

Future Years – Out and About Transport Conference 5th December 2016

Workshop – Campaigning for Better Public Transport George Arthur and Fran Postlethwaite – South Yorkshire Freedom Riders

Public transport is so important for older people but provision was referred to as becoming a post code lottery. It is a major issue.

The South Yorkshire Freedom Riders are a group of elderly and disabled people in South Yorkshire campaigning to win back travel concessions. Up until 31st March 2014 all elderly and disabled travel pass holders had free train travel in South and West Yorkshire. This was removed. A local campaign was organised and at the first meeting 300 people turned up – the room was full. People wanted to take some form of action and the term “South Yorkshire Freedom Riders” was born.

The action on board trains, refusing to pay, attracted significant publicity. Would they be arrested was in some of their minds. They travelled weekly as a group and eventually the police became involved.

After six weeks of “freedom riding” free train travel for disabled people and half price travel for the elderly was reinstated in South Yorkshire. They are still campaigning for free local train travel for the elderly.

The group also negotiated an agreement with Stagecoach that they would allow elderly pass holders to travel free on their buses to hospital appointments before 9-30am on showing an appointment card / letter.

Public transport has a number of positive health impacts – allowing older people to get out and about and reducing car usage and pollution particularly in our cities. Isolation and loneliness is recognised as a significant health issue.

The point was also made that older people travelling when they might otherwise not do so also benefited local economies.

The South Yorkshire Freedom Riders were born out of a significant local issue in 2014 – they still meet and campaign on transport issues locally and wider. Learning how to use “social media” in campaigning was referred to.