

Scotland's priority for future proofing our environment and economy should include measures to reverse the decline of public transport.

Bus provisions have been underfunded or poorly planned for far too long, and traffic/congestion measures are generally aimed at helping overall traffic rather than being directly targeted improvements to bus journeys.

Recent Active Travel policy places walking and cycling above bus journeys, whereas these options are not always solely practical for the types and lengths of journey being made. Most car users cannot walk or cycle the distance required to places of employment & leisure easily, so the car continues to dominate these trips. Improving walking and cycling provisions does not discourage car use alone and often these improvements are made in isolation from any public transport strategy. The remaining road space shared between private cars and public transport is reduced and congestion and bus delays increase. Walking space and cycle lanes are important but there must first be a public transport structure to support and encourage their use.

Improving the bus journey is one of the key actions that will increase walking and cycling, if we provide for a short walk or cycle to connect with a reliable, fast and environmentally friendly way of completing longer onward journeys.

During the last few decades vast numbers of bus routes have been cut or removed completely, and many communities have been cut off from services. Day to day passengers are too often impacted by congestion, roadworks and diversions out with the control of operators. Buses delayed by congested roads discourage passenger use and contribute to less bus passengers and more car trips every day.

There are a few actions to be taken to kick start the reversal of this trend;

- Town and city centre parking should be discouraged & capacity should be reduced by a % factor each year. This would stimulate bus passenger growth where bus operators can be an effective replacement method of travel. Our town and city streets would benefit from less traffic and pollution. Bus operators would have more favourable conditions for growth and investment. Roadside parking space may be converted to bus lanes, walkways and cycle lanes.
- Arterial bus routes for major towns and cities should have full uninterrupted bus lane provisions, that are protected from roadworks during operating hours. This would cut journey times and improve perception of bus travel. Each trip time reduction made will encourage travel and also equate to more trips or buses available to serve other communities. We usually do not allow Water / Gas / Telecoms companies to close railway lines and neither should they interrupt arterial bus routes. Works may still be done either outside operational hours or when provisions are made for bus routes to be filtered through works uninterrupted.
- A condition of the above provisions may be the use of Low Emission / Electric Vehicles being operated on newly protected bus lanes, which will further enhance perceptions of bus travel. The national policy should include a new support framework for electric buses with a main objective of having standardised charge point availability at strategic points like bus stations and main stopping areas with high dwell time. Bus operators main concern for electrifying their vehicles is range

and storage capacity, yet continental municipal operators have proved that en-route recharge can be an effective method of ensuring service delivery. This investment is missing from our current Private Operator (buses) / Local Authority (infrastructure) ownership model. French company Alstom have a safe ground-based charging technology currently available that would be perfect for our operators and their vehicle type mix of single and double deck buses. If provisions for en-route recharge were standard and readily available operators would have more confidence investing in the technology.

- New build & regeneration of communities are often designed with little thought of current or future public transport offerings. Planners should always ensure that road layout is appealing to bus operators by having easy access through or back to main direction of travel, well placed bus stops and bays, safe turning & waiting areas. Visually the area should see the bus route as just as quick as other means. Bus gates/lanes can be deployed, and car routes segregated to promote public transport. A new condition of planning approval could be that builders & designers seek a letter of support from local operators, therefore stimulating dialogue and discussions before planning approval & any work commences. This is a very simple action that could result in better served communities by the commercial market rather than by services with support of local authority funding.
- For less densely populated areas and neighbourhoods where we want to encourage walking and cycling to connect with nearby existing public transport, there should be safe and well-lit walkways, with good condition surfaces leading to bus routes & stops. Bus stops should have shelters and nearby safe bicycle parking areas. Walkways at roadside must have adequate drainage in place to ensure walkers are not discouraged by careless drivers driving through puddles.

When the above conditions are met bus operators will see revenue and passengers grow and return towards sustainable levels, this is where investment in fleet and stimulation of competition can be driven with purpose towards repairing our public transport network. Low emission or electric bus fleets will grow as car trips are forcibly reduced. With this growth will come the competitive desire for operators to serve more areas and communities, particularly those without service that may now have potential new passengers transferring from unfavourable car trips.

Franchising bus routes may be an alternative option to force operators into less served areas, but this will never guarantee enough passenger demand to stimulate fleet investment and may only thin out the provision of other services that are currently well used, thus leading to an overall reduction in passenger use or choice.

Scotland could easily achieve a future where our communities can expect access to environmentally friendly bus services that have clear road space, where journey time is minimal and reliable, where our towns and cities are pollution free welcoming spaces to visit, shop and work. All this is within our reach if we are willing to commit our support to bus routes and operators through better policy and planning. Its vitally important to start backing our bus operators as key stakeholders in delivering on our environmental and economic regeneration aims. Through these actions we can better connect our communities to vital services, and also allow much more inclusion and mobility within our neighbourhoods.