

Roger Elkins, Cabinet Member for Highways & Infrastructure	Ref No: H&I02 (20/21)
June 2020	Key Decision: Yes
English National Concessionary Travel Scheme – Discretionary Rail Cards	Part I
Report by Executive Director Place Services and Director of Highways, Transport and Planning	Electoral Divisions: All
<p>Summary</p> <p>The County Council is reviewing all areas of discretionary expenditure including where it currently funds senior rail cards as an alternative to a 'free' bus pass for eligible older residents of West Sussex. This is not a statutory duty under national legislation so could be withdrawn. Users have been consulted, as well as other stakeholders to help understand impacts of any changes to the current railcard offer.</p>	
<p>West Sussex Plan: Policy Impact and Context</p> <p>The current offer of a free senior person's rail card as an alternative to a free bus pass contributes to the West Sussex Plan ambition to make West Sussex a great place to grow older and promotes independence in later life for residents. It offers an alternative for residents who do not have ready access to bus services but can use rail travel as a suitable alternative.</p>	
<p>Financial Impact</p> <p>The English National Concessionary Travel Scheme budget provides for expenditure of £11.9m per annum. The anticipated cost reduction from withdrawing the senior rail card option is estimated at £50,000 per annum.</p>	
<p>Recommendations</p> <p>The withdrawal of the current offer of a free senior rail card as an alternative to a free bus pass to eligible older West Sussex residents from October 2020.</p>	

Proposal

1. Background and Context

- 1.1 The County Council has a statutory duty to administer the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) in West Sussex. ENCTS provides statutory free off-peak bus travel for eligible older and disabled people.
- 1.2 The County Council also provides discretionary free bus travel for eligible disabled people along with a companion at peak times (24/7) as well as the

alternative of Disabled Person Rail Card. These discretionary elements of the scheme in West Sussex are not being considered in this report.

- 1.3 The County Council also provides Senior Persons Rail Cards as an alternative to the bus pass for eligible older people on a discretionary basis, over and above the statutory requirements within the national scheme.
- 1.4 Currently approximately 2000 residents have taken up the alternative of a Senior Persons Rail Card.

2. Proposal Details

- 2.1 It is proposed to withdraw the free Senior Persons Rail Card from October 2020 to allow time for the County Council to ensure all affected users are aware and giving them ample time to prepare for the change.
- 2.2 Existing rail card holders will be able to use their card until it expires before receiving a free bus pass in accordance to the statutory obligation on the County Council. Alternatively they may purchase a replacement Senior Persons Rail Card for £30 for one year or £70 for three years from National Rail.

Factors taken into account

3. Consultation

- 3.1 A four-week consultation was carried out to understand the views of affected residents and other stakeholders. The consultation ran from 24 October to 4 December 2019 and received 783 responses; 375 of the respondents are current rail card holders. The findings from the consultation can be found in Appendix 1.
- 3.2 The rail card user consultation was shared with Members to comment if required.
- 3.3 The majority of respondents disagree (59% strongly disagree) that the free rail card should be withdrawn and 20% slightly or strongly agreed the free rail card should be withdrawn.
- 3.4 The majority of respondents who are rail card holders stated they would not take up a free bus pass if the rail card was withdrawn.
- 3.5 Many commented that it would put up the cost of the train indicating they would still choose rail instead of the bus, with many stating they use rail for longer journeys. This may indicate that the majority of rail card holders can afford the rail card without the County Council's non-statutory subsidy. However, 125 of the respondents stated they live in an area without good bus services.

4. Financial and Resource Implications

- 4.1 Revenue consequences of proposal

The estimated £50,000 cost reduction arising from the proposal is shown below:

	Current Year 2020/21 £m	Year 1 2021/22 £m	Year 2 2022/23 £m	Year 3 2023/24 £m
Revenue budget	11.940	11.915	11.890	11.890
Change from Proposal	-0.025	-0.025	0	0
Remaining budget	11.915	11.890	11.890	11.890

4.2 It is expected that some of the 2,000 rail card users will take up the option of using a free bus pass instead of continuing to use rail travel. This has been allowed for within the estimate.

4.3 There are no capital consequences arising from this proposal.

5. Legal Implications

The current funding of the senior rail card is not a statutory requirement.

6. Risk Implications and Mitigations

Risk	Mitigating Action (in place or planned)
Legal challenge under the Equality Act 2010	1. Disabled Rail Cards will still be funded 2. Senior Rail Card not a statutory requirement
Card users will have to fund senior rail card	1. Existing rail card holders will retain the card until it expires to delay payment 2. The standard cost of the national senior rail card is £30 providing excellent value for money for frequent users. An alternative of a 3-year card is available for £70

7. Other Options Considered (and reasons for not proposing)

Other options considered included withdrawing the same offer for people with disabilities. However, this was discounted because it is likely to impact access to employment for working age residents with disabilities.

8. Equality and Human Rights Assessment

An Equality Impact Report (EIR) has been completed and can be found in Appendix 2.

9. Social Value and Sustainability Assessment

Not applicable.

10. Crime and Disorder Reduction Assessment

Not applicable.

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Appendices

1. Consultation Analysis
2. Equality Impact Report

Background papers

None