

From: Chair – Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT)
Sent: 13 September 2021 13:52
To: Reid, Alan
Subject: Strathclyde Concessionary Travel Scheme and Gourock-Dunoon Ferry Fares etc

Dear Alan,

I wanted to give you an update since my last email about the request you made, on behalf of your constituents and the Cowal Transport Forum, for consideration to be given to new SCTS fares being aligned with RET pricing on Gourock Dunoon routes. I undertook to bring this to the September meeting of the SCTSJC to get you an answer, but having since had a chance to discuss this with officers following their preliminary examination of the figures, I am keen no hasty paper or position is taken. I understand now that the Dunoon routes account for around 35-40% of all Strathclyde ferry concessions journeys in total. Given ferry journeys are much more expensive than other trips whose discount the scheme pays for, it's clear the issue is a substantial matter, not just in terms of the significance of the support to your constituents, but also a financial element of the scheme as a whole.

Looking into it my officers also advised me that the issue around RET seems to be a complex one interacting with government policy (and I note this week's Programme for Government (PfG) announcements also include mention of a Fairer Fares commission reviewing concessionary travel). Whilst the SCTSJC is independent of central government, we are mindful that any changes they make may have cascade effects for our scheme. It would be wise for officers to try to get a sense from their Transport Scotland colleagues whether any policy shifts in prospect nationally might have any near-term impact on the scheme. Given all this, it was clear to me that gathering together a paper with a fair analysis of the implications of potentially aligning concession fares with RET and non-RET/commercial pricing (and the financial and administrative impacts on the Scheme such changes to concession fares on Cowal routes would have), required more careful examination than the time available before the coming meeting.

As things stand, the relative reductions in financial demand on the scheme during Covid have bought some breathing space to the stretched scheme finances. I anticipate therefore the revised fare structures will be implemented no sooner than financial year 22/23. This provides time to look carefully at the issue you have raised. So that we, and you, can have more opportunity to examine it in the round, but still ensure that a decision can be made well in advance of the introduction of new fare arrangements, I have agreed with officers that they should be in touch with you and your Forum colleagues directly and should bring a paper to the Joint Committee at its first meeting in early 2022.

I hope you will agree this is a sensible way forwards and I will bring this to the attention of your Argyll and Bute Council representative on the SCTSJC (absent any objection from you). During this work, SPT officers will be in touch to discuss the issues with you and the Forum on behalf of the Joint Committee.

I trust this measured approach meets with your approval and hope that the delay in clarity is not too disappointing.

Yours sincerely,

Martin

Cllr Dr Martin Bartos
Chair, Strathclyde Concessionary Travel Scheme Joint Committee