

Transport Benevolent Fund CIO – Moving forward for a brighter future

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For nearly 100 years the Transport Benevolent Fund CIO (TBF) has been helping public transport workers in Great Britain should they find themselves in need, hardship or distress.

Founded in 1923, the needs of employees in the 21st century take a very different form, but there is still need, hardship and distress among those involved in the public transport industry. This is best illustrated by the £2.9 million awarded to its members over the past 12 months.

The increase in demand for assistance and the inevitable rise in costs year-on-year has led to the TBF board of trustees to make the difficult decision to increase its weekly membership fee to £1.25 a week as from April next year. This small increase will ensure the charity can continue its good work in the future.

Following news of the planned increase, TBF chief executive officer John Sheehy, has written an article for railbusinessdaily.com about the charity and the plans moving forward.

“COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on the public transport industry, and workers across many sectors have been on the front line throughout the pandemic. By doing so they have exposed themselves

to the risk of the virus, and many have suffered as a result, with some paying the ultimate price.

Even before we were all dealing with the terrible effect of COVID-19 it is a sad fact that in modern Britain there are cases of need, hardship, and distress amongst those working within the public transport industry.

Physical and emotional illness can lead to many weeks off work with consequent loss of earnings, and whilst nothing can compensate a bereaved family for the loss of a loved one, the Transport Benevolent Fund CIO – TBF – is always ready to help in times of need and uncertainty.

What does TBF offer?

TBF offers people working in the public transport sector in Great Britain, who find themselves in need, hardship, and distress, a wide range of health, welfare, and financial benefits.

TBF is different and makes a difference. Membership is far reaching and helps a great many people on a day-to-day basis. Each family member is considered separately and benefits paid are not cumulative for the whole family.

Monies granted are for the beneficiary to keep, it is not a loan. There are no different levels of membership; the flat-rate weekly fee gives the member and their family access to the extensive range of benefits.

Benefits included:

Medical benefits

- Medical consultations, scans and tests where the NHS is unable to deliver within an acceptable time frame,
- Medical equipment not available from the State,
- Convalescence and recuperation.
- Complementary and alternative therapies
- Chiropractic and osteopathy treatments, physiotherapy, acupuncture, homeopathy, reflexology, chiropody and podiatry, and many more.

Financial help

- Cash grants to help cover short-term hardship when a member is off sick, usually for two weeks or more,
- Prescription prepayment certificates (PPCs).

Advice and bereavement

- Debt advice,
- Legal assistance (although employment-related matters and costs related to property conveyancing are not included),
- Bereavement grants if the member or their partner unexpectedly passes away (before State pension age) or on the death of a dependent child.

A small weekly fee covers membership for the prime member, their partner and dependent children. It is usually paid by payroll deduction but can be paid directly from the member's bank account by standing order if a payroll deduction is not an option.

The only criterion for membership is that the member is working within the industry on the day they join. There is no bar for those suffering from pre-existing conditions, no requirement for a medical, and no age limit for joining.

When members retire they may be able to obtain free membership if they have contributed long enough. Individuals can even continue with their membership if they leave the industry.

In recent years a significant number of employers, having recognised the benefit of TBF membership for their employees, have entered into a partnership with TBF and are now meeting the cost of membership as part of their employment package. Employers recognise the importance of work-life balance and the wellbeing of their workforce is an extremely important factor in keeping staff-turnover to a minimum.

How does TBF work?

TBF is a not-for-profit charity, registered in England and Wales, 1160901, and in Scotland, SC047016. The fund is governed by a board of trustees, most of who work in the transport industry, and they decide on all benefits awarded.

Patrons include leading figures in the major transport groups and the trades unions.

The weekly subscription is not the fund's only source of revenue; money is also raised through charitable events, Gift Aid donations, bequests and legacies.

With its head office in London, TBF has expanded steadily in recent years thanks in part to nine local organisers who visit key sites across the country, recruiting new members and offering advice to existing members. The fund does not pay commission, which means more of its money goes to assist those members in need.

A rise in membership fee

TBF has over 68,000 members and the current weekly membership fee is just £1 and this has not increased since 1994.

Keeping the fee so low for so long is, in part, thanks to well-managed investments, the gradual growth in membership, and generous donations.

Maintaining the weekly fee at £1 is, alas, no longer sustainable, and a rise will be implemented in the spring of next year, but it is a remarkably modest one given the benefits provided.

It was not an easy decision, but after lengthy discussions, the board of trustees has agreed that the membership fee will rise to £1.25 a week from 1 April 2021. This will not just help to meet increasing costs, but also to increase the benefits members will receive.

Current office practices at TBF have evolved over the past 97 years and there is no debate that modernisation, is overdue.

The new system will include the launch of an online portal, giving members instant access to their record with the fund, the opportunity to submit online claims and view their statement of funds. A state-of-the-art electronic payment system will reduce expenditure, improve efficiency, and boost the fund's green credentials. All data will be stored as per the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018, as it is now.

The moderate rise in the weekly fee will result in even more valuable benefits that can be shared by all members as the country continues to wrestle with the effects of COVID-19. TBF is all about helping people, people in the public transport industry, and the future for the fund and its members is extremely exciting."

John Sheehy, Transport Benevolent Fund CIO chief executive officer. www.tbf.org.uk

Photo credit: Transport Benevolent Fund CIO