

This paper looks at the social, environmental and economic importance of buses and considers ways in which they can be taken back into public control. It calls on the Scottish Government to provide financial support to Local Authorities who express an interest in bus re-regulation and public ownership of buses.

Environmental benefits

Transport is Scotland's largest single source of GHG emissions and responsible for more than a third of all emissions. Transport emissions have not fallen since 1990, despite reductions in other sectors. ⁱ

Air pollution is estimated to cause more than 1700 attributable (premature) deaths in Scotland each year. ⁱⁱ In many of our cities streets, air pollution breaches legal limits.

If we are to address climate change and air pollution then we need to support more people to get out of cars and into buses. ⁱⁱⁱ

Social benefits

Across Scotland, 29% of households don't have access to a car. ^{iv} This rises to 41% in Edinburgh and 46% in Glasgow and Dundee. Low-income households are less likely to have a car, with many in deprived communities cut off from accessing public services and engaging in society.

With many disabled people losing their motability vehicles because of changed benefit rules we need to see increased investment in accessible public transport.

A lack of affordable, reliable public transport means many low-paid workers, are forced to walk during and after their shift, risking their personal safety. Women are less likely to own cars and rely more heavily on bus travel. ^v With wage levels having stagnated over the past ten years, providing high-quality, low-cost public transport can boost incomes while also providing a crucial service.

Economic Benefits

The impact of covid and the shift to online retail means we need to do all we can to protect and enhance our town centres. ^{vi} Publicly-owned, free bus travel would be a way of doing that from the bottom up – designing town centres for people, not cars.

The Scottish Government currently gives £326 million a year in public subsidy to private bus operators. ^{vii} About 10% leaks out of the industry in dividends. ^{viii} Yet, Lothian Buses shows the potential of publicly run buses that reinvest in services.

Research for the STUC estimates that with the right policies, up to 60,000 green jobs could be created by upgrading transport to meet climate targets, with a further 13,000 ongoing jobs in operations. ^{ix}

This requires public investment of £660 million into electric bus fleets, £6-£11 billion in railway upgrades and electrification, and £2 billion in walking and cycling infrastructure, and £20-£30 billion in rapid urban transport (metro or tram) by 2040.

A revival in bus travel could support workers at ADL in Falkirk manufacturing world class buses but who have seen redundancies due to a lack of orders. Research shows that free bus transport also has economic benefits which far outweigh the cost of running it – returning £1.70 to the economy for every £1 spent. ^x



“Our transport system is too often tightening rather than loosening the grip of poverty on people’s lives. Our bus services, in particular, are unaffordable, inadequate and inaccessible for too many, and it is clear that the deregulated market is not meeting the needs of people on low incomes.”

- Peter Kelly, Director, Poverty Alliance

“Publicly owned buses means profits will be reinvested in the network, improving services to ensure they take people where they need to go. The current system is not working for passengers or the climate.”

- Gavin Thomson, Transport Campaigner, Friends of the Earth Scotland

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Taking back control: How to deliver publicly owned buses

Lothian Buses is the only publicly owned bus operator in Scotland. Yet, the 2019 Transport Act contains powers for public control of services, including re-regulating our bus network (under 'franchising') and setting up publicly-owned bus companies.

In Glasgow, the Trades Council and Get Glasgow Moving are playing a leading role in the Free Our City campaign for free, publicly owned bus travel.^{xi} In England, the involvement of regional TUCs in high profile campaigns have led to Andy Burnham committing to bus re-regulation in Greater Manchester and Tracy Brabin promising to do the same in West Yorkshire.^{xii}

The next 12 months are critical. Transport Scotland is working on the regulations which will enact the powers for re-regulation (franchising) and public ownership. It is also currently reviewing transport governance. All Scottish local authorities are members of regional transport partnerships.^{xiii}

However, the Scottish Government seems to be pushing its preferred option of Bus Service Improvement Partnerships (BSIPs). Unless we act now we risk being locked into a failing 'partnership' with private operators for years to come.

We know that councils in different parts of Scotland are interested in public ownership. Glasgow and North Lanarkshire have previously passed motions in favour of exploring public ownership while Aberdeen is investigating it. But councils are starved of funding and hollowed out by years of cuts. The Scottish Government must back up new powers with money and support.

The STUC is calling on:

1. Local Authorities to write to the Scottish Government to express interest in bus re-regulation and public ownership of buses.
2. The Scottish Government to provide financial support to Local Authorities to establish publicly owned bus companies and take back control of their bus networks.

Rather than lining the pockets of shareholders, we need to take back control of our buses so they are run by the people for the people.



“Orders benefit our communities, our environment and bus manufacturers, helping to retain skilled and secure jobs here in Scotland.”

**- Gordon Lyons, Union Convenor,
Alexander Dennis Limited Falkirk**

“Voluntary partnerships between bus companies and local transport authorities are a failed middle ground that should be phased out in favor of public control and ownership.”

**- Philip Alston, former UN Special
Rapporteur on extreme poverty and
human rights**

“The Scottish Government is spending vast amounts of public money subsidising the profits of those bus companies whilst allowing them to cut vital bus services with no regard for the communities who rely on them. That’s why North Ayrshire Council wants to intervene in the bus market through municipally owned bus services run for people not profit. However, for this to happen, we need financial support from the Scottish Government.”

**-Joe Cullinane, Leader of North Ayrshire
Council**

ⁱ<https://digitalpublications.parliament.scot/ResearchBriefings/Report/2021/1/12/109b01e8-6212-11ea-8c12-000d3a23af40#540abdd0-6d0f-11ea-b937-000d3a23af40.dita>

ⁱⁱ<https://www.gov.scot/publications/cleaner-air-scotland-2-draft-air-quality-strategy-consultation/pages/6/>

ⁱⁱⁱ<https://www.ippr.org/research/publications/all-aboard>

^{iv}<https://bit.ly/3yRH2jP>

^v<https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Engender-response-to-the-Scottish-Government-consultation-on-Scotlands-National-Transport-Strategy.pdf>

^{vi}http://www.stuc.org.uk/files/Policy/Research-papers/Who_is_winning_from_covid.pdf

^{vii}<https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/49874/scottish-transport-statistics-2020-may-2021.pdf>

^{viii}https://www.transportforqualityoflife.com/u/files/160120_Building_a_world-class_bus_system_for_Britain_FINAL1.pdf

^{ix}http://www.stuc.org.uk/files/Policy/STUC_Green_Jobs.pdf

^x<https://www.getglasgowmoving.org/reports/freebuses.pdf>

^{xi}<https://www.getglasgowmoving.org/campaign/freeourcity/>

^{xii}<https://actbuildchange.com/blog/the-uk-bus-revolution-begins-not-ends-in-manchester/>

^{xiii}<https://www.transport.gov.scot/our-approach/strategy/regional-transport-partnerships/>