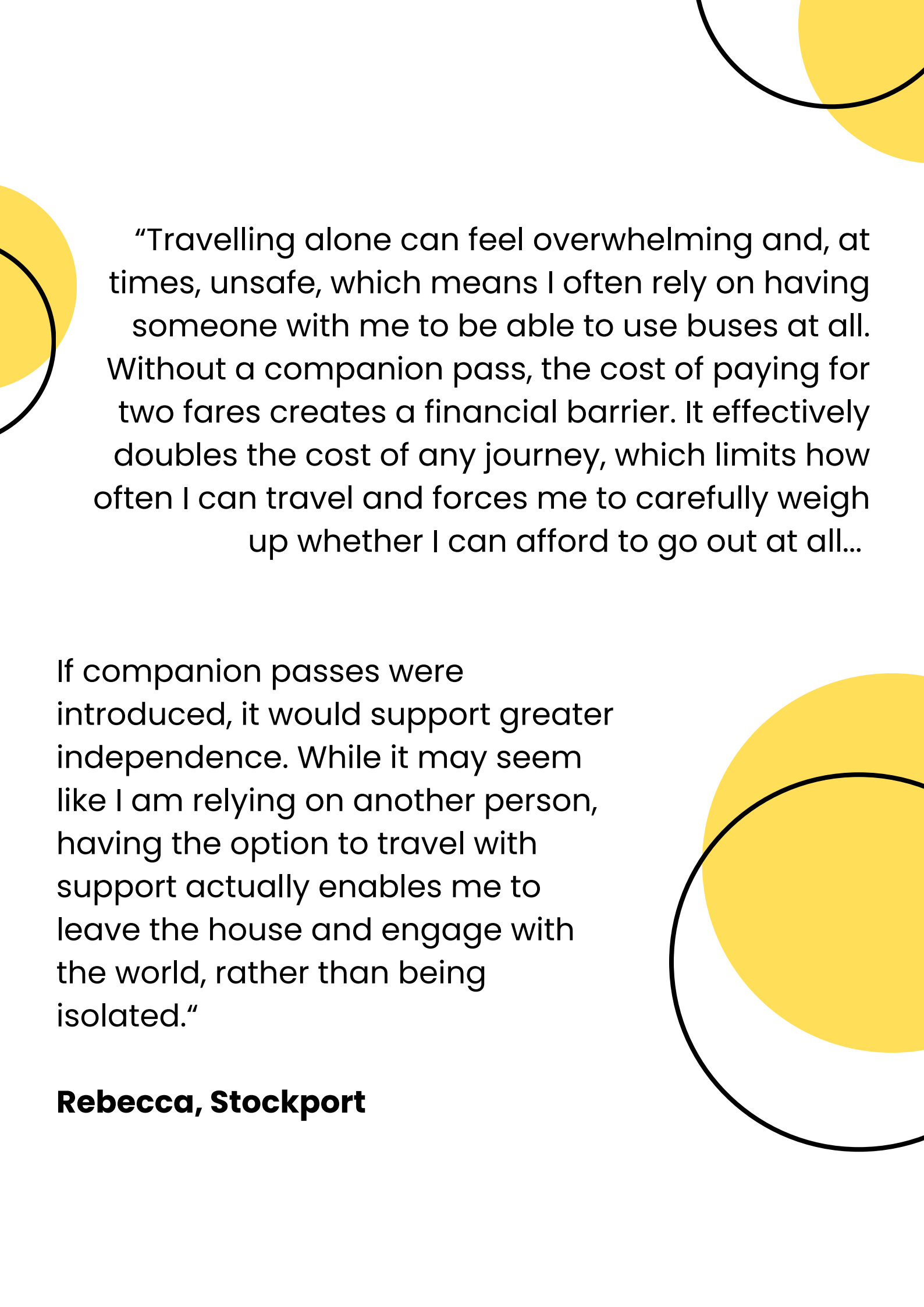


"TWO PLEASE!"

The Case for Companion Passes in Greater Manchester

**A report by
All Hours All Voices**





“Travelling alone can feel overwhelming and, at times, unsafe, which means I often rely on having someone with me to be able to use buses at all. Without a companion pass, the cost of paying for two fares creates a financial barrier. It effectively doubles the cost of any journey, which limits how often I can travel and forces me to carefully weigh up whether I can afford to go out at all...

If companion passes were introduced, it would support greater independence. While it may seem like I am relying on another person, having the option to travel with support actually enables me to leave the house and engage with the world, rather than being isolated.”

Rebecca, Stockport

Introduction

We are All Hours All Voices, a group of Greater Manchester residents of different backgrounds, with a wide range of life experiences, who have come together to advocate for fair, accessible and inclusive transport for all. We know from our own experiences how challenging it can be to access public transport, especially as a disabled passenger.

In 2025, we won our first campaign goal when time restrictions on concessionary bus pass travel were permanently lifted. We created an open letter, cosigned by a wide range of more than 40 organisations and charities that are led by, work with, or advocate for older and disabled people, calling for the trial removal of restrictions to be made permanent. We know the hugely positive impact this has already had on the lives of many people across Greater Manchester, and now we want to go further.



Now, we are calling for the introduction of Companion Passes for disabled people, who may require assistance when navigating the public transport system. Disabled people have a legal right to accessible transport and to live free from discrimination, and we believe the current lack of a Companion Pass falls short of that duty.

We are asking for a Companion Pass that reflects the lived experience of disabled people across Greater Manchester. Specifically, we are calling for a +1 style pass that allows the holder to choose their own companion, eligibility based on self-identification of need rather than receipt of benefits such as PIP and disabled people at the heart of designing and implementing the scheme from the outset.

Greater Manchester has already shown what is possible. Now we believe it has the opportunity to go further still and to set a gold standard for what an inclusive, accessible Companion Pass can look like: one that other city regions can look to and learn from.

In this report, our aim is to provide evidence of where this has already been implemented, through case studies, as well as stories of lived experience from people across the city region, sharing how the introduction of Companion Passes would remove barriers, open doors and allow them to more fully be a part of our Greater Manchester community.

What we are advocating for

For many disabled people, travelling independently is not possible without the support of a companion or Personal Assistant (PA). The cost of an additional fare can be a significant barrier, limiting access to work, healthcare, social activities and community life. This means that people who need to be accompanied when travelling are still unable to benefit from the removal of time restrictions on concessionary pass travel. A Companion Pass would make a real and immediate difference to people's lives.

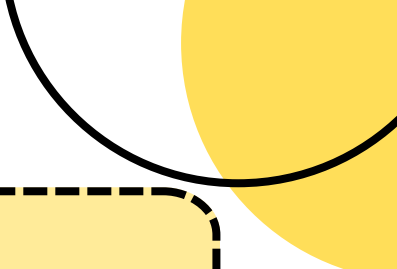
We believe that the following factors must be considered, in order to make the Companion Pass work to its fullest potential.

First, the pass must operate as a +1 style pass, allowing the holder to choose their own companion. Disabled people's support needs are personal and varied; the flexibility to decide who accompanies them is fundamental to their dignity and independence. It is also important to recognise that not every disabled person needs a companion to travel. Many disabled people travel independently, and a Companion Pass would simply ensure that those who do need support are no longer excluded.

Second, eligibility must be based on self-identification of need, rather than the receipt of benefits such as Personal Independence Payment. The PIP application process is widely recognised as stressful, complex and often inaccessible. With the TIMMS review potentially creating further uncertainty around eligibility, tying a Companion Pass to benefit status risks excluding many of the people who need it most.

I have to show my PIP letter
at least once a month. I
literally have a screenshot
saved on my phone. I'm sick
of having to constantly prove
myself.

Lorenza, Trafford

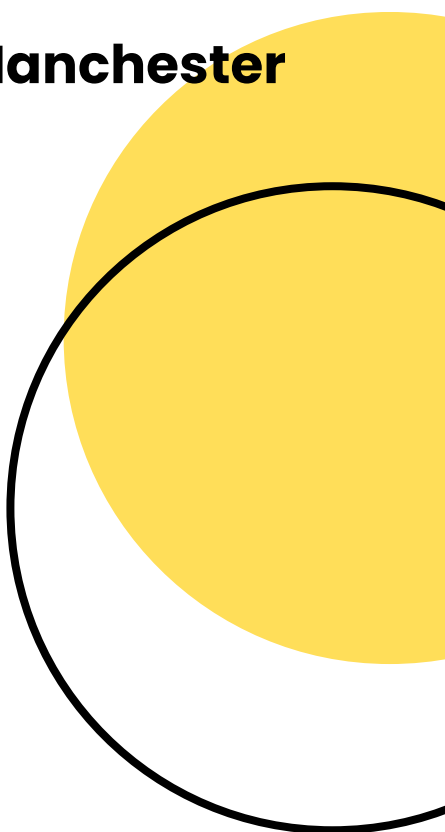


I'm my wife's registered carer and frequently need to accompany her on public transport. She is a wheelchair user and also has difficulty with navigating unfamiliar routes, so I help her to access transport (e.g. scouting for a member of staff to assist at train stations) and can help her replan an accessible route if her original route is disrupted. She attends several outpatient clinics, which are spread across Greater Manchester (Salford Royal Hospital, Altrincham Health Centre and North Manchester General Hospital) and all require at least one change to get to on public transport from where we live in Levenshulme. I am not currently employed as I have been unable to find a job that is compatible with my wife's care needs and my own mental health needs, so having a free companion travel pass would be a big financial help too.

Jo, Manchester

Third, disabled people must be at the heart of the design and implementation of this pass, not consulted as an afterthought, but genuinely involved in shaping how it works from the outset. Lived experience is essential to getting this right, and to avoiding the kind of design flaws that have limited the effectiveness of companion schemes elsewhere. Groups such as the Greater Manchester Mayor's Disabled People's Panel and Transport for Greater Manchester's Disability Design Reference Group already play an important role in improving the accessibility of public transport and would be well placed to help shape and guide this work.

Greater Manchester has already shown what is possible by making concessionary bus travel unrestricted. Introducing a gold standard Companion Pass is an opportunity to build on that progress, and to demonstrate that inclusive, people-centred transport can be more than an aspiration, it can be a welcome reality.



Worth the cost

South Yorkshire Combined Authority offers a good point of comparison for Greater Manchester and is a role model for several reasons. Though it is larger in size, it has less than half the population, and fewer densely populated areas. Despite this, it offers both 24/7 concessionary pass travel AND companion passes. If South Yorkshire can afford and administer both unrestricted travel and companion passes, we insist that Greater Manchester can do the same. It is also worth noting that unrestricted travel in South Yorkshire extends to the tram and train network, a future aspiration for our city region for All Hours All Voices.

South Yorkshire is far from alone. As of March 2024, 53 local authorities across the country offered some form of companion element as part of their concessionary travel scheme¹ and we know from our conversations with the charity Transport for All that this number has since risen.² Greater Manchester risks being left behind, rather than leading the way, if it continues to delay.

A Disabled Pass in South Yorkshire entitles holders to free travel at all times on local bus services, trams and trains within South Yorkshire, and Northern train services between South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire. If the pass has the "with carer" logo, a carer will also be able to travel with the holder free of charge.

Although 'With Carer' passes are intended for those who cannot travel unaccompanied, South Yorkshire recognises that disabilities can vary in the extent to which they interfere with mobility, and holders may also travel alone using a 'With Carer' pass. This reflects an important point: a disabled person may not need a companion for every journey, and having a Companion Pass does not mean they must always travel with someone. The choice of when to travel alone and when to bring a companion should rest with the pass holder.³

It would mean our disabled son could access more amenities more freely with me or his carer and ensure he becomes familiar and relaxed with regular transport. Financially it would also help as I work part time and am a single parent and I do not receive benefits.

Julie, Trafford

Co-production and dignity

Wokingham Borough Council's use of co-production sets a very high standard, which Greater Manchester could learn from and replicate. Wokingham's approach offers an example of what we are asking for in Greater Manchester: genuine co-production, where disabled people and those with lived experience help shape the services that affect them, rather than being consulted after decisions have already been made.

Wokingham's Social Care Future Charter, signed in January 2024, was inspired by the national Social Care Future movement which seeks to change the way people think about social care. The charter was developed with groups of residents and organisations with different experiences of social care in the borough.⁴

The charter identified five key changes to 'unlock a gloriously ordinary life':

- Communities where everyone belongs
- Living in the place we call home
- Leading the lives we want to live
- More resources, better used
- Sharing power as equals

In December 2024, Wokingham Borough Council removed all time restrictions on disabled bus passes, in direct response to feedback from disabled residents through Social Care Future conversations.⁵

Additionally, Wokingham Borough Council also offers companion passes. Users may take any other person with them, only the pass holder is named, and companions, whoever they may be, do not need to carry any documentation or proof of identity. All the bus pass holder needs to say is "two please."

Wokingham has demonstrated that a scheme can be simple, dignified and low barrier for the person using it, without requiring invasive checks or named companions. If a companion pass can work this way in Wokingham, we see no reason why the same model could not work equally well in Greater Manchester.

Wokingham also offer the option of an independent medical professional's signature on the application form as proof of need (in place of proof of receipt of benefits).⁶ However, we would advocate for self identification of need due to the fact that medical professionals charge to sign forms for non-NHS services.

Conclusion

We believe that the evidence in this report speaks for itself. From South Yorkshire to Wokingham, we have shown that Companion Passes are not a radical or untested idea, but a practical, working reality in communities across the country. The lived experience testimony we have shared demonstrates the human cost of continuing to wait.

On Friday 10th July 2026, we received a response from TfGM to the letter writing campaign we ran during Carers Week (8-14 June 2026), in which almost 2,500 letters were sent calling for the introduction of a Companion Pass. We want to directly address the points raised in that response.

TfGM's letter states that a Companion Pass "is likely to come with significant funding requirements." We agree that costs must be understood, but we feel that the using London as an example doesn't seem like a good basis to decide it wouldn't work in Greater Manchester in 2026. London's companion pass plans were one of Sadiq Khan's election pledges, based on an initial costing deemed manageable in January 2020. Upon election, the pandemic had led to unforeseen financial impacts, and that's why it was not included in his May 2021 manifesto and why TfL suspended work on it.⁷ The only way to know what a Companion Pass would genuinely cost in Greater Manchester is to trial it, and TfGM has already shown that trials work.

A trial may also offer a chance to explore ways of keeping costs low. Rather than printing and distributing new passes, TfGM could allow disabled people to self-identify their need for a companion and issue something as simple as a sticker to add to their existing pass. This would be low cost, quick to implement, and may even make a trial in November 2026 viable.

I have a PA via social care, but we are expected to pay for the travel out of pocket. People expect us to use PIP, but personally, PIP doesn't even cover half of the extra costs of my disabilities. It (a companion pass) would therefore mean more financial stability and being able to go out more.

Hannah, Tameside

I'm an advanced support worker who works in a complex service with three young autistic men with learning disabilities and autism. That means that they absolutely require 2 companions with them whenever they are out of their home. This means that a trip that takes any longer than an hour automatically costs them £8, even with their bus passes.

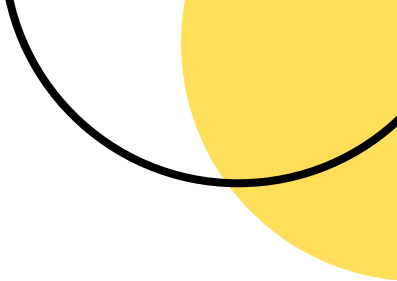
Oliver, Manchester

TfGM's response further states that a Companion Pass carries a risk of fraud or misuse. We would urge TfGM to reconsider this framing. As our Wokingham case study shows, other authorities have implemented companion schemes simply and without incident. Narratives around fraud and misuse, even when raised with good intentions, can cause real harm, inviting hostility and invasive questioning towards disabled people who are simply trying to go about their lives.

Greater Manchester has already shown what is possible. We believe the case for a Companion Pass is now overwhelming and we ask TfGM to commit to, at the very least, a trial, so that all of us, at all hours, can move freely.

Endnotes

1. <https://www.transportforall.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Concessions-Report-full-version.pdf>
2. <https://www.transportforall.org.uk/blog/2026/09/07/whats-next-for-the-campaign-to-unlock-transport-access/>
3. <https://www.travelsouthyorkshire.com/en-gb/ticketsandpasses/passes-faqs>
4. <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/news/2024/signing-new-future-social-care>
5. <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/news/2026/getting-places-matter-travel-story>
6. <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/sites/wokingham/files/2023-06/Companion%20bus%20pass%20guidance.pdf>
7. <https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/companion-travel-pass-0>



"I am a disabled person with progressive illnesses who has to rely on public transport to visit hospitals, GP surgeries and rehab clinics on a regular basis. I know that as my illnesses progress that in the near future I am highly likely to need a carer to assist with getting to these appointments.

Personally, I am not looking at today but towards the future, when I will be unable to travel on public transport without a companion. Those who are reading this and can implement free companion passes should also look to the future, as some of their friends, family or colleagues may one day require assistance when travelling on public transport in Greater Manchester."

Will, Stockport

