



SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT CROSS PARTY GROUP ON
SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

MIND THE GAP:

TACKLING TRANSPORT INEQUALITIES IN SCOTLAND

JUNE 2025

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FOREWORD



Following the Cross-Party Group's successful inquiries into traffic reduction in 2022 and decarbonising public transport in 2023, we shifted our focus to the pressing issue of tackling inequalities in transport.

Transport has a vital role in delivering a fairer society and enabling everyone in Scotland to have equal access to daily life, work, education and community wellbeing. However, there are gaps in our current system which mean that women, children, disabled people and low-income households do not have equal access to transport in Scotland. These groups experience barriers related to the cost, availability, safety and convenience of our transport network. We must create a fair and reliable transport system that everyone can access.

We held a series of valuable evidence sessions looking at the experiences of different groups across Scotland when it comes to accessing transport. These four sessions heard from witnesses on the themes of transport poverty, children and young people, gender and disabilities. They raised issues such as unaffordable fares, poor transport connectivity, inaccessible services and safety concerns.

This report brings together the findings from these evidence sessions and makes some recommendations to the Scottish Government and transport authorities to achieve a transport system in Scotland that works for everyone. These include defining transport poverty and better data collection and metrics to facilitate better monitoring and evaluation of transport poverty in Scotland. We're also calling for transport authorities to implement lived experience participation with those most affected by transport inequalities. This means that services will be shaped by the voices of those who need them most. Health impact assessments of transport policies should also be used to identify how likely they are to affect different population groups. These recommendations will go some way to remove some of the barriers that limit mobility and reinforce social and economic inequalities through our transport system.

Can I thank everyone who gave evidence to the CPG. Their expertise and insight was invaluable. I particularly welcome the contributions from the Scottish Youth Parliament who I have been fortunate to engage further with since their presentations in October.

Special thanks also to our secretariat, Transform Scotland, who have pulled together this report. As with our previous reports, we will send this to the Government for a response.

Graham Simpson MSP, CPG Convener

FOREWORD



"This report helps focus minds on what transport policy should be delivering for the most vulnerable in our society. Get that right and we'll have better transport options for all."

Mark Ruskell MSP, Deputy Convener



"It is great that we could study this subject of transport and inequalities. Ensuring everyone has access to safe affordable transport is a big challenge. Are we willing as a nation to pay the bill, in order to ensure that everyone in Scotland has the transport they need and deserve?"

John Mason MSP, Deputy Convener



"This was an excellent inquiry. The challenge now is to see the change delivered that is needed to make transport available and reliable, accessible and affordable and safe for everyone. We urgently need to see investment and joined up thinking."

Sarah Boyack MSP, Deputy Convener

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Transport plays a vital role in enabling access to work, education, healthcare, and social connections. But in Scotland today, too many people are being left behind by a system that doesn't recognise or meet their needs.

From high costs and unreliable services to safety concerns and physical inaccessibility, transport inequalities are reinforcing wider patterns of social and economic exclusion. These issues are particularly acute for:

- Low-income households
- Children and young people
- Women
- Disabled people

About the inquiry

In 2024–25, the Scottish Parliament's Cross-Party Group on Sustainable Transport launched an inquiry to understand how Scotland's transport system contributes to inequality — and what must change.

Over four themed evidence sessions, the Group heard from experts, advocates, and community representatives. Across all groups, similar challenges emerged:

- Unaffordable fares and limited concessions
- Inaccessible services and poor rural connectivity
- Lack of reliable, frequent public transport
- Safety concerns, especially for women and disabled passengers
- Exclusion from transport decision-making processes

Key recommendations

The inquiry's findings led to two overarching recommendations for the Scottish Government and transport authorities:

1. Define and measure transport poverty

- Adopt a national definition that includes affordability, accessibility, availability, reliability, and safety
- Mandate the collection and use of disaggregated data (by age, gender, income, disability) to track and reduce inequalities

2. Embed equity in participation and budgeting

- Require co-design with those most affected by transport barriers
- Apply equality budgeting to prioritise investment in services for children, women, disabled people, and low-income communities
- Conduct health impact assessments of all major transport policies and investments

These changes are essential to ensure Scotland's transport system works for everyone.

A photograph of a modern building with a curved white facade and large windows. A wooden slat balcony is visible in the foreground. The sky is blue with some clouds. A large purple number '1' is in the top right corner.

1

INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

1.1 Why an inquiry into transport inequalities?

Transport is more than just infrastructure; it is a critical link connecting people to essential services and opportunities. It shapes where and how we live, enabling access to employment, education, healthcare, and public spaces, and supporting healthier, more connected communities. Yet in Scotland, access to affordable, reliable, and safe transport remains uneven. Women, disabled individuals, older adults, young people, and low-income households often face barriers that limit mobility, reinforcing existing social and economic inequalities.

In 2024-2025, the [Scottish Parliament's Cross Party Group on Sustainable Transport](#) held an inquiry consisting of four evidence sessions to investigate these inequalities, focusing on **poverty, gender, age, and disability**.

Each theme explored how people's lived experience intersects with transport policy and transport provision – from unaffordable fares and poor rural connectivity to inaccessible services and safety concerns. Evidence was heard from experts and advocacy groups from across Scotland, foregrounding a critical issue: our transport system is often failing those who need it most.

In rural areas, sparse and unreliable public transport increases social isolation and economic hardship. For women, personal safety and inflexible schedules remain major barriers. Disabled people frequently encounter inaccessible vehicles, stations, and information. And for many low-income families, the cost of travel eats into already-stretched budgets, limiting access to vital services.

This report brings together the findings and proposals from these sessions, along with recommendations for transport authorities to (i) define and collect data on transport poverty and (ii) tackle transport inequalities through participation and budgeting. These are predicated on the overarching call to action: we need a transport system in Scotland that works for *everyone*.

1.2 About the CPG

The purpose of the Cross Party Group on Sustainable Transport is 'to raise the profile of sustainable transport', with a particular focus on cross-modal issues, within the Scottish Parliament, and to promote policies and priorities relating to sustainable transport.

During the Parliament's sixth session, the Group has previously completed inquiries on [road traffic reduction](#) and [decarbonising public transport](#).

[Transform Scotland](#) provides the Secretariat for the Group. More information about the CPG and its membership can be found on the Transform website at <https://transform.scot/our-work/cross-party-group/>.



TRANSPORT & POVERTY

2. Transport & poverty

Transport is essential for accessing work, education, healthcare, and community – but for people on low incomes, it's often a barrier. High transport costs force people to choose between paying for travel or pursuing opportunities, locking them in a cycle of poverty, social isolation, and poor health.

This is what underpins *transport poverty*: when people lack access to affordable, reliable, safe, and accessible transport options to meet their daily needs.

Low-income households are less likely to own a car, relying on often expensive or poor public transport. In areas with poor services, people may feel forced into car ownership, adding financial strain due to costs like fuel and insurance.

Without affordable, reliable transport, essential services and job opportunities are out of reach. A fair transport system must address these inequities, ensuring mobility doesn't perpetuate poverty.

On this topic the Group heard from Public Health Scotland, The Poverty Alliance and Transport Scotland on (i) the definition of transport poverty, (ii) the experience of transport for those living in poverty, and (iii) the actions taken by the Scottish Government to date.

2.1 Transport poverty – a public health perspective

Presentation from Public Health Scotland

Rethinking transport as a health issue

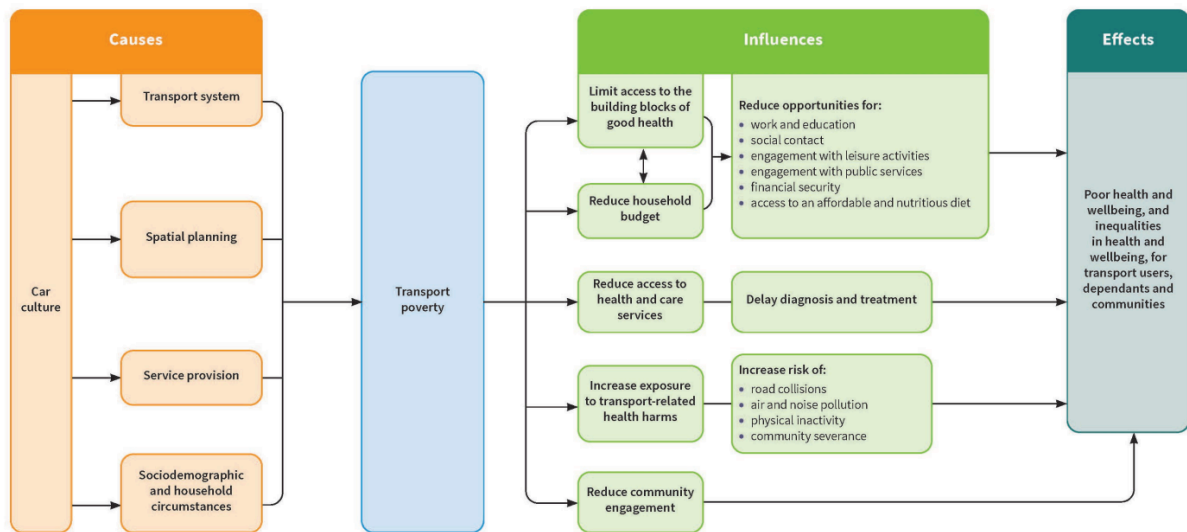
Public Health Scotland (PHS) highlighted transport poverty as a significant but often overlooked aspect of public health, drawing on findings from its report [Transport Poverty: A Public Health Issue](#).

Transport poverty definition:

'The lack of transport options that are available, reliable, affordable, accessible or safe that allow people to meet their daily needs and provide a reasonable quality of life.'

PHS emphasised that transport poverty is not just about cost, but includes wider structural barriers such as infrequent or unreliable services, poor physical accessibility, unsafe environments, and long travel times. These issues limit access to employment, education, healthcare and social participation — all key determinants of health.

The causes of transport poverty extend beyond the transport system itself, shaped by spatial planning, service delivery models, household circumstances, and an underlying culture of car dependency. People most at risk include those on low incomes, disabled people, women, and residents of rural and island communities.



A model of transport poverty: the causes and influences on health and health inequalities.
Source: Public Health Scotland

Reducing transport poverty

Applying a transport poverty lens reframes how we assess and address transport, shifting the focus from infrastructure delivery to lived experience and asking whether people can actually access the jobs, healthcare, education, and services they need in a safe, reliable, and affordable way. Tackling transport poverty in practice means raising awareness across sectors such as health and planning, and aligning public services with accessible transport, investing in inclusive low-carbon transport, prioritising the sustainable transport hierarchy, reducing structural car dependency where it disadvantages others, and designing systems that reflect the needs of Scotland's diverse range of users.

PHS concluded that tackling transport poverty requires cross-sector collaboration and a shift in how transport is valued – not just as infrastructure, but as a key enabler of health, equity and opportunity.

2.2 How transport and poverty intersect

Presentation from The Poverty Alliance

Insights from lived experience

The Poverty Alliance discussed the reciprocal relationship between transport and poverty, highlighting that transport poverty is a key driver of broader poverty. **It was noted that** low-income groups spend a significant portion (14%) of their income on transport, which limits access to work, education, and essential services. These groups are also more reliant on buses, and **with bus fares rising 26% above inflation between 2010 and 2020**, financial pressures have increased.

Research with citizen panels in urban and rural areas identified key issues in transport policy, including reliability, accessibility, safety, and the quality of vehicles. **Engaging communities in policy-making and improving public transport were identified as crucial steps** for reducing car dependency. **It was also noted that** rural residents face the additional challenge of paying £50 more per week for transport, which further restricts their mobility.

Tackling poverty through transport

The Poverty Alliance proposed that tackling transport poverty requires decision-makers to focus on making public transport more affordable and accessible for low-income groups – this includes expanding concessionary travel to cover under 25s, people on low-income and disability benefits, and unpaid carers. Moreover, prioritising public transport funding to ensure services are affordable, reliable, and tailored to local needs will help reduce transport poverty as improving access to opportunities such as work, education, and healthcare can help lift people out of poverty.

2.3 Government strategy on transport poverty

Presentation from Transport Scotland

Transport poverty in Scotland

Transport Scotland outlined the steps it is taking to address transport poverty. It was noted that **while fuel poverty received** more focus in recent years, **transport poverty received less attention** – despite having similarly harmful impacts on people's lives. People on low incomes often need to limit their activities due to affordability concerns. Transport Scotland acknowledged that **fuel duty is a regressive tax relative to household income and disproportionately affects those facing forced car-ownership.**

Transport Scotland's actions

One of the priorities of Transport Scotland's National Transport Strategy is to reduce inequalities by making transport more affordable and accessible. **It was reported that the Just Transition Plan for Transport sets out a goal to end transport poverty by 2055.**

Recent actions by Transport Scotland in this area include the [Fair Fares Review](#) (published in March 2024), which recommends maintaining concessionary schemes and prioritising bus-related measures, as buses are most relied upon by those most at risk of transport poverty. Other initiatives include a ferry fare freeze and a flat-fare bus pilot.

For 2024–25, the Scottish Government committed £430 million to concessionary travel and bus service funding. Over £11 million went into the Community Bus Fund, which targets areas with high levels of transport poverty. It was also noted that new bus powers and ongoing Bus Service Improvement Partnerships (BSIPs) support improved local service provision.

Key messages from the witnesses

1. Establish a **definition of transport poverty** (i.e. beyond affordability) and monitor progress using clear indicators across key dimensions — availability, reliability, affordability, accessibility, and safety.
2. Promote **cross-sector action** to reduce transport poverty, ensuring policies across health, planning, and climate are co-designed to meet the needs of those most affected.
3. Expand **concessionary travel** to under-25s, people on low incomes and disability benefits, and unpaid carers, and consider application across all modes.
4. Prioritise **investment** in affordable, reliable and integrated public transport, especially local bus services in rural and deprived areas, to reduce forced car dependency and widen access to opportunities.
5. Align **spatial planning**, public services, and transport systems to ensure everyone can reach education, healthcare and work without unaffordable or unsafe journeys.
6. Ensure people with **lived experience of poverty** have a meaningful voice in transport policy-making.



TRANSPORT, CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

3. Transport, children & young people

Transport plays a role in creating a fairer and more inclusive Scotland, particularly for children and young people. Yet their needs are too often overlooked in the planning of services and infrastructure. Many young people rely on walking, cycling, and public transport, but face challenges such as limited routes, unreliable services, safety concerns, and a lack of accessible infrastructure — especially in rural and island communities.

Children and young people make up 20% of Scotland's population and embedding healthy, sustainable travel habits early is essential. That means designing systems that genuinely meet their needs and reflect their lived experiences. Poor transport access can limit their ability to reach education, healthcare, work, and social opportunities, and contributes to wider health inequalities through poor air quality and restricted opportunities for active travel.

The Free Bus Travel Scheme for under-22s has made a significant difference to the lives of young people, with over 140 million journeys taken since its launch. Yet challenges remain; particularly around the availability and reliability of services, and uneven access across regions. Young people are clear: they want safer, healthier, and more affordable ways to get around, and they want a seat at the table when decisions about their means of getting around are being made.

On this topic, the Group heard from the Scottish Youth Parliament and Sustrans on (i) the role of public transport in the lives of Scotland's young people and (ii) children's experience of and attitudes towards active travel.

3.1 Children & active travel

Presentation from Sustrans

Understanding children's travel experiences

Children and young people depend on safe, accessible transport to support their health, wellbeing, and everyday independence. Sustrans' Children's Index, which is based on input from over 1,000 children, is helping to close the evidence gap on children's lived experiences of travel. It finds that around half of Scotland's children walk, wheel or cycle to school, yet barriers persist — from inadequate crossings and a lack of protected cycle routes to long distances and concerns about safety. Many young people say they would walk more if essential services were closer to home, and they back improvements like more road crossings (80%) and cycle paths separated from traffic (79%). The Index also highlights that children and young people care about their health, want to be driven less and that they don't feel the government is doing enough to help children lead healthy lives.

Embedding the future generation's needs in transport planning

The Children's Index highlights the need for transport planning that is grounded in evidence and shaped by the lived experiences of young people. Sustrans and its partners are working to ensure that children's views inform infrastructure decisions and are embedded in transport policy at every level. This means prioritising inclusive access, tackling health inequalities, and designing environments where all children can travel safely, confidently, and sustainably.

3.2 How transport and poverty intersect

Presentation from Scottish Youth Parliament

Public transport as a lifeline

For many young people, public transport is not a choice but a necessity. The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP)

highlighted that affordability, safety, and reliability are critical to making public transport work for young people across Scotland. While the Free Bus Travel Scheme for under-22s has had a major positive impact — reducing isolation and supporting access to education and work — not all young people are benefitting equally. Barriers remain, especially for those in rural or island communities, where poor connectivity, lack of ferries, and unreliable train services can cut off essential opportunities.

Calls for change

SYP representatives emphasised that public transport must be affordable, accessible, and designed with young people in mind. Their key priorities include:

- More reliable and frequent services
- Safer waiting areas and better route planning
- Accessibility for disabled young people
- Ending negative attitudes toward young passengers

The SYP's 'All Aboard' campaign calls for extending free travel to under-26s and ensuring young people have equal access to all modes of transport, no matter where they live.

Involving young people in decisions

Young people want to be part of the solution. The SYP called for stronger representation in transport planning and policy, arguing that young people are experts in their own experience. They proposed involving young people in the design and delivery of services and increasing youth presence in decision-making forums. Without this input, transport systems risk being out of step with the needs of those who depend on them most.

Key messages from the witnesses

1. Improve the **reliability and frequency of public transport services** for young people, particularly in rural and underserved areas, ensuring the Free Bus Travel Scheme for under-22s is effective by addressing gaps in service where access is limited or unreliable.
2. **Invest in more sustainable transport** options, in recognition of the fact that children and young people rely on active travel and public transport more than other groups.
3. Actively **involve children and young people in transport decision-making**, using evidence such as the Children's Index or representative organisations such as Scottish Youth Parliament to create policies and infrastructure that promote healthier choices and ensure services are safe, accessible, and tailored to their specific needs.

A photograph of a modern tram at a city station. The tram is white with large windows reflecting the surroundings. Several people are walking alongside the tram on the platform. In the background, there are city buildings with spires and a traffic light. The scene is captured in a cinematic style with soft lighting.

4

TRANSPORT & GENDER

4. Transport & gender

Transport significantly influences gender equality. Women often make more complex, multi-tasking trips — such as combining childcare, shopping, and part-time work — yet transport planning has historically focused on traditional 9-5 commuting patterns. This mismatch leaves women underserved by public transport routes and schedules.

Safety is another major concern: poorly lit stations, harassment, and unsafe walking routes disproportionately affect women, discouraging travel and limiting access to jobs, education, and services.

These barriers reinforce traditional gender roles and restrict independence. By addressing women's specific travel patterns and prioritising safety, transport systems can become powerful tools for empowerment — improving women's ability to get around, supporting economic participation, and helping close the gender gap.

On this topic the Group heard from Transport Scotland and Scottish Women's Budget Group on (i) the safety of women & girls on public transport and (ii) the role of gender budgeting for fairer transport.

4.1 Safety on public transport

Presentation from Transport Scotland

Understanding safety concerns for women and girls

Women and girls often feel unsafe on public transport — not just due to actual incidents, but because of persistent exposure to environments that feel threatening. Factors such as poor lighting, unreliable services, unfamiliar routes, and the presence of intoxicated individuals contribute to a heightened sense of vulnerability. Even routine journeys can involve navigating antisocial behaviour, unwanted attention, or harassment, particularly in the evenings or on quieter routes. This constant need for vigilance can deter women from travelling altogether, limiting access to key opportunities and services.

Transport Scotland's response

Transport Scotland has taken a research-led approach to tackling these safety concerns. Through a [series](#) of consultations, surveys, and engagement with women and stakeholders across Government, police and transport, they have identified key issues contributing to feelings of insecurity — whether this be time of travel, or alcohol use by other travellers, or the reliability and frequency of services. Their engagement work produced three key principles:

- **Consultation with women:** Direct input from women is essential in designing safe transport environments.
- **Simplified reporting procedures:** Streamlining the process to report incidents can build trust and encourage reporting, supported by staff training initiatives.
- **Sharing best practices:** While some organisations are implementing effective measures, these practices are isolated. A coordinated approach is needed to ensure consistent safety improvements across Scotland.

Ongoing work focuses on embedding these recommendations in policy and practice. Priorities include increasing visibility of staff, improving service reliability, and creating familiar, safe environments. By treating women's safety as central to transport planning, the aim is to build systems that support confidence, freedom, and equal access for everyone.

4.2 Gender budgeting

Presentation from Scottish Women's Budget Group

What is gender budgeting?

Gender budgeting refers to assessing how public money is raised and spent, with the goal of addressing structural inequalities. It asks key questions like *who benefits* from spending decisions and *who is left behind*. In transport, it exposes how planning often favours male commuting patterns over the more complex, care-related journeys women frequently make—such as trips to schools, shops, or health appointments.

Using gender budgeting for fairer transport

Applying gender budgeting in transport shifts the focus from outputs to outcomes. For instance, rather than measuring success by the number of miles of cycle lanes built, it asks whether those routes genuinely serve people's needs — connecting them to essential services and supporting everyday travel, such as going to a doctor's appointment or going to the shops. Evidence shows current infrastructure often fails to do this, especially for women balancing unpaid care responsibilities.

A 2024 survey revealed that over 25% of women — particularly single parents, disabled women, and those in rural areas — struggle with transport costs, leading to isolation and reduced wellbeing. The Scottish Women's Budget Group calls for a rethinking of transport investment: one that prioritises lived experience, centres unpaid care, carries out meaningful equality impact assessments, and actively involves under-represented groups to ensure our transport systems are inclusive.

Key messages from the witnesses

1. Implement intersectional **gender budgeting** in all transport planning and investment decisions, ensuring spending prioritises women's actual travel patterns and unpaid care work.
2. Pursue and embed the recommendations from Transport Scotland's *2023 Women and Girls' Safety on Public Transport* report to address **safety** concerns systemically.
3. Ensure all new active travel routes are designed to **support daily care-related trips** — not just commuting — by connecting homes to schools, healthcare, and essential services.
4. Require collection and publication of **gender-disaggregated data** in all transport consultations and usage surveys to measure reach, identify gaps, and track equality impacts.

5



TRANSPORT & DISABILITIES

5. Transport & disabilities

Disabled people in Scotland face persistent inequalities in accessing transport. The [social model of disability](#) highlights that it is not the disability itself, but rather the barriers in society (physical, attitudinal, financial, or systemic) that create exclusion. Across both public transport and active travel, these barriers are wide-ranging – from inaccessible infrastructure to negative attitudes from staff and other transport users. Transport systems are still largely designed with an able-bodied user in mind, further marginalising those living with disabilities.

Negative attitudes and inconsistent knowledge among transport staff can deter disabled people from travelling, turning routine journeys into stressful or exclusionary experiences. Poor information provision, such as inaccessible signage, missing audio announcements, and fragmented ticketing, disproportionately affects disabled passengers, particularly in rural areas where missing a connection can mean a complete inability to travel. These challenges are compounded for those living in poverty, where financial constraints make it even harder to access transport, and for those in remote areas, where transport options are already limited.

As Scotland works towards more sustainable travel through public transport, walking, wheeling, and cycling, it is crucial to recognise that these inequalities may worsen unless accessibility is prioritised from the outset. Disabled people, particularly those facing additional barriers like poverty or rural isolation, are at risk of being further excluded from the benefits of more sustainable transport options.

Making sustainable transport truly inclusive requires a shift away from viewing accessibility as an add-on. Accessibility must be embedded in design. The full range of barriers must be addressed so that Scotland's transport system works for everyone, regardless of ability, income, or location.

On this topic, the Group heard from Disability Equality Scotland and independent accessibility consultant Hussein Patwa on (i) the transport challenges for disabled people in Scotland and (ii) the need to embed access in sustainable transport initiatives.

5.1 Barriers to transport for disabled people

Presentation from Disability Equality Scotland

Top transport issues for disabled people

Disability Equality Scotland (DES) emphasised that disabled people – around 20% of Scotland's population – continue to face major transport barriers. A recent [DES survey](#) found that 96.7% of respondents identified accessible transport as their top concern, followed by inclusive communication, particularly for those with sensory impairments. Nearly 90% supported mandatory disability equality training for transport staff. These priorities reflect a persistent gap between policy ambitions and the lived experience of disabled transport users.

Inconsistent progress and the value of co-design

DES's review of [Transport Scotland's 2016 Accessible Travel Framework](#) (to improve the door to door journeys for disabled people) revealed patchy implementation across regions and modes. Key gaps include poor data collection, limited public accountability, an absence of inclusive communication, and a lack of mandatory disability equality training for public transport staff. The original framework also overlooked active travel, sustainable transport and community transport, all of which are now key priorities. In terms of infrastructure planning, co-design and access panels were flagged as critical solutions. Designing for disabled people from the outset ultimately benefits everyone, as seen in the case of Sighthill Bridge in Glasgow.

Addressing safety

DES raised serious concerns about safety, with 50% of disabled people fearing harassment on public transport. Disability hate crime reports rose 22% in 2024, and 97% of incidents go unreported. Currently, 26 transport providers have signed the [Hate Crime Charter](#), a commitment to a zero-tolerance approach to hate crime on public transport, though few offer specific training. With the Accessible Travel Framework set to expire in 2026

and the Just Transition Plan only promising full inclusion in 20 years time, DES argues that the pace of change is too slow.

5.2 Balancing equity and sustainability in transport

Presentation from Hussein Patwa, independent accessibility consultant

Accessibility in the sustainability agenda

Hussein Patwa highlighted the essential role of accessibility in delivering genuinely sustainable transport systems. While progress is visible in areas such as smart ticketing and decarbonisation, **too often these advances overlook the needs of disabled people**. For example, electric vehicles remain silent hazards for visually impaired users due to the lack of mandatory noise-emitting features, floating bus stops can create new barriers when poorly integrated with pedestrian access, and a lack of inclusive communication (e.g. audio-visual announcements, clear signage, and real-time accessible travel apps) can make travelling disorientating and distressing for passengers. These issues also become more pronounced during service disruptions or emergencies, which are increasing with climate change.

Prioritising inclusion in policy and in practice

While the core accessibility challenges are well understood, solutions remain delayed due to political hesitance and a reluctance to make difficult trade-offs. Patwa urged planners and policymakers to move beyond short-term fixes and commit to inclusive, long-term design. This includes recognising that disabled people have fewer travel options and are disproportionately affected by inaccessible environments. Accessibility must not be treated as an optional add-on – it needs to be fully integrated into sustainability planning from the outset. This is crucial if we are to have a modern transport system which serves all members of society whilst curbing emissions.

Key messages from the witnesses

1. Mandate **disability equality and hate crime training** for all public transport staff across all modes and providers, to ensure consistent standards and help disabled people feel safer and more confident using public transport, addressing safety concerns that often act as a barrier to access.
2. Embed **co-design with disabled people** in all transport planning and infrastructure projects, so that their needs are properly understood, represented, and met.
3. Prioritise **accessibility** in all sustainability and net zero transport strategies, so disabled people benefit equally from decarbonisation and modal shift, and the associated investment in active and public transport.
4. Require all transport operators to sign up to and support the **Hate Crime Charter** and embed clear reporting channels to tackle hate incidents and create a safer and more inclusive transport environment for all travellers.
5. Review and strengthen the **Accessible Travel Framework** before its 2026 expiry, with binding targets and accountability mechanisms to ensure the needs of disabled people are not sidelined amongst other transport priorities.



6

RECOMMENDATIONS

6. Recommendations

The inquiry heard from witnesses on the themes of transport poverty, children & young people, gender, and disabilities. The 'key messages' at the end of each section of this report highlight the witnesses' views as to how problems in each area can be alleviated. In this section, we present four cross-cutting recommendations which, if implemented, would provide a pathway towards the proactive reduction of transport inequalities.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Define transport poverty & collect the data that will allow it to be alleviated

1.1 Adopt a shared **definition of transport poverty** which includes affordability, availability, accessibility, reliability, and safety; and develop metrics for each dimension to allow progress towards its alleviation be monitored and evaluated.

1.2 Mandate **systematic collection of disaggregated transport data**, including trip purpose, frequency, mode, and intersectional demographic information, to inform budgeting and to monitor progress against transport poverty indicators.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Tackle transport inequalities through participation and budgeting

2.1 Require all transport authorities (local, regional & national) to implement **lived experience participation** through co-design with those most affected by transport inequalities, to identify unmet need and ensure that services are shaped by the voices of those who need them most.

2.2 Ensure that all transport authorities apply **equality budgeting** to ensure investment decisions prioritise the alleviation of inequalities suffered by children & young people, women, disabled people and those on low incomes. This is grounded in the Fairer Scotland Duty, which since 2018 has placed a legal responsibility for public bodies to "reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage, when making strategic decisions".

2.3 Require **health impact assessments** of transport plans and policies to identify how they are likely to affect different population groups and their wider impacts on health and wellbeing.

APPENDIX 1:

Meeting minutes

The four evidence sessions held by the CPG as part of its inquiry into transport inequalities were minuted. The minutes can be accessed at the links listed below.

Transport & Poverty (June 2024)

Minutes: <https://transform.scot/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/CPG-11-06-24-transport-and-poverty-draft-minutes.pdf>

Witnesses: Dr Margaret Douglas (Public Health Scotland), Ralph Hartley (The Poverty Alliance), Bertrand Deiss (Transport Scotland)

Transport, Children & Young People (October 2024)

Minutes: <https://transform.scot/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/1-Oct-CPG-Sustainable-Transport-Minutes.pdf>

Witnesses: Dr Lee Muir (Sustrans), Islay Jackson MSYP & David McGilp MSYP (Scottish Youth Parliament)

Transport & Gender (December 2024)

Minutes: <https://transform.scot/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/10-Dec-2024-Sustainable-Transport-CPG-draft-minutes.pdf>

Witnesses: Heather Williams (Scottish Women's Budget Group), Catherine Heeney (Transport Scotland)

Transport & Disabilities (March 2025)

Minutes: <https://transform.scot/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/2025-03-04-CPG-Sustainable-Transport-minute.pdf>

Witnesses: Douglas Bryce (Disability Equality Scotland), Hussein Patwa (independent accessibility consultant)

APPENDIX 2:

Summary of key messages raised by the witnesses

This table groups the key messages presented by the witnesses across the four evidence sessions on a thematic basis.

Theme	Recommendation
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support hate crime and disability equality training for all public transport staff; including signing up to the Hate Crime Charter• Improve reporting channels for incidents on, or related to, public transport• Implement Women & Girls' Safety recommendations
Affordability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider expanding concessionary fares to under-25s, low-income groups, unpaid carers, and people on disability benefits / further targeted support for unemployed individuals
Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Embed accessibility in all sustainability and transport strategies• Review and strengthen the Accessible Travel Framework with binding targets• Design active travel routes to support care trips
Availability & reliability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase investment in local, rural, and underserved areas to improve reliability of services, especially for youth and those affected by transport poverty• Increase investment and support for bus priority in urban areas
Data & evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Require gender-disaggregated and age-relevant transport usage data (such as the Children's Index) to guide transport investment and planning decisions

Representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed co-design with disabled people in all transport planning • Actively involve children, young people, and people with lived experience of poverty in the transport decision-making process
Cross-sector planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align spatial planning, healthcare, education, and transport systems and promote cross-sector action to reduce transport poverty; for instance, work to ensure appointment times are scheduled to allow people to get there by public transport
Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt a shared definition of transport poverty and track progress across availability, reliability, affordability, accessibility, and safety • Implement intersectional gender budgeting to ensure investment reflects diverse needs and travel patterns, including unpaid care work

Credits:

Report written by Laura Hyde-White (Transform Scotland). Editing by Colin Howden (Transform Scotland).