



Rural Bus Summit

*Summary of presentations and discussion
held on 25th August 2016*



Introduction

Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS), as Scotland's dedicated consumer champion, has been a prominent voice for those living in our rural and remote communities. From our successful *Postcode Penalty* campaign on rural delivery charges to our *Remotely Excluded* research report on issues that matter to Scots in rural communities, CAS and our 61 member Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) are uniquely placed based on our high engagement with rural consumers. Almost a quarter (23.6%) of CAB clients live in Scotland's rural or remote areas with a similar proportion (22.4%) of users of our consumer helpline living in these areas. This is comparable to the 21% of Scots who live there.



Word cloud of discussion at rural bus summit

In June of this year we published our *Round The Bend* report which looked at bus services in 113 local communities across Scotland and gathered information on over 1,200 journeys. This research was a collaborative project led by 16 of our local CAB members. Without these dedicated volunteers such a detailed and wide reaching research project would never have been possible. From Tweedbank to Thurso, Stonehaven to Stranraer our research uncovered some of the difficulties faced by rural bus users. This ranged from pricing – in remote rural areas the median cost of a return to the nearest job centre is £9 – to weekend services – 8% of locations surveyed had no Sunday service to the nearest hospital. Following our *Round the Bend* report we invited policy experts in public transport, consumer organisations, government officials and community representatives to discuss the issues facing rural communities and public transport. A list of attendees is included. This paper summarises the presentations and discussions as well as collating ideas from attendees and we present these as potential discussion points for future work on rural transport policy.

Summary of Presentations at Rural Bus Summit

A review of local bus provision by Scottish Citizens Advice Bureaux

Fraser Sutherland, Citizens Advice Scotland

A summary of how CAS carried out its research into rural bus provision and included details of main results discussed in the *Round the Bend* report. Key issues highlighted were lack of Sunday services connecting to healthcare facilities and large distances to the nearest college in rural Scotland.

Challenges facing rural bus operators

George Mair, Confederation of Passenger Transport

A number of challenges were highlighted including: the difficulty serving dispersed populations over large distances; reduction and uncertainty of public funding; move to more centralised public services; employing staff in rural communities; lack of consideration of public transport in planning decisions.

Barriers faced by the residents of Clackmannanshire who rely on public transport to attend hospital

Lynne Brierley, Clackmannanshire Citizens Advice

A case study example of how residents of Clackmannanshire that rely on public transport to travel to Forth Valley Hospital face the prospect of a long journey, extensive waiting times, that essentially could turn a 30 minute appointment into a day long trip. It was highlighted that better co-ordination of bus times could ensure services didn't overlap so much.

Connections in rural Fife

Julia Menzies, Citizens Advice and Rights Fife

A summary of research findings for how some residents of rural Fife find it difficult to access important public services due to them not being delivered in local communities. Key examples of how lack of connectivity affects people include: Reducing access to employment opportunities; Reducing access for health care and hospital appointments; Reducing access for social contact and support which reduces isolation and supports and sustains good mental and physical health; reducing access to Job Centre meeting may lead to sanctions for late or missed appointments.

The role of Regional Transport Partnerships

Trond Haugen, SESTrans

A summary of what Regional Transport Partnerships (RTP) do and do not do. This also included a summary of good practice and developments in recent years by RTPs including: bustracker and live departure information; the Thistlecard disability assistance card; OneTicket multimodal season pass; tripsharing initiative to encourage sharing of car journeys.

Summary of facilitated discussions at Rural Bus Summit

Two sessions of facilitated discussion were held at the summit. The first looked at pricing issues and how to ensure public transport is affordable for all in society. The following diagrams highlight best practice identified, which consumer groups attendees felt were most affected by current fare arrangements and what the main challenges are faced by bus operators and public bodies in addressing the issue.



Best Practice

- Flat rate tickets
- Change given on buses
- E-tickets and mobile apps
- Free Wifi
- Round number ticket prices
- Concessionary fares
- Interagency working
- Strong leadership from some local authorities
- Concessionary travel for over 60s and disabled
- Integration of car sharing and community transport
- Smartzone Aberdeen
- SPT Dial-A-Bus
- Plus Bus ticketing
- Smart Tickets
- Taxi Cards
- Premium intercity services



Challenged Consumers

- Unemployed
- Low paid
- Multiple jobs
- Students
- Multiple child families
- Disabled
- Remote rural consumers
- Young people



Current Challenges

- Reducing passenger numbers
- Lack of competition
- Unprofitable routes
- Lack of connections
- Lack of all routes on Traveline
- Public expectations
- Need for multiple changeovers
- Cut-throat competition
- Subsidies not transparent
- Poor assessment of value for money
- Big profits eroding trust
- New technology requires modernisation
- Concessionary fares
- Lack of coordination

Attendees were also asked to think of potential policy changes or new initiatives that would help make public transport affordable for all. The below table highlights some of the common ideas discussed.

-  **Options for making fares more affordable**
-  Make fares transparent
-  Roll out best practice examples
-  Ensure better connections at changeovers
-  Simple to understand fares
-  Increase bus usage
-  Widen access to concessionary fares
-  Cap on fare increases
-  More smart ticketing
-  Bus Regulation
-  Standardise fares
-  Increase national funding
-  Means test concessionary travel
-  Better use of motor stock

A second discussion on how to ensure key public services are accessible to those living in remote and rural areas of Scotland. The below tables highlight some current good practice and barriers as well as ideas generated to help those communities struggling to access services.



Best Practice

- Post bus
- Carrying goods by bus to help subsidise passenger miles
- Community owned and run bus schemes
- Services on wheel e.g. mobile banks and libraries
- Wifi on buses and at bus stops to help access to e-ticketing
- Rural community hubs for delivering services



Current Challenges

- Community lead schemes not long term funded
- Young people and those in low pay not supported by current schemes
- Unreliable services can put employment at risk
- Promotion of tourism by car no tourist spend on public transport
- Community services are volunteer lead – risk of fatigue
- High expectations of operators
- Remote locations mean services expensive to run physically



Options for providing more local services rurally



More community hubs – pooling resource



More mobile services to service larger areas



Valuing our public transport with investment



Ensure planning decisions take account of public transport



Champion use of public transport to tourists



Invest in buses through new National Transport Strategy

List of Attendees

Bob Barnes-Watts	Scottish Association for Public Transport
Lynne Brierley	Clackmannanshire Citizens Advice
Steve Bunch	Competition and Markets Authority
Francesca Crozier	Clackmannanshire Citizens Advice
John Finnie MSP	Scottish Green Party
Peter Grant	Transport Scotland
Eva Groeneveld	Which?
Derek Halden	DHC Loop Connections
Trond Haugen	South East Scotland Transport Partnership
Patrick Hogan	Citizens Advice Scotland
Arthur Homan-Elsy	Scottish Association for Public Transport
Keith Dryburgh	Citizens Advice Scotland
Greig Mackay	Bus Users Scotland
George Mair	Confederation of Passenger Transport
Susan McPhee	Citizens Advice Scotland
Julia Menzies	Citizens Advice and Rights Fife
Ally Nelson	Transport Scotland
Lucy Reid	Scottish Government
Sheila Scobie	Competition and Markets Authority
Caitlyn Scott	Scottish Labour Support Unit
Fraser Sutherland	Citizens Advice Scotland



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