and associated health difficulties in older members of the community. They were clear that the pass has wider benefits for them than simply providing free travel.

In summary, the group do not want to see any changes.

*'The pass is fine as it is. Please don't change it!'*

## **Stakeholder Consultation**

To complement the review of relevant policy documents, strategic consultations were held with a selection of stakeholders, including user groups, selected local authorities, WAG and bus operators. These consultations took the form of telephone interviews, which were semi-directive against open questions, complemented by follow up email correspondence. The stakeholders interviewed were as follows:

### **National/local government**

- Welsh Assembly Government (Head of Integrated Transport)
- City & County of Swansea (Acting Group Leader – Transportation)
- Wrexham County Borough Council (Transport Co-ordinating Officer)
- Cardiff County Council (Head of Concessionary Travel Unit)
- Carmarthenshire County Council (Transport Manager, Passenger Transport Operations Manager)
- Powys County Council (Head of Public Transport Unit)

### **User groups**

- Age Cymru (Head of Policy and Public Affairs)
- Bus Users UK Cymru (Senior Officer for Wales)
- Alzheimers Wales (Acting Director for Wales)
- National Partnership Forum for Older People (Transport Sector Representative)

### **Bus operators**

- Arriva Cymru (Concessionary & Smart Card Manager)
- GHA Coaches (Operations Manager)

The feedback received during the stakeholder consultations suggests that older people are generally happy with their concessionary passes and with the bus service. Local authorities are very happy with the administration of the scheme. However, there is possibly a need to monitor compliance and prevent the abuse of passes. More resources would be required to improve monitoring, which may be unrealistic in the current economic climate but the savings accrued on the reimbursement budget could potentially recoup the additional financial outlay for WAG in the medium term.

WAG, local authorities and bus operators are generally happy with the new reimbursement arrangements, which have capped the costs of the concessionary bus travel scheme. However, in the context of potential changes to the scheme in terms of fares, hours of operation and eligibility, some user groups have questioned the scheme's value for money, and suggest that efforts be made to improve the accuracy of the reimbursement process before any changes are made.

Beyond ensuring a more accurate reimbursement process, stakeholders are reluctant to suggest any amendments to the scheme, as all are aware of how highly older people value their passes and the benefits that the passes bring to some of the more vulnerable members of society. However, it is generally considered that the most politically acceptable means of managing scheme costs (in the context of people working longer and retiring later) would be to raise the age of eligibility for concessionary passes, as long as it is ensured that no older person loses their current entitlement.

Cross-border issues were not viewed as a particular problem by any of the stakeholders that we contacted, at least from the perspective of Welsh pass holders which is the focus of our research. This is borne out by our own questionnaire interviews and focus groups.

## Summary and conclusions

### Overview

In all activities undertaken, the Older People's Commissioner must give due regard to the United Nations Principles for Older Persons. In subjective terms, we have summarised below how the concessionary bus travel scheme contributes to each of the UN Principles:

- **Independence** - without the concessionary bus pass, we suggest that many older people without access to a car would be housebound and denied access to essential facilities which enables them to maintain their independence. The pass gives older people greater freedom to access food/clothes shopping, hospital/GP appointments, days out and volunteering opportunities. It gives older people the ability to regularly visit and care for loved ones, which would become much more difficult if bus travel had to be paid for;
- **Participation** – the concessionary bus travel scheme offers older people the opportunity to remain integrated in society. The availability of free bus travel enables older people to meet others and make new friends, reducing their isolation and loneliness. This in turn improves their quality of life and physical, mental and emotional well-being;
- **Care** – this principle states that older people should have access to health, social and legal care so that they can optimise their well-being. Free bus travel removes a significant barrier to accessing these opportunities. We suggest that the potential for the scheme to relieve pressure on health and social services budgets is clear, in two main respects:
  - the cost of the alternative health/community transport service which would need to be provided in the absence of free bus travel; and

- the ability of older people to use free bus services to access regular hospital appointments. Without these bus services, it is conceivable that a significant number of individuals would no longer be able to live independently, and would instead need to be placed in residential care at a much greater cost to the taxpayer.

Our contact with older people, as well as our consultations with various stakeholders, has demonstrated the numerous benefits that the concessionary bus pass brings to people's lives. Although we have not undertaken a full cost-benefit analysis as part of this commission, this evidence strongly suggests that the benefits of the scheme far outweigh the costs, and that the overall burden on the taxpayer would in all likelihood be significantly increased if free concessionary bus travel was to be discontinued;

- **Self-fulfilment** - this principle states that older persons should have access to educational, cultural, spiritual and recreational resources and be able to develop their full potential. The results of the questionnaire interviews demonstrate that older people use their concessionary bus passes for visiting friends and relatives, days out, accessing sport/recreation and volunteering. Whilst non-essential, all of these trip purposes are important to optimising older people's well-being and fulfilling their potential. The surveys have shown that many older people would be unable to make such trips if free concessionary bus travel was withdrawn. Self-fulfilment is therefore much less likely to be achieved; and
- **Dignity** – the availability of a universally available and unlimited concessionary bus pass clearly contributes to older people's dignity. Without it, the results of the questionnaire interviews and focus groups strongly suggest that many older people would have to depend on car-owning friends and relatives in order to undertake all but the most essential trips (e.g. days out, visiting friends/relatives/accessing sport and recreation), or not travel at all. For essential trips, such as food shopping and hospital appointments, older people would pay for bus travel, but with clear negative implications for household budgets and overall quality of life. Car owners would most likely switch to their cars for all trips, with clear environmental disbenefits.

## Conclusions

This research project has focused on obtaining the views of older people themselves on the concessionary bus travel scheme, supplementing this with desk research and consultations with various stakeholders.

In general, older people are very satisfied with their passes and with the bus service. They do not wish to see any changes to the concessionary bus travel scheme. Local authorities and user groups are similarly satisfied with the scheme.

*'It (the concessionary bus pass scheme) has improved social mobility and helped persuade people to use the public transport system. It's been a great success'*

If the free concessionary passes were no longer available, the questionnaire interviews and focus groups provide clear evidence that non car-owners would cut back on non-essential trips (days out/visiting friends and relatives/accessing sport and recreation), but would pay for essential trips (food shopping, hospital appointments). Car owners would most likely switch to their cars for all trips, with clear environmental disbenefits.

The concessionary bus travel scheme offers older people the opportunity to remain integrated in society, improving their quality of life. The scheme brings wider benefits in terms of relieving pressure on health and social services transport budgets, and the linkages are complex. Bus operators have acknowledged that the scheme has helped renew bus fleets and support both commercial and tendered services which would not otherwise be viable.

The revised reimbursement arrangements have been effective in capping the cost of the scheme. However, if the concessionary fares budget has to be reduced in the future, rather than amending the terms of the scheme policy makers should firstly focus on the reimbursement methodology to ensure that it fairly reflects distance travelled. Beyond this, raising the age of eligibility is viewed by older people and other stakeholders alike as the fairest way of managing scheme costs. As a last resort, a nominal flat fare

may be deliverable, but it must be stressed that there is a strong commitment within WAG to retaining the concessionary bus travel scheme in its current form.

### The next steps

Our research has provided an evidence base to demonstrate the benefits of the free concessionary bus travel scheme. However, our research merely forms a starting point in developing a robust argument for the retention of the current scheme in the face of financial challenges currently faced by WAG and local authorities. More detailed analysis would be beneficial in order to quantify the benefits of the concessionary bus travel scheme and present data in a format which can be easily understood by older people, user groups and policy makers alike. This analysis could include:

- **Cost benefit analysis** – the linkages between the concessionary bus travel scheme and other government budgets are complex. We have already speculated about the savings which the scheme brings in terms of the health and social care budgets and to the wider community from improved bus services. However, a full economic cost benefit analysis of the scheme would enable these complex linkages to be investigated in greater detail and the benefits quantified in financial terms, adding details to support our conclusions. With a reimbursement budget of £69m per annum, WAG is right to consider the scheme's value for money. Our research suggests not only direct social impacts (positive) for the older people of Wales but also indirect benefits e.g. for public services and benefits for other bus users. Operators suggest that they have used the funds to pay for new Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant buses (all buses are required to be low floor by 2015) as well as to improve frequencies. The frequency issue is of course of benefit to all age groups and has both an economic and environmental benefit in sustainability terms.
- **Data analysis using Geographical Information Systems (GIS)** – use of GIS mapping can show complex relationships in an intuitive and easy to understand way. GIS can be used for area profiling, pulling together multiple data sets to identify spatial patterns and commonalities or differences between areas. With specific regard to the concessionary bus travel scheme, accessibility analysis could be used to measure how well

places are served by the Welsh bus network. A scoring methodology could be developed, tailored to concessionary bus pass usage (i.e. preferred times of day/days of week to travel, access to specific destinations). Geographical intersection of the accessibility results with other socio-economic data sets would allow areas with common problems or advantages to be identified, classified and analysed. Animated maps of Wales could be produced showing the areas with high and low public transport accessibility for pass holders. This analysis could be repeated at regular intervals to allow the impact on older people of changes to the public transport network (such as reduced bus service provision) to be tracked over time.

Furthermore, although the benefits of the free concessionary bus travel scheme are clear, not all older people are able to access bus services. This may be due to accessibility problems, or the bus services may not operate at all. It would be beneficial to undertake further research to consider the wider transport and travel needs of older people in Wales, and explore options for improving opportunities where affordable, safe, frequent and reliable transport is not currently available.





# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Task

Mott MacDonald (MM) was appointed by the Older People's Commissioner for Wales (OPCW) in July 2010 to undertake research investigating the impact of the concessionary bus travel scheme on older people in Wales, with emphasis on obtaining the views of older people themselves.

The specific objectives were to examine:

- The frequency, nature and purpose of bus use amongst pass holders;
- Views about the concessionary bus travel scheme, from older people, user groups, bus operators and local/national government;
- Older people's experience of travelling by bus, in both urban and rural areas of Wales;
- The barriers older people face to travelling by bus; and
- Cross border issues between Wales and England in relation to bus pass use.

## 1.2 Response

Evidence from OPCW suggests that older people themselves have two key concerns about the future:

- The challenges of living on a fixed income; and
- Obtaining information about, and access to, services.

Each of the above has an association with and implications for the concessionary bus pass scheme. This is emphasised by the statutory requirement for the Older People's Commissioner to give due regard to the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, i.e. their independence, participation, care, self fulfilment and dignity. As such, OPCW consider it vital that the free concessionary bus pass for older people is retained.

The purpose of our research has been to provide an evidence base to demonstrate the effects of the scheme and to establish what, if any, positive impacts the scheme can have on other budgets, such as health and social care, as well as other user groups, notably young people.

Our methodology has combined original and secondary research techniques to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact that the introduction of concessionary bus travel has had on older people in Wales and the potential value it adds to their lives and to the wider community. The work undertaken can be summarised as follows:

- **Desk research** – we have reviewed relevant policy documents and operational data from OPCW, the Welsh Assembly Government and local authorities;
- **Quantitative research** – we have undertaken face to face questionnaire interviews with 666 older people in Carmarthen, Swansea, Cardiff, Builth Wells, Newtown, Wrexham and Mold, providing a balanced geographical coverage of Wales;
- **Qualitative research** – we have conducted two focus groups in Carmarthen and Wrexham to add depth to the face to face interviews and to explore issues arising from the questionnaire survey; and
- **Stakeholder interviews** – our research has been complemented by telephone discussions with user groups, bus operators, the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and local authorities, to consider issues and opinion as well as validating the findings of our original quantitative and qualitative research.

### 1.3 Report Structure

The report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 summarises the review of relevant policy documents and background data;
- Section 3 summarises the results of the face to face questionnaire interviews;
- Section 4 presents the findings of the focus groups; and
- Section 5 presents the findings of discussions with various stakeholder organisations;
- Section 6 brings together the main issues and conclusions identified in the above sections.

## 2. Policy Context

### 2.1 Current Situation

The concessionary bus travel scheme was introduced in April 2002 for residents aged 60 and over as well as qualifying disabled people of all ages, giving travel across local authority boundaries to make it an all-Wales scheme. Passes can be used at any time of the day, unlike in England where passes are restricted to the off-peak period and the scheme is in the process of being limited to those aged 65 and over. Welsh pass holders are able to use cross-border services if their bus journey starts or ends in Wales, although they are generally unable to transfer between bus services in England.

The scheme has proved enormously popular in Wales, with local authorities managing in excess of 650,000 passes annually. Table 2.1 shows the number of passes issued by each local authority, based on local authority administrative returns.

Table 2.1: Wales concessionary bus passes – numbers issued and in circulation

Local authority	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Isle of Anglesey	12,519	13,766	12,920	13,723
Blaenau Gwent	16,226	17,597	15,368	17,327
Bridgend	27,000	31,000	28,050	30,014
Caerphilly	37,694	36,190	36,435	37,826
Cardiff	61,972	53,762	60,526	64,111
Carmarthenshire	33,342	37,296	38,898	39,701
Ceredigion	14,600	16,588	15,224	16,015
Conwy	27,339	26,154	25,926	27,653
Denbighshire	17,888	19,294	20,729	20,729
Flintshire	28,608	27,933	26,346	27,602
Gwynedd	21,000	23,199	24,186	25,542
Merthyr Tydfil	10,000	12,790	13,343	13,469
Monmouthshire	13,480	18,358	18,802	19,665
Neath Port Talbot	29,351	31,479	31,702	33,162
Newport	28,537	29,630	27,513	28,772
Pembrokeshire	22,500	22,774	23,067	24,871
Powys	18,000	20,080	23,066	25,000

Local authority	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Rhondda Cynon Taff	49,524	47,892	49,873	50,783
Swansea	52,143	54,543	55,707	58,278
Torfaen	19,419	21,060	21,572	23,888
Vale of Glamorgan	23,985	25,569	26,123	27,297
Wrexham	22,390	23,606	25,035	26,151
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>587,517</b>	<b>610,560</b>	<b>620,411</b>	<b>651,579</b>

Source: Welsh Assembly Government

It should be noted that the numbers presented in Table 2.1 include disabled pass holders; the number of disabled and over 60s pass holders is disaggregated at local authority level. However, the table illustrates that the take up of passes amongst older people has increased steadily over time.

Table 2.2 indicates the current number of over 60s pass holders for selected local authorities. It also shows the number of concessionary journeys commencing within those local authority boundaries for the year 2009-10.

Table 2.2: Number of pass holders aged 60 and over and concessionary journeys, by local authority

Local authority	Number of pass holders aged 60 and over (September 2010)	Concessionary journeys commencing in local authority area (2009/10) (a)
Powys	23,513	447,153
Wrexham	23,708	2,156,928
Swansea	53,287	4,800,000
Cardiff	55,718	9,254,991
Carmarthenshire	38,134	1,446,461

Source: Local authorities

(a) Includes all concessionary pass holders (over 60s, disabled)

The number of concessionary journeys shown in Table 2.2 are annual headline figures and cannot be directly related to the number of passes in circulation, because it includes journeys made by pass holders living within other local authorities, for example a resident of Carmarthenshire travelling home from Swansea. However, the figures do suggest that passes are used more frequently by older people living within urban authority areas, where bus services can be expected to be more frequent and have longer operating hours. Our questionnaire interviews sampled older persons (aged

60 and over) in both urban and rural areas who use their passes at least once a fortnight.

Table 2.2 shows that the ratio of concessionary journeys to the number of pass holders is significantly higher in Cardiff, which demonstrates its status as a ‘honeypot’ destination, with older people travelling into the city from far and around.

## 2.2 Challenges

The popularity of concessionary bus travel amongst older people has increased the costs to WAG of the scheme. Table 2.3 shows that reimbursement payments made by WAG to bus operators have more than doubled in six years, to £66m in 2008-09.

Table 2.3: Local bus usage and WAG/local authority financial support

Financial year	Passenger journeys (million)	Reimbursement for free travel (£m)	Local authority support for bus services (£m)	Local Transport Services Grant (£m)
2000-2001	N/A	11	16	N/A
2001-2002	N/A	13	20	N/A
2002-2003	N/A	30	21	N/A
2003-2004	N/A	37	25	N/A
2004-2005	118	41	27	8.8
2005-2006	118	48	28	9.2
2006-2007	122	52	29	9.4
2007-2008	124	57	30	10.4
2008-2009	124	66	35	10.9
2009-2010	N/A	69	N/A	10.9

Source: Wales Transport Statistics 2009

The escalating costs of the scheme has been the subject of media attention<sup>2</sup> as this has had an impact on inter alia funds to implement discounted travel for 16-19 year olds, as was previously piloted in 2007. This is a concern to policy makers seeking to tackle the high number of 'NEETS' (young people Not in Education, Employment or Training), as the cost of public transport is considered a barrier to young people accessing new opportunities.

Within this context, the independent Ministerial Advisory Group has suggested to WAG that the universal entitlement to concessionary bus passes should be scrapped, with support instead being targeted at certain groups of people (e.g. jobseekers) or people living in a particular area (e.g. the south Wales Valleys)<sup>3</sup>. It is suggested that these changes could save £25m per annum.<sup>4</sup>

WAG has indicated that there is no intention to amend the entitlement or eligibility criteria for the concessionary bus travel scheme but, in response to rising costs, it has capped the concessionary fare reimbursement budget for 2010-11 at £69m, with the agreement of the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT, representing bus operators) and the Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers (ATCO, representing local authorities). In summary, the arrangements applying from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010 onwards are:

- Each operator's average adult single fare as of 30<sup>th</sup> September 2009 is used, plus a 3% uplift approved by WAG, rather than the variable average fare each month (thus overcoming the risk of operators manipulating their single fares to improve reimbursement). This fare is known as the Representative Concessionary Fare, and can be identified for each bus operating depot, or group of services.
- The reimbursement factor (known as the Modifying Indexation Factor) was unchanged at 73.59% for the first and second quarters of the financial year, but is subject to quarterly review between WAG, the Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers (ATCO) and the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT). With a fixed

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<sup>2</sup> 'Sharp rise in cost of free bus passes for elderly drives teenage jobs aid plan off the road'. Western Mail, 26 July 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Ministerial Advisory Group Phase 2 Report on Transport, July 2009.  
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/transport/publications/090715mag/?lang=en>

<sup>4</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/wales\\_politics/8184100.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/wales_politics/8184100.stm)

reimbursement budget this factor can be expected to reduce according to concessionary travel demand.

- Reimbursement is therefore calculated as Number of Journeys x Representative Concessionary Fare x Modifying Indexation Factor.

The new reimbursement arrangements have been successful in halting the increasing cost of the scheme. Nevertheless, challenges still remain. Changing demographics (i.e. an ageing population) means that the eligible cohort is increasing and demand for concessionary bus travel could therefore grow over time. It is possible that a progressively reducing rate of reimbursement for local bus operators may lead to the deregistering of some commercial bus journeys and changes in service patterns (e.g. lower frequencies and shorter operating hours).

The budget for WAG's Economy and Transport department will be reduced from £1,035m in 2010/11 to £888m in 2013/14<sup>5</sup>. Revenue spending will be reduced by 8.1% in real terms, whilst capital spending will be reduced by 35.5%. WAG has restated its commitment to retaining the concessionary bus pass scheme in its current form, although it is possible that this position may change following the National Assembly elections in May 2011.

It is therefore critical that a robust evidence base is assembled to demonstrate the effects of the concessionary travel scheme, on older people themselves but also the longer term savings it could offer to other departmental budgets (such as health and social care) and to other user groups (notably young people) who would benefit from the public transport improvements which may have been delivered as a result of the scheme.

## **2.3 Relevant Literature**

### **2.3.1.1 Strategic Plan 2010-2013 (OPCW, 2010)**

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales commenced her appointment in April 2008 as an independent advocate for older people in Wales. Four main objectives are set out in the Commissioner for Older People (Wales) Act 2006:

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<sup>5</sup> Business leaders dismayed by deep transport cuts'. Western Mail, 18 November 2010.

- a) promote awareness of the interests of older people in Wales;
- b) promote the provision of opportunities for, and the elimination of discrimination against, older people in Wales;
- c) encourage best practice in the treatment of older people in Wales; and
- d) keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of the law affecting the interests of older people in Wales.

The Strategic Plan sets out the activities through which the above objectives will be delivered during 2010-2013. In particular, the Commissioner will engage with and listen to older people and other key stakeholders throughout Wales, and develop an evidence base to underpin its work, to which this research is intended to contribute.

### **2.3.1.2 Response to National Transport Plan – One Wales: Connecting the Nation (OPCW, October 2009)**

The Commissioner has asked WAG to ensure that the National Transport Plan takes a long-term, holistic approach to the needs of older people in Wales. The response makes clear OPCW's wish that public transport needs to be made safer and more accessible for older people; that cross-border recognition of bus passes is ensured to help those travelling to England for medical treatment; and that WAG should consider ways in which concessionary travel could be extended to rail services and taxis/community transport, so benefiting those living where bus services are poor or those who cannot use bus services.

The response makes reference to the 2001 Census of Population, which identified that a much higher proportion of pensioner households do not have access to a car than all households; 48% compared to 26% of all households. It is this section of society, predominantly comprised of low income households, which is most reliant on buses and thus depend on the concessionary bus travel scheme for their economic and social well-being.

### **2.3.1.3 England-wide Concessionary Bus Travel: The Passenger Perspective (Passenger Focus, July 2009)**

The all-England concessionary bus travel scheme was introduced in April 2008, following the introduction of free concessionary travel within the pass holder's local authority area in April 2006. It differs from the scheme in



Wales in that it is limited to travel in the off peak period and is in the process of being limited to those aged over 65 by the year 2020 (the threshold in Wales is 60).

Passenger Focus (the independent bus and rail passenger watchdog) commissioned research into the England-wide concessionary bus travel scheme during January and February 2009. There were two main components to the research:

- eight focus groups (three with over 60s concessionary bus pass holders, one with disabled concessionary bus pass holders and four with non-pass holders) in Manchester, Bournemouth, Norwich and Hartlepool; and
- a survey of 2,000 concessionary bus pass holders and non-holders in Birmingham, Bath, Scarborough and Newark on Trent.

The research focused more on the travel habits of pass holders and non-pass holders rather than on the quality of life benefits offered by the English concessionary bus travel scheme. However, the research did demonstrate that free bus travel is making it easier for older (and disabled) people to get out of the house, visit friends and relatives, go shopping and take advantage of sport, leisure and recreational opportunities.

Pass holders and non-pass holders alike did express strong support for the scheme during the focus groups, citing it as the most significant thing the government had done to improve quality of life. However, a small number of pass holders felt that people should only receive a concessionary pass when they retire from work rather than at 60.

Most survey respondents wished to retain the scheme in its current form, with only 8% of pass holders and 13% of non-pass holders agreeing or strongly agreeing with the suggestion of replacing free travel with a half fare. A large majority (84%) of pass holders surveyed wished to see the concession extended to all types of public transport, but most felt that this was unrealistic due to the associated cost.

39% of pass holders aged 60 and over stated that they make a greater number of local journeys by bus within their local authority boundary since obtaining a concessionary pass, and 13% make more bus journeys outside their local authority.

The survey also demonstrated that the concessionary bus travel scheme has helped achieve modal shift from the private car, with consequent environmental benefits. 35% of pass holders stated that they were undertaking journeys by bus that they had previously made by car, whilst 12% stated that they were making journeys that they had not previously made by any means prior to the concession being introduced.

#### **2.3.1.4 Opportunities and Challenges, our ambition for public policy in Wales (Age Cymru, November 2010)**

This policy report is due to be published during November 2010 and seeks to provide an in depth analysis of the policy areas which affect older people and identifies ways in which the UK Government, Welsh Government and local authorities can work together to improve the quality of life of older people in Wales.

Extracts from the draft policy report relating to transport were supplied to Mott MacDonald by Age Cymru. This identifies that transport plays a vitally important role in helping people to maintain independence and wellbeing; ensuring communities are well-connected; and that services, facilities and amenities are accessible to all older people.

The report makes reference to statistics from [www.poverty.org.uk](http://www.poverty.org.uk), noting that half of all households without a car consist of individuals aged over the age of 60 and 66% of single pensioners do not have a car. Among households across all age groups without a car, around 40% feel that their local bus service fails to meet their travelling needs to the local town centre or shops, while around 65% believe it is inadequate for travel to their local hospital. These issues may affect older people who are socially isolated particularly adversely.

Age Cymru expresses strong support for the retention of the universal concessionary bus travel scheme, recognising that it provides an essential connection to services and amenities. However, the report acknowledges the importance of ensuring that transport policies deliver best value for public money. It suggests that free *local* travel for all older people is

protected (*italics added*). The report also emphasises the need to reform reporting and funding mechanisms used by WAG and bus operators.

The report also notes some existing barriers to bus use by older people, including:

- **Safety and accessibility of buses** – older people are sometimes put off using services because of experiences where buses move off before they have been able to take a seat or stop suddenly, often away from raised kerbs;
- **Condition and maintenance of bus stops** – adequate lighting, seating and shelter must be provided and regularly inspected to encourage more frequent use of some bus services;
- **Cross-border issues** – Age Cymru recommends that WAG works with the UK Government in guiding local authorities to arrange reciprocal arrangements locally, particularly in areas where people travel across border to access health services such as Powys; and
- **Lack of appropriate provision** – lack of availability of bus services and accessibility problems mean that many people still struggle to access safe, frequent and reliable public transport. Age Cymru suggests that options should be explored for extending the concessionary scheme to cover rail and provide taxi and community transport tokens on a national basis to improve the transport opportunities for older people who are unable to access bus services, as this becomes affordable.

The report also identifies the need to improve interchange arrangements between bus routes and railway stations, including accessibility to stations as well as the co-ordination of services.

## 3. Findings from the questionnaire interviews

### 3.1 Survey method

A face to face quantitative survey was conducted on street between 6<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> September 2010.

To be eligible for interview respondents had to:

- Be aged 60 or more years
- Own a concessionary bus pass
- Use the pass at least once a fortnight

This meant that occasional users of the bus pass were excluded from the survey sample.

A total of 666 interviews was conducted split between urban and rural locations as shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Sample sizes

Location	Sample size
<b>Urban</b>	386
Swansea	130
Cardiff	127
Wrexham	129
<b>Rural</b>	280
Builth Wells/Newtown	87
Mold	96
Carmarthen	97

Source: Mott MacDonald

It should be noted that the locations classed as rural were market towns located in rural areas.

The questionnaire (available in **Appendix A**) was designed by Mott MacDonald staff in conjunction with staff from OPCW. Welsh versions of the questionnaire were produced to accommodate Welsh language speakers.

### 3.2 Survey findings

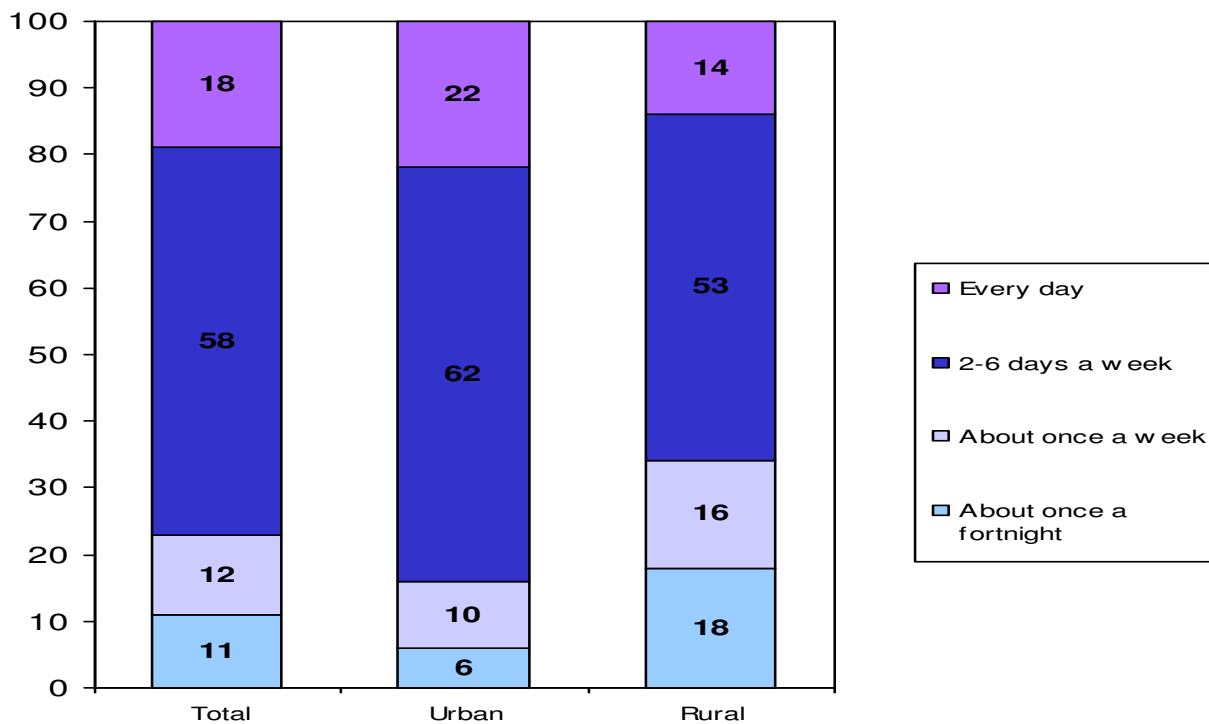
#### 3.2.1 Use of the concessionary bus pass

Respondents were asked how frequently they used their concessionary bus pass. Amongst the survey sample (which excluded those who used the pass less frequently than once a fortnight), the pass was used frequently, with three quarters (76%) using their pass more than once a week and a fifth (18%) of participants using it once a day.

Respondents interviewed in urban sample points used the concessionary bus pass more frequently than rural respondents; over four fifths (84%) of respondents in urban areas used the pass more than once a week compared to two thirds (67%) of rural respondents (Figure 3.1).

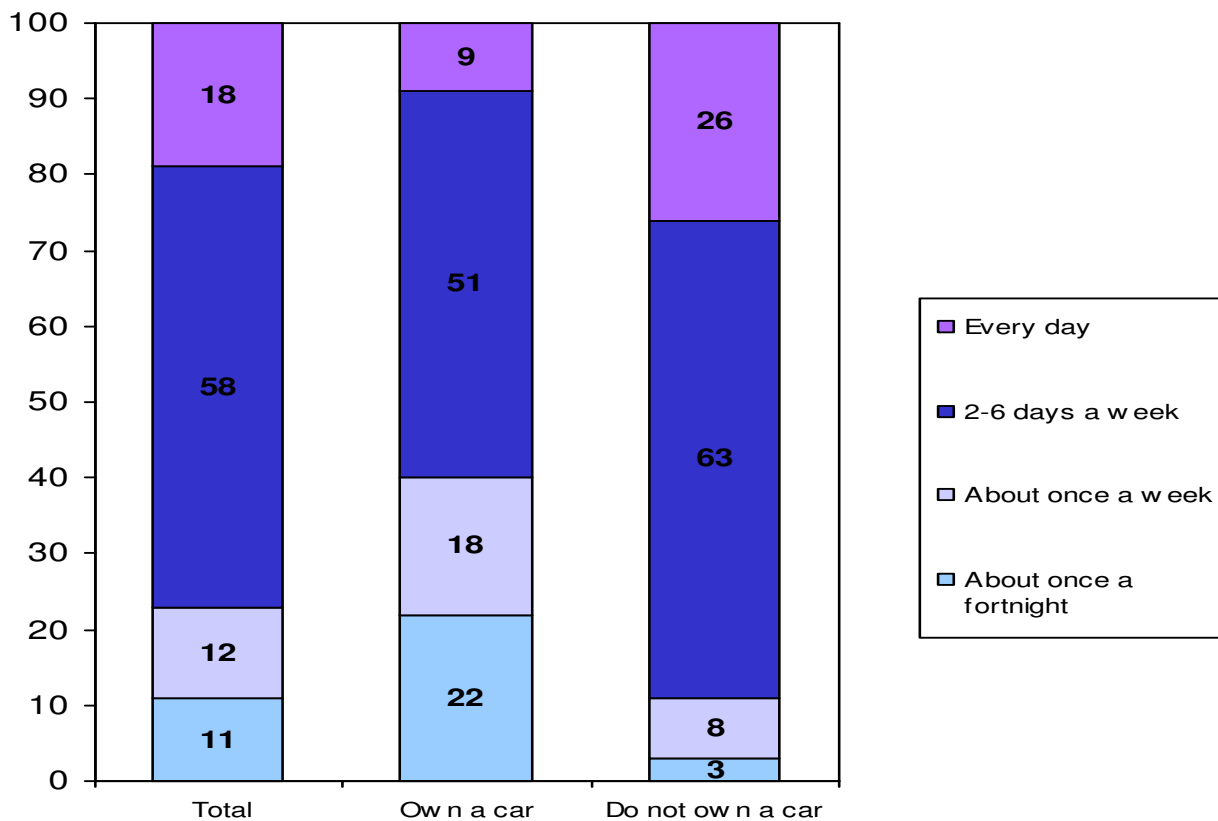
Frequency of use also varied by car ownership, with non car owners more frequent users than car owners; nine tenths (89%) of non car owners used the pass more than once a week compared to six out of ten (60%) of car owners (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.1: Frequency of using concessionary bus pass, by location (%s rounded)



Source: Q3 (all respondents) NB Numbers rounded

Figure 3.2: Frequency of using concessionary bus pass, by car ownership (%s rounded)



Source: Q3 (all respondents)

Respondents were asked a series of questions about how they used their concessionary bus pass.

Figure 3.3 below shows that the pass was used most commonly for essential household shopping trips, such as, food (88% of respondents ever used it for this purpose) and clothes (79% ever used)

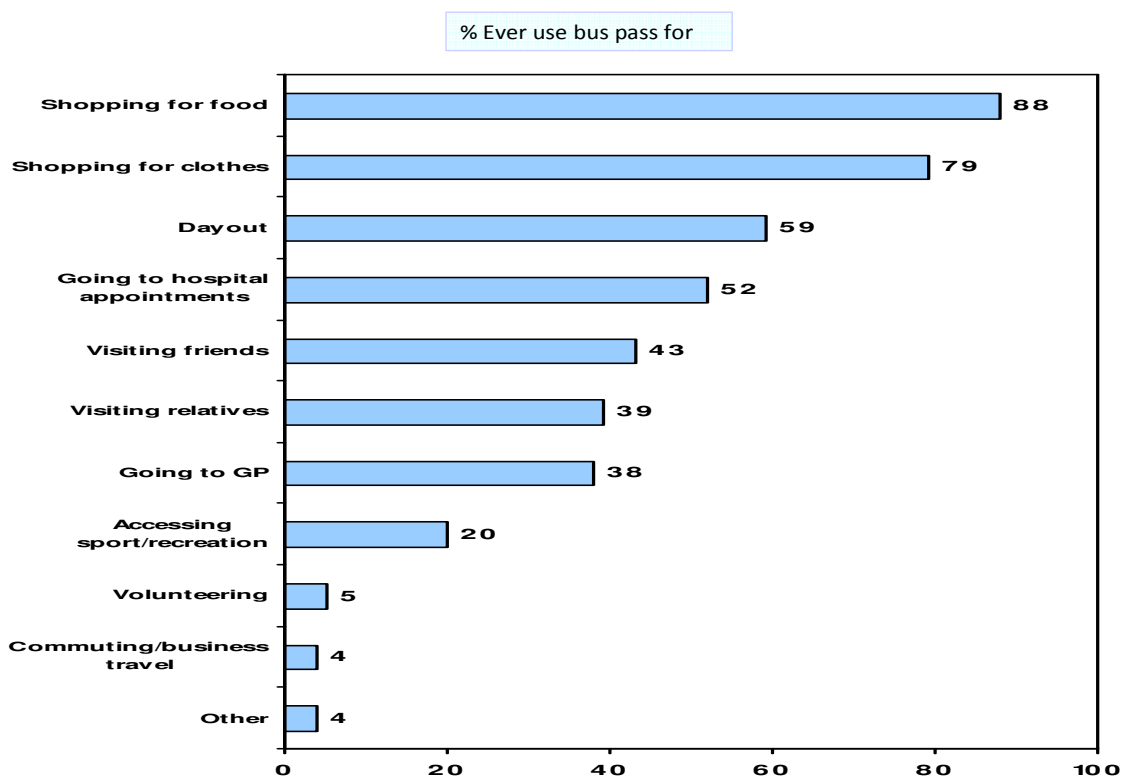
Use of the pass was not just confined to essential trips, but a large section of respondents also used the pass for leisure trips and for maintaining social networks:

- Days out/sightseeing (59%)
- Visiting friends (43%)
- Visiting relatives (39%)

The bus pass was also used by a large group of respondents for accessing health care and half (52%) used it to visit hospitals and just over a third (38%) used it to access GP services.

The bus pass was used by only a small minority of respondents for volunteering (5%) and commuting/business travel (4%)

Figure 3.3: Whether use Concessionary Bus Pass for type of trip



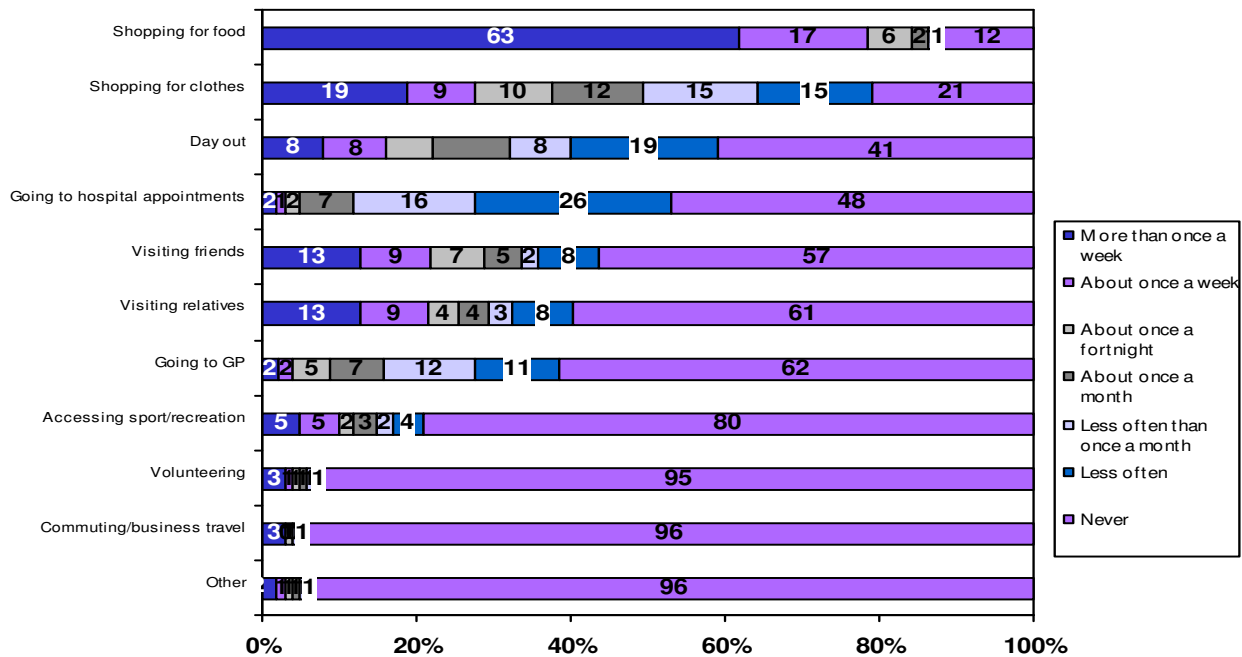
Source: Q4a (all respondents)

To understand further how bus passes were used, respondents were asked how frequently they used their bus passes for each purpose.

Figure 3.4 shows that the concessionary bus pass was used most frequently for food shopping trips (63% use it more than once a week for this purpose) and clothes shopping (19%).

These data suggest that the vast majority of all trips where the pass is used are for essential shopping trips.

Figure 3.4: Frequency of using Concessionary Bus Pass for type of trip



Source: Q4a (all respondents)

When using their concessionary bus pass, respondents were asked how far they had to travel for each type of trip that they conducted.

Figure 3.5 shows that the most common response for all trip types (apart from GPs) was 25 minutes or more. This suggests that for the majority of respondents services are not immediately on their doorstep and require a trip that is beyond walking distance.

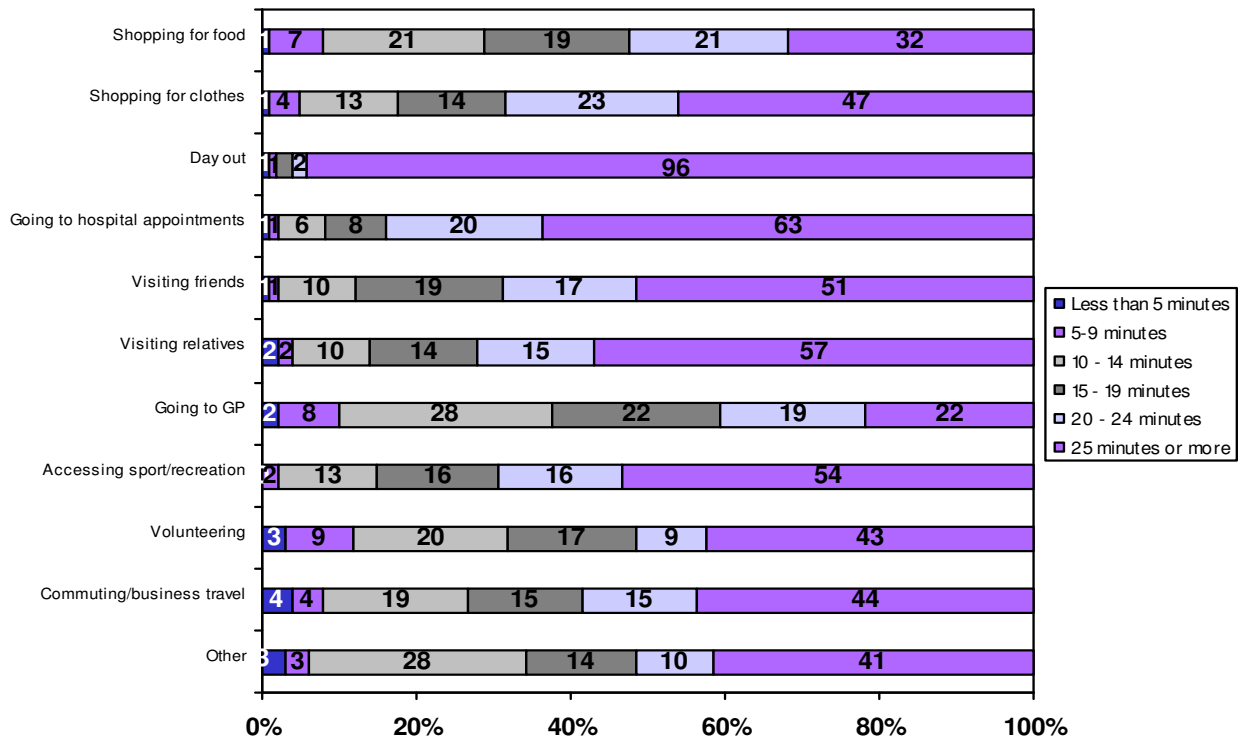
There was a spread of journey times for *shopping for food* (the most frequently made trip type). While almost a third (32%) had to make a trip of 25 minutes or more, approximately a fifth had a trip of 10 – 14 minutes (21%), 15 – 19 minutes (19%) and 20 – 24 minutes (21%). However, fewer than one in ten (8%) had a trip of less than 10 minutes when shopping for food.

The length of trip required to access health services varied by hospital and GP. Hospital appointments required one of the longest trips, with almost two thirds (63%) requiring a trip of more than 25 minutes whereas trips to the GP



required one of the shortest trips (only 22% requiring a trip of 25 minutes or more).

Figure 3.5: Length of journey by trip type when using Concessionary Bus Pass



Source: Q4b (all respondents who use pass for trip type)

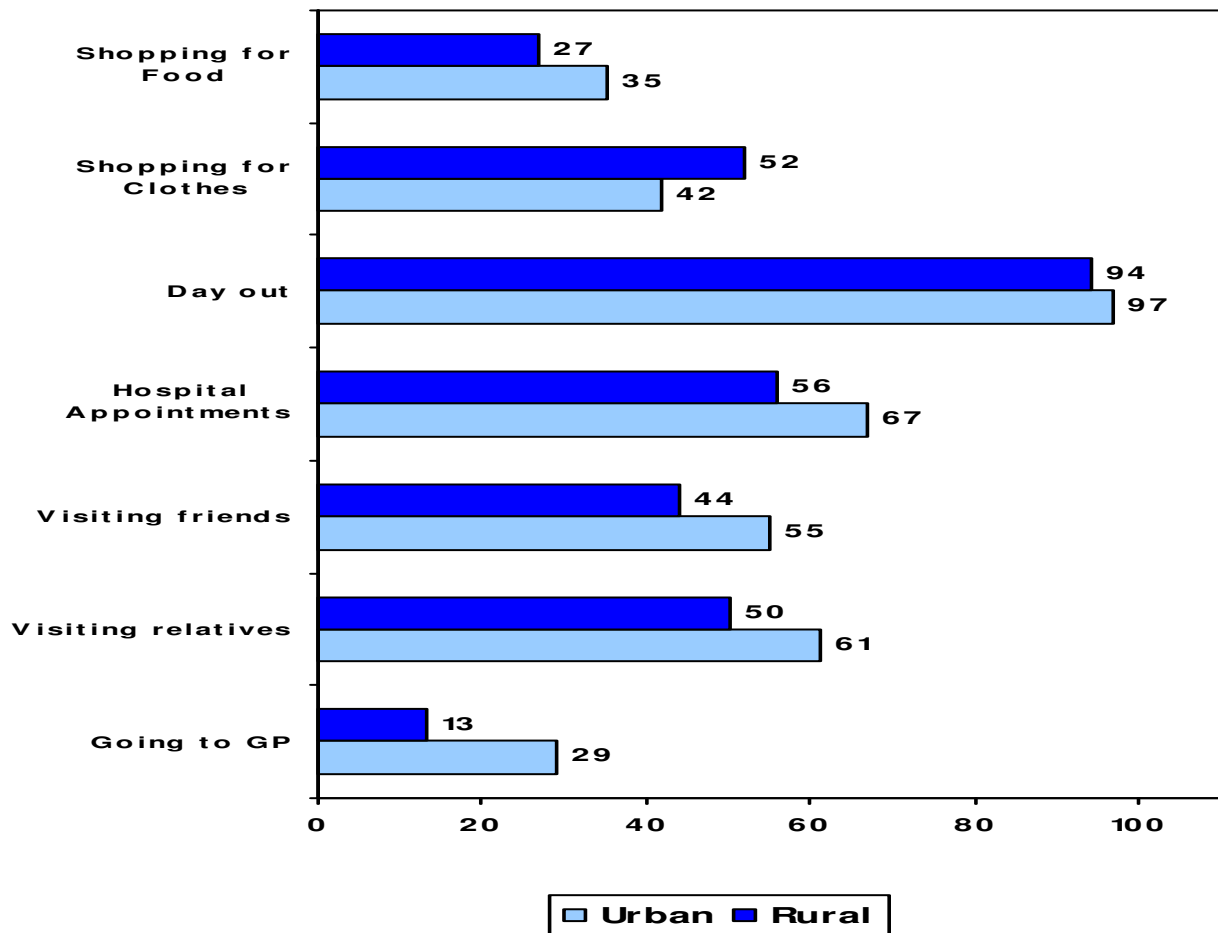
Figure 3.6 below looks at the percentage of respondents who had to make a trip of 25 minutes or more by urban and rural locations.

This shows that respondents interviewed in rural locations generally had a slightly shorter journey time than respondents in urban locations.

- Shopping for food (27% rural 25 minutes or more; 36% urban 25 minutes or more)
- Hospital appointments (56% rural; 67% urban)
- Visiting friends (44% rural; 55% urban)
- Visiting relatives (50% rural; 61% urban)
- Going to GP (13% rural; 29% urban)

Only trips for *shopping for clothes* were longer in rural locations (44% rural; 55% urban) suggesting less choice and availability in these locations and therefore a longer trip is required to achieve these.

Figure 3.6: Percentage of respondents whose journey is 25 minutes or more for trip type



Source: Q4b (all respondents who use pass for trip type)

### 3.2.2 Alternative methods of transport to the Concessionary Bus Pass

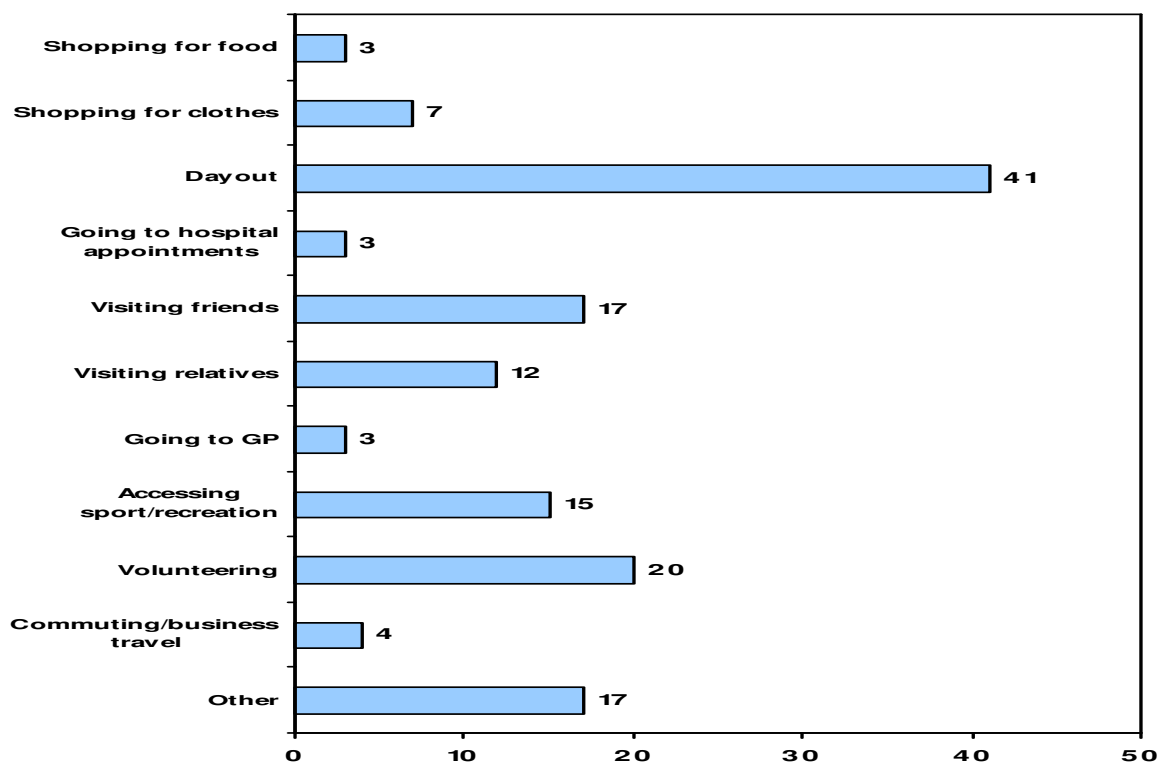
For each trip type that the respondent makes using his or her bus pass, they were asked how they would make the trip if they didn't have the concessionary bus pass.

Figure 3.7 below shows the percentage of respondents who would not make this type of trip if they did not have their concessionary bus pass.

These data show that the vast majority of respondents would still make essential trips, such as, food and clothes shopping trips. However, some respondents would no longer make some non essential trips, such as, days out (41% would no longer make trip), visiting friends (17%) and visiting relatives (12%)

The loss of the concessionary bus pass would also have an effect on those people who use the pass for volunteering activities, with a fifth (20%) saying that they would no longer make those trips.

Figure 3.7: Percentage of respondents who would no longer make trip type if didn't have Concessionary Bus Pass



Source: Q6 (all respondents who use pass for trip type)

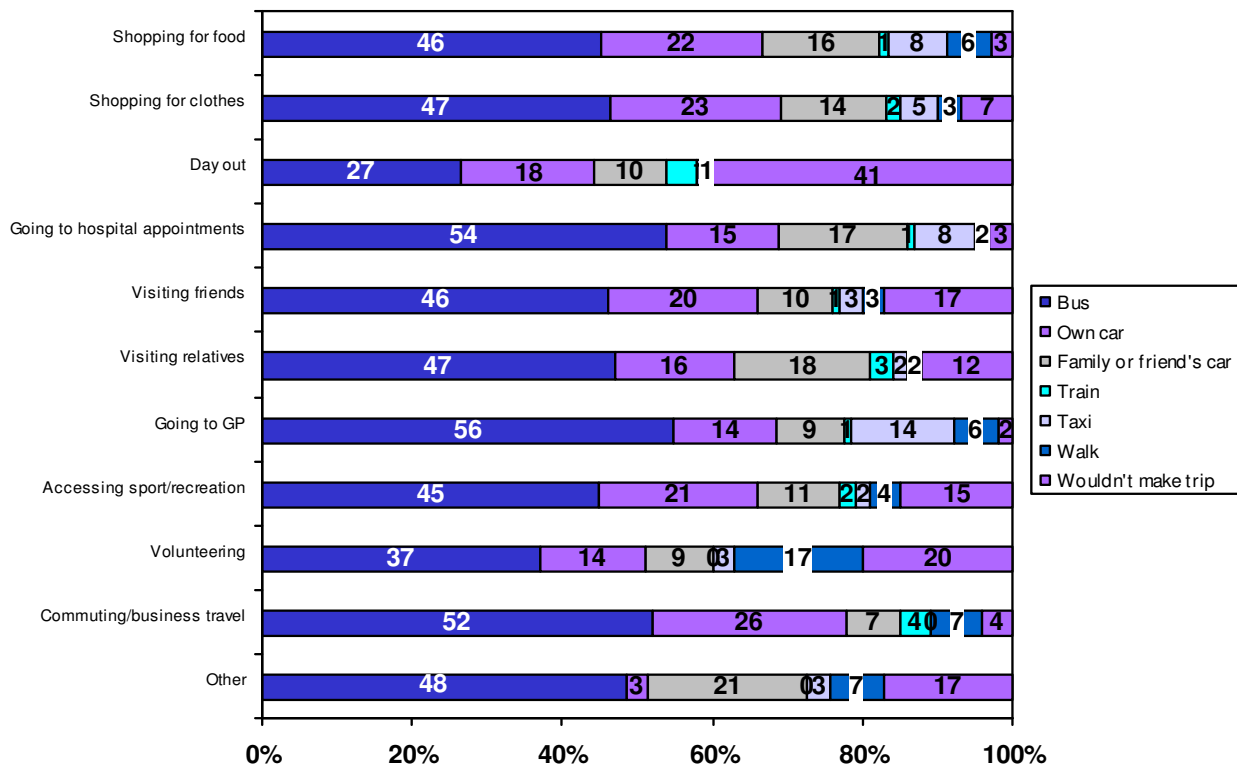
In terms of the type of transport respondents would use if they no longer had the pass, the results are similar for each type of trip made (Figure 3.8).

For most types of trip, just under a half would continue using the bus on a paid basis, with approximately a third switching to cars. Of those who would

switch to cars, most would use their own car but a large proportion would use the car of a friend or family member.

For example, for shopping for food trips just under half (46%) would use the bus, a fifth (22%) would use their own car and one in six (16%) would use the car of a family member or friend.

Figure 3.8: Alternative method of transport respondent would use if didn't have Concessionary Bus Pass



Source: Q6 (all respondents who use pass for trip type)

The method of transport that respondents would use if respondents no longer had the bus pass varies considerably by car ownership.

For car owners, if the concessionary bus pass did not exist most would switch from bus to car. For example, Table 3.2 shows that for *shopping for food* only a quarter (24%) would continue to use the bus and over half (54%) would use their own car instead and a further one in six (17%) would use the car of a family member or friend.

The fact that many car owners claimed that they would switch to cars without the bus pass suggests that the pass was successful in getting these respondents to use the bus more as a method of transport.

For those respondents who do not own a car, the majority would continue to use the bus with a small minority switching to car (using the car of friends or family).

For example, for *shopping for food* six out of ten (60%) non car users would continue to use the bus and one in seven (14%) would use the car of a family member or friend. One in eight (12%) would use a taxi for food shopping trips.

While the use of taxis was generally low for most trip types, there was a small group of non car owners who would switch to taxis for some trips:

- Shopping for food (12% of non car owners)
- Going to GP (18% of non car owners)
- Hospital appointments (10% of non car owners)

Given the frequency of *shopping for food* trips this switch to taxis could incur considerable expense for these respondents.

Table 3.2: Alternative mode of transport if concessionary bus pass did not exist

	Shopping for food		Shopping for clothes		Sightseeing/Day Out		Going to hospital appointments	
	Own Car	Do not own Car	Own Car	Do not own Car	Own Car	Do not own Car	Own Car	Do not own Car
Sample size	N=229	N=353	N=213	N=309	N=144	N=246	N=108	N=239
Bus	24%	61%	23%	63%	17%	32%	21%	69%
Car – own car	54%	1%	54%	1%	48%	0%	49%	0%
Car – belong to other	17%	14%	15%	13%	10%	11%	24%	14%
Taxi	1%	12%	0%	8%	1%	2%	3%	10%
Train	0%	1%	2%	2%	5%	3%	0%	0%
Walk	4%	7%	2%	4%	1%	0%	2%	2%
Wouldn't make trip	2%	4%	2%	10%	21%	52%	2%	3%

Source: Q6 (all respondents who use pass for trip type)

Table 3.3: Alternative mode of transport if concessionary bus pass did not exist

	Visiting Friends		Visiting Relatives		Going to GP	
	Own Car	Do not own Car	Own Car	Do not own Car	Own Car	Do not own Car
Sample size					N=65	N=186
Bus	24%	56%	27%	57%	22%	68%
Car – own car	60%	0%	49%	0%	54%	0%
Car – belong to other	13%	9%	19%	18%	17%	6%
Taxi	0%	5%	0%	3%	3%	18%
Train	1%	1%	1%	3%	2%	0%
Walk	0%	5%	1%	3%	3%	7%
Wouldn't make trip	2%	24%	4%	16%	2%	2%

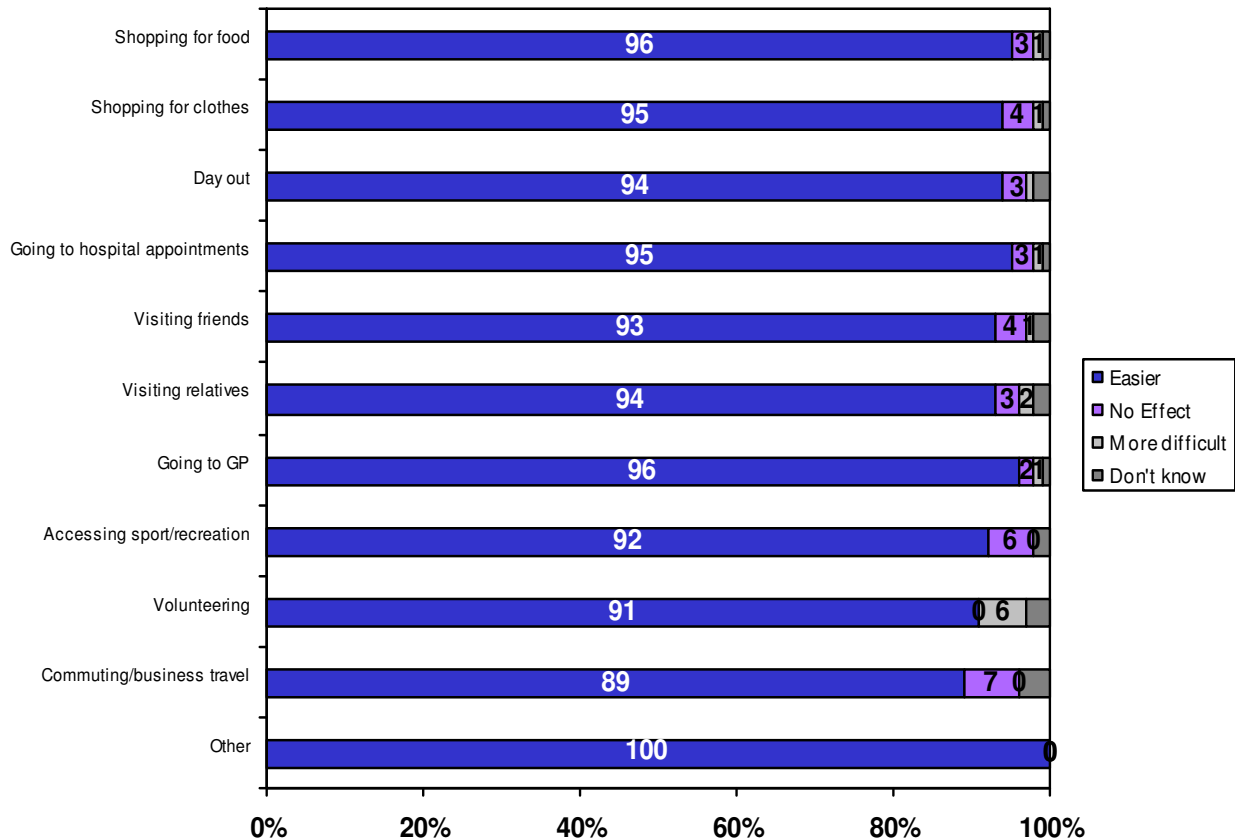
Source: Q6 (all respondents who use pass for trip type)

### 3.2.3 Opinion of effect of Concessionary Bus Pass on ease of travel

For each type of trip that respondents made using the pass, they were asked whether having their concessionary bus pass made it easier or more difficult to do that activity.

Figure 3.9 below shows that there was almost universal agreement that having the bus pass made it easier to conduct each trip type.

Figure 3.9: Whether Concessionary Bus Pass makes conducting activity easier or more difficult



Source: Q5 (all respondents who use pass for trip type)

### 3.2.4 Attitudes towards Concessionary Bus Passes

Respondents were presented with a series of attitude statements about the concessionary bus pass scheme. These statements were designed to provide an insight into the role of the bus pass on respondents’ social and economic well being. Figure 3.10 indicates the level of agreement or disagreement with the individual attitude statements.

#### Quality of life

There was a strong feeling among respondents that their quality of life would suffer if the bus pass did not exist.

Nearly eight out of ten (78%) respondents agreed that they *would feel more lonely and housebound without my bus pass*. The strength of feeling was extremely strong with six out of ten (62%) agreeing strongly.

A similar result was also found for the statement *without a bus pass my quality of life would suffer* (81% agreed overall, 66% agreed strongly).

### **Helping the community and family**

There was mixed view on the impact of losing the concessionary bus pass on *helping out family*. While a third (35%) agreed that it would mean that they wouldn't be able to help their family out, nearly four out of ten (39%) disagreed.

Only one in seven (14%) felt that without the pass they wouldn't be able to volunteer. However, the incidence of volunteering was low amongst the sample and therefore low agreement with this statement is to be expected.

### **Independence**

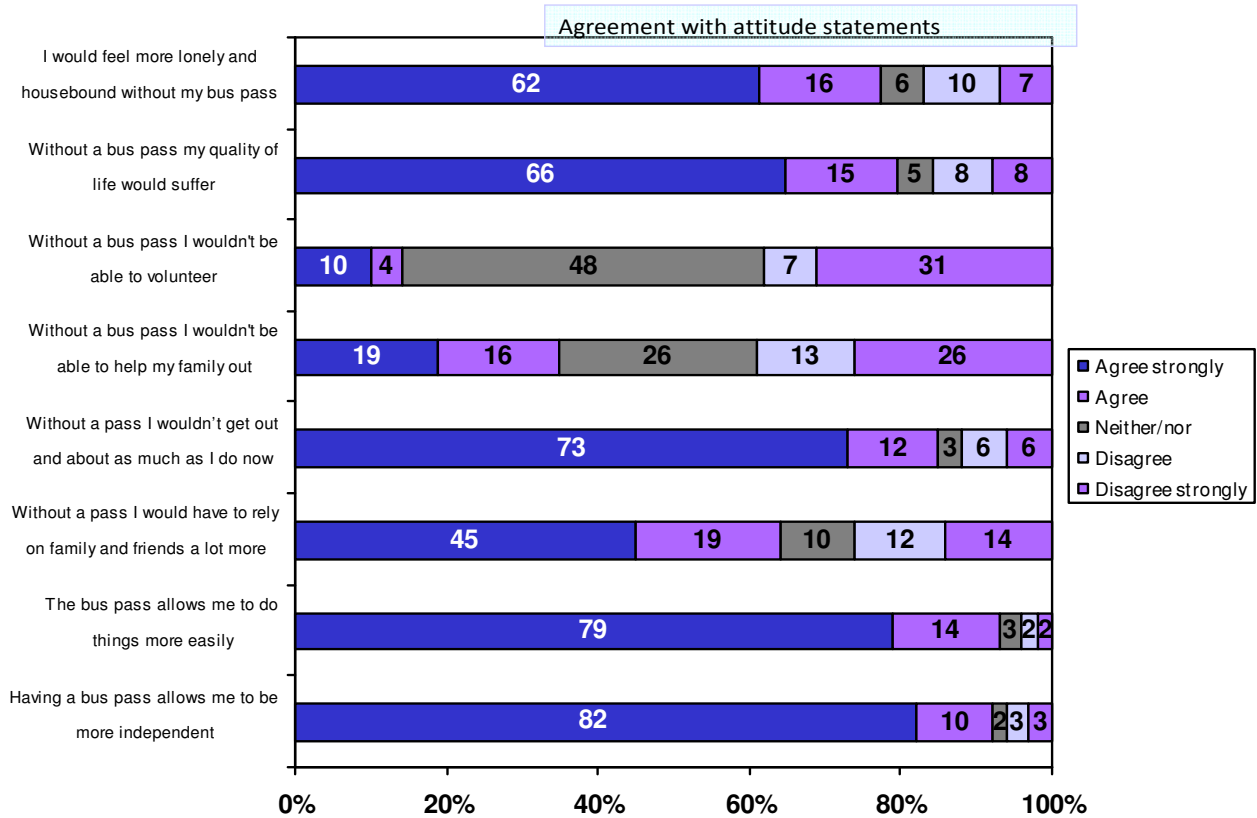
There was very strong agreement that the removal of the bus pass would have a detrimental affect on the independence of respondents:

- *Without a pass I wouldn't get out and about as much* (85% agreed; 73% agreed strongly).
- *The bus pass allows me to do things more easily* (93% agreed; 79% agreed strongly).
- *Having a bus pass allows me to be independent* (92% agreed; 82% agreed strongly).

There was a more mixed opinion about whether or not they would have to *rely on family and friends a lot more*. While the majority (64%) agreed that they would have to rely on family and friends a lot more without the pass, a quarter (26%) disagreed.



Figure 3.10: Agreement with statements about Concessionary Bus Pass



Source: Q10 (all respondents)

Attitude statements were also asked to ascertain respondents' views on alternatives to the current system and the economic impact of not having a concessionary bus pass. Figure 3.11 indicates the level of agreement or disagreement with these statements.

### Alternatives to current system

There was extensive opposition to changes to the current system.

Nearly nine out of ten (88%) respondents disagreed that the bus pass should be replaced with half price travel (69% disagreed strongly). Less than one in ten respondents (8%) agreed with this option.

There was also strong opposition to the idea that bus passes should only be used off peak (79% disagree; 55% disagree strongly). While opposition to

this idea was still strong there was slightly more agreement (14%) than with half price travel (presumably because bus travel would still be free, albeit restricted).

Respondents did not feel that the *concessionary bus pass was an unnecessary burden on taxpayers*. Three quarters of respondents (76%) disagreed with this statement and the fact that respondents felt that it was affordable to taxpayers could partly explain why there was such opposition to changes to the current system.

### **Economic impact**

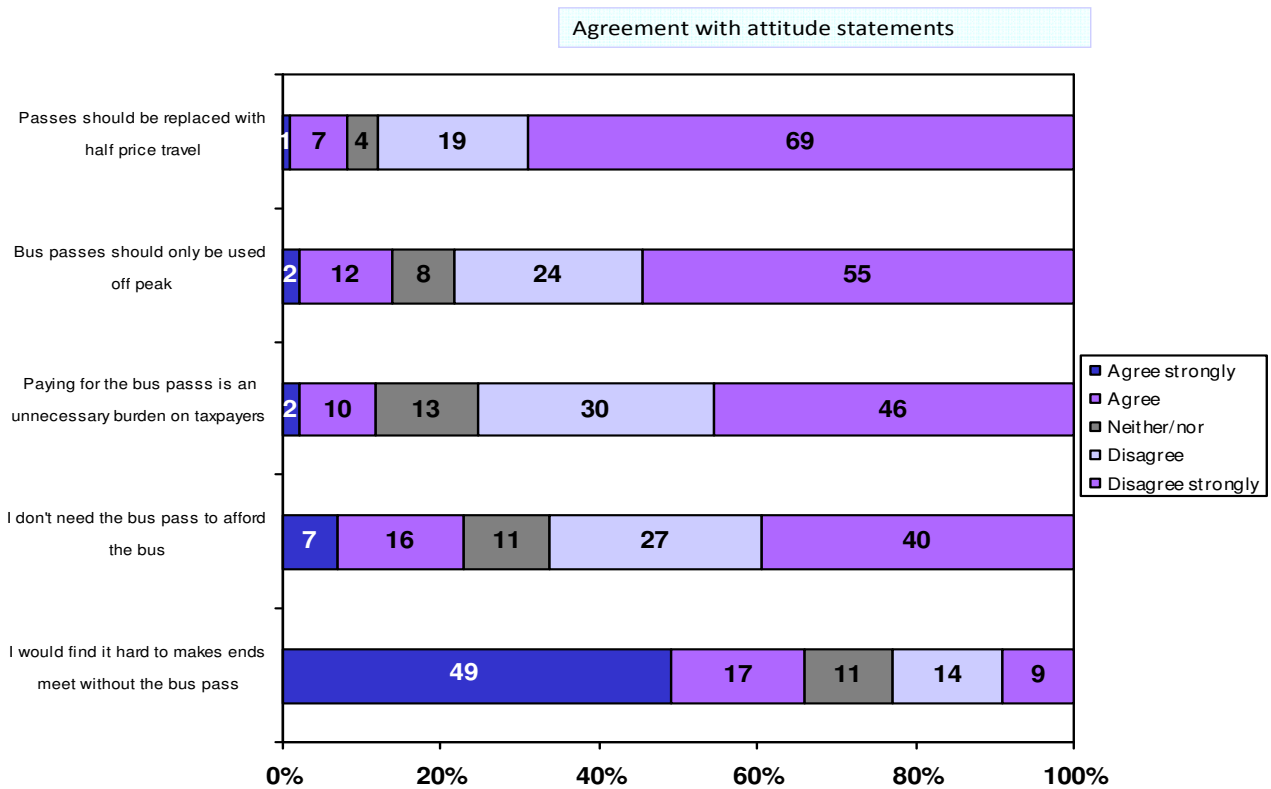
The majority of respondents felt that removal of the bus pass would negatively affect their economic circumstances.

Two thirds (67%) disagreed that *I don't need the concessionary bus pass to afford the bus*, with four out of ten (40%) disagreeing strongly.

Similarly, two thirds (66%) agreed that *I would find it hard to make ends meet without the bus pass*.

For both the above statements just under a quarter of respondents felt *that they would be able to make ends meet without the pass and afford the bus without the pass*.

Figure 3.11: Agreement with statements about Concessionary Bus Pass



Source: Q10 (all respondents)

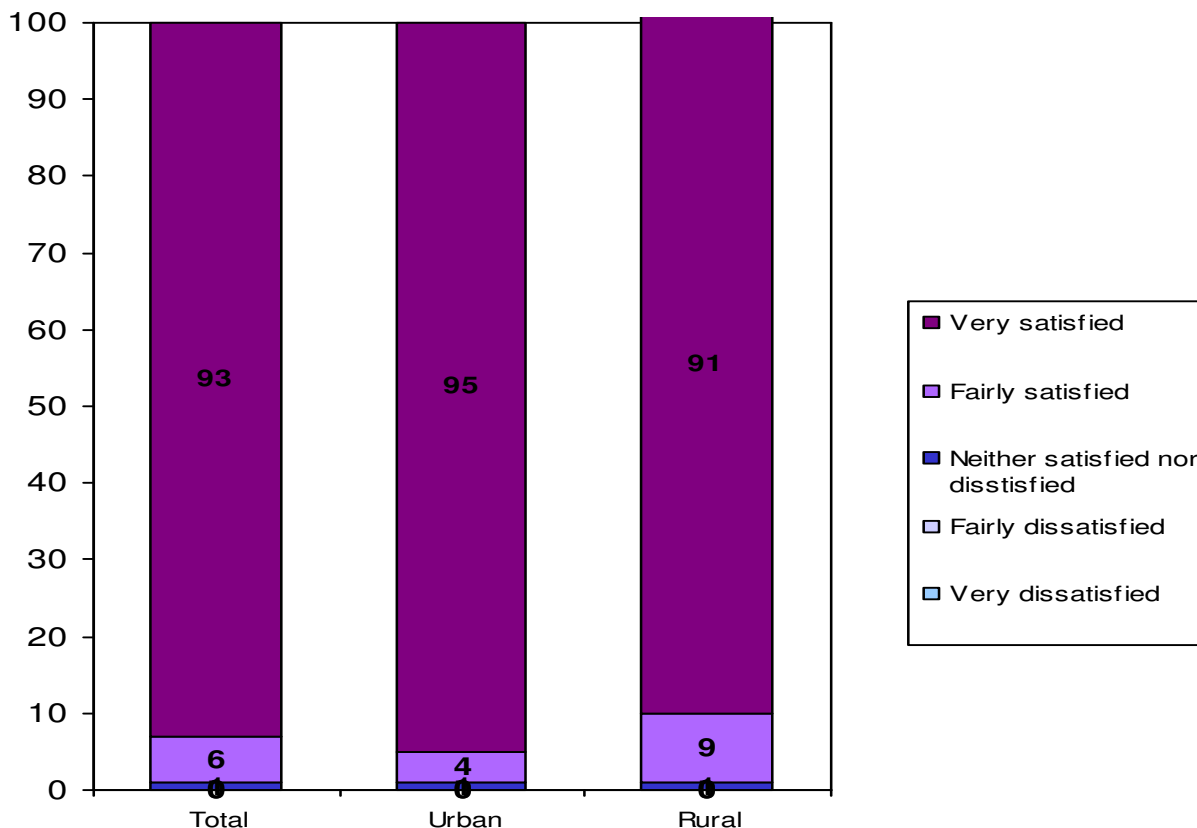
### 3.2.5 Satisfaction with Concessionary Bus Passes

Using a five point satisfaction scale respondents were asked to state how satisfied they were with their concessionary bus pass.

Satisfaction with the pass was virtually universal with over nine out of ten (93%) respondents very satisfied and a further 6% fairly satisfied.

There was little difference between respondents interviewed at urban locations and those interviewed at rural locations and satisfaction was extremely high among both sets of respondents, as shown in Figure 3.12 below.

Figure 3.12: Overall satisfaction with Concessionary Bus Pass



Source: Q7 (all respondents)

Respondents were then asked to say what the main benefits that the concessionary bus pass offers them; respondents were asked not to mention the obvious cost benefits of having a free pass. The question was asked spontaneously and without prompting.

Many of the responses reflected the freedom and independence that the bus pass offers respondents, as Table 3.4 shows. The most common answer was *freedom to get out of the house* (29%). Comments on a similar theme also received relatively high mentions: *can go out more* (14%), *independence* (8%) and *no need to rely on others* (7%).

The ease and the convenience of the bus pass scheme were also mentioned: *convenience* (14%), *no parking worries* (9%), *easy to get into town/shopping* (7%) and *makes life easier* (6%).

Table 3.4: Main benefits that the concessionary bus pass offers

Benefit	Total
	N=662
Freedom to get out of the house	29%
Convenience	14%
Can go out more regularly	14%
Can go to more places/where you wouldn't normally go	9%
No parking worries	9%
Independence	8%
Peace of mind/no worrying about cost	8%
Easy to get into town/shopping	7%
Less stressful than by car	7%
No need to rely on others	7%
Keeps you fit/active/well being	6%
Meet friends/people	6%
Makes life easier	6%

Source: Q8

### 3.2.6 Satisfaction with specific aspects of the bus service

Using a five point satisfaction scale respondents were also asked to say how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with specific aspects of the bus services that they use.

Satisfaction with all aspects of service was extremely high, with no areas receiving any meaningful levels of dissatisfaction (Figure 3.13).

Satisfaction was the highest for:

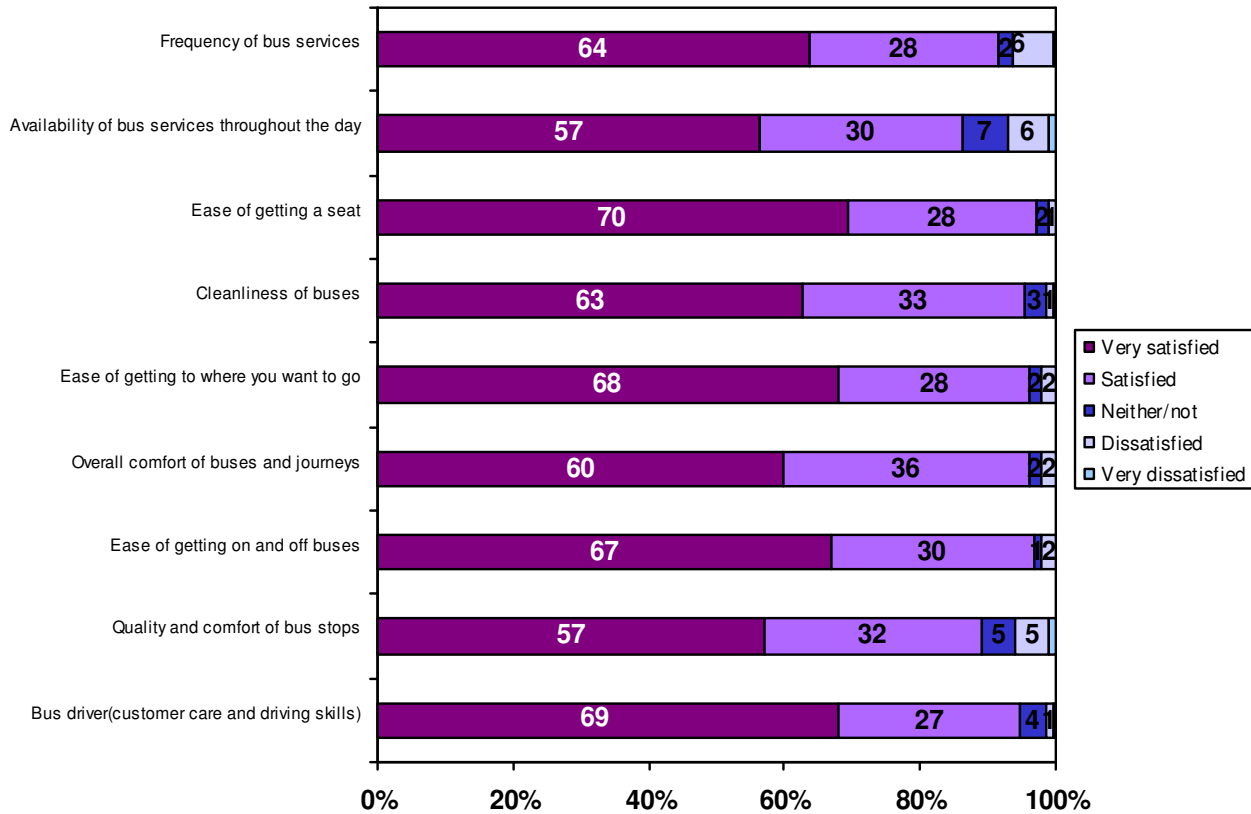
- Ease of getting a seat (70% very satisfied)
- The bus driver (their customer care and driving skills) (69% very satisfied)
- Ease of getting to where you want to go (68% very satisfied)

Satisfaction was still high, but slightly lower for:

- Availability of buses throughout the day (57% very satisfied)
- Overall quality and comfort of the bus stops (57% very satisfied)

Satisfaction was also high for ease of getting on and off the buses (67% very satisfied) indicating no accessibility issues.

Figure 3.13: Satisfaction with specific aspects of bus service



Source: Q9 (all respondents)

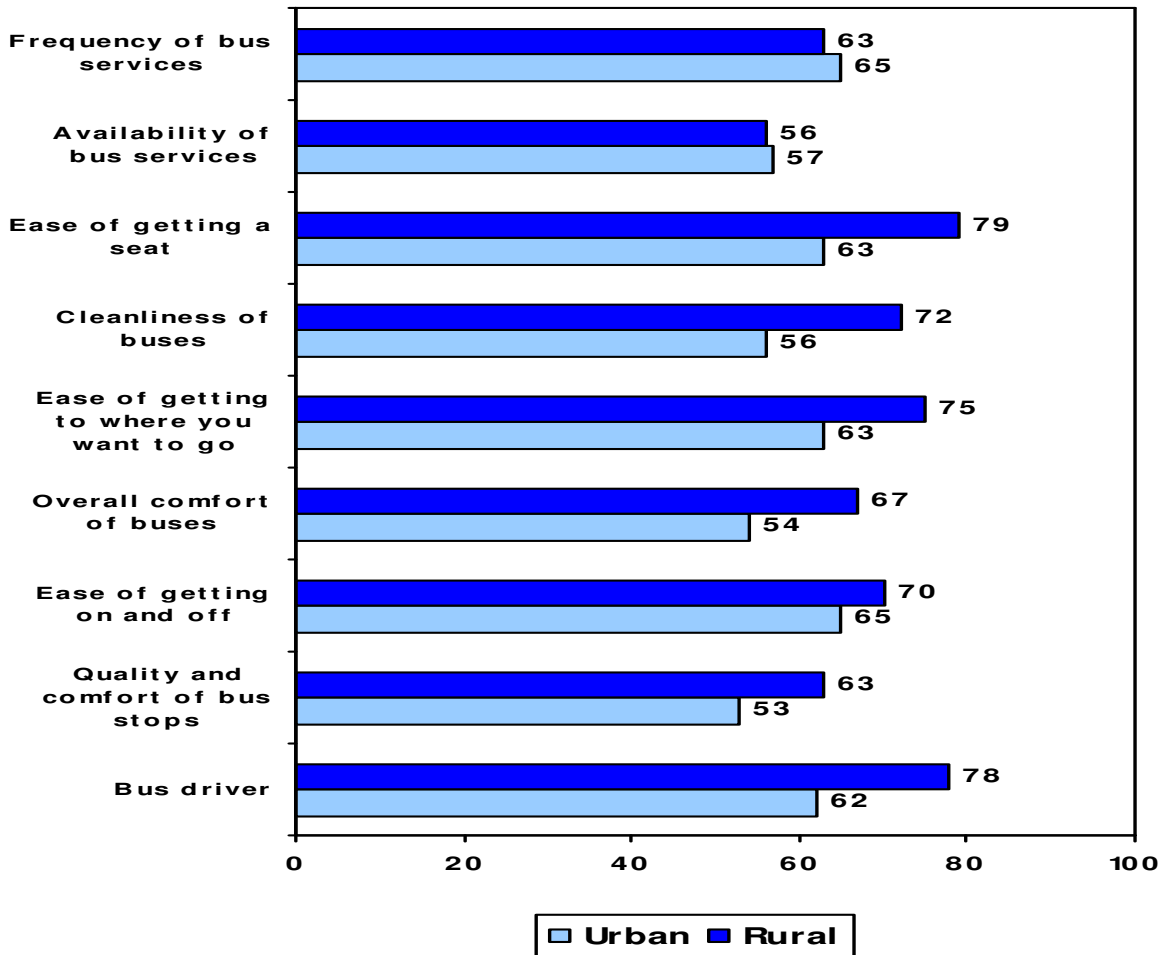
Figure 3.14 below compares satisfaction with specific aspects of the bus service by urban and rural locations. Because levels of satisfaction were so high comparisons have been made on the percentage of respondents providing the most positive response of *very satisfied*.

This analysis shows that respondents interviewed at rural locations were more likely to be very satisfied with specific aspects of the service than those in urban locations.

Differences between urban and rural locations were largest on:

- *Ease of getting a seat* (79% very satisfied rural; 63% urban)
- *Cleanliness of buses* (72% very satisfied rural; 56% urban)
- *The bus driver* (78% very satisfied rural; 62% urban)

Figure 3.14: Satisfaction with specific aspects of bus service by urban/rural locations



Source: Q9 (All respondents)

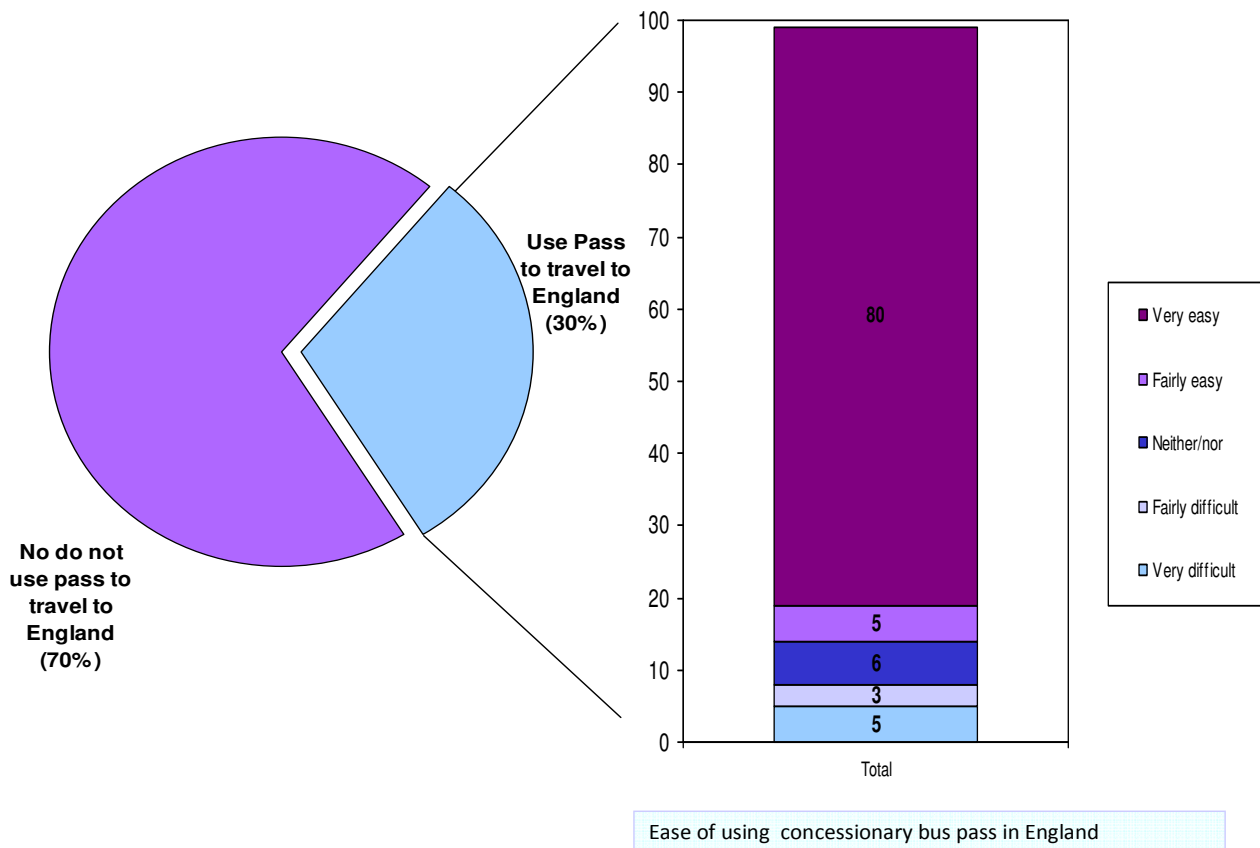
### 3.2.7 Use of Concessionary Bus Pass in England

Respondents were asked whether or not they used their bus pass to make trips from Wales to England.

Figure 3.15 below shows that just under a third (30%) of respondents had ever made this type of trip.

Respondents were then asked how easy or difficult it was to use the pass for this type of trip. The vast majority (85%) found this type of trip easy with only one in 12 (8%) stating that it was difficult.

Figure 3.15: Whether respondent has made trip from Wales to England/Ease of use for this type of trip



Source: Q11/Q12 (All respondents)

### 3.3 Effect of car ownership on opinion of the concessionary bus pass

Analysis of the data was performed comparing car owners with those who do not own a car. This analysis has revealed some large differences between these groups in terms of their demographic profile, their use of the bus pass and the effect that its withdrawal would have on their social and economic well being.

#### 3.3.1 Profile of car ownership

Tables 4.5 to 4.7 below provide a profile of those respondents who do not own a car. It can be seen that those who do not own a car are more likely to be:



- Women (non car owners 69%, car owners 58%)
- Aged 70 years or more (non car owners 64%, car owners 48%)
- Disabled (non car owners 30%, car owners 17%)

Table 3.5: Profile of car ownership by gender

	Own car	Do not own car
Sample Size	N=282	N=380
Male	42%	31%
Female	58%	69%

Source: B1 (all respondents)

Table 3.6: Profile of car ownership by age

	Own car	Do not own car
	N=281	N=380
60 – 69 years	52%	35%
70 – 79 years	37%	44%
80+ years	11%	20%

Source: B2 (all respondents)

Table 3.7: Profile of car ownership by disability

	Own Car	Do not own Car
	N=282	N=380
Consider self to be disabled	17%	30%
Do no consider self to be disabled	83%	70%

Source: B4 (all respondents)

As can be seen from Table 3.8 below, the majority of respondents either did not know or refused to provide their annual household income.

However, from what data that do exist it can be seen that those who own a car appear to have a higher household income than those who do not own a car.

While these data are too incomplete to form any definite conclusions they do indicate that car ownership could be a relatively good surrogate measure for wealth.

Table 3.8: Annual Household Income by Car Ownership

	Own Car	Do not own Car
	N=282	N=380
Less than £5,000	1%	16%
£6,000 – £10,000	5%	16%
£11,000 - £15,000	8%	6%
£16,000 - £20,000	5%	1%
More than £20,000	3%	0%
Refused	67%	47%
Don't know	11%	13%

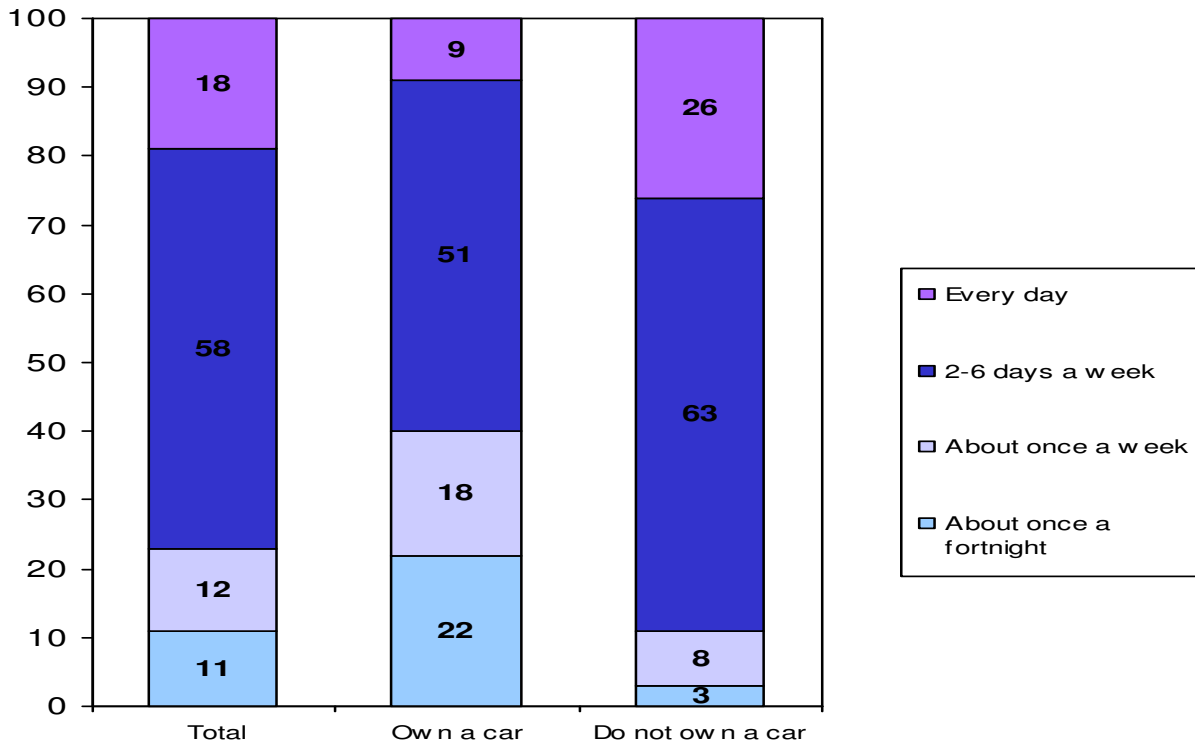
Source: B5 (all respondents)

### 3.3.2 Car ownership and use of the concessionary bus pass

As can be seen in Figure 3.16 below, frequency of use of the bus pass varied by car ownership, with non car owners more frequent users than car owners; nine tenths (89%) of non car owners used the pass more than once a week compared to six out of ten (60%) of car owners.

For non car owners the concessionary pass is therefore a more essential means of transport than for car owners.

Figure 3.16: Frequency of using Concessionary Bus Pass



Source: Q1 (all respondents)

As well as frequency of use, non car owners use the bus pass for a broader range of trip types than car owners.

Figure 3.17 below shows the percentage who ever use the bus pass for any of the listed trip types.

While both groups were highly likely to use the pass for essential *food shopping* trips, non car owners were slightly more likely to do so (non car owners 93%, car owners 81%).

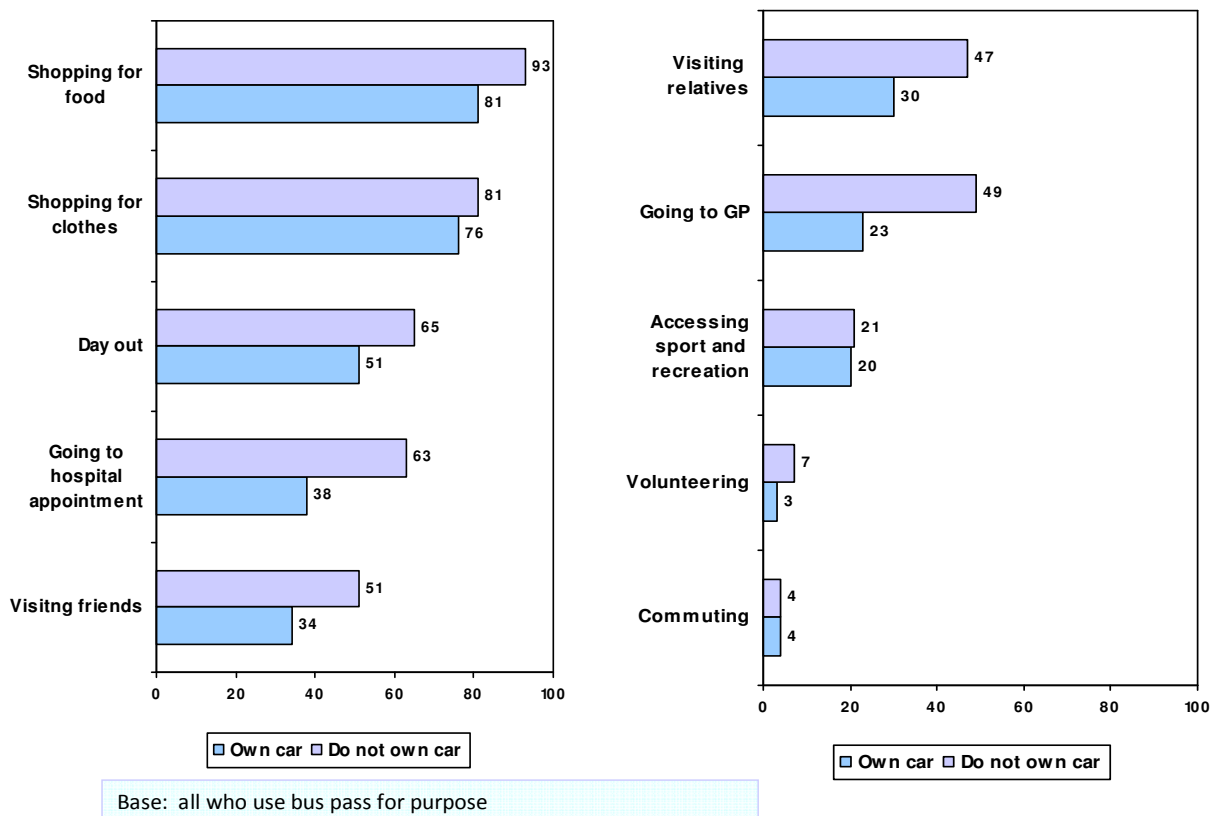
Non car owners were also much more likely than car owners to use the pass for maintaining social contacts, such as:

- *Visiting friends* (non car owners 51%, car owners 34%)
- *Visiting relatives* (non car owners 47%, car owners 30%)

The concessionary bus pass was also more likely to be used by non car owners to access health services than car owners:

- *Visits to GP* (non car owners 49%, car owners 23%)
- *Hospital appointment* (non car owners 63%, car owners 38%)

Figure 3.17: Whether use Concessionary Bus Pass for type of trip

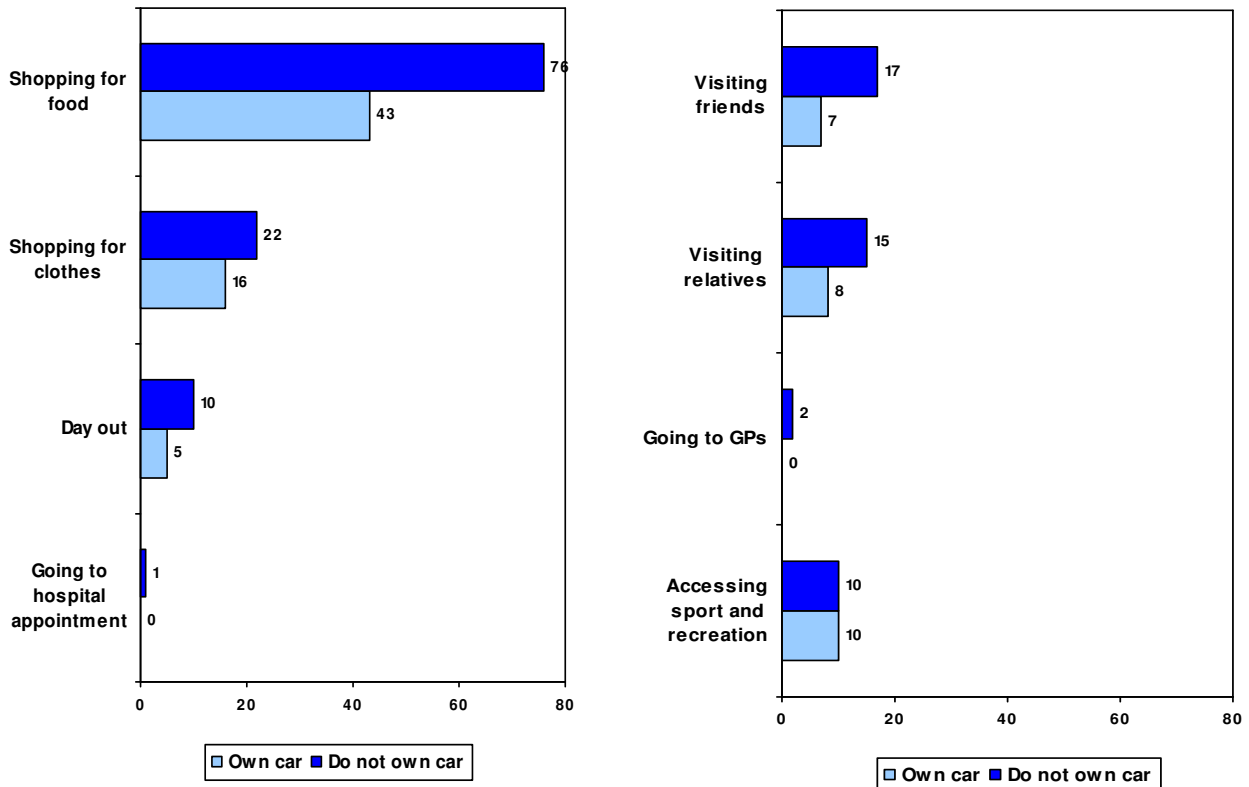


Source: Q4a (all respondents)

Figure 3.18 below also shows that, not only are non car owners more likely to use the bus pass for each trip type, they are also more likely to use it more frequently than non car owners.

For example, based on those respondents who use the concessionary bus pass for *shopping for food*, non car owners use the pass more frequently than car owners for this purpose (non car owners 76% more than once a week, car owners 43% more than once a week).

Figure 3.18: Percentage of respondents who use Concessionary Bus Pass more than once a week



Base: all who use bus pass for purpose

Source: Q4a (all respondents who use bus pass for purpose)

### 3.3.3 Car ownership and opinion of the concessionary bus pass

Analysis of attitude statements show that the concessionary bus pass has more impact on the lives of non car owners and its removal would have a more serious impact on their social and economic well being (Figure 3.19).

Given the fact that the profile of non car owners is more likely to comprise women, older people, disabled people and those with lower household incomes it can be concluded that its withdrawal would have a more negative effect on the more disadvantaged groups within society.

## Quality of Life

Non car owners were markedly more likely to feel that their quality of life would suffer if the concessionary bus pass was withdrawn and that they would have to rely more on family and friends:

- Without a pass my quality of life would suffer (non car owners 96% agreed, car owners 58%)
- I would feel more lonely and housebound without the bus pass (non car owners 92% agreed, car owners 58%)

## Independence

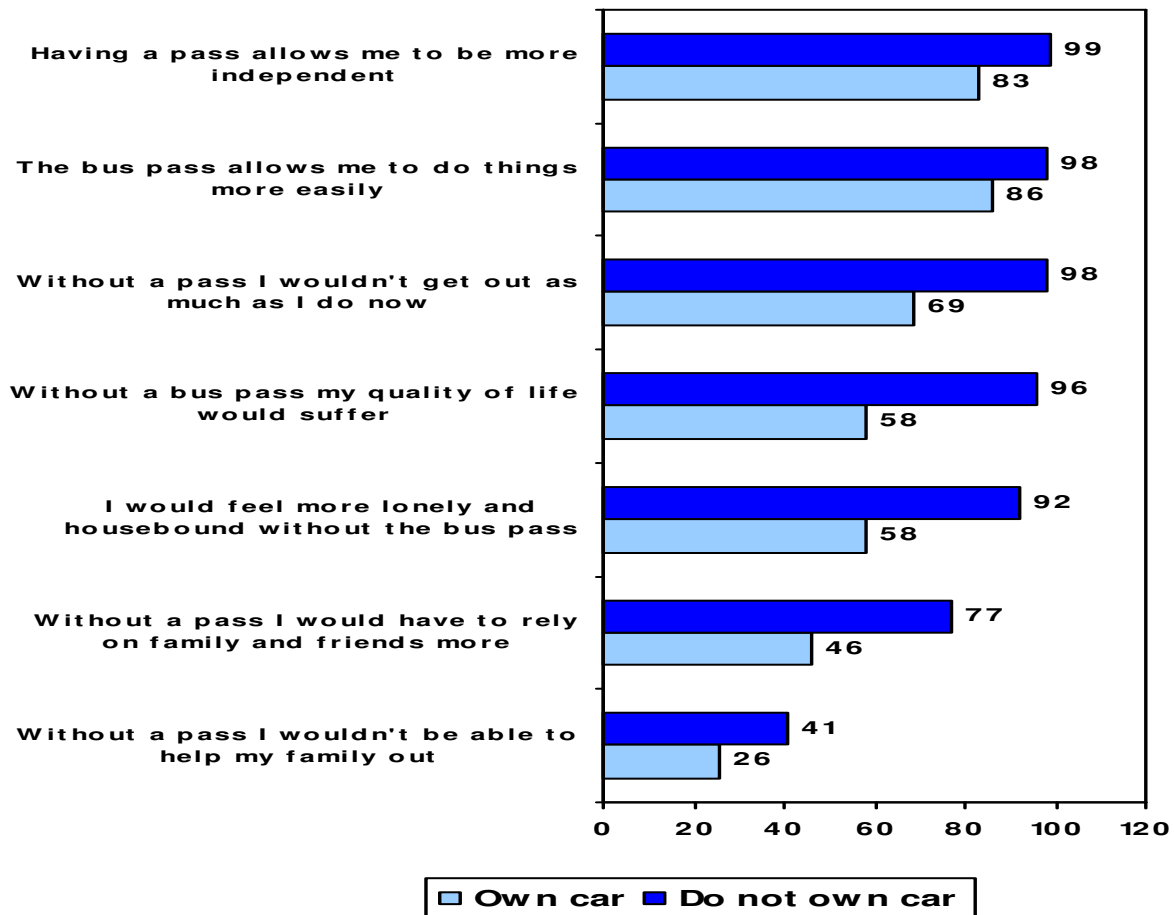
The bus pass enables those without a car to be more independent and get things done without the help of family and friends. The concessionary bus pass also allows car owners to feel more independent, but to a slightly lesser degree.

- Having a pass allows me to be more independent (non car owners 99% agreed, car owners 83%)
- The bus pass allows me to do things more easily (non car owners 98% agreed, car owners 86%)
- Without a pass I would have to rely on family and friends (non car owners 77% agreed, car owners 46%)

There is a strong feeling among non car owners that removal of the pass would mean that they would not be able to get out the house as much as they do now:

- Without a pass I wouldn't get out as much as I do now (non car owners 98% agreed, car owners 69%)

Figure 3.19: Agreement with statements about Concessionary Bus Pass by car ownership



Source: Q10 (all respondents)

### Alternatives to current system

The views of non car owners and car owners were broadly similar on alternatives to the current system, with both groups having a negative response to the suggested changes. However, non car owners were slightly more negative than car owners.

Over eight out of ten (81%) of car owners disagreed that the passes should only be used off peak; a similar, but slightly lower percentage of car owners (75%) also disagreed.

Both groups disagreed that the pass was an unnecessary burden on taxpayers (non car owners 79% disagreed; car owners 70% disagreed).

## Economic Impact

The economic impact of a withdrawal of the pass differed greatly between car owners and non car owners (Figure 3.20).

Among non car owners there was a very strong feeling that they *would find it difficult to make ends meet without the pass* (84% agreed; 66% agreed strongly).

In addition to this a large majority of non car owners felt that they wouldn't be able to afford the bus without the pass:

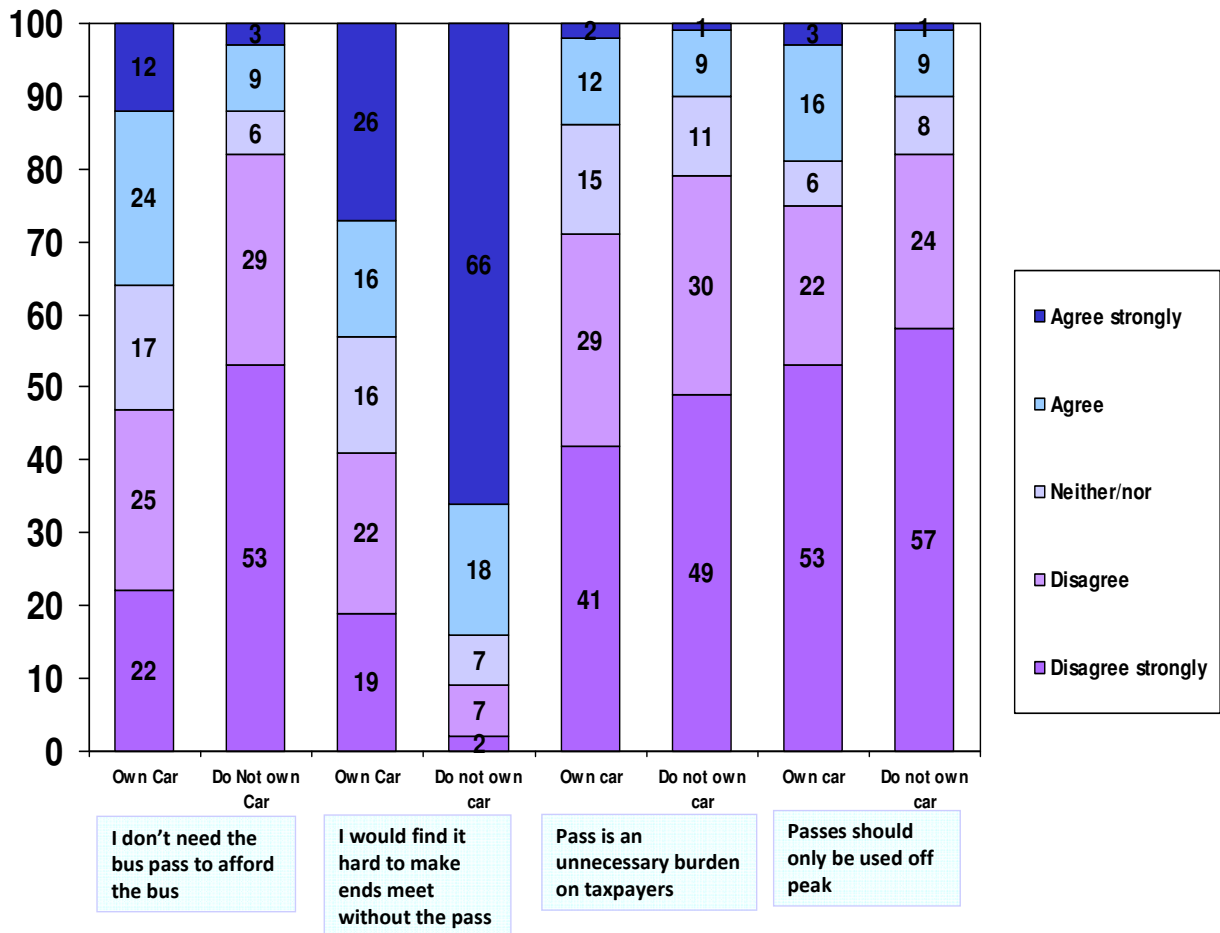
- *I don't need the pass to afford the bus* (82% disagreed; 53% disagreed strongly)

In contrast, the views of car owners were more mixed, with a large minority feeling that the withdrawal of the pass would have little economic impact on them. For example, while four out of ten car owners (42% agreed) felt that *they would find it hard to make ends meet without the pass* a similar proportion (41% disagreed).

Similarly, there was a mixed view on whether or not car owners could afford the bus without the bus pass. A third (36%) of car owners agreed that they didn't need the pass to afford the bus. However, almost a half (47%) disagreed with this statement indicating that they did need the pass to afford the bus.



Figure 3.20: Agreement with statements about Concessionary Bus Passes by car ownership



Source: Q10 (all respondents)

## 4. Findings from the Focus Groups

### 4.1 Overview

To add depth to the face to face interviews and to explore issues arising from the questionnaire survey, two focus groups were conducted in Carmarthen and Wrexham on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2010. These towns were selected to obtain a cross-section of participants from urban and rural areas in north and south Wales. Focus group participants were selected from those who had indicated during the questionnaire survey that they were willing to take part.

The focus groups were semi-structured against a topic guide (**Appendix B**) which enabled older people to raise issues of importance to them, whilst probing their underlying attitudes and obtaining an understanding of the issues affecting them most.

### 4.2 Carmarthen

#### 4.2.1 The group

The group consisted of five women and one man, of which the majority were either single or widows. All participants were retired and lived in the local area. A small number lived on the outskirts of the town centre, however most participants lived in more rural locations in nearby villages. Nearly all participants had lived in the Carmarthen area all their lives; however a small number had moved from England and Scotland to retire in Wales.

#### 4.2.2 Car ownership

Only one participant had access to a car and this was mainly used to visit relatives that lived in remote locations on an occasional basis. Some respondents reported to getting lifts from friends or family members however there was an overall consensus that asking for a lift was always a last resort, preferring to be self sufficient whenever possible.

*'I don't like to ask you see, they're busy enough so I don't want to be a burden'*

### **4.2.3 Travel horizons**

Most participants had busy social lives, either visiting family or friends, volunteering or participating in clubs such as the Women's Institute. A small number were carers and either looked after grandchildren or elderly relatives.

All female participants reported making regular routine journeys each week such as shopping, travelling to club meetings or visiting family on certain days of the week. This routine was rarely broken, regardless of weather conditions. More sporadic journeys tended to be visiting friends, hospital appointments or leisure trips. The male member of the group also reported making regular journeys, however his trips tended to have no real purpose other than to enjoy *'getting out of the house'*.

*'Sometimes I go back and forth into town two or three times a day'*

Travelling by bus was the main mode of transport for all participants and use of other modes such as the train or car were rarely used. Some participants reported travelling by taxi when their destination was not on a bus route such as visiting their local health centre or hospital.

All participants had made complex bus journeys, interchanging in Carmarthen town centre to travel to larger towns such as Haverfordwest or Swansea. These trips tended to be for leisure purposes and were less frequent.

### **4.2.4 Bus journeys and perceptions of bus services**

The majority of participants travelled by bus at least four times a week, with some using the bus on six days. All participants found it difficult to travel on Sundays or bank holidays when there was a reduced service, so were less likely to leave the house. Most participants travelled on services after 10am; however a small number preferred to use earlier services as these were operated by a smaller, local bus company which provided a more personal service. None of the participants reported to using the bus in the evening.

*'I always try to use buses run by the local bus companies, it's always the same driver'*

Participants without access to a car tended to frequently use the bus for shopping trips, travelling into Carmarthen every other day. This was attributed to the fact they were unable to do 'weekly' shopping trips as they could not carry a large amount of bags.

Participants were asked how they felt about travelling by bus and the general consensus was extremely positive. Group members found it difficult to criticise the service they received and were enthused with all aspects of bus travel.

*'I love catching the bus, it's a social thing and I've made so many friends'*

All participants reported that the bus drivers were friendly, polite and helpful. Each group member recalled events where the driver had assisted them either by updating them on any service changes, dropping them closer to their house or helping them off the bus.

*'Our bus drivers are lovely, there's two of them that drive our service and I couldn't say a bad word about either of them'*

*'We always have a bit of a joke or he likes to wind me up which makes my day'*

When asked to comment on the frequency of service, the group still remained positive, even if they were served by a bus every couple of hours. Participants could recall their daily bus timetable and had built a routine around this so felt that an infrequent service was not a problem to them. A small number reported that additional services on Sundays or bank holidays would be welcomed as it would give them greater opportunities to visit their family.

*'Why would I need more buses? I think it's just right for me, I have enough time to go into Carmarthen do some shopping and get the 2 o'clock bus home'*

*'The only thing I would say is that it would be nice to have a bus on a bank holiday when my grandchildren are off school'*

Accessing information varied from each participant, however all participants avoided using the internet or telephoning bus operators. Visiting the library, asking the bus driver or finding out from friends or family were quoted as methods of obtaining information. One participant reported to completing a form to receive timetables through the post, whilst another relied upon reading the local paper.

*'I've got no time for going online, the only line in my house is the washing line!'*

The only participant with access to a car reported that they drove on rare occasions, preferring to travel by bus wherever possible to avoid congestion and trying to find a parking space within the town centre.

#### **4.2.5 Use of concessionary bus passes**

The majority of participants had their concessionary bus pass since the scheme's inception and used it every time they travelled by bus. The pass was used to make essential trips such as food shopping but was also used to visit friends and family, leisure trips or to visit the library or heritage sites.

*'I'd hate to forget my pass!'*

One participant reported that when she needed to make occasional trips to the hospital or to the local health centre she used her pass to travel by taxi at a concessionary rate. Interestingly, she was made aware of this by a friend rather than using official lines of communication. The rest of the group reported to being unaware that their pass could be used in such a way (*Post meeting note: discounted taxi travel for concessionary bus pass holders is available in Ceredigion but not in Carmarthenshire which may explain the lack of awareness*).

There was some confusion over boundary restrictions with participants unsure of the limitations of their pass and the group tried to identify towns where their pass could be used. As participants predominantly rely on information from their friends rather than using an official source, it was

perhaps unsurprising that group members were unaware of any boundary restrictions.

The majority of participants used their pass to travel within the local area, however a small number had travelled to Swansea using their concessionary pass.

When asked if their travel habits had changed since receiving the pass, there was a general consensus that free bus travel had greatly increased the frequency of trips made. The participant with access to a car rarely drove, opting to travel by bus for the vast majority of his journeys.

#### **4.2.6 The benefits of the pass**

There was agreement that the frequency of social and leisure trips would be reduced if the concessionary pass scheme did not exist. As most participants had no choice but to make regular shopping trips, the frequency of these trips would have to continue at the same rate. A small number reported that they would be forced to move if the scheme did not exist, either closer to family or in the town centre where they could make journeys on foot.

The group was asked to describe the best thing about having a bus pass and the most popular response was the ability to travel on any bus at any time within the local area for free. In addition to this, the group felt that the pass had enhanced their lives as it made them more independent and had given them the freedom to travel, reducing the need to rely upon friends or family.

*'It makes me independent rather than dependant'*

*'My husband died two years after we moved to the area and I was really torn about moving back but since I got my pass I have a brilliant social life, it really is a god send'*

#### **4.2.7 The weaknesses of the pass**

There were no negative comments regarding the bus pass and the group struggled to find any weaknesses with the scheme. When pressed to consider how they'd change the scheme the majority reported that they would not want to amend anything however there were some suggestions of including train travel within parameters of the scheme.

*'The only thing I could say is that sometimes my pass doesn't work but the bus driver jokes that it's because I'm underage which makes me laugh no end!'*

#### **4.2.8 The future**

Most participants felt that changing the scheme to an off peak system would have very little impact on their lives. Only a small number reported that they would have to travel later, however the group agreed that this was more acceptable than removing the scheme altogether.

The merits of half price travel were discussed and the majority of participants felt strongly that this would affect the number of journeys they made throughout the week, opting to travel for essential reasons only. A number of participants reported that they constantly had to budget in order to make their pension last throughout the week, therefore any additional costs for travel would have a severe impact upon their lives.

The group considered replacing the free concessionary pass with a flat fare and there was agreement that whilst this was better than paying full price, it would still not offer the same benefits as the current system.

*'When you've had something for free for so many years and then you have to pay for it, it's not really fair.'*

When asked to consider if the pass was an unfair burden to the tax payer the group were outraged. There was a general consensus that concessionary pass holders deserved free transport as they had contributed to the economy throughout their working lives, blaming the economic downturn on the banking industry.

*'Why should we get penalised, I've paid tax for 40 years! It's the bankers fault not ours that the country is in this mess.'*

Using alternative modes of transport such as walking or travelling by taxi are not feasible options for the majority of participants. Most participants do not live close enough to walk into Carmarthen or have mobility problems, and in addition travelling by taxi was considered to be expensive so would not be considered a suitable alternative to using the concessionary bus pass. Participants with families living in the local area reported that they could ask close relatives for a lift, however this was felt to be very much a last resort.

The group's knowledge of other concessionary schemes was limited and this could largely be attributed to the fact they heavily relied upon receiving information from friends or family. One participant was aware that their pass could be used to visit heritage sites, however this was because she was informed by a friend. When asked to suggest methods to improve communication with older people, group members suggested sending each pass holder a regular newsletter informing them of any boundary restrictions and providing information on where the pass could be used such as on taxis and visiting heritage sites. Providing leaflets on the bus or at the doctors surgery was also suggested.

#### **4.2.9 Summary**

The Carmarthen focus group were passionate that the concessionary pass scheme should not be removed as it provided them with a lifeline to activities that helped to improve the quality of their lives. Being independent was of great importance to participants and the group felt that this provided mental health benefits as it encouraged them to remain active avoiding isolation. The group felt that isolation was a major contributor towards depression in older people and many participants considered themselves to be at risk if they were unable to take part in activities or have an active social life. A number of participants were not in a financial position to afford to pay for the number of bus trips they are currently making. Therefore, if the scheme was removed they would be drastically affected both financially and also socially, as they would not be able to make the nonessential trips which give a sense of purpose to their lives.



## **4.3 Wrexham**

### **4.3.1 The group**

The group comprised three women and three men. The group members live in a variety of locations; some live in the suburbs of Wrexham and others live further afield in more rural areas with one member living near Bala. The group members were also a variety of ages; all are eligible for a concessionary fare pass but they have held their passes from 5 to 11 years.

One group member noted that whilst he has been eligible for his pass for the past 10 years, he had not applied for his pass until he felt he needed it due to mobility difficulties. Furthermore, prior to using the pass, one group member regularly walked to the shops or other services, but the pass has helped since she started suffering from arthritis.

### **4.3.2 Car ownership**

The three men in the group said that they own a car. They tend to use their bus pass most of the time and only use the car for journeys or trip purposes which would be hard to undertake using a bus.

Two of the women in the group said that they regularly travelled by car until the death of their husbands. The pass has meant that they have been able to continue travelling to see friends and retain a level of independence.

### **4.3.3 Travel horizons**

The group were asked to think about their 'travel horizons' and the destinations they regularly travel to using their concessionary pass. All of the group said that they regularly travel from Wrexham to Chester and they tend to use their bus pass for recreational purposes such as shopping, visiting friends or other social purposes. The pass gives them the ability to 'go on an outing' to meet their friends and the bus trip in itself is a social occasion.

It is interesting that the group noted that they can see more of the landscape when travelling on the bus compared to in the car; by offering improved visibility when travelling, the combination of the concessionary bus pass and bus services have expanded the social travel horizons of residents who previously only travelled for social purposes by car.

One member of the group said that he now uses the bus to travel on holiday. This year he used local bus services and his concessionary pass to travel to the Gower for a week. The trip took him 8.5 hours and he met people on the way, some of whom he has continued to keep in touch with.

#### **4.3.4 Bus journeys and perceptions of bus services**

The group were asked to think about the bus journeys they make, and their perceptions of local bus services.

The group felt that local bus services are generally very good. They usually run on time and the drivers are particularly friendly.

*'They stop outside and help me with my bags into the kitchen. I know they shouldn't and I tell them not to get in trouble but they always offer to help'.*

However, the group did note that some bus services are less reliable. The bus occasionally does not turn up or they do not keep to time. GHA Coaches were noted as being a particular concern for members of the group. A member of the group said that the punctuality of services can often depend on the driver. Some drivers have been known to arrive and depart their stop before their set time in an effort to make up time.

The group also discussed the vehicles used by operators and the environment on the bus. One member of the group noted that the vehicles are generally clean and tidy but they can be quite dirty if they have previously been used to provide school bus services. This comment elicited further discussion on unsociable behaviour by some young people using public transport.

More positively the group noted that the majority of people using the bus during the day are older members of the community, certainly demonstrating the success of the concessionary bus pass and the positive impact the pass has had for older members of the community.

*'If the bus pass was stopped the buses would be empty! I'd have to do my shopping near home and I wouldn't meet my friends on the bus...'*

The group noted that there seem to be more buses available now since the pass was introduced. They equated this to the pass raising the number of passengers and bringing in more income for operators.

#### **4.3.5 Information**

The group noted however that a lot of their friends are not aware that they can use their pass for travelling by rail on the Wrexham – Bidston line. Residents can transfer to a rail pass, but it is not worth it living in Wrexham given the above benefit. This is an anomaly and the group recognised the particular benefit this concession gives them.

Members of the group suggested that they access information on bus services in their area through talking directly with their bus driver or talking to members of staff at the bus station. Only one member of the group uses the internet and they all expressed unease with using the phone because of automated systems.

#### **4.3.6 Using the pass**

In discussing the use of the pass, members were pleasantly surprised, when talking about their own experiences, to hear that they were not alone in expressing surprise that bus drivers rarely check bus passes. They were concerned that the individual using the pass may not be the person to whom the pass was issued.

*'The photo is very small... I don't know how they know if the pass is yours... sometimes I just think they look at the person and decide if they are old enough'*

The group then discussed the use of the pass when travelling between Wrexham and Chester. They explained that Welsh residents can use their pass on a bus from Wrexham to Chester, Shrewsbury and Oswestry but the journey must start in Wales and finish in England and vice versa. They cannot break their journey. If they do break their journey, south of Chester but in England for example, they must then travel back into Wales before catching a bus north again to complete their journey to Chester.

The group also noted that Welsh residents cannot drive to the outskirts of Chester for example and then use that town's Park and Ride system.

*'It's just something you have to work with. We are just lucky we can travel to Chester and England. Can people in England travel like that...?'*

One group member suggested that he saves £200 a month in fuel now that he uses his bus pass when travelling to Chester to do voluntary work.

#### **4.3.7 The benefits of the pass**

The group were asked to think about the benefits of the pass.

One member of the group noted that she acts as a part-time carer for her friend with MS. She suggested that if the bus pass was removed she would not be able to travel to look after her friend. In addition, her friend gives her a £20 carers allowance as a form of 'payment' for looking after her. Whilst this is a relatively small amount of money it is valued by the group member and would be missed if she could not continue with this 'job'. The concessionary bus pass has facilitated her receipt of this payment.

Other members of the group noted that they use their bus pass regularly to travel to appointments at the doctors and hospital for example. Using their pass to travel by bus is more convenient and it means they don't have to pay parking charges at the hospital or ask a friend for a lift.

*'It's good that we can use the pass whenever we want. I guess this is better than (sic) England...'*

The group also discussed the 'value' of the pass. They all noted the greater 'freedom' the pass gives them and the feeling that they are no longer housebound. The pass also has a social value in that it enables them to meet people and see friends.

#### **4.3.8 The weaknesses of the pass**

The group also discussed any 'weaknesses' of the pass. They couldn't really think of any weaknesses in the pass directly; rather they were concerned that it would be very hard to use the pass in rural areas if there were restrictions introduced on its use at certain times of the day. In many areas, there are so few buses available that pass holders must travel early in the morning or in the evening if they want to make a round trip in one day; in travelling from Bala to Wrexham there are only 4 buses a day.

#### **4.3.9 The future**

When thinking about the future, members of the group suggested that if the pass was removed they would not travel to Wrexham. They would be more selective over the trips they make and the places they go and they would no longer make trips for pleasure. They would have to prioritise essential trips given their limited income.

*'I'd still use the bus pass when I go shopping as I can't walk with heavy shopping bags...'*

The group were then asked to think about alternatives to the existing full concessionary bus pass.

They suggested that they would prefer a half-fare pass to any withdrawal of the existing pass but this would have cost implications for passengers, particularly those on a low income. They also thought that this might also

lead to administrative problems on the bus as drivers checked each user's pass and gave change for their half fare.

Other options suggested by the group were:

- Raising the age limit to 65 or 70
- Introducing an annual administration charge
- Means testing the granting of a pass; or
- Introducing a 'carnet' style concession rather than simple card.

The group were then asked to comment on the potential withdrawal of the concessionary bus pass. This gained a strong response from the group.

*'If you take the bus pass off people there will be uproar!'*

The group suggested that people have got used to the pass. They would be very upset if there were proposals to take it away. They definitely do not see it as a burden.

*'...and we have paid our taxes. This is something we are entitled to.'*

Two members of the group strongly suggested that as the state pension is so low the concessionary bus pass is one way of helping their pension go further.

The group then began to question the motivation for arranging this focus group and research process. One person in the group thought this discussion might be a 'cover'.

*'You'll make people worry the pass is being withdrawn and they will all be delighted when it is preserved!'*

They all agreed that taxis are too expensive. The benefit of the concessionary bus pass is that it enables them to travel without using taxis. The group noted that residents of Wrexham are able to use their concessionary bus pass on rail services between Wrexham and Bidston stations. This is really welcome as it makes it easier to travel to Liverpool.

*'I use it to go and see Everton play!'*

#### **4.3.10 Summary**

All members of the group stressed the value of the bus pass. It plays a valuable role in giving them a level of freedom and independence they would otherwise be unable to achieve without the pass. They do not want to be reliant on friends or family for transport. The pass also enables holders to have a full and active social life; the group were particularly conscious of issues surrounding depression and associated health difficulties in older members of the community. They were clear that the pass has wider benefits for them than simply providing free travel.

In summary, the group do not want to see any changes.

*'The pass is fine as it is. Please don't change it!'*

## 5. Stakeholder consultation

### 5.1 Overview

To complement the review of relevant policy documents, strategic consultations were held with a selection of stakeholders, including user groups, selected local authorities, WAG and bus operators. These consultations took the form of telephone interviews, which were semi-directive against open questions, complemented by follow up email correspondence. The stakeholders interviewed were as follows:

#### **National/local government**

- Welsh Assembly Government (Head of Integrated Transport)
- City & County of Swansea (Acting Group Leader – Transportation)
- Wrexham County Borough Council (Transport Co-ordinating Officer)
- Cardiff County Council (Head of Concessionary Travel Unit)
- Carmarthenshire County Council (Transport Manager, Passenger Transport Operations Manager)
- Powys County Council (Head of Public Transport Unit)

#### **User groups**

- Age Cymru (Head of Policy and Public Affairs)
- Bus Users UK Cymru (Senior Officer for Wales)
- Alzheimers Wales (Acting Director for Wales)
- National Partnership Forum for Older People (Transport Sector Representative)

#### **Bus operators**

- Arriva Cymru (Concessionary & Smart Card Manager)
- GHA Coaches (Operations Manager)

The responses received have been grouped into the following themes, to maintain stakeholder anonymity where necessary:

- Satisfaction with concessionary bus passes and the bus service;
- Local authority administration of the scheme;
- Reimbursement arrangements;
- Amendments to the existing scheme; and
- Cross-border issues.



## 5.2 Satisfaction with concessionary bus passes and the bus service

The findings of the questionnaire interviews (Section 3) and focus groups (Section 4) demonstrate a high level of satisfaction amongst older people with regard to both their free concessionary bus passes and the bus service.

*'The scheme has given older people greater opportunities to lead fulfilling lives'*

This corresponds with the findings of the Living in Wales surveys commissioned by WAG, although many stakeholders observed that some older people would wish to see the concessionary scheme extended to rail services. In some areas of Wales this has already been done in a limited way as part of a pilot scheme (ending in September 2011):

- The Borderlands Line (Wrexham – Bidston)
- The Cambrian Coast Line (Shrewsbury – Aberystwyth/Pwllheli).
- The Heart of Wales Line (Swansea – Shrewsbury)
- The Conwy Valley Line (Llandudno – Blaenau Ffestiniog)

There is much support for the concessionary rail travel pilot scheme and many stakeholders would like to see an all-Wales scheme, but this is seen as unrealistic in the current economic climate. Protecting existing entitlements, such as the free concessionary bus travel scheme, is seen as more important.

Moreover, WAG has expressed the view that any universal concessionary rail scheme would detract from existing products. For example, Arriva Trains Wales (ATW) has launched a 'Club 55' promotion (scheduled to end on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2010) which offers people aged 55 and over return rail travel anywhere on the ATW network for £15 return (£13 with railcard).

*'The concessionary bus pass scheme is as good as it's going to be...it won't be extended to rail services'*

As the representative for bus users in Wales, Bus Users UK Cymru fields numerous complaints regarding bus services. However, the main complaints from older people relate to connections with other services and

inadequate evening/weekend provision – few complaints are received regarding driver attitude and other issues.

*‘There is the perennial issue that buses never go where they (people) want to go – the route cannot please everyone’*

*‘Older people are just grateful to have a 24hr pass’*

A number of older people have raised matters with OPCW which relate to bus services:

- A man living in a rural community was concerned about rumours that the free bus pass scheme was to be scrapped, explaining that the local bus service was his only means of transport, providing a crucial link to friends, vital services, and to shopping facilities. In addition, the bus pass allowed him simply to get ‘out and about’ on a daily basis;
- A woman living in north Wales complained about inadequate connection times between rural bus services, explaining that operators will not impose a mandatory five minute wait time on certain connections. This causes much anxiety amongst older bus users as there is often a long wait until the next bus, or there is no later bus at all; and
- A woman living in Neath Port Talbot highlighted the lack of public transport to a new medical centre which had been built outside the town centre. The centre was opened a year ago and the only way to reach it was by private vehicle. The woman pointed out that, without a car, or a bus link, the only other option is take a taxi, which can be very expensive. She felt strongly that older people are the principal users of public transport and their needs and views should be properly considered when planning developments such as this.

A number of older people have reported safety concerns on buses to Age Cymru. Poor driving standards, e.g. sudden acceleration and braking, affects passenger comfort. Older people who are less mobile aren’t confident that the bus will wait for them to alight. The condition of bus stops is another issue often raised. Many stops don’t have lighting, seating or shelter. Some stakeholders consider that there is room for improvement here.

Age Cymru also report that vehicle accessibility has been raised by wheelchair users at a forum in West Wales. Accessibility is a particular

issue in rural areas where many stops don't have raised kerbs. However, it is also an issue in urban areas where many buses can't reach the kerb because of parked cars – this was cited as a particular problem in Cardiff.

### **5.3 Local authority administration of the scheme**

Funding for administration of the concessionary bus travel scheme originally came through the Local Transport Services Grant awarded by WAG to the 22 Welsh local authorities. However, local authorities complained that this was insufficient, so from 2004/05 WAG contributed £3 per pass in circulation per annum to cover administration costs. Each local authority invoices WAG for operating costs and administrative costs each year.

The local authority officers that we spoke to confirmed that the £3 per annum is sufficient to cover administration costs, particularly with a charge being levied on the public for lost passes. None of the local authority teams we spoke to has a member of staff dedicated to the administration of the concessionary scheme; all perform various roles. However, one officer noted that the administration payments did not leave any resource for monitoring compliance with the scheme.

### **5.4 Reimbursement arrangements**

#### **5.4.1 Recent changes**

From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010 the reimbursement arrangements were changed, so that reimbursement to bus operators was no longer calculated on the basis of the average adult single fare, but instead on the Representative Concessionary Fare which has been calculated for each bus depot or group of services.

*'Before the reimbursement arrangements were changed, every time bus operators put up their fares, usually every six months, the amount reimbursed went up too'*

Some anecdotal evidence was reported to MM whereby passengers had been told by bus drivers that routes were being withdrawn as a result of capping the reimbursement budget. However, WAG and local authority

officers are very pleased with the new arrangements and are of the view that bus operators should also be satisfied given that the arrangements were developed in consultation with the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT). Nevertheless, they acknowledge that it may be an administrative burden for smaller operators, particularly where the Representative Concessionary Fare varies between routes operated.

Now that the reimbursement budget has been capped, the reimbursement rate (set at 73.59p in the £ for the first two quarters of 2010-11) may reduce over the year as the available budget dwindles. WAG, local authorities and bus operators are working closely at the time of writing to review the reimbursement rate for the third and fourth quarters of the year.

Bus operators accept the reimbursement rate as being reasonable, but the problem is that the reimbursement does not reflect the length of the journey because it is based on a representative concessionary fare. This weakness in the current funding mechanism was also noted by Age Cymru, in the context of the recent debate in the Welsh media concerning the travel needs of younger people and older people.

Arriva cited the example of the Rhyl – Llandudno route, where it is only reimbursed at about £1.00 for a single journey, whereas the actual adult single fare is £2.50. However, it has been agreed between WAG and bus operators that only the boarding stage is recorded when the ticket is issued, as recording the alighting stage slows down boarding times, which then adds to bus journey times and operating costs.

*'Recording boarding stages only (not alighting stages) makes reimbursement less accurate, but this is the lesser of two evils'*

However, the introduction of the 2,500 new smart card ticket machines by WAG provided an opportunity for pass holders to tap in and out like the London Oyster card, which would have aided more accurate reimbursement. It appears, however, that the software has not been configured to allow this<sup>6</sup>, and 'tapping out' would probably require the installation of an additional

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<sup>6</sup> 'Sharp rise in cost of free bus passes for elderly drives teenage jobs aid plan off the road'. Western Mail, 26 July 2010.

reader on each bus so as to avoid conflict between boarding and alighting passengers.

Nevertheless, the smartcard technology does provide another opportunity to amend the reimbursement process. One potential option discussed with some stakeholders would be to charge each person's smartcard with a fixed sum of money per year, which could be deducted from every time the pass holder boarded a bus. This could have health benefits, for example older people would be more willing to walk short distances rather than boarding a bus to travel between stops. If pass holders were required to 'top up' their smart cards it could, however, penalise those older people using their passes most regularly.

#### **5.4.2 Potential abuse of concessionary passes**

Some instances of abuse were reported by stakeholders, and there was a view that a tightening of scheme administration would save money.

#### **5.4.3 Potential future challenges**

One cross-border bus operator reported that its English services were being hit by a 'triple whammy', suggesting that the England concessionary fares reimbursement budget will be cut by 13%, Bus Service Operator Grant (BSOG) reduced by 20% by 2015 as well as a reduction in the local authority bus revenue support budget.

The above budget cuts of course apply to England only as the responsibility for such budgets are devolved to WAG, whose spending decisions have yet to be made public (at the time of writing). For example, the decision may be taken to maintain the current BSOG budget. This would be welcomed by bus operators, as BSOG currently allows them to constrain their current fares. However, if WAG does decide to reduce BSOG bus operators may respond by increasing their fares and reimbursement payments would be increased as a result. There is some speculation as to how this would affect the reimbursement budget going forward.

#### **5.4.4 Benefits to bus operators from concessionary fare income**

It was observed by some local authorities that the number of concessionary journeys has not been increasing in 2010 at the rate that they had been in the preceding five years. This will be a concern to operators, as although they are supposed to be no better or worse off as a result of the concessionary scheme, they freely admit that they have been using the funds to pay for new Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant buses (all buses are required to be low floor by 2015) as well as to improve frequencies.

*‘Undoubtedly it’s helped us buy new buses, and increase frequencies as well. It’s nice to have the base income stream guaranteed’*

### **5.5 Amendments to the existing concessionary scheme**

The findings of the questionnaire interviews (Section 3) and focus groups (Section 4) demonstrated older people’s strong opposition to any amendments to the existing concessionary bus travel scheme. These findings were communicated with stakeholders.

*‘The concessionary pass is at the top of older people’s minds – many ask if it is going to disappear’*

#### **5.5.1 Peak period restrictions**

Introducing peak period restrictions on concessionary bus travel was opposed by all stakeholders. Several local authority officers and bus operators observed that it would simply lead to two new peaks in demand during the morning and afternoon, i.e. after 0930 and before 1530.

*‘A peak period restriction would simply create two peaks – it wouldn’t benefit the operators or save money’*

*‘The bus service has already been built up to accommodate the greater number of passengers, so peak time restrictions wouldn’t benefit us’*

Bus Users UK Cymru cited experience in England, where older people have problems making hospital appointments because passes cannot be used at peak times. This restricts the times during which older people can make appointments, i.e. to between 1100 and 1500. It would be very difficult for doctors to ensure all older people were seen between these times, and it was noted that many patients will be aged 60 and over in any case.

Bus operators pointed out that a peak period restriction would hinder the ability of rural bus users to get to their destination and back within the time available.

### **5.5.2 Half-fare travel**

Reintroducing half-fare travel was similarly opposed by all stakeholders, although WAG expressed a desire to understand older people's willingness to pay for bus travel, for example speculating about the fare level above which older people would start to be dissuaded from making non-essential trips (it should be noted, however, that WAG has no plans to amend the free concessionary bus travel scheme at the present time). WAG has not undertaken any surveys from the pass holder's perspective, but the findings of the MM research, i.e. that older people would either revert to their own car or travel for essential trips only, came as no surprise.

It was noted that many older people recognise that concessionary bus travel is an expensive scheme, but most do not understand that the bus operator is reimbursed at the same flat rate regardless of journey length. One stakeholder had received comments from older people suggesting that they may be prepared to pay a nominal flat fare per ride (e.g. 50p). Some bus operators and user groups felt that a flat fare could deter unnecessary short bus journeys from one stop to the next. This could encourage people to walk further, with consequent health benefits. However, maintaining the status quo would still be preferable from older people's own viewpoint, as the focus groups confirmed.

*'A nominal flat rate would be the least worst case (if charging had to be introduced). But this would lose a lot of goodwill and the political kudos that comes from a free scheme'*

Alzheimers Wales also expressed its strong support for retaining the concessionary bus travel scheme in its current form, and dementia support workers at the local service bases noted that the free passes are very helpful for carers whose relatives are now in care. They felt that any proposed change to the scheme would provoke anxiety amongst carers.

*'We are aware of carers who use buses on a regular basis to visit their loved ones in the care homes. If they had to pay obviously this would add to their financial burden and they may not be able to visit as often as they would like'*

It was noted by WAG that there are many complex linkages between the concessionary bus travel scheme and other departmental budgets. These are difficult to quantify, but it is clear that removing the free travel entitlement would adversely affect the health/social services budget, as older people would have to transfer from public bus services to health/community transport services in order to attend essential appointments. One stakeholder noted that University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff is served by 470 buses per day, and speculated how older patients would travel to the hospital if free travel was no longer available.

*'I'm not in favour of introducing half-fare travel...this would defeat the objectives of the scheme. Would this not impact upon health budgets?'*

Furthermore it was acknowledged by WAG, local authorities and bus operators alike that the concessionary scheme contributes to retaining commercial bus services that would otherwise have to be supported.

*'We wouldn't deregister the entire service, but we would look to deregister early morning/late evening journeys if we didn't have the concessionary pass income'*

A large proportion of bus patronage is comprised of concessionary pass holders. The proportion of course varies across individual routes, but as a snapshot GHA Coaches recorded 250,000 passenger boardings in



September 2010, and 115,000 of these (46%) were made by concessionary/disabled pass holders. Many commercial routes depend upon concessionary pass income, especially in rural areas. Arriva report that its commercial services around Barmouth and Colwyn Bay remain 'fairly robust' but its routes around Bangor and Holyhead, serving rural villages, would be deregistered without concessionary pass income.

*'Any saving (from removing concessionary free travel) would simply be paid back in revenue support...it would be like robbing Peter to pay Paul'*

Moreover, there are bus routes which already receive local authority revenue support which wouldn't have a sustainable patronage base without the concessionary pass scheme. GHA Coaches cited one of its routes which operates on Wednesdays only, which has 18 users per day. Only one of these users pays a fare.

It is clear that retention of the free concessionary bus travel scheme supports other policy agendas like improving access to work opportunities – if early morning/late evening services are curtailed then this would be made far more difficult.

### **5.5.3 Charging for the issue of concessionary passes**

Several stakeholders suggested that charging pass holders for the issue of their smartcards may help recoup the cost of the scheme. For example, with the old half-fare scheme Wrexham County Borough Council charged older people £5 per pass. However, it was agreed that introducing such charges would penalise those who rely on their concessionary pass the most, i.e. older people on low incomes.

### **5.5.4 Means testing**

WAG and local authorities are opposed to the means testing of concessionary bus passes, citing the administrative burden and associated costs. It was observed that means testing is not an exact science.

One stakeholder stated that it would not explicitly oppose means testing, but stated that universal benefits do encourage social cohesion. However, another stakeholder expressed strong opposition to means testing, being of the view that most wealthy people (with the possible exception of transport professionals) would not use their passes in any case.

*'means testing of passes would look like charity...the average millionaire would never use one...there's only a cost if people use their pass so the actual cost saving would be moderate'*

If costs had to be reduced, stakeholders suggested that increasing the age of eligibility would be simplest and fairest.

### **5.5.5 Changing the age of eligibility**

It was unanimously agreed by stakeholders that the fairest way of managing the costs of the concessionary bus travel scheme would be to increase the age of pass eligibility in stages. One user group suggested that the age of eligibility could rise in line with pension age, i.e. to 66 in 2020 and 68 in 2046. Another user group reported the view that as long as the threshold was raised in stages so that no current pass holder loses their entitlement, opposition is unlikely.

No stakeholder sought to defend the use of concessionary passes for commuter travel, and pass holders' comments were noted, i.e. some felt that they should not be receiving free travel when they have not yet retired.

However, any proposal to raise the age of eligibility has not been formally endorsed by WAG. It was stressed to MM that this will be a matter for Ministers to decide.

## **5.6 Cross-border issues**

Welsh pass holders are able to use cross-border services if their bus journey starts or ends in Wales, although they are generally unable to transfer

between bus services in England. The exceptions reported by local authorities are:

- **Chester** – pass holders can change buses at Chester Bus Station to reach the Countess of Chester Hospital, which is the local hospital covering much of Flintshire; and
- **Kington** – pass holders can change here for onward travel to Hereford, which benefits those travelling from Presteigne in Powys.

Access to health care for Powys residents was not identified by stakeholders as a problem, as there are direct bus services from Powys to Shrewsbury Hospital.

The large majority of respondents to the questionnaire interviews (Section 4) stated that it was easy to use their concessionary pass for trips into England. This finding was validated by WAG, the National Partnership Forum for Older People and bus operators.

All stakeholders considered that the cross-border arrangements work well from the Welsh pass holder's perspective and felt no reason to change them. The problem is for English concessionary bus pass holders. Pass holders living in Cheshire can travel to the end of bus routes in Wales, but pass holders from other English local authorities (such as Shropshire) cannot do so – their passes are only valid to the fare boundary. Examples of this anomaly include **Monmouth**, where Welsh pass holders can travel into Gloucestershire but English pass holders cannot use their passes to travel in the other direction, and **Whitchurch**, where English pass holders cannot use their passes to travel from Shropshire into Wrexham.

WAG and the National Partnership Forum for Older People noted the predicament of English pass holders, but the matter is clearly outside of their remit.

*'Ideally Welsh passes would be valid in England and vice versa, but there would then be the issue of compensation, so I doubt it will happen'*

## 5.7 Summary

The feedback received during the stakeholder consultations suggests that older people are generally happy with their concessionary passes and with the bus service. Bus Users UK Cymru and Age Cymru have each received complaints in this regard, but the findings of our own research suggest that these complaints represent only a small minority of older bus users.

Local authorities are very happy with the administration of the scheme. However, there is possibly a need to monitor compliance and prevent the abuse of passes. More resources would be required to improve monitoring, which may be unrealistic in the current economic climate but the savings accrued on the reimbursement budget could potentially recoup the additional financial outlay for WAG in the medium term.

WAG, local authorities and bus operators are generally happy with the new reimbursement arrangements, which have capped the costs of the concessionary bus travel scheme. However, in the context of potential changes to the scheme in terms of fares, hours of operation and eligibility, some user groups have questioned the scheme's value for money, and suggest that efforts be made to improve the accuracy of the reimbursement process before any changes are made. The concessionary smart cards provide the potential to achieve more accurate reimbursement. However, it would have been desirable to facilitate this during the original procurement process for the new smart cards and bus ticket machines. Nevertheless, the introduction of an all-Wales transport entitlement card (scheduled for 2014), covering rail and bus users of all ages, may provide an opportunity to address this problem.

Beyond ensuring a more accurate reimbursement process, stakeholders are reluctant to suggest any amendments to the scheme, as all are aware of how highly older people value their passes and the benefits that the passes bring to some of the most vulnerable members of society. However, it is generally considered that the most politically acceptable means of managing scheme costs (in the context of people working longer and retiring later) would be to raise the age of eligibility for concessionary passes, as long as it is ensured that no older person loses their current entitlement.

Cross-border issues were not viewed as a particular problem by any of the stakeholders that we contacted; at least from the perspective of Welsh pass holders which is the focus of our research. This is borne out by our own research (Section 4) and it is hoped that the local arrangements between Welsh and English local authorities will continue, so that access for older people to essential facilities in England is maintained in the future.

## 6. Summary and conclusions

### 6.1 Overview

In all activities undertaken, the Older People's Commissioner must give due regard to the United Nations Principles for Older Persons:

- Independence
- Participation
- Care
- Self-fulfilment; and
- Dignity.

We have summarised in the following sections how the concessionary bus travel scheme contributes to each of the above principles. Our conclusions are necessarily subjective but the extensive research undertaken during this commission, listening to the views of older people, user groups, bus operators, local authorities and WAG, provides evidence to support the statements made.

#### 6.1.1 Independence

Without the concessionary bus pass, we suggest that many older people without access to a car would be housebound and denied access to essential facilities which enables them to maintain their independence. The pass gives older people greater freedom to access food/clothes shopping, hospital/GP appointments, days out and volunteering opportunities. It gives older people the ability to regularly visit and care for loved ones, which would become much more difficult if bus travel had to be paid for.

#### 6.1.2 Participation

The concessionary bus travel scheme offers older people the opportunity to remain integrated in society. The availability of free bus travel enables older people to meet others and make new friends, reducing their isolation and loneliness. This in turn improves their quality of life and physical, mental and emotional well-being.

### **6.1.3 Care**

This principle states that older people should have access to health, social and legal care so that they can optimise their well-being. Free bus travel removes a significant barrier to accessing these opportunities. We suggest that the potential for the scheme to relieve pressure on health and social services budgets is clear, in two main respects:

- the cost of the alternative health/community transport service which would need to be provided in the absence of free bus travel; and
- the ability of older people to use free bus services to access regular hospital appointments. Without these bus services, it is conceivable that a significant number of individuals would no longer be able to live independently, and would instead need to be placed in residential care at a much greater cost to the taxpayer.

Our contact with older people, as well as our consultations with various stakeholders, has demonstrated the numerous benefits that the concessionary bus pass brings to people's lives. Although we have not undertaken a full cost-benefit analysis as part of this commission, this evidence strongly suggests that the benefits of the scheme far outweigh the costs, and that the overall burden on the taxpayer would in all likelihood be significantly increased if free concessionary bus travel was to be discontinued.

### **6.1.4 Self-fulfilment**

This principle states that older persons should have access to educational, cultural, spiritual and recreational resources and be able to develop their full potential. The results of the questionnaire interviews demonstrate that older people use their concessionary bus passes for visiting friends and relatives, days out, accessing sport/recreation and volunteering. Whilst non-essential, all of these trip purposes are important to optimising older people's well-being and fulfilling their potential.

The surveys have shown that many older people would be unable to make such trips if free concessionary bus travel was withdrawn. Self-fulfilment is therefore much less likely to be achieved.

### **6.1.5 Dignity**

The availability of the concessionary bus pass clearly contributes to older people's dignity. Without it, the results of the questionnaire interviews and focus groups strongly suggest that many older people would have to depend on car-owning friends and relatives in order to undertake all but the most essential trips (e.g. days out, visiting friends/relatives/accessing sport and recreation), or not travel at all. For essential trips, such as food shopping and hospital appointments, older people would pay for bus travel, but with clear negative implications for household budgets and overall quality of life. Car owners would most likely switch to their cars for all trips, with clear environmental disbenefits.

## **6.2 Conclusions**

This research project has focused on obtaining the views of older people themselves on the concessionary bus travel scheme, supplementing this with desk research and consultations with various stakeholders.

In general, older people are very satisfied with their passes and with the bus service. They do not wish to see any changes to the concessionary bus travel scheme.

It is clear that the free passes have a major impact on non-car owners' quality of life. Non car-owners are more likely to be older, female, disabled and have a lower income. The free passes also provide a significant financial benefit for those pass holders who do have access to a car.

The concessionary bus travel scheme offers older people the opportunity to remain integrated in society, improving their quality of life. The scheme brings wider benefits in terms of relieving pressure on health and social services transport budgets, and stakeholders have noted that the linkages



are complex. Bus operators have acknowledged that the scheme has helped renew bus fleets and support both commercial and tendered services which would not otherwise be viable. This positively affects the ability of younger people to access education, training and employment opportunities. It is clear that the interests of older and younger people are not mutually exclusive, and should not be pitted against each other.

*'It (the concessionary bus pass scheme) has improved social mobility and helped persuade people to use the public transport system. It's been a great success'*

The revised reimbursement arrangements have been effective in capping the cost of the scheme. However, if the concessionary fares budget has to be reduced in the future, rather than amending the terms of the scheme policy makers should focus on the reimbursement methodology to ensure that it fairly reflects distance travelled. The smartcard technology provides an opportunity to achieve this without adversely affecting passenger boarding times. Beyond this, raising the age of eligibility is viewed by older people and other stakeholders alike as the fairest way of managing scheme costs. Some older people comment that those of working age should not be entitled to free travel. As a last resort, a nominal flat fare may be deliverable, but it must be stressed that there is a strong commitment within WAG to retaining the concessionary bus travel scheme in its current form.

### **6.3 The next steps**

Our research has provided an evidence base which demonstrates the benefits of the free concessionary bus travel scheme. However, our research merely forms a starting point in developing a robust argument for the retention of the current scheme in the face of financial challenges currently faced by WAG and local authorities, with the budget for WAG's Economy and Transport department due to be reduced by 12% in absolute terms in the next three years to 2013/14. Within this context, it is possible that WAG's commitment to retaining the concessionary bus pass scheme in its current form will be reviewed following the National Assembly elections in May 2011.

More detailed analysis would be beneficial in order to quantify the benefits of the concessionary bus travel scheme and present data in a format which can be easily understood by older people, user groups and policy makers alike. This analysis could include:

- Cost benefit analysis; and
- Data analysis using Geographical Information Systems (GIS)

Furthermore, although the benefits of the free concessionary bus travel scheme are clear, not all older people are able to access bus services. This may be due to accessibility problems, or the bus services may not operate at all. It would be beneficial to undertake further research to consider the wider transport and travel needs of older people in Wales, and explore options for improving opportunities where affordable, safe, frequent and reliable transport is not currently available.

### **6.3.1 Cost benefit analysis**

The linkages between the concessionary bus travel scheme and other government budgets are complex. We have already speculated about the savings which the scheme brings in terms of the health and social care budgets, and the benefits that improved bus services have brought to younger people accessing education and employment. However, a full economic cost benefit analysis of the scheme would enable these complex linkages to be investigated in greater detail and the benefits quantified in financial terms, adding details to support the conclusions drawn from the research we have already undertaken.

With a reimbursement budget of £69m per annum, WAG is right to consider the value for money derived from the scheme. Our research suggests not only direct social impacts (positive) for the older people of Wales but also indirect benefits e.g. for public services and benefits for other bus users. Operators suggest that they have used the funds to pay for new DDA compliant buses (all buses are required to be low floor by 2015) as well as to improve frequencies. The frequency issue is of course of benefit to all age groups and has both an economic and environmental benefit in sustainability terms.

### **6.3.2 Data analysis using Geographical Information Systems (GIS)**

There are many benefits in using GIS to analyse and present data. Maps can show complex relationships in an intuitive and easy to understand way. GIS also can be used for area profiling, pulling together multiple data sets to identify spatial patterns and commonalities or differences between areas.

With specific regard to the concessionary bus travel scheme, accessibility analysis could be used to measure how well places are served by the Welsh bus network. A scoring methodology could be developed, tailored to concessionary bus pass usage (i.e. preferred times of day/days of week to travel, access to specific destinations). Geographical intersection of the accessibility results with other socio-economic data sets would allow areas with common problems or advantages to be identified, classified and analysed.

Animated maps of Wales could be produced showing the areas with good public transport accessibility for pass holders, and other areas more difficult to reach. This analysis could be repeated at regular intervals to allow the impact on older people of changes to the public transport network (such as reduced bus service provision, which is very likely to occur if overall revenue funding for public transport services is reduced) to be tracked over time.

### **6.3.3 The wider transport and travel needs of older people in Wales**

Our research has focused upon the concessionary bus pass scheme. However, the current financial challenges will adversely affect the ability of WAG and local authorities to fund the wider provision of transport and travel services in general. It is important that these wider impacts on older people are better understood. That transport plays a vitally important role in helping older people maintain their independence and well-being is clear from our research; however not all older people are able to access free bus services. Further research could be undertaken to more comprehensively understand the concerns of older people when they travel, and the quality of services and infrastructure provided. Rail services, community transport, private transport and taxis can all play a role in maintaining people's quality of life, and options should be explored to improve accessibility to these transport

opportunities. The research should also consider the potential implications of changes to current transport provision and accessibility for user groups other than older people, such as younger people and disabled people.

# Appendices

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# Appendix A. Interview Questionnaire





**BUS SERVICE RESEARCH Q7398 (September 2010)**

Good morning/afternoon. My name is.....and I am from QRS Research Ltd, an independent Market Research agency. We are undertaking a survey on behalf of the Older People's Commissioner for Wales, which is Wales's independent advocate for older people to help them understand how people use their concessionary bus pass. It takes approximately 10 minutes and all answers are anonymous and strictly confidential.

**Section A: Frequency and Nature of Bus Use**

**Q1: QUALIFIER:** Can I just check, do you have a concessionary pass?

YES	1	CONTINUE
NO	2	<b>THANK AND CLOSE</b>

**Q2: QUALIFIER:** Do you have a pass because of .....? **SINGLE CODE ONLY**

Your age	1	CONTINUE
Your disability or impairment only	2	<b>THANK AND CLOSE</b>
Both	3	CONTINUE
Other	4	<b>THANK AND CLOSE</b>

**SHOWCARD Q3**

**Q3: QUALIFIER:** How often do you use your concessionary bus pass? **SINGLE CODE ONLY**

Every day	1	CONTINUE
2-6 days a week	2	CONTINUE
About once a week	3	CONTINUE
About once a fortnight	4	CONTINUE
About once a month	5	<b>THANK AND CLOSE</b>
Less than once a month	6	<b>THANK AND CLOSE</b>

**SHOWCARD Q4a****Q4a:** How frequently, if at all, do you use your concessionary bus pass for the following reasons?**SINGLE CODE ONLY PER ACTIVITY**

	Every day	2-6 days a week	About once a week	About once a fortnight	About once a month	Less than once a month	Less often	Never
a) Visiting friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
b) Visiting relatives	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
c) Shopping for food	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
d) Shopping for clothes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
e) Accessing sport/leisure/recreation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
f) Days out/Seeing places of interest/Sightseeing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
g) Going to your GP	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
h) Going to hospital appointments	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
i) Commuting/Business Travel	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
j) Volunteering activities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
k) Other ( <b>please write in</b> )	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

**ASK Q4b-Q6 FOR THOSE ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED AT Q4a CODES 1-7 ONLY.  
TICK ALL THAT APPLY ON Q4b-Q6.**

**SHOWCARD Q4b****Q4b:** On average, how long is your length of journey when you use your concessionary bus pass for these reasons? **SINGLE CODE ONLY PER ACTIVITY**

	Less than 5 minutes	5-9 minutes	10-14 minutes	15-19 minutes	20-24 minutes	25 minutes or more
a) Visiting friends	1	2	3	4	5	6
b) Visiting relatives	1	2	3	4	5	6
c) Shopping for food	1	2	3	4	5	6
d) Shopping for clothes	1	2	3	4	5	6
e) Accessing sport/leisure/recreation	1	2	3	4	5	6
f) Days out/Seeing places of interest/Sightseeing	1	2	3	4	5	6
g) Going to your GP	1	2	3	4	5	6
h) Going to hospital appointments	1	2	3	4	5	6
i) Commuting/Business Travel	1	2	3	4	5	6
j) Volunteering activities	1	2	3	4	5	6
k) Other ( <b>please write in</b> )	1	2	3	4	5	6

**SHOWCARD Q5**

**Q5:** Does having a concessionary bus pass make it easier or more difficult to do the following activities, or does it have no effect? **SINGLE CODE ONLY PER ACTIVITY**

	<b>Easier</b>	<b>No effect</b>	<b>More difficult</b>	<b>Don't know / NA</b> <i>(DO NOT READ OUT)</i>
a) Visiting friends	1	2	3	4
b) Visiting relatives	1	2	3	4
c) Shopping for food	1	2	3	4
d) Shopping for clothes	1	2	3	4
e) Accessing sport/leisure/recreation	1	2	3	4
f) Days out/Seeing places of interest/Sightseeing	1	2	3	4
g) Going to your GP	1	2	3	4
h) Going to hospital appointments	1	2	3	4
i) Commuting/Business Travel	1	2	3	4
j) Volunteering activities	1	2	3	4
k) Other ( <b>please write in</b> )	1	2	3	4

**SHOWCARD Q6**

**Q6:** If you didn't have a concessionary bus pass, which, if any, of these methods would you use to make these types of trip? **SINGLE CODE ONLY PER ACTIVITY**

	<b>Bus</b>	<b>Train</b>	<b>Car – own car</b>	<b>Car – family or friends</b>	<b>Taxi</b>	<b>Walk</b>	<b>Wouldn't make trip</b>
a) Visiting friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b) Visiting relatives	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c) Shopping for food	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d) Shopping for clothes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
e) Accessing sport/leisure/recreation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
f) Days out/Seeing places of interest/Sightseeing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
g) Going to your GP	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
h) Going to hospital appointments	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
i) Commuting/Business Travel	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
j) Volunteering activities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
k) Other ( <b>please write in</b> )	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**SHOWCARD Q7****Q7:** How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your concessionary bus pass?**SINGLE CODE ONLY**

Very satisfied	1
Satisfied	2
Neither nor	3
Dissatisfied	4
Very dissatisfied	5

**Q8:** Other than saving you money, what are the main benefits that the concession bus pass offers you? **PROBE FULLY AND RECORD VERBATIM**

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**SHOWCARD Q9**

**Q9:** And how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following aspects of the bus services that you use? **SINGLE CODE ONLY PER STATEMENT**

	<b>Very satisfied</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>Neither nor</b>	<b>Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Very dissatisfied</b>
a) The frequency of bus services	1	2	3	4	5
b) Availability of buses throughout the day and evening	1	2	3	4	5
c) Ease of getting a seat	1	2	3	4	5
d) The cleanliness of buses	1	2	3	4	5
e) Ease of getting to where you want to go	1	2	3	4	5
f) Overall comfort of buses and the journeys	1	2	3	4	5
g) Ease of getting on and off buses	1	2	3	4	5
h) Overall quality and comfort of the bus stops	1	2	3	4	5
i) The bus driver (e.g. their customer care and driving skills)	1	2	3	4	5

**SHOWCARD Q10**

**Q10:** I am now going to read out some comments that other people have said about the concessionary bus pass. Taking your answer from this card please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each. **SINGLE CODE ONLY PER STATEMENT**

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither nor</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
a) Concessionary bus passes should be replaced with half priced travel	1	2	3	4	5
b) I would feel more lonely and housebound without my bus pass	1	2	3	4	5
c) Concessionary bus passes should only be used off peak	1	2	3	4	5
d) Paying for the concessionary bus pass is an unnecessary burden on taxpayers	1	2	3	4	5
e) I don't need a concessionary bus pass to afford the bus	1	2	3	4	5
f) Without a concessionary bus pass I wouldn't get out and about as much as I do now	1	2	3	4	5
g) Without a pass I would have to rely on family and friends a lot more	1	2	3	4	5
h) Without a pass my quality of life would suffer	1	2	3	4	5
i) Without a bus pass I wouldn't be able to volunteer	1	2	3	4	5
j) Without a bus pass I wouldn't be able to help my family out	1	2	3	4	5
k) I would find it hard to make ends meet if I didn't have a pass	1	2	3	4	5
l) Having a bus pass allows me to be more independent	1	2	3	4	5
m) The concessionary bus pass allows me to get things done more easily	1	2	3	4	5

**Q11:** Do you ever attempt to use your concessionary bus pass to make trips from Wales into England?

YES	1	Go to Q12
NO	2	Skip to Q14

**Ask Q12 for those that answered Yes code 1 @ Q11. All others skip to Q14**

**SHOWCARD Q12**

**Q12:** Which of these phrases best describes how easy or difficult it is to use your concessionary bus pass for trips into England. **SINGLE CODE ONLY**

Very easy	1
Fairly easy	2
Neither easy nor difficult	3
Fairly difficult	4
Very difficult	5

If FAIRLY OR VERY DIFFICULT, Codes 4 or 5 @ Q12 ask.....

**Q13:** Why do you say that it is fairly or very difficult to use your concessionary bus pass for trips into England? **PROBE FULLY AND RECORD VERBATIM**

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**ASK Q14 TO CAMARTHEN AND WREXHAM INTERVIEWS ONLY - OTHERWISE SKIP TO DEMOGRAPHICS**

**Q14:** We are planning to undertake a focus group of concessionary bus pass users where we will talk in more depth about the issues raised in our interview today. The focus group would be held during the daytime at a venue near this location and would last about two hours. Participants would be paid £20 for their time. Would you be interested in taking part in a focus group of concessionary pass users?

YES	1
NO	2

**NOTE TO INTERVIEWER: PLEASE ENSURE YOU TAKE RESPONDENTS CONTACT TELEPHONE NUMBER ON VALIDATION PAGE IF CODED 1 @ Q14.**

**ASK ALL - Section B: Demographics****B1. GENDER**

Male 1  
 Female 2

**B2. AGE:** (Write in exact age and code below): \_\_\_\_\_

60 – 64	1
65 – 69	2
70 – 74	3
75 – 79	4
80+	5
DK / NR	8

**B3. Do you consider yourself to be a disabled person? SINGLE CODE ONLY**

Yes 1  
 No 2

**B4. Can I also ask.....Do you or does anyone else in your household own a car?**

Yes, I own a car	1
Yes, my husband/wife/partner owns a car	2
Nobody in my house owns car	3
Other ( <b>Write in</b> )	4

**B5. What is your annual household income?**

Less than £5k	1
£6k-£7k	2
£8-10k	3
£11-12k	4
£13-15k	5
£16-20k	6
£21-25k	7
£26-£30	8
£31-35k	9
£33-40k	10
More than £40k	11
Refused	12
Don't Know	13

**Q7398 BUS RESEARCH**

**RESPONDENT DETAILS (validation purposes only)**

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

.....

**FULL** POST CODE

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TEL.....

**INTERVIEWER DETAILS**

I confirm that I have undertaken this interview strictly in accordance to your instructions and it was conducted within the Code of Conduct of the Market Research Society with a person unknown to me.

SIGNATURE.....DATE.....

NAME.....



# Appendix B. Focus group discussion guide



## Concessionary Bus Pass Research: Discussion Guide

### Introductions

Introduce self/Mott MacDonald – an independent market research agency commissioned to undertake research on behalf of Older People's Commissioner for Wales.

Explain the process, Data Protection and MR Code of Conduct

Ask permission to audio record the group. Welsh-English interpreter??

### Background:

- Participants to introduce themselves: first name, family, working/retired, lifestyle, how they spend their time etc
- How long have you lived in/around the area? How far from the nearest town centre do you live?

### Travel horizons:

- Tell me about your regular journeys, where are you travelling to?
- How far are the journeys?
- What mode of transport do you generally use?
- Does this vary by distance/type of journey? In what ways?

### Bus journeys and perceptions of bus services:

- How often would you say you use the bus?
- How do you feel about using the bus? What are the positives and negatives about using the bus? *Spontaneous first then probe issues such as:*
  - *reliability of buses*
  - *frequency*
  - *comfort*
  - *cleanliness*
  - *ease of access*
  - *ease of getting a seat*
  - *ease of getting where you want to go/changes required/ routes*
  - *access to bus stops*
  - *drivers*
  - *safety*
  - *fares*
- Do you ever look for information about bus journeys? When/why? Do you ever have to plan bus journeys?
- How easy is it to find the information you want? How do you search for it?
- Are there times when you could use the bus but don't? Tell me about these? *Spontaneous first then probe: night time, Sundays, on my own, if there are too many changes, longer journeys, if food shopping/carrying something large*
- What mode would you use in these situations? Do you have access to a car?

### Concessions:

- How long have you had a concessionary bus pass?
- How often do you use it?
- Why do you use it? Every journey, specific types of trips: *Probe: shopping, for food, for clothes, visiting friends, attending appointments, work/volunteering, days out*
- Are there any trip types that you wouldn't make if you didn't have a concessionary bus pass? Why / not? What types of trips, e.g. days out, volunteering etc.
- How far do you travel using it? (for Wrexham in particular - Do you travel over the border into England? How does that work?)
- Has your travel changed since you had the pass? In what way? *Probe: More journeys, more shorter journeys, change in mode of travel? Do you use your car less now that you have a pass, or do you just travel more often?*
- What's the best thing about having a bus pass?
- What other value do they provide for you? How do you judge value? What criteria are you using to judge the value? *Probe:*
  - *financial value*
  - *independence*
  - *improved QoL*
  - *freedom from relying on family/friends*
  - *able to do more*
  - *able to work/volunteer*
  - *able to visit friends/family*
  - *can access further away places*
- Aside from the above what do you think are the benefits/weaknesses of the concessionary pass? *Spontaneous first then probe: Explore issues such as cost to the tax payer, not valid for services wholly in England, not valid on trains.*
- Do you think there should be any changes made to the concessionary bus pass? *Spontaneous first then suggest potential ideas*

*In England the bus pass can only be used outside of peak hours.*

- *How would you feel about this?*
- *Would it have any impacts on you?*

*Some people have suggested that concessionary passes should be replaced by half price travel instead.*

- *How would you feel about this?*
- *Would it have any impacts on you?*
- *How about a flat fee for a journey? E.g. 50p for any journey?*
- *How would you feel about this?*
- *Would it have any impacts on you?*

*There is a suggestion that concessionary bus passes are an unnecessary burden on tax payers?*

- *How do you feel about this?*
- *Would it have any impacts on you?*
  
- If you didn't have a concessionary bus pass would it impact on your life? In what ways?

**Other concessions:**

- Are you aware of any other concessionary passes? E.g. for rail?
- Do you have any other concessionary tickets?

If yes:

- What for?
- How often do you use it?
- When would you use this instead on bus pass? *Probe: types of journeys*

**Sum up**