

HELPTHEAGED WE WILL

Help the Aged in Scotland



Press Release

Monday 15 December 2008

Give Scotland's older and disabled people a Fare Deal for Christmas Campaigners today (Monday December 15) urged the Scottish Government to grant Scotland's older and disabled people's wish for a "Fare Deal" this Christmas.

"Santa" joined them to present Transport Minister Stewart Stevenson with a giant Christmas card on behalf of the thousands of older and disabled people across Scotland unable to benefit from the Government's free bus travel scheme.

Twelve charities representing Scotland's older and disabled people, led by Help the Aged in Scotland, Capability Scotland and the Community Transport Association Scotland, joined forces to launch **A Fare Deal?** campaign asking the Scottish Government to include Demand Responsive Community Transport (DCRT) in the scheme as a matter of urgency.

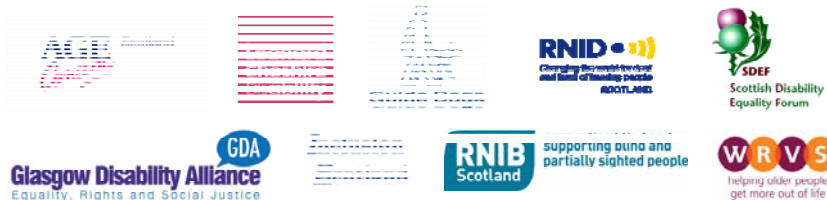
Santa also presented the Minister with "gifts" containing over 4000 signatures collected to demonstrate public backing for extending the free bus scheme.

A Fare Deal? was launched to highlight the fact that many disabled and older people are excluded from Scotland's concessionary bus travel scheme for older and disabled people, either because they cannot access conventional buses, live too far from a bus stop, have no bus service at all or the timetable does not suit their needs.

They are forced to turn to DRCT services or in extreme cases, taxis. This usually costs them money, which many can't afford, putting the most vulnerable at risk of poverty and isolation. When the intention of the concessionary travel scheme was to promote social inclusion, it simply isn't fair that the people most in need of this support are excluded from it.

Naomi Benton, 29, from East Lothian, explained : "I have to be exceptionally organised - I can't just choose to go out. I want to use public transport and improve my health. But I often don't know in advance if I will be well enough to go out. I have to rely on people a lot for lifts."

Faye Gatenby, Capability Scotland's Campaigns, Parliamentary and Policy Manager, says: " Disabled people must not be excluded from the healthier, wealthier and fairer Scotland that the Government is working towards, nor from the benefits free bus travel can bring, simply because the buses are not accessible to them. A lot still needs to be done to make Scottish transport accessible - extending the National Concessionary Bus Travel



Scheme to include Demand Responsive Community Transport is a small, relatively inexpensive yet important step that the Government can take."

Gail Brown, Campaigns Officer at Help the Aged in Scotland says: "It's high time everyone who is entitled to use the Scotland-wide free travel scheme got a Fare Deal. Thousands of older and disabled people have to restrict their journeys to essential trips and miss out on social, cultural and even economic activities just because demand responsive community transport is not included."

John MacDonald, Director for Scotland, Community Transport Association says: "The scheme has been a boon for many people but sadly it's those who need it most who are missing out. Extending it to community and voluntary transport providers, who provide the best services for those who are most frail or disabled, would be easy and the cost to the government would be insignificant."

The organisations supporting **A Fare Deal?** are Help the Aged in Scotland, Capability Scotland, Community Transport Association Scotland, Age Concern Scotland, Leonard Cheshire Disability, Guide Dogs, RNID Scotland, Scottish Disability Equality Forum, Glasgow Disability Alliance, Inclusion Scotland, RNIB Scotland and WRVS.

Ends

For further information contact Carol Stewart on 0131 347 1052/ 07944 060322

Notes to editors:

1. Two of the Scotland-wide Free Travel Scheme's key objectives are to
 - "Allow older and disabled people (especially those on low incomes) improved access to services, facilities and social networks by 'free' scheduled bus services; and so promote social inclusion"
 - "To improve health by promoting a more active lifestyle for the elderly and disabled"

2. A 2006 Report from the Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee recommended that "*the Scottish Executive make current and future DRT services eligible for concessionary fares in line with the concessionary fares scheme introduced in April 2006*".

3. A survey conducted by the Community Transport Association (CTA) in July 2007 showed that community transport (which does not include all forms of DRCT) provided 2.6 million passenger journeys in Scotland the previous year, i.e. 1.3 million return journeys. CTA estimate that these journeys would have been made by around 100,000 passengers. Return fares on DRCT services in Scotland average around £4. The cost of extending the scheme in 2007 to include all DRCT services would have been **£5.2million**.

4. Research by Leonard Cheshire Scotland has shown that 32% of disabled people who had a scheduled medical appointment in the last 12 months missed it due to lack of accessible transport. A missed appointment results in a significant cost to the NHS and a conservative estimate shows that over half a million hospital appointments were missed in Scotland at a cost of £50.7 million. Extending the Free Travel Scheme to include DRCT could lead to substantial savings to the NHS.