

## BusFair Speech to Council

David Smith, Cross Gates Good Neighbours

I'm David Smith and I'm representing the BusFair Campaign for a better and fairer deal on the concessionary bus fares for older and disabled people in Leeds and West Yorkshire.

I grew up in Burmantofts and, like Alan Bennett, I've always been grateful for my education in Leeds. I became a scientist and spent most of my working life at Bart's Hospital in London. I'm now a Trustee at Cross Gates Good Neighbours and also at Leeds Older People's Forum.

I'd like to take you back to 2019 and a lunch club at the Roscoe Methodist Church in Chapeltown. I'd been volunteering with Adults and Health, visiting groups of older people in different parts of Leeds to ask what would make their lives better. As I enjoyed some lovely Caribbean food and ginger beer, the ladies there were soon telling me how they can't use their free bus passes before 9:30 am on weekdays. So there and then I decided to investigate further and the BusFair Campaign was born.

I soon found that the 9:30 am cut-off is part of the basic default concession in England, but that in other parts of the country, such as Scotland, Wales and even Hull, the bus passes work all day and every day. I have a bus pass myself and I use it all the time, but before 9:30 am it does feel like being shunned from public transport. In England, transport authorities like WYCA have the power to deliver extra concessions.

I'd like to thank Cllr Venner and the Health & Wellbeing Board for the Allyship, which pairs people from the Third Sector like me with Board members. I was really fortunate to be allied with Cllr Arif, and even more fortunate that she adopted the BusFair Campaign as our Allyship project. I'm joined today by *(some other supporters of BusFair)*.

The Allyship aims to put equity and inclusion at the heart of health and care. That ethos becomes even more significant now that Leeds is a Marmot City. For our disadvantaged communities, the 9:30 am cut-off really affects people's lives, such as older people with early appointments at the doctor or hospital. Many disabled people wish to work regularly and are encouraged to do that, but the 9:30 am cut-off can make it financially impractical, even with the new £2 cap on single fares.

As you all know, Leeds aspires to be "The Best City to Grow Old In", and I do believe it's almost there. We have the unique Neighbourhood Network Schemes, nurtured and sustained by the Council. Our NHS in Leeds is a national vanguard of innovation and best practice. And I know from personal experience that the Leeds charity sector is recognised nationwide and provides great value through Forum Central and Voluntary Action Leeds.

But right now, the buses are frustrating the "Best City" ambition. The West Yorkshire Combined Authority has the power to deliver something better and fairer for our older and disabled people, although this will currently depend on funding from government.

**Ask:** We would like Council to support free travel at all times for older and disabled people with bus passes in Leeds and West Yorkshire.

531 words

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