

Keith/Greg

Buses:

You will have read that the County's transport budget has a deficit of 5.4 million pounds. This is the additional money it is felt the Government should contribute to cover the cost of concessionary bus passes used in this County – not just by residents but by visitors from all over the country. Not surprisingly there have been reductions to some of the subsidised bus services, including the Coast Hopper. A number of people have made suggestions, such as paying a £1 per journey, but the County is not permitted to compromise in any such way – only the Government can change the system. Below is a specimen letter to the Minister for Transport suggesting ways to improve the concessionary pass scheme and reduce the cost to the County. If you would like to write to the Minister feel free to adapt the letter – even asking about the £5.4m. Copying me in would be useful in gleaning how much interest there is in modifying the scheme. I HAVE BEEN ASKED TO STRESS THAT THIS SPECIMAN LETTER IS COMING FROM ME AS COUNTY COUNCILLOR AND NOT A COUNTY COUNCIL LETTER.

Norman Baker MP, Under Secretary of State for Transport
Great Minster House, Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DR

Dear Minister,

Concessionary bus passes

It is surprising that with all the austerity measures introduced more is not being done to reduce the costs of the concession pass scheme and make it more sustainable. We understand that all parties have pledged to protect the concession pass but think the government should consider other approaches to the scheme.

The social and economic value of the scheme is highly valued but pass holders recognise that it cannot be provided in its present form forever. Local press, websites and blogs indicate a wave of support for action to protect the pass for the longer term. Below are a few ideas which we believe would place the concession scheme on a stronger footing and that should be carefully considered:

- i An annual charge of say £30 would help fund the scheme. For someone taking 4 trips a week it would average out at less than 15p per journey. More frequent use would significantly reduce the cost.
- ii Return to the half fare system that existed before 2007. This was well received by pass holders and bus operators. There also seemed to be enough money to go around for the councils and operators.
- iii. Charge a flat fare rather than an annual fee. If we all paid 50p for a journey this would make a contribution to the running costs of the scheme. Although those who travel daily may find an annual charge more attractive.

We hope you will take these suggestions in the spirit that they are given. We want the scheme to remain but recognise the present format is not sustainable. Combined with other changes that have made it more expensive to run buses, and with cuts to support from county councils, there is a real danger that buses will disappear long before the passes do, making the concession scheme next to useless.