

South West of Scotland Transport Partnership (SWestrans)

Equality Outcomes 2021-2025

SWestrans is the Regional Transport Partnership (RTP) for the South West of Scotland and was established by the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005, which created seven RTPs in Scotland. It covers the same area as Dumfries and Galloway Council and NHS Dumfries and Galloway.

The Partnership Board includes members nominated by Dumfries and Galloway Council, NHS Dumfries and Galloway, and South of Scotland Enterprise. It has a wide range of strategy and policy responsibilities relating to transport, as well as a number of operational responsibilities, primarily supporting socially necessary bus services and assisting with the delivering of school transport with Dumfries and Galloway Council.

We are committed to contributing to the National Transport Strategy (NTS2) priority to reduce inequality and the associated outcomes to ensure everyone in Scotland will share in the benefits of a modern and accessible transport system that:

- Will provide fair access to services we need
- Will be easy to use for all
- Will be affordable for all

To ensure that equality issues are fully addressed, this outcome report sets out the range of equalities issues facing SWestrans and its operations, the outcomes that we have set and the actions to be taken to meet these outcomes.

Issue – Bus publicity and journey information

Evidence shows that those with protected characteristics are more likely to use and rely on public transport, especially bus services. Communicating when services are scheduled for, where services are (real time passenger information) and what safety and accessibility measures are in place on these services are all imperative for confidence in the public transport network.

The frequency and nature of the changes made to local bus services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted a variety of issues with how we currently communicate service information and timetables to the public.

The Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland (MACS), when addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on equalities and human rights, shared that there has been a lack of information and advice about availability of public transport and assistance. Disabled people and/or older people with mobility needs have found the significant reduction in public transport services to be particularly difficult to deal with and often do not have access to reliable and accurate information when they are trying to make travel plans. Furthermore, a recent Disability Equality Scotland (DES) poll shows that people did not know what to do or what services were/are in place.

Whilst these issues have been exacerbated by circumstances in the last year, they existed prior to the pandemic. The Bus Passenger Survey for the South West of Scotland, undertaken by Transport Focus in 2018, showed a decline in passenger satisfaction in bus publicity. These results reflected the removal of the limited real-time information that was previously in place, the decrease in printed timetables, and the increase in passengers using mobile technology to access service information.

As we continue through, and emerge from, the pandemic, there is a need to ensure that our information is regularly updated as travel guidance and services change and that this information is available to all. Providers are increasingly relying on the provision of service information through digital means. This excludes those disabled people or older people who may be less likely to have access to or the skills and confidence to use digital technology and those who cannot afford to be digitally connected. This is an issue likely to be experienced in our region where those using the national concessionary card make up a high proportion of local bus patronage.

We need to improve our understanding of the barriers in accessing information, improve our processes to accommodate people who experience these barriers and promote these. Access to public transport information in a variety of languages and formats is available on request, however this offer has not been adequately publicised and is therefore not utilised.

Inequality	The communication needs of different protected characteristics need to be more considered. Too often people do not have the information required, in the right format, to plan and undertake their journey.
Equality outcome 1	Everyone will be able to easily access and understand the local bus service information they need.
Protected Characteristics Groups Supported	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Disability • Gender • Race
General equality duty	Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
Link to strategic priority	Contributes to the achievement of the National Transport Strategy (NTS2) priority to reduce inequality and outcomes that transport will be easy to use for all and provide fair access to services.
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve at-stop bus publicity (as well as improving at-stop facilities) • Improve printed publicity • Improve digital publicity • Improve communications and language to ensure that our information and services are accessible • Engagement with stakeholder groups to understand information gaps • Adopt additional methods of informing our communities

Issue – Public Transport Provision

Evidence shows that a lack of public transport services and options disproportionately impacts on disabled people, women and the young and old.

This impact is compounded in rural areas, such as Dumfries and Galloway, where the current level of public transport provision, including accessible transport, and connectivity issues can act as barriers. These barriers contribute to a range of socioeconomic issues including difficulty accessing suitable employment, education and training opportunities and healthcare; and increasing social isolation, out-migration of young people and 'forced car ownership' (transport poverty).

The wider public transport sector faces great uncertainty due to the impact of low patronage associated with COVID-19 restrictions, and the long-term risk that travel demand and behaviour will be sustained. In terms of the bus network within Dumfries and Galloway, this poses a significant challenge as provision across the region was already a complex fragile balancing act in which the inter-dependent factors of commercial local bus, supported local bus and school transport all inter-connect and cannot be sustained individually. There is a real risk of service reduction across our local public transport network.

Retaining transport links is essential as they are often a lifeline service for many for our residents who do not have any alternative transport options. A study of bus passengers in the region showed that 56% cited their reason for using the bus as 'no option to travel by other means' (this is 12% higher than the Scottish average).

There is also a recognition that public transport needs to be delivered in a more flexible way so that people can access the services/opportunities they need at the time they need. Bus service frequencies across much of the region are already low, with some areas having no service in the off-peak periods. It is also more difficult to integrate services in rural areas given the dispersed residents and low population densities. This low demand can lead to high fares for users and/or need for subsidy.

Public transport systems tend to be designed to serve the needs of commuters with traditional 'nine-to-five' working patterns. Public transport timetables and routes are, as a result, not designed to fit travel behaviour that is shaped by unpaid care work and part-time employment. The hours over which bus services in the region operate constrain use of the network early and later in the day e.g., to access shift-based employment and evening social & leisure opportunities (young people). SWestrans welcomes the introduction of free bus travel for those who are aged under 19, however it is essential that there is an appropriate level of service for this benefit to be realised fully.

Inequality	Protected characteristic groups are more likely than most to use public transport and tend to be disproportionately affected by service reductions. The current local transport network is at risk and needs to be more flexible to meet the needs of those who need it most.
Equality outcome 2	Public transport services are more flexible to meet the identified travel needs of those who need them most.
Protected Characteristics Groups Supported	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Disability • Gender
General equality duty	Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
Link to strategic priority	<p>Contributes to the achievement of the NTS2 priority to reduce inequality, specifically the outcome to ensure that disadvantaged communities and individuals have fair access to the transport services they need.</p> <p>Links to the Council Plan, 2017-22: Improve public transport timetables across the region, particularly connections between services and campaign for the retention of rural bus routes.</p> <p>SWestrans has a statutory duty to secure the provision of public transport services it considers appropriate to secure to meet any public transport requirements within its area that are not being met.</p>
Activities	<p><u>Retention of transport links</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with national agencies and transport operators to protect key public transport links • Assist Dumfries and Galloway Council with its Public Transport and Travel Transformation work • Advocate for increased financial support for rural bus services <p><u>Adapting our services to better suit those who need them most</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making sure the voice of protected characteristics is heard within the new Regional Transport Strategy and Delivery Plan.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work with the Third Sector, NHS and DGC to enhance the capacity of Community Transport and trial new service solutions through the Public Social Partnership.• Develop, design and implement a more flexible transport delivery model.• Trial Demand Responsive Transport solutions.• Work with young people representatives so they can make full benefit of free travel for U22s.• Work with the Local Employability and Skills Partnership and South of Scotland Enterprise to identify transport solutions to ensure sustainable, public and active travel access to employment, education and training locations.• Review and update the existing local bus Root and Branch Policy to reflect changes in transport demand.
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Issue – Transport Affordability and Transport Poverty

Disabled people, people with mental health conditions and people from ethnic minority groups are more likely to live in poverty and women and disabled people are more likely to experience severe material deprivation. Dumfries and Galloway Council's 'Future approach to tackling poverty and inequality for Dumfries & Galloway' (Jan 2021) shares that 'the statistics on poverty and Dumfries and Galloway are stark'. Around one in five Dumfries and Galloway residents live in poverty. On the tighter definition of income deprivation, 11.5% of the population are considered income deprived.

Transport was an issue that came out strongly, particularly from people with lived experience of poverty, through consultation undertaken by the Poverty and Inequality Commission. The National Transport Strategy 2 (Feb 2020) sets out that the single most important factor cited by those on low incomes as the greatest transport-related barrier is cost. People in low income households are excluded from maintaining social connections or accessing employment or training opportunities due to the affordability and availability of transport options. Beyond the practical issues, those living in poverty have told the Poverty and Inequality Commission about feeling isolated, about the anxiety that unreliable transport causes them, and about the stress they feel due to high transport costs putting pressure on already stretched budgets.

People living in poverty are more likely to travel by bus, while those in higher income households are more likely to travel by car. Public transport is therefore important to those on low incomes to allow them access to services and facilities they need. Locally, the price of fares on commercially funded bus services and the lack of integrated ticketing across multiple operators/routes is an issue. An analysis of bus fares against the equivalent cost of travelling by car has highlighted the financial disadvantage placed on those reliant on public transport services (South West Scotland Transport Study, 2020).

Research undertaken by Sustrans stated that over one million people in Scotland also live in areas that are at risk of 'transport poverty'. People are deemed to be at risk of transport poverty when they do not have access to essential services or work due to limited affordable transport options and this then compounds their financial pressures i.e. cannot access employment or need to spend resources on private vehicles. Research into the Poverty and Deprivation Position in Dumfries and Galloway (Dec 2020) found that 39% of data zones in Dumfries and Galloway are considered Access Deprived (Access to Services domain, which looks at travel times to services), equating to 5.7% of Scottish data zones. This is higher than all other comparable local authorities with the exception of Fife. The Council's approach to tackling poverty and inequality includes an objective to reduce the financial pressures on people in poverty, and states that public transport is poor, 'putting increased emphasis on having a private car, a rural poverty penalty for those who cannot afford one'.

Inequality	The affordability of transport and transport poverty is an issue across Scotland and within Dumfries and Galloway, especially in remote rural areas. Protected groups are more likely to be living in poverty and the lack of affordable transport contributes to the socio-economic disadvantages they experience.
Equality outcome 3	Access and affordability issues are reduced through new transport solutions developed with partners.
Protected Characteristics Groups Supported	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Disability • Gender • Race
General equality duty	Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
Link to strategic priority	<p>Contributes to the achievement of the NTS2 priority to reduce inequality, specifically the outcome to ensure that disadvantaged communities and individuals have fair access to the transport services they need. The strategy identifies that the cost of transport is a barrier, including the Policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transport will be affordable for all: people have different incomes and our transport system will not exclude people from mobility by making it unaffordable. • We will minimise the connectivity and cost disadvantages faced by island communities and those in remote rural and rural areas, including safeguarding of lifeline services. <p>Dumfries & Galloway Council's 'Future approach to tackling poverty and inequality for Dumfries & Galloway' is intended to be taken forward by a number of partner organisations. It includes an objective (3.3) to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the rural poverty transport penalty through enhancing investment in community transport, and through exploring the development of affordable car loan products, particularly for those seeking employment.
Activities	The Poverty and Inequality Commission's Transport and Poverty in Scotland Report (2019) made recommendations that, if implemented, would start to move the transport system closer to meeting their principles. Many of these need to be actioned nationally.

	<p>Regionally, we will work to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Involve individuals and communities with lived experience of poverty in identifying needs, and designing transport services to respond to those needs. We will engage with volunteers with lived experience of poverty through the Tackling Poverty Reference Group.• Explore a range of ways of making travel more affordable. We will lead on the Council's Transformation review of fees/fares and work with transport operators and Transport Scotland to encourage and assist with integrated ticketing options and reduced fare schemes.• Examine ways of addressing the transport challenges faced by people on low incomes in remote and rural areas. We will identify areas where affordability of transport services is affecting access to health appointments and employment opportunities and work with partners to pilot and deliver transport solutions.• We will continue to investigate how new and innovative transport methods (e.g. demand-responsive transport, autonomous vehicles, and Mobility-as-a-Service) can be used to address transport barriers faced by people on low incomes and to connect particularly remote and rural communities.• Information from Young Scot, the Scottish Youth Parliament and the local 10,000 Voices Study revealed that key issues for young people include the availability and cost of public transport. SWestrans will work to encourage use of the new free bus scheme for U22s – transport affordability issues will only be alleviated for young people if they have adequate access to services. We will also undertake work to mitigate the unintended consequences that the scheme may have on other users, i.e. that it does not drive up the single adult fare.
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Issue – Evidence and Engagement

The National Transport Strategy 2 and Scotland's Accessible Travel Framework both share a vision that 'all disabled people can travel with the same freedom, choice, dignity and opportunity as other citizens'.

There are still problems for disabled people using the transport system in Dumfries and Galloway. This means disabled people sometimes do not feel supported and comfortable when travelling within our region, and sometimes cannot make journeys at all or choose not to make journeys due to the difficulties involved.

Inclusivity plays a key role in achieving an accessible and equitable transport network. The Accessible Travel Framework states that everyone involved in delivering transport information, services and infrastructure can support disabled people to travel. Involving disabled people in the design, development and improvement of transport policies, services and infrastructure leads to increased successful door-to-door journeys, and more often.

However, barriers to transport are not limited to the physical; feedback from the Dumfries and Galloway Equality and Diversity Working Group highlighted that people in our region with protected characteristic groups (such as sexual orientation and race) are affected by social barriers to transport.

SWestrans needs to improve how we support and involve people with protected characteristics in the transport and travel decisions we make to ensure that the existing and future transport network and travel infrastructure reduces and minimises these physical and social barriers. This can hopefully be achieved by participating and engaging more frequently with service users and representative groups to share experiences, feedback, knowledge and learning.

We currently have gaps in evidence for all protected characteristics, but particularly, we have gaps in our evidence for, race, religion and beliefs, gender reassignment and sexual orientation. There is some evidence at a national level that these groups do face inequality when accessing or using transport, but we do not have sufficient data at a regional level. The development of a new Regional Transport Strategy offers an opportunity to carry out a comprehensive travel and transport consultation and engagement for the South West of Scotland which will include a focus on evidence collection around experiences people with protected characteristics have with our transport network.

Issue/Inequality	The difficulties that people with protected characteristics experience when accessing and using public transport and travel infrastructure could be more successfully addressed if more efficient engagement processes and data gathering were put in place.
Equality outcome 4	Our work is informed by a greater understanding of the transport and travel needs, barriers faced and experiences of people with protected characteristics.
Protected Characteristics Groups Supported	All protected characteristics, with a particular focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability • Sexual orientation • Race
General equality duty	Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
Link to strategic priority	Contributes to the achievement of the NTS2 Outcome that transport will be easy to use, safe and secure for all.
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved data collection and analysis • Improved engagement and consultation with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Protected characteristic groups, especially: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Disabled ▪ Sexual orientation ▪ Race ○ Equality Working Groups and third sector organisations ○ Transport operators on identified accessibility barriers • Involve Protected Characteristic groups throughout the development of a new Regional Transport Strategy to identify barriers and a transport work plan/programme of support and improvements • Use the Place Principle