

Scottish Women's Convention response
to the Scottish Government's
consultation on:

Draft Just Transition Plan for Transport



May 2025

Premise

The Scottish Government hopes to significantly change methods of travel across the country by 2024, as transport accounts for the largest share of Scottish greenhouse gas emissions. Through decarbonisation, they hope to achieve net-zero, and propose that through the following proposals a 'Just Transition' can occur. This Transition aims to minimise negative impacts on people and businesses, asking therefore asks respondents to consider how their lives could be altered by such changes. The Plan also identifies key challenges and opportunities facing the transport sector, setting out an approach for the future.

After the Scottish Government have received responses, these will be organised and summarised, directly influencing the development of Scotland's Just Transition.



The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)

The SWC is funded to engage with women across Scotland to ensure that their views are represented in policy and decision-making processes. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of parliamentary, governmental, and organisational consultation papers at Scottish, UK and international levels.

The SWC gathers information using different methods, including roadshows, thematic conferences, surveys, and both in-person and online roundtable events. This submission presents the views of a range of women, reflecting their opinions, ideas and lived experience. Working together with many other equalities organisations and community groups, we use our broad network to ensure that women from a range of backgrounds are heard and acknowledged. We are continually reviewing innovative ways of engaging with women and developing our trauma-informed and culturally sensitive practice to support vital contributions from as many women as possible.

People and Communities

Are there any gaps in our priority actions to support people and communities to the transition of the transport sector?

The SWC commend the progress made by the Scottish Government in improving public transport services for the people of Scotland; women have regularly praised the release of the national concessionary travel scheme, stating that it has significantly relieved financial pressure (Scottish Women's Convention, 2024). However, despite some progress, SWC focused work on the issue of public transport in 2024, revealed that women still believe there to be major gaps in provision. Women therefore called for an emphasis on affordability and accessibility for all public transport options, with bus services highlighted as requiring significant intervention.

It was explained that due to deregulation and privatisation of bus services, costs were often high for customers. Women also felt that despite high prices the quality of service was poor, causing significant frustration. They stated that poor service actively pushed them to use personal vehicles, particularly commuters who require reliable service. Bus services in Edinburgh were pointed as a positive Scottish example, with privatisation being avoided in this locale. Instead, it was proposed that through the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, franchising options could be utilised more comprehensively to improve service provision (Scottish Women's Convention, 2024).

- “I have had situations with my part-time work, where I needed to go long distances, and sometimes the bus fare was so expensive I would walk, which then meant that I had less time at home for my other job, to do chores, to help my family”
- “It’s a downward spiral as well, so you end up using your car more because the bus service is bad, and other people do the same, so then the service worsens.”
- “...the problem isn’t about money, we don’t want to just jump into a bus that you can get for free, because that’s not practical. I think if buses were regular, on time, and the system worked, like in other countries, a lot of people would ditch their cars, get on the train, get on the bus”

Overall, the Scottish Government’s proposals are largely admirable; tackling the climate crisis through the reduction in emissions should be viewed as a priority. However, this must be facilitated through a wider cultural change, which will likely begin with the improvement of local public transport options for the Scottish population. While this has been stated within the proposals, bikes have also been discussed as a significant focus. Active travel will play a part in the move to a low carbon society, however, if one were to apply an equalities lens, many individuals are unable to ride a bike. For example, those with mobility requirements, the elderly and women with young children, will likely struggle to make use of active travel options. It is ultimately for this reason that public transport options must be prioritised to facilitate the Scottish Government’s vision of a just transition.

Which of the priorities we have set out in the draft Plan do you think would be most helpful for people like you to reduce how often, or how far, they drive in a private car?

- **More access to online services - Agree**
- **Access to car clubs - Disagree**
- **Availability of demand responsive transport for some areas - Agree**
- **Better use of space for active travel and public transport – Strongly agree**
- **Increasing costs to make driving a less attractive option in some circumstances – Strongly disagree**

With regards to the proposed priorities, we believe, through consultations with women, that improving the use of spaces for active travel and public transport are key. As stated above, improving public transport provision for women is vital in reducing personal vehicle usage. Improvements should centre around an enhanced service quality, as well as increase in access for all communities and reduced costs. Women also highlighted the value of integrated ticket options, stating that a one-ticket system would increase ease and ultimately limit prices paid by customers.

- “...the tram and bus should be integrated so you can tap on/off for both and have it capped”
- “Bus services are expensive and unreliable, there is no Glasgow-wide integrated ticket”
- “[We should have] integrated bus and rail services.”

However, we would propose that active travel does not play an equal part in this vision for an improved transport system. While improvements to active travel infrastructure are helpful in providing individuals with alternative modes of transport, a wider cultural change is required to have a major impact. Furthermore, many women across Scotland are unable to make use of active travel options, as a result of additional considerations, such as mobility requirements, pregnancy and age. This lack of basic access to active travel options, ultimately limits the full impact of bikes. Therefore, we would argue that while active travel will play a role in the just transition, it cannot be overly relied upon.

Additionally, we would highlight our concern surrounding discussions of increasing costs to make driving a less attractive option. While we acknowledge the pressing need of the climate crisis, increasing household costs during the current financial situation would likely be damaging for many women. Women are less likely to own a personal vehicle in the first instance compared to men, however this does not limit the impact increased costs would have on this group. We have regularly heard accounts that high living costs have negatively impacted women's lives, with pay levels not accounting for inflation rises. We would also highlight, that women residing in rural communities are

unable to use public or active transport options due to geographical barriers. These women have explained that public transport options are generally unreliable and/or unavailable near their homes. Also, due to the general climate and landscape of rural Scotland, cycling is not viewed as a viable option. Rural women are therefore heavily reliant on cars and already pay high fuel costs to heat their homes and run vehicles. Overall, proposals to increase the costs of driving would not be viewed favourably by the SWC.

- “...that’s the thing about the cost of living, is that it’s impacting people who would normally never have felt those kinds of things.”
- “I also find that there are certain places in Inverness that are really hard to get to by bus...You need to have access to a car, like you’ve got to pay for those lessons, and they’re so expensive, and then all of the costs of owning a car. Or you just live and expect that you won’t see anyone or go anywhere.”
- “The more rural areas, you absolutely need a car, you’re sharing a road with tractors...it’s also not practical in the weather.”
- “I wouldn’t dare use a bike on our roads here [in Skye].”

Is there anything else you would like to see in the draft Plan for people who are more likely to face challenges accessing affordable, convenient and safe travel options?

We welcome the acknowledgement of women and girl’s safety within the draft proposals, with the inclusion of Transport Scotland’s 2022 research into this topic. Multiple actions were recommended as a result of this work, which align with SWC findings, namely improved guidance for women and girls on reporting mechanisms and increases in lighting within train stations.

However, the key concern for women was the reduction in transport staff across stations and trains. They explained that the lack of staff presence contributed to a sense of unease, making them feel unsafe and insecure about travelling alone. Similar issues were also found when speaking to women who use buses, with some providing harrowing accounts of sexual assault. There was a strong sense from women that increasing staff numbers would assist in mitigating fears, enabling women and girl’s free movement across Scotland. Additionally, women believed that all public transport staff should have comprehensive training surrounding sexual assault and harassment, to ensure correct procedures are adhered to in dangerous situations. This relates to improved reporting mechanisms, as well as support processes to facilitate women and girls’ sense of safety.

- “...that goes down to the staffing railways as well, because they’re trying to reduce station staff in Largs now, so there’s unmanned stations, and even the person being on the train by themselves, I mean they’re not going to challenge a group of people.”

- “...the unmanned stations, you wouldn't have to sit outside in the cold and dark if they had someone working inside, you could sit in there and be safe. They security is gone because there's no staff anymore.”
- “I've been physically attacked, sexually attacked on buses and trains loads of times, and naebody's even tried to help me. They've stood and watched it.”

Workers

Are there any gaps in our priority actions to support workers in the transition of the transport sector?

Yes.

We applaud the Scottish Government's commitment to improve diversity across the transport sector, yet we would highlight the lack of tangible action included within the current plan to facilitate this change. From speaking with women who work or have worked within the STEM sector, there is a lack of retention of women workers. They explained that women and girls tend to succeed within STEM subjects, however, often leave paid employment due to a combination of structural barriers and misogyny.

With regards to structural barriers, women in STEM explained that childcare availability severely limited their capacity to return to work. Similar issues were found more widely when the SWC considered current childcare offerings in Scotland, with women stating that childcare had become less affordable, inflexible and inaccessible under the new 1140-hour scheme (Scottish Women's Convention, 2024). These limitations ultimately prevent women from fully participating in the employment market, with immediate intervention being required. Women emphasised the need for flexibility across childcare providers, with a range of shift patterns being considered.

- “Improve childcare facilities across workplaces, women are the only ones who have to interrupt their career for parenting.”
- “[Employers] need to acknowledge and accommodate the caring responsibilities women often have.”

Additionally, women in STEM highlighted the poor provision of maternity and paternity leave. They stated that due to variations in maternity leave options, women struggle to balance work and caring responsibilities. It has been widely acknowledged that the gender pay gap is actively fuelled by women taking maternity leave; when women exit the workplace for prolonged periods of time, they are passed over for promotions and opportunities (Pregnant Then Screwed, 2024). This was highlighted as a major issue within STEM careers, due to the quickly evolving nature of technology and science, with gaps resulting in a lack of knowledge and/or skills. Some believed that a solution to this issue would be an increase in paternity care, stating that this should be mandatory, encouraging men to use the options provided. Alternatively, women suggested mentorship schemes, which would assist in minimising the impact of maternity leave

for women. They explained that through direct personalised training, returning mothers could be enabled to return to work at the correct skill level.

- “Many women desire to have children, and this will inevitably lead to needing to take ‘career breaks’ or go on maternity leave. Some STEM areas can evolve rapidly with changes in technology and leaving the workforce for a few years can result in not keeping up with new skills and tools.”
- “...in an ideal world, wouldn't it be great to have mandatory maternity and paternity leave that's the exact same amount of time?”
- “Maybe mentoring or training schemes that can help women planning to return to work, to enrol in various courses or workshops that will improve their existing skills or acquire new ones. This will improve long-term employability.”

Alternatively, young women who have not yet had children are also not given the opportunity to succeed at work as a result of direct misogyny. Women in STEM explained that as a result of discriminatory attitudes, superiors had viewed their capacity to have children as reason to dismiss their potential. This directly relates to the wider issue of misogyny within STEM sectors, with women struggling to thrive in toxically masculine environments. Through our work on misogyny in 2023, the SWC found that issues such as sexual assault and ‘boys’ club’ mentalities remain a key barrier to women's employment prospects (Scottish Women's Convention, 2023). Therefore, it is of vital importance that the Scottish Government aim to erode current damaging cultures within the transport sectors, which prevent women from reaching their full potential. This cultural change is unlikely without significant investment in training for staff at all levels, as well as clear harassment protocols, which empower staff members to report abuse.

Monitoring and Reporting

What are your views on the draft indicators we have set out for measuring our progress towards delivering the Just Transition outcomes for the transport sector?

Outcome 2:

The SWC are pleased to note the inclusion of indicators which consider levels of diversity within the transport workforce, namely that of the gender pay gap, gender balance and age profile of workers. Through such indicators, an improved understanding of the overall workforce can be gathered. We have regularly heard from women on the value of such data, with data actively driving budgetary decisions. We would, however, note the exclusion of the ethnicity pay gaps, with these issues becoming increasingly prominent across Scottish sectors. It has been observed that ethnic minority employees will experience a median hourly pay of £10.99, compared to white employees who will have a median hourly pay of £12.25 (Scottish Government, 2022). More recent data is lacking; however, the issue remains prevalent, requiring urgent attention.

Outcome 6:

Outcome 6 is greatly welcomed, with increased understanding of the journey time to basic services, enabling improved transport planning systems and community cohesion. We would state however, that due to the caveats of the journey time calculation, the data appears inconsistent and potentially misleading. By only including the fastest available route via public transport during a specific timeframe, considerations such as infrequent services are not taken into account. We would therefore state that an average calculation be taken, which is more likely to adequately represent the lived experience of women in Scotland.

Also, as the model calculates the nearest location that fits the description of the essential service in question, rural communities are being let down. For example, women living on the Isle of Skye, do have access to a newly completed hospital on the island. However, due to inconsistencies in staffing, departments, such as the maternity department, are not operational throughout the week. Therefore, women must travel to Raigmore Hospital in Inverness to give birth, a journey which can take approximately two hours. This issue was identified by the SWC during a Roadshow in 2024, with women feeling let down by current service provision, and ultimately put at significant physical risk (Scottish Women's Convention, 2024). We would therefore suggest increased consideration of rural communities within the proposed indicators, and while we welcome the inclusion of island communities in Outcome 7, this is inadequate to incorporate the variety of rural Scottish life.

Conclusion

Having listened to women, our three key recommendations on this topic are:

- Public transport must be centred throughout Just Transition planning, prioritising the need for affordable, accessible services.
- Improve and promote sexual harassment/assault reporting mechanisms on public transport formats. This includes improved training for all public transport staff on the issue of violence against women and girls.
- Ensure remote and rural communities have been effectively considered throughout progress indicators.

The SWC is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government's consultation on the **Draft Just Transition Plan for Transport**. As an organisation, we will continue to work with women from across Scotland to gather voices and experiences relating to this topic and its effects on women's equality.

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