

LETTERS



I'M OVER 65, BUT I DON'T NEED A DISCOUNTED BUS FARE

Bus fare discounts for senior citizens should be taken and used

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As a 32 year old full bus fare payer, I am heartened to read Clarfield's concern over whether benefits for his generation are dooming the rest of us.¹ But he need not give himself such a hard time, and I hope that data from the English free bus pass scheme for older people offer him some comfort.

Free bus travel for people over 60 has been offered in England since 2006. It costs about £1bn a year and is aimed at reducing social exclusion among this potentially marginalised group.² Potential inequalities resulting from the scheme are of course a concern, but within this age group both possession and use of the bus pass are similar across markers of socioeconomic status.^{3,4} Associations with physical activity and adiposity have also been noted, so it is possible that if you keep people healthy healthcare costs may be reduced for all of us. Owing to budgetary pressures, and perhaps the cohort of healthier older people Clarfield mentions, the age of eligibility is rising, such that it will be 66 by 2020. Suggestions of moving away from a universal scheme towards means testing were rejected on the basis that the universality of the scheme was one of the main benefits in terms of promoting a sense of inclusion and belonging in society.

Whether such schemes threaten intergenerational solidarity is more difficult to judge, but Clarfield should still use his bus discounts with impunity. Such schemes potentially have benefits on social inclusion and health and their universality can be important in realising their value.⁵ Whether these benefits extend to discounts at the cinema, however, remains an under-researched area, and further work is needed by researchers of all ages.

Competing interests: I have conducted research on the free bus pass for older people in England.

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- 2 Butcher L. Buses: concessionary fares. Standard Note: SN1499. House of Commons Library 2013. <http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/sn01499.pdf>.
- 3 Webb E. Sponsoring public transport and health in older people. *Maturitas* 2015;81:239-40. doi:10.1016/j.maturitas.2015.03.011 pmid:25864131.
- 4 Coronini-Cronberg S, Millett C, Lavery AA, Webb E. The impact of a free older persons' bus pass on active travel and regular walking in England. *Am J Public Health* 2012;102:2141-8. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2012.300946 pmid:22994251.
- 5 Green J, Jones A, Roberts H. More than A to B: the role of free bus travel for the mobility and wellbeing of older citizens in London. *Ageing Soc* 2014;34:472-94. doi:10.1017/S0144686X12001110 pmid:24478532.

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