



**A NEW ERA IN ALL ISLAND TRAVEL ABOUT TO BEGIN AS SEAMLESS ALL-IRELAND FREE SCHEME IS LAUNCHED**

***SENIOR RESIDENTS IN ALL PARTS OF THE ISLAND WILL TRAVEL FREE OF CHARGE FROM APRIL***

A historic new All-Ireland Free Travel scheme will commence from Monday, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2007

The scheme will herald a new era in seamless free all-island, North and South, travel opportunities for tens of thousands of older people in every part of Ireland

The announcement of the commencement of the new scheme in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland was made today at Connolly Railway Station in Dublin by An Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern TD, Minister for Social Affairs, Seamus Brennan TD and David Cairns MP, Northern Ireland Transport Minister.

The current Cross-Border Travel Service allows users to travel from a point in one jurisdiction to a point in the other jurisdiction. The new scheme will allow seniors (those aged 66 and over) resident in the Republic of Ireland to travel free of charge on all bus and rail services in Northern Ireland. Likewise, seniors (over 65) in Northern Ireland will travel free on bus, rail, air and ferry services participating in the Free Travel scheme in the Republic of Ireland.

More than 600,000 customers are in receipt of free travel in the Republic of Ireland, of which 430,000 are aged over 66 years. Current annual expenditure on the scheme is more than €58 million.



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While it is not possible to predict the exact number of customers who will avail of the new travel scheme, an indication is that under the existing limited 'point to point' arrangement some 220,000 cross-border journeys are made each year.

The Taoiseach said: "The commencement of an All-Ireland free travel initiative is truly historic as it allows older people to travel to any destination on the island they choose. Its introduction is another example of how close North-South co-operation can deliver real practical benefits for people throughout the island of Ireland. The new scheme opens up a seamless travel system that allows older people to travel anywhere on the island and I would encourage senior citizens to make full use of the new concessions to explore as much of the island as they possibly can through leisure breaks, visiting family or friends, or simply taking day trips to the many attractions the island of Ireland has to offer. I am particularly pleased that in beginning this unrestricted all-island scheme we are delivering on the commitment in the Programme for Government to introduce All-Ireland Free Travel for our older people on all parts of the island".

Minister Brennan said the start-up of the All-Ireland scheme was the culmination of years of discussions and negotiations and was a tribute to the dedication and commitment of all involved.

"The new scheme heralds the beginning of a new era in All-Ireland travel opportunities for tens of thousands of older people on the island. It is an initiative that will remove all existing restrictions and help to build new understandings and friendships throughout the island. In many ways it is about more than just new unrestricted travel arrangements, it is a facility that will allow the older people of the island to gain a deeper understanding of each others part of the country. It is



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also a recognition, and a gesture of gratitude, to all of our older people who have contributed so much over so many years to the building and shaping of the modern, progressive island we have today”.

Minister Cairns said: “The introduction in 2002 of free travel in Northern Ireland through the Concessionary Fares Scheme has resulted in over 200,000 senior citizens enjoying greater levels of mobility and independence than ever before. Today we can confirm that the new All Ireland Free Travel Scheme will begin on 2 April. Northern Ireland Senior SmartPass holders will also be able to use their existing SmartPasses to obtain free travel on public transport throughout the island of Ireland.”

Under the new scheme, travel in the Republic will be facilitated by Northern customers using their current Senior Smartpass as a flash-pass. Customers from the Republic wishing to avail of the free travel concession in the North will require a similar electronic Senior Smartpass and this can be obtained through applying to the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA).

The application process will involve customers submitting application forms and having photographs authenticated at their nearest DSFA local office. The documentation will then be forwarded direct to the card producing company for the issue of a Smartpass to the customer. Details of the applications process will be given in advertisements in the national and regional media over the coming days.



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The Free Travel Scheme was introduced in 1967 and has undergone significant change in the last number of years.

One of the most significant improvements took place in September 2006 with the removal by Minister Brennan of peak travel time access restrictions applied on Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann provincial city services in Cork and Limerick.

At present work is progressing on the replacement of the existing Free Travel pass with a Travel card to improve customer service and bring improved security features.

**ENDS**