



Strategic Issues Update for the SPT area

Committee Strategy & Programmes

Date of meeting 17 February 2023

Date of report 7 February 2023

Report by Chief Executive

1. Object of report

The object of this report is to provide an update on strategic-level issues affecting transport in the west of Scotland.

2. Background

Members will be aware that a range of policy, planning and delivery initiatives are underway within transport and related sectors across Scotland at present, at national, regional and local levels. The effects of these on the people, communities and transport network of the west of Scotland could in some cases be significant and it is therefore essential that SPT continues to monitor progress and influence outcomes in order to maximise benefits for our area. This report summarises current key workstreams and SPT activity in that regard.

3. Update

3.1 General

Since the last update to the Committee in September 2022¹, the ongoing effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis continue to take their toll on the people and communities of the west of Scotland, and the transport network.

Public transport patronage continues to be below pre-pandemic levels with ScotRail services at circa 60-70% and bus at 80-85% of 2019 patronage. The picture is positive for some SPT services with Subway reaching on average 90% of pre-pandemic levels and occasionally higher, and supported bus services achieving 85%, reflecting the importance of these often 'lifeline' services to communities across the region. However, for the MyBus demand responsive transport service, numbers remain significantly below pre-pandemic levels at around 30% but are steadily picking up.

As noted in previous reports, the reasons for this slow return to pre-Covid levels are varied and wide-ranging including the impact of working from home (WFH) as well as the cost of living crisis impacting on people's ability or desire to make journeys. On a more positive note, there has been a modest recent increase in town centre footfall albeit still significantly below pre-pandemic levels e.g footfall for Glasgow city centre in December 2022 was up 4.8% from the previous month.

The cumulative impact of all of the above on the public transport industry continues to be significant as operators continue to try to achieve a sustainable position for service

¹ https://www.spt.co.uk/media/ybkfbyn5/sp090922_agenda9.pdf

provision. Issues with front line recruitment and retention continue to cause serious challenges in service operation for most operators. Transport Scotland's Network Support Grant funding (previously known as Covid Support Grant) which was originally planned to end in Autumn 2022 has now been extended until Spring 2023. This, along with continued recovery in public transport patronage, is welcome news but the potential impact of this funding finally being withdrawn creates uncertainty about the longer-term future of some bus services. However, officers continue to monitor this situation closely as any expected replenishment of the network to pre-Covid levels through SPT subsidy would require additional revenue funding of a scale currently unavailable. SPT has advised Transport Scotland that any expectation that SPT is resourced to fill gaps beyond current levels is not realistic.

More fundamentally, the current and potential future impacts of the above issues on the people and communities of the west of Scotland is significant, particularly rural and remote areas, areas of multiple deprivation, and households in the region that do not have access to a car for private use.

However, SPT and partners across the region and Scotland remain focused on addressing these challenges. SPT is in regular communication with the Transport Minister, Transport Scotland and others about funding and wider solutions to identified issues. The range of activity covered in the rest of this report demonstrates further action aimed at encouraging more use of and investment in sustainable transport measures, and officers will continue to update the Committee on current events, future issues and actions therein as progress is made.

3.2 National

3.2.1 Transport (Scotland) Act 2019/Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy (SRBS)

SPT is guided that regulations and guidance on the provisions of the Act, relating to franchising and Bus Service Improvement Partnerships will be issued late 2023 following consultation and engagement, which SPT will seek to be fully involved in. Members will recall the report to the Committee in November 2022² regarding a proposal for a Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy and preparatory work is underway to start the process for development of the SRBS, following the presentation for approval of the new Regional Transport Strategy to the Partnership in March 2022.

3.2.2 National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)

The Scottish Parliament approved the revised draft of Scotland's Fourth National Planning Framework on 11 January 2023. The revised draft NPF4³ was laid before parliament in November 2022 following revisions in response to the public consultation. SPT's response to the consultation was approved by the Partnership in March 2022⁴.

The revised draft NPF4 comprises the National Spatial Strategy for 2045, including National Developments, Regional Spatial Priorities, and National Planning Policy focused around the themes of Sustainable Places, Liveable Places and Productive Places.

Regional Spatial Priorities for the west of Scotland are set out in the Central and South areas, with connections to the surrounding areas also of significance.

² https://www.spt.co.uk/media/zqsayayn/sp251122_agenda8.pdf

³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-planning-framework-4-revised-draft/>

⁴ https://www.spt.co.uk/media/kaohp12w/p180322_agenda11.pdf

The following National Developments are of significance for transport in the west of Scotland:

- Central Scotland Green Network;
- National Walking, Cycling and Wheeling Network (Scotland wide);
- Urban Mass/Rapid Transit Networks (Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen);
- Hunterston Strategic Asset;
- High Speed Rail;
- Clyde Mission; and
- Stranraer Gateway.

At the time of writing, Scottish Ministers intend to adopt and publish NPF4 on 13 February 2023, following the commencement of the provisions of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 which amended the composition of development plans to include the National Planning Framework. From this point, NPF3 and Scottish Planning Policy are superseded and Strategic Development Plans – Clydeplan in the SPT area will no longer be in effect.

Prior to the publication of NPF4, the Scottish Government will issue transitional arrangements for local development plans and in Spring 2023, bring new regulations into force and publish new guidance on Local Development Planning.

SPT, as a statutory Key Agency in the development planning process, will review and consider the implications for its role and engagement in the Local Development Planning process and the content of the NPF4. The future of Clydeplan is considered later in this report.

3.2.3 Scottish Parliament Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee Report – The Role of Local Government and its Cross-Sectoral Partners in Financing and Delivering a Net-Zero Scotland

The Scottish Parliament’s Net Zero, Transport & Energy Committee undertook an inquiry into the role of local government and its cross-sectoral partners in financing and delivering a net-zero Scotland. The Committee has recently published its final report⁵ which includes a range of conclusions and recommendations, including in relation to transport and active travel. A key recommendation relates to a positive, enhanced future role for Regional Transport Partnerships, as follows:

“Transport and active travel:

The Committee supports a stronger Regional Transport Partnership model to help enable positive behavioural change. RTPs should be empowered and resourced to be lead decision-takers on achieving a more joined up and strategic approach to public transport and active travel at regional level: one reflective of actual travel or commuting patterns, which do not stop at Council boundaries, and to achieve better integration on transport policy between member Local Authorities. This in return requires RTPs to be higher profile, more transparent and more responsive organisations, with clearer processes for public engagement.

⁵ <https://sp-bpr-en-prod-cdneq.azureedge.net/published/NZET/2023/1/23/2c9752ff-eb3f-4273-8f78-e726676a3b6e/NZET062023R1.pdf>

In addition, the report also highlights whether the Scottish Government should consider a step change in the number of municipally-operated bus services as part of its vision for a decarbonised transport sector, and what further changes would be needed to enable local transport authorities to make use of the new bus powers.

Further, from a transport perspective, the report also asks the Scottish Government to work with COSLA to champion best practice in EV charging point roll-out across all Councils as an integral element in a place-based approach to spatial planning.

The Scottish Government will respond to the Committee's recommendations in due course, but in the meantime SPT will review the findings from the report in detail and consider their implications in dialogue with Transport Scotland, local authorities and other partners. It is worth highlighting that, in early February, members of Transport Scotland's Transport Governance Group (including SPT and Nestrans officers, representing the Regional Transport Partnerships) were advised by TS that the work of the group was being paused due to other work pressures. Officers will update on this as and when the group reconvenes.

3.2.4 Fair Fares Review & Public Transport Fares

Transport Scotland is taking forward a Fair Fares Review to ensure a sustainable and integrated approach to public transport fares. The review will look at the range of discounts and concessionary fare schemes which are available on all modes. SPT has been in liaison with Transport Scotland about the review, which is due to report this Spring and officers will provide a report of its recommendations following publication.

Below is a brief summary of the current position on fares for public transport in the west of Scotland:

- Rail Fares

Transport Scotland has recently announced⁶ funding of £15 million to deliver a 6-month pathfinder pilot during 2023-2024 which would remove peak-time rail fares on some routes. ScotRail is working with Transport Scotland to finalise the desired outcomes of the pilot to maximise use of the £15m available.

- Subway Fares

At the Partnership meeting held in December 2022⁷, Members approved a recommendation to postpone a previously proposed Subway fare increase due to be implemented in January 2023. This is in light of the continuing positive growth in patronage as noted above but also recognising the ongoing cost of living crisis affecting many Subway users.

- Fares on SPT Socially-Necessary Bus Services

There are no plans at present to raise SPT's socially-necessary bus services maximum fare level, thereby helping ensure that the impact of the cost of living crisis is minimised for those who rely most on these services.

⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/corporate-report/2022/12/scottish-budget-2023-24/documents/scottish-budget-2023-24/scottish-budget-2023-24/govscot%3Adocument/scottish-budget-2023-24.pdf>

⁷ https://www.spt.co.uk/media/x2kj5u1j/p161222_agenda9.pdf

- Ferry Fares

Transport Scotland announced on 15 January 2023 that fares on the Northern Isles and Clyde & Hebrides ferry networks will be frozen until end of September 2023, this measure being designed to help people and businesses in Scotland's remote rural and island communities.

3.2.5 Green Freeports

Following agreement between the UK and Scottish Governments, a bidding process for the establishment of two Green Freeports in Scotland was initiated during 2022.

A Green Freeport is a large zoned area within a defined boundary which includes a rail, sea or airport. Operators and businesses in the zone can benefit from a package of tax and other incentives through a combination of devolved and reserved levers. Green Freeports are designed to boost innovation and inclusive growth within communities, while supporting Fair Work First practices, creating new green jobs, upholding the highest environmental protections and supporting economic transformation.

Following the bidding process, the UK Government announced in January that Opportunity Cromarty Firth and Firth of Forth Green Freeport have been selected jointly by the Scottish Government and UK Government as the locations for Scotland's first Green Freeports.

A bid submitted by Glasgow City Region was unsuccessful. The Clyde Green Freeport aimed to create up to 30,000 new jobs, attract £2.5 billion of capital investment and transforming nearly 600 hectares of vacant land. The bid, which had support from a range of partners including SPT, set out an ambitious decarbonisation plan to help accelerate the Scottish and UK Governments' net zero ambitions with the Clyde Green Freeport aiming to achieve net zero by 2040. Projects included the roll-out of green fuel for air, rail, road and sea transport within industries dominated by carbon. Key locations for investment included Greenock Ocean Terminal, Mossend rail freight hub and the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation District Scotland (AMIDS) at Glasgow Airport. Glasgow City Region is currently in communication with the Scottish and UK Governments about next steps for the proposal and officers will advise the Committee of any progress in due course.

3.3 Regional

3.3.1 Regional Transport Strategy (RTS)

Further to the report to the Partnership in December⁸, officers continue preparing the new RTS for presentation to the Partnership in March, including revising and finalising the RTS Policies, as appropriate, taking on board the consultation feedback from partners and stakeholders including members of the public. Concurrently, a series of Partnership member engagement sessions are planned over the January-March period on key elements of the new RTS.

3.3.2 ClydePlan

SPT has a long-standing positive working relationship with ClydePlan, the regional planning body for the Glasgow City Region, seeking to ensure a strategic integrated approach to regional transport and land-use planning for our area. As members will be aware, the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 removed

⁸ https://www.spt.co.uk/media/d20nc3ot/p161222_agenda7.pdf

strategic development planning authorities (such as ClydePlan) from the development planning process, although the Scottish Government highlighted that the preparation of voluntary Regional Spatial Strategies could be a useful framework for local planning should councils across Scotland wish to undertake them jointly or individually.

Over recent years, support from ClydePlan officers in the preparation of the Regional Transport Strategy and other workstreams has been hugely useful and SPT has worked with ClydePlan in the development of a draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the Glasgow City Region. However, SPT is guided that the future operation of ClydePlan is currently under review following the announcement that key personnel at the organisation are retiring. SPT remains committed to the integration of strategic regional transport and land-use planning and has contacted council officers involved in the future of ClydePlan in seeking to ensure our involvement in any amendment to the framework and operation of ClydePlan in future. It is worth highlighting that a key recommendation of the Glasgow City Council leader's Connectivity Commission in 2017 was to integrate SPT and ClydePlan. Officers will update members on these matters in due course as progress is made.

3.3.3 Bus Partnership Fund Network Study/Community Bus Fund

Further to a previous report to the Committee⁹, SPT continues to work with Glasgow City Council on behalf of the regional Glasgow Bus Partnership to take forward a review of the strategic bus network in the region in seeking to enable future bids to the Bus Partnership Fund. A key aspect of this work will be ascertaining how best to integrate any future strategic bus corridor developments with other large-scale infrastructure projects such as the Clyde Metro and the Avenues programme.

In addition, SPT awaits the launch of Transport Scotland's delayed Community Bus Fund (CBF), intended to assist local transport authorities develop bus services in their area, including through utilisation of provisions in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019. As noted earlier, the ending of Network Support Grant in Spring will place a strain on the network and potentially result in future demands on SPT for subsidy, therefore the CBF could be an important source of funding to assist in alleviating some pressure on the bus network. Officers will continue to update Members on this and other strategic bus issues as matters progress.

3.3.4 Motherwell Transport Interchange

Further to an earlier update to the Partnership in March 2022¹⁰, good progress continues to be made towards completion of the £14.5 million redevelopment of Motherwell Rail Station, together with the £2 million Town Centre Transport Interchange. The station project is being managed by ScotRail and the interchange project managed by North Lanarkshire Council. Construction firm Balfour Beatty was contracted to oversee the delivery of both projects. The Project Client Steering Group, chaired by SPT, continues to meet regularly to oversee the delivery of both projects in a coordinated manner. The station and interchange works are due to complete in Spring 2023.

3.4 Local

Officers continue to liaise with councils, Community Planning Partnerships and other partners in relation to a range of other plans, initiatives and projects, including the developing RTS, Local Transport Strategies, delivery of projects from SPT's capital

⁹ Section 3.1.6, https://www.spt.co.uk/media/mdijzb5t/sp270821_agenda8.pdf

¹⁰ https://www.spt.co.uk/media/hd5juix4/p180322_agenda13.pdf

programme as well as undertaking liaison with relevant organisations in relation to other issues. In addition, SPT is working closely with our partner Councils to coordinate and help deliver active travel funding through both the Regional Active Travel Grant Fund and the Active Travel Transformation Fund which are covered in a separate report to this Committee.

4. Conclusions

As can be seen from this report, there are a wide range of challenges and opportunities facing those involved in transport in the west of Scotland at the current time. Matters are evolving quickly and SPT is seeking to ensure that it continues to play a leading role in developments. Officers will continue to update Members on the issues in this report and others as they emerge as matters progress.

5. Committee action

The Committee is recommended to note the content of this report.

6. Consequences

Policy consequences	<i>The developing new Regional Transport Strategy will play a key role in setting the framework for strategic issues in transport over coming years.</i>
Legal consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Financial consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Personnel consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Equalities consequences	<i>The impact of the issues identified in this report could be significant for equalities groups. Due process in terms of statutory impact assessments will need to be undertaken by responsible parties to ensure appropriate mitigation of any matters identified.</i>
Risk consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Climate Change, Adaptation & Carbon consequences	<i>The impact of the issues identified in this report could be significant and due process in terms of statutory impacts assessments will need to be undertaken by responsible parties to ensure appropriate mitigation of any matters identified.</i>

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