

20 October 2020

London MPs
(sent via email)

Withdrawal of child fare discounts on Transport for London (TfL) services

Further to my previous letter of 1st June 2020 to you regarding the Government's proposal to withdraw free travel for under 18s as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, I am writing to request that you ask Ministers to look again at the proposal in the light of emerging evidence as to the cost, practicality and potential benefits of this proposal.

Originally the rationale given for removing free travel was to help reduce demand on public transport¹, but since the success of the return to school in London this September, this no longer seems to be an issue, undermining the original rationale for the proposal.

Since the beginning of the September 2020 school term, there is mounting evidence that the bus network has been able to provide sufficient capacity for both school children and other passengers, such as key workers, without significant incidents. This is a result of careful network planning, the encouragement of walking and cycling where possible, and by some parents taking their children to school by car. Additional buses have also been deployed with the help of a £6m grant from the Department for Education. As a result of these changes to travel behaviour, TfL data shows that only 70% of previous Zip card demand is now being carried.

Our own weekly satisfaction survey of fare paying passengers that we conduct with Transport Focus shows no significant decline in satisfaction levels around crowding, social distancing and the behaviour of other passengers since schools have returned, further indicating that the return to school has had no adverse effects on non-school passengers. The Prime Minister's recent announcement encouraging people to work at home if they can, will further reduce the need for public transport at peak times, as will London's progression into Tier 2 restrictions.

Recently our weekly survey has highlighted the intention of 33% of Londoners to drive more, once Covid no longer poses a significant risk.² Furthermore, parents are even more likely to say that they will drive more in future than non-parents. If this became reality, it would undermine the Government's aim of reducing private car usage in line with its decarbonisation strategy.

In 2014 the Department for Transport (DfT) commissioned research into the effectiveness of the Zip card scheme³. This concluded that from the perspective of the Cost Benefit Analysis framework and representative year 2009, the policy has reduced Road Traffic Injuries, increased bus travel and reduced car travel while not reducing levels of active travel. In the

¹ Letter from Baroness Vere, Minister of State to Emma Gibson, Director London TravelWatch

² <https://d3cez36w5wymxj.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/15175600/Travel-during-Covid-19-survey-16-October-2020.pdf>

³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK263964/>

base case, the monetised benefits have substantially outweighed the costs, providing what the DfT considers to be 'high' value for money.

Reasons for this included:

1. There was increased bus use by young people and by (fare paying) adults: both rising at the same rate.
2. There was a reduction in car journeys by adults and children
3. The scheme normalised bus use and so resulted in reduced car dependence in later life.
4. There was a predated increase in assault injuries to young people, but the scheme mitigated the risks of this e.g. risk of being stranded, and was perceived to be a safer mode of travel than walking for girls
5. It increased access to and take up of training and education, and encouraged independent travel.

I have also included [a link to a report from London Councils](#) which sets out the additional costs likely to be incurred by TfL, the London Boroughs and parents if the proposed change goes ahead. These are significant when compared to the marginal benefit in public transport capacity that the scheme might gain. Noteworthy is the cost to parents. Removing this concession will mean increased costs for families, such as those with split childcare arrangements or where the child is helping with care for an adult.

London Councils have also raised concerns about the timetable and practicalities of being able to consult on and implement the proposed change.

London TravelWatch is therefore of the view that given the change in circumstances since the Government proposed this measure it no longer meets its original objective - in effect, the moment has passed for this measure to be effective. There is also evidence that the removal of free travel could result in the unintentional side effect of fuelling a car-led recovery from Covid 19.

If you decide to raise any of these issues with Baroness Vere, we would be grateful if you could let us see any response that you might receive.

Yours sincerely



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