



Strategic Issues Update for the SPT area

Date of meeting 8 September 2023

Date of report 29 August 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 to report

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

3. Outline of proposals

3.1 General

Further to the update to the previous Committee in June¹, in general, public transport patronage remains below pre-pandemic levels. However, Subway patronage now seems to be stabilising at over 100% of pre-Covid levels, and the most recent figures for SPT's supported bus services shows they are now circa 98% of pre-Covid levels, confirming the importance of these often 'lifeline' services to communities across the region. For the commercial bus network, passenger numbers remain around 90% of pre-pandemic levels, and patronage on ScotRail services remains low at circa 75% of pre-pandemic levels. On SPT's MyBus demand responsive transport service, numbers remain significantly below pre-pandemic levels at around 30%, although it is worth noting reduced service provision is still in place at the current time.

3.2 National

3.2.1 Scottish Government and COSLA Verity House Agreement

On 30 June 2023, the Scottish Government and COSLA announced a new Partnership Agreement² – to be known as the Verity House Agreement (VHA) – making a commitment to a more collaborative approach to the delivery of their shared priorities, with the maxim “local by default, national by agreement”. Officers have engaged with colleagues from Transport Scotland (TS) and COSLA in relation to the VHA, but at this stage it remains to be seen as to whether there will be any implications for Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) as a result of the

¹ https://www.spt.co.uk/media/pjebvxj4/sp090623_agenda6.pdf

² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/new-deal-local-government-partnership-agreement/>

new agreement. Transport Scotland is arranging a meeting with RTPs to have a detailed discussion on the VHA in coming weeks, and officers will keep members updated as matters progress.

3.2.2 Scottish Parliament Cross-Party Group on Sustainable Transport Call for Evidence

The Scottish Parliament Cross-Party Group on Sustainable Transport was established in 2021 with the purpose 'to raise the profile of sustainable transport' within the Scottish Parliament, with a particular focus on cross-modal issues and to promote policies and priorities relating to sustainable transport.

The Group is chaired by Graham Simpson MSP and Deputy Convenors are John Mason MSP, Sarah Boyack MSP and Mark Ruskell MSP. Transform Scotland act as secretariat and membership of the group includes RTPs, ScotRail, CalMac, Sustrans, Confederation of Passenger Transport, Mobility & Access Committee for Scotland (MACS), Transport Focus, the Community Transport Association, and a range of charities.

In June 2023, the group launched a Call for Evidence³ into the Government's plans for cutting emissions from public transport, seeking views on how to urgently decarbonise Scotland's fleets of buses, trains and ferries. The Call for Evidence ran until 15 August and SPT submitted a response in line with the new Regional Transport Strategy.

3.2.3 Active Travel Transformation Programme (ATTP)

Members will be aware that the Scottish Government is increasing its investment in active travel to 10% of Transport Scotland's annual budget from 2024/2025, circa £320m, and had established the ATTP to ensure the right mechanisms were in place to enable efficient and effective delivery of projects arising from that funding. As part of the process, Transport Scotland has been reviewing the most appropriate model for delivery. A partnership model between Transport Scotland, Local Authorities, RTPs and the third sector is the preferred option of SPT and Transport Scotland, as it has most potential for effective delivery of the increased active travel budget. Discussions are ongoing with TS, the RTPs and COSLA in regard to this and, at the time of writing, a paper is being presented to COSLA leaders in August to finalise their position. Officers will continue to keep the Committee updated as the way forward on the ATTP is finalised.

3.2.4 Scottish Government Just Transition Plans (JTPs)

The Scottish Government established a Just Transition Commission to advise Scottish Ministers and to make recommendations on future action in relation to achieving climate change targets in a fair and equitable way, leaving no community behind. The Commission has recently published a report setting out thinking on challenges ahead. This includes a number of recommendations for transport, including:

- ScotRail capacity must be expanded, not diminished, in order to provide a quality service, avoid widening inequalities and share social and economic benefits of high-quality, low-carbon transit.
- Low-emissions transport infrastructure for underserved regions with critical roles to play in Scotland's net zero aspirations must be invested in as a priority.

³ <https://transform.scot/2023/05/12/a-fossil-free-future-cpg-inquiry-into-the-decarbonisation-of-public-transport/>

- A robust, resilient and comprehensive network of infrastructure across Scotland to support electric vehicles is required, with a fair funding model for delivery.

In response to this, the Scottish Government committed to deliver a series of Just Transition Plans, focussed on sectors that the Commission identified as key to delivering national net zero targets:

- Built Environment and Construction;
- Land Use and Agriculture; and
- Transport.

To begin the development of these JTPs, the Scottish Government has published a series of discussion papers⁴ on each of the sectors to outline the key challenges and opportunities that the transition to net zero will bring in each sector. While the outcomes from the engagement process on these are awaited, the discussion paper on transport makes clear that a future Transport JTP will refer to the four “key sustainable travel behaviours” identified in the Scottish Government’s 20% reduction in car kilometres route-map, aimed at reducing car use, namely:

- Reducing the need to travel, by making use of sustainable online options;
- Living well locally, by choosing local destinations or reducing the distances driven;
- Switching modes to walk, wheel, cycle or public transport where feasible;
- Combining trips or sharing journeys with another person if car use remains the only feasible option.

The Scottish Government propose to draft targeted action plans and route maps for each sector will be prepared during 2023/24. SPT has engaged with the process to date and officers attended a recent stakeholder workshop which aimed to gather feedback and a range of insights on JTPs. While there is no formal deadline for comments as part of the process, officers are in the process of preparing a submission to the Scottish Government and will provide a further update to the next Committee.

3.3 Regional

3.3.1 Regional Transport Strategy (RTS)

Following approval of the final draft RTS by the Partnership in March, in line with due process it was submitted for approval by Scottish Ministers. Comments were received from Transport Scotland over the summer seeking clarification or minor amendment to the text of the RTS. Subsequently, on 14 July 2023, the SPT Chair received a letter from the Minister for Transport confirming approval of the RTS. The final RTS for publication will be presented to the Partnership in September, including details about any changes made as a result of TS’s comments although, as noted above, these are relatively minor.

3.3.2 Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy (SRBS)

Work is progressing on the Case for Change for the SRBS, including engagement with councils and operators over August and September, and the key findings from the Case for Change remain on track to be presented to the Partnership in September, with the SRBS recommended option(s) to be taken forward presented

⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/transition-built-environment-construction-sector-discussion-paper/>
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/transition-land-use-agriculture-discussion-paper/>
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/transition-transport-sector-discussion-paper/>

to the Partnership in March 2024. Further, as noted in a separate paper to this Committee, a potential regional bid to Transport Scotland's recently-launched Community Bus Fund could help fund any future work arising from the SRBS. Officers will keep members updated as matters progress.

3.3.3 RTS Governance Workstream

Members will recall that the new RTS contains a commitment for SPT and councils to undertake a review of transport governance and roles & responsibilities in the west of Scotland. Early internal work has begun on this workstream, and it is anticipated that dialogue with councils about how to take this forward will take place over coming months. At this stage, a report is planned to be presented to the Partnership in December 2023, detailing progress to date and an outline plan and timescales for completion of the workstream, including arrangements for public/wider stakeholder consultation and engagement.

3.3.4 Regional Active Travel Strategy (ATS)

The Regional Active Travel Strategy and Network and Infrastructure Delivery Plan will provide a framework for the long-term development of a cross-council boundary network of active travel routes across the region. In addition, a series of non-network related actions (e.g. bike sharing) will also be assessed. The outputs of the ATS will help to inform future investment decisions including which projects are funded through SPT's Capital Programme. Development of the ATS and Delivery Plan is now well underway, jointly funded through the Capital Programme and a £60,000 grant award from Sustrans Places for Everyone fund.

Initial focus is on the development of a Case for Change setting out the problems, objectives and vision for the strategy. This is being informed by extensive stakeholder engagement and will be followed by the development of options for the creation of a comprehensive regional active travel network.

A draft ATS and Delivery Plan will be presented to the Partnership for approval in March 2024, and following this a 12-week consultation period will take place. After reviewing the feedback from the consultation, the ATS and Delivery Plan will be finalised and submitted to the September 2024 meeting of the Partnership for final approval.

3.3.5 "Get Smart, Get Cycling" Event at Kelvinbridge Subway Station Park-and-Ride

As part of our ongoing commitment to encouraging active travel and as a means of continuing to encourage more sustainable travel choices and modal shift, SPT sought to harness the potential of the UCI Championships to promote a legacy of active and sustainable travel across the Strathclyde region. As such, on Sunday 13 August, SPT hosted a free, non-ticketed event at Kelvinbridge Subway Station park and ride where a number of local charities provided free cycling-based services and activities for adults and children. These events included:

- Bike for Good: a three hour "Dr Bike" bike repair service and promotion of their new "SwitchUp" affordable bike subscription service.
- Play Together on Pedals: providing free learn-to-ride sessions for pre-school and school-age children where all equipment is provided.
- Own Yer Bike: promoting accessible cycling through provision of trishaw rides, advice on bike maintenance, and promotion of their affordable, refurbished bike sale scheme which diverts unmaintained bikes from landfill.

SPT staff hosted the event and handed out promotional materials that included a range of SPT-branded cycling merchandise including reflectors, tyre pumps, lights and repair kits. The event was well attended and benefitted from spectators visiting to view the UCI Women’s Elite Road Race as well from a marketing campaign undertaken by SPT in advance of the event.

The event was very successful with all participating charities and attendees providing positive feedback. Play Together on Pedals highlighted that out of around 13 – 15 children who visited and were unable to cycle independently, four children (over a quarter) were able to do so by the time they left the event. Further opportunities for such events will be explored in future.

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 newly approved RTS, Local Transport Strategies, delivery of projects from SPT’s capital programme as well as undertaking liaison with partners in relation to other issues.

4. Committee action

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

5. Consequences

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| Policy consequences | <i>All workstreams noted in this report are in line with the policies of the new Regional Transport Strategy.</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.</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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