



Strategic Issues Update for the SPT area

Committee Strategy & Programmes

Date of meeting 9 September 2022

Date of report 31 August 2022

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

Further to previous reports¹, 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 February, a range of factors have emerged or grown in prominence which are having a significant impact on society and, in turn, the transport network. While the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic are still taking their toll, other issues such as the cost of living crisis and predicted recession are creating huge difficulties and uncertainty for the people and communities of the west of Scotland.

Public transport patronage remains very low when compared with pre-pandemic levels, with rail at 60% and the commercial bus network at 70-75%. The picture is better for some of the services provided by SPT, with Subway reaching on average between 80% and 85% of pre-pandemic levels, and supported bus services achieving 80%, 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 previous levels at 25%.

The reasons for this slow return to pre-Covid levels are varied and wide-ranging: changed behaviours arising from the pandemic such as working from home (WFH) or a hybrid of WFH/office working on different days of the week; industrial action on the rail network; and the cost of living crisis impacting on people's ability or desire to make journeys. In relation to the latter point, it is also worth highlighting that bus operators

¹ https://www.spt.co.uk/media/k11mcptq/sp180222_agenda12.pdf

have noted a marked decline in numbers of National Entitlement Card holders traveling by bus even though they travel fare “free”, potentially due to users wishing to save money by not visiting shopping or leisure destinations. Further, any anticipated growth in public transport patronage as a result of recent increases in the cost of petrol and diesel has not manifested itself to any extent.

A return in footfall to city centres across the UK remains highly variable and this too is having a significant impact on public transport usage. For Glasgow city centre, at the time of writing, figures for weekend footfall are up compared with pre-pandemic, while weekday footfall remains below previous levels. How long this trend continues remains to be seen although it is worth highlighting that Scottish Government Covid guidance continues to be “to encourage employers to facilitate hybrid and flexible working. This may have benefits which go beyond the need to control COVID-19, for example, supporting businesses and organisations’ sustainable operations.”²

The cumulative impact of all of the above on the public transport industry has been huge, as operators continue to try and achieve a sustainable position for future service provision. Issues with driver recruitment and retention are causing serious challenges in service operation, and the ending of Transport Scotland’s Network Support Grant funding (previously known as Covid Support Grant) in Autumn is particularly concerning for bus operators, with a further shrinking of an already depleted network a potential risk. Officers continue to monitor this situation closely as any expected replenishment of the network to pre-Covid levels through SPT subsidy would require revenue funding of a scale currently unavailable. Members are also advised the UK Department for Transport recently announced an extension of bus support grants for operators in England to March 2023, at a cost of £130million³.

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 for those in rural and deprived areas, and the many households in our region who have no access to a car. In Glasgow, for example, this equates to 55% of households.

However, SPT and partners across the region and Scotland as a whole are putting significant efforts into addressing these challenges. SPT is in regular communication with the Transport Minister, Transport Scotland (TS) and others about funding and wider solutions to the range of issues, and officers are guided that a major national campaign is soon to launch promoting a return to public transport, alongside a further campaign encouraging registration for the “free” bus travel for Under-22’s initiative. At local level, an initiative to encourage a return to Glasgow City Centre by public transport to aid the daytime and night-time economy is also being planned, led by Glasgow Chamber of Commerce. 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

In June, Transport Scotland published an information note on implementation of the municipal bus operator provisions of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, with the Transport Minister making a statement encouraging local transport authorities to consider utilising these powers. Guidance was also issued on the

² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-general-guidance-for-safer-workplaces/pages/working-arrangements/#:~:text=and%20business%20support-Hybrid%20working,businesses%20and%20organisations'%20sustainable%20operations.>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/130-million-to-protect-bus-services-across-the-country>

Workplace Parking Licensing provisions of the Act and SPT is guided that guidance and regulations on the other provisions of the Act, including in relation to franchising and Bus Service Improvement Partnerships, will be issued during 2023. SPT is undertaking further work exploring the potential presented by the provisions of the Act, as part of the development of the new Regional Transport Regional Strategy (RTS), building on previous work⁴ undertaken in partnership with Glasgow City Council and reported to the Committee in February. Officers will continue to update members on activity in relation to the provisions of the Act as matters progress.

3.2.2 Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2)

Transport Scotland has advised that, following the consultation on the STPR2 earlier this year, responses are in the process of being reviewed and analysed. Further appraisal work on the 45 recommendations put forward in the STPR2 is underway, and TS anticipate publishing the final STPR2 report and accompanying NTS Delivery Plan later in 2022. Officers continue to engage with TS in regard to this, and the STPR2 recommendation on Clyde Metro is the subject of a separate report to this Committee.

3.2.3 National Conversation on Rail

SPT is guided that the Scottish Government is in the process of launching the National Conversation on Rail announced earlier this year, as part of the transition of ScotRail becoming publicly owned and operated on 1 April 2022. The Conversation will encourage an open discussion and views on the future of Scotland's railways, and officers will update members on this in due course and a response to the Conversation will be presented for approval by a future Committee.

In addition, SPT has recently engaged with representatives of ScotRail Holdings to discuss how a more collaborative approach on rail related matters can be implemented, thus supporting the role of the regional transport authority in rail developments, and improvements to the public transport network across the region.

3.3 Regional

3.3.1 Regional Transport Strategy

Further to the report to the Partnership in June⁵, the 12-week public consultation on the new draft Regional Transport Strategy was launched on 5 August and will run until 28 October. News of the consultation launch was shared widely with the public, partners and stakeholders, including through social media.

Further to discussion at the Partnership in June, information sessions with Partnership members on the development of the new RTS are being planned and members will be notified of these in due course. Officers are also seeking opportunities to engage directly with councils and other partners and stakeholders over the period of the consultation and will continue to update the Partnership and Committee on progress on development of the new RTS over coming months.

⁴ Section 3.3 and Appendix 2, https://www.spt.co.uk/media/vh5prl5y/sp180222_agenda11.pdf

⁵ https://www.spt.co.uk/media/qz3gbqy3/p240622_agenda10.pdf

3.3.2 Active Travel

Members are reminded that the Scottish Government has committed to spending £320million per year⁶ – 10% of its total transport budget - on active travel infrastructure and initiatives by 2024/25, up from circa £150million in 2022-23. In preparation for this, Transport Scotland has initiated an Active Travel Transformation Project, seeking to ensure that the appropriate skills, resources, and project development and delivery processes are in place in those organisations expected to deliver results from this step-change in funding. SPT, directly and through a seconded representative of the Regional Transport Partnerships of Scotland from Hitrans, has been inputting to the Active Travel Transformation Project, as the significant increase in funding presents a huge opportunity for SPT and our constituent councils to play a key role in active travel development and delivery over coming years.

Further, and to that end, SPT is currently in the process of applying to Sustrans' Places for Everyone programme for funding to take forward the Regional Active Travel Strategy, which will set a framework for investment in active travel in the region in future years. Officers will advise of progress of this application and the outcomes of the Active Travel Transformation Project as matters progress.

3.3.3 Bus Partnership Fund Strategic Corridors Study/Community Bus Fund

Further to a previous report to the Committee⁷, SPT is working with Glasgow City Council on behalf of the regional Glasgow Bus Partnership to take forward a review of strategic bus corridors in the region. Funded through the Bus Partnership Fund, this study will undertake research and analysis on 5 key strategic bus corridors: Dumbarton Road, Pollokshaws Road, Paisley Road West, Maryhill Road and Great Western Road to identify beneficial improvement opportunities 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 is guided that Transport Scotland will soon launch a new 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 Autumn 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.

The Scottish Government has allocated £1 million in the Scottish Budget for development of the CBF in 2022-23. Beyond this, the recent Resource Spending Review allocated £46 million to the CBF for the remainder of the current Scottish Parliament session, with a further £30 million allocated in the Capital Spending Review. Transport Scotland is currently finalising how the fund might be used and has advised they will work with partners on the design of the CBF. Officers will continue to update members on this and other strategic bus issues as matters progress.

⁶ <https://www.transport.gov.scot/active-travel/developing-an-active-nation/#:~:text=Investing%20in%20Active%20Travel&text=The%20Scottish%20Government%20has%20committed,as%20creating%20segregated%20cycling%20lanes> .

⁷ Section 3.1.6, https://www.spt.co.uk/media/mdijzb5t/sp270821_agenda8.pdf

3.3.4 Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure

In January, the Scottish Government committed to a £30million investment in electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure, to be matched by an equivalent amount of private sector funding. Glasgow City Region (GCR) was awarded development funding to assess existing infrastructure and future requirements, and is now in the process of developing a strategy for this, the elements of which will complete in the last quarter of this financial year. In preparing these future plans, GCR has created a Taskforce, of which SPT has been invited to be a member, which will assist in the development of plans and consider other related matters. Officers will keep the Committee updated on progress in relation to this and related workstreams.

3.3.5 SPT Transport Summit

Officers are currently in the process of developing plans for a one-day SPT Transport Summit, expected to take place in late October. The aim of the Summit is to bring together senior politicians, officers, and decision-makers from across the region and beyond to discuss the significant challenges and opportunities facing transport in our area now and in the future. The Transport Minister has indicated a willingness to participate in the Summit and officers will seek to present a report to the Partnership in September with more detail on the agenda and programme for the day. However, a 'save the date' invitation will be issued as soon as possible to all Partnership members for diary planning purposes.

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 programme and those mentioned elsewhere in this report, as well as undertaking liaison with relevant organisations in relation to other issues.

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>

Name Neil Wylie
Title Director of Finance and Corporate Support

Name Valerie Davidson
Title Chief Executive

For further information, please contact *Bruce Kiloh, Head of Policy and Planning at bruce.kiloh@spt.co.uk*.