

12<sup>th</sup> December 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 Older Person Bus Pass Holders**

Further to your letter of 16<sup>th</sup> November 2018 regarding the consultation on changes to the concessionary fares scheme for Older Person Bus 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.

We are aware that Reading Borough Council faces significant financial pressures from reduced funding from central government and increasing demand for its adult social care 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 Older Person 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 Older Person Bus Pass could be significant and could result in some residents travelling less frequently or not at all.
- Those so affected are likely to be those who cannot afford to pay a fare, at least some of whom are likely to be residents for whom the Council will have some level of adult social care responsibility.
- At a time when Reading Borough Council is seeking to reduce the upward pressure on its adult social care expenditure in order to achieve sustainable budget savings going forward, withdrawal of use of the bus pass on Readibus may therefore be counter-productive in terms of the Council's objectives – and reasons for considering a change of policy – of reducing its overall expenditure, as the cost to the Council of that adult social care responsibility may be higher.
- Indeed, research by KPMG [Greener Journeys “*The Costs and Benefits of Concessionary Bus Travel for Older and Disabled People in Britain*” June 2017] and others shows that expenditure on use of the free bus pass generates benefits and savings of greater value than the expenditure (of 3.79 times greater value according to the latest report).
- Additionally, 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.
- The Council only recently consulted on changes to the use of the Older Person Bus Pass with changes introduced from April 2017. The outcome of that was a positive decision to retain use of the Older Person Bus Pass on Readibus. This decision and the Council's long-term support for Readibus generally over more than three decades, has illustrated the Council's commitment to looking after the most vulnerable residents in the local community whilst developing Reading over that time as a growing and prosperous town. We would



encourage the Council to uphold that recent decision and to continue the retention of use of the Older Person Bus Pass on ReadiBus.

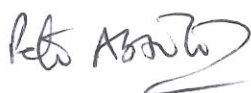
- A priority in Reading Borough Council's Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2017-2020 is 'reducing loneliness and social isolation'. Withdrawing the entitlement to use the Older Person Bus Pass on ReadiBus would not be in keeping with this strategic Council priority.
- The cost to Reading Borough Council of the use of the Older Person Bus Pass on ReadiBus is relatively small compared to the overall cost of the use of Older Person Bus Passes in Reading. A change of policy to implement a withdrawal of the entitlement to use these passes on ReadiBus would have a disproportionate impact on elderly people with restricted mobility compared to the proportionate saving to the overall concessionary fares budget. This would seem to be contrary to the requirements of The Equality Act 2010.
- For local elderly and disabled people who cannot use mainstream public transport for the journeys that they wish to make, ReadiBus is the only bus that they can use their bus pass on.
- Many local community services and indeed some Council services rely upon ReadiBus for the participation of residents in their activities. The impact of withdrawing the use of the Older Person and/or Access Bus Passes from use on ReadiBus will also impact on these services and organisations as well as on the residents themselves who use the ReadiBus if some residents subsequently cease to travel or travel less often. It could even potentially affect the viability of some of these services, which would then impact even more residents.
- Without access to such support networks, such residents could experience an adverse effect on their health and well-being.

Additionally, for a small number of holders of an Older Person Bus Pass, travel on ReadiBus may not be possible without a companion. 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 will generate 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 more 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 resident from needing adult social care services can save considerable sums of money - ReadiBus is used by hundreds of residents of the Borough of Reading who have restricted mobility, thereby potentially helping to prevent a much higher rate of escalation of adult social care expenditure than might otherwise be the case. The entitlement to use the bus pass on ReadiBus represents good value for money when viewed in this context.

We hope that you will re-consider this proposal and maintain the entitlement to use the Older Person Bus Pass and companion pass on ReadiBus at all times of the day. We would be very happy to meet with you if this would be helpful to you.

Yours sincerely,



Peter Absolon  
General Manager  
ReadiBus



Sophie Bowlby (Prof)  
Chair