

**From the office of the Minister for Infrastructure
Liz Kimmins MLA**

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Chairperson
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06 February 2026

Matthew, a chara,

COMMITTEE FOR FINANCE – ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL PROVISIONS BILL – CLAUSE 17

The Committee has requested details on any modelling that the Department has done regarding the level of fee that might be charged to apply for a SmartPass.

The Department remains in the early stages of policy development concerning the potential introduction of a SmartPass fee. As outlined during the Committee briefing, the final level of any fee (or fees) will depend on two key factors:

Administrative Costs of Operating the Scheme

The administrative cost of running the SmartPass Scheme was approximately £740,000 in 2024/25. These costs are expected to change as the Department transitions toward an online application system. Updated cost projections will therefore be required before a final fee can be set.

The Categories on Which the Fee Would Be Levied

Officials intend to explore a range of options, including: applying a fee to all SmartPass recipients, or introducing a differentiated approach, where certain cohorts may be exempt, or some groups may pay a reduced fee. This analysis will inform which model is most appropriate, equitable, and administratively efficient.

Regardless of the fee structure ultimately chosen, the Department emphasises that the total income generated from any SmartPass fee (or fees) will not exceed the administrative costs of the new online application system once it becomes fully operational. This ensures the fee is cost-recovery only, not a revenue-generating measure.

The Committee has requested further information on any work officials have undertaken regarding other concessions that the fee might be used to subsidise.

Any income from the SmartPass fee will be used to meet the administrative costs associated with processing applications. By covering these costs, the Department may free up resources elsewhere within the overall budget, which could, in turn, support the enhancement of concessionary arrangements in future. Decisions in this regard remain subject to further policy development, the availability of resources, and wider priorities across the Department.

I can, however, reassure Members that I fully recognise the importance of concessionary travel to disabled and older people and the benefits the Scheme provides, both to users and wider society. Having met with many campaigners on this issue, I am actively considering the option to extend the half fare concession to free travel. My officials are currently working in close collaboration with Translink to consider how this policy could be implemented should budget be available.

Finally, Members have asked whether the Department plans to table an amendment to the Clause to change the Assembly procedure to affirmative resolution, or whether it would be my expectation that the Committee would do so.

I note the views expressed by both the Committee for Finance and the Committee for Infrastructure in support of using the draft affirmative procedure for regulations establishing a SmartPass fee. While the Department had initially considered the negative resolution procedure to be appropriate for what is, in essence, an administrative cost-recovery mechanism, I am content to proceed on the basis of the draft affirmative procedure. I will write to the Minister of Finance to request that the Department of Finance tables the necessary amendment to give effect to this approach.

I hope this information is helpful.

Is mise le meas

LIZ KIMMINS MLA
Minister for Infrastructure



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

Committee for Finance

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(Via email:

22nd January 2026
Our Ref.:

Dear Liz,

Re: Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill – Clause 17

First, I would like to thank you for permitting your officials to brief the Committee on Clause 17 of the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill which deals with the Smart Pass. At its meeting yesterday. Members found the briefing both comprehensive and useful, with considerable engagement between the Committee and your officials.

The Committee agreed that I should write to clarify a few issues. Members would be grateful if you provide details on any modelling that your department has done regarding the level of fee that might be charged to apply for a Smart pass. Additionally, the Committee would be interested in receiving further information on any work your officials have undertaken regarding other concessions that the fee might be used to subsidise. Your officials indicated that options might include using the fee to support greater subsidy of fares for disabled travellers, or those on particular benefits. Members are supportive of this work and would be keen to see what might be possible. As the Committee is still considering this Bill, Members would be grateful for any further updates on the progress of work on this as they become available.

You may also be aware that the Committee has corresponded with the Infrastructure Committee, requesting its views on the Clause. The Infrastructure Committee has indicated that it believes that the Assembly procedure for a fee for application for the Smart pass to be brought forward should be affirmative. This would also be the review of the Finance Committee. The existing provision for negative resolution would not necessitate a full debate and discussion on the fee, including clarity for the wider public that the fee would be based on cost recovery and/or for the provision of further concessionary travel. It is important that there is a clear understanding why the fee is being applied.

**Matthew O'Toole, Chairperson, Committee for Finance,
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During their evidence, your officials indicated that they were cognisant of the discussions regarding the use of affirmative resolution and that your department is agreeable to this. It would be the Committee's view that the regulations to create the fee for applications should be made using draft affirmative resolution, to allow for debate and understanding of the rationale for the fee, as well as providing the greater flexibility for the Assembly in being able to amend the regulations if that was its will. Members agreed that I should ask if your department plans to table an amendment for this change to the Clause, or would it be your expectation that the Committee would do this.

As you will appreciate, the Committee has a timescale in which to undertake its scrutiny, so I would be grateful for a response by **Thursday 12th February 2026**.

Yours sincerely,

Matthew O'Toole MLA
Chairperson
Committee for Finance

cc. Infrastructure Committee (committee.infrastructure@niassembly.gov.uk)