



**25 November 2010**

**For immediate release**

## **Social exclusion to increase due to Government spending decisions**

The General Secretary of the National Federation of Occupational Pensioners (N.F.O.P) is deeply concerned that decisions made by the Coalition Government will force many pensioners into social exclusion - despite the proven risk this poses to their health.

The worries follow recent decisions concerning travel for pensioners. The first – to stop ring-fencing council spend on free bus passes – has resulted in several regions severely limiting when pensioners can travel, despite assurances from the Government that the bus pass would be protected.

The second decision is to force rail users to reduce the level of Government subsidy to the rail network by significantly increasing rail fares – which in some areas will see travel prices increase by up to 13 percent.

As the Government's decision to use the CPI for pension increases will also leave pensioners poorer, even though one in five pensioners are living below the official poverty line, the stark reality is that many will not be able to afford to travel, resulting in social exclusion.

This could have tragic consequences for pensioners, as a recent report from the Mental Health Foundation found that "persistent loneliness is linked to stress, as well as poorer functioning of the immune and cardiovascular systems".

Roger Turner, General Secretary of the N.F.O.P, said that the importance of available travel for pensioners must not be underestimated.

"Recent government decisions will leave many pensioners with no choice but to isolate themselves as they will not be able to afford to travel – yet it is essential for the wellbeing of pensioners that they can travel to visit loved ones and maintain their independence.

"A recent Centre for Social Justice report stated that due to changing society, many pensioners are left alone with no-one to care for them, which has a detrimental effect on their emotional and physical health.

"Karen Lumley, Conservative MP for Redditch, stated herself that: *"Concessionary travel is vital to many communities, especially to the elderly....who would otherwise be cut off from basic services. Eleven million people in England qualify for the concession, which is no small number...The preservation of concessionary travel is a huge deal."*

"Yet the recent flurry of government decisions seem to directly contradict this view. Urgent action needs to be taken to ensure that pensioners are able to stay independent and access the services they need. Without the ability to travel, I am deeply concerned that many pensioners will be totally socially excluded – which could have tragic and far-reaching consequences."

**Notes to editors:**

1. N.F.O.P is a Company Limited by Guarantee and is a democratic, non-party-political organisation of occupational pensioners. We were formerly known as UNITE, the National Federation of Royal Mail and BT Pensioners
2. N.F.O.P represents the interests of over 90,000 occupational pensioners from across the country and abroad. Speaking with one voice enables us to engage more powerfully with Government and Parliament on behalf of our members.
3. To contact N.F.O.P call 01582 721652, email [info@nfop.org.uk](mailto:info@nfop.org.uk)