

NEWS FROM NORTHERN IRELAND BRANCH 267

1. Firstly my apologies for the absence of Branch Notes in the June Magazine. Owing to an oversight on my part, I missed the submission date!
2. **Concessionary Fare Scheme:** You will likely have seen media reports that the Department of Infrastructure has issued a comprehensive public consultation, with the objective of reducing the cost of the current scheme. All political parties over the years have given their unqualified support to the continuance of the SmartPass, because of the positive impact that the concessionary fare scheme has on the lives of older people. It was surprising therefore, that the Department embarked on this exercise in the absence of a Minister. I found it almost insulting for the Department to state in the consultation paper that, sustainability of such a valued scheme, necessitated savings to be made to current costs, by suggesting a range of detrimental cuts to the scheme provisions. As I write these notes at the end of July, I am drafting the Branch response, for the approval of the Committee, resolutely opposing any changes to the scheme, that negatively impact on older people. There has been precious little reaction so far from Politicians and the onus is on all of us to ensure that there is a co-ordinated response, both at Branch level and individually, to make our opposition to any cuts that will impact on the current right of older people to enjoy free travel on both train and bus. So make your views known to your local representative and support any local activity, protesting against the Department's proposals. Should you wish to have a copy of the Branch response to the consultation, contact me and I'll e-mail a copy to you, (or I'll meet requests for a hard copy if you are not on-line).
3. **Branch Meeting:** The Quarterly meeting will be held in the City Hotel, Londonderry, **on Wednesday, 18 October 2023**, commencing with a finger buffet at 1.15pm. Perhaps you will note the date in your diary. Please advise me by text, telephone or e-mail if you intend to join the meeting as I need to advise the Hotel of the numbers. I particularly urge members in the North West to attend if it is convenient for you.

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