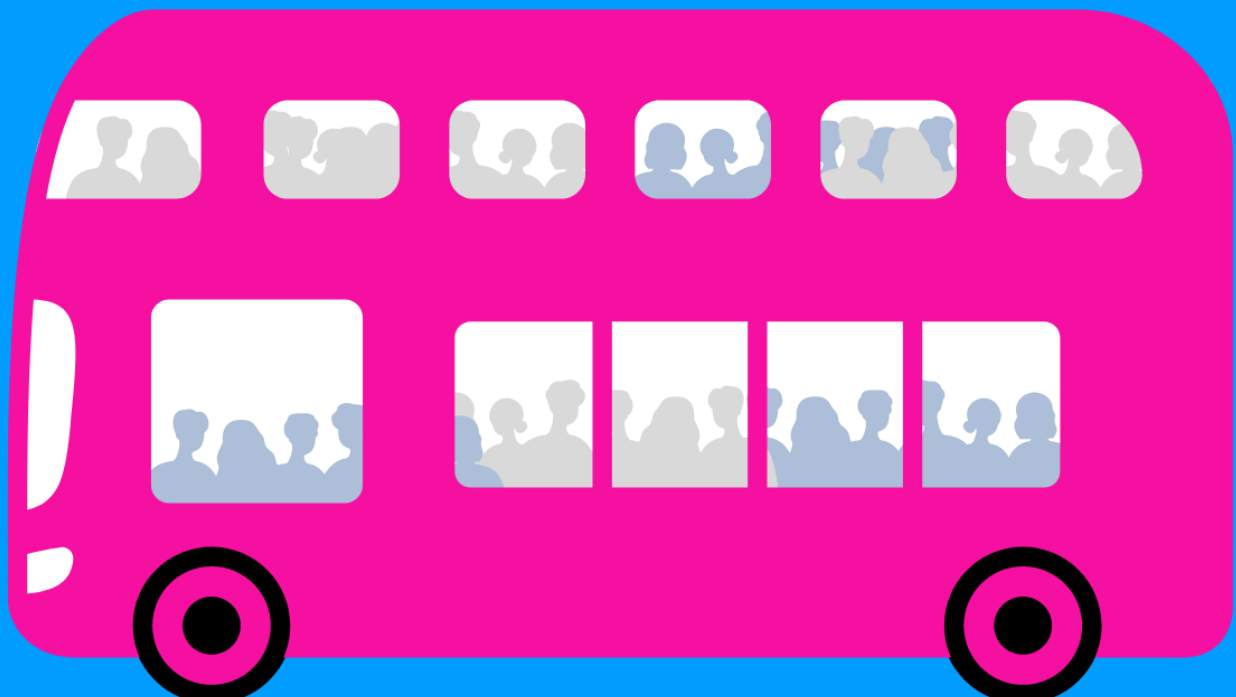




Challenge Poverty Week 2024  
Policy Briefing 2

# A Scotland where can all get 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 representative, 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 and unpaid carers;
- Integrate our transport systems and expand concessionary travel to include all modes of transport including rail, ferry and tram; and
- Ensure public transport funding is directed towards networks which are affordable, reliable, safe and meet the needs of local people.

### Introduction

Transport is a public good that should be available to all. Good, affordable transport enables people to access jobs, education and training which can raise household income and protect people from being swept into poverty or pulled in deeper. However, we have a public transport system which fails to live up to its potential to be a transformative anti-poverty tool. Our current system is also preventing people from being able to make the switch away from car use, stifling Scotland's net-zero ambitions.

But the impacts of this are not felt equally. There continues to be particular issues with our transport system for groups who are more likely to be experiencing poverty. 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. 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, require support from others who drive cars or cannot afford new electric vehicles or find charging infrastructure inaccessible.

We are calling on the Scottish Government to **improve the affordability and accessibility of public transport so all of us have the same freedoms to access essential services, employment and leisure.**

### **Our public transport system is too expensive**

Analysis by IPPR Scotland has 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>1</sup> For people living in rural Scotland, just getting around puts even more of a squeeze on finances - transport is the most significant additional cost compared to people living in urban areas, amounting to an additional £50 per week.<sup>2</sup>

The cost of bus travel has risen 60% over the past decade, significantly faster than average wages and the broader cost of living.<sup>3</sup> The impact of increased fares fall disproportionately on people living on low incomes as they are more likely to use the bus and rely on public transport.<sup>4</sup> 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>5</sup> The Poverty Alliance's research with people with lived experience of poverty highlighted that cost remains one of the key barriers to accessing public transport.<sup>6</sup> Unaffordable fares can mean a choice between accessing jobs, education or social opportunities or meeting other essential costs.

Unfortunately the Scottish government's Fair Fares review did not include any significant proposals to address these challenges, despite clear recommendations from a citizen's panel of people with experience of poverty who fed into the review.<sup>7</sup> It has also been disappointing to see plans reversed which would have extended concessionary bus travel to people in the asylum system. Our work with asylum seekers shows that they are struggling to stay afloat on extremely limit budgets, and thus cannot afford the cost of transport contributing to social isolation, poor physical and mental health.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> IPPR Scotland (2022) *Universal basic services: Building financial security in Scotland*. Available at: <https://www.ippr.org/articles/universal-basic-services-scotland>

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government (2021) *Poverty in rural Scotland: evidence review*. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/poverty-rural-scotland-review-evidence/pages/4/>

<sup>3</sup> Transform Scotland (2024) *Briefing on Scottish Government Fair Fares Review debate*. Available at: <https://transform.scot/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/2024-03-28-Fair-Fares-Review-debate-Transform-Scotland-briefing-paper.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Transport Scotland (2022) *National Transport Strategy (NTS2): Monitoring and Evaluation 2019 Baseline Report*. Available at: <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/monitoring-and-evaluation-2019-baseline-report-may-2022national-transport-strategy-nts2/reduces-inequalities/>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Get Heard Scotland (2023) *Participation of people with experience of poverty in the development of Scottish Government Fair Fares Review*. Available at: [www.povertyalliance.org/people-with-experience-of-poverty-and-the-scottish-government-fair-fares-review/](http://www.povertyalliance.org/people-with-experience-of-poverty-and-the-scottish-government-fair-fares-review/)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Poverty Alliance (2023) *The life of Glasgow pigeons is more certain: mental health and wellbeing amongst people navigating the asylum process*. Available at: <https://www.povertyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Rights-in-Action-Final-Report-Mental-Health.pdf>

## **We need to expand concessionary travel to under 25s, people in receipt of low-income and disability benefits and unpaid carers and people seeking asylum.**

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.

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 at particularly risk of poverty such as people in receipt of low-income and disability benefits, under 25s, unpaid carers, students and modern apprentices, and asylum seekers.

## **Our transport systems are not integrated**

Many people across Scotland rely on multiple forms of transport to get where they need to go – whether buses, trains, trams, subways or ferries. But, each mode is owned by a different company who will charge differing amounts for their services, forcing people to purchase multiple tickets for one journey and driving up the expense for that trip. This is particularly true for women who are more likely to make multi-purpose journeys to balance caring responsibilities, paid work and education.

While extremely welcome, concessionary travel schemes which are vital in reducing costs for those who are eligible, are also not integrated meaning people who rely on multiple modes of transport cannot fully benefit from concessions. This is particularly a challenge for people in rural areas, where bus routes alone often do not enable people to get where they need to go. The commitment in the Fair Fares review to expand concessionary foot passenger travel for under 22s island residents on inter-island ferries is welcome and will assist with the integration of our public transport system. However, its impact will be limited whilst public transport links to and from ferries remain poor.

## **We need to integrate our transport systems and expand concessionary travel to include all modes of transport including rail, ferry and tram**

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. In addition, according to the Scottish Government, international evidence shows that successful public transport systems with high levels of user satisfaction have integrated ticketing across all forms of public transport.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Transport Scotland (2024) *Fair Fares Review Supporting Paper 4: International Benchmarking*. Available at: <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/jdxbv30/international-benchmarking-supporting-paper-four-fair-fares-review.pdf>

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

### **Our transport system is not managed, planned or funded efficiently**

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>10</sup>

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>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. This failure is particularly impactful for: women and girls who account for the majority of public transport users and face concerns for their safety; disabled people who continue to face issues of accessibility; 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. Older people may also be unable to reach vital services, or see friends and family, without an accessible and reliable public transport system.

### **We need to ensure public transport funding is directed towards networks which are affordable, reliable, safe and 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.

Given that roughly 55% of bus services are paid for by Government funds,<sup>12</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 are calling on the

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<sup>10</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>11</sup> Get Heard Scotland (2023) Participation of people with experience of poverty in the development of Scottish Government Fair Fares Review. Available at: [www.povertyalliance.org/people-with-experience-of-poverty-and-the-scottish-government-fair-fares-review/](http://www.povertyalliance.org/people-with-experience-of-poverty-and-the-scottish-government-fair-fares-review/)

<sup>12</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/>

Scottish Government to ensure local authority funding enables the design of public transport services and routes which meet the needs of local people.

## 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. The Scottish Government must ensure that local authorities have sufficient resourcing to maximise the powers over franchising.
- Accessibility and transport routes are being cut so people are being forced to spend more time trying to get access, or navigating multiple routes. As a result, people utilising public transport are increasingly time poor.
- 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.
- Ferries are central to the ability of island residents to access employment, education and essential services, but affordable and accessible ferry provision is not always at the heart of transport policy-making. There is a need to place greater emphasis on the importance of ferries to low-income people living on Scotland's islands.
- Making transport more affordable, without accompanying action to increase accessibility, will mean that disabled people continue to be locked out of using public transport.
- 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.
- The Scottish Government's ambitions of reducing car kilometres requires 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.
- While people are supportive of the aims and ambitions of the just transition, we must ensure that progress towards net zero does not compound existing inequalities, including for disabled people.

### 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.
- Families in rural Scotland can face additional costs of £50 a week (or more) in order to travel where they need to. In the context of the Scottish Child Payment set at £25 a week, it is clear that reducing the cost of transport for rural families would have a significant effect on family finances, and could contribute to a reduction in child poverty.

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