

## **Unforgotten Forces Consortium Consultation Response: Transport Strategy**

**October 2019**

### **Summary**

- The Unforgotten Forces consortium welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Scottish Government's National Transport Strategy.
- From our ongoing work relating to social isolation and loneliness, and veterans' health wellbeing, it is clear that veterans require connecting to people and support services in order to have their varied needs addressed.
- For older veterans, transport provision has to be:
  1. locally available;
  2. easily accessible;
  3. cost effective;
  4. take account of geographic restrictions;
  5. take account of local and nationally based support services specific for veterans;
  6. and take account of the needs older veterans may have while utilising the transport infrastructure including a disability or having a companion on board.
- Therefore, Scotland's National Transport Strategy requires to be drafted and analysed from the veterans' perspective, particularly older veterans who often face transport related barriers when accessing services and connecting with their local communities.

## **Transport Provision – The Consortium**

Consortium partner Fares4Free coordinates and provides free transport for veterans, helping to combat loneliness and isolation and providing access to important support services for older veterans. Other members of the consortium such as Scottish War Blinded and Erskine possess mini-buses which they use to provide veterans with transport between their homes and activity / support centers.

The following casestudies highlight how older veterans have benefited from this service while also highlighting the specific (health, disability, connectivity, and companionship) needs they have that any National Transport Strategy should be based upon:

### **Case Study – Udston Hospital**

Fares4Free provide older veterans and their carers with weekly transport to Udston Hospital in Hamilton. The service takes between 2 and 8 veterans who are experiencing dementia and isolation plus their carers to attend appointments with hospital nurses and mental health practitioners. Opportunities to have the veterans engage with other groups and age ranges are also presented. For example, volunteers from the Police Scotland Youth Volunteer project have been involved with the service. Older veterans using the service have reported that they have found this to be extremely therapeutic with drivers and volunteers also enjoying the banter and interactions.

### **Case Study: James Docherty, 93, Royal Navy Veteran**

Mr Docherty was referred to Fares4Free by the Russian Consulate in Edinburgh. He was eager to attend their National Day event because they planned to honour veterans of the Arctic Convoys. Fares4Free included Jim in the transport that evening along with other older veterans from Dumfries and Galloway, Fife, Ayrshire, Glasgow, Renfrewshire, East Lothian and East Renfrewshire.

At the time, Fares4Free's driver told Jim of some of the destinations Fares4Free could provide transport to and from and introduced him to a veterans' centre. However, Jim was independent and at the time could still manage the bus into Glasgow and the Subway to the centre. Fares4Free would meet him there regularly and eventually as self travelling became more difficult, Fares4Free would make sure that he got to tea with his new found friends every Tuesday. This continues.

Fares4Free have taken Jim to many remembrance and memorial events and even took him back to Loch Ewe, the starting point of some Arctic Convoys, where he met other veterans from WW2 and various diplomats and dignitaries including the Lord Lieutenant.

During the particularly hard winter of 2018, Fares4Free made sure provisions and companionship got through to Jim and other veterans in various part of the country.

Fares4Free manage this by using existing infrastructure and vetted drivers in the taxi trade which lets us provide community transport in rural areas as well as towns and cities. This model means minimal investment is required on capital vehicle assets which depreciate in value and require expensive fleet management and upkeep.

## **The Key Issues**

Some of the key issues older veterans have reported to service providers relating to transport are as follows:

- Transport is not always so readily available in some areas, particularly those that are quite rural with some areas only connecting with one or few modes of transport. For example, buses running every hour instead of half hourly and smaller towns and villages do not have train connections.
- Access to different transport modes which may not always take account of someone's hidden or visible disability. This includes people not coping in spaces with too much noise due to experiencing anxiety related disorders such as PTSD or feeling uncomfortable sitting in crowded carriages.
- The main barriers for passengers with hearing loss include not hearing public address system on transport or at stations so they often miss out on information about platform/stance changes, route changes or cancellations – especially if visual displays aren't working properly or are showing the incorrect sequence of destinations.
- Transport staff (drivers, conductors, passenger assistance) should be trained to identify and support people with disabilities with regular refreshes offered.
- The cost of transport can be very high especially during peak times when people have little option to travel for hospital and care appointments. Older veterans also may have to take a carer or family member with them to appointments especially if they are older, have a disability or in need of support. This would increase the cost unless free or discretionary travel was offered by transport providers.
- Veterans with service related health injuries (physical and mental health) often have to travel long distances from their home to access specialised services. For example, travelling from the North – East to Ayrshire to access Combat Stress.

Service provider Fares4Free highlights that investment in capital vehicle assets is not what is being suggested or asked for. Instead, a community transport model should be adopted whereby existing infrastructure and vetted drivers in the taxi trade are used to provide transport service in a way which is attuned and appropriate for older veterans.

## **Recommendations**

The Unforgotten Forces consortium recommends the following actions be included in Scotland's National Transport Strategy:

1. Transport providers who have signed up to the Armed Forces Corporate Covenant should ask themselves what more they can do to address the transport related needs of older veterans therefore giving effect to the aims and principles of the Covenant.
2. Government and transport providers explore ways to improve transport infrastructure and increase local availability in rural areas including the Borders, Highlands, and Island communities.
3. Government, transport providers, and service providers should identify the costs older veterans will face when travelling, and the cost incurred to take on a companion which should be factored in when providing the transport and or support service.
4. Government, transport providers, and service providers should work collaboratively and efficiently to educate people about service provision, provide voluntary training for transport staff, and to ensure the transport journey evolves around getting an older veteran into their hospital appointment, and not just ending as soon as they have got them to the hospital door.

## About The Consortium

The Unforgotten Forces consortium is a prime example of collaboration amongst military and civilian charities. Led by Poppyscotland, the Unforgotten Forces consortium is a partnership between 16 organisations that have come together to undertake a three-year delivery plan worth £4 million to improve the coordination of existing charitable provision and introduce new services aimed at supporting veterans aged 65 and over.

Partners involved are: Action on Hearing Loss Scotland; Age Scotland; ILM Highland; Citizens Advice Scotland; Defence Medical Welfare Service; Erskine; Fares4Free; Legion Scotland; Luminare; Music in Hospitals & Care Scotland; Poppyscotland; Royal Air Forces Association ; Scottish Older People's Assembly; Scottish War Blinded; SSAFA - the Armed Forces Charity, and the University of the West of Scotland.

## **The Unforgotten Forces Consortium Led By Poppyscotland - Partners are:**



## Further Information

If you have any further queries or require additional information, please contact Usman Ali, Public Affairs Manager at Poppyscotland by emailing [u.ali@poppyscotland.org.uk](mailto:u.ali@poppyscotland.org.uk)