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*Concern*



## Consultation response

Ref 0412

# Local Transport Discussion Brief – Conservative Policy Forum

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The Local Transport Discussion initiated by Conservative Policy Forum is part of the 'Ideas Challenge' set out by Oliver Letwin MP at Party Conference 2011. Three streams were prioritised for the Ideas Challenge: productivity; cities towns and villages of the future; and our ageing population. Age UK believes that local transport is an important factor in all three of these streams up for debate.

## Key points and recommendations

For many older people local public transport is a lifeline, allowing them to get out and about, reach services and meet friends and family. Public sector subsidy supports a modern local transport infrastructure which will in turn unlock the spending power of older people and support local communities.

From the age of 50 the total number of trips people taken each year by any form of transport begins to decline<sup>i</sup>. Although travel by car as a passenger or driver is still the primary form of travel, the percentage of older people holding a driving license is lower than for other age groups. Older people and younger people on average make proportionately more trips by public transport (bus, coach and rail). Buses are the most popular form of public transport and they are used frequently. Thirty-nine percent of people over 60 take a bus at least once a week<sup>ii</sup>.

Age UK believes the following measures need to be put in place to improve local transport:

- The funding and planning of local transport crosses national and local government, the private and community sector. To make the most of shrinking budgets all these organisations need to work together to make sure transport investment is properly targeted and innovative solutions are found.
- Improving the availability of public transport should be a priority for the Government. There needs to be clearer guidance for local transport authorities and transport operators on accessibility planning.
- Public transport needs to be physically accessible to older people. The Government should work with transport operators and local transport authorities to improve the physical accessibility, safety and reliability of the journey as a whole, from leaving the housing to arriving at a destination.
- Flexible working provides mutual benefits to employers and employees and could tackle congestion by changing transport patterns. We support the Government's plans to extend the Right to Request flexible working to all employees and are seeking confirmation of their plans.
- Local transport, town centres and shops need to be designed with older people in mind, otherwise the local economy is missing out on the spending power of older consumers.

## 1. Many of the benefits of local transport are gained by the individual – for example, leisure, employment, more family time. Is it right for the Government to subsidise these things?

Yes. An effective and sustainable local transport infrastructure has a direct economic benefit, and therefore any subsidy should be seen as an investment. However, an equally important role for government is to ensure that the investment is effectively delivered.

The responsibility for delivering and funding local transport services crosses national and local government, as well as the private and community sector. This means co-operation and co-ordination is needed between all these sectors to improve local transport services for older people.

Having the right transport in place makes local communities and economies tick. National and local government need to work together on the long-term planning of the transport system to make sure it meets the needs of residents and visitors. They also need to be able to direct investment in vital infrastructure or services, particularly where this affects access to key services and people's well-being.

Improving mobility for older people will have a direct benefit to the local economy. Older people's spending reached an estimated £109 billion in 2010 (65 plus), around 15% of overall household expenditure, and is set to grow<sup>iii</sup>. Older people also contribute their time through volunteering in the community or taking on caring responsibilities. However, in some places inadequate local public transport means older people find it difficult to get from their neighbourhood to the high street.

An Age UK survey found that a significant number of people over 65 have difficulties accessing key services. For instance, 16% found getting to the nearest supermarket difficult, and the figure rose to 24% to reach a bank and 34% to reach the nearest hospital. Being able to use local public transport is what makes many of these activities possible.

The availability of public transport also differs significantly between communities. In urban areas the percentage of people who live with 13 minutes walk of a regular (hourly) bus is around 95 per cent, but in rural areas this falls to 50 per cent.<sup>iv</sup> This isn't just a practical problem, for some older people lack of transport adds to their isolation.

As noted by David Halpern, the director of Number 10's Behavioural Insight Team, loneliness and isolation have been shown to have a direct impact on people's health. Research suggests the impacts of social relationships on premature death are comparable with well-established risk factors for mortality such as smoking.<sup>v</sup>

These factors are already a consideration in the distribution of some public subsidy, for instance, bus service subsidy:

- Concessionary travel funding: national government provides funding for trips made using the national bus concession and this is reimbursed to bus operators by local authorities. This enables older people to travel on buses without making difficult financial decisions.

- Local authority funding: subsidy is provided for bus services on routes that are not commercially viable but are vital to the local community; and funding is provided for additional bus concessions determined locally.
- Bus Service Operators Grant: national government provides a grant to bus operators based on the number of kilometres they operate on registered local bus services. Originally a fuel rebate, the grant is now aimed at benefiting passengers by keeping fares low.

The removal of the coach concession shows the impact of reducing public subsidy. From the 1 November 2011 older people no longer benefit from a 50% discount to coach travel. Coach operators have been able to claim subsidies in return for offering a half-price concession to older and disabled people.

We were contacted by a large number of older people who depend on the coach concession to get out and about, to see friends and family or travel further afield. Examples of their concerns are highlighted below. People in later life that are at risk of facing loneliness and social isolation will be further put off from making longer journeys.

**Reactions from older people to removing the coach concession:**

"Bearing in mind that most of the National Express coaches that I get to go down to baby sit in the school holidays are mostly full with concessions I can see buses running half empty or even complete services being taken off. I think that this is a really bad decision and very short sighted ... This is the tip of the ice-berg and if they get away with this we all know what will go next."

"I travel a lot by National Express as with the concession it was affordable and as a widow I felt safer and more comfortable on the coach and don't have to worry about my luggage...looks like that will soon be coming to an end..."

Although some operators will be able to provide some level of discount to older people, this does not match the government's concession. While we recognise that difficult decisions have to be made to meet the budget deficit, the cut to the coach concession came without an opportunity to fully debate the impacts. Future funding decisions need to be made by including older people in the debate and decision-making process.

Older people had to bear the loss of coach concession, but removing any other subsidy such as cutting the bus concession would be significantly worse. In particular it would affect the 39% of people over 60 that use the bus at least once a week, not all of whom would be able to pick up the extra cost and would therefore hit local economies.

## 2. Is / was flexibility possible in your workplace? If you could change your hours to avoid commuting at rush hour, would you?

Research funded by Age UK shows that flexible working is possible in many workplaces, has benefits for business and employees, and is not abused by employees.

Flexible working is an essential part of the Government's strategy to extend working lives and help people remain active in the labour force for longer. If taken up more widely it could have the knock on effect of changing commuter patterns and reducing congestion.

There are various ways of working which could be described as 'flexible', for example:

- Home working / teleworking
- Working a four day week or nine day fortnight
- Some, but not all, part-time working
- Flexible hours (flexi time)
- Annualised hours
- Term time working
- Job sharing

There are a number of gains for employers through embracing flexibility, including improved productivity and increased employee loyalty. The business case for flexible working is already well recognised, and there are several pieces of research and reports from business groups and Government which showcase this.<sup>vi</sup>

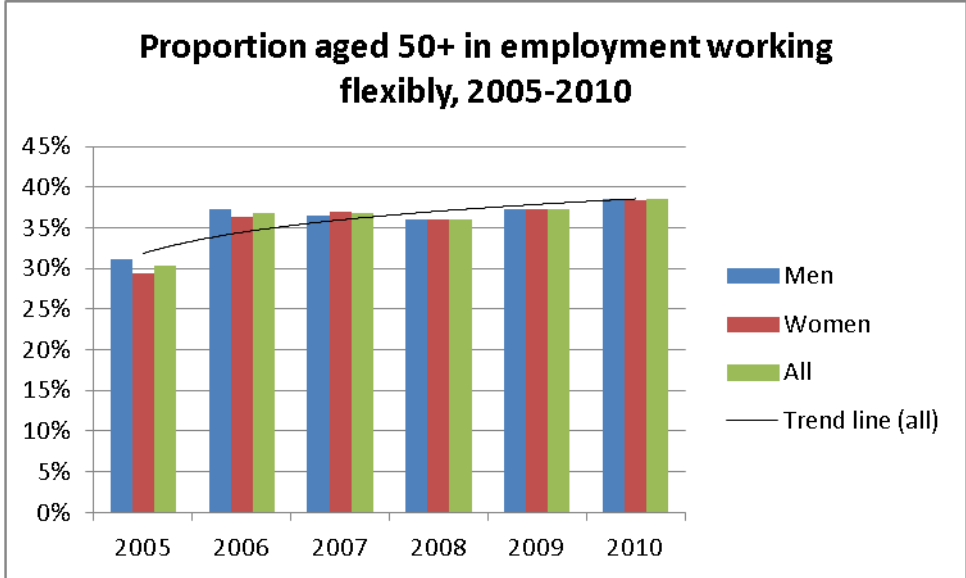
Research by Brigham Young University in the US<sup>vii</sup> conducted across four countries looked at working from home and found that it can bring significant benefits to productivity as a result of improved work-life balance. The research analysed nearly 25,000 IBM employees and found that an individual working from home on flexitime can spend up to 57 hours per week on their paid work before feeling a work-life conflict, compared to someone working a schedule of 38 hours based on-site.

There are also benefits to employees. Age UK commissioned the University of Kent to undertake some qualitative research examining older workers' experiences of flexibility, which was carried out from June 2010 to September 2011.<sup>viii</sup> The research showed that flexibility in the workplace has benefits for many older workers for a variety of reasons, especially:

- Managing health conditions
- Improving work-life balance
- Meeting work-related aspirations
- Managing caring responsibilities.

Age UK will shortly be publishing a policy report looking in more detail at this, and we would be happy to send you a copy.

More people aged 50+ are working flexibly than five years ago, rising to 38 per cent of people aged 50+ in employment in 2010 (see Chart 1 below). However, access to flexible options is still not embedded in the cultures of many businesses – in order for employers to access a wider talent pool of older workers, in particular bearing in mind the UK’s ageing workforce, offering flexible working options will become increasingly important.



Source: Age UK analysis of the Labour Force Survey 2005-10

While many older workers already have positive experiences of flexible working, and have reached an arrangement with their employer, there are still others who have not.

For example, people with caring responsibilities often find that employers are unwilling to discuss flexibility, and that acceptance of flexibility is often only for those with childcare responsibilities.

Some employers misuse flexibility – for example it can be a means of coercing older workers to do extra shifts, or to change working patterns at short notice. Again, we believe this is attitudinal and that if employers and individuals were more aware of the mutual benefits of flexible working when jointly agreed, misuse could become increasingly rare.

Some employers fear that offering flexible working will lead to an abuse of trust. This appears to be completely untrue – all the older workers who participated in the Age UK funded research were aware of the business restrictions of flexible working, and when they did work flexibly were keen to be seen as thankful and trusted employees. Most found they were more productive and more loyal as a result.

The Coalition Government has committed to extending the Right to Request flexible working to all employees, which will create a legal right to ask their employer for a change in their working patterns. The employer will have a duty to seriously consider the request, although if it conflicts with business objectives it can be rejected. At

present this applies to parents of children under 16 and some carers. Age UK strongly supports the extension of this right to all employees. We believe it will help 'nudge' employers towards a culture where flexible working is embedded in their organisational values.

In addition, many older workers lack the confidence to ask their employer about flexible working. The right to request can help empower those who either work for an organisation without a formal policy or have a poor relationship with their line manager.

We are currently awaiting further announcement from the Government, and we would urge them to confirm plans to press ahead with the extension.

### 3. Should we prioritise reductions in journey times for those already on the network or connecting people who cannot currently access public transport?

These two aims are not necessarily in opposition. There are a number of improvements that could be made to connect more older people to public transport, including availability of the service and physical accessibility. Improving these elements will also improve journeys for those that already have access to the network.

#### **Maintaining and improving available services**

We recognise that priorities need to be set to target transport investment. To make the most of shrinking budgets across the public and private sector transport providers and policy makers need to be pulling together to make sure transport investment is properly targeted.

For instance, Surrey County Council used accessibility planning to ensure the majority of people still had access to bus services when they were making decision about spending. This is often done through "mapping audits" comparing the local transport network, the location of services and disadvantaged groups. This makes the ability to get to work and key services a factor in investment decisions.

The Government has commissioned research into the effectiveness of accessibility planning and the completion date is April 2012<sup>ix</sup>. We welcome this and urge the Government to use the findings of this research to produce clearer guidance for local transport authorities and transport operators on accessibility planning.

Improved prioritisation may also mean doing things in a completely new way. The Isle of Wight Council, for example, had to end their bus contract for rural routes on the island. Rather than lose the service completely, the council and bus company negotiated a new contract that sees volunteer bus drivers providing the service.

The future of transport needs as much innovative thinking in relation to local schemes as we see for exciting new rail and airport plans.

## **Improving physical accessibility**

For some older people public transport presents accessibility problems. Tackling these problems could ensure that the investment in these services has the maximum possible benefit both for local economies and for individuals.

The Life Opportunities Survey<sup>x</sup> found that 74 per cent of adults with an impairment had difficulty with at least one mode of transport, which meant they did not use it at all or less than they liked. Long distance rail and coach were the modes most reported as difficult and the main barriers were cost and anxiety or lack of confidence. There were also 34 per cent of adults with an impairment that reported buses as difficult to use. Other than cost, the main reason cited was difficulty getting on and off transport.

A legal framework was put in place to ensure transport was physically accessible. The Disability Discrimination Act 1985, now part of the Equality Act 2010, requires transport operators to ensure that customers can board transport vehicles with relative ease. The Equality Act 2010 will also mean local authorities are bound by the public sector Equality Duty when planning and providing transport.

However, recent research by Age UK London showed that despite buses meeting accessibility standards, there were still barriers to access caused by attitudes and behaviour of drivers and other passengers. For instance, not having enough time to sit down before the bus moves off or drivers not pulling the bus right into the kerb. They also noted that on occasion the accessibility measures put in place were not working, such as broken ramps.

Public transport needs to be physically accessible for older people. The Government should work with transport operators and local transport authorities to improve the physical accessibility, safety and reliability of the journey as a whole, from leaving the housing to arriving at a destination.

## **4. Is it more important to make ticket prices simple (for example, one flat price for a particular journey) or to use flexible ticket prices to encourage users to take transport outside of peak hours?**

It should be possible to achieve a balance between making ticket prices simple and keeping flexibility to incentivise behaviour. Experience with the energy market has shown that excessive complexity means that competition cannot work efficiently<sup>xi</sup>. We would argue similar logic should be reflected in ticket pricing.

## **5. What could or should government be doing to encourage more people to buy or use a) electric cars and b) bicycles?**

Many older people are keen environmental activists and would like to see the government to do more to promote sustainable travel. However electric cars and bicycles are not the only means of doing this.



The Greener Wiser Manifesto<sup>xii</sup>, written by a Taskforce of older people, stated that people in later life want a much greater role in decision making about the environment and issues that affect their communities. On transport the Taskforce made the following recommendations:

1. Promoting public transport, especially in the design of new communities, retail outlets and essential services, so that it is a viable option for older people.
2. Stronger legislation to avoid the development of ever, larger, faster and higher impact modes of transport.
3. Restructuring rail fares to incentivise the use of public transport for longer journeys and to address the financial barriers of expensive fares.

## 6. What local transport problems are detrimental to your local economy?

As highlighted above, older people's spending reached an estimated £109 billion in 2010 (65 plus), around 15% of the overall household expenditure, and is set to grow<sup>xiii</sup>. Age UK believes the local economy is missing out on the spending power of older consumers because the design of town centres and shops do not take their needs into account. Lack of local public transport limits how far people are able to go and means older people find it difficult to get from their neighbourhood to their local High Street.

Leeds Older People's Forum told us "The city centre is viewed as a young person's playground, with acknowledgement from planners that more must be done to make it accessible to young families, yet there is little consideration beyond the realms of social care for the needs and wants of older people in the city."<sup>xiv</sup> This cannot be fixed by focusing on the local economy alone. Local transport planning needs to ensure older people can get from their neighbourhood to the high street. People need to be confident to travel between their homes and town centres.

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- i National Travel Survey, Department for Transport, 2009
- ii National Travel Survey, Department for Transport, 2009
- iii The Golden Economy – The Consumer Marketplace in an Ageing Society, Age UK, 2010
- iv National Travel Survey, Department for Transport, 2009.
- v SCIE Research briefing 39: Preventing loneliness and social isolation: interventions and outcomes. SCIE. 2011  
<http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/briefings/briefing39/>
- vi See for example: Hooker et al (2007), Third work-life balance employee survey, Department for Trade and Industry; Hayward et al (2007) 3rd work-life balance employer survey, BERR; CBI (2009), Employment trends survey; Federation of Small Businesses (2010), Flexible working: small business solutions;
- vii Hill EJ, Erickson J, Holmes E & Ferris M (June 2010), Workplace flexibility, work hours, and work-life conflict: Finding an extra day or two, Journal of Family Psychology
- viii Alden E (2012), Flexible employment: how employment and the use of flexibility policies through the life course can affect later life occupation and financial outcomes', Age UK Research Report
- ix [www.dft.gov.uk](http://www.dft.gov.uk)
- x Life Opportunities Survey, Interim Results 2009/10 Office for National Statistics
- xi See <http://www.ofgem.gov.uk/Media/PressRel/Documents1/RMR%20Oct.pdf>
- xii Greener Wiser Manifesto, Green Alliance, 2010
- xiii The Golden Economy – The Consumer Marketplace in an Ageing Society, Age UK, 2010
- xiv At your convenience, Age UK Blog, 2011 <http://ageukblog.org.uk/2011/07/29/at-your-convenience/#more-954>`FirefoxHTML\Shell\Open\Command`