

Concessionary Travel

Burden on Society or Valuable Asset?

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PREFACE

This paper is written for and addressed to all the older people who responded to the survey instigated by the Greater London Forum.

In February 2011, Lynn Strother the Director of the GLF set in train a survey with an inquiry of older people within the London Forums as to what use they put their "Freedom Pass". Freedom Pass being the name by which the free travel in London is known. From over 3000 responses it has been possible to draw some tentative conclusions. It has been recognised that any relatively small survey restricted to one locality (Greater London) care must be taken not to draw national conclusions.

The survey recognises that many responders to a survey list more than one benefit or activity so the number of benefits recorded should not be seen to reflect the number of responses received.

It has been possible to give some case studies to illustrate examples of use and produce a diagram showing how the Pass is used. The raw statistical material from the GLF initiative has been the first time since 2000 that I have been able to get any information upon which to test my belief on the value to society hypothesis.

Introduction

“Welfare in Chaos as thousands live to 100” is one of the more moderate headlines, other harsh and unthinking articles have been written fanning the flames against attitudes portraying older people as well off, and living the good life whilst today's generation struggle.

It has even been suggested that all benefits should be means tested, not just the financial ones but any concession that is age generated. There are organisations, admittedly far right organisations, that suggest pensioners should pay higher taxes, have no fuel allowances, get no free prescriptions, fund all their own care in old age even when suffering from debilitating diseases like Alzheimer's. That older people should pay the full price for Museums and Galleries and Theatres are also stipulated along with the removal of the Concessionary travel Bus Pass. All based on the assumption that the pensioners constitute tomorrow's problems.

It is extremely easy for professionals, especially transport professionals, and I include myself in this to say that the costs of free concessionary travel are expected to increase considerably and could well become unaffordable as the demographic time bomb reaches maximum effect. Likewise it is being stated that Concessionary Travel is a successful and popular policy yet it is a policy that no Government could financially sustain.

No one it seems takes an optimistic view in the fact there will be more older people pro-rata in society as the years go on. In this discussion paper I hope to demonstrate the value to society as a whole of this demographic change that is taking place, by taking just one of those issues, that of the concessionary travel.

History

I have been involved for over 10 years in debates that surround Concessionary Travel for older persons and persons of restricted mobility (PRM) as an Adviser to the Transport Select Committee of the House of Commons and for National Pensioners Convention (NPC) Greater London Forum (GLF) and an Expert on the Universal Access and Independent Living (UIAL) Group of AGE- Platform in Brussels. However it was in Birmingham that the Labour Leader of the Council had free bus travel written into the 1955 election manifesto against some opposition. It got to the House of Lords who decided, in 1958, that an amount of fare foregone had to be calculated for each journey and of course that is still the basis today everywhere. So it was that way it began. It became West Midlands wide some years later.

London followed suit and developed the concept. Gradually local authorities started to offer concessions on travel such as half price bus fares in their own locality for Pensioners so the value has been a long recognised one.

It was at that time a post code lottery and the government decided to make Concessionary travel national. Throughout its development starting with the Transport Act of 2000 which imposed half price bus fares on all local authorities for which funding was provided and progressed through the other enabling Acts of 2006 and 2008 and the gender equalisation of 2003 which generated discussions, papers presented and conferences to explore the subject.

Although through these discussions it has been possible to suggest there are benefits to society as a whole if free travel is available there were and are many counter arguments put forward that makes it difficult to place a figure on the economic advantages, particularly in the face of a hostile press. This invariably emanated from disagreements about funding between national government and local councils which has applied equally to Labour and now the Coalition government. These local arguments resulted in scaremongering headlines that played into the hands of the money counting "cut back services" brigade and fuelled the ageist approach. There have been headlines such as "Local Town Hall staff sacked to provide pensioner free travel" or "Come on Granny get your coat Pensioners go joy riding while others pay". Likewise "Pensioners fill the buses whilst workers cannot get to work" and "Public toilets to be shut to pay for pensioner's bus pass." Or again, "Council Tax to rise to fund concessionary travel for pensioners". All of this ignored what many were proving that the Bus Pass can be of economic and social benefit to the whole of society.

I consider this to be divisive considering that 2012 is to be the Year of Solidarity between the generations.

What are the Benefits?

In spite of this adverse publicity from some local press a number of large cities that have had Concessionary Travel in place before it was ever an Act of Parliament have claimed considerable cross benefits. These have been reported as savings on social care, Meals on Wheels, commercial benefits in the town centres where it is possible to meet socially, some venues in the centres e.g. theatres and cinemas taking the advantage to fill seats that would otherwise be empty in the middle of the day.

Most people agree that Public Transport plays a major part in enabling older people to continue to live in their own homes and participate fully in the life of the community. In the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport magazine an article relating to Accessibility of Transport for those of restricted mobility written by Ann Frye a Fellow of the Institute and an expert in this field made comment as follows:

It is certainly clear that transport plays a major part in both the economic and social well being of disabled and older people. Without the means to get out independently and to be self sufficient in terms of daily living: getting to the shops, to medical appointments or to social activities, many will become dependent on others to provide those services and support for them. For many older people, the biggest problem is the lack of opportunity to meet with friends and have the sort of social life that the rest of us take for granted, and to do this many of them need an accessible local public transport service.

In societies like ours where few have sons or daughters still living in the neighbourhood, the burden of care will generally fall on the state in one form or another. This can range from the GP having to make a house call because the disabled or older patient cannot get to the surgery through to domiciliary and other forms of social care delivered to the person at home. Not only is all of this very expensive, it is also less effective in terms of the quality of

care. For example the cleanliness and lighting levels in an older person's home are not going to offer the same quality of environment for diagnosis or treatment as the GP's surgery. For those who depend on others to do their shopping, there is evidence to suggest that their nutritional levels decline because their horizons and choices of food become more restricted.

In addition there is well documented evidence that a loss of day to day outdoor mobility can trigger a decline on both physical and mental health and wellbeing and may lead to people needing full time or residential care much sooner than might otherwise have been the case.

A Transport Conference was held under the auspices of the Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers (ATCO) on 19 July 2005 at the Cavendish Conference Centre, London W1 at which John Gould, Managing Director Stagecoach South Wales and Chairman CPT Wales spoke and made the point that there had been an increase of as much as 20% in some cases of normal fare paying passengers as a result of the concessionary use. This increase in family, friends, and grandchildren on public transport was what first alerted me to the commercially economic case.

Volunteering

The WRVS have published a report entitled Gold Age Pensioners which researches in depth the economic value of people over 65 years old. In it they say, *"More than any other group in society, older people are the social glue of most communities. Our research shows that every year, each older volunteer spends an average of over 100 hours 'informally' volunteering and more than 55 hours in formal volunteering roles. This is worth £10 billion to the UK economy"*

What older people put into society far outweighs what they take out, either financially or indeed emotionally with the 'sage like' advice borne by life experience they give. That wisdom is in greater proportion to the more frequently made references to the Dementia Syndrome.

It is important to understand how one sees the word 'Volunteer' and to tease out the differences between formal and informal volunteering. This is necessary for many older people do not accept they are volunteers as they see a volunteer as part of a structured system whereby someone is put forward or put themselves forward for a recognised organisation, for example Samaritans, CAB, WRVS etc. In our survey they did however accept the words "Contributors to society".

In 2008-09 Citizenship Survey – Volunteering and Charitable Giving Report taking a core base of 8,768 aged from 16 to 75 and over it was found that in the group aged between 65 and 74 30% took part in formal volunteering and 38% informal volunteering and in the Group over 75 20% took part in formal volunteering and 32% in informal volunteering. That is a big unpaid contribution to society.

However an Age of Opportunity Paper states, "The IBIS bi-annual survey also reveals unsurprisingly that those living in or vulnerable to social exclusion are less likely to participate in volunteering than those who are not." From our survey we know that transport is key to avoiding social exclusion.

It has been difficult to evaluate exactly the different types of volunteering or "contributing". So many do not include the fact they may contribute to committees and stakeholder meetings,

attending local Forums, Neighbourhood Watch or opening up the Church Hall, the organising of Coffee Mornings, getting neighbours shopping, hospital visiting, or representing churches and chapels at funerals. The examples could go on.

However I have given here some case studies taken at random from the 3,000 responses to the survey on which this paper is based followed by a diagram showing a breakdown of the benefits culled from the total responses.

Case Studies

Pensioner A is in 80s. A regular worker with children for many years and still assists in projects around London. "With my Bus Pass and packed lunch" contributes in this way twice a week and in addition uses the Pass for hospital, shopping etc.

Pensioner B is a carer to two different people – one in Essex and one in North London and visits both regularly. B buys with care fresh food of good nutritious value in alternative places for economy – street markets and shops etc. As a carer assists Pensioner visited with launderette and helps clean flat and generally cooks. In the other case which is a multiply disabled person adds to the home help already provided (which is the maximum permitted) cooks and generally assists and takes her out in the wheelchair which is not provided by Social Services. The Freedom Pass makes this possible.

Pensioner C travels to visit Grandchildren to give help since father of the children left. C takes the children to museums, parks and other cultural opportunities and deals with their essential learning. Overall without her involvement the family would be split and maybe go into alternative care.

Pensioner D is in 80s and a volunteer at an Age Concern (Pop in Parlour), travels to assist there twice a week which enhances the centre and her own health, alertness and general well being.

Pensioners E is a two pensioner example of husband and wife who simply list shopping, hospital appointments, visiting family, visiting friends, visiting people in Care Home nearby, shopping for friends who are unable to get out, collecting grandchildren from school when required, accompanying people to hospital, help print and distribute local magazine and play the piano at the local Care Home – all for no charge using the Freedom Pass.

Pensioner F lists Building Society, Library, Dry Cleaners, Charity Shop and local cinema all about four miles away but a bus stop nearby. Weekly visits to local parks, plays scrabble and mah-jong and now holidays only in the UK using the Bus Pass in other cities and visits museums, galleries and

restaurants and the great houses of interest. Is part of a shared learning project and assists in the London Archives and works and contributes to OXFAM. Claims this is part of keeping her healthy.

Pensioner G lists daily mass, parish church twice a week, prayer groups, attends doctors and specialists, visits family, library, podiatrist and generally visits places of interest with friends thus contributing to society economically.

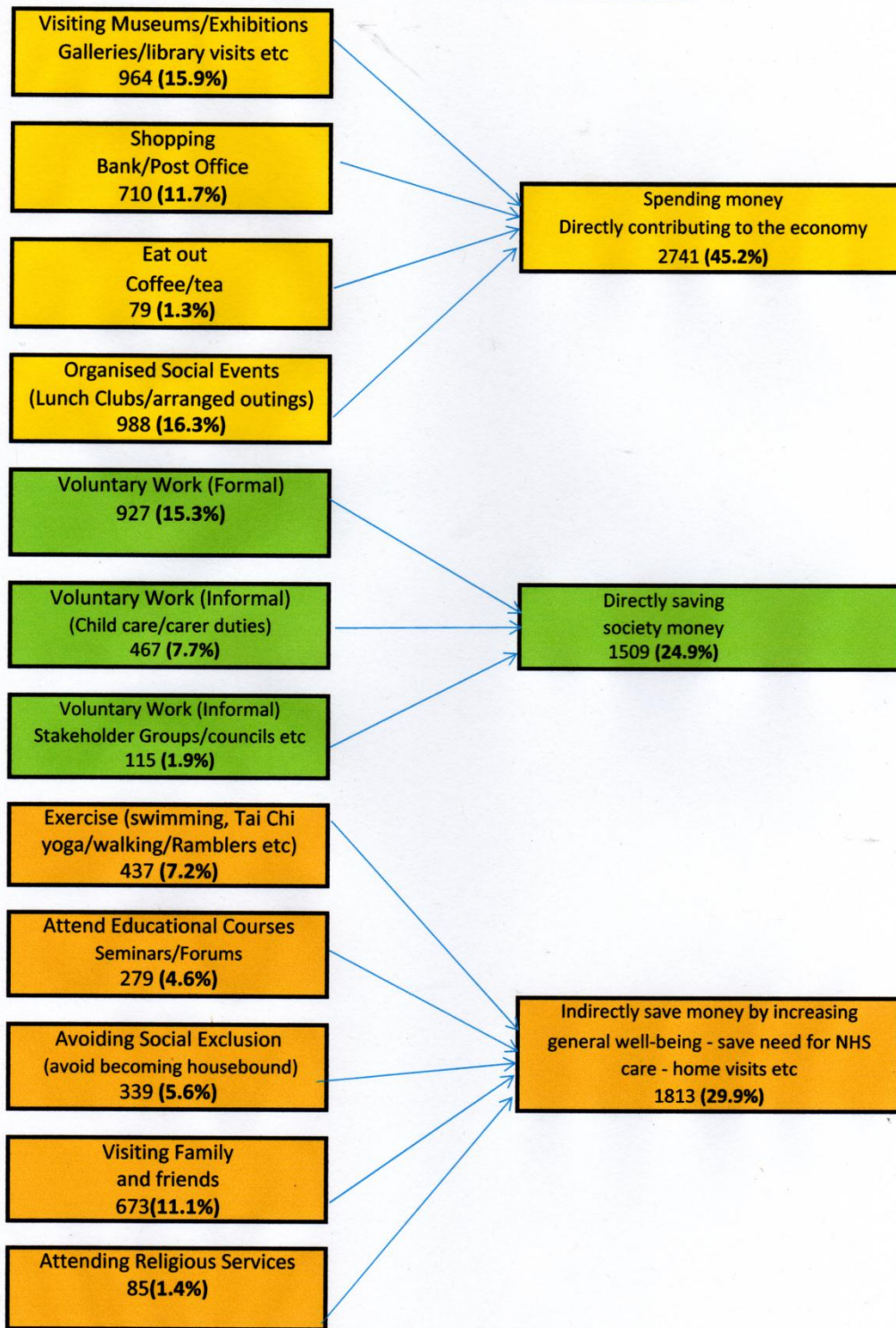
Pensioner H is a PhD and former lecturer and professor and still goes pro bono to the department sometimes as much as three times a week to assist students thus putting his 50 years experience to the assistance of the young. Journeys made possible by the Freedom Pass.

Pensioner I lists visiting friends and elderly relations to help avoid their social exclusion and her own. Lists volunteering, helping at local hospital which is a journey involving two buses and no possibility of car parking at journey's end. Goes rambling to keep fit. Is part of the joint campaign of London Citizens. Whenever out spends money and thereby assists the local economy. Pensioner I also cites the non use of car and reliance on bus and train as being of environmental benefit.

Pensioner J is involved in volunteering to avoid social isolation and improve her own health. Works two or three times a week at a day centre with people who cannot speak English. In addition interprets for GP surgeries and local social services.

Pensioner K supports children with learning difficulties. Is a fundraiser and volunteer officer for various charities, visits refugees and helps with homeless locally. Again all made possible by the Freedom Pass.

**BREAKDOWN OF MAJOR BENEFITS INTO GENERAL CATEGORIES
BASED ON MULTIPLE RESPONSES FROM INDIVIDUALS**



Conclusion

“Burden on Society or Valuable Asset?” Is the question posed by the title of this paper.

For the better understanding of some of today’s generation who express most things only in financial terms, it is only in financial terms do I draw a conclusion.

However the wider issue of why these young people should be expressing in such equivocal terms the need for a monetary return is a surprise to me for they will have been fed, nurtured and educated by that very generation they choose now to regard as a financial burden.

Civilised society it is said can be judged by how it treats its older citizens. Maybe this is an overused phrase but it need to be remembered.

One cannot evaluate easily the enormous benefit to society access to transport is to the elderly, whether that access is the provision of transport itself or the Bus Pass that enables them to use it.

Access to transport generally is a different and larger subject that encompasses loss of bus routes, rural area, and disabled facilities but this survey is a snapshot of what the elderly can achieve when given the means.

This survey was not done by a “tick box” computer program but by people painstakingly writing letters and emails all carefully read. Some were simple, some more detailed and very personal but the overall picture was, even from a financial viewpoint, that there are direct and indirect savings to society which far outweigh the costs.

Therefore given inclusion in society older people, far from being tomorrow’s problem, will be part of tomorrow’s solution.

Peter Rayner