

Response to Scottish Government consultation 'Consultation on Free Bus Travel for Older and Disabled People and Modern Apprentices' on 17/11/2017

Prepared by Emma Cooper, Chair of Scottish Rural Action Working Group on Rural Transport.

Response

Scottish Rural Action did not make a submission for questions 1 – 3.

Question 4.

Are you in favour of providing free bus travel to Modern Apprentices? Yes X No

Should this be targeted at Modern Apprentices under Age 21? Yes No X

Is there a better way to provide support to help with the travel costs of Modern Apprentices?
Yes X No

Comments:

A short online survey of young people from rural areas (273 respondents) carried out by Scottish Rural Action from 31st October 2017 to 15th November 2017 indicated that the cost of public transport prevented a significant number of rural young people from accessing education and employment (29% and 47% of respondents respectively), in some cases causing them to move away from the rural location.

'Can't access jobs as salary would barely cover travel costs'

'Couldn't justify spending half my wages to get to and from work'

'I had a part time job half an hour away. The cost of the bus fare was equivalent to two hours pay from a four or five hour shift which became untenable'

The outmigration of young people is a concern for rural people ([Manifesto for rural Scotland, 2016](#)) who, in some areas, are seeing serious population decline and demographic changes. In addition, 40% of young people tell us that they took a job because it was affordable to travel to, indicating that they are not able to reach their full potential because of the cost of travel.

'But gave it [a job with low travel costs] up because it was awful. Then moved away.'

Of our respondents, 32% stated that they would be willing to travel more than 50 miles per day for education or employment if public transport was free and 24% would be willing to travel 30-40 miles. Harnessing the willingness of young people to travel to engage in education and employment could make a substantial difference to local rural economies and the quality of life of many young people, as well as helping to address population change issues.

Transport to and from rural areas is costly for young people. Of our respondents aged 19-26, 37% indicated that they spend more than £50/week and 7% spent upwards of £100/week on transport to and from work or education. For a young person (aged 18-20) on the minimum wage at 40hours/week, this equates to more than 22% of their weekly wage, and for those paying over £100/week, over 45% of their income is spent on travel.

'The only way I could access work was to get into debt with financing a car loan. A large percentage of my wage goes on my car.'

'if I did not have the support of my parents I would not have been able to take up the offer of apprenticeship.'

The issue of transport costs in rural areas is exacerbated by the need to take longer journeys, often at more inconvenient times and using multiple modes of transport, which increases the cost of travel. School-subsidised buses and bursaries from college have a positive impact on access to education, but this evidence suggests that these measures are not sufficient to meet the needs of a significant proportion of young people in rural areas.

'While I was only paying £1.65 a return everyday to travel to school due to it being subsidised by the council of the school I attend, because I was having to pay for it out of my own EMA it added up to £8.25 a week meaning I had lost almost a third of my EMA which meant I was unable to buy some of the school supplies and textbooks I needed.'

'free transport would open up my choice of education and employment'

'The ferry is our public transport, but there are not the concessions available on the ferry as those in towns and cities are afforded for buses.'

The issue of transport costs preventing access to education and employment does not decrease with age. The age group with the highest proportion of respondents indicating concerns with transport costs prevent them from accessing education and employment (38% and 52% respectively) was ages 22-26. Likewise, the costs of commuting for education or employment also increase with age; almost 10% of young people aged 22-26 spending more than £100/week on travel to and from work or education compared with 4% across the age groups.

Young people in the age bracket 19-21 were most likely to have had issues accessing education (38%) implying that access to further education is most challenging.

'If i dont get travel expences £46 a week soon i will need to leave college'

'Education is priority, however, the costs are high £19.20 a week on buses.'

'Mum is disabled and money is very limited, I have to travel to college and bus fare is expensive'

This is supported by evidence from 'Rural Scotland Key Facts 2015' (<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/03/5411>) which indicates that young people from rural communities are less likely to go into further education than their urban counterparts. Education level has a significant impact on lifetime earnings, unemployment rates and consequently quality of life, health and life expectancy (<http://www.poverty.org.uk/31/index.shtml>) – as well as our national GDP. [NB. There are equally high levels of access to University from rural and urban areas (to which young people can move and receive loan funding for accommodation, travel and living costs), indicating that this issue is not due to educational attainment, but to the unique characteristics which aid or deter access to Further Education.]

'Missed open days to university as the travel was too expensive'

'My transport to school from Acharcle to Ardnamurchan is paid for, but if I chose to go to Lochaber High or Mallaig, where there are a better choice of subjects then it would cost me thousands of pounds a year so I am limited to my school by my location.'

Colleges are also more centrally located than schools and the irregular hours mean parents are less able to provide transportation. Young people at this age may not yet have passed their driving test or be able to finance a car and fuel, or may have other burdens on their finances. This reliance on parents may consequently impact on the levels of independence young people have compared with urban counterparts.

'Makes me very dependent on my parents as we have no public transport in our village and it curtails socialising and after school activities.'

'If it wasn't for my parents support with funding my living – food, clothes etc. I couldn't do what I do. The only way to access work was to get in to debt to fund a car loan. A large percentage of my wage goes on my car'

Unprompted, a number of young people also raised the issue of fairness in relation to transport costs in regards to age, location and additional needs they have.

'Perhaps the senior bus pass could be pegged to state pension age in order to free up eligibility for students who, after all, would only be holders for 4 years in most instances.'

'I'm a young carer and there is little to no financial help available, I feel discriminated against.'

'Many OAPs in this area are wealthy and have means of transport that are not buses, trains etc. However young people who struggle to find employment in the area pay out the nose for a somewhat poor service. A child fare covers you until you are 15 and yet you cannot drive yet.'

'It is ridiculous that you can travel from Aboyne to Aberdeen for more than the cost of a bus from Aberdeen to Edinburgh.'

It is therefore our view that:

- Young people with valuable skills and experience who can contribute to the rural economy are being excluded from fulfilling their potential and from living in rural communities due to the cost of travel. This has a lifetime impact on quality of life and our rural and national economies.
- Free travel for all young people living in a rural community, across all modes of transport, whilst in education and their first years of employment would ensure equality of access and benefit our rural and national economy, reduce isolation and loneliness, reduce the outmigration of young people from rural areas, and help to address rural poverty.
- To be effective for rural Modern Apprentices, and ensure equity of access, consideration should be given to funding travel on other modes of transport including rail and ferry.
- The age cap of 21 is not appropriate for young people from rural communities, who are less likely and slower to move into further education, and spending a significant proportion of their income on travel.
- These schemes may be more practically delivered in the form of an appropriate travel allowance.

- Further work needs to be carried out on the impact of travel costs and provision on young people in rural Scotland.