



Scottish Association for Public Transport

SCOTTISH TRANSPORT MATTERS

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This issue of "Scottish Transport Matters" focuses on the dire state of public transport resulting from the coronavirus pandemic. The problems facing transport are outlined in the next section. Rebuilding public transport patronage, urgently needed on environmental and social grounds, is discussed in an article by Paul Tetlaw in Section 2.

Social distancing is likely to continue for some time into the future, requiring greater financial support to maintain bus and train services made uneconomic through lower revenue earning capacity. A potential renaissance in car use is possible unless the Scottish Government and councils take steps to provide attractive public transport alternatives. Increasing subsidies to maintain the pre-existing pattern of bus and rail services will be difficult during this economic downturn. The best way forward is likely to be full integration of the public transport system, as described in Section 3 below.

Business failures and job losses are expected as a result of the lockdown. Scottish tourism is being badly affected with some Scottish hotels already closed permanently, bringing the prospect of a new "Highland Clearance". A green infrastructure investment programme will be needed to stimulate recovery. The UK government is continuing with the HS2 project. The Scottish Government should launch a programme of rail upgrades and electrification, more bus/rail interchanges, and urban street projects to promote walking, cycling and buses.

The next issue of Scottish Transport Matters will include the SAPT Annual Report and Treasurer's Report for 2019 due at the cancelled AGM in April. The SAPT recommendations on the Edinburgh City Mobility Plan, and proposals for a Very Light Rail Metro for Glasgow will also be covered.

There will be no SAPT public meetings in 2020 due to the coronavirus precautions. Next year should see better times.

We hope that you are keeping well during these difficult times for us all.

The coronavirus pandemic has caused a collapse in public transport use, following the lockdown and Government advice to make only essential journeys and avoid public transport if possible.

Buses: Bus companies are operating emergency timetables. On some routes, operators are teaming up to provide more frequent joint services for key workers. With 2 metre social distancing a 75-seater double decker can carry only around 18 passengers. So all services will be uneconomic and waiting travellers will have to get used to *Bus Full* signs. School transport will be a problem once schools return.

Ferries: CalMac are running a very limited service. Only essential journeys, services and supplies are allowed. 163 people travelled on Easter Sunday, compared with 21,570 last year. Stowaways are being intercepted, with two islanders stopped from trying to leave the Isle of Arran! With social distancing of 2 metres, ferries carry on average 17% of normal passenger capacity, though 91% of car capacity is available. So islands will miss out on any staycation boom this year. Some islanders are pressing for a ban on day-trippers. But the Arran Ferry Action Group says reduced capacity is “potentially catastrophic for the island economy” and compares cramped cabins of airliners carrying greater numbers than on the voluminous lounges and vast open deck spaces of large CalMac ferries.

Short-distance ferry routes where car travellers can remain in vehicles will avoid restrictions on car passengers: for instance Lochaline-Fishnish (Mull), Gigha, Cumbrae and Skye.

Trains: ScotRail are running around 40% of the full timetable, to be increased to 60% soon, but currently carrying only around 5% of normal passengers (see photo on right). Trains will have between 11% and 16% of normal capacity with 2 metre social distancing. A 1 metre distance will increase rail, bus and ferry capacity towards 50% of normal.



Almost empty 6-car trains leave Helensburgh for Edinburgh every 30 minutes. Photo: J.McCormick

Public Transport Recovery

As Covid-19 eases and the economy restarts, travel demand will grow. This could lead to a large modal shift to car, increasing congestion and emissions (the next serious world crisis?), and disadvantaging people without cars.

The Scottish government and most councils are encouraging more walking and cycling. But public transport use will grow more slowly as:

- Commuting is unlikely to return to pre-covid level due to continuation of some home working, and higher unemployment
- On-line shopping will reduce shopping trips
- Leisure and tourist trips by train may be less enjoyable with face masks now mandatory

The government has commendably increased funding to maintain a reasonable level of bus and train services for key workers. But as the economy heads into recession, the public purse will be under mounting pressure.



Empty Waverley station:

Photo: BBC

A new strategy for funding buses and trains is needed. Bus services will almost all need public subsidy for the foreseeable future. The Scottish Government and councils should take the opportunity to make funding of bus operators and ScotRail conditional on co-operating to provide an efficient integrated public transport system. The advantages of this approach are investigated in Section 3.

Rebuilding Public Transport Patronage

**by Paul Tetlaw: Convener of Transform Scotland's Policy Forum
and SAPT Committee Member**

The drop in public transport patronage during the coronavirus lockdown has been unprecedented in its scale and extent. While restricting access to public transport to key workers was essential for an effective lockdown we now need to consider how to rebuild patronage and plan for the long term. Crucially, we should not forget lessons from history of previous major disruptions to society, these events dim in people's minds and life returns to normal – albeit this may be a 'new normal'. Human beings are social animals who like to come together and mix in numbers – they like to gather at pubs, restaurants, theatres, cinemas, sporting events and indeed their workplaces and an efficient public transport system is an essential component of a return to normal life.

The coronavirus situation will pass but the climate emergency remains and requires urgent action. The same holds true for our poor public health record and the impacts on health of poor air quality and inactive lifestyles. As we emerge from the economic impacts of the virus there will be an ever more pressing need to protect and regenerate our town and city centres. Of equal importance is the need to ensure that our transport system is socially just. The lockdown highlighted some serious and alarming social justice issues where those with a car were very much favoured over those without – such as for food shopping, a virus test, attending hospitals or other essential activities. The gradual release of lockdown continues to favour those with a car. A sustainable transport system with a comprehensive public transport network at its core has a major role to play in addressing all these challenges.

One remarkable feature of the lockdown instructions was the dramatic improvements in local air quality from the much lower levels of road traffic. These reduced levels of traffic encouraged many more people to walk and cycle and emergency measures taken by councils to create more space for active travel are to be heartily welcomed as was the government advice to take daily exercise. However these benefits are rapidly diminishing as the roads once again become dangerous and car dominated. Permanent measures must be put in place to encourage and promote active travel modes and change the mind-set of many motorists. These should also include a reallocation of road space throughout urban areas to extend bus lanes and give priority status at junctions. Bus remains the primary public transport option for the public at large and bus journey times should be reliable and competitive with the car. Coupled with bus priority measures a bus scrappage scheme to replace older buses with modern low emission ones would boost the economy and help deliver improved air quality. We are fortunate in Scotland to have a major bus manufacturer in Alexander Dennis in Falkirk.

Whilst the need for social distancing has understandably impacted on public transport the messaging around this has created nervousness among the population about using the mode. However, we need to put the risk of public transport use alongside the many risks associated with our transport systems. For example you are 20 times more likely to die in an accident when travelling by car than by train and hundreds of times more likely to be seriously injured; similarly the bus is a much safer form of transport than the car. Among those most seriously affected by the virus are ones suffering from obesity and its associated diseases and those who have been impacted by poor air quality and developed breathing difficulties. So a growth in car traffic at the expense of public transport and active travel will bring with it serious long term detriments and will render it ever more difficult to tackle the challenges ahead to which I have already referred.

It is essential that we use this crisis to create a green recovery. The 'new normal' should see a major investment in sustainable transport modes that will not only allow us to tackle the numerous challenges ahead but create jobs for many who will soon find themselves out of work.

The health crisis and the necessary short term measures have created a unique opportunity to rethink the public transport offering. Further electrification of the rail network should be a priority and the Williams Review of the rail industry is still pending. We do however know it recommends a much closer link between train and track and we now have the opportunity to tackle one of the other longstanding issues – that of fares and ticketing. The aim must be to create an integrated ticketing system across all public transport modes combined with true physical integration of the modes. The Scottish Government has the levers to achieve this and there has never been a better opportunity. Now is the time for the Government to create a world class sustainable transport system as a key element of a green recovery.

Bus and Rail Covid Financial Crisis

By the end of March, concessionary bus travel had fallen by 81%. The Scottish Government announced emergency support for the bus industry, continuing to pay operators the concessionary travel and Bus Service Operator Grant at the pre-covid rate of £260 million per year. A further £47 million has been allocated to cover increased bus services over 8 weeks from Phase 2 of the lockdown.

For ScotRail and the Caledonian Sleeper, the existing franchise agreements have been temporarily varied for a minimum period of six months. During this time the train operators will receive increased payments of around an additional £250 million to cover operating costs, necessary because of reduced revenues, with a small management fee paid at the end of the variation period subject to satisfactory performance.

This is in addition to the subsidy of £639 million paid to Abellio ScotRail in 2018/2019. Passenger journeys, at 98 million, showed no increase from the previous year, though the number of ScotRail staff increased by 7.2% to a total of 5168 (source: Office of Road and Rail).

Regaining bus and train passengers and revenue could take a lengthy period as confidence gradually returns and covid-19 finally recedes as have previous major diseases such as TB, smallpox and polio. But as mentioned in Section 1, working from home and internet shopping are expected to continue for many, so travel demand is not expected to return to the previous pattern.

Making additional support payments for buses and ScotRail ad infinitum is not going to be easy for councils and government, with other social priorities also looking for a share of dwindling public funds.

New Transport Framework Needed

Most bus services operated on a commercial basis before lockdown. But public transport for the foreseeable future will need greater subsidy. Some places may be left without any public transport. To avoid this, bus and rail services should be integrated into a more affordable national transport system.

Rail: ScotRail services should be reviewed to cut rising costs. ORR figures show that ScotRail trains on average carried only 62 passengers in 2018, one of the lowest load factors across UK train companies. (ScotRail train capacity varies from over 500 seats on an 8-car Edinburgh-Glasgow electric to 140 seats on a 2-car Class 156 or 158). ScotRail staff cost £301M in 2017/18 compared with £49M for fuel costs.

A review of timetables for the post-covid situation is now needed. On urban routes, particularly around Glasgow, demand is concentrated at commuter peaks, though probably less so in future. On some routes with 15-minute service one option could be to reschedule trains to run every 20 minutes. This would have minimal impact on passengers but could cut train miles by up to 25%. For instance by adjusting stopping patterns, Ayr/Gourock-Glasgow trains could be reduced from 4 per hour to every 20 minutes. Some short-distance rail services could be consolidated with longer routes, with trains lengthened to maintain overall seating capacity. For instance extending Glasgow-Newton trains to Hamilton and Motherwell and lengthening trains to 6-cars would help connectivity from Glasgow Southside to Lanarkshire, allowing Argyle line trains to be rescheduled to again include Lanark, so reducing congestion in Central High Level.

Bus: Scottish bus usage has been declining since the 1960s as car ownership rises. Bus deregulation based on a competitive framework has not reversed this trend. International comparisons show that European countries with integrated bus and rail services have seen bus usage increase. With most post-covid bus services now needing financial support, and some rural routes at risk, the time has come to re-organise bus funding to support a fully co-ordinated national rail and bus public transport network.

The Bus Service Operator Grant (BSOG) subsidises any bus service including those duplicating other bus services and trains. BSOG should be replaced by an **Integrated Transport Grant** focused on bus services that are specified by transport authorities and operated as concessions as part of co-ordinated transport plans. A higher level of bus funding could be allocated from the transport budget if the rail subsidy can be reduced. Co-ordinating buses with trains will also increase rail revenue, further reducing the rail subsidy. Some unnecessary duplication of services could be saved by a well-planned co-ordinated network.

Easy bus/rail interchange and ticketing is key to a successful integrated transport system. A number of areas already have convenient interchanges, for instance Lanark, Partick and Fort William, though without bus/rail co-ordination these do not achieve their full potential. HITRANS has plans for a new interchange at Inverness. A programme of new bus/rail interchanges throughout the country could be part of a green initiative to integrate public transport and boost employment in the construction industry.

SAPT is preparing an Integrated Transport paper which will be sent to the Transport Secretary.

BUS and TRAM

The First Minister of Scotland announced on 18th June that face coverings will be mandatory on all public transport services (including taxis and private hire vehicles) and in stations and airports from Monday 22 June.

Main construction work on the Edinburgh Tram Newhaven extension is now restarting. This will encompass the existing sites on Lindsay Road, Melrose Drive and Constitution Street, starting from 15th June. Main construction works on Leith Walk from Elm Row to Crown Place will start on 22 June.

In the seventh week of Transport Focus's Covid-19 travel survey over 2000 people were consulted about their current travel behaviour and attitudes to travel in future during the coronavirus outbreak:

- Public transport use still low. Some more driving and perceived volume of traffic still increases.
- Attitudes towards provision of hand sanitiser on public transport, use of face coverings outside the home, and social distancing on public transport remain consistent
- 61% agree that they will feel safer using public transport with everyone wearing a face covering. 92% agree that as more people start to use public transport social distancing (at 2 metres) will not always be possible

Transport Secretary Michael Mathieson has announced that, due to the effect of Covid-19, introducing low emission zones in the four biggest cities by the end of 2020 is no longer practicable. Pleas have been made for free local public transport as well as added impetus to active travel (S9 May). Edinburgh City Council has revived suggestions for fewer bus stops but it is claimed that this would increase queues at bus stops at a time when buses have severely curtailed occupancy due to social distancing rules (S9May). A Dalton looks at ways of raising public transport use in Edinburgh. Use of facecovers may allow use of 40% (or more) of seated capacity and reduce the need for emergency financial support – but working from home is likely to remain at higher levels while others may prefer to use cars in streets still with less motorised traffic (S15May). Lothian Buses are expecting a £6m loss of income over the current year while the City Council has lost £10m of on-street parking revenue due to temporary cessation of charges.

In Edinburgh, income from new bus lane cameras in Liberton Road reached almost £300,000 in the period from mid-June 2019 to mid-February 2020. Neil Greig of IAM Roadsmart sees this as a failure as the essential purpose of bus lanes is to keep other vehicles out of lanes (EN 28Apr). Passengers on Edinburgh trams are down 90% since late March with similar falls on the Glasgow Subway. Progress is being made on compensation to the operators similar to that made to bus operators (S1May)

Stagecoach reports that local buses are running at only 17% of 2019 levels and do not anticipate a full return to 2019 style operation due to some permanent shifts to working from home, shopping from home, home education and telemedicine – though, on the positive side, buses could gain from pressures for a greener economy and reduced car use (S 29 May). Meantime, half of Stagecoach bus drivers and engineers are on furlough (S 4Apr). McGills Buses report a 90% fall in custom and have slashed services (S14Apr)

Wrightbus, based in Northern Ireland, have been seeking more orders for their hydrogen buses for city operation (as in Aberdeen) but are facing severe financial pressures/ liquidation. It has been preparing to deliver the world's first doubledeck hydrogen bus to Aberdeen (S&EN23Apr)

FirstBus in Glasgow has mothballed many buses and introduced what is basically a Sunday service level on all days. (S 3Apr). Coach firms, including Prentice Westwood of Newtongrange, have also been badly affected by a collapse in usage.

Specialist Leisure Group, which includes the Shearing brand, extensive Scottish tours from Easter to October, and hotels has already gone into administration (H23May,S26May)

RAIL

ScotRail reports 97.6% of trains ran to time in April, helped by the reduced level of service introduced due to Covid19. Some services have since been restored but usage is still well below previous levels and affected by social distancing regulations. (H9May) LNER is requiring pre-booking of seats to ensure Covid19 regulations are met. Avanti West Coast is also advising pre-booking to ensure space is available (H16May)

Repairs to the Cairngorm funicular railway have been approved by the National Park Authority. Cost is estimated at £10m and Scottish Government approval is now being sought. The railway has been closed since September 2018 due to structural problems. Before Government approval no date can be set for reopening (H23May). But now, Audit Scotland have recommended full reconsideration of options open to Cairngorm Mountain Limited.

Greengauge 21 have published a report "High-Speed Rail and Scotland". Current HS2 Ltd plans do not extend north of the Manchester-Leeds-York axis, but the report suggests that adding a line northwards from Manchester to Glasgow/Edinburgh would have a strong economic case. New HSL is recommended from Rutherglen to Carstairs, through East Lothian, and from Oxenholme to Lancaster, with other sections of track upgraded. Electrification from the Central Belt to Perth, Inverness and Aberdeen would improve connections from north Lanarkshire via Stirling, and from Edinburgh via Dundee.

The Times wrote that the private car would increasingly be seen as the safest way to travel, with the government actively promoting it as an alternative to public transport.

Scotsman transport correspondent Alastair Dalton predicted that ministers would want to reduce the pressures on public transport by encouraging active travel while also wanting to cut the extra support which had doubled for rail firms.

Arup won a contract from Network Rail for design and engineering studies and assessment of Portobello Jn, with further options including remodelling of Niddrie South Jn, electrification and resignalling of the Edinburgh Suburban Line and work on the Scotland East to England Connectivity Programme. Retired electric train 314209 is moving to Brodie Engineering in Kilmarnock as part of the Scottish Enterprise project to create a hydrogen train.

ScotRail have ceased using loco-hauled Mk2s on the Fife Circle peak services.

Robert Foster of Skipton wrote that the doubling of subsidy in thirty years could be explained by the cost of infrastructure projects and by too many trains running. Leeds-Edinburgh had gone from two a day to two an hour and Scotland had huge overprovision of trains: it was unnecessary to have 4x8-car trains every 15 minutes between Glasgow and Edinburgh on one route plus several others over the other three routes.

AVIATION

Edinburgh Airport has attacked government plans for 14 day quarantine for incoming passengers. This will hit prospects for in-tourism and deter bookings of foreign holidays by residents in Britain as quarantine would apply on return. 'Air bridges' on specified corridors may ease the problem.

Ryanair plans to restore 40% of its flight schedule by 1 July. Since mid-March there has been a skeleton service of 30 flights per day. Edinburgh Airport has shrunk from 581 take-offs and landings a week to 16. In April Heathrow passenger numbers fell by 97% compared to 2019.

EasyJet passenger arrivals in UK are down 99%. Workforce is to be cut by 30%.

Oban Airport is to use drones for trials of medical supplies to islands

FERRIES & SHIPPING

CalMac needs additional millions of pounds from the Scottish Government because of huge loss of passengers and car traffic, carrying only 5% of normal traffic at what is usually the busiest period. CalMac received £139 million subsidy during the last financial year.

Research has confirmed that storms are growing stronger due to the effects of global warming, threatening the reliability of ferry services. Future policy on ship and terminal design should reflect this.