



CONFERENCE REPORT

11th May 2024

Glasgow Grosvenor Hotel

The Scottish Women's Convention
**How Can We Make Transport
Work for Women and Families
in Scotland?**



Agnes Tolmie

SWC Chair

“At the Scottish Women’s Convention (SWC), we carry out a range of activities across Scotland, including roundtables on specific issues, and roadshows, where women tell us about the challenges facing their local communities. What is consistent at all of these events, is the subject of transport. Women have a wide range of experience with regards to transport, whether that is access, price or safety.

In Scotland, we can see a strange paradigm; between the years of 2022 and 2023, public transport journeys rose by 34%, which is 396 million journeys, taken by either bus, rail, air or ferry¹. In some ways that’s a good thing, if one considers the environment, particularly as there were 181,000 new vehicle registrations between 2022 and 2023, and personal vehicles caused 41% of Scottish transport’s total greenhouse gas emissions in 2021.

Yet, despite 76% of public transport journeys being made by bus, the number of buses available has dropped. So, we’re encouraging people to use the bus, providing free transport for many, but we lack the vehicles. So, it is clear that there are many things we need to look at, with women’s views being central to understanding how transport can be improved across Scotland.”

5 Key Points & Recommendations

- Increase the number of publicly supplied buses across local authorities to improve reliability.
- Work to reduce public transport ticket prices, considering the needs of women and families.
- Improve training for public transport employees, ensuring that they are sensitive to the needs of women in their community.
- Re-establish the presence of public transport employees across buses and trains, providing an increased sense of safety for women.
- Integrate public transport services, learning from other countries and cities in the UK, such as London, to understand how a one-ticket model can be integrated across Scotland.

¹ Transport Scotland. (2023). Summary Transport Statistics. Available at: <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/scottish-transport-statistics-2023/summary-transport-statistics/>

Bettina Sizeland

Bettina joined Transport Scotland in 2022 as Director for Bus, Accessibility and Active Travel (BAAT), having previously worked for Scottish Government as Deputy Director for Culture and Historic Environment and before that, as Deputy Director for Tourism and Major Events. As Director for BAAT, Bettina oversees the delivery of an ambitious policy agenda, working with delivery partners to improve sustainable, accessible transport options.

Bettina is also a Chartered Civil Engineer and holds an MBA. Before her time in the Scottish Government, she worked for ten years overseas in Africa and Asia as an engineering advisor for the Department for International Development.



Our first speaker was Bettina Sizeland, Director for Bus, Accessibility and Active Travel (BAAT) at Transport Scotland (TS). She began by highlighting the recent research carried out by TS, on [‘Women’s and Girl’s Views and Experiences of Personal Safety When Using Public Transport’](#). This work was commissioned by the previous Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth, MSP, in 2022, and underpinned by an awareness that unequal access to transport contributes to women and girls economic and social disadvantage. The project, published in 2023, utilised a mixed methodology, with TS releasing a public attitudes survey, alongside qualitative focus groups, which included both users and transport workers, in the hope that an in-depth picture of lived experience could be created.

TS’s public attitudes survey found that women and girls do not feel safe across public transport modes and are more likely to report being victims of harassment on and around public transport. Moreover, the qualitative research highlighted that women and girls have come to expect unwanted sexual behaviour across their transport experiences. They stated that they felt safer travelling during the day, rather than at night, which significantly impacts women’s and girls’ ability to partake in employment, education and social activities. It also found that women and girls are likely to adapt behaviours to ensure their safety, with examples given such as not travelling at certain times of the day or in certain circumstances. Bettina explained that this can result in higher travel costs for women and girls, through personal vehicle or taxi usage. Furthermore, women and girls generally felt safer when routes were familiar, meaning that a lack of reliability across services, where there could be long waits for replacement services, contributing to women’s and girls’ transport anxieties.

- “...the public attitudes survey enabled us to ask questions about safety...and the analysis showed us that women felt less safe...and those findings add to a wider evidence-base, which show a significant problem around unwanted sexual behaviour/sexual harassment on public transport”
- “Women and girls who took part in the research also highlighted that unwanted behaviour as being expected or the norm; that it was something they had to deal with.”

Bettina went on to explain the work being carried out as a result of this report’s recommendations, focusing on the first recommendation, which considers how technology could be used to assist women and girls in feeling safe across public transport modes. In May 2024, [TS released work](#) which included the mapping of current technology options,

such as personal safety apps, to tackle the issue of women's and girls' safety and how this could be harnessed through policy in the future. Bettina highlighted one such app, the Railway Guardian personal safety app, which was released alongside a wider campaign to tackle violence against women and girls by the British Transport Police. She did state however that the report concluded that there is a lack of evaluation across personal safety apps, recommending that a comprehensive evaluation process should be developed prior to further emphasis to the public.

- **“...technologies can be used by women and girls to feel safer and more confident.”**
- **“Apps exist in a complicated market, there are lots of apps, and the tech works in different ways...So, making an endorsement of any particular app is a work in progress, and it's something that we need to think about quite carefully.”**

Additionally, Bettina raised the issue of antisocial behaviour on public transport, including alcohol consumption. TS had found that alcohol and drug consumption contributed to women's feelings of insecurity on public transport in the aforementioned report, with women and girls stating that it was often a precursor to unpredictable/abusive behaviour. A ban on alcohol on trains across Scotland came into force during the Covid-19 pandemic, in the hope that general safety could be improved. Bettina explained that there have been some issues with enforcement however, including from women transport workers when confronting passengers who may be drunk/are drinking. She went on to state that the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Fiona Hyslop, MSP, and TS are working to evaluate the alcohol ban, gathering a mixture of views.

As well as antisocial behaviour on trains, Bettina explained that TS have been working to reduce antisocial behaviour on buses. She stated that there has been some concern around the increase in young people using buses in Scotland, due to the Under 22 free bus scheme. In order to combat anxieties, TS are carrying out ongoing evaluation, with the first evaluation finding that there has been a reduction in safety concerns, rather than an increase, since the scheme was introduced. Bettina therefore felt that further research was required to understand the dynamics at play in relation to this issue, across bus networks in Scotland.

“ ...using transport, free of fear, is crucial to women and girls being able to live fulfilling lives, contribute to society and the economy. ”



Lara Henderson

Lara is a Development Officer for Scotland working at the Community Transport Association (CTA), a UK charity and membership organisation leading a thriving Community Transport movement. Lara works directly with members, providing advice and support to new and existing Community Transport initiatives. She has led key elements of CTA's Mapping Scotland project, creating the first-ever online and interactive map of the Community Transport sector in Scotland.

Prior to joining CTA, Lara worked in Housing and Communities for a local authority and completed a research internship with a not-for-profit organisation tackling barriers to gender equality in employment. She holds a degree in Politics and International Relations and is passionate about working towards a transport network which is safe, accessible and affordable for all.

The second speaker at our conference, was Lara Henderson, a Development Officer for Scotland, at the Community Transport Association (CTA). Lara explained the work of the CTA to attendees, stating that they are a national organisation, covering the breadth of the UK, and have roughly 180 members in Scotland. These members provide community transport through a range of means, including minibuses, active travel groups, and many more, with Lara highlighting that community transport cannot be limited to a set definition of modes. Instead, she explained that community transport can be defined as **“community-led solutions to unmet transport needs...set up for a social purpose and never for profit”**. The range of community transport options in Scotland has been mapped by the CTA, with an [interactive map](#) available on their website.

With regards to the CTA itself, she stated that they provide support for communities aiming to establish community transport in their area, as well as those who already have community transport as an option. This support is provided through their ability to grant permits to not-for-profits, ensuring they are operating legally and safely, and through the UK's only transport-specific advice line, which provides callers with the advice and support they need in relation to community transport. Through their extensive engagement with community transport providers, the CTA also carry out policy and research work. Lara provided a few examples of recent reports released by the CTA, including their [‘More Than A Minibus’](#) report, which outlined the post-pandemic community transport landscape, as well as their [‘Act Local’](#) report, which focused on community transports role in a move to Scotland's just transition to net zero.

- **“...we wanted to find out what services are out there, how they are doing, and how they're delivering their services. And we looked at stats from 2021, which...was impacted by the pandemic, so, a lot of services had to adapt to help their communities”**
- **“A lot of operators are really passionate about climate action, and community transport itself is really well-suited to that, in terms of helping people reduce car journeys.”**

Lara went on to highlight the experiences of community transport users. She explained that due to community transport being not-for-profit, it can be more affordable for passengers. Also, as it is community-focused, community transport can be more flexible to the needs of users, with accessibility remaining a key priority for providers. Lara linked this with points made by previous speaker, Bettina Sizeland, on safety. She explained that passengers often have a more social experience when using community transport and are

provided with an opportunity to build connections with staff and fellow travellers. [Work carried out by the CTA in England](#), stressed the social value that community transport can have, finding that community transport can actively target social isolation and contribute to community bonding. This project also found that 93% of people who were surveyed said that community transport had a positive impact on feelings of isolation, loneliness and companionship.

- “Community transport services are often run on a smaller scale, and that quite often means that you can get to know the driver, and many have passenger assistants”
- “...generally, it’s [community transport] a more social experience”

To conclude, Lara illustrated the demographic make-up of workers across community transport. She explained that women appear to be well-represented in the community transport sector, with initial reports finding that 52% of volunteers are women, however, Lara did state that further work was required to have a more accurate picture of workers/volunteers. Additionally, through this work, the CTA have found that despite men/women volunteer numbers being relatively equal, only 30% of community transport drivers were women. During the launch of the newly launched [Women in Community Transport network](#), some women provided examples of being discouraged from becoming drivers, with Lara suggesting that pre-existing gender roles contribute to a limitation of opportunity for women in the sector. Through the CTA’s Women’s Network, the CTA hope to work towards the goal of better transport options for everyone, enhancing diversity across the sector.

- “...volunteer data was well-balanced, 52% were women, but there was a big difference in the number of those who were drivers, only 30% were women. There are a lot of roles in community transport, but it does open the question, of what women see their roles as, and how that influences their opportunities.”

“...testimonials from passengers show that it has allowed them to build stronger connections in their community, and also socially and physically do what they want...the impact community transport has had on their lives has been really positive.”



Ellie Harrison

Ellie is an artist, writer and public transport campaigner based in Glasgow. She is founder and co-ordinator of 'Bring Back British Rail' and the co-founder and current Chair of 'Get Glasgow Moving', public transport campaign. This campaign aims to establish fully integrated and affordable public transport. From 2019-2023, Ellie fused together her art and activism in 'Bus Regulation: The Musical', telling the history of public transport policy in three of the UK's biggest post-industrial city regions in collaboration with local public transport campaigns. In 2023, Ellie helped to launch the new region-wide 'Better Buses for Strathclyde' campaign to put pressure on the transport authority to bring the region's bus network back into public control using new powers in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019.



The final speaker of our conference was Ellie Harrison, a public transport campaigner, who is the current Chair and co-founder of [Get Glasgow Moving \(GGM\)](#). Ellie opened by providing her motivations for becoming a public transport campaigner, stating that she had experienced significant frustration when using transport. This frustration was often caused by high prices, unreliability of service and poor joined up thinking between providers. As a result, Ellie co-founded GGM in 2016, which calls for an integrated transport service. Ellie explained that this means that all modes of transport, such as trains, buses, ferries, etc. are co-ordinated and part of one system. She also stated that delivering good affordable transport is vital for the environment, social inclusion and economic prosperity. She went on to highlight that due to the increased likelihood of women using the service, women should be centre stage throughout development of public transport systems.

- “I moved here in 2008...and was just really annoyed at the cost of it, the unreliability of it, and the really bad planning, and the lack of coordination between operators since it was all privatised.”
- “...we need a better system... from a social justice perspective, from an economic perspective and...from a gendered perspective...as we've heard, women are less likely to drive, more dependent on public transport and are predominately not in positions of power in the transport sector.”

Ellie went on to discuss the current bus situation, proposing that bus deregulation and privatisation during the 1980s had caused negative outcomes. She explained that through deregulation, private companies focused on profitability of services, rather than reliability. This had also caused higher ticket prices for users, with there being a lack of control over pricing structures across the Glasgow region. She stated that some areas of the UK had avoided privatisation, with Lothian Buses being the only Scottish example. This service is publicly owned and highly regarded, providing affordable and accessible transport for users.

- “...this policy of bus deregulation was brought in, in 1986, and it meant that buses were no longer planned or run by public bodies, it was put out to private companies, to run routes anywhere they wanted...there was no regulation over the fares”
- “And what we have had since then is a vicious cycle of decline because companies only want to run profitable routes, so they cut services, they put the fares up...We have lost thousands of miles of routes”

Through GGM, Ellie and her fellow activists worked to amend the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, so that it would enable Scottish regions to set up publicly owned bus companies, and to regulate privately-owned bus companies through franchising. GGM is calling for Transport Scotland (TS) to empower the Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) to utilise franchising, so that bus routes are organised around community need; tickets are affordable and integrated; and a daily price cap applied.

Despite progress in this area, Ellie emphasised that the ability to franchise through the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, took four years to enact, in comparison to similar powers in England, taking only two months. Ellie explained that the franchising of services had begun in other British regions, including [Greater Manchester](#), Liverpool and West and South Yorkshire. She believes that this will significantly improve the travel experience of 8.5 million people, with Ellie proposing that reinvigorated public transport will likely have significantly positive effects on individual's lives. Therefore, Ellie and GGM hope that the changes seen elsewhere in the UK, can be utilised by SPT and TS to improve service-provision for those residing across Strathclyde. Ellie also draw attention to a 2023 report carried out in conjunction with the Centre for Cities, ['Miles Better: Improving Public Transport in the Glasgow City Region'](#), which considered how franchising could be utilised by SPT, outlining a framework and budget for the plans.

- **“So, the first was Better Buses for Greater Manchester, which launched in 2018, this was a very successful campaign...it has meant that all of the buses in the region will go back into public control, and the active travel network will be totally integrated into this”**
- **“...76% of all public transport journeys are made by bus. In Strathclyde something similar would really transform people's lives.”**

The final point from Ellie, focused on how this franchising system could not only be used by the SPT, but also how other regional transport partnerships could begin to implement increased public control over bus routes. There are seven regional transport partnerships in Scotland, as set up in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005, and Ellie believes that a regional approach would enable integrated public transport across Scotland. This approach has been backed by evidence from other countries, such as Germany², and from a TS evaluation of governance³. Overall, Ellie proposed that the release of centralised control from TS, as well as sufficient funding, was imperative to reversing transport decline.

- **“What we hope is that SPT can really blaze a trail for other regions to follow”**
- **“...and what we need TS to do, is to devolve the power and funding to the regional level, so that these regional transport authorities can actually plan and deliver networks.”**

“ We need to create a public transport system that is easy to use, cheaper than the car...it really isn't rocket science...It just comes down to good governance and regulation which, sadly, we have been completely lacking in this country since the 1980s. ”

² TfQL Community Interest Company. (2016). Building a World-Class Bus System for Britain: Extended Summary Report. Available at: <https://transportforqualityoflife.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/160314-building-a-world-class-bus-system-extended-summary-report.pdf>

³ Transport Scotland. (2019). Transport Governance: A Report by a Short-Life Working Group Looking at the Roles and Responsibilities of the Bodies Who Run Scotland's Transport Network. Available at: <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/45102/national-transport-strategy-transport-governance-working-group-report.pdf>

Discussion

After the contributions from our speakers, we opened the floor for a Q&A and, also, asked our in-person and online attendees to share their experiences of transport in Scotland. During this discussion multiple topics came up including, **reliability, safety, price and integration of transport services.**

Reliability

A key issue raised by women throughout discussions, was reliability. Many recounted stories of unreliable services, particularly around bus provision, stating that buses were often cancelled, late or failed to show. This resulted in a lack of confidence in public transport, and ultimately, was a significant barrier to women's usage of transport services.

Women highlighted that unless reliability is guaranteed, they would be unlikely to move from personal vehicle usage to public transport services. The Scottish Government's route map for 'Reducing Car Use for a Healthier, Fairer and Greener Scotland', developed in conjunction with COSLA, clearly shows that by 2023 they hope to achieve a 20% reduction in car usage⁴. Throughout this route map there is limited inclusion of 'reliability', with this being focused on rural communities. Women across [SWC Roadshow events](#), have stated that transport is consistently unreliable, particularly ferries, actively worsening their wellbeing. They have made consistent calls for an improved service, highlighting the impact on rural economies. However, it is clear that as well as rural areas, women across Scotland view public transport as unreliable and ultimately, does not meet their needs.

- **"It's the unreliability as well...you never know if it's going to arrive, you have to cross your fingers really. As you say, you just go in the car, it's safe, warm and whatever. You can leave when you like and come back when you like."**
- **"I've been in groups with people from the Highlands, and transport is non-existent."**

Safety

Attendees also discussed the issue of safety, stating that they often do not feel safe on buses and trains. Some gave accounts of being assaulted on public transport, and many had felt unsafe. This was linked with reliability, as some women felt that the risk of a bus or train not showing up, increased their chance of being assaulted. Again, this was off-putting for women using public transport, while also actively worsening women's and girls' sense of safety. Furthermore, older and disabled women explained that they often felt unsafe while on buses, highlighting erratic driving, and a lack of consideration of their mobility needs. When one considers that the majority of bus users are concessionary ticket holders, including the over 60s bus pass, it is vital that improved training is carried out with drivers, which includes a focus on the diverse range of needs of users. Staff were also seen as a major preventative measure against potentially abusive behaviour, with women believing that train/bus conductors and ticket office workers should remain across services.

⁴ Scottish Government and COSLA. (2021). Reducing Car Use for a Healthier, Fairer and Greener Scotland. Available at: <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/50872/a-route-map-to-achieve-a-20-per-cent-reduction-in-car-kms-by-2030.pdf>

- “I wonder if the safety this is about the unreliability. Like if you’re standing for ages, you don’t know when it’s coming. So, you’re okay if you’re standing there for about ten minutes, that’s fine, but then you start to wonder if it’s ever coming. And you’re quite vulnerable”
- “...I’ve been physically attacked, sexually attacked on buses and trains loads of times, and naebody’s even tried to help me...And one of the bus drivers actually put me aff [the bus] ...I walk everywhere now. I can’t go on buses and trains anymair, I just can’t stand it”
- “...they [buses] do sometimes jerk terribly when they’re stopping. I did have a bad fall not that long ago on a bus, so I have to make sure that I’m always holding on to something.”
- “I think it would be helpful to have someone on to help keep watch while someone is driving.”

Price

Women highlighted the increasing cost of tickets on public transport as an area of concern. They explained that the general rise in living costs had had a significant impact on their household income, and that they felt that there was a lack of regulation across services. This behaviour was seen as a major issue on buses across Scotland, with private companies controlling regions, resulting in raised prices for users. Women also highlighted the practice of keeping change, with some providers demanding that users have exact fares. ‘Exact Fare Policy’ is in use across many Scottish bus services, with the motivation being that it will reduce passenger/driver interaction times. However, women were highly negative of the scheme, stating that it amounted to “theft”, and that despite contactless payments becoming more popular, women who prefer to use cash, either through habit or necessity, were being unfairly discriminated against.

- “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”
- “Well, I was a carer for my dad...and you didn’t get much money to be a carer, and I mean if I had to go anywhere for appointments and things, I found it too expensive”
- “...I mean if you give them [bus drivers] a fiver, they’ll keep your change and aw that. Because they’re no regulated, they make their own rules, and no-one really questions it”

Integration of Transport Service

It was suggested by multiple women that an integrated system of transport services would significantly improve service-provision across Scotland. Women gave multiple ideas as to what they would like to see if transport services were to change, including a single ticket which could be used across multiple transport modes, as well as joined-up timetables. Timetables were raised as a particular issue, with some women feeling that electronic displays did not provide up-to-date information, and some bus stops had no information at all. Women also explained that often the physical spaces that transport modes existed within, such as stations and bus stops, were not designed to consider the needs of women, being out of town or in unlit areas. It was proposed that a full overhaul of transport systems could create a service that effectively worked for the majority of people, with women believing that integration was key in delivering this.

- “...the biggest frustration is how disjointed it is...I spent some time in Germany...and you have one card, you go on and off all the transport...It’s so simple. We are so complicated up here.”
- “The city is cut off from the train station and the bus station, so you have to walk for about an hour and a half...to get to the town centre, and between that there’s nothing.”

Thank You!

Thank you to all of those who attended our conference, as well as those who contributed online and via email. Also, thank you to our speakers for providing their wealth of knowledge and experience, as well as brilliantly contributing to our broader discussion.

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