

---

**DARLINGTON CONCESSIONARY FARE TRAVEL SCHEMES 2006/2007**

---

**Responsible Cabinet Member(s) - Councillor Nick Wallis,  
Highways and Transport Portfolio**

**Responsible Director(s) - John Buxton, Director of Development and Environment**

---

**Purpose of Report**

1. To propose a course of action in view of the uncertainties around the revised statutory concessionary fare travel scheme giving free travel on local bus services (for people aged over 60 and people with travel disabilities) due for implementation from 1 April 2006.

**Information and Analysis**

***Current Situation***

2. Since 2001, the Council has participated in an operator provided prepaid bus pass, giving eligible users the ability to travel on local bus services without payment of fares in return for a single up front payment. This discretionary scheme developed out of a tradition whereby many residents receiving travel tokens under a previous scheme redeemed them for an operator season ticket rather than for individual journeys. The current prepaid pass is available in two forms, namely:
  - (a) An Urban Bus Pass giving free travel in the urban area of Darlington and half fare travel in rural areas in the Borough.
  - (b) A Borough Bus Pass giving free travel throughout the Borough of Darlington.
3. Prepaid passes are normally issued in either six monthly or yearly time periods, although new applicants can purchase a pass for the balance of the Council financial year that they are joining in.
4. The prepaid bus pass scheme is due to end on 31 March 2006, prior to the introduction of the new statutory scheme.
5. The Council also offers a statutory bus pass under the requirements of the Transport Act 2000. This pass is locally branded as a Standard Bus Pass and gives users the ability to travel for half fare on local bus services throughout the Borough. There is currently no charge for this pass and the current issue will not expire until 31 March 2009 (but see below).
6. The Council also offers taxi vouchers as an alternative to the use of a bus pass. Vouchers were introduced in 2001 to replace the previous token based system and continue to provide eligible people who were unable to use conventional bus services with a travel concession.

This discretionary scheme was reviewed by Cabinet on 7 June 2005 following a detailed report by consultants, JMP Limited on behalf of the Council (JMP researched usage and views amongst users and non-users of the scheme and analysed options. The vouchers are redeemable on all taxis and private hire vehicles licensed by the Council or the Traffic Commissioners (where the owner has other vehicles/staff licensed by the Authority). The vouchers are also redeemable on Ring-a-Ride services and are for all journeys where the start, finish or both is within the Borough boundary.

7. Table 1 summarises the passes available in 2005/06

Pass Type	Details	Cost to user	Number taking up passes as at 1 October 2005
Urban 6/12 months	Free travel in the urban area of Darlington and ½ fare in the rural area for 6 or 12 months	£40 or £80	3,133
Borough 6/12 months	Free travel throughout the Borough for 6 or 12 months	£45 or £90	955
Standard/Half Fare	Travel throughout the Borough until 31 March 2009	Free	8545
Taxi Vouchers/£50 book of £1 vouchers per year	For use on taxis/PHVs/Ring a Ride with at least one trip end in the Borough	Free	1013

8. In addition to the receipts from the passholders of the prepaid pass (estimated as £336,590 in 2005/6) a Council budget of £779,020 has been set for 2005/6, including £77,000 approved by Cabinet in May 2005 for 2005/6 only. Development and Environment Department's MTFP includes £713,000 for Concessionary Fares in 2006/07.

***The New Statutory Bus Pass***

9. In his 2005 budget, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the introduction of a new national concessionary fare travel scheme from 1 April 2006, giving free travel on local bus services to eligible people. People who are over 60 or who have a legally defined travel disability will, from this date, be able to travel free on all local bus services within their administrative area between 09:30 and 23:00 Monday to Friday and all day at weekends.
10. The new national scheme replaces the current half fare scheme (the Darlington standard bus pass). Councils may choose to add discretionary elements according to the needs of their local populations - for instance, on Teesside it is hoped to continue the current cross-boundary travel arrangements.
11. Some uncertainty exists at the time of writing about the additional sum of money being made available to the Council to undertake this new responsibility, since the Government will not make a final announcement until late November/early December. It is provisionally expected that the sum of £669,000 in 2006/07 will be made available to support the increased costs incurred by the Council, although a figure of £857,000 has been shown on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's website. There is therefore

considerable uncertainty around this figure.

### ***Tees Valley Aspirations***

12. The Tees Valley authorities, through the Joint Strategy Unit, commissioned consultants TAS to examine options for a joint scheme across the five districts and identify the costs of such a scheme and of a number of potential enhancements relating to time of day and cross boundary travel. There is an aspiration across the other authorities on Teesside to have a joint scheme allowing free travel within the Tees Valley and, should funding permit, also offer cross boundary travel into adjacent areas, provided that one trip end is within the Tees Valley.

### ***Needs of Local People***

13. As part of the JMP report into Darlington's concessionary fare schemes, both users and eligible non-users were asked about their preferences if improvements were to be made. Since the questionnaire was based on the offer of a paid for pass, many of the conclusions about cost and value for money are no longer relevant. However the need for some users to travel outside of the Borough was a key concern, particularly to County Durham to reach hospitals and other services.
14. User behaviour also shows that many current users travel before 09:30 Monday to Friday to access facilities such as Darlington Market and health services.

### ***Discretionary Additional Elements***

15. Under the new scheme, the Council is free to add discretionary elements to the statutory scheme as it sees fit. As detailed above, the Tees Valley area local authorities are hoping to introduce a cross boundary scheme comparable to the one which currently operates in Middlesbrough and Stockton. Cost is, however, an issue since until negotiations are completed with local bus operators, no local Council knows exactly how much the new arrangements will cost.
16. In view of user comments, user behaviour and the Tees Valley aspirations, should funding permit, the following discretionary elements could be added, in order, to the new statutory bus pass from 1 April 2006:
  - (a) A taxi voucher scheme, as at present, to cater for those who meet the Council's eligibility criteria with an annual value of £50, it is recommended that this continues without change.
  - (b) The ability to use the standard bus pass all day Monday to Friday within the Borough.
  - (c) The ability to use the standard bus pass all day Monday to Friday within the Borough and outside the Borough, provided one trip end is within the Borough.
  - (d) The ability to use the standard bus pass anywhere within the Tees Valley and outside the Tees Valley, provided one trip end is within the Tees Valley.

17. In view of the considerable uncertainties of available resources and the cost of the statutory scheme, it is recommended that the discretionary elements at (a) to (d) in the above paragraphs be decided by the Director of Development and Environment, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, taking into account the financial position of the Council. Timescales for serving relevant notices to bring in discretionary elements at the same time as the statutory free scheme are such that decisions will need to be taken in the very early New Year. Additional discretionary elements would become affordable only if Government grant was received at a higher level than anticipated..

### **Costs**

18. The precise costs to the Council are dependent on negotiation of the formula for payments to bus operators, and on scheme details, pass take up and usage, but it is estimated that the most likely outturn value in 2006/07 for a full year could be about £1,423,000 for the basic scheme. This value is also highly dependent on negotiations with bus operators. Of this sum, £669,000 would be income received from Government, leaving the balance of about £754,000, to be funded by the Council. This is £41,000 more than resources earmarked in the MTFP for 2006/07 set in the Medium Term Financial Plan, or about £100,000 more than anticipated resources including the taxi voucher scheme.

### **Outcome of Consultation**

19. The outcome of consultations with users and non-users is set out in paragraphs 13 and 14 above. Consultations with bus operators are in progress.

### **Legal Implications**

20. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

### **Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

21. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

### **Council Policy Framework**

22. The issues contained within this report do not represent change to Council policy or the Council's policy framework

### **Decision Deadline**

23. For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this is an urgent matter as three months notice of changes to the concessionary bus scheme is required to be given to the bus operators.

## **Key Decisions**

24. This is a key decision and has been advertised in the Forward Plan.

## **Recommendations**

25. It is recommended that:

- (a) The Council amends the standard bus pass scheme to reflect the new conditions set by Government from the 1 April 2006 and continues with the taxi voucher scheme.
- (b) The Director of Development and Environment be authorised to make any necessary administrative arrangements to implement the concessionary fare travel schemes, including the addition of any discretionary elements as set out in this report, should funding permit, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport.

## **Reasons**

26. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:

- (a) To meet legal obligations placed upon the Council.
- (b) To implement the requirements of the new statutory scheme (and any discretionary add-ons) in a timely and effective manner.

**John Buxton**  
**Director of Development and Environment**

## **Background Papers**

- (i) JMP Study Report 2005
- (ii) TAS Study Report 2005

Simon Houldsworth : Extension 2701  
cc