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**Democratic Services Section
Legal and Civic Services Department
Belfast City Council
City Hall
Belfast
BT1 5GS**



**Belfast
City Council**

7th February, 2021

MEETING OF CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

The above-named Committee will remotely, via Microsoft Teams on Wednesday, 9th February, 2022 at 5.15 pm, for the transaction of the business noted below.

You are requested to attend.

Yours faithfully,

RONAN CREGAN

Deputy Chief Executive

AGENDA:

3. Matters referred back from Council

- (a) Notice of Motion - Free Public Transport for Young People - Responses
(Pages 1 - 6)

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Subject:	Responses from Translink and Minister for Infrastructure re Notice of Motion – Free Public Transport for Young People
Date:	9th February 2022
Reporting Officer:	Alistair Reid, Strategic Director of Place and Economy
Contact Officer:	Carolyn Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

☐

No

☒

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

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☐
☐
☐

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

☒

No

☐

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To note the correspondence received regarding the Notice of Motion re Free Public Transport for Young People.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is asked to note the correspondence as set out in the report.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>The Committee will recall that, at its meeting on 10th January, 2022, the Council agreed to the following motion:</p> <p>“This Council supports the promotion and expansion of sustainable transport in Belfast as a critical step to averting climate change, address the significant levels of air pollution, reduce congestion and improve public health. Extending and improving uptake of sustainable transport is key to our City playing its part in averting climate breakdown. In order to create a societal shift in how people</p>

	access public transport, this Council therefore calls upon the Minister for Infrastructure and Translink to introduce a pilot of free public transport for young people in Belfast which will also include the West Belfast taxi association and the Shankill taxis.”
3.2	Accordingly, Democratic Services wrote to the Minister for Infrastructure and Translink and a response has been received on behalf of the Minister for Infrastructure from her Private Secretary (appendix 1) and from Translink (appendix 2).
3.3	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>
3.4	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	<p>Appendix 1 – Response from Minister for Infrastructure</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Response from Translink</p>



**From the office of the Minister for Infrastructure
Nichola Mallon MLA**

Sara Steele
Democratic Services Officer
Belfast City Council
Legal and Civic Services Department
City Hall
Belfast
BT1 5GS

Room 708
Clarence Court
10-18 Adelaide Street
BELFAST
BT2 8GB
Telephone: (028) 9054 0105
Email: Private.office@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

Your reference: SS 10.01.2022
Our reference: CORR-0114-2022
7th February 2022

Dear Ms Steele

Free Public Transport for Young People

Thank you for your email to Minister Mallon received on 26 January 2022 advising of the Belfast City Council motion calling for a trial to provide free travel for young people on public transport services within Belfast. The Minister has read your letter and asked me to respond.

The Minister welcomes the motion and notes the interest shown by councillors to explore ways to address the impacts of climate change and the role that sustainable transport may play. Concessionary travel, which is available to a range of vulnerable groups including children aged 5-16, connects people and opportunities through the public transport network. Improving access to public transport helps to protect the environment by encouraging people to travel more sustainably.

Minister Mallon has recently announced her intention to extend free travel across Northern Ireland for people with disabilities who currently pay half fare and to widen the range of services facilitating concessionary travel by extending the Scheme to new operators (including some in Belfast) who have already indicated or expressed an interest in joining. This is in the context of the current budget consultation and the proposal for the associated ring funding of such a move.

As you will be aware, the current public transport network faces financial challenges each year. Given that Translink operate one of the widest public transport networks within these islands, there is a significant cost to running these important services as fare revenue is not sufficient to cover them.

In that regard, the Department for Infrastructure provides a subsidy to Translink to offset the remaining cost of the network with a contractual obligation to maintain the organisation's going concern status. However, as the Department has faced significant budgetary constraints since 2014/15, this has meant that opening baselines for the public transport network are below what is required to operate it. This has meant that in

many years Translink has delivered the public transport network at significant losses. This challenge remains as we look forward to future years.

Minister Mallon would be very keen to offer young people free travel however it would require a significant increase in funding from the Executive to the Department. Please be assured that the Minister continues to make the case around the Executive table for increased funding for our public transport services, not only to maintain existing services but to expand it given the economic, social justice and environmental benefits it delivers.



KATHRYN MCFERRAN
Private Secretary to the Minister

Ms Sara Steele
Belfast City Council – Legal and City Services Department
City Hall
Belfast
BT1 5GS

1st February 2022

Dear Sara,

Ref: SS 10.01.2022 Free Public Transport for Young People

Thank you for your recent letter in relation to Belfast City Council's passing of a motion in favour of free public transport for young people, as tabled by Councillors Smyth and O'Hara.

Translink would be broadly supportive of such a policy on the public transport network in Northern Ireland. We believe that such a step would help to tackle climate change, air pollution and congestion both in the short and long-term and play a role in forming life-long sustainable travel habits for a Net Zero Northern Ireland, in keeping with the Executive PfG and Belfast City Council's Belfast Agenda. It would also have a key role in enhancing social inclusion, as well as making access to education, apprenticeships and employment much easier for many young people in Northern Ireland.

However, we wish to emphasise that such a policy, as well as the details associated with a pilot, is ultimately a matter for the Department for Infrastructure. This would include consideration of the affordability of this policy given the pressures that continue to reside on the Department's budget.

It is worth noting that Translink already provides a yLink card for use by young people, which provides access to 1/3 discounts on public transport in Northern Ireland; in recognition of the detrimental impact of the pandemic on young people, Translink has suspended the upfront cost of £8, associated with this.

I hope you will find this of use. Please do not hesitate to contact my office should you require additional information.

Yours sincerely,



Chris Conway
Group Chief Executive, Translink

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