

Overview & Scrutiny Committee 1

PARTNERSHIPS, REGENERATION,
COMMUNITY SAFETY &
ENGAGEMENT



Concessionary Bus Fare Scheme - Possible variation to scheme

October 2009



NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Index

Chair's Foreword	2
Executive Summary	3
Final Report including recommendations	7

Foreword

The Appreciative Inquiry into the Concessionary Bus Fares Scheme was established in 2008. The setting up of the inquiry followed representations on variations being made at Council in May 2008. Subsequently, the matter was referred to Cabinet by Council (2nd June 2008) and on to Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 (25th June 2008).

In order to achieve a cost-effective exercise, the main evidence for the report – the bus pass user survey – was coordinated with mailing out to bus pass-holders for the National Fraud Initiative, requested by the Audit Commission. This necessarily lengthened the consultation process, together with the considerable data collation following a good response (20% of surveys sent out) and considerable interest from the participants in the consultation.

The Inquiry has highlighted a number of issues and it is anticipated that the findings and recommendations, if adopted, will contribute to major improvements in the Concessionary Bus Fares Scheme in Northampton.

I should like to thank all those people acknowledged below who gave up their time to contribute to this review.



Councillor Sadik Chaudhury

Chair, Concessionary Fares Appreciative Inquiry

Acknowledgements to all those who took part in the Review: -

Appreciative Inquiry Members:

- Cllr Sadik Chaudhury (Chair - 2009)
- Cllr Tony Clarke
- Cllr Ifty Choudary
- Cllr Paul Varnsberry (Chair –2008)
- Paul Lewin, Planning Policy and Heritage Manager, Planning and Regeneration
- Richard Holmes, Principal Planner, Planning and Regeneration

Mr Rashmi Shah – representations to Inquiry/Committee

Cheryl Doran, Assistant Head of Customer Services – Charging Review

Matt Gamble, Atkins – Consultants Report

Members of Pensioners Forum

Members of Disabled People's Forum

Lindsey Ambrose, Forums Officer, Policy and Community Engagement

Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer, Policy and Governance

Concessionary Travel Authorities responding to survey

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Appreciative Inquiry is tasked with the consideration, in conjunction with public consultation, of possible variations to the Concessionary Bus Travel Scheme currently operated by the Borough Council. The setting up of the inquiry followed representations on variations being made at Council in May 2008. Subsequently, the matter was referred to Cabinet by Council (2nd June 2008) and on to Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 (25th June 2008).
- 1.2 The Inquiry is focused on a number of possible variations to the current concessionary scheme. The purpose of the Review is to recommend, following consultation and investigation, variations to the scheme, which should be the subject of further consideration by Cabinet/full Council.
- 1.3 The main possible variations to the scheme, under considerations are:
 - Late evening travel after 11pm – Mondays to Thursdays.
 - Morning Travel before 9.30am – Mondays to Fridays
 - The current statutory scheme in Northampton offers all-day free bus travel Saturday and Sunday. *Although the above possible variations have been identified separately with separate impacts and resource implications, the most practical means of introduction would be 24-hour free bus travel on weekdays by combining the two.*
 - Free bus travel for companions to Disabled pass-holders
 - Free companion travel for Disabled pass-holders from all Northamptonshire Districts (NBC bear the cost when the pass-holder boards the bus In Northampton). This would be reciprocated when Northampton pass-holders travel in other districts.
 - Possible charging for replacement passes when lost.

CONCLUSIONS AND KEY FINDINGS

A significant amount of evidence was assembled, details of which are contained in the report. After gathering evidence the Committee established that: -

After all of the evidence was collated the following conclusions were drawn: -

- The Consultants Report on the impact of potential changes principally provides a forecast of resources required to implement the proposals. It has been modified in the light of changing circumstances and forecasts, particularly in respect of changes in policy in other districts in the County.

- The Consultation Survey of Bus Pass Users has indicated a strong preference for all the proposed changes to be introduced and this has been reinforced by further consultation with Forums.
- The limited consultation with other Concessionary Travel Authorities needs to be seen in the context of being a random cross-section of authorities without a detailed look at travel patterns and other factors within these areas. In this sense, although the cross section have largely introduced discretionary elements into their schemes, the need for comparison within Northamptonshire is seen as more important to the exercise.
- The Department for Transport consultation on possible administrative changes has provided an important context for planning the future of the service. Whilst it is still at the consultative stage, the most likely outcome is transfer of responsibility to the County Council and their desire to have a clear scheme conforming to one set of rules. This need for conformity would apply, possibly with greater emphasis, were responsibilities to be transferred to regional or national level.
- The need for a uniform scheme which is clear both to bus users and bus companies is emphasised by the introduction of an electronic recognition system on the buses, due to commence in Autumn 2009. The 'smartcard' technology is complex in its introduction and variations should be kept to a minimum
- The impact of introducing a charge for replacement passes has been set out, for members' consideration.
- A key preliminary study to this evidence is the Equality Impact Assessment, which has a fundamental influence on the forecasting of the impact of proposals.
- In summary, the elements proposed can be assessed within the broad areas of the evidence presented – resource implications, results of consultation, the need for conformity within the County and the equality impact.

Introduction of Companion Travel for eligible disabled pass-holders within Northampton

Introduction of Companion Travel for eligible disabled pass-holders from other Northamptonshire districts

- The resource implication has been estimated at £40,000 if introduced in 2010-11

- A clear majority in the consultation survey (87%) were in favour of the proposal
- In terms of a uniform scheme within the County, 5 districts have this discretionary element in place and introduction in Northampton would reinforce this.
- The equality impact assessment has identified the non-inclusion of these elements of the scheme as a major barrier to achieving full equality within the scheme.

Introduction of All-Day Free Travel: Monday-Friday

- The resource implication has been forecasted as £386,000 if introduced in 2010-11. Lower estimates have emerged from consultation with other authorities outside the County but there is a strong likelihood that the above estimate will be reached and it needs to be quoted as a risk implication. In addition, the introduction of free all-day travel may attract claims for capital expenditure from bus operators, which could incur additional expenditure.
- A clear majority in the consultation survey (89%) were in favour of free travel before 9.30am.
- In terms of a uniform scheme within the County, 4 districts do not have this discretionary element in place and 2 further districts are reviewing a possible change away from the discretionary free all-day travel to the statutory position i.e. no free travel before 9.30am. The retention of the statutory scheme in Northampton would reinforce this majority of districts adhering to free travel only being offered after 9.30am.
- The equality impact assessment has identified the inclusion or non-inclusion of this element of the scheme as having no significant impact on achieving full equality within the scheme.
- The evidence from other concessionary travel authorities, which is a random cross-section, differs from the County situation and together with the strong lobby for the proposal from the bus user survey and other representations may prompt the need for further member consideration of the options.
- This further consideration could include the introduction within the scheme of selective 'all day travel' elements, as discussed later in the report (pages 9-11) :
 - Free weekday late night travel 11pm-4pm
 - Free all-day travel for disabled pass-holders only

Possible Charging for Replacement Bus Passes

- The resource implication of introducing a £10 charge (which reflects real costs) is estimated as an income to the authority of £12,000 per annum.
- A clear majority in the consultation survey (59%) were in favour of introducing a charge.
- In terms of a uniform scheme within the County, all other districts have a charge in place and introduction in Northampton would reinforce this.

- It would also anticipate the possible administration of the scheme in future by the County Council.
- The proposal would not impact on equality within the scheme and would improve the service in helping to reduce any fraudulent use of passes

RECOMMENDATIONS

The above overall findings have formed the basis for the following recommendations:

- That Companion Travel for eligible disabled pass-holders, both within Northampton and for eligible disabled pass-holders from other Northamptonshire districts be introduced in Northampton from April 2010, in the Northamptonshire Concessionary Travel Scheme 2010-11.
- – That, in view of the clear support for and priority given to the introduction of all-day weekday free bus travel in the public consultation undertaken, Cabinet be asked to consider the introduction of this discretionary element in the concessionary travel scheme for Northampton or selective elements of the proposal as set out in the report.
- That a charge for replacement bus passes be introduced as soon as practicable – the recommended charge to reflect administration and production costs being £10.

Northampton Borough Council

Report of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 (Partnerships, Regeneration, Community Safety and Engagement)

Concessionary Bus Fares Scheme – Appreciative Inquiry into Possible Variations of the Scheme

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The Appreciative Inquiry is tasked with the consideration, in conjunction with public consultation, of possible variations to the Concessionary Bus Travel Scheme currently operated by the Borough Council. The setting up of the inquiry followed representations on variations being made at Council in May 2008. Subsequently, the matter was referred to Cabinet by Council (2nd June 2008) and on to Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 (25th June 2008).
- 1.2 The Inquiry is focused on a number of possible variations to the current concessionary scheme. The purpose of the Review is to recommend, following consultation and investigation, variations to the scheme, which should be the subject of further consideration by Cabinet/full Council.

2. Context and Background

- 2.1 The Transport Act 2000 introduced a national minimum standard for local authority concessionary bus travel schemes of half-fare travel for older and disabled people. In 2002, this was extended to include all aged 60 and over.
- 2.2 Since April 2006, travel concession authorities (TCAs which are districts in shire areas or unitary authorities) have been required to provide their residents who are 60 and over, or disabled, with at least free off-peak local bus travel in their local area. Northampton Borough Council provided the statutory concession with free travel after 9.30am: this statutory provision has continued with the introduction of the national concession scheme.
- 2.3 The Chancellor announced, in the 2006 Budget, that the statutory minimum entitlement was to be further extended to free off-peak local bus travel anywhere in England from 1 April 2008. The Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007 provided for this further improvement. Grant funding from the Department for Transport has been allocated to districts, in anticipation of the additional resources required as a result of greater bus usage by concessionary pass-holders. (The Borough Council reimburses operators for bus journeys where the pass-holder starts the journey in Northampton)

- 2.4 An annual concessionary travel scheme is provided jointly by all the districts in Northamptonshire together with the County Council, the latter administering the scheme and coordinating reimbursement to the bus companies. The Northamptonshire Joint Travel Concession Scheme for 2010-11 will commence on 1st April 2010. Any variations to the scheme currently being considered could be incorporated into the scheme, to commence in April 2010.
- 2.5 Reimbursement for the free bus travel is made to bus companies on the basis of detailed guidance and methods of calculation provided by the Department for Transport. The current budget prediction for 2009-10 is £2.9m and for 2010-11 the current forecast is £3.7m. These budget forecasts do not include allowance for any introduction of the variations to be discussed. The shortfall in allocated Central Government funding for many local authorities has been the subject of much discussion and representation, coordinated by the Local Government Association. The effect of the shortfall on Northampton is that the local revenue i.e. Council Tax element of the budget is predicted at £1m for 2009-10 and £1.8m for 2010-11.
- 2.6 The current scheme offers the concession to residents aged 60 and over and residents with eligible disabilities for free bus travel. The current scheme offers free bus travel between 9.30am and 11pm Mon-Fri and all day at weekends. At present, there is no provision for companions to travel free with disabled residents. The variations under consideration are:
- Late evening travel after 11pm.
 - Morning Travel before 9.30am

Although the above possible variations have been identified separately with separate impacts and resource implications, the most practical means of introduction would be 24-hour free bus travel on weekdays by combining the two.

- Free bus travel for companions to Disabled pass-holders
 - Free companion travel for Disabled pass-holders from all Northamptonshire Districts (NBC bear the cost when the pass-holder boards the bus In Northampton). This would be reciprocated when Northampton pass-holders travel in other districts.
 - Possible charging for replacement passes when lost.
 - Other arrangements required, to ensure the inclusion of all eligible residents in application procedures.
 - Other measures to ensure that the use of free travel and mobility benefits is extended to all eligible sections of the population.
- 2.7 The aim of the background legislation is:
- A) to encourage the use of sustainable public transport
 - B) to improve the social inclusion, mobility and well-being of the eligible groups through greater access to public transport and destinations

2.8 Council's Corporate Priorities

2.8.1 This Review links to the Council's corporate priorities as it demonstrates a commitment:

- A) to customer service and choice and equality of opportunity ('customers at the heart of what we do')
- B) to 'partnership working and engaging with our communities' by providing the service in partnership with Northamptonshire County Council and District Councils and addressing the needs of those residents eligible for free bus travel.

3. Evidence Collection

3.1. In scoping this Review it was decided that evidence would be collected from a variety of sources: -

3.2. Consultants Report on impact of potential changes to scheme

3.2.1 A scoping report for introducing discretionary elements into the existing Concessionary Fares Scheme has been commissioned from Atkins Transportation and Management. The work has been funded from the allocation for research within the Concessionary Fares Budget.

3.2.2 Key points of evidence

- The table below outlines the main points of the scoping report.

Number of Pass holders estimated at 31 March 2009 – basis for report findings	28,000
Current total mid September 2009	29,833 (increase accords with forecast in report)
Introduction of Companion Travel for eligible disabled pass-holders within Northampton	Estimated increase in number of disabled passes issued 22% with a medium resource implication £37,000
Introduction of Companion Travel for eligible disabled pass-holders from other Northamptonshire Districts	Estimated number of disabled passes in other Northamptonshire Districts 431 – low resource implication £2,000
Introduction of Free Travel from 23.00pm to 4.00am Mon to Fri	Disabled pass-holders – no resource implication 60 and over pass-holders – low resource implication £1,600

Introduction of Free Travel before 9.30am Mon- Fri – Disabled Pass-Holders only	Disabled pass-holders – medium resource implication – £20,000
Introduction of Free Travel before 9.30am Mon- Fri - 60 and over Pass-holders only	60 and over pass-holders – major resource implication <u>- Major resource implication £280,000</u>
Introduction of Free Travel before 9.30am Mon- Fri – ALL PASS-HOLDERS	<u>- Major resource implication £300,000</u>

- The report was produced in December 2008 in advance of the public consultation exercise undertaken. Several key aspects of the findings require revision in the light of changing circumstances and forecasts:
 - At the time of the report, Northampton was the only district not to offer companion travel to disabled pass-holders, to enable a companion to travel on the same pass, in order to assist the disabled person in their bus travel. Corby District has now withdrawn companion travel within their district. However, the majority of districts (5) still offer companion travel and the issue has been identified as a ‘high risk’ equality issue in the Equalities Impact Assessment, to be discussed later in this report.
 - At the time of the report, Northampton and South Northamptonshire were the only districts not offering all day weekday concessionary travel. With the impact of the recession and budget restraints, the balance has changed as detailed in the table below.

Comparison of discretionary policy with Northamptonshire districts

District	Free Companion bus travel for disabled pass-holders 2009	Free bus travel for all pass-holders pre 9.30am weekdays 2008	Free bus travel for all pass-holders pre 9.30am weekdays 2009-10
Corby	No (Recent change in response to budget considerations)	Yes	No – changed in April 2009
Daventry	Yes	Yes	No – from 1st Nov 2009

Kettering	Yes	Yes	Yes – Understood that reversion to 9.30 start (No) is under consideration
Northampton	No	No	No
South Northants	Yes	No	No
Wellingborough	Yes	Yes	Yes - Understood that reversion to 9.30 start (No) is under consideration
East Northants	Yes	Yes	Yes – Decision made to retain free pre 9.30am travel
Districts offering concession	Yes – 5 No -2	Yes – 5 No - 2	At present Yes – 3 (2 subject to change) No - 4

- The resource implications of the possible variations in the report were based on the budget forecast for reimbursement to bus companies for 2009-10. Applying the findings to the 2010-11 budget forecast shows a substantial increase. The major resource implication would be for the introduction of all day weekday travel – 2010-11 Budget forecast of £3.7m gives a resource implication for all day travel of £386,000.
- Regarding Late evening travel after 11pm and Morning Travel before 9.30am, separate introduction would be more confusing to drivers and bus users. Although the above possible variations have been identified separately with separate impacts and resource implications, the most practical means of introduction would be 24-hour free bus travel on weekdays by combining the two. However, separate elements could be considered:

Elements of free all-day weekday travel proposal

- *It can be seen that the resource implication of introducing free weekday late night travel from 11pm to 4am is very small in relation to the cost of pre 9.30am free travel and on that basis it could be introduced as an independent element. In view of the limited opportunity for bus travel at late night, this proposal is relatively easy to introduce at minimal cost in terms of the overall budget.*
- *Similarly, the introduction of free pre-9.30am travel for disabled pass-holders has a medium resource implication,(which is a small proportion of the cost, were the discretion to be extended to all pass-holders). However, there is potential for inequality in extending the scheme to a section of the bus users. Whilst the lobby by disabled bus users has been centred on the need to attend early hospital appointments etc, there will be many residents over 60 who are attending early*

medical/hospital appointments and many of them may be old and frail. So this selective introduction could have its problems.

- It was established in the report that the introduction of Companion Travel for disabled pass-holders living in Northampton would result in an estimated 22% increase in the number of disabled passes issued. This would result in a resource implication of approximately £40,000 per annum.
- The report also examined the introduction of Companion Travel for disabled pass-holders from other districts totally 431 in December 2008. These people are reimbursed by NBC when they board buses in Northampton – mainly to go home to surrounding districts. The introduction of this variation has an estimated modest resource implication of approx £2,000 per annum.
- In respect of the possible introduction of all day weekday free travel, the report recognises that the behaviour of passengers in the face of a move to an all-day scheme is uncertain. The shift of concessionary journey times to pre 9.30am inevitably involves the authority paying for reimbursement, when previously the pass-holder was paying a fare before 9.30am. The report uses Bedford as an example for prediction of the effects.
- The other town in Stagecoach East's operating area of a comparable size and with a comparable bus network to Northampton is Bedford. Bedford operates an all-day concessionary fares scheme and data was obtained from Stagecoach East for the report research. The data suggested that 10% of all concessionary trips were before 9.30am (Mon-Fri) and that a move from statutory minimum (as Northampton) to an all-day scheme would increase trips by 10.42%. This estimated increase has been used to predict the resource implication.

3.3 Consultation Survey of Bus Pass Users

- 3.3.1 Consultation with current concessionary pass holders was carried out in April/May 2009. The survey was in conjunction with a mailing out to all 28,000 residents holding a pass, which was required for the National Fraud Initiative exercise requested by the Audit Commission. 6,000 questionnaires were sent to a random sample of over 20% of current pass-holders. The response to the survey was very positive with over 21% of forms being returned (1267 returns). In addition, the consultation was available on the Council's web pages and 41 replies were received on-line.
- 3.3.2 A separate Consultation Monitoring Form was sent out with the 6,000 survey questionnaires and the results have provided an age and ethnic origin profile of respondents (as well as indicating their preferences for future consultation). The return of these forms has also been to a similar level to the main survey (1200 20%). This information has been

used to inform the Equality Impact Assessment, to be discussed later in this report.

3.3.3 The sample consultation of 20% of bus pass users gave a good cross-section of opinion on the issues and clear priorities emerged to inform further consideration. Also, the consultation exercise in conjunction with the Audit Commission requirement for mailing out represented a 'value for money' exercise.

3.3.4 Key points of evidence

- A summary of replies to the survey is outlined in the following table :

Bus Pass User Survey – Summary of Results

Question	Strongly Agree/Agree	Disagree/Strongly Disagree
<p>Q1. Include late evening travel?</p> <p>Never travel after 11pm 64%</p> <p>No late journeys by bus 79%</p> <p>If free after 11pm, would you use a bus more? Yes 24%</p>	59%	41%
<p>Q5. Include morning travel before 9.30am?</p> <p>Never travel before 9.30am 5%</p> <p>Daily/Weekly travel before 9.30am 49%</p> <p>All or some journeys made by bus before 9.30am 77%</p> <p>If free before 9.30am, would you use a bus more? 79%</p>	89%	11%
<p>Q10. Include free companion travel for disabled pass-holders?</p>	87%	13%

<p>Bus travel restricted by companion not travelling free? Very/sometimes 18%</p> <p>Would you apply for a companion pass if introduced? 10%</p>		
<p>Q13. Include free companion travel between other Northamptonshire districts?</p> <p>Travel to other districts? Daily/Weekly -10%</p>	86%	14%
<p>Q17. Do you agree with a charge for replacement bus passes?</p> <p>Suggested charge £5 – 69% £10 – 8%</p> <p>Other – 23%: Of which (%age of total answers) 2% - no amount given 2% - no charge 4% - £1 11% - £2 or £2.50 4% - £3</p> <p>Lost a pass? – Never – 92% Yes – 8%</p> <p>Had a pass stolen? – 2%</p>	59%	41%

Q15. Which of the possible changes is most important?

Respondents putting the option first

Late evening travel (11pm +)	Early morning travel before 9.30am	Free companion travel
3%	88%	9%

Q21. Have you experienced any access issues applying for a bus pass?

Yes 2%

Q26. Employment Status?

Employed 13% Seeking work 1% Retired/not working 86%

- A variation to include free travel before 9.30am was strongly supported by 89% of replies and 88% identified this change as their first option, when asked which change was most important. 79% of respondents said that, if free early morning travel was introduced, they would use the bus more often at this time. At present, 77% of the replies indicated that, when they traveled before 9.30am, all or some of their journeys were made by bus paying a fare.
- When asked what journeys needed to be made before 9.30am, the purpose was:
 - Work 5%
 - Medical Appointment 42%
 - Voluntary work 7%
 - Leisure 22%
 - Social/visiting 14%
 - Shopping 5%
 - Other 5%

This reflects the employment status of respondents with 14% employed/seeking work and 86% retired/not working.

- The introduction of free companion travel for disabled pass-holders both in Northampton and the County was strongly supported, 87% agreeing with the change in both cases. 20% of respondents said that their bus travel was restricted by the lack of free companion travel and 17% said that, if companion travel were introduced, they would use a bus more often.
- 11% of replies said that they would apply for a companion pass if free companion travel were introduced. This reinforces the forecast of 'take up' in the consultant's report on the impact of proposals
- 59% of replies supported the introduction of a charge for replacement bus passes, when the original pass is lost. The majority (69%) felt that a £5 charge would be appropriate.
- A very small number of replies (2%) referred to any problems in obtaining a pass. This reflects the efficient and robust system in place, administered by Customer Services, following the initial contract delay problems in setting up the national pass in April 2008.

- A large number of comments accompanied the survey replies with many positive comments on the current scheme and much lobbying for the changes proposed. Many of the comments were informative to the exercise e.g. explaining the condition of certain disabilities and the need for free companion travel to give pass-holders greater independence (teenagers with disabilities being able to travel with their friends rather than their parents, for example).
- The results of the Consultation Monitoring Form established that pass-holders represented a cross-section of the community with no significant concerns about exclusion from the scheme. The results in terms of equality strands are attached at Appendix 1.

3.4 Consultation with NBC Pensioners Forum, NBC Disabled People's Forum and other local organisations, dealing with disability/equality issues.

3.4.1 Initial consultation at the start of the Inquiry took place with the Pensioners and Disabled People's Forums. The Pensioners Event held in September 2008 also involved a useful discussion of the issues and the return of 30 draft questionnaires, which aided the final design of the bus pass survey form. Mr Rashmi Shah has made several presentations on his concerns (as a blind bus pass-holder) to the Appreciative Inquiry and to Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1, which have helped to inform the process of the Inquiry.

3.4.2 Further consultation with the two Forums has recently taken place on the Equality Impact Assessment for the concessionary fares scheme and possible changes.

3.4.3 Key points of evidence

- Discussion at Forum meetings has centred on general agreement that the proposed changes to the scheme should be implemented, very much in line with the feedback for the user survey.
- The Pensioners Event held on 25th September 2008 was very helpful in promoting group discussion on topics. A summary of relevant issues raised is given in Appendix 2.
- A number of relevant organisations focused on residents with disability and the elderly were contacted for their views. The responses have been limited and most of these have been individuals or groups responding to the user survey – these have been included in the summary discussed earlier.

- The Northamptonshire Learning Disability Board was a principal point of contact. They have expressed their concern that people with learning disabilities have to pay to use buses before 9.30am and that carers must pay to travel with the person they support.
- Northampton Door to Door Service is a specialist non-profit bus operator, which has been supported by the Borough Council for a number of years. The service strongly supports the issue of companion passes to disabled residents. The staff are aware that people are more restricted in using the service because free travel is not available for essential companions/carers.

3.5 Consultation with/Information from other Concessionary Travel Authorities

3.5.1 A number of authorities were selected for consultation on the basis of locality and also similar population size and characteristics. The response has been positive and a summary of the results is given below.

3.5.2 Key points of evidence

- A small number of authorities replied to the selective consultation. However, it does provide a useful cross-section indicating that the majority of those replying include discretionary elements in their scheme. The variations introduced also provide possible options for consideration. The details are shown in Table 1 of Appendix 3.
- The consultation was also used as a means of assessing the cost of discretionary elements within the overall schemes. A range of 0.9% to 6.1% of the total concessionary fares scheme emerged from those authorities outside Northamptonshire, which sent a reply. The details are shown in Table 2 of Appendix 3. If the highest percentage is applied to Northampton's budget for 2010-11, the resource implication of introducing discretionary elements is £226,000. It should be stressed that the replies represent a very small cross-section of authorities and this must influence the validity of the exercise.
- Comparisons with local districts are also helpful. In 2008-09, in Corby, discretionary elements amounted to 11% of the budget for pre 9.30am free travel and 9% for companion travel. Both these elements have now been withdrawn in Corby. In Daventry, the discretionary part of the scheme budget was 13%. These proportions accord more closely with the detailed comparison with Bedford undertaken by Atkins, as discussed earlier.
- The exercise illustrates that as with so many aspects of concessionary fares forecasting, local travel patterns and patronages are difficult to

anticipate. However, in terms of a prudent risk and resource impact assessment, the Atkins forecast (£386,000 2010-11) remains a good indication of the impact of the scheme changes. The reality, if changes were introduced, could be less significant.

3.6 Department for Transport Consultation on possible changes to the administration of Concessionary Travel – April 2009

3.6.1 This consultation, which has been carried out since the commencement of the Inquiry exercise, has an important influence on decisions to change the scheme to discretionary elements.

3.6.2 Key points of evidence

- The Department for Transport carried out a consultation with all Concessionary Travel Authorities, which closed in July 2009. The consultation was to seek views on the possible transfer of Concessionary Travel responsibilities to upper-tier authorities – locally Northamptonshire County Council - regionally or nationally (England).
- In response to the consultation, the County Council has expressed a provisional preference for transfer to the County Level. District Councils in Northamptonshire, including Northampton, have expressed a preference for administration at County level.
- A fundamental issue is the changes which would take place in Central Government funding support with a reduction in the support grants to District Councils and a transfer of funding to the County Council. A further consultation will be carried out, by the DfT, on this central issue, to move the proposal forward.
- It is understood that the initial response from local authorities in England is:
 - 50% favour transfer to upper-tier : County Councils etc
 - 25% favour regional administration
 - 25% favour national administration
- The case for a transfer to the County Council has many advantages and implications. The current system has shortcomings in terms of often inadequate central government funding and this has been keenly felt in Northampton, with a substantial proportion of the budget coming from local Council Tax funding. The transfer would give efficiency savings through shared services and give a clearer focus for both bus operators and concessionary fares customers.
- Subject to further consultation and legislation, it is proposed that a change to the system would be introduced in April 2011, when the

current 3 year grant settlement to existing TCAs ends. This 3-year funding was introduced with the change to an England wide free travel system in April 2008.

- The main implication, should changes take place in 2011, on this investigation is that the County Council would be looking for a standard travel scheme for the whole County. The DfT stress one of the advantages of change as 'One set of rules for a wider area in relation to travel enhancements'. As can be seen for earlier discussion in this report, Northamptonshire Districts are moving towards a majority with the statutory minimum travel scheme with no free travel before 9.30am. This possible change therefore presents a strong argument for Northampton retaining the statutory minimum (in respect of peak time travel) in order to support a clear and uniform scheme at County level.
- It should be stressed that the ability for individual districts, should they no longer administer concessionary travel, to introduce discretionary elements, is likely to be retained. But these will necessarily be locally funded.
- Administration of the issue of bus passes is likely to remain at local level for the convenience of customers – Northampton Borough Council would still be involved in applications for passes, probably by means of a Service Level Agreement with the County Council.

3.7 Possible charging for replacement bus passes

3.7.1 A budget option appraisal was undertaken, by Customer Services, in 2008 following the introduction of the England wide national bus pass. This forms a useful basis to assess the impact of introducing a charge for replacement, where appropriate.

3.7.2 Key points of evidence

- An Option Appraisal was carried out in September 2008 to assess income from charging for replacement passes. All other districts in the County make a charge of either £5 or £10 for replacement : charges in other authorities consulted were similar.
- During the period from June 2008 to date (15 months), 1564 replacement passes were issued. This provides a useful basis for prediction and 1200 replacements a year is used for this purpose.
- Charging for replacements would need to be at the discretion of Customer Services staff. If a pass has been stolen at no fault to the owner, a charge may not be appropriate. If the pass has been lost, the responsibility is with the card-holder and a charge would be appropriate.

- Options for the level of charge:
 - A £5 charge was suggested, by the majority (69%) of pass-holders in the survey and this would represent an affordable sum bearing in mind that many pass-holders represent a vulnerable/lower income section of the community. This level would still incur a cost to the authority for a replacement.
 - £5 x estimated replacements of 1200 would give an incoming sum of £6,000 per annum to cover costs
 - A £10 charge would represent a more realistic cost to the authority of both production of the card and staff time involved. Certainly, if a transfer of responsibilities to the County Council took place, this could be an appropriate administrative charge within a Service Level Agreement.
 - £10 x estimated replacements of 1200 would give an incoming sum of £12,000 per annum to cover costs
- Certainly, advice from Customer Services staff is that a number of residents persistently lose their passes. A charge would encourage more responsible safe keeping of the pass. In addition, there is the potential for fraud if multiple passes are circulating. Duplicate 'old' passes are 'hot-listed' when replacements are issued but at present can still be used as 'show' cards to drivers. The introduction of smartcard readers onto buses in the latter part of 2009 will mean that 'hotlisted' cards will not register and will be confiscated by drivers, thus reducing the potential for fraudulent misuse.
- Again, the argument for conformity within the County should transfer take place, supports a charge being made, in line within all other local districts.

4 Equality Impact Assessment

- 4.1 A full Equality Impact Assessment has been made and has been the subject of consultation with the Pensioners Forum and the Disabled People's Forum:
- 4.1.1 As discussed earlier in this report, the Consultation Monitoring Form, which accompanied the Bus Pass User Survey, established that the pass-holders represented a cross-section of the community with no significant concerns about exclusion from the scheme. The results in terms of equality strands are shown in Appendix 1.
- 4.1.2 The assessment has been closely related to the possible changes to the Concessionary Fares Scheme, which are the subject of this review. The conclusions of the assessment are detailed in Appendix 4. Their

main implications, in terms of equal opportunities, to the possible changes proposed are as follows:

- **Free travel to companions of disabled pass-holders**
 - Lack of free companion travel is a major discriminatory element in the scheme and represents an urgent priority for resolution.
 - In order that the proposed introduction, if approved, is fully effective, it is also recommended that free companion travel from pass-holders from other districts should be offered when they board a bus in Northampton.
 - **High risk of non-implementation in equality terms**

- **All pass-holders could be perceived, to be discriminated against, in comparison with residents of other Districts where wider concessions apply – principally, in respect of free bus travel before 9.30am.**
 - The differential with other Northamptonshire authorities has changed since the setting up of the Appreciative Inquiry, as discussed above. This element is not in the statutory scheme prescribed by Central Government and many authorities have retained this minimum free bus travel regime. Therefore, the Borough Council is no more or less discriminatory than legislation adopted by the Department for Transport and a large number of districts throughout England.
 - **The introduction, or not, of the proposal is therefore a low level risk and subject to further Member consideration. In terms of this exercise looking at equality strands, there are no major discriminatory elements but there is a prospect of improving the service for all users.**

5 Conclusions and Key Findings

- 5.1 After all of the evidence was collated the following conclusions were drawn: -
- 5.2 The Consultants Report on the impact of potential changes principally provides a forecast of resources required to implement the proposals. It has been modified in the light of changing circumstances and forecasts, particularly in respect of changes in policy in other districts in the County.
- 5.3 The Consultation Survey of Bus Pass Users has indicated a strong preference for all the proposed changes to be introduced and this has been reinforced by further consultation with Forums.
- 5.4 The limited consultation with other Concessionary Travel Authorities needs to be seen in the context of being a random cross-section of authorities without a detailed look at travel patterns and other factors within these areas. In this sense, although the cross section have largely introduced discretionary elements into their schemes, the need for comparison within Northamptonshire is seen as more important to the exercise.
- 5.5 The Department for Transport consultation on possible administrative changes has provided an important context for planning the future of the service. Whilst it is still at the consultative stage, the most likely outcome is transfer of responsibility to the County Council and their desire to have a clear scheme conforming to one set of rules. This need for conformity would apply, possibly with greater emphasis, were responsibilities be transferred to regional or national level.
- 5.6 The need for a uniform scheme which is clear both to bus users and bus companies is emphasised by the introduction of an electronic recognition system on the buses, due to commence in Autumn 2009. The 'smartcard' technology is complex in its introduction and variations should be kept to a minimum.
- 5.7 The impact of introducing a charge for replacement passes has been set out, for members consideration.
- 5.8 A key preliminary study to this evidence is the Equality Impact Assessment, which has a fundamental influence on the forecasting of the impact of proposals.
- 5.9 In summary, the elements proposed can be assessed within the broad areas of the evidence presented – resource implications, results of consultation, the need for conformity within the County and the equality impact.

Introduction of Companion Travel for eligible disabled pass-holders within Northampton
Introduction of Companion Travel for eligible disabled pass-holders from other Northamptonshire districts

- The resource implication has been estimated at £40,000 if introduced in 2010-11
- A clear majority in the consultation survey (87%) were in favour of the proposal
- In terms of a uniform scheme within the County, 5 districts have this discretionary element in place and introduction in Northampton would reinforce this.
- The equality impact assessment has identified the non-inclusion of these elements of the scheme as a major barrier to achieving full equality within the scheme.

Introduction of All-Day Free Travel : Monday-Friday

- The resource implication has been forecasted as £386,000 if introduced in 2010-11. Lower estimates have emerged from consultation with other authorities outside the County but there is a strong likelihood that the above estimate will be reached and it needs to be quoted as a risk implication. In addition, the introduction of free all-day travel may attract claims for capital expenditure from bus operators, as discussed earlier, which could incur additional expenditure.
- A clear majority in the consultation survey (89%) were in favour of free travel before 9.30am.
- In terms of a uniform scheme within the County, 4 districts do not have this discretionary element in place and 2 further districts are reviewing a possible change to the statutory position i.e. no free travel before 9.30am. The retention of the statutory scheme in Northampton would reinforce this majority of districts adhering to free travel being offered after 9.30am.
- The equality impact assessment has identified the inclusion or non-inclusion of this element of the scheme as having no significant impact on achieving full equality within the scheme.
- The evidence from other concessionary travel authorities, which is a random cross-section, differs from the County situation and together with the strong lobby for the proposal from the bus user survey and other representations may prompt the need for further member consideration of the options.
- This further consideration could include the introduction within the scheme of selective 'all day travel' elements, as discussed earlier (pages 9-11)
 - Free weekday late night travel 11pm-4pm
 - Free all-day travel for disabled pass-holders only

Possible Charging for Replacement Bus Passes

- The resource implication of introducing a £10 charge (which reflects real costs) is estimated as an income to the authority of £12,000 per annum.
- A clear majority in the consultation survey (59%) were in favour of introducing a charge.
- In terms of a uniform scheme within the County, all other districts have a charge in place and introduction in Northampton would reinforce this.
- It would also anticipate the possible administration of the scheme in future by the County Council.
- The proposal would not impact on equality within the scheme and would improve the service in helping to reduce any fraudulent use of passes

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 On the basis of evidence submitted and the concluding summary, it is recommended that the following proposals are put forward:
- 6.2 That Companion Travel for eligible disabled pass-holders, both within Northampton and for eligible disabled pass-holders from other Northamptonshire districts be introduced in Northampton from April 2010, in the Northamptonshire Concessionary Travel Scheme 2010-11.
- 6.3 That, in view of the clear support for and priority given to the introduction of all-day weekday free bus travel in the public consultation undertaken, Cabinet be asked to consider the introduction of this discretionary element in the concessionary travel scheme for Northampton or selective elements of the proposal as set out in the report.
- 6.4 That a charge for replacement bus passes be introduced as soon as practicable – the recommended charge to reflect administration and production costs being £10.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Bus Pass Survey : Equality Strand Profile

The sample survey of 20% of pass-holders attracted a positive response from 20% of those surveyed. This cross-section of pass-holders can be used for a comparison with the equality strand profile for the town as a whole. Any imbalances/issues can be identified from this exercise.

GENDER

GENDER	Bus pass user survey (Consultation monitoring form) 1097 - 100%	Northampton 194,458 – 100%
Males	425 – 39.2%	95,380 – 49%
Females	605 – 55.8%	99,078 – 51%
Both marked or not stated	55 – 5.1%	

Higher female to male ratio than town wide – explanation:

Not stated answers may skew

Males may have greater access to a private car/historically greater dependence of women on public transport

Better survival rate into old age of women

AGE

AGE	Bus pass user survey (Consultation monitoring form) 1097 - 100%	Northampton 194,458 – 100%
	Holding a 60 and over pass 1135 – 93%	Eligible 60 and over 35,818 – 18.4%

The selective nature of eligibility for a bus pass (Aged 60 and over) means that there are no grounds for age comparison

DISABILITY

DISABILITY	Bus pass user survey (Consultation monitoring form) 1097 - 100%	Northampton 194,458 – 100%
	Holding a disabled peoples's pass 76 - 6%	Eligible disabled people 15,959 – 8.2%

The selective nature of eligibility for a bus pass within the specified disability categories means that it is difficult to accurately define the eligible population. Inevitably, the proportion of disabled people is much higher amongst pass-holders.

The answers given on the survey for pass ownership have a similarity with town wide proportions. This could give cause for concern about under representation/low take up of passes.

However, the consultation monitoring form results show a much higher number of respondents with a disability –280 or 25.5%. The main explanation for this lies in the previous operation of issuing bus passes – disabled passes for 1 year duration, Aged 60 and over for 15 years. Inevitably, many disabled people aged 60 and over opted to obtain a 60+ pass – even though, the expiry period is now the same for both (5 years), this practice towards more 60+ passes is likely to persist. The application procedure for a 60+ pass is easier – the disabled people's pass generally requires a doctor's certificate being obtained, which is more complicated.

Therefore, the discrepancy does not appear to have an equality implication.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Not included in survey questionnaire (no relevance to exercise)

RELIGIOUS FAITH

Not included in survey questionnaire (no relevance to exercise)

ETHNICITY

ETHNICITY	Bus pass user survey (Consultation monitoring form) 1097 - 100%	Northampton 194,458 – 100%
	White 1013 – 92.4%	91.6%
	Indian 16 – 1.5%	1.7%
	Black Carribean 15 – 1.4%	1.5%
	Other 10 – 1%	

Ethnic groups in the survey very closely accord to town-wide proportions of groups

Appendix 2

PENSIONERS EVENT HELD ON 25TH SEPTEMBER 2008

GROUP LEADERS

Group 1	Cllr Jane Hollis
Group 2	Cllr Paul Varnserry
Group 3	Cllr Pam Varnserry
Group 4	Richard Holmes
Group 5	Paul Lewin

31 questionnaires were returned during and after the event.

GROUP 1 : MORNING TRAVEL & COMPANION TRAVEL

Hitchin has no time restrictions.

A lot of appointments start at 9.30am.

Poses a problem when leaving to catch more than 1 bus! So have to pay full fare.

Have to time medical appointments after 09.30am to allow travel time.

Restriction in choice

First class Age Concern 10.00am from Kingsthorpe means late arrival.

Only travel that early when absolutely necessary.

Move to 9am would help (graduated).

Companion bus travel exists countywide except Northampton. Strongly feel this should be rolled out in the town.

Countywide to be a companion you must be 16+. Strongly feel that this should be rolled out to under 16s who make up large % of carers.

(NOTE – No legal requirement for companions to be over 16 – this is being clarified with DfT since there is a concern that youngsters may not be able to deal with incidents involving the disabled traveller they are accompanying)

11pm anomaly should be removed.

GROUP 2 : MORNING TRAVEL & LATE EVENING TRAVEL

24 hours

7 days a week.

Taking money from charity.

Earlier.

Flexible.

Unreasonable (link it to trains and coaches).

Empty buses.

Limiting social life.

Less costs to Council, so able to extend use.

GROUP 3 : MORNING TRAVEL & COMPANION PASSES

Earlier start time.

People need to be able to travel at time of choice.

Some buses full after 9.30

Some buses empty before 9.00

Companion travel = 2 passengers.

No confusion (e.g. Eire, Scotland).

Should be issued automatically to all disabled pass holders.

Consistent application across the UK needed.

GROUP 4 : MORNING TRAVEL

Strongly agree to 9.30 restriction being lifted – 24/7 scheme.
'Rush hours' – plenty of space on buses for extra people before 9.30am.
This encourages better use of buses – keeps services going.
Blind persons had all day travel under old scheme.
Would travel before 9.30 much more if free.

Journeys required before 9.30am:
Early shopping/market
Church
Medical appointments
Voluntary work
Catching early trains/coaches for long-distance

GROUP 5 : MORNING TRAVEL

Morning travel.
Restrictions removed - ✓✓✓✓✓
Complicated – different rules in parts of County
Concession for specific journeys – E.g. health visits.
Safer to mix with other people – can feel isolated at times.

Appendix 3 – Consultation with other selected Concessionary Travel Authorities

Table 1 Discretionary elements offered by authority

Local Authority	Free Late Travel after 11pm	Free Morning Travel before 9.30am	Free travel for companions to Disabled Pass-holders – within authority	Other discretionary measures
Leicester City	Yes	60 and over – half fare Disabled - free	No	None
Canterbury	No	Yes	Yes	Park and Ride – pass holders can travel as foot passengers free
Chelmsford	Yes until 12pm	Yes 9am	Yes	Older Persons promotion days
Basingstoke	Yes	Yes	Yes	Promotion in Council magazine
Stafford	Yes	Yes	Yes	General publicity
Harlow	Yes until 12pm	Yes 9am	No	None
Stoke on Trent	Yes	Yes	Yes	Application Service at 5 local centres
Milton Keynes	Yes	Yes	No	None
SUMMARY	5 – YES 2- UNTIL 12PM 1-NO	5- YES 2- 9AM 1 –HALF FARE	5 – YES 3 - NO	

Table 2 Costs of Discretionary elements

Local Authority	Total annual cost of concessionary travel scheme	Annual cost of discretionary elements %age of budget	Free all-day travel or part (as above) %age of budget	Free travel for companions to Disabled Pass-holders %age of budget
Leicester City	-	-	-	-
Canterbury	£2.2m	£75,500 3.4%	£47,500 2.1%	£28,000 1.3%
Chelmsford	£2.3m	-	-	-
Basingstoke	£2.8m	£24,000 0.9%	£24,000 0.9%	Minimal
Stafford	£1.5m	£50,000 3.3%	£50,000 3.3%	-
Harlow	£1.7m	-	-	-
Stoke on Trent	£4.9m	£93,000 1.9%	£50,000 1%	43,000 0.9%
Milton Keynes	£2.1m	£129,000 6.1%	£129,000 6.1%	-

Appendix 4

SUMMARY		0.9% - 6.1% range	0.9% - 6.1% range	0.9-1.3% range
<p>Appendix 4 Concluding Areas of Concern within Equality Impact Assessment</p>	<p>Recommended Measures/Actions</p>	<p>Risk in relation to Equality Impact</p>	<p>Timescale</p>	<p>Resource Implications</p>
<p><u>Applications for a Bus Pass</u></p> <p>Disabled residents with mobility problems may need a more specialised service in applying for a pass – at present, there is potential for disadvantage.</p> <p><i>Residents from minority ethnic groups may be under-represented and may need a more specialised service in applying for a pass – at present, there is potential for disadvantage.</i></p>	<p>Further staff training in awareness of the issues and innovative consideration, to ensure that applications can be dealt with in a fair and equal manner for all sections of the eligible population of Northampton</p> <p>Further contact with appropriate local organisations to encourage take up and use of passes by these groups</p> <p>Further general publicity, possibly targeted, as appropriate, to encourage take-up</p>	<p>Low</p>	<p>If introduced April 2010</p>	<p>Low Measures largely introduced to mitigate issues</p>

Appendix 4 Concluding Areas of Concern within Equality Impact Assessment	Recommended Measures/Actions	Risk in relation to Equality Impact	Timescale	Resource Implications
<p><u>Use of the Bus Pass</u></p> <p><i>Northampton does not offer free travel to companions of disabled pass-holders – all other districts in Northamptonshire do. The lack of this discretionary concession could be seen to discriminate against disabled residents.</i></p>	Free bus travel for companions to Disabled pass-holders	High risk of non-implementation	If introduced April 2010	Estimated increase in number of disabled passes issued 22% with a medium resource implication
<p><u>Use of the Bus Pass</u></p> <p><i>Northampton does not offer free travel to companions of disabled pass-holders – all other districts in Northamptonshire do. The lack of this discretionary concession could be seen to discriminate against disabled residents.</i></p>	Free companion travel for Disabled pass-holders from all Northamptonshire Districts (NBC bear the cost when the pass-holder boards the bus in Northampton). This would be reciprocated when Northampton pass-holders travel in other districts.	High risk of non-implementation	If introduced April 2010	Estimated number of disabled passes in other Nthants TCAs 431 - low resource implication

<p>Appendix 4 Concluding Areas of Concern within Equality Impact Assessment</p>	<p>Recommended Measures/Actions</p>	<p>Risk in relation to Equality Impact</p>	<p>Timescale</p>	<p>Resource Implications</p>
<p><u>Use of the Bus Pass</u></p> <p><i>All pass-holders could be perceived, to be discriminated against, in comparison with residents of other Districts where wider concessions apply – principally, in respect of free bus travel before 9.30am.</i></p>	<p>Free Morning Travel before 9.30am, weekdays</p> <p>Subject to further member consideration as a low risk proposal</p>	<p>Low risk in terms of equality implications</p>	<p>If introduced April 2010</p>	<p>Free travel from 23.00pm to 4.00am Mon to Fri Disabled pass-holders – no resource implication 60 and over pass-holders – low resource implication Free Travel before 9.30am Mon- Fri Disabled pass-holders – medium resource implication 60 and over pass-holders – major resource implication</p>