



Better Public Transport Conference

A report from the
National Pensioners Convention
Transport Working Party
March 2013

**BETTER PUBLIC TRANSPORT CONFERENCE
28 FEBRUARY 2013, ST PANCRAS CHURCH HALL, LONDON**

Ron Douglas, NPC Transport Working Party

- Welcomed the 77 delegates and explained that this was the latest in a series of these conferences run by the NPC transport working party. This had always been a core issue for the NPC – especially as the organisation had been at the forefront in securing the original concession from the Labour government in the late 1990s.

Richard Hebditch, Campaign for Better Transport

- Bus services provide a lifeline for many older people, and having accessible and affordable public transport is vital to leading an active and independent life. The concessionary bus scheme enables pensioners to reach key services, friends and family, as well as enabling them to make an economic and social contribution. That is why the wider benefits of bus travel and its role in improving older people's quality of life need to be recognised in all transport policy. However, there is no point in having a bus pass without a bus to get on.
- Over the last year there have been significant funding cuts to bus services which seriously affect the convenience of bus travel for older people. There have always been inequalities in access to reliable bus services, but there is now evidence that the situation is getting worse. In many cases, buses are cut without suitable alternatives.
- The current national concession was introduced in 2008, with a statutory minimum concession providing free off-peak bus travel to those reaching state pension age (set at the level for women) between 9.30am and 11pm Monday to Friday and all day weekends and on public holidays. There is primary legislation protecting this concession which would need a change of legislation if it were to be altered.
- However, in some places local authorities provide more than the statutory minimum, such as free travel before 9.30am or use of other modes of transport, such as trams and metro services.
- Responsibility for planning local transport increasingly rests with local authorities or the integrated transport authorities in metropolitan areas.
- Funding for concessionary travel comes from three main sources:
 1. National government provides funding for trips made using the national bus concession and this is reimbursed to bus operators by local authorities
 2. Local authorities provide a subsidy for bus services on routes that are not commercially viable but are vital to the local community, as well as for any additional bus concessions determined locally
 3. National government provides a Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) to companies based on the number of kilometres they operate on registered local bus services
- 70% of local authorities made cuts to bus provision in 2011/12 and are concerned about further cuts in the future. Some local authorities have also argued that they have not been given sufficient funds from national government to reimburse bus operators for concessionary fares.
- Bus operators also will see the BSOG reduced by 20% from 2012/13. All this has an impact on the ability to maintain good bus services.

- In 2010, 77% of eligible individuals owned a concessionary bus pass. Research shows that 39% of pass holders made a greater number of local journeys by bus than before they obtained the pass. For pensioners with an annual income of less than £15,000 pass ownership is 80-82%. Above this income level, pass ownership decreases.
- There is also a difference between urban and rural bus usage. The average annual bus pass usage is 240 trips in London, 135 trips in Metropolitan areas and 70 trips in the Shires. 55% of urban residents use their pass at least once a week compared to 28% of those living in rural areas. Despite owning a pass, one quarter of those living in rural areas use their pass less than once a year. The way society is planned can therefore mean that the location of services and facilities is often inaccessible to those without access to private transport.

Peter Rayner, NPC Vice President

- In February 2011, an analysis of bus usage in Greater London was conducted, and based on over 3000 responses it has been possible to draw some conclusions. The survey recognises that many responders list more than one benefit or activity so the number of benefits recorded should not be seen to reflect the number of responses received.
- “Welfare in Chaos as thousands live to 100” is one of the more moderate headlines, other harsh and unthinking articles have been written fanning the flames of ageist attitudes portraying older people as well off, and living the good life whilst today’s generation struggle. It has even been suggested that all benefits should be means tested, not just the financial ones but any concession that is age generated. There are organisations, admittedly far right organisations, that suggest pensioners should pay higher taxes, have no fuel allowances, get no free prescriptions, fund all their own care in old age even when suffering from debilitating diseases like Alzheimer’s. That older people should pay the full price for Museums and Galleries and Theatres are also stipulated along with the removal of the Concessionary travel Bus Pass. All based on the assumption that the pensioners constitute tomorrow’s problems.
- It is extremely easy for professionals, especially transport professionals, to say that the costs of free concessional travel are expected to increase considerably and could well become unaffordable as the demographic time bomb reaches maximum effect. Likewise it is being stated that concessionary travel is a successful and popular policy yet it is a policy that no Government could financially sustain. No one it seems takes an optimistic view in the fact there will be more older people pro-rata in society as the years go on. However, the NPC believes there is a value to society as a whole of this demographic change that is taking place, by taking just one of those issues, that of the concessionary travel.
- In spite of a torrent of adverse publicity as to the value of concessionary bus travel it should be recognised that the scheme contributes to savings on social care, Meals on Wheels, commercial benefits in the town centres where it is possible to meet socially, some venues in the centres e.g. theatres and cinemas taking the advantage to fill seats that would otherwise be empty in the middle of the day.
- Most people agree that public transport plays a major part in enabling older people to continue to live in their own homes and participate fully in the life of the community. In the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport magazine an article relating to Accessibility of Transport for those of restricted mobility written

by Ann Frye a Fellow of the Institute and an expert in this field made comment as follows:

It is certainly clear that transport plays a major part in both the economic and social well being of disabled and older people. Without the means to get out independently and to be self sufficient in terms of daily living: getting to the shops, to medical appointments or to social activities, many will become dependent on others to provide those services and support for them. For many older people, the biggest problem is the lack of opportunity to meet with friends and have the sort of social life that the rest of us take for granted, and to do this many of them need an accessible local public transport service.

In societies like ours where few have sons or daughters still living in the neighbourhood, the burden of care will generally fall on the state in one form or another. This can range from the GP having to make a house call because the disabled or older patient cannot get to the surgery through to domiciliary and other forms of social care delivered to the person at home. Not only is all of this very expensive, it is also less effective in terms of the quality of care. For example the cleanliness and lighting levels in an older person's home are not going to offer the same quality of environment for diagnosis or treatment as the GP's surgery. For those who depend on others to do their shopping, there is evidence to suggest that their nutritional levels decline because their horizons and choices of food become more restricted.

In addition there is well documented evidence that a loss of day to day outdoor mobility can trigger a decline on both physical and mental health and wellbeing and may lead to people needing full time or residential care much sooner than might otherwise have been the case.

- A Transport Conference was held under the auspices of the Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers (ATCO) on 19 July 2005 at the Cavendish Conference Centre, London W1 at which John Gould, Managing Director Stagecoach South Wales and Chairman CPT Wales spoke and made the point that there had been an increase of as much as 20% in some cases of normal fare paying passengers as a result of the concessionary use.
- In 2011, the WRVS published a report entitled Gold Age Pensioners which researches in depth the economic value of people over 65 years old. In it they say, *“More than any other group in society, older people are the social glue of most communities. Our research shows that every year, each older volunteer spends an average of over 100 hours ‘informally’ volunteering and more than 55 hours in formal volunteering roles. This is worth £10 billion to the UK economy”.*
- What older people put into society far outweighs what they take out, either financially or indeed emotionally with the ‘sage like’ advice borne by life experience they give.
- It is also important to understand how one sees the word ‘Volunteer’ and to tease out the differences between formal and informal volunteering. This is necessary for many older people do not accept they are volunteers as they see a volunteer as part of a structured system whereby someone is put forward or put themselves forward for a recognised organisation, for example Samaritans, CAB, WRVS etc. In our survey they did however accept the words “Contributors to society”.

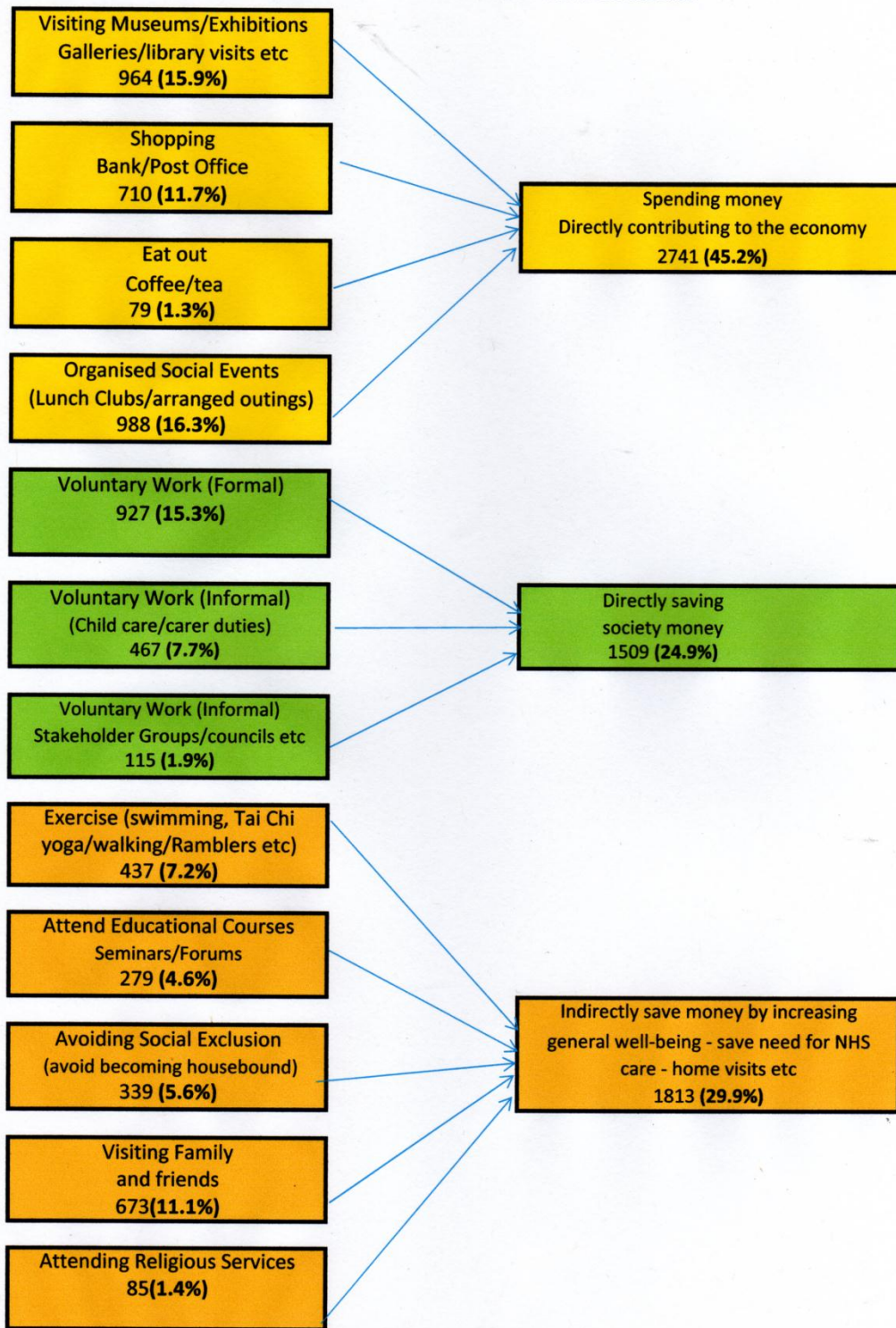
- In 2008-09 Citizenship Survey – Volunteering and Charitable Giving Report taking a core base of 8,768 aged from 16 to 75 and over it was found that in the group aged between 65 and 74, 30% took part in formal volunteering and 38% informal volunteering and in the Group over 75, 20% took part in formal volunteering and 32% in informal volunteering. That is a big unpaid contribution to society.
- However an Age of Opportunity Paper states, “The IBIS bi-annual survey also reveals unsurprisingly that those living in or vulnerable to social exclusion are less likely to participate in volunteering than those who are not.” From our survey we know that transport is key to avoiding social exclusion.
- It has been difficult to evaluate exactly the different types of volunteering or “contributing”. So many do not include the fact they may contribute to committees and stakeholder meetings, attending local Forums, Neighbourhood Watch or opening up the Church Hall, the organising of Coffee Mornings, getting neighbours shopping, hospital visiting, or representing churches and chapels at funerals. The examples could go on. However, there are a number of case studies taken at random from the 3,000 responses to the survey taken to illustrate the point as follows:

Case Studies

1. Pensioner A is in 80s. A regular worker with children for many years and still assists in projects around London. “With my Bus Pass and packed lunch” contributes in this way twice a week and in addition uses the Pass for hospital, shopping etc.
2. Pensioner B is a carer to two different people – one in Essex and one in North London and visits both regularly. B buys with care fresh food of good nutritious value in alternative places for economy – street markets and shops etc. As a carer assists, Pensioner B visited launderette and helps clean flat and generally cooks. In the other case which is a multiply disabled person adds to the home help already provided (which is the maximum permitted) cooks and generally assists and takes her out in the wheelchair which is not provided by Social Services. The Freedom Pass makes this possible.
3. Pensioner C travels to visit grandchildren to give help since father of the children left. C takes the children to museums, parks and other cultural opportunities and deals with their essential learning. Overall without her involvement the family would be split and maybe go into alternative care.
4. Pensioner D is in 80s and a volunteer at an Age Concern (Pop in Parlour), travels to assist there twice a week which enhances the centre and her own health, alertness and general well-being.
5. Pensioners E is a two pensioner example of husband and wife who simply list shopping, hospital appointments, visiting family, visiting friends, visiting people in Care Home nearby, shopping for friends who are unable to get out, collecting grandchildren from school when required, accompanying people to hospital, help print and distribute local magazine and play the piano at the local Care Home – all for no charge using the bus pass.
6. Pensioner F lists Building Society, Library, Dry Cleaners, Charity Shop and local cinema all about four miles away but a bus stop nearby. Weekly visits to local parks, plays scrabble and mah-jong and now holidays only in the UK using the Bus Pass in other cities and visits museums, galleries and restaurants and the great houses of interest. Is part of a shared learning

- project and assists in the London Archives and works and contributes to OXFAM. Claims this is part of keeping her healthy.
7. Pensioner G lists daily mass, parish church twice a week, prayer groups, attends doctors and specialists, visits family, library, podiatrist and generally visits places of interest with friends thus contributing to society economically.
 8. Pensioner H has a PhD and is a former lecturer and professor and still goes pro bono to the department sometimes as much as three times a week to assist students thus putting his 50 years' experience to the assistance of the young. Journeys made possible by the bus pass.
 9. Pensioner I lists visiting friends and elderly relations to help avoid their social exclusion and her own. Lists volunteering, helping at local hospital which is a journey involving two buses and no possibility of car parking at journey's end. Goes rambling to keep fit. Is part of the joint campaign of London Citizens. Whenever out spends money and thereby assists the local economy. Pensioner I also cites the non-use of car and reliance on bus and train as being of environmental benefit.
 10. Pensioner J is involved in volunteering to avoid social isolation and improve her own health. Works two or three times a week at a day centre with people who cannot speak English. In addition, interprets for GP surgeries and local social services.
 11. Pensioner K supports children with learning difficulties. Is a fundraiser and volunteer officer for various charities, visits refugees and helps with homeless locally. Again all made possible by the bus pass.

**BREAKDOWN OF MAJOR BENEFITS INTO GENERAL CATEGORIES
BASED ON MULTIPLE RESPONSES FROM INDIVIDUALS**



- For the better understanding of some of today's generation who express most things only in financial terms, it is only in financial terms that this survey draws a conclusion. However, the wider issue of why these young people should be expressing in such equivocal terms the need for a monetary return is a surprise to me for they will have been fed, nurtured and educated by that very generation they choose now to regard as a financial burden.
- Civilised society it is said can be judged by how it treats its older citizens. Maybe this is an overused phrase but it needs to be remembered. One cannot evaluate easily the enormous benefit to society access to transport is to the elderly, whether that access is the provision of transport itself or the bus pass that enables them to use it.
- Access to transport generally is a different and larger subject that encompasses loss of bus routes, rural area, and disabled facilities but this survey is a snapshot of what the elderly can achieve when given the means. The overall evidence gathered is, even from a financial viewpoint, there are direct and indirect savings to society which far outweigh the costs. Therefore given inclusion in society older people, far from being tomorrow's problem, will be part of tomorrow's solution.

Chris Perry, Head of Integrated Services, Centro

- In total there were 4.6bn bus journeys in England in 2010/11, with 2.3bn of these being outside London. Just 53.5% of all bus operating revenue comes from fares and the remainder from either direct subsidy (19.9%) or through concessionary travel schemes (18.8%) or the Bus Services Operating Grant (7.8%).
- In October 2010, the Spending Review set out three significant decisions that could have a dramatic impact on this public funding:
 1. An overall 28% reduction in local authority revenue expenditure from 2011/12
 2. Changes in the formula for concessionary travel reimbursement from 2011/12
 3. A 20% reduction in the BSOG from 2012/13
- We should remember that prior to the 2000 Transport Act, travel concessions were always discretionary. Nevertheless, there has been free travel for pensioners in the West Midlands since at least 1974.
- The minimum concession increased from half fare to free in 2002, and nationwide across England some years later. However, community transport schemes such as dial a ride are not statutory and indeed in the West Midlands a charge was introduced in 2011.
- In the West Midlands the picture is of a reducing number of people receiving concessionary travel, due to the government's decision to accelerate the state pension age. Locally this is down from 81 million in April 2009, to the latest figure of 69 million.
- It should also be recognised that there is no such thing as free travel. There is of course a cost involved and that is paid for either by government or local authority subsidy. By law however the bus companies should not make a profit out of the scheme.
- In the West Midlands the statutory scheme costs £59.5m and the extension of the concession to local rail and metro adds a further £4.1m.
- Currently it is not clear who is using the pass, although in the West Midlands the highest take up historically tended to be in more affluent areas. Smart

transactions will therefore allow much improved understanding of who is making trips.

- There is also a concern that individuals may hold a bus pass but there are no buses. This is particularly a problem in rural areas. Although even in the West Midlands there are many services using estates that carry almost exclusively concessionary passes. What use is the pass if these services can no longer be afforded?
- Metropolitan Transport Authorities - monies ring fenced for transport, statutory expenditure taking up more and more of budget, less and less available for discretionary services, including long held policies, such as subsidised bus, free travel on local rail and metro. But statutory services must come first.
- Shire and unitary authorities - monies not even ring fenced for transport - transport budgets competing with libraries, adult and children's services etc. This creates even more of a challenge in rural areas.
- As a bus operator, the biggest challenge for us is the reduction in the BSOG. This has already been reduced by 20%, and could be reviewed again in next Comprehensive Spending Review. This cut will lead to increased costs for the industry, feeding through to increased fares, putting more pressure on local authority budgets, leading to service withdrawals, but less money available for replacement services funded by local authorities.

Tracy Jessop, Assistant Director, Environment, Transport & Development, Norfolk County Council

- We have to recognise the exceedingly difficult situation in which local authorities find themselves. The shift from grants to district councils to county councils has meant there is now less money available. Councils are facing a reduction in income and must find savings from somewhere – bus services being but one of many competing public services. Connecting with passengers early enough can help make changes that least inconvenience those who rely on them.
- In Norfolk we formulated proposals to look at services on a route by route basis, using a number of specific criteria in order to decide which services would be withdrawn and which would remain:
 1. Who is using the services:
 - The number of users on a route
 - Level of income of those on the route
 - Levels of car ownership within the area of the route
 - The age range of people within the area of the route
 - Proportion of residents on the route with difficult social conditions
 2. The impact of changes to routes
 - Availability of alternative transport such as community-based transport
 - Whether the route offers journeys to work or education
 - Whether the route is used by many older or disabled people
 - Whether frequency can be reduced, rather than the whole service
 3. Other considerations
 - Whether the bus operator would be able to run the service without the council's financial support
 - Whether renegotiation around cost of services was possible
 - Whether services could be replaced with other arrangements, such as community transport
 - Value for money, comparing cost of service with passenger usage

- Whether fares could be raised
- Whether services on Sundays or late evenings, when usage is lower, could be removed rather than removing the service entirely
- Local groups should be aware that every time a council wishes to alter a service, they are obliged by law to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment.

NPC Transport Working Party

- It was clear that all the main political parties are considering the idea of means-testing universal pensioner benefits, such as the bus pass. There are many arguments against such a move and much of the conference has explained how the universality of the concession is part of a wider effort to tackle social isolation, at the same time as enabling older people to make a valuable contribution to their local economy and community. The NPC intends to make the retention of these benefits a key campaign at the general election and will be seeking suitable pledges from candidates. In addition, Early Day Motion 373 in the name of David Causby MP is calling on the government to keep existing benefits on a universal basis. People are encouraged to ask their MP to sign the motion.
- Alongside this work, the Transport Working Party is keen to promote the trial in the West Country on Great Western Trains that allows older people to use their bus pass in lieu of a Senior Railcard, thus saving them £28. If this trial is seen to be a success, then pressure can be mounted to extend the scheme nationwide.
- The NPC continues to argue for the bus pass to be honoured across all parts of the UK, so that a pensioner in Scotland can visit London and use their pass and vice versa.
- There remain important concerns over early morning appointments to medical care that fall outside the 9.30am start, and need to be addressed, as do the problems facing people who use community transport schemes. If an individual is unable to use a scheduled bus because either there are access problems or there are no routes near where they live, their use of community transport schemes should be free otherwise they are being treated as second-class travellers.
- It is vital that changes to local concessions are challenged locally by pensioner and other user groups. Details of such changes should be sent to the NPC office in order that a picture can be created as to what is happening across the country.
- We must continue to make the case wherever possible for the bus pass on grounds of social inclusion, environmental impact and economic sense.
- Copies of the *We Love The Pass* petition can be brought to the NPC Pensioners' Parliament in Blackpool 18-20 June 2013. Additional copies are available from the NPC.

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Registered Attendees

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MAURICE	AUSTIN	NPC ANGLIA
DEREK	BAKER	NPC TRANSPORT WORKING PARTY
ANGELA	BANNER	REDBRIDGE PENSIONERS FORUM
ALEXANDRA	BARNES	NPC SOUTH EAST
URSULA	BENJAFIELD	MALDON DISTRICT 50+ FORUM
TOM	BIMPSON	NW UCU RMB
MALCOLM	BOOTH	NFOP
DAVE	BROWN	NPC NORTH WEST
GLEN	BURROWS	BRIDGWATER SENIOR CITIZENS FORUM
FRANCIS	BYRNE	NARF
		UNISON RMS LANCASHIRE COUNTY
TERRY	CARTER	BRANCH
		NPC LEWISHAM PENSIONERS ACTION
		GROUP
BERNICE	CHAMBERS	
SUE	CLARK	
JUNE	CLARKSON	PORTSMOUTH PENSIONERS ASSOCIATION
PETER	COLLIER	OLDER PEOPLES NETWORK CROYDON
FRANK	COOPER	NPC PRESIDENT
MARTINO	CRANCHI	FNP CISL GB
GEORGE	DAY	BRENT PENSIONERS FORUM
TONY	DONAGHEY	RMT
RON	DOUGLAS	NPC TRANSPORT WORKING PARTY
RODNEY	DOWNING	NPC SE REGION CWU
		ENVIRONMENT AGENCY UNISON BRANCH
		SOUTHERN REGION
WENDY	DOWSE	NPC EASTERN REGION
IAN	EVANS	CROYDON RETIRED PEOPLE CAMPAIGN
PATRICIA	FENNESSY	TYNE & WEAR TRANSPORT USER GROUP
VICKI	GILBERT	NPC ADVISOR
JAY	GINN	UNITE RMA WOOLWICH
TONY	GREVILLE	CSPA
RALPH	GROVES	RMT SOUTHEAST REGION RMT
ARLENE	HANSELL	NARPO
NICK	HARTFREE	DHBUG
PAUL	HAWORTH	CWU WEST LONDON
BRIAN	HUDSON	BECTU-NFTVA BRANCH
DAVID	HUGHES	NPC ANGLIA REGION
CHRIS	BROOKS	UNITE NORTH EAST YORKS & HUMBER
ALLAN	JACKSON	ASLEF
RAY	JACKSON	CWU (S LONDON SURREY N HAMPSHIRE)
JIM	JAMES	RMT
GORDON	JONES	TSSA
JOEL	KOSMINSKY	MILTON KEYNES PENSIONERS
LEONARD	LEAN	CWU
BRIAN	LEE	NPC ANGLIA
FRANK	LUCKING	NPC EAST MIDLANDS
ALAN	MARSHALL	TSSA
BRIAN	MAYHEW	

LES	MCDOWELL	BRITISH TRANSPORT PENSIONERS FED
ELSIE	MOORE	SOUTHEND PENSIONERS CAMPAIGN
DAVE	MORGAN	UNITE
MIKE	MORIARTY	
PASQUALE	MOTTOLA	INAS ITALIAN WELFARE
TERRY	MURPHEY	NPC TRANSPORT WORKING PARTY
BARBARA	O'HARE	BRAINTREE PENSIONERS ACTION GROUP
BERNARD	O'NEIL	NPC CORNWALL
JOHN	PAINE	OXFORDSHIRE UNISON RMS
JOHN	PLANT	GREENWICH PENSIONERS FORUM
JOHN	POWELL	
PETER	RAYNER	NPC VICE PRESIDENT
N J	RICHARDSON	RMT LMRM BRANCH
MIKE	ROBERTSON	CWU SOUTH EAST ANGLIA RM
PAUL	RUSSELL	UCU
BARBARA	RYAN	
JOANNE	SANDERSON	TUC PENSIONERS COMMITTEE NETWORK
BOB	SEARS	NPC TRANSPORT WORKING PARTY
PETER	SMITH	ASLEF RMS & ENFIELD OVER 50s FORUM
ROBERT	SNELLINS	BRIDGWATER SENIOR CITIZENS FORUM
PENNY	STEPHENS	RICHMOND ON THAMES FORUM
ALAN	TAYLOR	ASLEF
J M	TAYLOR	BTPF
GLYN	THOMAS	CDS COOPS
ROBERT P	VINCENT	UNISON WEST MIDLANDS RMS
JIM	WEBB	NPC ANGLIA
JOSE	WOODHOUSE	MILTON KEYNES PENSIONERS ASSOC
RICHARD	WORRAL	NPC TRANSPORT WORKING PARTY
LAWRENCE	WRIGHT	NARPO

