

South West of Scotland Transport Partnership (SWestrans) Equality Outcomes 2025-2029



Introduction

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 delivery of home to 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 1 – Bus publicity and journey information

Strategic link

Regional Transport Strategy 2023-2042

Priority 5- Enhancing Access to Transport Services

- Journey planning information should be available in various formats to meet the needs of differing users including online, traditional paper copies, braille, large print, and audio
- Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) should be made available for all public transport modes at stations, stops and on-board services wherever possible and practical

Priority 7- Improving the Quality and Affordability of our Public Transport Offer

- Enhancements to existing bus stops will be implemented where practical to improve security, accessibility and the attractiveness of bus services for all users

Background

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 Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland (MACS) have highlighted that disabled people and/or older people with mobility needs have found the 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.

Bus service 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.

Inequality	The communication needs of different protected characteristics need to be more considered.
Equality outcome 1	Those with protected characteristics will have equal access to public transport information, in a variety of formats.
Protected Characteristics Groups Supported	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Disability • Sex • 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>Links to National Transport Strategy (NTS2) priority to reduce inequality, and the outcomes that transport will be easy to use for all and provide fair access to services.</p> <p>Links to Regional Transport Strategy 2023-2042 Priority 5- Enhancing Access to Transport Services and Priority 7- Improving the Quality and Affordability of our Public Transport Offer</p>

Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve at-stop bus publicity • Improve printed publicity • Improve digital publicity • Improve communications and language to ensure that our information and services are accessible • Implement RTP1 at bus stops • Equality and Diversity Training for all SWestrans staff
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Issue 2 – Public Transport Provision

Strategic link

Regional Transport Strategy 2023-2042

Priority 5- Enhancing Access to Transport Services

- Opportunities to enhance the customer experience when using public transport should be explored, particularly for vulnerable users who may require additional assistance or chaperoning in order to make their journey
- The public and active travel networks should provide equal access for all including vulnerable groups such as women, elderly and younger people, ethnic minorities, people with mobility impairments or disabilities as well as those on low incomes

Priority 6- Sustainable and Extended Local and Regional Public Transport Connectivity

- Where no bus service exists, demand responsive transport (DRT) solutions will be developed and operated by third sector community transport operators, DGC Buses and the community

Priority 7- Improving the Quality and Affordability of our Public Transport Offer

- Improving links between different modes of transport by reducing the distances between connecting modes and coordinating the timing of services should be taken forward as a priority whenever possible.

Background

Evidence shows that a lack of public transport services and options disproportionately impacts disabled people, women, and the young and old. In rural areas, such as Dumfries and Galloway, low levels of public transport provision and connectivity issues can act as barriers to travel. These barriers contribute to a range of socio-economic issues including difficulty accessing suitable employment, education and training opportunities, and healthcare which then increases social isolation, out-migration of young people and forced car ownership.

The bus network within Dumfries and Galloway is 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, which could have an adverse impact on those in protected characteristics groups.

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.

Inequality	Protected characteristic groups are more likely than most to use public transport and tend to be disproportionately affected by service reductions.
Equality outcome 2	Public transport services are more flexible to meet the travel needs of those who need them most.
Protected Characteristics Groups Supported	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Disability • Sex • 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>Links to 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 Regional Transport Strategy 2023-2042 Priority 5- Enhancing Access to Transport Services, Priority 6- Sustainable and Extended Local and Regional Public Transport Connectivity, and Priority 7- Improving the Quality and Affordability of our Public Transport Offer.</p> <p>SWestrans has a statutory duty to secure the provision of public transport services it considers appropriate to meet any public transport requirements within its area that are not being met commercially.</p>
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with Scottish Government and transport operators to protect key public transport links • Lobby for increased financial support for rural bus services • Work with the Third Sector, NHS, DGC and SOSE to enhance the capacity of Community Transport • Develop, design and implement a more flexible transport options • Promote free travel for U22s as part of our publicity

Issue 3 – Transport Affordability

Strategic Link

Regional Transport Strategy 2023-2042

Priority 6- Sustainable and Extended Local and Regional Public Transport Connectivity

- Bus service improvements should be focused in areas identified as at greatest risk of both transport poverty and deprivation. This should be informed by further analysis to develop options to improve bus service connectivity such as increased service frequencies, new services, more direct services and / or more express services
- Where no bus service exists, demand responsive transport (DRT) solutions will be developed and operated by third sector community transport operators, DGC Buses and the community

Priority 7- Improving the Quality and Affordability of our Public Transport Offer

- Opportunities to expand the eligibility of existing concessionary travel schemes or to create new schemes to allow more users access to reduced / no fare journeys should be explored with key partners including Transport Scotland
- Expansion of existing concessionary travel schemes to cover rail should be considered to enable more users to access affordable rail travel
- The introduction of new rail fare structures should be explored to remove inequalities and to ensure that journeys to similar destinations incur similar costs which are affordable for all users
- Integrated ticketing solutions should be built upon and better promote existing schemes such as PlusBus and Rail and Sail as well as seeking new opportunities to deliver integrated ticketing measures for bus, rail and ferry in the region

Background

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' shares that one in five Dumfries and Galloway residents live in poverty.

The National Transport Strategy 2 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, resulting in isolation for many.

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.

Inequality	The affordability of transport within Dumfries and Galloway is an issue due to its rurality. Protected characteristic groups are more likely to be living in poverty and the lack of affordable transport contributes to the socioeconomic disadvantages.
Equality outcome 3	Access and affordability issues are reduced through transport solutions developed with partners.
Protected Characteristics Groups Supported	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Disability • Sex • 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>Links to 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.</p> <p>Links to Regional Transport Strategy 2023-2042 Priority 6- Sustainable and Extended Local and Regional Public Transport Connectivity, and Priority 7- Improving the Quality and Affordability of our Public Transport Offer.</p>

Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engage with volunteers with lived experience of poverty through the Tackling Poverty Reference Group• Work with 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• Continue to investigate how Community Transport can be used to address transport barriers faced by people on low incomes• Work to encourage use of free bus scheme for U22s through promotion and publicity
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