



WORKING TOGETHER TO COMBAT POVERTY

Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee: Transport (Scotland) Bill, September 2018

1. About the Poverty Alliance

The Poverty Alliance is the national anti-poverty network in Scotland. We are an independent organisation with over 230 members drawn from the voluntary and public sectors, trade unions, researchers, faith groups and individuals with direct experience of poverty. We have a number of key policy areas that provide the focus for our activities; addressing low incomes, supporting services to reduce poverty, enhancing the participation of people with direct experience of poverty in policy development processes, and addressing attitudes to poverty.

2. Background to submission

The Poverty Alliance welcomes the introduction of the Transport Bill. *Every Child, Every Chance: The Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2018 – 2022* recognises the importance of transport in contributing towards targets set by the Child Poverty Act – both through its impact on income and costs. We consider that the Bill provides an opportunity to build upon this, and consider how public transport is provided in such a way as to better support people on low incomes and contribute towards the reduction of poverty in Scotland. Of particular interest is section 2 of the Bill, concerning the improvement of bus services.

This submission has been informed by the Poverty Alliance's community engagement and research activity, including a discussion group held as part of our Get Heard Scotland programme.

3. Transport and poverty

Transport has a critical role to play in the lives of people experiencing poverty. It helps to maintain social connections, supports access to essential services, and facilitates access to employment training opportunities. Yet too often, people on low incomes are prevented from accessing these opportunities due to affordability and availability issues; something that can both contribute towards and intensify the experience of poverty. Indeed, research found that over 1 million people in Scotland were living in areas at high risk of transport poverty¹.

4. Barriers to transport faced by people on low incomes

From the Poverty Alliance's extensive community engagement experience, we know that issues around transport are of critical concern to people on low incomes.



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These issues include:

- **Affordability**

The cost of transport – and particularly bus services - is an issue that is repeatedly raised by people experiencing poverty. Too often people on low incomes are prevented from accessing transport due to cost, or have no choice but to spend relatively large proportions of their incomes on transport.

One participant in research that we undertook on child poverty in Aberdeenshire told us:

“And a single into Aberdeen is, kind of, £13.10, and, often, you can get a return for £13. It’s absolutely nuts.”

This adds weight to an existing body of evidence highlighting the high cost of bus fares, particularly for people living in more rural areas.ⁱⁱ

While concessionary travel schemes are available for some groups, it is clear from our experience that the majority of people on low incomes are unable to access these schemes. For example, our work in Aberdeenshire found limited awareness of the Jobcentre Plus Discount Card. There are also relatively limited criteria for access, with many people experiencing poverty not qualifying.

- **Service coverage**

As well as the cost of transport, the availability of bus services is a second major barrier faced by people on low incomes, who often live in areas which are either under-served or not at all served by bus services.

While the problems of route coverage are acute for people living in rural areas, they also exist in urban areas. The Poverty Alliance facilitated a discussion – as part of our Get Heard Scotland initiative – at a community group in Easterhouse, Glasgow in which participants spoke of how – while bus services are available in the community – many of them do not run on routes that would provide them with access to the services and facilities that they need.

5. Impact of barriers to transport

Through our engagement with communities affected by poverty, we know of the impact which affordability and service coverage factors can have, including:

- **Increased risk of social isolation and difficulties maintaining social connections**

For people experiencing poverty, transport services – and particularly bus services - are critical to maintaining social connections. Yet due to the high cost of travel and lack of coverage in some – particularly rural – areas, people on low incomes can find it difficult to maintain these connections and can be at increased risk of social isolation.

Participants in research undertaken by the Poverty Alliance in Aberdeenshire highlighted this risk, as well as the impact of losing bus services:

“I used to go doon to my daughter every week, but I dinnae go doon at all hardly noo, and then because there was a local bus took me doon, and then I could get a bus tae take me back but that’s nae on anymore.”

“There were no buses. All of their (the participant’s children’s) meetings with friends and everything, you were traveling. You know, you had to get in the car to take them. So they’ve relied more and more heavily on the internet and speaking to friends via Facebook and by online games.”

- **Limiting of access to employment and education opportunities**

Low paid jobs often involve early or late shift work, with the modern labour market increasingly also involving insecure and irregular work. People in this type of employment require a flexible and affordable transport system that meets their needs, but we know that often this is not available to them.

As a result, high transport costs limit the employment opportunities available to people (given that the costs of commute can often outweigh low wages). Indeed, the Poverty and Inequality Commission identified a lack of access to transport as one of the key barriers to employment.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Commission also identified issues faced by young people in paying for transport, backing up findings from our work in Aberdeenshire, where young people told us that the cost of transport represents a significant barrier to them entering the labour market and engaging in education.^{iv}

- **Access to services**

Access to high quality public services such as health, education, social security and childcare services, is essential in tackling poverty. Yet – due to unaffordable or unavailable transport – these services can often be inaccessible or only be accessible at high cost.



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This issue is of particular concern in rural areas, where dispersed services mean that individuals are often forced to spend significant amounts of their low incomes in order to access their rights and utilise basic public services.

6. Recommendations for the Transport Bill

Transport should feature as a key component of all local authorities' local child poverty action reports; however the Transport Bill can also contribute towards poverty reduction efforts, as identified in *Every Child, Every Chance*. It is welcome that the Bill provides local authorities with additional powers over bus services in their area, and this has the potential to address ongoing market failures of affordability and coverage.

There are areas in which the Bill could be strengthened in order to more strongly and clearly recognise the importance of high quality, affordable bus services to people on low incomes, and to recognise the role that access to affordable transport has to play in poverty reduction. This could be done in a number of ways, for example by:

- Including within the requirements of bus service improvement plans the additional requirement of detailing how the measures proposed will contribute towards the reduction of poverty and/or better meet the needs of people on low incomes.
- Making provision within the Bill for expanded concessionary travel schemes, particularly for people on low incomes.
- Taking action to reduce – through regulation if necessary - fares, given the clear failure of the market to deliver affordable bus services.

7. Conclusion

The Transport Bill provides an opportunity to ensure that Scotland's transport system – and in particular its bus services – better supports people experiencing poverty. As it stands, the Bill has the potential to improve the current situation but it would be further improved by more explicit recognition of the challenges faced by people experiencing poverty, in particular by addressing affordability issues. We encourage the Committee to further explore the ways in which this strengthening could take place.

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ⁱ Sustrans (August 2016), *Transport Poverty in Scotland*, https://www.sustrans.org.uk/sites/default/files/file_content_type/transport_poverty_in_scotland_report.pdf

ⁱⁱ Citizens Advice Scotland, June 2016, *Round the Bend: A review of local bus provision by Scottish Citizens Advice Bureaux*, https://www.cas.org.uk/system/files/publications/round_the_bend_0.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Poverty and Inequality Commission, February 2018, *Advice on the Scottish Government's Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2018*, <https://povertyinequality.scot/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Child-Poverty-Delivery-Plan-advice-Final-Version-23-February-2018.pdf>

^{iv} John H. McKendrick, Fiona McHardy and Peter Kelly, April 2018, *Tackling Child Poverty in Aberdeenshire: lessons from local voices*, Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit & the Poverty Alliance