

Participation of people with experience of poverty in the Just Transition Plan for Transport

September 2023

What we did

The Poverty Alliance were commissioned by the Just Transition team at the Scottish Government to support the engagement of people on low incomes in the development of Scottish Government's policies to support a just transition to net zero.

This is a report on Just Transition in the transport sector based on two online deliberative discussion workshops with people living on a low income and with Poverty Alliance member organisations.

Our workshop with people living on a low income involved was split between people living in rural and urban group to enable a greater understanding of the differing experiences of transport in these geographies.

The three-hour discussion involved a range of questions, developed by Scottish Government on the topics of:

- Embedding fairness into efforts to reduce car use;
- Facilitating viable alternatives to car use;
- Barriers and attitudes to public transport and active travel;
- Access to employment, including green jobs.

Who took part

17 participants were recruited and supported to engage with the discussion. These were 9 women, 8 men. 7 were Black and Minority Ethnic, 10 were white, 6 identified as having a disability. 12 lived in urban areas, 5 lived in rural areas.. Participants came from Aberdeen, Cowdenbeath, Dundee, Edinburgh, Fife, Glasgow, Inverness and Western Isles.

38 Poverty Alliance member organisations attended a members' workshop to further consider some of the key questions around transport and overarching Just Transition themes.

Executive summary

A common thread in every conversation we had, across the urban and rural groups, was an emphasis on the vital importance of public transport. Perceptions of the quality, reliability and affordability of public transport, which were, on the whole, considered to be inadequate and strongly influenced how people thought about other goals (such as reduced car usage). All participants felt that significant improvements will be required to public transport provision if these goals are to succeed without negatively impacting vulnerable groups.

Across the urban and rural participants, the affordability of public transport was seen as critical to access to employment, services and having positive impact for people's health and wellbeing. There was unanimous agreement that transport was a critical policy priority for people living on low incomes. Public transport was seen as having potentially transformational benefits. One participant stated, 'I firmly believe that transport fixed once and for all, for the next 100 years, would help Scotland massively'.

An additional common theme which surfaced across questions, was the importance of appropriate balance between 'the carrot and the stick' – i.e, approaches which emphasised the benefits of policies versus perceived 'punitive' approaches.

1. How have your travel patterns changed since the pandemic?

- Participants reported travelling less regularly than prior to the outbreak of Covid-19.
- There were positive changes, with the majority of participants across the rural and urban groups stating that they were now more likely to walk or cycle than they were prior to the pandemic.
- All participants felt that it was only very recently that public transport provision had returned to pre-covid timetables which had also contributed to using public transport less.
- Some participants stated that their use of public transport had not changed at all since the pandemic. The primary reason for this was the pre-existing issues with availability and reliability.

2. How can we discourage car use, fairly?

- All participants wanted to see fewer cars on the road.
- As well as getting the right balance between 'carrot and stick', education was seen as critical to facilitating culture change.
- Active travel was recognised as a key alternative to car use but there was consensus that cost and safety concerns remained a barrier to the use of alternatives such as scooters and bikes.

- Any push to reduce car use must be met with considerations around provision, reliability and affordability of public transport, whilst also recognising that for some in rural areas private cars will always be necessary. As alternatives, participants suggested:
 - Reducing the carbon emissions of running private cars, for example through a mass provision of bio-fuel. This would include services like taxis which were identified as a key method of transport for people who cannot drive and live in a rural area.
 - Incentivising reduced use of private cars through refunds of car tax for lowered use of a car.
 - Promoting schemes like car exchanges, shared taxis and dial-a-bus.
- 3. What needs to be considered to ensure that reducing car use doesn't unfairly impact specific groups of people, including those in rural areas, disabled people, or those living on a low income?**
- Cost was identified the key barrier to increased use of public transport, particularly in terms of access to employment and that this effects people on low income more acutely.
 - Safety was also key consideration, particularly for women and Black and minority ethnic participants.
 - Public transport accessibility was another key concern with this being particularly difficult for those with prams or wheelchair users.
 - Particular difficulties were expressed for certain groups where public transport is currently a non-option such as single parents who are in employment.
- 4. For your community, what benefits might there be with the transition to net zero? How can these benefits be fairly distributed?**
- Participants saw active travel as a positive an alternative to public transport and private car use. However, a range of barriers emerged from the discussion including cost, safety and storage.
 - With regards to the possible benefits of access to green jobs participants reported a lack of clarity as to what constitutes a green job.
 - Access to upskilling and reskilling support was seen as critical to accessing green jobs, as was a focus on equalities.
 - It was clear that fair work principles must be embedded into green job offers in order to ensure they alleviate rather than entrench inequality.

Main Report

Key Messages

Given the differences in current provision and future priorities across various geographies in Scotland, this report takes the key messages from the urban and rural groups in turn and collates them under key themes. A summary of the key messages across the two groups can be found in the executive summary above.

Theme 1 - Changes in travel patterns since the Covid-19 pandemic

Urban key messages

Within urban Scotland there was consensus that participants travelled less regularly than they did prior to the outbreak of Covid-19. Where possible, particularly for those with health conditions or who live in households where someone has a health condition, people tried to do more activities remotely. This included doing grocery shopping online; working from home more regularly; and connecting with organisations online.

People in urban areas reported some positive changes since the pandemic. The majority of participants were now more likely to walk or cycle. This was motivated by health and wellbeing for some participants, while others said they had become more conscious of the health and safety on buses since the pandemic and wanted to avoid utilising this form of transport. This increased use of active travel was seen as having positive benefits including increased social interaction and mental health.

There were also negative post-pandemic experiences. One participant commented that bus services in their area had deteriorated since the pandemic, with services now being less regular and less reliable. Another participant had recently purchased a moped due to the unreliability of public transport in their area in the aftermath of the pandemic, and the high cost of car use during the cost of living crisis.

Rural key messages

Similar findings were reported amongst rural participants. One participant completely avoids public transport since the beginning of the pandemic due to fears around exposure to Covid-19. This was linked to overcrowding of buses. This continues to impact their use of public transport today as buses are still extremely crowded due to a lack of adequate provision, cuts to local bus numbers and replacement of double decker buses with single deck buses. For those that are particularly anxious about contracting Covid-19, they continue to avoid using public transport unless for absolute essential trips such as healthcare appointments.

Rural participants felt that it was only very recently that public transport provision had returned to pre-covid timetables which had meant they had used public transport less.

Some participants stated that their use of public transport has not changed at all since the pandemic. The primary reason for this was the pre-existing issues with availability and reliability. For example, one participant stated that driving remained their primary mode of transport as their nearest bus stop was around one mile away from their home. Even during the pandemic when working from home became more prevalent, this participant noted still having to make a number of car journeys to do things like shopping and recycling and so the actual number of car journeys they made did not reduce significantly. Another participant highlighted that their use of public transport had not changed due to the public transport system continuing to not meet their needs.

For other participants, car usage had declined over the pandemic. This was tied to the availability of public transport in their locality. One participant had relatively good public transport provision due to their proximity to a town and so used the bus. However, they noted that the local council was exploring ways to cut these services to save money which may impact their use of buses.

Theme 2 - Taking a fair approach to discouraging car use

Question - What needs to be considered to ensure that reducing car use doesn't unfairly impact specific groups of people, including those in rural areas, disabled people, or those living on a low income?

Question - How should larger, more polluting vehicles (e.g. SUVs) be treated as part of the transition to net zero?

Question - How might we reduce car use for multi-car households in a fair way?

Urban key messages

Participants unanimously agreed that they would like to see less cars on the road. However, the reliability and regularity of public transport in people's locality was a key determinant of how they viewed a transition to public transport or active travel. Bus travel, for example, was seen as reliable and affordable in Edinburgh which meant that participants in this region saw the adjustment away from car use as being more attainable and straightforward. Where public transport was seen as less reliable, for example in Inverness or Dundee, it was seen as more challenging to encourage car use. Improving public transport infrastructure was seen by all participants as the key action to reducing private car use.

In analysing the approach to discouraging car use, the focus of the discussion was on the appropriate balance between 'carrot and stick'. There was broad agreement that

there was a need for a less punitive approach. For the transition to net zero to be successful, there is a need for a high level of buy-in and that requires greater understanding of the benefits for all of us across the population.

If the Scottish Government adopts a ‘beating with a stick’ approach, participants identified the risk of a backlash, as witnessed in the coverage of the low emissions zones. The majority of participants agreed that the framing of policies intended to reduce car use should be less focused on ‘taking things away’ and more focused on ‘selling benefits’. For some people using a car is still cheaper than public transport, and this cannot be right if we are to be encouraging greater use of public transport. Similarly, for certain groups, including disabled people, public transport is not yet accessible which prevents the transition away from private car use.

Key considerations for reducing car use in urban areas:

- Tied to the balance of ‘carrot and stick’, education was seen as critical to encouraging people to understanding the mutual benefits of reduced car use (e.g. health, cost and climate). Teaching children the benefits of active travel was identified by some as a good starting point.
- Active travel is a key alternative to car use. The majority of participants had increased their walking and minority increased their cycling since the pandemic. However, there was consensus that cost remained a barrier to the use of scooters and bikes; safety remained a key concern for the majority of participants; and active travel was not seen as practical for all groups. See question 4 for more information on active travel.
- Concessionary travel should be extended to those under the age of 25 and to those living on low incomes to encourage greater use of public transport.
- Safety, particularly for women and Black and minority ethnic people, was a key deterrent for public transport usage. Fears over safety were heightened at night where services were less regular and people did not feel safe at bus stops, depots, or on the bus itself.
- Public transport accessibility was a key concern with this being particularly difficult for those with prams or wheelchair users.
- Car share models were of interest to a majority of participants, but there is currently low awareness of this model.
- One participant suggested that households should be limited to the ownership of one car to minimise the number of multi-car households. Others in the group felt this was too punitive in approach.

The majority of participants agreed that bigger, higher polluting cars should be taxed more. However, this came with the caveat that this policy change has to be accompanied by incentives and financial support for people living on low incomes to

change to less polluting forms of transport. One participant stated: *“who doesn’t want to play their part in climate change and reduce their own costs – but electric cars are out of the budget of low-income households”*.

Financial support or reducing the cost of electric vehicles was important to people on low incomes. The idea of a car share (co-wheels) emerged organically during the conversation, raised by one of the participants. When we explored this idea in more detail, a majority of participants supported the concept. People also noted that this model would have the added benefit of contributing to community cohesion and engagement with your neighbours.

Rural key messages

There was consensus that for some households it would be impossible to reduce private car use and rely on public transport in rural areas. This was due to lack of adequate public transport options that meet people’s needs, limited routes and frequency. Particular difficulties were expressed for certain groups such as single parents who are in employment who cannot rely on public transport due to the lack of efficient routes and times which would enable them to do things like school drop offs, commuting and shopping in a reasonable amount of time.

It was felt strongly by participants that there was a need to better consider individual needs rather than collective needs. One participant highlighted that using private cars in rural areas is about survival for some people, yet others may have more flexibility (such as those who live near a town). There was a need to create space in discussions around reducing car use for people who do not have that option. This particularly resonated for people living in remote rural areas. One participant highlighted that there could be a greater effort to target private car use reduction schemes at those who have cars optionally as luxury items rather than pressuring all private car users equally.

Lack of provision of public transport in rural areas means that reducing car use fairly was seen as highly difficult, if not impossible, in the current situation. This impacts groups such as shift workers disproportionately who simply cannot rely on public transport that does not meet late/night shift patterns. It was clear that in order to reduce car use, there must be an alternative public transport provision which currently does not exist.

Rural participants echoed urban participants’ discussion on the balance of carrot-and-stick to lower car use. Participants felt there were lots of ways that car use could be reduced however the key factor missing was fairness. They noted that any push to reduce car use must be met with considerations around provision, reliability and affordability of public transport. As alternatives, participants suggested:

- reducing the carbon emissions of running private cars, for example through a mass provision of bio-fuel. This would include services like taxis which were

identified as a key method of transport for people who cannot drive and live in a rural area.

- incentivising reduced use of private cars through refunds of car tax for lowered use of a car.
- Promoting schemes like car exchanges, shared taxis and dial-a-bus.

Related to this, participants noted that a greater provision of car clubs, at affordable hire rates, would be helpful. One participant noted a car hire scheme in their local area run by local companies was helpful to begin with. However, high demand meant it was often booked up and a lack of secure funding meant that the car fell into disrepair. It was felt that car clubs would be more useful for people living in urban areas, but there may be benefits for people living in remote rural areas.

There were two main considerations on how to reduce car use amongst people who owned multiple cars. Firstly, that there needs to be some consideration of the needs of some larger households for example those with multiple children, and adults who may work jobs in different locations. Secondly, participants felt strongly that there is a need to separate those who require more than one car to meet their needs and those who own multiple cars because they want to rather than need to. One participant felt that multicar households were not an issue as practically, only one car can be used by one person at a given time.

Participants agreed that without a substantial, mass investment in infrastructure, people living in rural areas are unable to make a switch to electric vehicles. This reaffirmed the belief that bio-fuel provision will be central to reducing carbon emissions.

For people who face barriers to accessing public transport (such as disabled people, single parents etc) participants noted that public transport has to be designed around their needs. For people with children/buggies, and people with disabilities, a crammed single deck bus is unsuitable, therefore they will naturally seek another option for travel. Affordability is important, with one participant highlighting their desire for public transport to be free for all, however, noting that the provision needs to match this in order for it to be useful and alleviate inequality.

Member's workshop key messages

Poverty Alliance members echoed the need for policy interventions to focus on 'carrot' rather than stick. There were concerns that in the context of an inadequate public transport system it is impossible for measures that impose additional costs on households, or that are seen as punitive, like low emissions zones or additional charges for high mileages, to be fair. The consensus opinion was that, in the absence of a good public transport system, it is hard to reduce car use fairly. One member stated:

'It seems that all interventions will capture people unfairly. If there was a fantastic nationwide bus service, then that would begin to change things, but it is hard to talk about restricting car use in any meaningful way within the current system we

are working in. Anything that has additional charges for mileage disproportionately impacts rural people, or people who live on the outskirts of cities who work in the inner city.'

Within Scotland's current provision of public transport and underdeveloped active transport infrastructure members have been unable to identify a route to fairly reduce car usage. The default position is likely that increasing costs of fuel and cars will disproportionately affect people living on a low income and increase inequalities. This is why, for some, bike storage is a social justice issue.

A shared fear was that rising petrol and diesel costs, or interventions that increase costs are likely to have unintended consequences. A Poverty Alliance member noted that over the last winter we have seen the voluntary and public sector effectively subsidising the high costs of energy by providing people with energy vouchers, food vouchers and plugging the gap caused by high oil and gas prices. The particularly poignant example was given of those who last winter could not afford to run lifesaving electrical medical equipment. There were concerns raised about increasing car fuel prices leading to the third and public sector stepping in to effectively subsidise oil companies due the duty of care they have towards the, often vulnerable, people they support.

Car sharing and car clubs was discussed, however members they noted that these can be prohibitively expensive and are only really an option in urban areas.

Theme 3 - Making public transport a more attractive option

Question - How can public transport become a more attractive option?

Question - What one change would make you more likely to use public transport?

Question - What might that mean for how public transport can be redesigned in your community to cater to people's changing travel patterns?

Urban key messages

Consistent themes emerged when considering changes that would make participants more likely to use public transport. Participants unanimously agreed on key considerations of: affordability; reliability – services turning up when timetabled; safety; and the service being designed for the needs of the community, including ownership models and working toward renationalisation.

A perceived dominance of commercial companies in our bus services was seen by a minority of participants as being a deterrent to the use of public transport as the services were designed for commercial interest, rather than the needs of the community. The expansion of community transport and renationalisation were key

priorities for a minority of participants. By contrast, participants living in Edinburgh highlighted positivity towards the running of their bus service.

There was consensus that cost was the key barrier to increased use of public transport, particularly in terms of access to employment. One participant highlighted their experience of working part-time in retail which required them to buy a return bus ticket to work a four- or five-hour shift. This represented a high proportion of lost income when forced to use public transport for part-time work and contributed to being unable to access an adequate income.

Similarly, from a climate perspective, the high cost of public transport for part-time shift workers was seen as reinforcing private car use.

Safety was a key consideration for a majority of participants, but particularly for women and Black and minority ethnic participants. One participant, a Black and minority ethnic woman, noted that she does not feel safe on the bus at nighttime or during the day and worries about her daughter who is now attending university using buses. Participants recalled negative experiences on public transport that had impacted their feeling of security and use of buses.

Bus stops being well lit was seen as an important starting point to improve safety. There was no consensus about whether cameras on buses contributed to safety, either real or perceived. Another Black and minority ethnic woman noted that she had been undertaking self-defence classes to increase her feeling of safety on public transport as she feels it is not taken seriously enough.

A minority of participants noted that there were concerns with anti-social behaviour on buses, tied to the concessionary bus travel for under 22s. A minority of participants felt that young people should lose their entitlement if they were abusing it, while others were concerned as to what this would mean for access to education for these groups.

Integrated ticketing was a concern for a minority of participants due to their reliance on cash, or issues with safety and access when someone did not have access to a digital device or that device had run out of battery.

Rural key messages

Fundamental to making public transport more attractive in rural areas was ensuring there was adequate provision of enough buses, routes that work for local people and having buses available more frequently.

Rural participants also reflected positively on bus companies such as Lothian in Edinburgh due to the reliability and punctuality of the service. However, private companies who were more likely to operate in rural spaces were considered to have a lower quality fleet, and infrequent and unreliable timetables. Improving the quality of the

fleet was a key component of making public transport more attractive for rural participants. It was felt that the quality of buses was much better in urban areas and that rural spaces often end up with older, run-down models which can often break down.

This opened up discussions about whether the community would benefit from Net Zero and about the perceived disparity of responsibility between individuals and larger companies. One participant who lives near Mossmoran Plant felt that proposals to remove cars from the road and encourage public transport use would be pointless as it was ultimately cancelled out due to the pollution from the plant. There was frustration from participants about the hypocrisy of individual people being asked to make significant lifestyle changes, such as switching to public transport, yet larger companies continue to pollute. This was considered to be a key area where further action must be taken to reach Net Zero targets and benefit communities more broadly.

Member's workshop key messages

Poverty Alliance members felt that our current public transport system is a key barrier to reduced car use. They echoed the need for our public transport system to be more affordable, physically accessible to mothers and disabled people, and more reliable. Members particularly brought out the gendered aspect of public transport use particularly in rural areas. It was highlighted that women are more reliant on public transport than men, and this creates issues in rural areas where transport is not as readily available. The inaccessibility of transport for prams and wheelchairs means that individuals can be waiting for several buses, increasing the risk to their safety. One member stated:

“Women are telling us they are missing job centre appointments, that they are getting sanctioned for that. Women feel as if they are being penalised by the whole system. At night it's not safe.”

In line with the discussions had with the citizen's panel, Poverty Alliance members felt that the safety and accessibility of bus stops and increased ticket integration between forms of public transport, and across local authority borders were also key areas for improvement. The idea that different strategies to improve usage of public transport need to be taken in urban and rural areas was a widely shared idea.

Theme 4 - The use of active travel

Question - Would you like to use active travel more? What might help you be more likely to use 'active travel'?

Urban key messages

Participants were interested in active travel as an alternative to public transport and private car use. However, a range of barriers emerged from the discussion including cost, safety and storage. While outwith the powers of the Scottish Government, a minority of participants also highlighted Scotland's challenging climate as a barrier. It was seen as critical that emphasis is placed on active travel in the summer months – as people may not want to travel by bike, foot or wheels during winter. A minority of participants noted other practical considerations such as the challenges of using bikes to travel with children or to do tasks such as grocery shopping.

There was consensus that cost is a critical barrier, with those with more financial resources seen as having greater access to bikes or scooters and having more capacity for storing a bike. The cost of bikes and electric scooters were a key barrier to active travel for people living on low incomes, and the cost of bikes had risen substantially since the Covid-19 pandemic. Those with greater resources were also viewed as having greater access to the knowledge of how to use and fix a bike, as well as being part of cycling clubs. Being in a deprived area where roads were not as good, or where it was more difficult to store bikes (e.g storage sheds being focused in more affluent areas, and difficulties of storing bikes in small properties) was seen as a key barrier to access.

The safety of being on a bike was a key barrier, raised by all of the participants - whether they currently cycled or not. Drivers were not viewed as giving sufficient space or regard to cyclists on the roads and it was thus intimidating to cycle in cities. Some participants preferred to use bikes for leisure activities rather than for commuting to work or services due to road safety issues. There was consensus that better cycle lanes; tightening up of cycling laws; and education for drivers was seen as key to improving uptake of cycling in urban areas.

Rural key messages

Rural participants had similar discussions regarding cost, access and storage in active travel. Distance was an additional deterrent as it may take people in rural Scotland much longer to reach destinations on bikes compared to driving. Provision of affordable access to bikes was seen as important to encourage people to cycle. One participant noted an e-bike hire scheme which was extremely popular in their area, particularly for areas which have hills making cycling more challenging.

There were also discussions around safety and lack of confidence cycling on roads. Participants were clear that a greater provision of bike lanes that segregate cars from cyclists would be needed to encourage more active travel. A participant reported that despite owning multiple bikes, they avoid using them due to the poor conditions of the roads due to potholes. This was also an issue for participants walking more. They described a lack of safe routes to cross busy, main roads in their area which causes them to have to risk crossing at dangerous points. Finally, one participant highlighted

the lack of shower facilities near services they wished to access, again creating issues which make using cars more preferable to cycling.

Member's workshop key messages

Poverty Alliance membership organisations working on active travel noted an increased demand for funding for bikes, bike repair and bike storage. Members cited the difficulties imposed by current annual funding structures for this kind of work, as they were often struggling to meet demand.

They also noted an increase in demand for infrastructure to support active travel from housing associations and registered social landlords across Scotland as a response to poor public transport links and low car ownership. They also reported a need for cultural change around perceptions of cycling.

Theme 5 - Reduction in demand for transport among people with high carbon footprints, such as those who frequently fly

Question - How can we fairly encourage a reduction in demand for transport among people with high carbon footprints, such as those who frequently fly?

Questions - What types of information or support could enable people in your community to change their travel behaviours?

Urban key messages

A majority of participants agreed a need for balance between discouraging flights without making holidays unattainable for those on low incomes while others remain able to afford this. The ability to go on holiday or visit friends and family in other countries was seen as important for people's health and mental wellbeing. Returning to the idea of 'carrot and stick', a key issue was the high expense of going on holiday in Scotland. Transport within Scotland was seen as prohibitively expensive, due to it not being integrated or joint-up. It was felt that we need to incentivise people holidaying within Scotland, and that includes making it more affordable.

Rural key messages

Flying was an issue both in regard to international flights and domestic flights. Participants echoed the thoughts of urban participants regarding the necessity of being able to travel internationally for holidays or work. Domestically, people living in the more remote islands can often be frequent fliers out of necessity; it was felt that it would be unfair to put restrictions on people who rely on flying for these means. Rural participants agreed that taking holidays in Scotland was too expensive compared to going to abroad and challenging this may incentivise local holidays, ultimately driving down emissions from flights.

It was highlighted that low-income households are less likely to fly, and this should be considered in the context of setting policy to reduce flying. Participants were also hesitant to suggest that anything can be done to combat this effectively as people need to fly to travel. Participants did highlight the need for longer distance train fares to be made drastically cheaper in order to incentivise people to use trains over flights.

Theme 6 - Transport and access to green jobs

Questions - Are Green jobs on your radar? Would you be interested? If so, what are the barrier? What can government do about this?

Urban key messages

There was a lack of clarity as to what constitutes a green job and people did not feel that they had seen an increase in green jobs in their local area or city. Access to upskilling and reskilling support was seen as critical, as was a focus on equalities as women are currently vastly under-represented in green jobs in energy. The affordability and availability of public transport was raised by a majority of participants as a barrier to employment.

Rural key messages

Rural participants noted that they would be interested in green jobs however there is a lack of awareness of where to access them. They noted that there seems to be a lack of green jobs available to them and that those they do see are often voluntary, rather than paid, opportunities. A lack of flexible working was a key point for some participants. One participant who has a child with additional support needs noted that green jobs are not an option for them without the flexibility to allow them to care for their son and work. Lastly, the issue of pay was a considerable issue. One participant had recently accepted a green job yet noted that it was a pay cut from their old post and a less secure contract. It was clear that fair work principles must be embedded into green job offers in order to ensure they alleviate rather than entrench inequality.

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