

Participation of people with experience of poverty in the development of Scottish Government Fair Fares Review

Executive Summary:

The Scottish Government is progressing the Fair Fares Review to explore options for a fairer, more transparent system of fares and increase affordability for those who need it most. As part of the review “Pathfinder” pilot projects to address the cost and availability of public transport and that increase integration between services and modes will be developed. In November 2022 the Poverty Alliance were commissioned to recruit, support and facilitate a Citizen’s Panel of people with experience of poverty and using public transport in Scotland to share their views and shape the Fair Fares Review.

What we did

People from rural and urban areas with experience of poverty were recruited. We designed a series of discussions focusing on experiences in accessing public transport now, our aspirations and vision for a World Class Public Transport System in Scotland and key messages for the Fair Fares Review. First and last session brought all participants together with Scottish Government officials. Sessions in between were divided between urban and rural groups.

Who took part

21 participants were recruited and engaged with the process throughout. These were 15 women, 6 men. 8 were Black and Minority Ethnic, 13 were white. 13 lived in urban areas, 8 lived in rural areas. 4 identified as having a disability. Participants came from Aberdeen, Borders, Dundee, Edinburgh, Fife, Glasgow, Inverness and Western Isles.

Key Messages

Fundamentally, people experiencing poverty in rural and urban Scotland had similar aspirations and priorities for public transport.

A lack of safety forces people to change their behaviour and limits participation in society. The safety of women and girls, disabled people and Black and minority ethnic people should be considered throughout the Fair Fares review.

People living on low incomes in both urban and rural Scotland are much more likely to use buses rather than trains. Public transport interventions that work for people living on low incomes should therefore focus on buses.

Reliability is critical to people. Public transport must be reliable and show up, in good condition and on time, with routes that work for local communities.

Both rural and urban participants prioritised the need for a public transport system that is more affordable, more accessible, more reliable and meets local needs.

Rural and urban groups emphasised the need for expanded and easily accessible concessionary schemes that reduce costs for people who need it most.

Ticketing should be integrated to cut costs for the user and to create ease of travel.

Participants strongly felt that as people living on low incomes are the group most likely to rely on public transport, there should continue to be participation throughout the Fair Fares Review. They offer to support that participation.

Aspirations for Public Transport in Scotland

Aspirations of a rural group of participants – in five years' time:

More people who are currently disenfranchised from services will have access to free bus services, more services should be available in rural areas at reduced costs. It is not fair that peak fares are a punishment for people in work.

Scotland should work towards a gradual free public transport for everyone.

Concessionary travel schemes should be automated to remove barriers in application process and should be integrated for all forms of transport.

Extend concessionary travel schemes to homeless, in care or with No Recourse to Public Funds (refused asylum seekers, foreign spouses of British nationals etc).

Information about routes, timing, accessibility for elderly and disabled people will be easily available.

Quality of public transport stock will be improved as will the ancillary services (waiting rooms, toilets, shelter at stations or bus stops) etc.

Public transport will be safe and accessible for people with disabilities, those with caring responsibilities and passengers with additional support needs.

Aspirations of an urban group of participants – in five years time:

Public transport should be affordable for all passengers. To achieve this, costs should be set as a ratio of the minimum wage for under 23s.

In the longer term, we work towards public transport being free for all at the point of use.

Concessionary schemes should be extended to all those receiving benefits, avoiding barriers created by bureaucracy. People in the asylum process should be included.

Public transport should be reliable, predictable and dependable.

Some ways to achieve this include ensuring signs at bus stops and apps are accurate; designing buses to have space for both wheelchairs and buggies and providers should be held financially accountable for unreliable services.

Public transport should be safe for everyone regardless of gender, race and religion. This review should consider gender, disability and race throughout the whole process. This might result in providers and frontline staff taking account of gender, disability and race in training.

A majority, but not everyone, agreed that to reduce car use and encourage public transport use we should have a publicly owned public transport system to reduce the inefficiency of the profit motive.

Pathfinder Projects: the removal of Peak Fares on railways

Participants supported the removal of peak fares on railways as a way to support people experiencing in-work poverty. However, this pilot pathfinder will not benefit any participants in this process as people living on low incomes are much more likely to use buses than trains.

Participants deliberated and prioritised pathfinder projects that would make a difference for them.

Rural participants top priority was:

- Expanding the concessionary travel scheme to all forms of public transport, (bus, trains ferries etc) and increase target groups.

Urban participants top priority was:

- Reducing bus costs by capping fares and affordable monthly tickets

Full Report: Participation of people with experience of poverty in the development of Scottish Government Fair Fares Review

March 2023

Introduction

The Scottish Government is progressing the Fair Fares Review to explore options creating a fairer, more transparent system of fares and increase affordability for those who need it most. As part of the review “Pathfinder” pilot projects to address the cost and availability of public transport and that increase integration between services and modes will be developed.

In November 2022 the Poverty Alliance were commissioned to recruit, support and facilitate a Citizen’s Panel of people with experience of poverty and using public transport in Scotland to share their views and shape the Fair Fares Review.

What we did

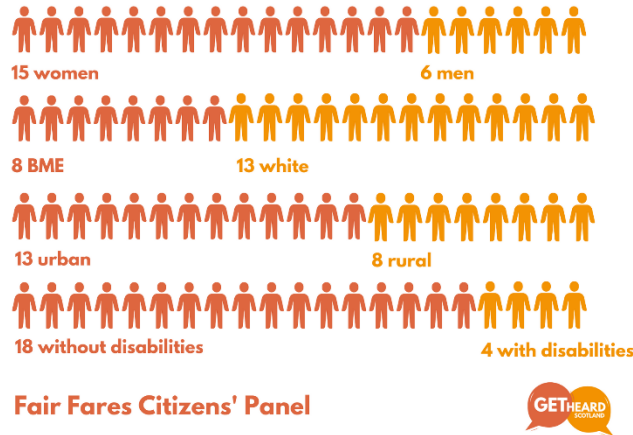
People from both rural and urban areas were recruited to understand the differing experiences of public transport in these contexts. Participants were provided an opportunity to learn about the policy aims, hear each other’s experiences, consider current policies and approaches, deliberate, prioritise and describe their aspirations for a fair public transport system in Scotland.

The first and last session brought all participants together with Scottish Government officials. Sessions in-between were divided between urban and rural groups.

We designed a series of workshops focusing on the following key discussion areas:

- What are the main difficulties that you experience in accessing public transport?
- How do these difficulties impact on your day-to-day life as well as those around you?
- What currently works well in terms of access to public transport and why?
- What would make accessing and using public transport easier for you?
- Imagine a Vision for a World Class Public Transport System in Scotland: What principles and priorities do you think should be reflected in this vision?
- What actions do you think need to be taken, and by whom, to make this vision a reality?

Who took part



Key Messages

Fundamentally, people experiencing poverty in rural and urban Scotland had similar aspirations and priorities for public transport.

A lack of safety forces people to change their behaviour and limits participation in society. The safety of women and girls, disabled people and Black and minority ethnic people should be considered throughout the Fair Fares review.

People living on low incomes in both urban and rural Scotland are much more likely to use buses rather than trains. Public transport interventions that work for people living on low incomes should therefore focus on buses.

Reliability is critical to people. Public transport must be reliable and show up, in good condition and on time, with routes that work for local communities.

Both rural and urban participants prioritised the need for a public transport system that is more affordable, more accessible, more reliable and meets local needs.

Rural and urban groups emphasised the need for expanded and easily accessible concessionary schemes that reduce costs for people who need it most.

Ticketing should be integrated to cut costs for the user and to create ease of travel.

Participants strongly felt that as people living on low incomes are the group most likely to rely on public transport, there should continue to be participation throughout the Fair Fares Review. They offer to support that participation.

Aspirations for Public Transport in Scotland

Participants were supported to imagine a vision for a World Class Public Transport System in Scotland, by discussing and agreeing on principles, priorities and aspirations for a public transport system in 5 years time. These were developed in urban and rural groups separately. Although there were clear similarities participants decided to keep and report on these aspirations distinctly.

Aspirations relating to Cost

Urban group aspirations

- *Public transport should be affordable for all passengers. To achieve this, costs should be set as a ratio of the minimum wage for under 23s.*
- *In the longer term, we work towards public transport being free for all at the point of use.*

Rural Aspirations

- *More people who are currently disenfranchised from services will have access to free bus services, more services should be available in rural areas at reduced costs. It is not fair that peak fares are a punishment for people in work.*
- *Scotland should work towards a gradual free public transport for everyone.*

Cost was a key consideration for both urban and rural groups. Public transport costs influenced and restricted decisions to go to places, employment decisions and how they spend their time. Participants all recalled times where the cost acted as a barrier to their plans:

“it’s just over what I make in half an hour- I can’t really justify it and I don’t really go into city centre as much because the tickets are so expensive”.

Both groups felt that it was necessary for public transport to begin to move towards being universally free at the point of use to make it truly fair. Participants were however sceptical about whether this would happen and if it did, believe it would be a longer-term goal. In the interim, participants supported ideas of reducing costs for public transport through concessionary travel. There was a clear understanding that affordability of travel should be measured on the basis of people earning the least.

A majority of participants felt that peak fares were a punishment for people who work; participants thought peak fares were unjust and supported their removal.

Most focus was given to bus costs. Including work taking place in Manchester where prices for bus tickets have been capped¹. It was felt that this would be a positive first step towards universal free bus travel and would benefit people living on low incomes.

Aspirations relating to Concessionary Travel Schemes

Rural Aspirations

- *Concessionary travel schemes should be automated to remove barriers in application process and should be integrated for all forms of transport.*
- *Extend concessionary travel schemes to homeless, in care or with No Recourse to Public Funds (refused asylum seekers, foreign spouses of British nationals etc).*

Urban Aspirations

- *Concessionary schemes should be extended to all those receiving benefits, avoiding barriers created by bureaucracy. People in the asylum process should be included.*

Participants who were parents commented on the success of the under 22's National Entitlement Card (NEC) concessionary bus travel scheme when they were able to access it.

“Under 22 has made such a difference and eased and helped us as a family. Cost was the thing that prevented me going to city centre. “

However, praise for the scheme included criticisms of the administration process. The application process was overly complex and hard to navigate, participants noted that some lacked the documentation needed to apply as these often required money. This meant that some gave up and didn't benefit.

“I also had huge problems for my son and at one stage I nearly gave up. And for people who don't know how to use computers or aren't' educated enough [it's too hard to access] I heard lots of others make the same complaints”.

It was therefore felt that automation of concessionary schemes was necessary and that eligible people (under 22's, asylum seekers, people in receipt of social security etc.) should automatically receive a smart card to access free public transport in a similar way to those over 60 receive.

¹ For more info, see: [Capped £2 bus fares introduced early in Greater Manchester - BBC News](#)

Rural participants agreed that concessionary schemes should be extended to cover other modes of transport such as ferries and trains.

Participants shared examples of their children's NEC cards being rejected at certain times of night which had dangerous implications for safety. Restrictions on the existing schemes should be removed.

Despite problems in application, there was praise for concessionary schemes overall and a strong belief that some population groups require support to access public transport to aid them to access essential services and to take part in society.

Aspirations relating to Availability and Reliability

Rural Aspirations

- *Information about routes, timing, accessibility for elderly and disabled people will be easily available.*
- *Quality of public transport stock will be improved as will the ancillary services (waiting rooms, toilets, shelter at stations or bus stops) etc.*

Urban Aspirations

- *Public transport should be reliable, predictable and dependable.*
- *Some ways to achieve this include ensuring signs at bus stops and apps are accurate; designing buses to have space for both wheelchairs and buggies and providers should be held financially accountable for unreliable services.*

Both urban and rural groups noted that public transport can be unreliable. Often buses and trains were late or were cancelled at the last minute without adequate information or replacement services.

For people living in rural areas, public transport was felt to be particularly unreliable and often unavailable. This was impacted both by restricted number of routes, buses going long distances to make up for cuts to routes and poor weather resulting in last minute cancellations. This meant people in rural Scotland losing trust in public transport getting them to where they need to be safely and on time. And often being forced to use private, more expensive forms of transport. This puts people off using public transport:

“It's hard to encourage people to take the bus if you cannot guarantee it will be there.”

Urban participants were less likely to have access to a car and therefore when public transport did not show up, they were forced to walk. This could be late at night or in

poor weather conditions raising important safety and health concerns, particularly for women, girls, and disabled people.

“as a parent reliability is one of your biggest concerns. You want to teach your children independence, if the buses aren’t reliable that is a fear. When it’s after dark, you always have that fear that something is going to happen”.

The lack of reliability of services meant that some participants commented that they had opted out of social events or had been unable to access essential services:

“Great music venues in Galashiels but the last bus back is at half-past nine. If I can’t get a lift, I can’t go”

“I was late for a hospital appointment last week because the bus didn’t show up.”

The issues of availability and reliability also considered the lack of information on last minute changes or cancellations, out of date information on bus stops, and inefficient mobile phone apps that do not reflect the real-time current status of buses and trains. The poor quality of transport was also linked to this with participants in both urban and rural area noting instances where buses may catch fire and so would be cancelled but a replacement service would be put in place.

Aspirations for equality and safety

Rural Aspirations

- *Public transport should be safe and accessible for people with disabilities, those with caring responsibilities and passengers with additional support needs.*

Urban Aspirations

- *Public transport should be safe for everyone regardless of gender, race and religion. This review should consider gender, disability and race throughout the whole process. This might result in providers and frontline staff taking account of gender, disability and race in training.*

Participants raised important equalities considerations regarding access to and use of public transport for different groups. Disabled people and women shared often negative experiences of public transport.

Disabled participants who use wheelchairs, carers, and parents who had young children who need prams noted that public transport is particularly inaccessible and unreliable for them due to the lack of space for wheelchairs and prams on most buses. These experiences meant that they had been forced to restrict their lifestyle as they were often unable to get on the bus due to lack of space. This was also seen in other infrastructure that supports access to public transport such as the condition of pavements and roads:

“I used a bus before I was disabled, but now accessibility of public transport is a big barrier and pavements are not always accessible to get to public transport”.

Disabled participants also noted the lack of information surrounding accessibility of transport whether this be via apps, websites or indeed information at bus stations and stops. Participants noted that not being able to guarantee safe transport home deters people from going out, and raises gendered safety concerns:

“If I try and book things it doesn't tell you if they the station is accessible, seats I'll be able to use. I struggle to find all of that. So, I prefer not to do that. And as a disabled woman, I don't want to be stuck anywhere on my own. It doesn't sound fun.”

Due to the negative impact of not being able to access public transport on mental wellbeing, participants felt like this was an area that needs to be considered in the review:

“young women with buggies and toddlers are very isolated because of their inability to access public transport.”

Issues around safety and race were also raised as part of these discussions:

“I would never go on the bus in the dark... Once the terrorist attacks had happened a good friend of mine had their hijab pulled off in the day time, not even in the dark.”

Participants felt it was important for all staff working in public transport to receive training on equalities issues. Training on these issues would lead to better designed services that meet the needs of these groups and support greater empathy and understanding from drivers towards equality groups. Participants also highlighted the need for the layout of buses to be redesigned to better accommodate people using wheelchairs and prams to prevent any dispute between the two.

Public ownership

- *A majority, but not everyone, agreed that to reduce car use and encourage public transport use we should have a publicly owned public transport system to reduce the inefficiency of the profit motive.*

In the urban group some participants agreed that public transport run by private companies for the aim of profit cannot be efficient in meeting the needs of people or in meeting the climate target aims of taking cars off the road. A profit motive contributed to unprofitable routes to be cancelled, which fails local communities.

Pathfinder Projects: Peak Fares

Participants were asked for their views on “Pathfinder Projects” proposed by the Scottish Government to tackle costs and availability of public transport. They were asked about the impact that the removal of peak rail fares would have on their transport habits.

Specifically on the removal of peak fares, there was consensus amongst participants in both urban and rural localities to remove peak fares, with many believing it to be unfair for working people and to directly link to in-work poverty:

“I don’t think peak/ off peak is fair. People who are more likely to rely on public transport is more likely to be on a low income. Why are people paying premium for not being able to afford to maintain a car”

Participants agreed that those living on a low income were unlikely to use trains at all as they were too expensive, even with off-peak fares. Conversely, rural participants noted that often rail is their *only* option and so the removal of peak fares would be helpful in this regard. Participants in both groups highlighted that to best support people living on a low income, pathfinder projects would be better to focus on the cost, availability and reliability of buses as this is the primary mode of transport for low-income communities.

Alternative Pathfinder suggestions

Participants were asked to develop priorities of pathfinder projects that would make a difference for them. Both rural and urban groups had separate priorities for pilot schemes showing the need for localised solutions based on community need (see Figures 1 and 2).

Rural suggestions for Pathfinder Projects

The rural cohort suggested future projects could include:

- Staff training to understand the importance of inclusion.
- Expanding concessionary travel scheme to all forms of public transport, to all of those in receipt of benefits, to those with no recourse to public funds and those who are homeless or in temporary accommodation.
- Integrated ticketing between different modes of transport and providers.
- Investment in new better designed stock with more accessibility spaces for disabled people and parents with prams.
- Increasing availability of Pingo Bus service².

Participants were then asked to rank which of these projects would be the most beneficial to them. The top priority was:

- Expanding the concessionary travel scheme to all forms of public transport, (bus, trains ferries etc) and increase target groups.

Followed by:

- Capping ticket prices as has been seen in Manchester.

Urban suggestions for Pathfinder suggestions

The Urban group suggested that future pathfinder projects could include:

- Capping fares such as single or daily fares, as in Manchester or affordable pre-loaded monthly/weekly bus cards.
- Reducing cost of bus tickets by introducing a reward scheme based on use.
- Integrating buses and trains in a zonal system as in London with an oyster type card
- Free public transport for a period of time to test demand, or pay what you think for a period of time.

When asked to rank which of these projects would be the most beneficial to them. The group had two equally ranked suggestions for pathfinder projects:

- Reducing cost by capping fares and affordable monthly tickets
- Expansion of concessionary schemes to people who are in the asylum system.

Participation

² For more information, see: [Pingo Berwickshire - Borders Buses](#)

There was unanimous agreement from participants that people experiencing poverty, who use public transport, and are in underrepresented groups should meaningfully participate throughout the Fair Fares review:

“People who on lower incomes are effected the most, they should be the one with a voice.”

This citizen panel offer to support that ongoing participation by being available to work with the Scottish Government and to meet with Ministers and others.

There was recognition of the role the Scottish Government has in reaching out to people experiencing poverty. Participants suggested taking participation out into communities most affected by working with community sector and schools and nurseries. Participants felt strongly that there should be a significant emphasis on ensuring representation of women, asylum seeking communities, and Black and minority ethnic people.

Linked to this, participants were keen to voice their concerns that participation can often be a tick box exercise. To demonstrate that the voices of people experiencing poverty are valued and respected participants emphasized that their participation must lead to policy change:

“I think that with any process of participation that involves people retelling their lived experience, it’s really important that that leads to change.”

For more information, please contact:

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Appendix

Rank these 1 -7

Mentimeter



Figure 1: Screenshot of Mentimeter results asked rural participants what their priority pathfinder scheme would be?

Rank these 1-5

Mentimeter



Figure 2: Screenshot of Mentimeter results asked urban participants what their priority pathfinder scheme would be?

Rail Travel



Figure 3: Jamboard from Session 2 for Urban Participants - Question asked: would the removal of peak rail fares impact you?

Rail Travel



Figure 4: Jamboard from Session 2 for Rural Participants - Question asked: would the removal of peak rail fares impact you?

Participants evaluated the process by discussion and also by an anonymous form, which is summarised below:

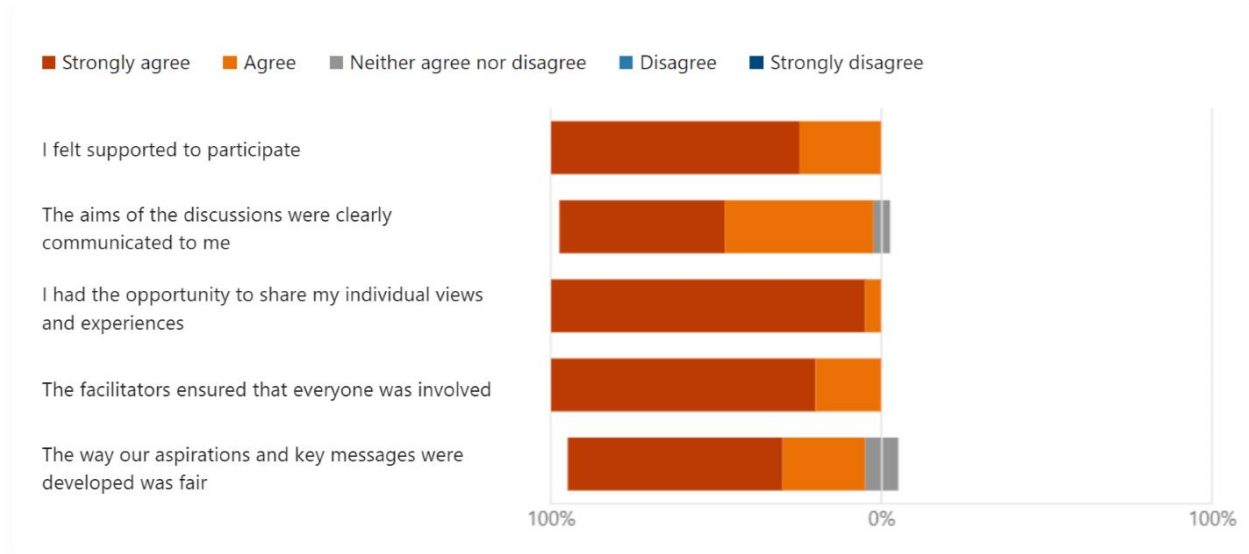


Figure 5: Poll results from last session of Fair Fares Process. Participants asked to feedback on their experience of the participation process