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Dear Alan,

Thank you for your e-mail of 4 May about free ferry travel for young people living on the Cowal Peninsula as part of the proposed free bus travel scheme in Scotland for those aged under nineteen. I have noted the points you raise about ferry travel for young people living in Cowal.

As part of the budget discussions in February, the Scottish Government committed, in principle, to implementing free bus travel for those aged 18 and under, if possible by January 2021. Our initial estimates suggest that free bus travel to people aged 18 and under would benefit around 700,000 families in Scotland. However, it is important to ensure the legal, technical and operational requirements needed to bring this policy forward are fully tested and robust prior to implementation. We will be consulting with bus operators, local authorities and other interested parties as we develop plans for implementation and delivery of this commitment. The interaction between the proposed new concessions and ferry travel will be one of the issues to be looked at as part of this work.

In addition to these targeted extensions we are reviewing options for extending public transport concessions to people under 26 and their costs and benefits. We will report progress on this as part of our wider reporting on action to tackle child poverty.

However, as is the case with the rest of the Scottish Government, Transport Scotland resources have been pivoted to respond to Covid-19 and the challenges that it presents. That has resulted in a significant reprioritisation of work within the organisation that will have an impact on a range of policy areas. In light of this, for now, the focus of Transport Scotland and our transport operators is firmly on the challenges that are presented by Covid-19.

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Our transport operators are taking guidance from Transport Scotland's resilience team and Health Protection Scotland and are focussed on ensuring the resilience of essential lifeline services over the coming months. We are prioritising efforts on current operations and live projects and are therefore putting operational initiatives and longer term strategy work on hold for the moment. These issues will be picked up again in due course, as we return to business as usual and the accompanying urgent resilience effort is scaled back.

At present, local authorities receive funding through the local government finance arrangements in respect of local travel concession schemes. Local authorities have discretionary powers under the Transport Act 1985 to provide local travel concession schemes if they wish. The terms, conditions and level of concession offered under any such scheme are for individual local authorities and, in Strathclyde's case, the Strathclyde Concessionary Travel Joint Committee (SCTJC), to decide taking into account local circumstances. The Scottish Government is unable to intervene in any decisions made by local authorities or the SCTJC relating to their concessionary travel schemes.

I hope this is helpful.

*Kind regards*



**PAUL WHEELHOUSE**

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