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Press release

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Free bus travel is widely used but there were weaknesses in the scheme's planning and implementation

Scotland's national scheme of free bus travel for older and disabled people is widely used. However there were weaknesses in how it was planned and implemented.

An Audit Scotland report published today, *National concessionary travel*, looks at the scheme, which was introduced in 2006 to replace 16 local council-run programmes. National concessionary travel (NCT) is popular among users, with 80 per cent of over-60s in Scotland holding a bus pass.

There was only limited information about the cost of the scheme when the Scottish Parliament considered its introduction. While NCT started on time, robust systems were not in place to effectively manage it or monitor its success, and the overall impact of the scheme is still not clear. There has been a four-and-a-half-year delay in rolling out the technology to support the scheme, and this is costing £42 million, against an original budget of £9 million.

Auditor General for Scotland Robert Black said: "National concessionary travel is popular, with take up by older people at a very high level. But there were weaknesses in how the scheme was planned and implemented. Systems to effectively administer NCT were not in place, and this left it more open to error and fraud.

"It is expected to take four and a half years longer than planned to fully introduce the technology that is key to the scheme working effectively, and this has cost more than four times the original budget."

Since 2006, just over 1.1 million people have been issued with a bus pass and the costs of national concessionary travel are significant - over £199 million during 2009/10. This is expected to rise although it is not possible to predict exact future costs. Audit Scotland illustrates the potential costs of the scheme in the report: for example, allowing for the estimated growth in the number of people aged 60 and over, by 2025 annual costs could rise to £216 million (in 2010 prices). Future increases in the price of adult single fares – which have increased on average at 6.25% a year since NCT was introduced - would make the costs higher.

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Notes to editors

1. There are just over 1.1 million NCT passes in circulation and around 80 per cent of people aged 60 or over have a pass. Around 15 per cent of NCT passes are issued under disability criteria. However, the proportion of disabled people with a bus pass is not known, as an individual may be eligible for NCT under a number of different disability criteria and disabled people aged over 60 may claim a pass based on their age, not their disability.
2. Research by the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland says NCT has had only a limited impact on preventing isolation among the elderly, improving health and reducing car use. The research also says while take up is high among older people, take-up among disabled people varies considerably around the country and the reasons for this are unclear. Audit Scotland has not validated this research.
3. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 can be found on Audit Scotland's website www.audit-scotland.gov.uk
4. Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act, 2000. Audit Scotland has prepared this report for the Auditor General for Scotland.
5. The Auditor General is responsible for securing the audit of the Scottish Government and most other public bodies in Scotland, except local authorities. He investigates whether spending bodies achieve the best

possible value for money and adhere to the highest standards of financial management. The Auditor General is independent and is not subject to the control of the Scottish Government or the Scottish Parliament.