

Briefing note on bus pass issuing from 1 April 2011

From 1 April 2011, County Councils have been given responsibility for free (concessionary) bus passes for elderly and disabled people (instead of District and City Councils). It is possible that some people will hear of this change, and be worried about how it might affect them. It would therefore be very helpful if those who have regular contact with people in this group could take the opportunity to reassure them that, **for virtually all bus pass users, there is no change.**

The most important points are:

- Although newly issued passes have a County Council logo on them, **older passes with District Council logos will still be valid until the expiry date on the pass.**
- Until March 2012, District Councils will still be issuing passes on the County Council's behalf; until then people should **contact the District Council as before** if they have a problem with their pass, or wish to apply for a pass for the first time.
- When a pass **reaches its scheduled expiry date**, passholders will receive a new one automatically through the post (**Important Note:** this does **not** apply to passes issued by West Oxfordshire District, holders of these will need to go to the Witney office for a replacement when their old pass is about to expire).

Other information which may be helpful is as follows:

- Many buses in Oxfordshire have **Smartcard readers** on their ticket machines, and pass users must touch their pass on the ticket machine to record their journey. All types of passes should work on these readers; if one doesn't, the passholder should contact the District Council for a replacement. (On 'non-Smart' buses, the pass should still be shown to the driver).
- If a pass is **lost**, contact the District Council for a replacement (which will have a County Council logo); there will be a charge of £10 for this.
- Passes will be accepted for free travel **from 09.00 on weekdays**, (all day at weekends) when boarding a bus anywhere in Oxfordshire. The 'national standard' is a 09.30 start, so when getting on a bus outside Oxfordshire it is safest to assume that free travel does not start until 09.30.
- Passes will be accepted for free travel on **dial-a-ride services**, everywhere in Oxfordshire
- The County will not issue **travel tokens** as an alternative to bus passes - tokens were discretionary and not all Districts Councils offered them previously. District Councils which offered tokens in the past have all already written to each individual token user saying that tokens are no longer available, and offering a bus pass instead, so existing token users should already know about this.

- ‘**Companion passes**’ (which allow people who, because of their disability, need a companion to be able to travel, to take a companion free as well as themselves) are still available. Some existing companion passes do not work properly on the new smartcard readers; for the time being they are being accepted for travel but those who are affected will receive a new pass through the post in a couple of months time. Once that has happened faulty passes will no longer be accepted by bus companies. However, all new passes (and old passes issued by Cherwell and South Oxfordshire) are not affected; they already work properly and will not be replaced.
- In order to spread the workload of reissuing passes when they expire, new passes will have an expiry date in the month of the passholder’s birthday. This may sometimes result in two passes, issued at the same time, having different expiry dates; it is nothing to worry about!

There is a County Council enquiry line for issues to do with concessionary travel. It is **0845 310 11 11**. This number is on the new passes because they will continue to be valid long after the Districts cease to do the pass-issuing job for us. However, for problems to do with the passes themselves (including the new ones) until March 2012 it will be **quicker to continue to contact the relevant District**. The face of the new passes has two small letters after the County name, which indicates the issuing District – older passes of course have the logo of the District Council on them.

District contact numbers are:

South Oxfordshire District (letters: SV)	0345 3022313
Vale of White Horse District (letters also SV).....	0345 3022315
Oxford City (letters OX).....	01865 249811
Cherwell District (letters CH).....	01295 227001
West Oxfordshire District (letters WE).....	01993 861000