Integrated Transport Policy Paper 2020
Policy Committee

Preamble

This paper was largely written in 2019, before the outbreak in March 2020 of the Covid-19 pandemic which has had such a huge effect of the lives of everyone. There are now restrictions on using any public transport with a requirement for all passengers to wear a mask and advice to (as far as possible) keep at least 1 metre away from any other passengers.

Because of this, while the measures proposed in the paper may not seem appropriate in the summer of 2020, once measures to combat the virus have been devised and implemented, they will become necessary again. We need to plan ahead.

As will become clear, we firmly believe that a greater use of public transport is vital to secure the environmental and accessibility benefits that all Scottish urban areas need, and for the transport needs of rural areas to be met. This will become possible to achieve once the current “social distancing” requirements are removed.

In presenting this paper now, several new developments have been included.

Introduction

Scottish Liberal Democrats have always been clear that an extensive, economic, efficient, and effective transport system is good for Scotland. It allows us to develop a strong economy and brings social equity to every part of our country.

In 2020 the majority of the world is accepting that we face a climate emergency. To meet the agreed targets set after the Paris Agreement of net zero carbon by 2050, and to achieve the more ambitious target of 2045 that Liberal Democrats believe is possible, will require big changes to our way of life.

Radical changes to the way that public transport is provided could make a positive contribution to our quality of life as we take the other challenging steps, in all aspects of our lives, needed to take the carbon out of heating, power and transport.

This policy paper argues that an integrated approach to the planning and operation of transport is required, so that public transport and active travel can provide a viable, convenient and attractive alternative to the car. The current governance of public transport and active travel in Scotland is confused and fragmented, leading
to a tendency for rail and bus operators to compete with each other, rather than to provide a competitive alternative to the petrol/diesel car. We need to create a system that puts the passenger first, especially for rail and bus travel, and make these services immediately more attractive.

The paper looks at how rail and bus services are currently planned and managed, and how an alternative approach could better meet our needs. We conclude that the ScotRail franchise system in Scotland can be adapted to suit local circumstances. However, for bus services, radical action is required. To take the carbon out of road transport will require more co-ordinated action to improve the scale and convenience of bus services than can possibly be achieved by relying on the myriad of operators and confused governance structures we have in Scotland.

The evidence

The environment

The big carbon equivalent outputs in Scotland are approximately as follows\(^1\) and show the importance of making changes in transport:

- Industry 13 million tonnes
- Energy supply 20 million tonnes
- Residential 8 million tonnes
- Agriculture 5 million tonnes
- Transport 13 million tonnes

Passenger trends

Bus passenger numbers in Scotland have declined from 600,000 in 1989 to 400,000 in 2018 and are still falling. This is a greater decline in passenger numbers than in the rest of Great Britain\(^2\). London is different. In London bus passenger numbers have increased since 2008.

Rail passenger numbers in Scotland are steadily increasing, up 17% in the last five years. New stations and routes, especially in the Strathclyde area, in the last 30 years, in particular, have driven growth. This growth has displaced cars from the roads for commuters and improved peoples’ options for long distance travel. In Spring 2019, the Scottish Liberal Democrats passed a new policy calling for the further expansion of the rail network.
Transport legislation

Bus services in Great Britain were deregulated by the 1985 Transport Act everywhere except London.

In London the democratically accountable Transport for London (TfL) specifies routes, frequency, fares, bus capacity and quality. Bus companies compete for the right to run the franchise and are paid to run the service according to quality standards. All income from fares goes to TfL. This system of franchising has remained in place through governments and mayoralities of both Conservatives and Labour. Indeed, the powers of TfL have been enhanced to give them an oversight on all forms of local transport.

In the rest of Great Britain bus companies can register and run any route and service pattern they wish, often competing with each other for passengers. Local authorities have powers to pay for specific non-commercial services to fill the gaps left by this free market system. In 2018, Scottish passengers paid £385m to bus companies in fares and the Scottish taxpayer pays £299m to bus companies to run non-commercial and concessionary services.

During the period that bus deregulation was introduced, British Rail was broken up and train operating franchises were introduced. While the franchising system gives the public sector control and influence over service patterns, frequencies and fares, it operates completely separately from bus services. Consequently, there is minimal interaction between the rail operators, local authorities and bus operators, sometimes to the detriment of the passenger. Within the rail franchise process there needs to be an ability to require the rail operator to engage, at a local level, in multi modal ticketing arrangements and service developments.

In addition to these operational changes to public transport, the oversight and influence of local government over public transport strategy has been seriously diminished. The abolition of the regional councils removed a strong governance structure for co-ordinated transport and spatial planning. The Regional Transport Partnerships, that replaced them, now have minimal influence by comparison to their predecessors.
Current developments

In July 2020, Transport Scotland published a new policy entitled “Rail Services: Decarbonisation Action Plan”. The broad aim is to eliminate, as far as possible, the use of diesel passenger trains within 15 years and thereby seek modal shift to rail for both private and heavy goods vehicles.

The current intention is that lines between Glasgow/Edinburgh and Aberdeen and Inverness will be fully electrified, along with Glasgow – Dumfries – Carlisle, the East Kilbride and Maryhill lines, the Borders railway, and the routes in Fife (including the reopened branch to Leven). It is intended that other more remote routes such as the West and North Highland will use hydrogen or battery traction. Work on the lines to East Kilbride and Kilmarnock, and Maryhill, has already started, with routes in Fife and to Perth following.

This is welcome as a means of substantially reducing the amount of carbon emissions from transport.

In contrast, the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 is limited in its ambition. For bus services it offers local authorities more options to run services. However, profitable routes will largely remain the domain of the bus companies. Its proposals for the Regional Transport Partnerships are equally lacking in their ambition.

Bus companies, and the Rail Industry, have made good progress in converting their fleets to more environmentally friendly fuels and electrifying more of the central Scotland rail network. The accessibility of vehicles has improved substantially, with almost all buses and trains now having entrances and space for wheelchairs and pushchairs. This welcome move has been largely driven by the direction of local authorities to meet the Disability Discrimination Act.

Emerging battery technology is exciting! From being, only recently, just an interesting experimental idea used for special purposes, city buses that can operate purely on “green” battery power are now becoming more widely available. In London there are over 300 electric buses and a main double deck service [No.94] is operated by them. In 2020, a main service in Manchester has become electric and there is also a single deck service [M3] in Glasgow. Many others are expected to follow soon. These developments need actively to be encouraged to improve air quality in urban centres.

The climate emergency is real. It requires action to take the carbon out of transport. Bus transport is ideally placed to help this to happen. Increasing bus passenger
services will offer people a low-carbon travel mode, and will also help to reduce congestion in urban areas and improve journey times for all travellers. Such a policy will cut the energy and resources that would be needed if we were to replace every fossil fuel car in Scotland. A radical new policy on bus transport will help social equity for people who cannot afford to own and maintain their own vehicle or replace an old vehicle with an electric one.

This positive growth in bus travel cannot be left to the myriad of private companies whose first interests, necessarily, are to their business and shareholders. The taxpayer currently contributes 45% of the funding for bus services. It is right that the scale of the control allocated to transport authorities for this financial contribution is increased radically.

The London model

As noted above, the situation in London, is different:

“London’s bus network is unique in mainland United Kingdom in that it is regulated. This enables Transport for London (TfL) to plan, procure and manage a network of services in a consistent and co-ordinated manner.”

It is worth noting, also, that TfL is the integrated body responsible for the Capital’s transport system and is a functional body of the Greater London Authority. TfL’s primary roles are to implement the Mayor of London’s Transport Strategy and to manage transport services across the Capital.

In summary, TfL can plan and procure an integrated public transport system that is easy and economic to use and that is set within the context of an integrated transport plan covering public, private and active transport modes. In the jargon, it can offer a carrot and wield a stick to influence travel behaviour and choices.

Critically, it has been able to introduce integrated ticketing systems that apply to bus, underground, local rail, and river services across the city and suburbs. This means that there is no money penalty for changing from bus to train and is in stark contrast to Scotland. A Transport Scotland report from as far back as 2008 says, “In this scenario, where the prevailing ethos is ‘free market’, there is limited opportunity to facilitate interchange and co-ordination, with preservation of company market share often a business goal for the transport operator.” This demonstrates that the clear limitation of the current system has been recognised. The Scottish Government has done nothing to address it.
Regeneration and social equity

Strong regional transport authorities, linked into the spatial planning and regeneration powers of local authorities, give some important new opportunities for communities to be regenerated.

For example, the recent report Connecting Glasgow: Creating an Inclusive, Thriving, Liveable City\(^5\) contained ambitious plans to increase bus passenger numbers by 25% in the first five years. However, a major hurdle identified was the foundering of the partnership between public and private bodies to oversee bus operations.

That report highlighted how large areas of officially recognised multiple deprivation cannot reasonably access the rail network, and therefore a focus solely on existing rail provision will miss the opportunity to regenerate these communities.

At the other end of Britain, one of the priorities of the Cornwall Deal – equivalent to a city deal for a predominantly rural area – was local control of bus transport, “The Deal enabled significant improvements to our transport infrastructure, allowing us to lead the way towards a unified public transport system.”\(^6\)

Proposals

This report, and its accompanying recommendations, focus on putting passengers at the heart of the transport system. It proposes radical change to improve bus services. It establishes the governance structures required to allow the regions of Scotland to develop integrated transport systems that address their specific needs and support a greener environment.

This report has principally focused on bus and rail, but the responsibilities of the proposed regional transport bodies, based on the successful London model, should stretch to cover road networks, active travel and local ferry and air services. Detailed proposals for each of these are best proposed through a further policy motion.

Using new technologies to reduce the need for commuting will also be required. The job of this paper is to take carbon out of commuting, when it happens. There has been a substantial growth in “working from home” during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic. While this will reduce as it is brought under control, the long-term impact may lead to significant changes in land-uses in urban centres.
As we rise to the challenge of meeting the climate change emergency, there are few aspects of our lives today that will not need to change. Consequently, we need a planning framework that enables that change.

**Policy proposals**

It is proposed that Scotland should revitalise the existing 7 regional transport partnerships, based on groups of local councils, with strong powers and direct links to the existing spatial planning and regeneration powers of local councils. The regional transport partnerships would have the power to:

1. Establish a system of local bus route franchising following the Transport for London model with the power to:
   a. Set routes, service frequency, fares, and bus quality standards and receive all fare income;
   b. Specify, where appropriate, that electric buses should be used rather than diesel vehicles (similarly electric taxis as now widespread in London);
   c. Invite bus companies to compete for the right to run, and be paid for, each route franchise;
   d. Monitor the performance of each franchisee, penalising or rewarding them as appropriate.

2. Develop, in conjunction with local councils, integrated transport plans for their areas (covering public and private transport, and active travel);

3. Develop and promote transport infrastructure schemes within their areas;

4. Borrow money to fund development schemes;

5. Establish and operate integrated ticketing for all local public transport services within their areas (local bus, local rail and local ferry);

6. Provide and maintain information services to allow passengers to plan and track their journeys.

7. Ensure, through detailed input to the ScotRail franchise, that local rail services and integrated ticketing system for their areas are developed and implemented in conjunction with the franchise bus operators. There needs
to be scope easily to amend/adjust the rail franchise by mutual agreement as circumstances develop

Endnote

This policy paper was developed by a small group of members. In particular thanks go to two expert members who gave up substantial amounts of their time to help: Andrew Nisbet, a former head of transport planning in major local authorities, with responsibilities throughout Britain; James Duncan, a former senior manager with Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive and interim director with several other local authority transport bodies.


3 London’s Bus Contracting and Tendering Process TfL, TWC 12/8/15


5 https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=43556&p=0


7 The existing RTPs are Strathclyde, South East, South West, Tayside & Central, North East, Highlands & Islands, and Shetland
Helping Nature to Fight Climate Change
Report of the Scottish Policy Committee – August 2020

A Climate Emergency

The last six years have included the five warmest years on record. Scientists estimate that human activities have caused 1.0°C of global warming above pre-industrial levels.

As a result of global warming, Greenland is losing on average 286 billions of tonnes of ice per year and sea levels have risen by 7cm in the last 25 years. There are now 634 million people at risk from rising seas.

We are running out of time to stop global warming, with the most recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report predicting that, if the temperature increases by over 1.5°C, we will reach a tipping point from which we will be unlikely to recover.

How nature can help

Nature currently sequesters 5 billion tonnes of carbon per year, with around half of human CO₂ emissions stored by nature. However, habitation damage caused by climate change is reducing nature's ability to store carbon.

Biodiverse ecosystems are more resilient than ecosystems with less diversity, borne out by studies which show a correlation between biodiversity and carbon storage, a relationship particularly noticeable in grasslands and forests.

The United Nations has declared 2021–2030 the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. Its aim is to restore 350 million hectares of degraded land, which is estimated could remove up to 26 gigatonnes of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere globally.

Biodiversity under threat

The recent Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) report warns that up to one million species are threatened with extinction, many within decades.

The rate of extinction for insects is eight times faster than that of mammals, birds and reptiles with more than 40% of insect species declining and a third endangered. This is particularly concerning as insects are responsible for pollinating the majority of plant species.
IPBES predicts that most of the Aichi biodiversity targets will be missed by the 2020 deadline. Scottish Natural Heritage’s 2017 interim report shows Scotland only being on track to meet 7 of its 20 Aichi Biodiversity targets. The Scottish Government cut the budget for the six relevant organisations related to biodiversity by 20%.

Habitat fragmentation causes a decrease in the species richness of plants, arthropods and birds of between 20% and 75% due to loss of genetic diversity caused by increased isolation and the edge effects whereby species struggle to survive on edges of smaller, more fragmented habitats.

**Scotland’s National Parks**

Scotland’s national parks have helped to restore over 1000 hectares of peatland, created 5000 hectares of new native woodland and help protect vulnerable species such as the red squirrel, black grouse and capercaillie.

The National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 states that parks should “conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area”, but it also gives them a responsibility to promote economic development. The park authorities have often ended up mired in controversy trying to meet these conflicting aims.

For example, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park granted planning permission for Tyndrum gold mine in a Special Area of Conservation, despite objections from Scottish National Heritage, Friends of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, the Mountaineering Council of Scotland, Network Rail, and the Scottish Campaign For National Parks.

Planning permission was also given for the controversial An Camas Mor housing development at Rothiemurchus despite it being the only Scottish habitat for the slender groundhopper. The RSPB raised concerns it would have a negative impact on the population of capercaillie population, an endangered species.

**The important role of peatland**

Peatland in good condition stores carbon and can sequester an additional 0.7-2.8 tonnes of CO$_2$ per hectare, with Scottish peatlands currently storing 1.7 billion tonnes of carbon, equivalent to 140 years’ worth of Scotland’s total annual greenhouse gas emissions. Conversely, peatland in poor condition can release as much as 24 tonnes of CO$_2$ per hectare.

Unfortunately 80% of Scotland’s peatland is estimated to be damaged. Peatland Action has helped restore 15,000 hectares of damaged peatland. However, as their funding is allocated annually they are limited to small scale projects that can be completed in a year.
The Grouse Moor Management Group Report

The Scottish Government commissioned a report into the environmental impact of grouse moor management in 2017. This was in response to a report by Scottish National Heritage on the fate of satellite-tracked golden eagles in Scotland, which noted that 40 out of 131 young golden eagles had disappeared in suspicious circumstances on or near grouse shooting estates.

The resulting report by the Grouse Moor Management Group was published in December 2019. The majority of the group (including the chair) wished to introduce licensing for grouse shooting immediately. However, to ensure a unanimous recommendation a compromise was agreed where licensing would be introduced in 5 years time if the situation doesn't improve.

The group also looked at muirburn, the management of mountain hares and the use of medicated grit to treat worms.

Muirburn is the controlled burning of vegetation to provide young, more nutritious shoots for grouse and other species, and to destroy regenerating trees, thereby maintaining open moorland. Muirburn can be used to prevent wildfires and there are some studies which suggest it can be a net positive in dry heathlands. However, it is generally accepted that it is detrimental in wet heaths and peatlands.

Muirburn is governed by the Muirburn Code. However the code is widely seen by many practitioners as best practice guidance only, and therefore adherence to its requirements are highly variable.

The damage to upland habitats caused by man-made tracks

Upland habitats are sensitive to change and slow to repair. Upland tracks can alter drainage patterns, cause the loss of stored carbon through soil erosion, the loss of nests, shelters or foraging areas, impacting on species such as ground nesting birds, otter, water vole, badger, wildcat, fish and aquatic invertebrates.

Agricultural and forestry tracks don't require full planning consent even though there is evidence that this exemption is being abused by land owners constructing tracks for sporting or recreational use, or altering tracks under the guise of maintenance.

Trees and deer management.

At present, forests store as much as 45% of all land carbon, with studies showing that younger forests can sequester more carbon than older well established forestry.
In Scotland around 9.5 million tonnes of CO₂ each year are removed from the atmosphere by our forests.

However, excessive deer numbers are having a serious negative impact on woodland regeneration. Deer in Scotland have no natural predators and as a result their numbers have doubled in the last 50 years.

**Policy proposals arising from this paper**

- **A.** The Scottish Government to provide funding to fulfil Scotland's Aichi spending targets;

- **B.** The Scottish Government to guarantee multi-year continued funding to Peatland Action so it can engage in projects that aren't possible to complete in a single year;

- **C.** The Scottish Government to make sure that the replacement to the Common Agricultural Policy and the Basic Payment Scheme rewards sustainable practices and encourages peatland restoration;

- **D.** The Scottish Government to take forward the findings and recommendations of the Grouse Moor Management Group Report on the regulation of muirburn and medicated grit;

- **E.** The Scottish Government to prepare a draft bill for consultation, to introduce immediate licensing of grouse shooting;

- **F.** The Scottish Government to enact the recommendations of the Wildlife Crime Penalties Review Group (Poustie Review) as part of the next Criminal Justice or Criminal Proceedings Act;

- **G.** The Scottish Government to amend the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 to make it clear that, when there is a conflict, the responsibility for conservation should take priority over the responsibility for economic development;

- **H.** The Scottish Government to begin a consultation process on the possibility of new national parks, with the aim of a new national park joining the existing parks if there is local support. Areas with existing campaigns for a national park, such as Galloway and West Dumfries and Argyll and Bute should also be considered;

- **I.** The Scottish Government to amend planning policy to require full planning permission for all tracks in national parks or on land used for shooting or other recreational sports, clarifying the difference between track maintenance and alterations and widening, which should require prior notification;
J. The Scottish Government to conduct a review on deer management;

K. Scottish Government to direct its agencies and rural funds to drive an ambitious national programme of reconnecting natural and semi-natural habitats;

L. Councils to sow wild flower seeds in road verges and where safe to do so reduce cutting to once a year in late summer. This will provide bees and butterflies with a self sustaining habitat filled with pollen and nectar;

M. The UK Government to replace any EU funding (received via European Regional Development Fund, Cohesion Fund or European Social Fund) which was being used to fund projects aimed at increasing biodiversity or fighting climate change.