

Free travel on railways for companions to blind Scots

A trial of free rail travel for blind Scots and their companions has begun.

Sight loss charities have hailed a pilot scheme that will provide free rail travel for the companions of blind and partially sighted individuals on all Scotrail train journeys as life-changing.

Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans say this [initiative](#) will reduce loneliness and isolation, fostering independence, and enhancing mental well-being.

Minister for Equalities, Kaukab Stewart, officially launched the pilot scheme at Anniesland Station earlier this week, and was joined by Craig Spalding, Chief Executive of Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans, along with representatives and campaigners from Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans, both of which have driven the successful Fair Rail Campaign.

Under this new [pilot scheme](#), individuals holding an eye +1 National Entitlement Card (NEC) will be able to travel with a companion at no additional cost starting 01 April 2025. The pilot scheme, which will run for one year, aims to make train travel more affordable and accessible for blind and partially sighted passengers by introducing a consistent, nationwide policy for free companion rail travel, aligning with existing concessionary bus and ferry travel across Scotland.

Ms Stewart said: "I am genuinely delighted to be launching

this pilot, which is testament to the hard work by all those involved in the campaign to bring this about. Making rail travel more accessible and affordable for people with sight loss is an important step in helping them access communities, education, and employment.”

ScotRail

Claire Dickie, ScotRail Commercial Director, said: “At ScotRail, we are committed to improving accessibility and ensuring that our services are as inclusive as possible for all customers. This trial initiative is an important step towards making travel easier for those who rely on assistance when using our services.”

Craig Spalding, Chief Executive of Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans, said: “We are delighted that the Scottish Government is introducing this [pilot](#). After over two years of campaigning, this is a significant achievement for our Fair Rail Campaign. Thanks to collaboration with ScotRail and Transport Scotland, rail travel will become more accessible and affordable for people with sight loss across Scotland.

“For many visually impaired individuals, public transport is essential, yet travelling alone is often not an option, and the cost of a companion ticket can be prohibitive. This new policy will make a real difference, supporting rehabilitation, promoting independence, and ensuring that people with vision impairments remain connected with their communities.”

Joe Tottenham, a 92-year-old army veteran, who is supported by Sight Scotland Veterans, comments: “I’m so proud to be part of the Fair Rail campaign led by Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans who have campaigned tirelessly on this issue. Knowing no matter where I’m going in Scotland that my companion can travel with me at no extra cost will change my life. As a blind person, having someone to help me get on and off the train is vital – I’d be lost without them.”

Colette Walker, who is visually impaired and co-chair of Sight Scotland's policy group, adds: "This will make such a difference to me financially, as well as to my safety and quality of life."

Fair Rail Campaign

The Fair Rail Campaign was launched over two years ago, calling for a national policy to provide free rail travel across Scotland for the [companions](#) of those with a National (Scotland) Concessionary Travel for Blind Persons card. Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans were approached by many individuals with sight loss who were concerned about rising travel costs and the confusion surrounding various concessionary schemes. The charities brought the issue to the Scottish Parliament, where it was debated in a Members Debate brought forward by Graham Simpson MSP and considered in the Fair Fares Review, ultimately leading to this pilot scheme.

Mr Simpson said: "I welcome the launch of the fair rail campaign pilot. This is long overdue after many years of campaigning by Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans, who first brought the issue to my attention several years ago.

"I held a Members' Debate in the Parliament on this issue in 2022. Last year, the Fair Fares Review made a loose commitment to a pilot project, so I am pleased to see that the Scottish Government is finally addressing this important issue.

"For many blind and partially sighted people, having a companion can mean the difference between travelling or not travelling. This pilot is a step in the right direction, but I would urge the Scottish Government to get on with implementing a national policy that entitles the companions of people with sight loss to free rail travel, to make our rail network more equitable and accessible for everyone."

For more information please visit sightscotland.org.uk



Kaukab Stewart MSP on left Picture – Chris Watt Photography