



## Bus for a Just Recovery

### Bus for Rural Areas

Bus services are critical for rural areas, keeping people connected - especially those who are younger, older and those who do not have access to a car.

The importance of transport links in rural areas was recognised in the The National Council of Rural Advisers' report setting out recommendations to Scottish Ministers in September 2018.

These were taken forward by Ministers in February 2019, with the announcement of a new Rural Economy Action Group. The advisers' report highlighted that the rural economy accounted was worth some £35 billion in 2015, 27% of the overall economy – with some 435,000 jobs. Around 20% of the population lives in rural areas, so their importance to the country as a whole cannot be under-estimated.

### Transport figures in two of the key desired outcomes of the proposed Rural Economy Framework.

Objective 9 concerns improved and inclusive access to rural housing solutions, and highlights the need to “Improve transport links and public transport to match evolving seasonal demand”.

Objective 10 seeks “a robust infrastructure, with improved and inclusive access to services, mobility and connectivity” in which one of the key actions is to “improve transport links and public transport.”

### A challenge for public transport provision in rural areas arises because of:

- low population density, meaning fewer people to serve
- high levels of car ownership
- highly diverse patterns of travel
- seasonal variations between peak and off-peak tourist seasons

This usually means that transport services cannot be self-supporting and require ongoing support from local authorities and other bodies.

Increased patronage of services will come from:

- consistency of funding, policy and provision over sustained periods
- high quality services in terms of vehicles, reliability and customer care

- routes and networks which deliver benefits for residents and visitors alike

In addition to straightforward revenue support from local authorities, there have been many successful trials of alternative methods of funding including:

- hypothecation of car parking revenue from designated tourist sites
- commercial sponsorship
- other fund-raising from volunteers or small charitable grants.

It has previously been argued that benefits in terms of cost saving and service delivery can be achieved by integrating services already provided for health, social services and home to school travel. However, there can be difficulties about ensuring that services meet the needs of both clients and commissioning authorities as well as budgetary problems.

**For all these reasons supporting bus services in rural areas is so crucial.**

Through sharing with others why bus is a great choice and by choosing bus instead of car ourselves, each one of us can make a positive investment in bus leading to better services and investment in zero emission vehicles.

Car dependency and forced car ownership is an issue in rural areas, and contributes to the emissions from transport - the biggest climate challenge for Scotland to address.

When the average bus produces less emissions than the average car, and can take up to 75 cars off the road - it is easy to see how bus can be a solution to the climate crisis.

Choosing bus can also improve health and tackle inequalities of access to services and opportunities.

Thanks to Chris Cheek for this contribution on rural buses and why they are so important to a just and green recovery from the pandemic.

