

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Free bus travel for young people (under 22s) in Scotland

I am writing to update you on an exciting new scheme which is launching on the 31st January 2022, when all young people living in Scotland aged between 5 and 21 years will be eligible for free bus travel within Scotland. For those aged 5 to 10 we are trying to encourage as many people as possible to apply using parentsportal.

Why the scheme is important

The scheme is designed to help create a sustainable future for young people by embedding sustainable travel habits from an early age. This can help Scotland to tackle the climate emergency and meet targets to become Net Zero by 2045.

At the same time, the introduction of free bus travel for under 22s will also reduce inequalities and advance equality of opportunity and outcome for young people and families as well as having the potential to help address child poverty by reducing household outgoings. Free bus travel supports the delivery of a Just Transition and removes financial barriers, giving young people more and better choices in work, education, health and social activities.

Research commissioned in October 2021 revealed nationwide support for the roll out of free bus travel amongst young people – with almost two-thirds (61%) agreeing that access to public transport will play a central role in the fight against climate change. One full double decker bus equates to removing 75 single occupancy cars from Scotland's roads. All delivery partners are committed to delivering the scheme in a way that is safe for children and young people and instils confidence in their parents and guardians. That is why parents or guardians will be required to apply on behalf of children under the age of 16 to ensure they can exercise their responsibility for their children's safety.

Transport Scotland has also worked with Barnardo's Scotland to make available additional training for bus drivers on child safeguarding in advance of the scheme's launch.

What does this mean for your child?

Your child will be able to access free bus travel on registered bus services across Scotland including a very limited number of local cross-border services from the south of Scotland into northern England.

How will my child obtain free bus travel?

Young people aged between 5 and 21 years old will need to apply for a National Entitlement Card or a Young Scot National Entitlement Card.

The card has an electronic chip inside it. When a child gets on a bus, the bus driver will ask them to tap the card against a card reader. The card reader will tell the bus driver if the child has free bus travel enabled on their card or not.

Children under 16 years old will need their parent/guardian to apply on their behalf and provide approval for free bus travel to be enabled on their child's card.

Young people aged 16 years and over will be able to apply for free bus travel themselves.

Children under 5 years old can already travel on buses for free. They will not need a to apply for a card.

When can parents or young people apply for free bus travel?

Applications are now open to all young people and children aged 5-21 years who can apply for their new or replacement NEC or Young Scot NEC to access the scheme from 31 January. **However, we are asking that only those for whom bus travel is essential apply at this time, because of work, education, health or care reasons, for example, in line with restrictions relating to Covid-19.** All other eligible applicants will be encouraged to apply at a later date through a national marketing campaign.

Application Process

Even if you already have a National Entitlement Card or Young Scot National Entitlement Care, you must apply for a new or replacement card if you wish to use the scheme.

For children aged 5 to 10 applications should be made via parentsportal. A guide on to the application process is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4F-G-kzbNo>. Further information about parentsportal is available on Aberdeenshire Councils website here: <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/school-info/parents-portal/>

For children aged 11 to 15 an application should be made via <https://getyournec.scot/nec/> Please find step-by-step instructions on how to apply for a NEC and free bus travel through getyournec.scot: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ev_sEjprEDE

For young people aged between 16 and 21 applications should be made by themselves via <https://getyournec.scot/nec/>

Once your application has been processed your NEC will be delivered to your home address.

Please note that an online application should take around 10 minutes and will provide a swifter response and delivery of your updated card.

Other Ways to Apply

If you are unable to apply online, you can download and complete an application form and email it to together with copies of external documents. If you do not have access to a computer, a paper copy of the application form can be obtained from any Aberdeenshire Council Service Point or by request to the NEC Office on 03456 081 208.

Young people under 16 years old who want to apply for the young's person free bus travel scheme and cannot apply online can collect and fill an application form from their schools. Parental approval will be needed for the free bus travel to be enabled to the card.

If you are in any doubt or need help applying for your NEC assistance can be provided by contacting the NEC Office at entitlementcard@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Please note that a paper-based application may take several weeks before your card is received.

What happens if I change my mind and want to stop my child having free bus travel?

If you change your mind at any time while your child remains under 16 years of age, you can apply to have the free travel product removed from your child's card. You can do this online or by contacting your local council. You will be sent a new card and should destroy the old one.

For further information on the scheme please see:

Transport Scotland - <https://www.transport.gov.scot/concessionary-travel/young-persons-free-bus-travel-scheme/>