

Transport Update

Summary and Recommendations

Building on a transport response proposition previously agreed by the Environment and Economy Board, this report highlights relevant updates and progress, with a view to develop a way forward on three key transport priorities which have emerged as a result of responding to the pandemic.

The Board is invited to:

- i. Note the update on the recovery, public transport, active travel and electric vehicles
- ii. Agree the proposed COSLA position which acknowledges the continued need to focus on the above areas, and
- iii. Agree to invite Transport Scotland back to the Board to discuss electric vehicle infrastructure later in the year.

References

Previous relevant reports;

- Environment and Economy Board December 2019 – Bus Partnership Fund
- Environment and Economy Board December 2019 – Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure
- COSLA Leaders 15 May 2020 – Spaces for People
- COSLA Leaders 29 May 2020 – Spaces for People
- Environment and Economy Board June 2020 – Covid-19 Transport Update
- COSLA Leaders July 2020 – Education Recovery Guidance

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September 2020

Transport Update

Purpose

1. A report to the Environment and Economy Board in June provided an overview of the ongoing challenges caused by the impact of Covid-19 on transport. It asked Members to endorse a set of high-level principles to inform our contribution to the national recovery response. This report outlines how those agreed positions have been subsequently been taken forward and looks ahead to how transport can make contribution to the strategic goal of the Board.

Current COSLA Position

2. The Environment and Economy Board endorsed a set of key principles – summarised below - to inform COSLA’s transport response to the pandemic. The Board acknowledged that much of our work on business as usual transport priorities had to be paused to allow officers to focus on emerging issues linked to the current pandemic. This included:
 - Emphasising the need for local responses and avoiding a one-size-fits all approach;
 - Continued focus on reliable public transport provision and active travel modal shift;
 - Drawing on Local Government professional expertise, and
 - Ensuring our response is in line with our duty to deliver on climate change commitments and the role that transport plays in the just transition to a net-zero society and economy as agreed previously by the Board.
3. In common with the other reports on this agenda, this paper should be read alongside the agenda item 3 on the priorities of the Board. This paper highlights that three transport policy areas have required a particular focus as a result of our continued work on responding to Covid-19, as well as their relevance to this Board’s existing positions on achieving net zero no later than 2045. These are:
 - Public transport
 - Active travel
 - Electric vehicles and charging infrastructure

This paper discusses each of these areas in turn below.

What is changing?

Transport and the Recovery from Covid-19

4. Transport continues to feature highly in the response to the challenges raised by the Covid-19 pandemic. The [Transport Transition Plan](#) is available online on the Transport Scotland website.
5. The [Advisory Group on Economic Recovery](#) set out its priorities for Scotland’s economic recovery on 22 June. This report emphasises the need to prevent further widening of inequality in society as well as a focus on education and skills and employment to provide

the focus of a whole system approach to economic recovery. The Scottish Government [response](#) to the Advisory Group identified transport as a key enabler of the Scottish economy, highlighting the importance of investment in transport infrastructure (including maintenance of existing assets) to support economic recovery. The report by the Advisory Group is discussed at more length in agenda item 5.

6. In its [Advice on a Green Recovery](#) published in July, the Just Transition Commission identifies transport as one of the critical areas that merited attention in the context of a green recovery. It emphasises that current circumstances may represent a potential turning point for the transport system in Scotland, as many people experience cleaner air and adapt to traveling less. However, risks are identified around the shift in perception towards public transport, affecting patronage and the equity implications of threats to the viability of some services. There is a clear need for Government intervention to support a green transport recovery, embed some of the more positive trends seen in transport use in recent months (increased walking and cycling) but also address the equity and economic impacts that these changes may bring.

Public transport

7. Since the last meeting of the Board COSLA focused on two aspects of public transport. The first was school transport provision ahead of schools returning in August and the second was engagement with Transport Scotland on the Bus Priority Rapid Deployment Fund (BPRDF).
8. COSLA officers worked with the Scottish Government on the development of the school transport elements of the [guidance](#) for the re-opening schools, which was published on 30 July following approval by COSLA Group Leaders.
9. Substantial engagement with Local Government colleagues and bus operators was required to produce a set of acceptable and practical options for school transport provision – with a particular focus on registered school services, given capacity constraints and need for physical distancing between pupils and other passengers. School transport arrangements ahead of schools reopening also had an operational impact on some local authority waste services, which is covered in detail elsewhere on the agenda.
10. The Scottish Government announced a £7m Public, School and Community Transport Covid-19 Mitigation Fund on 18 August to help support physical interventions by transport operators to increase capacity and public confidence for those using public, school and community transport. Measures include driver screens, hand sanitiser dispenser and fitting, or disinfectant fogging equipment. The scheme is open to applications from both operators and local authorities. However prior to this announcement, the Scottish Government agreed with COSLA that a subset of the £7m, £1.5m, would be distributed to Local Authorities to support the installation of Covid-19 mitigation measures on vehicles used for Local Authority provided or contracted school transport. The distribution of this funding is to be agreed by COSLA Leaders at their meeting on 28 August.
11. During the early stages of the pandemic this year, COSLA officers were informed by Transport Scotland that the 2019 Programme for Government commitment to invest over £500m in improved bus priority infrastructure (Bus Partnership Fund) would be paused due to the Covid-19 crisis. This was followed by a decision in July to repurpose £10m capital funding - allocated to this year's tranche of the Fund and for bus priority measures on trunk roads – for a Bus Priority Rapid Development Fund (BPRDF).

12. In line with the original purpose of the funding, the BPRDF is for temporary bus priority infrastructure, to mitigate against the expected increase in car use and therefore traffic congestion, as lockdown measures are eased. Such temporary infrastructure will in turn enable evaluation of the case for permanent measures under the wider Bus Partnership Fund, once this programme is re-started. These temporary interventions are aimed at encouraging bus usage in the recovery period post lockdown for people returning to work and leisure travel; they include bus lanes, bus gates, priority signalling and related signage.
13. This Fund has been developed in direct response to a number of local authorities' requests for funding support.
14. The BPRDF was launched on 17 July, and a paper was submitted to the Settlement and Distribution Group (SDG) soon thereafter. COSLA Leaders agreed at the end of July to simply note the fund had been announced, as per SDG recommendations. Reservations were expressed by some Members on the predominantly urban nature of this Fund. These have been fed back to Transport Scotland, emphasising the need for funding to allow as broad a range as possible of interventions to adequately address local transport challenges, particularly in rural areas.
15. Transport Scotland officials have indicated that work on the main Bus Partnership Fund is likely to recommence in the autumn, however timescales for the launch have not yet been confirmed. COSLA officers will attend a meeting of the Bus Partnership Steering Group in September, which has been set up to consult stakeholders on the re-start and launch of the Bus Partnership Fund.
16. The Scottish Government also approved additional expenditure of up to £63 million to support bus operators with maintaining bus services from 17 August until 8 November. This extends the support of up to £46.7 million which is being provided to increase bus services since 22 June. The funding will cover the expected loss of fare-paying passenger revenue that operators continue to experience due to COVID-19 physical distancing requirements and reduced carrying capacity.
17. [Transport Scotland data](#) for the period 27 July – 2 August shows an overall reduction in journeys using public transport modes when compared to this time last year. Capacity is also predicted to be limited in the coming months to enable users to socially distance. Public messaging continues to stress the need to only use public transport as a last resort, to ensure it is available for those with no alternative. This, coupled with concerns about using public transport identified in Transport Scotland's regular [Public Attitudes Surveys](#), signals the risk of a 'car-led recovery' and highlights the need for continued action to mitigate as much as possible its negative effects on service viability, congestion, air pollution and especially on groups without access to private cars.
18. It is critical that Local Government is enabled to play its part in mitigating these adverse impacts. We believe that further work is required to inform COSLA's position on public transport in light of the challenges that Covid-19 will present and the indications that public transport will continue to feature strongly in the national political agenda, both in terms of strategic focus but also funding. With the input of professional associations, we believe it would be useful to provide a focussed report on public transport, setting out key issues, challenges, and priority areas for action and investment, with a particular focus on non-urban areas. This could be taken to a future meeting of the Board and form the basis of our engagement with Scottish Government on public transport.

Active Travel

19. In line with the position agreed by Leaders, COSLA officers have continued to meet regularly Transport Scotland, SCOTS and Sustrans on the operation and progress of the Spaces for People (SfP) Fund. This group now offers an established channel for free flowing discussion between officers and a space for issues to be raised as appropriate.
20. Applications for the Fund closed in early July and the full £30m was allocated soon thereafter. Additional funding was subsequently repurposed from this financial year's active travel budget to fund all second bids, taking the funding to £38.97m. A total of 30 Local Authorities have applied and received [funding](#).
21. The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity also announced on 17 August that the Scottish Government intends to reduce the match funding rate for the Places for Everyone programme from 50% to 30%. This means that the Scottish Government will provide, through Sustrans, 70% of the funding required to for Places for Everyone, which funds permanent infrastructure projects.
22. The level of interest from Local Authorities in the Spaces for People Fund has created tangible momentum in the active travel agenda since the beginning of the pandemic.
23. While it is too early to be able to fully take stock of the impact of Spaces for People, partly because not all of the interventions are in place yet – initial reflections from Local Authorities have highlighted the following:
 - A substantial level of mobilisation at both officer and political level;
 - On balance, positive engagement and general acceptance from the public, especially for radical measures in some places;
 - The elements of urban space reimaging in SfP interventions have offered some benefits to businesses reopening, although there have also been instances of challenges where changes to physical space have been perceived as a barrier by some shops and organisations;
 - Positive feedback on the structure of SfP as a scheme, particularly on the 100% level of funding which removes the need for Local Authorities to identify match funding; and
 - Overall, a welcome shift in relationships with Sustrans over their approach in the administration of this funding, with more flexibility and discretion left to local authorities to make the best interventions possible based on local knowledge.
24. There is a general recognition within Local Government that active travel is at a developmental curve, which Spaces for People has contributed to accelerating. Looking to the future:
 - Given Spaces for People interventions are temporary, Local Authorities will need to evaluate the effectiveness of their measures and, where they have been positive, consider how they can 'lock in' their benefits in the longer term;
 - While the reduction in match funding for Places for Everyone is welcome, it may raise expectations and increase pressure on Local Authorities, whose ability to deliver the schemes does continue to be limited by the level of match funding still required;
 - The effectiveness of active travel scheme delivery may be limited by the annual nature of active travel funding, as well as issues in the delivery pathways, notably in terms of capacity and skill base at a local level;

- A need to address and seek to improve certain aspects of the current funding structures to maximise the benefits of the schemes for local communities;
 - Ultimately, a need to build confidence and an evidence base to showcase Local Authorities' ability and commitment to delivering positive outcomes through active travel. Positive examples and lessons learned through Spaces for People would represent a starting point.
25. Following a meeting between the Environment and Economy Spokesperson and the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity, Leaders agreed in May 2020 that COSLA would seek to gather evidence and develop the rationale for a political review of active travel funding, as well as identify issues in the current structures that may limit Local Authorities' ability to respond effectively to the potential shift in transport behaviour post-Covid19.
26. The points set out at paragraphs 26 and 27 provide an initial foundation for that work which officers will seek to build upon, with more detailed reports to be presented to the Board as it develops.

Electric Vehicles and Charging Infrastructure

27. A report on electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure was taken to the Board in December 2019, seeking Members' views on electric vehicle policy and their initial considerations on the future role of Local Government in supporting the network. The report generated a good discussion and Members agreed the proposed COSLA position, which was reflected in COSLA's [response](#) to the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee's call for views on electric vehicle infrastructure as part of a wider energy inquiry.
28. The Committee published the [findings](#) of their inquiry in July, recommending that COSLA considers undertaking a stocktake of best examples of innovative work from around Scotland. The Committee also asks COSLA and the Scottish Government to provide an update on how the transition to electric vehicles will be ensured and supported by extensive and reliable infrastructure. COSLA officers are considering how best to respond to the Committee.
29. Electric vehicle policy continues to be of relevance to the work of the Board, potentially more so in the context of a 'green recovery' from the Covid-19 crisis and our continued commitment to lowering transport emissions if we are to reach the Climate Change (Scotland) Act's target for net zero carbon emissions by 2045 and a reduction of 75% by 2030 (compared to 1990 levels).
30. The overall value of funding to councils from Transport Scotland for low carbon activities has increased to £20m, from around £18m last financial year. However the majority (over £15m) of 19/20 funding to Local Authorities has been accrued, as Covid-19 has delayed both vehicle delivery and installation of charge points. Discussions with Transport Scotland suggest that there continues to be a strong appetite across the board from Local Authorities to continue adding to their EV infrastructure.
31. There are currently around 300 charging points in the pipeline for this year from committed funds in the previous year, as well as around 100 to be delivered through this year's funding. These will add to the existing 1250 charging points in the ChargePlace Scotland network. In terms of Local Authority fleet electrification, the forecast for this year is of 700 to 800 vehicles to be decarbonised. The Scottish Government aims to phase out the need for new petrol and diesel light commercial vehicles by 2025.

32. Beyond the immediate operational challenge of decarbonising Local Authorities' fleets, fundamental questions do remain on the longer term future of electric vehicle charging infrastructure, and the role that the public sector – Local Authorities in particular – will wish to play in coming years.
33. With 60 new EV models entering the market this year alone, the expectation is that EVs are set to progressively become more 'mainstream'. As ownership grows, so is demand across the charging network, with the private sector expected to be increasingly part of that picture in the longer term. The introduction of tariffs for charging also represents an important consideration going forward, given the provision of free electricity by councils is likely not to be sustainable as the shift to electric vehicles intensifies in the coming years.
34. COSLA is ideally placed to facilitate these strategic considerations going forward through engagement with the Board and continued joint working with Transport Scotland to keep Members updated and showcase the very good work already happening at a local level.

Proposed COSLA Position

35. COSLA will continue to advocate for as significant a role as possible for Local Government in Scotland's transport response to the pandemic and in the Just Transition to a Net Zero Economy no later than 2045, which the Board is also being asked to agree as its own strategic goal.
36. As set out in this report, three areas - public transport, active travel and electric vehicles/charging infrastructure - have continued to require our focus as a result of responding to the pandemic. We expect this to be the case for the foreseeable future. We would welcome the Board's acknowledgment and endorsement that the core of our work on transport will increasingly revolve around these areas. This is not only because of their increased relevance due to the pandemic, but also their importance in the context of a just shift to a Net Zero, sustainable, society and economy.

Next Steps

37. If the Board agrees, we will focus on the following as our next steps over the coming months:
 - **Public transport:** we will undertake further work, with input from professional association colleagues, to inform COSLA's position on public transport in light of the continued challenges that Covid-19 presents, taking a focussed report to the Board at one of its future meetings. We will also aim to keep the Board updated on the progress of the Bus Partnership Rapid Development Fund as well as Transport Scotland plans to recommence work on the Bus Partnership Fund;
 - **Active travel:** the immediate next step will be to present to the Board an overview of Spaces for People, in terms of outcome delivery, challenges and lessons learned by Local Authorities, through joint working with SCOTS. In the medium term and in line with the position agreed by Leaders, we will work to determine whether the rationale is there for a political review of active travel funding by identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the current structures, especially in light of the increased interest in cycling/walking infrastructure as a result of the pandemic;
 - **Electric vehicles and charging infrastructure:** we will invite Transport Scotland to a future meeting of the Board to update Members on the progress of fleet electrification and continue developing our position on the future of charging infrastructure and tariffs.

