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for Transport

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- 4 JUL 2016

*Dear Maggie*

I would like to clarify the position of concessionary travel as you raised this in the committee debates on the Bus Services Bill on 29<sup>th</sup> June. The English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) was introduced in April 2008 to provide free England-wide off-peak bus travel to eligible older and disabled people. The purpose of providing free local bus travel England-wide is to ensure that no older or disabled person in England need be prevented from bus travel by cost alone.

The Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007, which provides the basis for the ENCTS, modified previous legislation from 2000 which guaranteed initially half fare and then free off-peak local bus travel in England **only within** the area of the local authority in which an eligible person resided.

As well as having to provide for the ENCTS, local authorities are able to offer their own local discretionary schemes. For example extending the ENCTS to peak travel, allowing companion travellers for disabled people or youth concessions.

A number of reviews of the related guidance in this area have taken place over recent years. However these have tended to be technical in nature rather than of the broader policy. For example:

- how the accuracy of the 'no worse off, no better off' reimbursement regime<sup>1</sup> which exists between Travel Concession Authorities (the local authorities which issue ENCTS passes) and operators can be strengthened; and
- updating the guidance Travel Concession Authorities follow for assessing the eligibility of disabled people for concessionary travel<sup>2</sup>

My earlier letter to Lord Bradshaw, which he mentioned in the debate, referred to the command paper we laid in April on the post implementation review of the statutory reimbursement arrangements for concessionary travel. This review concluded that: the objectives and rationale for intervention were correct, that the Regulations had achieved the objectives they set out to; positive wider benefits had been generated; and there had been no significant unintended consequences. The command paper is available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/518497/mtc-england-regulations-2011-post-implementation-review-print-version.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/518497/mtc-england-regulations-2011-post-implementation-review-print-version.pdf)

There have been no formal reviews nor are there currently any plans to undertake any reviews, to consider either removing, restricting or expanding the current scheme. Concessionary travel is addressed under the following Conservative Party manifesto commitment:

"Our commitment to you... protect pensioner benefits, including the free bus pass, TV licenses and Winter Fuel Payment"

In terms of concessions for the young, the Government recognises the importance of buses to young people and that the cost of travel can cause difficulty for those seeking education, training or employment opportunities. We entirely understand the reasons for wanting to support further travel concessions.

Nevertheless, there are no plans at present to introduce a statutory national bus travel concession for young people in England, given the current pressures on the public finances. In England, currently around £1 billion a year is spent on concessionary travel and any extensions to the scope of the statutory minimum would bring with them associated costs. The Government

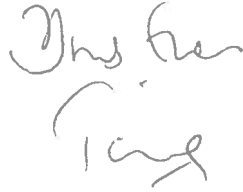
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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-reimbursing-bus-operators-for-concessionary-travel>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-local-authorities-on-eligibility-for-disabled-people>

is focusing its efforts on finding efficiencies in delivering the existing national concession to help the financial stability of the scheme.

I have placed a copy of this letter in the Libraries of both Houses

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ahmad" followed by a flourish.

**LORD AHMAD**