

**REPORT TO:** Council

**DATE:** 11<sup>th</sup> October 2007

**REPORTING MEMBER:** Cabinet Member (Planning & Transport)  
*Councillor D Mackenzie*

**SUBJECT:** **NOTICE OF MOTION  
FREE BUS TRAVEL – COMMUNITY TRANSPORT**

**WARD/S AFFECTED:** All

**FORWARD PLAN REF:** N/A

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## **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 At the Council meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2007, Councillor Clark proposed the following Notice of Motion, which was seconded by Councillor Willis :

This Council recognises the growing and important role played by community transport in the Harrogate district. But it notes that on 1 April next year the government will introduce free bus travel across the country. This facility will not be available to the elderly and infirm who use community transport so successfully in growing numbers.

This Council calls upon the government to secure a level playing field with the free facility also being offered at no cost to the council to users of community transport.

- 1.2 The Notice of Motion was referred to me as the Cabinet Member (Planning and Transport) and I met Councillor Clark on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2007.
- 1.3 At the meeting Cllr Clark confirmed that he had raised the Notice of Motion as the Council's Older People's Champion and not as a representative of Community Transport.

## **2.0 NEW CONCESSIONARY FARES SCHEME**

- 2.1 The new concessionary fares scheme to be introduced in April next year will enable any person eligible for a concessionary pass to travel on local

registered bus services in any part of the country. This is in addition to the current scheme whereby authorities must allow free travel for their residents within their own areas. The change to the legislation also places the liability for the cost of a journey with the authority where the individual boards the bus irrespective of where the pass is issued.

2.2 The financial impact that the enhanced scheme will have on the Council is still unclear. The government are currently consulting on 3 options for the distribution of the new grant but none of the options are likely to be sufficient to cover the cost.

2.3 It is currently estimated that the cost of concessionary fares to the Council will exceed £2m next year, which is an increase of about £1m. However, the extra grant provided by government may be as little as £300k, leaving a potential shortfall of upto £700k. This shortfall will have to be met from the Council's own funds.

### 3.0 **RESPONSE TO THE NOTICE OF MOTION**

3.1 At the meeting with Councillor Clark the main issues discussed were: -

1. there is an active campaign to secure government funding to extend free concessionary fares to Community Transport;
2. Community Transport have already lobbied government but there is a need to do more;
3. the new concessionary fares scheme to be introduced in April 2008 is unjust since the majority of people aged 60+ and the disabled who live in rural areas do not have access to public transport. There are also large parts of the main urban areas which are, similarly, not served by local buses;
4. there is a concern in government that the extension of concessionary fares would create an added burden for the voluntary sector but this would not be applicable to the Little Red Bus, which has already received future builders funding to build capacity. In any case the Little Red Bus is willing to act as a pilot so that government could judge the full impact;
5. the cost to government would be fairly small, at £25m pa, given that the grant to cover the cost of the enhancements to be introduced from April next year amounts to some £212m.

3.2 As a result of the financial pressures from concessionary fares detailed above, there is little possibility of the Council extending the existing local enhancements to concessionary fares, which currently receive funding for half fares on community transport and trains.

3.3 However, the points made by Councillor Clark about the inequity of the government's current proposals are justified and I would recommend to

Council that we support Community Transport in lobbying for the extension of the free concessionary fares scheme to the Little Red Bus, provided that it is at no cost to the Council.

**Background Papers – None**

**OFFICER CONTACT:** Please contact Mr J D Burton, Head of Highways & Transport if you require any further technical information on the contents of this report. The officer can be contacted at the Department of Development Services, Knapping Mount, West Grove Road, Harrogate, by telephone on 01423 556606 or by Email – [john.burton@harrogate.gov.uk](mailto:john.burton@harrogate.gov.uk).

**SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT / POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

		Implications are		
		Positive	Neutral	Negative
A	Economy		✓	
B	Environment		✓	
C	Social Equity			
i)	General		✓	
ii)	Customer Care / People with Disabilities		✓	
iii)	Health Implications		✓	
D	Crime and Disorder Implications		✓	

If all comments lie within the shaded areas, the proposal is sustainable.