



UNISON Scotland submission:

Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee. Transport (Scotland) Bill

September 2018

Introduction

UNISON is Scotland's largest trade union with members across the public, private and voluntary sectors. We have members working for a range of transport organisations, including regional transport partnerships and Scottish Canals and many members in local government who support Scotland's transport infrastructure including planners, engineers, and roads staff. All our members have an interest in the wider citizenship impact of Scottish transport policies and a direct interest in travel and transport as it affects them and their own families, whether for travelling to work or for other travel. We have members working in local government and in the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) who have specific responsibilities relating to air quality. Many UNISON members working in the NHS have to deal with the wide-ranging health consequences of air pollution – pollution described by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as a global public health emergency¹. And many of our members suffer from poor air quality in and around their own homes and workplaces.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Committee's Call for Views.

Background

UNISON Scotland wants to see an integrated, sustainable public transport system. with the railways re-nationalised and with bus re-regulation, including more public and community ownership. Given Scotland's climate change targets, with - we hope - a net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 target to be set in the new Climate Change Bill, transport is a major sector where emissions must be reduced urgently. Massively improved public transport is the way to make a meaningful shift away from car use. Municipal bus services should be expanded to replicate the success of Lothian Buses. Current private bus company fares are unacceptably high, contributing to declining bus use, when we need more and better designed services.

We made a detailed response in August 2017 to the Environment, Climate Change & Land Reform Committee's Inquiry into Air Quality in Scotland, covering Low Emission Zones, among other policy proposals. Since then, the evidence has become utterly overwhelming that much more must be done by all nations to meet the United Nations Paris Agreement goals of limiting global warming to 1.5°C or at least well below 2°C. The UK Committee on Climate Change report last week highlighted the need for more work on reducing emissions in transport in Scotland.

UNISON urges the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee members to examine the Bill with this wider picture in mind. Climate change is an urgent health and safety issue for the planet. As we said in the Air Quality response, finding the

right mix of policy initiatives on transport will have win, win, win effects for health, air quality and tackling climate change. It is essential to ensure that changes take account of the needs of everyone using the various modes of transport and everyone affected by air pollution and climate change - i.e. the whole population, but with some more vulnerable than others. **The Committee should prioritise fairness and reducing inequalities in its recommendations. This should include support for those with limited transport options, whether due to where they live, to disabilities, to being on low incomes without access to cars etc. Green travel to work plans are key also, with recognition of the essential car user role in many posts and of those working early/late shifts etc.**

We are keeping this submission brief, with comments below on the Bill overall, on Low Emissions Zones, bus services, and Scottish Canals. We see the provisions for integrated ticketing, for a ban on pavement and double parking and for regulating road works as generally worthy of support.

The Bill overall

Along with the Stop Climate Chaos Scotland coalition and many others, we want to see Scotland contribute its fair share to meeting the Paris Agreement goals. Stepping up transport emissions reductions is essential, but unfortunately this Bill is a missed opportunity in its current form. There is no mention of rail, and we see that the Scottish Association for Public Transport has pointed out that the Bill's Policy Memorandum makes no reference to the Scottish Government's National Transport Strategy, or to transport integration. As the SAPT rightly says, the objective of transport integration is to combine the flexibility and wide reach of local bus services with the speed and comfort of the national rail system... to create a co-ordinated, high quality public transport network with wide geographical coverage, catering for local and long distance travel. We agree that better transport integration should be included in the Bill's policy objectives.

The Bill is disappointing in other ways and we cover bus services below, but would point out here that local government funding is under immense pressure following years of austerity cutbacks. This puts funding available for maintaining subsidies on some routes at risk. There is no change proposed to the financial framework for public funding for support. UNISON believes there should be ramped up public spending on public transport, both with policies mentioned above, but with innovative ideas that could be trialled such as, for example, free public transport. This is being piloted in five cities across Western Germany, including Bonn, Essen and Mannheim. Scotland should look at a trial, linking it with a new industrial strategy as it would create a demand for electric or hydrogen buses.

Active travel of course, has to be a priority for funding. Cycling and walking routes and policies should be fully integrated with public transport, as appropriate.

Low Emissions Zones

Toxic, illegal air pollution is a public health emergency. Recently published research on the impact of air pollution on babies in the wombⁱⁱ, and its role in increased risk of

dementiaⁱⁱⁱ adds to the mountain of evidence of the widespread harm being done to human health. Elevated pollution levels, usually located in urban areas with high volumes of road traffic, have been associated with a number of health issues, including heart disease and lung cancer. Worst affected are the young, elderly and people who already have heart and lung conditions. Scotland was the first country in Europe to adopt the WHO recommended limit for PM 2.5 in April 2016. We should continue the level of ambition with policies that will deliver health and climate outcomes that benefit everyone. Work must begin immediately to bring air pollution levels down to legal limits as soon as possible across all of Scotland. It is important though, that any policies for transport demand management are based on Fair Work and Just Transition principles, ensuring no-one is left behind.

We will always stand up for our members' interests and some transport demand management policies, including LEZs, may involve considerable changes for our members. But we also recognise and prioritise the crucial health and safety issues involved – issues around air pollution and the impacts of climate change, the importance of cleaner, safer streets, healthier lifestyles and the welcome impact on wellbeing and overall health, including mental health. We believe the impact of the smoking ban is an example to use, in the ways that this has had wide ranging benefits, not just for reducing lung cancer rates.

Economic impacts can be and should be managed, along Just Transition principles, The importance of wider policies than dealt with here cannot be stressed enough and the Committee should take these on board, including arguing for massive improvements to public transport before implementation of demand management measures. Without real alternatives to cars, such changes would have too negative an impact on those who have no other, or few other realistic options. We also need infrastructure spending to provide safe cycling and walking routes. Many, if not most, of these actions need to come before strong disincentives to car use are put in place.

LEZs must be used to improve transport and quality of life for all, particularly the most vulnerable. Any LEZ would not be a success if it led to those with least finding their transport options significantly curtailed. With this in mind, we believe the proposals in the Bill for LEZs must be considered with wider integrated public transport plans in mind and that guidance must include a clear role for negotiated green travel to work plans. This issue highlights the importance of our point above about including better transport integration in the Bill's policy objectives.

UNISON proposes that the Scottish Government establishes a working group involving trade unions to develop guidelines for ensuring that traffic demand management proposals are fair and equitable, negotiated with recognised trade unions, and align with Just Transition and Fair Work principles. This will be important both for air quality initiatives and for wider active travel/climate change policies. It can be separate from, but linked with, or potentially run by the forthcoming Just Transition Commission. It should start with proposals for Glasgow's LEZ and examine and recommend best practice from a range of international examples, e.g. European cities that achieved strong shifts to active travel and cleaner transport, including examples of car free city centres, and look at integrating these with initiatives such as the new Member's Bill from Mark Ruskell MSP, aiming to replace current default 30mph speed limits on urban roads with 20mph limits, a move which has won wide support^{iv}. The group should produce guidance for policy development

and implementation, including the needs of commuters, workers and disadvantaged groups. Along with moves to integrated smart ticketing, consideration could be given to providing extensions to subsidised/free transport to particular groupings, such as e.g. for young people, job seekers, asylum seekers, people with disabilities etc.

We are willing to support a range of traffic demand management measures, **providing there is sufficient investment in ensuring that all affected have a genuine choice/option of low cost public transport that is available in a realistic timetable for those on 24/7 shift work and that recognises for a range of workers that cars are the only option – for example, social workers transporting children and similar essential car users.**

Bus services

A key disappointment in the Bill, widely commented upon, is that it does not move to give greater powers to councils to support the setting up of municipal bus services. We note that the Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland gave evidence to the Committee earlier this month suggesting that members may want to look at broadening the remit proposed, so that new local authority bus companies are not restricted to non-profit-making services.

We joined last year with sister unions, Friends of the Earth, Get Glasgow Moving and others to call for better buses^v, with a need for re-regulation and much improved co-ordination, planning and integration of services. Scotland's buses have seen declining use at a time when we should be developing and extending such a vital service. The general public supports this^{vi} and we want to see buses run in the public interest, rather than to line the pockets of rich tycoons, with big private bus companies cherry picking profitable routes. Bus travel is 65% more expensive in 2018 than in 2008, yet real household incomes have been falling in that period. In the last five years there has been a 10% reduction in bus journeys, double the reduction in Great Britain as a whole.

Our members tell us about the difficulties of finding bus services that meet their needs, particularly outside peak hours. They complain of the expense of bus travel and highlight poor planning of, for example, new health facilities with no consideration of public transport access. One complained of a new nursing home built "at the edge of the town and up a hill. The nearest bus stop involves crossing a four lane dual carriageway. Considering most of the patients are elderly it is not rocket science to understand most of the visitors are elderly too. My neighbour traveled everyday via buses with a heavy bag of laundry and often complained about the struggle of the journey. I contacted the council and the bus company who both said there was a bus stop within a certain distance but did not care about the dual carriageway or the hill or dark days of winter."

These are the kinds of difficult impacts on people's lives of not having an integrated public transport system that puts needs before profits. We must do better.

UNISON does not believe the Bill will make any major improvements towards reversing the decline in bus use. It should be amended to ensure other areas can emulate the success of Lothian Buses. As Get Glasgow Moving said in their

submission, local transport authorities must have the power to run both commercial and non-commercial routes. That will allow cross subsidy to help fund essential but unprofitable routes and “will begin to close the gap between the affordable, reliable bus services provided in Edinburgh by publicly owned Lothian Buses and the expensive and unreliable services outside the capital.” Other models that should be encouraged and supported include non-profit co-operatives, and social enterprises delivering affordable services responding to local needs.

At the moment, 43% of bus company revenue comes directly from local or central government through grants and concessionary travel reimbursement. This money would be being more effectively spent if all of it were being kept in a network of publicly owned and run bus companies – rather than having portions of it siphoned off in the form of dividends. The level of public subsidy and consequent dependency on that subsidy of what are in effect local bus monopolies makes the timidity of the measures in the Bill to restructure transport for the public good very difficult to understand.

Scotland needs a radical shift to boost public transport, not further dabbling with market mechanisms.

Scottish Canals

It is UNISON’s view that public bodies should have worker directors on their boards. We do not oppose increasing the size of the Board, but propose that this should be an opportunity to ensure that Scottish Canals appoints a trade union representative as a worker director.

We note also that questions have been raised during evidence sessions about whether Scottish Canals has a duty under legislation to ensure that canals are open and navigable. Given the problems there have been recently^{vii}, we would support action to make sure it is a top priority that canals are kept open, with a suitable amendment if needed.

Conclusion

We urge the Committee to support calls for a radical transport policy, delivering cleaner, greener, affordable travel and improved health and quality of life; a policy that helps deliver emissions reductions to help meet the Paris Agreement goals. Scotland would fail if we settle for mere dabbling with market mechanisms. In particular, we stress the need for improvements to public transport before setting in place any major transport demand measures. Change should be part of green travel to work plans negotiated with recognised trade unions. **We urge prioritising fairness and reducing inequalities. This should include support for those with limited transport options, whether due to where they live, to disabilities, to being on low incomes without access to cars, etc.**

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ⁱ <http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/250141/1/9789241511353-eng.pdf?ua=1>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/sep/16/air-pollution-particles-found-in-mothers-placentas>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/sep/18/air-pollution-causes-jump-in-dementia-risk-study-suggests>

^{iv} <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-45631496>

^v <https://foe.scot/campaign/air-pollution/need-better-buses/>

^{vi} <https://www.commonspace.scot/articles/12982/majority-scots-back-public-ownership-bus-services-new-poll-finds>

^{vii} <https://www.scotsman.com/news/transport/scotland-s-canals-being-left-to-rot-as-repair-bills-pile-up-1-4737364>