



Mrs. Miriam Reilly  
Meetings Administrator,  
Corporate Services Department,  
South Dublin County Council,  
County Hall,  
Tallaght,  
Dublin 24.

Your Ref: M21/0721

DEPREP– 2021 – 26510

July 2021

Dear Miriam,

Ms. Heather Humphreys TD, Minister for Social Protection, has asked me to reply to your correspondence on behalf of the members of South Dublin County Council regarding the agreed motion that the free travel scheme should be extended to people who suffer with epilepsy and have their drivers licence temporarily suspended.

The Free Travel scheme provides free travel on the main public and private transport services for those eligible under the scheme. These include road, rail and ferry services provided by companies such as Bus Átha Cliath, Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann, as well as Luas and services provided by over 80 private transport operators. There are currently approx. 1,003,000 customers with direct eligibility. The estimated expenditure on free travel in 2021 is €95 million.

In general, access to a free travel pass for those aged under 66 is linked to a person being in receipt of certain primary Social Protection payments such as Disability Allowance, Invalidity Pension, Carer's Allowance, Blind Pension and Partial Capacity Benefit.

Extending the free travel scheme to people with epilepsy because they have had their driving licence temporarily suspended cannot be considered in isolation. There are a range of disabilities and medical conditions that can prevent a person from holding a driving licence and to award a free travel pass to any one of these conditions in isolation would immediately result in calls for all people who are not allowed to hold a driving licence because of their medical condition to receive the free travel pass and could result in challenges under the Equal Status Act.

If the Free Travel scheme were to be extended to all people who are not allowed to drive due to their disability, regardless of whether they receive a qualifying payment, a medical assessment process would be required for all such applications, significantly changing the nature of the scheme and requiring additional administrative processes to be put in place in order to adjudicate eligibility. Significant extra funding would also be required and accordingly, it could only be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

Under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme, my Department may award a travel supplement, where the circumstances of the particular case so warrant. The supplement is intended

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to assist with ongoing or recurring travel costs that cannot be met from the client's own resources and are deemed to be necessary. Every decision is based on consideration of the circumstances of the individual case, taking account of the nature and extent of the need and of the resources of the person concerned.

I hope this clarifies the position.

Yours sincerely,

David O'Callaghan  
Pensions Policy and Free Scheme Unit

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