

Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme – information pack

Overview

Free bus travel for 5-21 year olds resident in Scotland will be available from 31 January for those with a valid National Entitlement Card (NEC) or Young Scot NEC. Children under the age of 5 already travel for free on commercial bus services and don't need a card.

A national marketing campaign was due to launch from 5 January to encourage applications, giving full details on how and when to apply. However, given the current situation with the pandemic, it has been decided to pause the launch of the national marketing campaign – which proactively encourages bus travel – until the situation improves. We think it is important to avoid promoting bus travel at a time when core Scottish Government messaging is to stay at home as much as possible and for people to limit their interactions voluntarily.

All young people and children aged 5-21 years can still apply for their new or replacement NEC or Young Scot NEC from 10 January to access the scheme from 31 January, however we are asking that only those for whom bus travel is essential apply at this time. That might be work, education, health or care reasons, for example. Information about the scheme and how to apply will be available on the [Transport Scotland website](#) from 5 January ahead of local authority delivery partners opening applications on 10 January.

This approach aims to help minimise pressure on local councils, impacted by the pandemic, who will be processing applications and responding to queries, while ensuring young people and children under 22 for whom bus travel is essential are able to access the scheme from 31 January. Everyone under the age of 22 and living in Scotland will be proactively encouraged to apply to access the scheme by the extensive marketing campaign which will be launched nationally at a later date.

Why the scheme is so important

The scheme represents a very significant investment by the Scottish Government in creating a sustainable future for young people by embedding sustainable travel habits from an early age. This is essential in helping Scotland to tackle the climate emergency and meet our ambitious target to become net zero by 2045.

At the same time, the introduction of free bus for under 22s will also reduce inequalities and advance equality of opportunity and outcome for young people and families, and has the potential to help address child poverty by reducing household outgoings. Free bus travel supports our delivery of a Just Transition and removes financial barriers which will give 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.

The Scottish Government is 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.

Application process

5-21 year olds living in Scotland will need a valid National Entitlement Card (NEC) or Young Scot NEC to access free bus from 31 January.

- Many young people will already have a NEC or Young Scot NEC but this will not allow them to access free bus travel. Everyone who is eligible will have to apply for a new or replacement card if they wish to use the scheme.
- The Improvement Service and National Entitlement Card Programme Office (NECPO), together with local authorities, are responsible for handling applications and issuing National Entitlement Cards (NEC and Young Scot NEC) which are used to access the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme.
- The scheme will use the existing application processes and will enable young people or their parents/guardians to apply either online or in person at council offices.
- Applications open on 10 January. All eligible children and young people can apply but we are working through our network of delivery partners and stakeholders to get messaging out, encouraging children and young people to apply at this time if they need to make essential journeys by bus.
- A number of different methods will be available for 5–21 year olds to get their card to access free bus travel: online at [GETYOURNEC.SCOT](https://getyournec.scot) or through parentsportal.scot if it is used by the child's school; via a local council where it is not possible to apply online; and, in some local council areas, schools are coordinating applications on behalf of their pupils.
- Young people aged 16-21 should apply themselves.
- Parents or guardians will be required to apply on behalf of 5-15 year olds.
- Children under the age of 5 do not need to apply as they already travel for free on commercial bus services without a card.