

## **P-04-506 Free bus pass / concessionary travel for benefit claimants, students and under 18s – Correspondence from South East Wales Transport Alliance to the Committee, 22.11.2013**

*I refer to the attached letter to Councillor Phil White, to which he has asked me to respond.*

*I note the request for a scheme “for the poor and vulnerable in our society to have free access to bus services in Wales, and concessionary fares on the rail network.”*

*The South East Wales Regional Transport Plan includes amongst its goals, providing access to employment and other facilities, promoting social inclusion and equality, and promoting modal shift in favour of sustainable transport options. However, progress in achieving these goals needs to be balanced against the availability of resources, which are coming under unprecedented pressure, and measures to pursue them need to be prioritised in terms of their effectiveness.*

*The context for the Regional Transport Plan is set by the Wales Transport Strategy, prepared by the Welsh Government. While local authorities have a role in the administration of the Concessionary Fares scheme, the terms of the scheme and its funding are determined by the Welsh Government.*

*In the event of the Welsh Government considering proposals to change the scheme or its level of funding, there would be a strong case for modelling the implications of different options, and consulting upon them, before developing a firm set of proposals. While it is possible that removing the entitlement of some to the scheme might free up resources to extend it to others, this would need to be tested. It is notable that, within South East Wales, of those concessionary travel passes issued, only 63% are in regular use. Mechanisms to increase the funding available to make concessionary fares more widely available could include the levying of a nominal charge for each journey, and levying a charge for each pass. However, it is understood that any such proposals, or any other changes to the ways in which the concessionary travel scheme operates, other than its level of funding, would require changes to primary legislation. With current pressures on revenue budgets, and in particular, projected reductions in the concessionary travel reimbursement rate determined by the Welsh Government, it is unlikely that extending the scheme could be considered without resort to measures of this nature.*

*It is notable that some bus companies have from time to time provided reduced / free travel for other groups such as young people and job seekers. Examples can be found at the following web sites.*

<http://www.traveline-cymru.info/news/2013/01/07/bus-for-jobs-scheme-giving-free-travel-to-the-unemployed-for-january/>  
<http://www.stagecoachbus.com/busforjobs.aspx>

**Sewta** is the alliance of local authorities charged with developing transport policy and delivering transport projects on behalf of the 10 local authorities in South East Wales and their partners, both in the transport industry and in organisations representing passengers’ interests.

Sewta’s membership includes the local authorities of Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Monmouthshire, Newport, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Torfaen and the Vale of Glamorgan. Partners are the Confederation of Passenger Transport, Arriva Trains Wales, First Great Western, Network Rail, Bus Users UK, Passenger Focus and Sustrans. Sewta works closely with the Welsh Government.

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**Sewta**

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