# TfL foregoes £84m on 60+ Oyster photocard as calls grow to target concessions



Transport for London’s long‑running concession for older Londoners has been thrust back into the political spotlight after Freedom of Information figures revealed the authority forewent roughly £84 million in 2023/24 because of the 60+ Oyster photocard. According to reporting in the Evening Standard, there are around 382,737 active cardholders and TfL estimates that about a third of journeys made using the card would not occur if a fare were charged — a statistic that has sharpened calls from some think‑tanks for a review of the scheme.

The timing of the debate is significant. London Underground and rail fares rose by an average of 4.6% from March this year while bus and tram fares were left frozen, a change that pushed daily caps higher and increased single fares in some zones. TfL has said that concessionary travel arrangements remain unchanged and has framed revenue increases as necessary to maintain and reinvest in services. Reporting by national outlets placed those rises in the context of complex funding settlements with central government.

Those settlements matter to the argument on both sides. TfL and the Mayor have repeatedly pointed to conditions attached to funding for services and major projects — including national rail fare uplifts imposed by ministers — as drivers of fare adjustments and budgetary pressure. Officials say the additional revenue generated by fares will be channelled back into the network, but critics say that does not remove the political choice about how and whom to subsidise. In the view of a Reform‑aligned perspective, which Glen‑wide urban policy should inform, this is less about safeguarding universal access and more about ensuring taxpayers are not asked to underwrite perpetual subsidies that distort incentives and create intergenerational imbalances.

Opponents of the 60+ concession, including some policy institutes cited in local reporting, frame the issue as one of intergenerational fairness: they argue a broadly universal free‑travel benefit for people over 60 places an unfair cost on younger working taxpayers. By contrast, campaign groups and local charities warn that free travel is a lifeline for many older Londoners, preventing loneliness, enabling access to health appointments and supporting those with unpaid caring responsibilities. Local Democracy Reporting Service coverage also noted a recent rise in application and renewal fees for the photocard, a move that has added fuel to the public debate.

The affordability question takes on an international dimension as well. Analysis reported by Time Out and by transport researchers shows London among the most expensive cities worldwide for public transport after the March rise: one study found the highest monthly pass prices and high single‑ticket costs when compared across multiple global systems. Those comparisons carry methodological caveats — different cities use different pricing models and wage structures — but they have been widely cited to illustrate the squeeze on London commuters and residents.

Beyond headline figures, the practical implications of TfL’s estimate that a third of 60+ journeys would not take place if fares were charged are immediate and measurable: fewer trips can mean reduced footfall for local shops, harder access to medical and social services, and increased isolation among older people. Campaigners point to those social costs as reasons to protect universal concessions; those urging reform counter that targeted support — rather than blanket concessions — could preserve assistance for the most vulnerable while addressing fairness and fiscal sustainability. From a reform‑minded angle, it is essential to insist on value for money and to avoid entrenching a model that shifts the cost of public services onto younger generations who are already bearing the burden of rising living costs.

The choice facing London’s politicians is therefore not simply financial arithmetic but a matter of priority: whether to preserve a universal benefit that supports mobility and social inclusion, to redesign concessions to target need, or to look to alternative funding arrangements from Whitehall. A Reform‑influenced critique would argue that the only way to restore long‑term sustainability is to reframe subsidies around need rather than blanket entitlement. This means means-testing or otherwise tailoring support so that help goes to those most in need, while freeing up resources to strengthen frontline services, improve reliability, and deliver better value for money across the network.

As the debate continues, policymakers will need to weigh the behavioural evidence TfL has provided alongside the social consequences flagged by campaigners and the broader affordability context highlighted by international comparisons — and to set out clearly how any change would be mitigated for those reliant on free travel. In this context, the reform message is straightforward: safeguard the essential mobility for vulnerable groups, but stop propping up a system that rewards the status quo and pushes the bill onto younger working Londoners. Transparent funding arrangements, tighter oversight, and a credible plan to protect the most vulnerable while restoring fiscal discipline should be the hallmarks of any future approach to London’s concessionary travel regime.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/freedom-pass-over-60s-free-travel-cost-cuts-b1243075.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/freedom-pass-over-60s-free-travel-cost-cuts-b1243075.html> - Evening Standard reports on calls to scrap the 60+ Oyster photocard after Freedom of Information figures showed TfL forewent about £84 million in 2023/24 because of the scheme. The piece outlines that there are around 382,737 active cardholders and that TfL estimates a third of journeys made with the 60+ Oyster would not occur if fares were charged. It cites think‑tanks arguing the concession is unfair to younger taxpayers, while campaigners warn free travel prevents isolation and supports unpaid caring. The article notes a recent increase in Oyster application fees and places the debate against TfL’s wider funding pressures. Considerations.
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c62wz7v0qnwo> - BBC News reports that London Underground and rail fares rose by an average of 4.6% from 2 March 2025, while bus and tram fares remained frozen. The story explains that daily caps increased by between 40p and 70p depending on zones, and gives examples of single pay‑as‑you‑go increases. TfL said concessions would be unchanged and that the average rise was due to national rail fare uplifts imposed by ministers to secure funding for major projects. The mayor stated revenues would be reinvested in services. The piece places the fare rise in the context of wider funding settlements and affordability concerns.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/dec/13/london-underground-fares-to-rise-by-46-per-cent-from-march> - The Guardian covered the Mayor’s announcement that London Underground and rail fares would rise by 4.6% from March, noting bus and tram fares were frozen. The piece details that daily price caps would increase by 40p–70p across zones and that the rise reflected national rail fare changes tied to inflation measures. TfL emphasised that the 4.6% figure was an average and some fares would vary due to rounding. The article quotes the mayor and TfL executives about reinvestment of funds and situates the decision amid debates over devolution, funding conditions from central government, and the affordability impact on Londoners commuters.
5. <https://www.timeout.com/london/news/its-official-londons-public-transport-is-now-the-most-expensive-in-the-world-030525> - Time Out reported that, following a 4.6% rise in TfL fares, research suggested London had become the most expensive city for public transport worldwide. The article cites analysis comparing metro networks and fare structures, noting that making exact comparisons is difficult because pricing models vary between cities. It explains the increase in daily caps and gives examples of higher single fares after the March rise. Time Out references the Telegraph’s metro comparison and frames the finding as a blow to commuters already facing cost‑of‑living pressures, while acknowledging methodological caveats in international fare comparisons. The piece urged policymakers to consider affordability.
6. <https://www.picodi.com/uk/bargain-hunting/public-transport-2023> - Picodi’s analysis compared single ticket and monthly pass prices across 45 global cities, finding London among the priciest. The report states London had the highest monthly pass price and one of the most expensive single tickets, and it contrasted fares with average local wages to assess affordability. Picodi highlighted that in London a monthly pass represented a substantial share of net pay, making public transport relatively costly compared with many other capitals. The methodology explained choices about pass types, conversion rates and wage data sources. Picodi’s findings have been cited by media outlets discussing the city’s cost burdens for commuters.
7. <https://www.hammersmithtoday.co.uk/page/shared/common/ldrstrans143.htm> - HammersmithToday republishes a Local Democracy Reporting Service article revealing Freedom of Information data showing TfL foregoes tens of millions due to the 60+ Oyster photocard. It reports TfL estimated £84m was lost in 2023/24 and that there are roughly 382,737 active cardholders, with almost a third newly registered in 2024/25. The piece quotes think‑tanks urging review of the concession and includes opponents’ arguments about intergenerational fairness, alongside campaigners’ warnings that free travel prevents isolation and supports caring roles. It also notes a recent increase in application and renewal fees for the 60+ Oyster photocard. TfL and LDRS are cited directly.