



TRANSPORT AND MENTAL HEALTH

THE VIEWS OF 87 PEOPLE WITH
MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS ON
TRANSPORT AND BUS PASSES IN THE
HIGHLANDS

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**HUG at
Highland Community Care Forum**

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WHAT IS HUG?

HUG stands for the Highland Users Group, which is a network of people who use, or have used, mental health services in the Highlands.

At present, HUG has approximately 380 members and 14 branches across the Highlands. HUG has been in existence now for 13 years. Between them, members of HUG have experience of nearly all the mental health services in the Highlands.

HUG wants people with mental health problems to live without discrimination and to be equal partners in their communities. They should be respected for their diversity and who they are.

We should:

- Be proud of who we are
- Be valued
- Not be feared
- Live lives free from harassment
- Live the lives we choose
- Be accepted by friends and loved ones
- Not be ashamed of what we have experienced

We hope to achieve this by:

- Speaking out about the services we need and the lives we want to lead.
- Challenging stigma and raising awareness and understanding of mental health issues.

HUG's aims are as follows:

- To be the voice of people in Highland who have experienced mental health problems.
- To promote the interests of people in Highland who use or have used mental health services.
- To eliminate stigma and discrimination against people with mental health problems.
- To promote equality of opportunity for people with mental health problems irrespective of creed, sexuality, gender, race or disability.
- To improve understanding about the lives of people with mental health problems.

- To participate in the planning, development and management of services for users at a local, Highland and national level.
- To identify gaps in services and to campaign to have them filled.
- To find ways of improving the lives, services and treatments of people with mental health problems.
- To share information and news on mental health issues among mental health service user groups and interested parties.
- To increase knowledge about resources, treatments and rights for users.
- To promote cooperation between agencies concerned with mental health.

INTRODUCTION

For a long time we have been aware that transport is particularly important if you live in a large geographical area such as the Highlands.

It can be difficult to make appointments and to travel for basic tasks if you don't have access to a car, which can lead to isolation for those who are stuck at home.

Our impression is that the concessionary bus passes for older and people with disabilities have made a huge difference to people with a mental illness but recent rumours about their future has caused a lot of anxiety to our members.

Therefore over the spring months of 2009 we consulted our members on the issue by visiting 13 of our branches and having informal semi structured discussions on the subject.

In total we met with 87 people and their comments were used to create this report which has, in turn, been approved by the HUG Round Table (the HUG steering committee)

WHY USE TRANSPORT?

This is such a simple question that we had a little difficulty answering it. The obvious answer is that we use it to get to places that we couldn't get to otherwise.

However there are other reasons. Many of us said that we use transport to get away from the isolation of our house where we may be very alone and even feel trapped.

"it has been a tool to help each other and lessen the effects of isolation"

"it gives us freedom, especially in a rural area where everything is miles away, you can get to places. Without transport you can become a hermit"

Some of us use transport to get out and do new activities that we wouldn't do if we stayed at home.

Some of us also said that if we get ill then we often stop travelling and hide at home, even if we are capable of driving and have a car and a licence. In fact, for some of us, one of the first signs of illness is that we stop travelling.

It can be a way of getting to places we wouldn't ordinarily get to.

"just to be able to get out to the countryside or other places, it clears your head a bit"

Just as with other people, we need transport to get to appointments, to do voluntary work or paid work and so on.

It can also be a way of getting some relief from our pain.

"I used to drive for miles to escape"

It is also necessary to use transport so that we can get to therapeutic and social facilities, such as drop in centres and training units.

WHAT FORMS OF TRANSPORT DO WE USE?

At least 50% (maybe much more) of our members did not have a car and a substantial number had no access to a car.

People used:

Buses, trains, lifts (from friends), their own cars, support workers cars, taxis, ferries, bicycles, the post bus, dial a ride/community transport schemes, hospital drivers and walking to get about.

They mainly used buses and although taxis were mentioned a lot they were also said to be far too expensive for most people.

We believed that people have better access to transport according to the background they come from. For instance, we had the impression that older people would be less likely to ask for lifts than younger people.

WHY DON'T WE USE CARS?

Those of us who don't use cars have the following reasons for this:

- They are too expensive to buy and keep. Road tax, petrol and insurance are more than people can afford.
- We have lost the confidence to continue driving.
- We have medical conditions that prevent us driving such as epilepsy.
- We may have had our licence taken away because of our mental illness.
- We doubt our judgement and safety when driving.
- We don't like the road conditions in the Highlands, both the weather and single track roads can be off putting.
- It is hard to get insurance.
- Our medication may make it unwise for us to drive.
- Some of us don't know how to drive.

"if I'm having a bad day I don't get behind the wheel"

Despite this some of us do have cars and, although we struggle to keep our cars, find the freedom they give us very important.

BUSES

"I wouldn't be here without it"

"I would be stuck in the house"

Buses are the most commonly used form of public transport that we use.

BENEFITS OF BUSES

The principle advantage is that, if we have a bus pass, then the buses are free.

Some of us get to know the regular drivers well and like this, as well as meeting other passengers.

"I've made loads of friends on the bus"

But there are others: such as they are non-smoking and that they are not our responsibility, we don't have to drive them, park them or look after them.

We can also get a good view from the buses.

They are great if we are not able to drive for whatever reason or if we just don't like driving.

Some of the drivers are appreciated

"the driver is pleasant enough but it can be a bit of a rush"

"they help you on and off and make sure you are seated before they drive off"

Some of us said that the buses were "good" or "great" and that we had no problems with them.

DISADVANTAGES OF BUSES

Many of us said that they are often late and often don't turn up on time. For some of us it was this unpredictability that was the biggest problem.

"you can manage with an infrequent service as long as it will turn up when you think it will"

However, the inconvenience of having to manage with buses that are few and far between is also a disadvantage, as is getting to the bus stop.

"when its raining and you have to walk to the bus stop."

Some of us need to use the toilet frequently and therefore can't use those buses that don't have toilets and go moderately long distances.

We can find it hard to find out the times of the buses.

If we don't have a bus pass they are too expensive and we often don't use them much.

"I can't afford to use the bus, I have to cycle"

In some rural areas there are no buses or only one or two buses a day making it almost impossible for people to get out and about by public transport.

"I couldn't get here if I just used the bus"

"no bus comes near my door"

Some of the bus drivers didn't seem to like people using bus passes as did some other passengers;

"some drivers make sarcastic comments about the bus passes"

"the looks on their faces; generally grumpy"

"other passengers when they pay and see you."

Some of us are very worried about travelling and only feel safe if we already know the bus driver and some drivers seem to drive faster than we would like.

"Now the drivers are all strangers, before they knew all the customers well"

It is not always pleasant having to wait for the bus.

Some of us can't face travelling on the bus as it can feel too public, too crowded, noisy and claustrophobic.

Sometimes buses don't go where we want them to go which makes travel inconvenient.

"sometimes there are no buses so you have to walk"

They can be seen as uncomfortable and we have problems when they are too hot or too cold, when the toilet doesn't work and when they don't stop for comfort breaks.

Sometimes they seem to be very old in some parts of the Highlands. Some of us thought we weren't allowed dogs and pets on the bus but we weren't sure if this was true [in fact we are allowed pets on buses].

Not all buses have disabled access which can cause problems. (One of us who has problems with balance has fallen from the bus a few times and needed hospitalised as a result.)

Not being able to smoke on them is a problem for some of us. When they don't stop when we need them to can also be frustrating.

The lack of buses on a Sunday is an irritation as is the shortage of 'local' buses.

TRAINS

These are used far less than buses.

BENEFITS OF TRAINS

They are clean and comfortable and north of Inverness are not crowded. They are pleasant and people can move about on them. In the areas close to Inverness they are quicker than the bus.

"they are much better than the bus but are more expensive"

They are more predictable than buses and have good signing to say when they are going to be late.

"facilities especially for disabled are good (as with buses)"

DISADVANTAGES OF TRAINS

- The main problem is that a concessionary travel pass only entitles people to half fare instead of a free fare so most people avoid using them.
- The station can be a long distance away and the rail network in the Highlands only covers a small portion of the area so it is inaccessible to many people.
- *"there are none where I live"*
- Sometimes they are crowded and we cannot get a seat.
- Some people find them easier to manage than buses and others feel the opposite.
- People can get frustrated when they break-down and are delayed.
- There is a feeling that there are not enough trains

- It is less likely that we will know each other when making a journey.
- We may not be able to get to the train in time for the journey
- *"The train to Inverness is too early to get. You need to get a taxi to Kyle which is too expensive"*
- Some of us find the food on trains is too expensive and that the journey from Caithness to Inverness takes too long.
- Some of us struggle with being in a public environment on a train just as we do on a bus.

BUS PASSES

Concessionary travel passes give people who qualify for them free travel on nearly all buses in Scotland and half price travel on trains within Highland region.

DO PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT THEM?

In the past many people didn't know about bus passes but in this round of meetings the vast majority of our members knew of bus passes even if many were unsure if they qualified for them.

We were, however, aware that people who had fairly recently developed a mental illness were often unaware of the existence of bus passes that they might qualify for.

HOW MANY PEOPLE HAD THE PASSES?

Slightly fewer than 50% of our membership had bus passes but not everyone used them.

BENEFITS OF TRAVEL PASSES.

To some people the freedom to travel that travel passes give is literally life changing:

"they are a blessing"

"it's magic it only costs 50p to get to Edinburgh"

"it stops you going stir crazy – just hop on a bus and go away, it's really good"

"if you are on a budget you can't use a bus but with these there are no limitations"

"the freedom, you can get to places easily"

"I look forward to seeing things out the window like the seals at the bridge"

"it saves money, gets us out, helps us meet people, they increase our options"

"I wouldn't have gone out without it; I used to stay at home."

"I would use it to make myself see my C.P.N."

"it helped me get a job and helped me travel"

"you can visit friends and relatives"

"they are eco"

"I would be absolutely lost without mine it would be a case of not going out"

"some of them mean that you can have a carer with you which is good."

Despite having bus passes some of us don't use them. This is because we may be too ill to travel or part of our illness means that we can't face other people. Sometimes we just don't like buses and sometimes we have access to cars which we prefer.

"I got it fairly quickly but there can be a long wait for buses so I didn't want to use it too much"

THE PROBLEMS IN GETTING BUS PASSES

For many of us there is no problem in getting a bus pass apart from finding out about them in the first place and realising we qualify.

However, many of our members who are probably entitled to bus passes do not have them however, due to a lack of knowledge by them. Also lack of knowledge on the part of those people meant to help us get them.

Some of us leave the whole process to our C.P.N.s (community psychiatric nurses) and have no problem. But many of us think we are not entitled to them because one of the criteria to qualify for a bus pas, that of being on Disability Living Allowance (D.L.A.) was changed to having to be on the high rate of D.L.A. In fact most of our members who are on D.L.A. because of mental illness will almost certainly have been ill for longer than a year and are

therefore (if they need to travel for treatment) entitled to a bus pass on the grounds of mental illness rather than disability benefits that they get. This is not what they are always told when they go to service points, in fact they are still sometimes refused passes even when they point these issues out.

Some of our members don't get passes because they go in and out of illness for instance being depressed for a few months every year but not all year and therefore not being seen as ill for longer than a year which is a qualifying criteria.

Some don't get passes because they do not acknowledge that they have an illness. Others don't because, although they clearly have a mental health problem, they don't have a formal diagnosis.

If we are in contact with a community mental health team it can often be quite easy to get a pass but if we have to prove our illness on our own it can become very difficult. If we try to manage without contact with mental health services it can be even harder. It appears that, often, a member of the c.m.h.t. in the Highlands is the only person able to verify that someone has an illness. This is not helpful to the vast majority of people who are not clients of the community mental health teams.

"if you're on your own without a C.P.N. or social worker you're stuffed."

"till very recently it was almost impossible as the G.P.s could no longer sign the form"

There is a very strong feeling that it is much harder to get a pass than it used to be and a great deal of anxiety for those who have passes coming up for renewal that they will be refused the new bus pass in the future.

"I was told I should get one but never got it"

"I went in to renew it but was told that I wasn't disabled enough or mentally ill enough. I nearly had to give up work because of it but the C.P.N.s. helped me get it. The service point was not helpful and was quite rude."

"I went in to renew my bus pass but because I am not on the higher rate I am no longer eligible."

"There is a widespread ignorance from C.P.N.s about the forms"

WHO SHOULD BE ELIGIBLE FOR TRAVEL PASSES

We had quite a debate on this subject, mainly around means testing. Some of us thought that if people were well off or well paid then they didn't need passes but others felt that this shouldn't be an issue. We felt:

People:

- With any disability defined by diagnosis or the benefits that we receive should be eligible.
- Some of us thought we should be entitled if we had an addiction and others the opposite.
- Some of us thought that anyone on benefits or on a low income should be entitled to bus passes.
- Some of us thought that everyone should have passes as it would make the world more eco and enhance everyone's ability to work.
- We agreed that anyone with a mental illness should get passes.
- Children were also suggested and older people were included
- Anyone on DLA was another suggestion
- Anyone who has difficulty in walking
- People who could demonstrate that cheap travel would benefit them therapeutically.

THE FUTURE OF BUS PASSES

When we started this consultation it was in an atmosphere of rumour and conjecture.

There was a strong feeling that the financial cost of bus passes was greater than government could sustain and that bus passes were due to be phased out or made even harder to get. Some people said that, as bus companies relied on the income from bus passes and got this from the government, that it was in their interest to raise bus fares to maximise this income rather than keep fares cheap to maximise passenger numbers.

This caused a great deal of anxiety to us. We felt that it should be easier to get bus passes, and that the rule that says you have to travel for treatment should be amended or deleted. As travel, even recreational travel is therapeutic and is certainly so if we are going to a drop in centre or training unit. Such places may not necessarily provide health care but do provide a safe positive environment.

These rumours still persist despite government statements that seem to be saying that they will be expanding the range of people who will be entitled to bus passes.

"I don't know what I would do without my bus pass; my life style would be completely different"

OTHER POINTS TO MAKE ABOUT BUS PASSES

A small number of us felt that travel purely for pleasure was an abuse of the system and some people were aware of people using bus passes to go to Inverness to get drugs. They did not approve of this.

We thought that the voluntary sector and G.P's should be able to sign certificates of eligibility.

We felt that bus passes should be eligible on trains across Scotland not just in our council area.

We felt that they should be subsidised more as they not only prevent illness, promote recovery and help people get help and do things that they wouldn't normally do, but they are also good for our environment.

Some of us felt that the need to be ill in order to get a bus pass meant that there was an incentive to be ill.

Some of us worried that bus passes made travel for people without passes more expensive.

Some of us felt that it was an easier system when it was operated by Highland Council rather than the Government.

A few of us worried that the information that could be obtained from bus passes could enable people to get information about us that we didn't want them to have.

Some of us wished that they covered the whole of the UK.

TRAVELLING AS THERAPY

Nearly all of us agreed that travelling is a therapeutic activity in itself, if we are well enough to do so.

Travelling is good for us whether we are travelling for the sake of it or whether we use it to get to places, people and activities such as voluntary work, relatives and the shops.

It is for this reason that we object to one of the conditions for eligibility to bus passes being about needing to travel for treatment. Quite apart from being almost impossible to prove (and how often do we need to do this travelling to qualify?) it is not the main way in which bus passes are so therapeutic for us.

"It's a release to get out of your everyday environment into the countryside"

"I love getting around and doing photography. It allows me to make connections..."

"When you are too depressed to get outside, once you get to the bus stop it opens up the world, it feels like an achievement."

TRAVELLING TO MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS USING PUBLIC TRANSPORT

This can be a hard thing to do and is sometimes almost impossible. At the minimum it can be a mild inconvenience:

"You need to leave an extra hour to get there on time."

"You have to get the bus early to Portree and then get stuck there with no where to go."

"They do try but even making an appointment for 11.00 can be too early to get there from Wick"

At the worst people have to find accommodation because appointment times combined with travelling times make it impossible to get home in time or to the appointment in time.

"In order to make an appointment... I had to sleep outside in order to get back home."

"Off the island there can be big problems. I was given an appointment before the first bus arrived in Inverness. I tried to change it but they wouldn't. I would have had to get a B & B but luckily I got a lift instead."

"Sometimes you have to go all the way to Inverness [from Wick] for a five minute appointment."

"If you have an appointment for 11.00 in Golspie then you have to wait until 2 to get a bus back."

"You can miss a day's work to get an appointment in Inverness"

There are solutions though. Some of us use a hospital car or minibus which is very good although it is hard to get. Also, it can be hard to know when it will leave or return.

The community car schemes are also useful (although there are rumours about the funding available to the Gairloch community car scheme which is causing some anxiety.)

"the [Lochaber] community car scheme is good but you have to pay mileage and need to book it in advance."

In some places buses are well routed. For instance, most buses in Fort William go via the medical centre.

For some of us literacy or visual problems mean that we have problems knowing when or which bus to get.

"I can't read a bus timetable so it's difficult."

There was a call for hospitals to keep bus timetables both for staff and patients and to be sensible when setting appointments by keeping an eye on distances involved and possible bus times. The refusal of some people to change appointment times, even when this meant people had to stay in a bed and breakfast the night before, was not appreciated.

A lack of information meant that some people who would have used buses didn't do so.

TRAVELLING TO HOSPITAL IN AN EMERGENCY

When we need to be admitted to hospital as an emergency we are usually very ill and are often transported by ambulance.

For some of us there is either no problem with this because the trip is uneventful or else how we are transported to hospital is the least of the worries that we have at the time. Some of us knew we had been taken to hospital by ambulance but had little memory of the event.

For others it is much harder; sometimes we don't know where we are going or if we do, may have never been there before. This can make us very anxious.

The fact that we have to be strapped in to our seat has associations of restraint with some of us which is also unpleasant.

"Awful, I was strapped in, it was very undignified"

A lot can depend on the attitude of the ambulance drivers. If we know them it is usually better.

"The staff were weird, they talked about people they knew and made inappropriate comments"

"It's chronic; you're not well and there are two strangers that don't understand anything or know anything. It was a long way. They didn't understand and I didn't know them. They were both male."

"It's horrendous. You're out of place, withdrawn into yourself feeling you will explode because you don't want to go. You're going into the unknown and think you'll be gone forever or that you'll die. You feel distrust and fear."

"I knew the driver so it was ok. They were sympathetic and comforting."

"The crew were pleasant. They knew me. I went in the ambulance as the patient transport was elsewhere."

The bureaucracy is also a problem. We talked about long waiting times for the ambulance to arrive and felt that it took ages for the appropriate paperwork to be completed to allow us to travel.

"The ambulance was very good, the staff knew me and my family so it was ok. But the wait was bad though."

The cost of accompanying people to hospital who couldn't have otherwise have got there was also mentioned. Sometimes this is paid for and sometimes not. Equally getting home again if it is after the bus has stopped is sometimes catered for and sometimes not:

"I have had to accompany a relative or friend (to get them to hospital) Once staff paid for a taxi for me to do this."

"I had to pay for a taxi home after I was refused admission. It cost a good deal to get back; £20 - £30."

Sometimes the police have had to take us into hospital. As far as we know they have been sensitive and helpful when they have done this.

Sometimes people end up at a hospital that is a long way away, either because that is the nearest one or the nearest one is full. This can be hard when considering family and friends who want to keep in contact.

We did not have much to say about what it was like to have a nurse escort except that it seemed fine.

Some of us worried about being transported by ambulance and felt that we might be wasting resources.

If we are taken to hospital by family this can also be hard for practical reasons such as getting lost trying to find the hospital which is not signposted well.

USING PUBLIC TRANSPORT WHEN WE ARE ILL

This was a subject that almost everyone agreed was very difficult for us.

When we are acutely ill it can become impossible for us to use public transport (for some of us the first sign of illness is that we stop travelling) and if we do use it we can become extremely anxious.

Although it depends on the illness we tended to agree that travelling could become a very frightening process.

"I was psychotic and frightened everyone was going to kill me"

"I couldn't face the bus. I just stopped."

"You can have to get off because you can't stay on the bus"

If we have a car we may struggle to drive but this can cause problems because the car can be our only link with the outside world.

" If you are low you can lose confidence and become wary that you will cause an accident. But it is hard as you need a car in a rural area like this."

Being in a public situation when ill can be one of the hardest things associated with travelling.

"The nightmare of going to the bus stop and having to speak to people you know when you can't speak"

"It's too hard with other people; you could be all confused and not feel safe."

"Kids screaming when you need peace and quiet."

"If you are crying on the bus you feel very foolish"

We can feel very exposed when travelling and ill and worry what people think of us

"When on pass you can be paranoid that people know you are going to and from New Craigs"

"If we 'freak out' people will look at us."

Sometimes when we are ill we can only travel if we have a companion. A car can end up being the only form of transport that we can manage. Unlike a bus or train, a car can stop and we can get out of it and relax for a time.

"A taxi can help but the community car is better."

"The car feels safe"

"I have to have someone drive me. I am not qualified to drive and also am unfit to drive."

TRAVELLING LONG DISTANCES FOR TREATMENT

In the Highlands concepts of how far it is reasonable to travel and its effect vary but generally people are used to going long distances. For some people a round trip of 80 miles is no problem but when they start having to go to Glasgow or Aberdeen then it does begin to become truly inconvenient.

However, time consuming trips when using public transport, and not feeling our best, may negate the benefits of our treatment.

"I had to go from Ullapool to Inverness weekly. I couldn't cope with people and got ill."

"I had to get a taxi to get the early bus to Inverness, then a bus to New Craig's, then back to the station, bus back to Skye and a taxi home. It was exhausting so in the end the treatment didn't help much either."

We tended to find that if we had access to a car then travelling was much better. Some people said they could not have made the journey without the car. A hospital car can be a good solution but there was a feeling that people generally didn't know about this and that even if they did it could be hard to access.

If we are on the edge of a health board area then it can be a bit frustrating as the nearest hospital may be out of our area and we can't go to it.

When going long distances we may travel for the whole day for a single appointment and may end up either tired or worked up and anxious. This is made worse if we are going somewhere we haven't been before and end up lost in a strange hospital.

OTHER ISSUES

There was a suggestion that a subsidised taxi service would be better for some people for whom a bus becomes inaccessible when they are ill.

If we have mobility problems, can't face company or can't manage getting on or off the bus on our own a companion can be very helpful. The companion card that comes with the bus pass is very helpful in this respect. There is a rumour that if people persistently use the bus without having a companion with them that this provision will be withdrawn from their card. This does not reflect the fact that mental illness is a variable condition and that when we are

ill and vulnerable we may need a companion but that when we are well we may have no need for this type of assistance.

The infrastructure of public transport seems a bit confused sometimes, with trains arriving but no buses being available to continue the journey home. In addition there is a feeling that the major routes all go to Inverness. If we want to go elsewhere across country, this can be much harder.

"We need more adequate and integrated transport systems"

A lot of us said that we need better, easier to understand timetables and that it would be good if every bus stop had an up to date time table not just at the main stops.

Some of us use the post buses which are currently surrounded with rumours about impending closure.

One of the main priorities was for people who had to use public transport to travel but were presently not on a bus route. We felt that such people can get very isolated.

We also said that Dial-a-ride services often need booked days in advance and that it is rare for people to be organised enough for them to know what day they are going to travel.

CONCLUSION

The need for transport is a basic feature of modern life. In a society which is almost totally reliant on the use of private vehicles substantial portions of the population (who for reasons of poverty or who are no longer allowed to drive) find themselves excluded from a central tool of community life. This applies to many people with mental health problems.

In a place like the Highland Health Board area which covers a vast geographical area (similar in size to that of Wales) people without access to transport can be even more disadvantaged and may find themselves physically and socially isolated. Where this is coupled with pre-existing mental health problems their emotional well-being is at severe risk.

The advent of the travel pass first by Highland Council and later by the Scottish Government was a great tool in reducing the exclusion and marginalisation of older and disabled people across the region

and opened up new opportunities and routes into recovery for people with a mental illness.

However, stringent conditions for obtaining travel passes mean that many people with a right to bus passes still do not have easy access to them. This is further complicated by a perception that people responsible for providing them are not as clear about people's entitlement to bus passes as they should be. Anecdotal evidence of this can be provided in HUG. We are mainly seen as a group of people with severe and enduring mental illness and therefore it is likely that a majority of our membership should be entitled to bus passes and yet only around 50% of our members have a bus pass.

Although a travel pass is a boon to many people they are not the complete solution. We find that members with particular conditions or those who are acutely ill tend not to be able to use public transport, especially mass transport vehicles. This is even more so if they have other disabilities which make public transport more inaccessible. It seems that the most severely ill, far from being helped by bus passes find them an irrelevancy in their lives and end up extremely isolated and very vulnerable.

Despite its expense or possible inconvenience it may be better, in terms of an equalities approach to disability, to look at the use of subsidised taxi services, expanded cheaper more accessible community car schemes or hospital car schemes to overcome this disadvantage for this section of the mental health community.

Within the Highlands travelling for medical appointments or treatment can cause much hardship for people. Even with a car and job people can easily spend a day travelling to a short appointment. This hardship is even more apparent if public transport is used where even short journeys can leave people stranded in strange villages because of a shortage of transport to return home.

The occasional unwillingness of staff to change appointment times to meet the requirements of people travelling in from remote and rural areas is regrettable, and the fact that a number of our members have had to pay for accommodation and in one case sleep rough in order to attend an appointment is not acceptable for people on a low income.

In addition, when talking of mental health, some of our treatments are emotionally draining. The exhaustion that accompanies travelling long distances when already very distressed in a public situation may completely outweigh the potential benefit of the treatment that they have been given. Consideration should be given

to making Inverness based treatments accessible locally or of providing more emotionally sensitive ways of catering to people's transport needs.

Travelling to a psychiatric hospital in an emergency is always going to be a hard event to manage sensitively. However, we would be pleased if bureaucracy and unnecessary delays caused by obtaining ambulances could be overcome. We need to do our very best to minimise the distress that an emergency admission causes. Even though it is undoubtedly often a part of illness, it is not acceptable that a person being transported to hospital should think that they will die or never return.

It is equally unnecessary for people to be ignorant of their destination and frightened of what they will face on arrival. The fact that when our members are known and liked by ambulance staff, they tend to have relatively pain free journeys should be kept in mind by staff transporting frightened, confused and traumatised people for whom the future is bleak, and the journey terrifying.

APPENDIX 1

HELP WITH TRAVEL AND COSTSIF YOU LIVE WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

This article aims to help you know when people with mental illness or disability can be entitled to help with travel and costs. It looks at National Entitlement Cards – also known as free bus passes - and when companions can be included on your bus pass. It also looks at how you can get reduced train fares. Further work is needed to gather information about how and when and who can get access to transport service for attending treatment by NHS Highland.

To access the following schemes if you have physical disabilities, you could check the rules that are based on your physical mobility needs rather than your mental health needs.

Free Bus Travel - National Entitlement Card

This scheme is funded by Scottish Government. It lets card holders travel anywhere in Scotland, at no charge, as long as you have your card with you. The scheme also lets some card holders have a companion travel free with them. You can use your card on any bus any day and at any time (there are a few exceptions e.g. sight seeing buses).

In Highland you can also use your National Entitlement Card to get reduced fares on Highland ferries and on Highland train journeys. For details please contact the transport service to find out if they give discounts and how much it is.

(In the future it is intended that the entitlement card can be used to access services like libraries and sports centres. This is why it is called an entitlement card and not a bus pass. It also explains why card holders might get letters from the council about services other than transport. You can tell the council not to send you any of these letters if you don't want them.)

When can people who have mental illness or disability get a Free Bus Travel card?

You should apply for a card if you are:-

1. 60 years old or over OR
2. Under 60, and live with disability or long term illness,
AND:-
 - receive the high or middle rate care component of DLA (Disability Living Allowance) OR

- have a Blue Badge for parking OR
- you have a signed and completed form (NCT 002) from a member of your specialist mental health treatment team OR
- have been, or would be, refused a driving licence on medical grounds (not if this is due to alcohol or drug abuse) OR
- many of the disabilities that cause mobility problems e.g. blind, deaf or receive high rate mobility component of DLA

More about form NCT002 – this form asks a member of your mental health specialist team e.g. CPN consultant support service manager or Mental health social worker to confirm various points about how you are affected by your mental health problem. Most importantly it asks that they confirm that:-

1. you “suffer from mental disorder in terms of the Mental Health Act etc 2003” AND
2. your “ability to travel has been impaired” for at least a year AND
3. you need to travel in order to keep health or social appointments or participate in activities not just for treatment but also as part in a care or rehabilitation programme.

When is a companion entitled to travel free with you?

One person can travel with you free if your card shows they are entitled to.

Card holders who:

- receive DLA at middle or high care rate; OR
- receive AA (Attendance Allowance); OR
- are registered blind OR
- live in a care home or hospital and would otherwise be entitled to DLA at the middle or high rate care or AA

Card holders should have a symbol on their card that tells the bus driver that a companion is entitled to travel free with you. It is always your choice to take a companion with you. There is no requirement that you take a companion with you each time you travel.

How do you apply?

Application forms can be available and should be returned to Council Service Points. You can also pick up and return a form to some Post Offices.

It is not yet clear where you can get NCT 002 forms (forms confirming mental health reasons for entitlement to bus pass). Currently the guidance is to get one from your CPN, support service manager or other mental health specialist. Contact Highland Council on 0845 709 0202 for an update on this.

Along with your completed application, you must include a passport type photograph and proof of your identity and residence in Scotland.

You must also provide confirmation that you are receiving the right benefits or forms to show your state of health, such as NCT002, or Blue Badge etc. The application form lists you which kind of form or letter will confirm your eligibility.

For more information and help:-

about free bus travel cards see :- publictransport@highland.gov.uk or phone 0845 709 0202 OR any advice agency such as CAB or your local Council service point.

about bus timetables planning trips and other things

e.g. like can you take your dog or bike on the journey with you?

See:-

publictransport@highland.gov.uk and click on 'bus' or 'train'.

These website pages list contact details for all the transport providers in Highland. They also let you access guides on how the Free Travel scheme works.

Also www.traveline.org.uk or phone 0871 200 22 33.

More information about bus travel passes.

The information you provide in your form will be protected by the Data Protection Act and not used for any other purpose. Your card will carry only your name and photograph, a reference number and other symbols to let the driver know the area you come from (e.g. Highland), or whether a companion is entitled to travel with you. This should minimise any risks of misuse of your identity if your card is lost or stolen.

If your card gets lost or stolen Transport Scotland can cancel your card and stop anyone else using it, if you tell the Council that this has happened. You can get a new card if yours gets lost, stolen or damaged. Just go to your local Council service point.

Disabled Person Railcard

This scheme allows card holders to travel throughout Great Britain for 1/3 off most rail fares. The scheme also lets some physically disabled card holders have a companion travel with them at a reduced fare. You can use your card at any time and some tickets have restrictions on when you can use them. You should check when you buy your tickets for these restrictions.

You must carry your railcard with you on all train journeys to show you are entitled to the reduced fare and cards cost £18 for one year or £48 for 3 years.

Who can be entitled to a Disabled Persons Railcard?

Any person who receives Disability Living Allowance (except those who receive only low rate care) or Attendance Allowance can be entitled to this railcard. If you have epilepsy and are currently not allowed to drive because of your health condition you may also be entitled. There are no specific criteria referring to people who have mental illness or disability.

How do you apply?

You can apply online at www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk or get an application form from any manned train station. Complete the form and send payment and proof of entitlement to the address shown on the application form; not to the train station.

For more information and help;-

about Railcards www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk or phone 0845 605 0525

about Timetables (and help planning trips can be available) www.nationalrail.co.uk this website also gives contact details for the various train service providers throughout UK

If you lose or damage your card you have to pay to have it replaced. If it is stolen you may be able to get it replaced free of charge.

NHS travel costs in the Highland area

Who can get this help?

Help with costs of travelling to health care appointments in the NHS Highland area, including Argyle and Bute come from the Highlands and Islands Travel Costs Scheme.

- Any person travelling at least 30 miles by land, or more that 5 miles by sea, can apply to have their costs reimbursed.
- Travel must be by the cheapest form available.
- If you cannot afford to pay before you travel you may be able to get costs in advance.
- Cost for companions may be reimbursed also, where it is shown that a companion is "medically necessary" when travelling.
- It may also be possible to request reimbursement for the costs of staying overnight in exceptional circumstances.

If you travel less than 30 miles to your appointments then you may be able to get help travel costs for health appointments because you are receiving certain benefits. Eligible benefits include: - Income Support; Employment Support Allowance (income based); Job Seekers Allowance (income based) or Pension Credit. Some people who receives tax credits may get this help also.

How do you get your costs refunded?

When you attend your appointment ask for form HC5 - help with travel costs. You should hand back the completed form and receive your money there and then.

Other Travel Choices in the Highlands

Some local areas have **Dial a Bus/Ride Schemes; Postbus Services; or Community Transport Schemes**. For information about what's available in your area please check with your local CAB; Community Care Forum; Library, Council service point or Social Work Service. Sometimes especially in more rural areas, you can get this kind of information at your local Post Office; GP practice or Community Centre. Fares and charges for these schemes will vary and you ask for more information about this.

More information about help with travel and its costs

Your responsibilities

Your travel concession cards can only be used by you and you have the same rights to use the bus as any other passenger

For some longer distance journeys, where possible, you should plan and book before the day you have to travel. For journeys that you pay a fare, it may be cheaper if you book and buy your ticket well in advance of your trip.

Do you not get the right benefits to be entitled to help with travel and costs?

Entitlement to help with travel and its costs usually depends on the type of benefits you are receiving. You should remember that your award for these benefits is based on how you are affected by you illness or health condition. So in effect the basis for entitlement to travel help is health focussed.

If you think you need more help to manage travel and have been told you are not entitled because you are not receiving the right benefits, it may help to ask an advice agency (e.g. CAB or Depression Alliance) to check that you are getting the right benefits at the right rates.

What if you are not happy with the transport service you get?

This HUG report, has pointed out many of the things people are not happy with about bus, health service travel or train services. Many of these problems can be talked about through **complaints procedures**. Making comments or complaints as individuals or as groups can often, in time, lead to changes in the service; especially when the complaint involves **issues about equality** or meeting the duties within **the Disability Discrimination Act**.

Contact the local or head office of the transport provider (e.g. Bus Company) you want to complain about and ask for a copy of their complaints procedure to be sent to you. You might ask them to send you a copy of their customer service policy so you can see how they may not have lived up to their promises to their customers. You can then use this as a starting point when you write your comments or complaint. You can usually find contact details on your tickets or on posters on the bus or train or at stations.

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