



Peak-Time Travel Restrictions For Pensioners & Other Free Travel Customers Ends Today After Almost 40 Years

Seamus Brennan - "Restrictions Have No Place In 21st Century Progressive Ireland Where The Role In Society Of Older People & Those With Disabilities Is Changing And Expanding"

From this morning, all restrictions on travel on public transport services at morning and evening peak-times for holders of Free Travel passes, which have been in existence for almost 40 years, have been officially lifted.

To celebrate the historic ending of the restrictions, the Minister for Social Affairs, Seamus Brennan T.D., this morning joined a number of pensioners on a Dublin Bus journey.

Minister Brennan said the lifting of the restrictions, which were first introduced in 1967, means that in future there will be no limits placed on the amount of free travel eligible people take or at what time they take it.

More than 600,000 customers are in receipt of the Free Travel scheme, of which 430,000 are aged over 66 years. Some 145,000 are in receipt of an invalidity/disability type payment and a further 25,000 are carers.

The peak time access restrictions have applied up to now on all Dublin Bus services and on Bus Éireann city services in Cork and Limerick.



Department of Social and Family Affairs

Up to now the rules had specified that access to these services for Free Travel pass holders was restricted on Monday to Friday from 7 am to 9 am and from 4.30 pm to 6.30 pm. There have also been restrictions on Friday evening travel from 4 pm to 7 pm within a 20 mile radius of Dublin, Cork and Limerick.

Minister Brennan said: "The lifting of all travel restrictions at peak times will benefit tens of thousands of people, particularly older people and those with disabilities, who up to now have been severely curtailed in the times they have been allowed to travel in the main cities, and surrounding areas, on public transport services. It is also a recognition that many eligible Free Travel people, especially those with disabilities, are becoming increasingly more active in the workforce and in availing of other activities that are contributing to creating a more tolerant and more enlightened society.

"Ending these restrictions also removes the need for people to have to go through the process of having to apply for special passes so that they can attend hospital appointments, or educational, rehabilitative and therapeutic courses that are, very often, central to improving their recovery and improving their lifestyles."

The Free Travel Scheme is available to persons aged 66 years or over who are permanently resident in the State, and to all carers in receipt of Carers Allowance. The scheme is also available to certain people with disabilities and people who are in receipt of certain welfare type payments.

Current annual expenditure on the scheme is some €58.3 million, of which the 2006 estimate provides for a total of €48.5million payable to the CIE Group for the travel services it provides.

Under the scheme as it existed up to today, the Department had, with the agreement of the relevant operators, issued unrestricted passes, permitting free travel at peak times, to certain customers with disabilities primarily for the purposes of attending educational, long-term rehabilitative and therapeutic courses. In addition, in exceptional circumstances, the Department had issued temporary unrestricted passes for a limited period of six to twelve months to facilitate hospital appointments. Some 4,000



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unrestricted passes issued during 2005 and there are currently approximately 19,000 such passes in circulation. The need for such special passes will now cease.

ENDS

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