

# **Call to remove free bus passes for young as anti-social behaviour surges**

**Edinburgh city council has called on the Scottish Government to remove free bus passes from young people guilty of anti-social behaviour on city transport.**

The call comes on the back of growing violence on city buses which saw £1,700 worth of damage in broken bus windows in three days last month and 60 % rise in reports of ASB since the introduction of the passes in 2022.

The SNP group warned against getting “into a dangerous place” targeting young people as the “obvious culprits” when anti-social behaviour was widespread among adult passengers.

Labour’s Stephen Jenkinson accepted amendments from the Tories seeking the pursuit of stricter policing of bus passes for those under 22 and the Lib Dems who urged better use of existing laws to control anti-social behaviour on buses.

All parties agreed that attacks on bus drivers and bus vandalism were unacceptable.

Councillor Jenkinson said: “This issue has been prominent on buses in Edinburgh where a string of incidents has raised alarms for public safety and the welfare of of bus staff.

“The free travel pass scheme introduced in 2022 was designed to provide young people with accessible transport, reducing

costs and encouraging sustainable travel. Whilst its benefits cannot be overstated, with 100 million journeys made so far, it has undoubtedly brought unintended consequences.

“In recent months we have seen heightened reports of vandalism, verbal abuse and physical threats. This violence isn’t isolated. Across Edinburgh anti-social behaviour has escalated police have identified patterns of young individuals misusing passes to travel between areas sometimes to engage in disruptive or even criminal behaviour.

“It’s crucial to recognise that the majority of young people including my own children use the pass responsibly. Eliminating the scheme entirely would penalise those who rely on for education, for work or family commitments. Instead, measures must focus on accountability.

“Ideas such as temporarily suspending travel cards for those involved in misconduct have been debated and I know from my discussions with Lothian Buses they would be supported. But we know that technological and logistic hurdles currently remain.”

He called for community collaboration between transport operators, the public and police to help address the issues as well as work in schools to address anti-social behavioural issues.

“We must ensure this landmark policy continues to benefit the majority while protecting those who work tirelessly to provide safe and reliable public transport in Edinburgh and Scotland.”

Councillor Katrina Faccenda said: “It’s really important that bus operators step up and guarantee as safe a working environment as possible. We need Police Scotland to get more police actively on buses and the safety within bus stations.”

Speaking for his amendment the SNP’s Danny Aston said: “We all

know there are very real consequences when Lothian Buses withdraw services. It is a minority of people who are causing these problems and unfortunately not limited to young people. The worst incident I have witnessed towards a bus driver was by a fully grown adult man.

“I do think we need to be clear that bus operators can already restrict access in line with their conditions of carriage and I think there’s a lot of work to be done with operators with trade unions and others to further develop existing powers and what further powers might be needed.

“But I think we are getting into a dangerous place by making this just about young people. I’m not suggesting that either Councillor Jenkison or Faccenda suggested that, but I read the Tory amendment, and I see they have taken the Labour motion like catnip.

“ I would ask Labour colleagues to think about punching down on groups like young people. I understand the instinct to go after who the obvious culprits are but I think we are missing the whole story.

“Our amendment seeks to set out the bigger picture here of having properly funded youth work and alleviating poverty which create the context for some of the terrible behaviour we have seen.”

Councillor Neil Gardiner said: “I think we need to be careful when we exclude young people. The net consequence for young people and for wider society is not good so on the one hand I stand up for drivers but on the other hand I’m worried about the tone of this. I think we do need some good youth work.”

Youth anti-social behaviour was a cry for help from young people which the council had to answer, he added.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter