

2nd July 2018

Mr Cris Butler
Head of Transportation
Reading Borough Council
Civic Offices
Reading
RG1 2LU

Dear Cris,

RE: Consultation on Changes to the Concessionary Fares Scheme for Access Pass Holders

Further to your letter of 25th May 2018 regarding the consultation on changes to the concessionary fares scheme for Access Pass Holders, and in particular the proposed withdrawal of the entitlement to their use on Readibus, the following is the Readibus' Board's response to this proposal, as agreed at its meeting on 28th June 2018.

We are aware that Reading Borough Council faces significant financial pressures from reduced funding from central government and increasing demand for its services and have sympathy for the Council's need to make savings. However, we strongly believe that the Council should not withdraw the entitlement to use the Access Bus Pass on Readibus at any or all times of the day for the following reasons:-

- The impact of this on Readibus users with an Access Bus Pass would be disproportionately large and significant compared to the relatively modest savings that this aspect of the proposal would generate.
- Reading Borough Council is on record that use of the bus pass on Readibus is funded by bus lane enforcement revenue. There is no evidence presented to suggest that the revenue from bus lane enforcement has reduced or is insufficient to continue the funding of the use of the free bus pass on Readibus.
- An objective of the proposal as stated in your letter is that this proposal 'would bring the Reading Borough Council scheme for Access Pass holders in line with the current Older Person's pass holders scheme in Reading'. The current Older Person's bus pass can be used on Readibus at all times of the day. In order for the scheme for Access Pass holders to be in line with the current Older Person's pass holders scheme in Reading, the Access Pass should also continue to be able to be used on Readibus at all times of the day.
- A priority in Reading Borough Council's Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2017-2020 is 'reducing loneliness and social isolation'. Withdrawing the entitlement to use the Access Bus Pass on Readibus would not be in keeping with this priority.

For some holders of an Access Bus Pass, travel, even on Readibus, isn't possible without a companion. It would be discriminatory for the companion pass not to apply as it would mean that someone whose disability is such that they need a companion would be charged to travel when someone who did not need a companion in order to travel would not be. For the relatively small number of people who need to travel with a companion in order to travel on Readibus, we believe that the companion entitlement on Readibus should also be maintained.

The entitlement to use the free bus pass on Readibus generates savings to Reading Borough Council, particularly to its Adult Social Care budget. Enabling residents with restricted mobility to



freely use Readibus means that people are able to get out and about; to do things for themselves rather than relying on others; to participate in social activities and events; to get fresh air and exercise; and to meet people, helping to tackle the loneliness and isolation that can lead to a deterioration of mental and physical health and well-being. The prevention of just one person from needing adult social care services can save considerable sums of money. Readibus is used by 2,000 residents of the Borough of Reading who have restricted mobility. Many of these might not be able to use the service as much or even at all if they could not use their bus pass on Readibus. The entitlement to use the bus pass on Readibus represents outstanding value for money when viewed in this context and should be maintained not just despite the financial pressures that the Council is under but *because* of the financial pressures that the Council is under.

We hope that you will re-consider this proposal and maintain the entitlement to use the Access bus pass and companion pass on Readibus at all times of the day. We would be very happy to meet with you as you have offered if this would be helpful to you.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,



Peter Absolon
General Manager
Readibus



Sophie Bowlby (Prof)
Chair