

# Challenge Poverty Week 2023

## Policy Briefing 4

### A Scotland where we can all get to where we need to go



## What is Challenge Poverty Week?

Challenge Poverty Week was launched by the Poverty Alliance in 2013. We wanted to highlight the injustice of poverty in Scotland, and to show that collective action based on justice and compassion can create solutions. The week is an opportunity to raise your voice against poverty and unite with others in calling for a just and equal Scotland. Each year, hundreds of organisations in Scotland do just that, including elected representatives, charities and NGOs, local authorities, faith groups, businesses, school and colleges, trade unions, professional bodies and more.

## What are we calling for?

**Improve the affordability and accessibility of public transport so all of us have the same freedoms to access essential services, employment and leisure.**

## How do we get there?

- **Expanding concessionary travel to under 25s, people in receipt of low-income and disability benefits, unpaid carers, students and modern apprentices, and asylum seekers.**
- **Integrate our transport systems and expand concessionary travel to include all modes of transport including rail, ferry and tram.**
- **Ensure local authority funding enables the design of public transport services and routes which meet the needs of local people.**

## 1. Introduction

Transport is a public good that should be available to all. But too often, people living on low incomes are locked out of accessing public transport due to the rising cost of fares, resulting in many people being unable to access employment, education, leisure activities, and health care. Meanwhile, inefficient public transport services, disjointed ticketing systems, and the lack of accessibility is preventing people from being able to make the necessary switch from car use to public transport that we urgently need to make if we are to meet our climate targets.

There continues to be particular issues with our transport system for groups who are more likely to be experiencing poverty including disabled people, who continue to face issues of accessibility, and women. Women account for the majority of public transport users; are less likely to own cars; face legitimate concerns for their safety on public transport; and are more likely to be primary caregivers for children.<sup>1</sup> Without measures to improve the accessibility of public transport, policies which focus on active travel and car-free zones have the potential to discriminate against disabled people who are more reliant on cars; who require support from others who drive cars; or who cannot afford new electric vehicles or find charging infrastructure inaccessible.<sup>2</sup> Meeting our climate targets means Scotland must move away from private car use towards sustainable public transport, but we have to ensure we do not leave anyone behind. We are clear that public transport must be both more affordable and accessible if it is to function as an anti-poverty measure.

We are calling on the Scottish government and our local authorities to take the necessary action that will unlock public transport for more people and make it an attractive travel option that tackles poverty and fights the climate emergency.

## 2. How do we get there?

It cannot be right that so many people are locked out of accessing essential services and leisure due to an expensive and inaccessible public transport system. Transport is a vital public service, and the Scottish Government must make our transport system work for those who rely on it most by:

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<sup>1</sup> Engender (2017) *Gender Matters* available at <https://gendermatters.engender.org.uk/content/resources/Gender-Matters-Roadmap---towards-womens-equality-in-Scotland.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Inclusion Scotland (2022) *Response to the Economy and Fair Work Committee's inquiry into town centres and retail* available at [https://yourviews.parliament.scot/efw/towncentres/consultation/view\\_respondent?show\\_all\\_questions=0&sort=submitted&order=ascending&q\\_text=inclusion&uuld=822574778](https://yourviews.parliament.scot/efw/towncentres/consultation/view_respondent?show_all_questions=0&sort=submitted&order=ascending&q_text=inclusion&uuld=822574778)

## Expanding concessionary travel to under 25s, people in receipt of low-income and disability benefits, unpaid carers, students and modern apprentices, and asylum seekers

The burden of increased fares and poorer services falls disproportionately on people living on low incomes, as they are most likely to rely on public transport and account for the majority of those using the bus. Around one-quarter (24%) of people earning up to £15,000 a year use the bus to get to work, compared to just 4% of those earning over £50,000 a year.<sup>3</sup>

Being unable to access transport locks people into poverty by limiting access to opportunities to increase their income, such as work and education, and also worsens mental health and increases social isolation. As has been shown in research by the Poverty & Inequality Commission,<sup>4</sup> transport matters in relation to poverty because good, affordable transport can enable people to access jobs, education and training which raises household income and protects people from being swept into poverty or pulled in deeper.<sup>5</sup> Analysis by IPPR Scotland found that transport costs represent a significant drain on household finances for families with children in Scotland, accounting for over one fifth of household costs after housing and childcare.<sup>6</sup>

It is for these reasons that the introduction of the under 22s concessionary travel scheme, alongside the continued funding of the vital over 60s concessionary travel scheme, was the right thing to do. Some 38% of all bus journeys in Scotland are now made under the National Concessionary Travel Scheme – but there are many people in poverty and on low incomes who do not yet qualify for concessionary travel. The Poverty Alliance’s research with people with lived experience of poverty highlighted that cost remains the key barrier to accessing public transport.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Transport Scotland (2022) *Monitoring and Evaluation 2019 Baseline Report - May 2022 - National Transport Strategy (NTS2) – Reducing Inequalities*. Available at: <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/monitoring-and-evaluation-2019-baseline-report-may-2022-national-transport-strategy-nts2/reduces-inequalities/>

<sup>4</sup> Poverty and Inequality Commission (2019) *Transport and poverty in Scotland*. Available at: <https://povertyinequality.scot/publication/transport-and-poverty-in-scotland-report-of-the-poverty-and-inequality-commission/>

<sup>5</sup> UK Government (2019) *Transport and inequality: An evidence review for the Department of Transport*. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/953951/Transport\\_and\\_inequality\\_report\\_document.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/953951/Transport_and_inequality_report_document.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> IPPR Scotland (2022) “*Universal Basic Services: Building Financial Security in Scotland*”. Available at: [https://www.ippr.org/files/2022-03/1646753753\\_universal-basic-services-scotland-march-22.pdf](https://www.ippr.org/files/2022-03/1646753753_universal-basic-services-scotland-march-22.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Get Heard Scotland (2023) *Participation of people with experience of poverty in the development of Scottish Government Fair Fares Review*. Unpublished.

Expanding free bus travel would widen access to the transport that unlocks the world of work, education and leisure. A critical starting point for the expansion of concessionary schemes would be to include groups particularly vulnerable to poverty such as people in receipt of all low-income and disability benefits, under 25s, unpaid carers, students and modern apprentices, and asylum seekers.

### **Integrate our transport systems and expand concessionary travel to include all modes of transport including rail, ferry and tram.**

Many people across Scotland rely on multiple forms of transport to get where they need to go. People living in urban settings may rely on combinations of buses, trains, trams, and subways, while people living in rural areas may rely on buses, trains and ferries. Too often in rural areas, bus routes simply do not enable people to get where they need to go which limits the effectiveness of concessionary bus travel in these geographies.

In Scotland, the varying modes of public transport are owned by different companies who charge differing amounts for their services, forcing people to purchase multiple tickets for one journey and driving up the expense for that trip. For example, during our engagement process with people living on low incomes, we heard how difficult and expensive it was to travel from Glasgow's southside to the east end of the city as this required multiple providers and tickets.<sup>8</sup> This is particularly true for women who are more likely to make multi-purpose journeys to balance caring responsibilities, paid work and education.<sup>9</sup> The integration of concessionary travel schemes and ticketing was a key priority for people in both rural and urban areas during our engagement with people with experience of poverty as part of the Scottish Government's fair fares review.<sup>10</sup>

Integrating ticketing systems is not a new policy, with multiple schemes already in place across the UK, including London and Manchester. During COP26 in Glasgow, delegates were given cross-mode transport passes to improve the ease of transport across the city. We know, therefore, that integrated ticket systems are possible when there is political willingness to do so. It therefore cannot be right that local people are denied access to these

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<sup>8</sup> Get Heard Scotland (2023) *Participation of people with experience of poverty in the development of Scottish Government Fair Fares Review*. Unpublished.

<sup>9</sup> Close the Gap (2022) *Response to the economy and fair work committee inquiry into town centres and retail* available at <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/content/resources/Close-the-Gap-response-to-the-Economy-and-Fair-Work-Committee---Town-centres-and-retail.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Get Heard Scotland (2023) *Participation of people with experience of poverty in the development of Scottish Government Fair Fares Review*. Unpublished.

critical and cost-saving policies when transport is so central to achieving climate and social justice.

## **Ensuring that local authority funding enables the design of public transport services and routes which meet the needs of local people.**

The Transport Act 2016 was the right step towards allowing local authorities to design public transport that works for local needs. However, chronic underfunding of local councils has meant these critical powers are going to waste because they simply cannot afford to put them into action.

As a result, the majority of public transport in Scotland is privately owned with routes designed based on their profitability, not how they meet the needs of local people. This has had particular impacts on people living in rural areas who face large numbers of service cancellations. According to Transport Scotland, the distance covered by local bus services has fallen 15% since 2011/12, and the number of passenger journeys has fallen by 52% since 2007/08.<sup>11</sup>

Linked to this unreliability, there is a lack of guaranteed safety when using buses which can force people to change their behaviour and limit their participation in society. Due to the unreliability of our public transport systems people often do not trust that public transport will arrive on time or indeed, at all.<sup>12</sup> This is particularly impactful for women and girls, disabled people and Black and minority ethnic people who often withdraw from activities to ensure their safety in the face of legitimate fears of violence and discrimination on public transport and in public spaces. Older people may also be unable to reach vital services, or see friends and family, without an accessible and reliable public transport system

This is of course impacted by the efficiency of our bus system. Given that roughly 55% of bus services are paid for by Government funds<sup>13</sup>, there are pertinent questions to be asked of bus companies regarding decisions over which routes are cut (particularly in rural areas), the wellbeing, pay, and retention of bus drivers, and the quality and safety of Scotland's bus fleets. We

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<sup>11</sup> Transport Scotland (2023) *Scottish Transport Statistics 2022*. Available at:

<https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/scottish-transport-statistics-2022/chapter-02-bus-and-coach-travel/>

<sup>12</sup> Get Heard Scotland (2023) *Participation of people with experience of poverty in the development of Scottish Government Fair Fares Review*. Unpublished.

<sup>13</sup> Transport Scotland (2022) *Scottish Transport Statistics 2022 – Chapter 02 – Bus and Coach Travel*. Available at; <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/scottish-transport-statistics-2022/chapter-02-bus-and-coach-travel/>

## Developing our policy asks

This year, the policy asks for Challenge Poverty Week were developed in collaboration with a short life working group with representation from public bodies, the private sector and a variety of third sector organisations. We would like to thank these organisations for their participation in this process.

### What we heard from our Short Life Working Group:

- Access to affordable and suitable transport is a particular challenge in rural areas. A key priority should be protecting and reinstating bus routes which are essential to local people. Bus routes should be determined by people, not profit.
- Concessionary travel schemes must be well-advertised and easy to access. For example, existing concessionary schemes in certain local authorities for people accessing mental health support are not promoted and have onerous application processes.
- While a focus on buses is welcome, as low-income households are more likely to utilise this form of transport, people in certain geographies are more reliant on trains and ferries due to availability of bus travel. We must take action to improve affordability across our public transport system.
- The introduction of Low Emissions Zones has placed new financial burdens on low-income households who do not have access to cars which meet this criteria. Ensuring public transport is affordable and accessible is critical to ensuring low income households continue to have good access to our towns and cities.
- Making transport more affordable, without accompanying action to increase accessibility, will mean that disabled people continue to be locked out of using public transport.
- On the road to free public transport for all, we should start with those who need it most.
- Legitimate fears about safety also influence women's decisions around travel. Women cite public transport as a 'hotspot' for gendered abuse and sexual harassment. Action to improve women's safety on public transport must also accompany action to make it more affordable, if women are to have improved access to public transport.
- Transport is a critical tool to address social isolation and loneliness, particularly for older people in Scotland. A lack of accessibility; the

absence of evening buses; and poor integration is leading to many older people being unable to fully participate in society.

- The Scottish Government has set a target of reducing car kilometres by 20% by 2030 as part of their strategy to fight the climate emergency. To do this, more people must make the switch from cars to public transport and this requires an incentive to do so. Affordable and accessible transport is key to our just transition.

## How will this help Scotland to meet our child poverty targets?

- *Best Start, Bright Futures* establishes connectivity as a priority area of action if we are to tackle child poverty. Within this, the Scottish Government place emphasis on “enhancing access and affordability of public transport”. Our policy asks are firmly focused on access and affordability.
- A priority family group in the child poverty delivery plan is mothers under the age of 25. Extending concessionary travel to under 25s will help to reduce costs for this target group, while also giving younger mothers greater access to employment; education; and social activities – all of which are highlighted as concerns in the child poverty delivery plan.
- Improving the accessibility and affordability of public transport will reduce costs for households with a disabled person, another priority group in the child poverty delivery plan. Again, this will also improve access to employment, education and training for disabled people while also addressing social isolation.

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