

## Sally Tsoukaris

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**From:** Connor Whyton <C.Whyton@connectpa.co.uk>  
**Sent:** 06 January 2026 11:37  
**To:** Sally Tsoukaris; David Luxton; Eamonn Donaghy; Alan Lees; Richard Critchley  
**Cc:** Later Life Ambitions  
**Subject:** Monitoring Update

Hi all,

The **House of Commons** held a Westminster Hall [debate](#) on free bus travel for people over 60, led by **Tony Vaughan (Lab, Folkestone and Hythe)**. Please see a summary of the key points below:

### **Tony Vaughan (Labour, Folkestone and Hythe)**

- Set out the case for buses as a vital public good that enables better connectivity and environmental benefits, while highlighting frustration at regional inequalities in free bus travel for over-60s.
- Challenged the assumption that people over 60 are financially secure, citing evidence of rising poverty among 60–64-year-olds due to pension age increases and caring duties amidst other factors, and the high number of over-60s working in key sectors such as health and retail.
- Pointed to successful existing schemes in London and the Liverpool city region, showing that free or reduced travel for over-60s can work in practice when backed by local funding and powers, and argued that locally led solutions reflect local needs best.
- Responded to concerns about shrinking commercial bus routes by agreeing that sustained central government investment is essential, but stressed that local authorities must be accountable for how funding is spent to benefit passengers.
- Explained that a centrally mandated national scheme would cost an additional £250–£400 million per year and could lead to service cuts without proper funding, while noting competing priorities such as cheaper fares for students and apprentices, which may deliver stronger economic returns.
- Argued for local authorities to set up municipal bus companies, as the interest of companies involved in privatisation have been put above those of the customer.

### **Steve Darling (LD, Torbay)**

- Noted a significant shrinkage in the number of available commercial routes in Torbay, whether for bus pass users or other bus users. He argued that sustained investment was needed to correct this.

### **Rachel Maskell (Lab, York Central)**

- Noted that inequality around bus use was at the heart of the debate.
- As well as geographical inequality, noted the socioeconomic inequality that exists, particularly when we look at putting resources into enabling older people to access bus services so that, instead of paying £6 for a return journey, they can access things such as health appointments on time.
- “Is it not worth looking at people living in deprivation and putting money into supporting people from those communities to use buses?”

### **Iqbal Mohamed (Ind, Dewsbury and Batley)**

- Argued that people's access to free travel should not depend on where they live or how stretched their council's budget happens to be. National problems require national solutions.
- “We also need to be honest about the scale of the gap that people face. It is not a short transition period. The difference between age 60 and state pension age is six years, and that gap is set to increase further as the pension age rises.”
- “It is six more years during which people might be driving less, losing confidence behind the wheel, or giving up their car altogether, but are still expected to pay rising transport costs.”

### **Mohammad Yasin (Lab, Bedford)**

- Argued that free bus travel for over-60s would not only provide much-needed financial relief, but help to reduce social isolation, support access to healthcare and enable continued engagement in work, volunteering and community life.

- Labelled it as a small investment that delivers significant social value and improved quality of life for thousands of older residents.
- Made the case for people across England to be able to access free and reliable transport, regardless of the financial situation of their local councils, so that bus users in England have the same provision as those in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

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**BBC News** [reports](#) that drivers over the age of 70 will have to have their vision checked every three years, under plans to reform driving laws in Britain. The changes are part of the government's new road safety strategy, which will be published on Wednesday.

**Lilian Greenwood, local transport minister**, said: "We know driving can be very important for older people's wellbeing and help them to live independently, but we must also make sure everyone is safe on our roads. As the country's older population grows, our plans in the first road safety strategy in more than a decade will preserve personal freedoms where possible with action to save lives."

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**The Times** [reports](#) that **London Councils**, the umbrella body that administers the scheme on behalf of the local authorities for the capital's 32 boroughs and the City of London, is launching a review which could recommend that free travel for Londoners aged 66 and above be restricted solely to bus services.

The annual cost of the Freedom Pass scheme is expected to increase by more than 10% this year to £372 million. **Alexander Ehmann**, a member of the transport and environment committee and a Liberal Democrat councillor in Richmond, described "the cost of the Freedom Pass [as] a ticking time bomb for London local authorities. He added that: "The spiralling costs come at a time where councils such as Richmond are already set to be hobbled by £30 million plus in year cuts, as part of the ironically named 'fair funding reforms' of the Labour government.

Best wishes,  
Connor

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