

RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

CALL FOR EVIDENCE ON IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19 FOR THE SCOTTISH BUDGET AS THIS RELATES TO THE RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY IN SCOTLAND

SUBMISSION FROM COMOUK

INTRODUCTION

CoMoUK is a charity that promotes the public benefits of shared transport. Our remit covers all shared modes of transport including bike share, car share, e-scooters and demand responsive transport. We work with a broad range of stakeholders including local authorities, businesses, housing developers and local communities to support the growth of shared transport. This is achieved through advocacy, research and development. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Committee's call for views.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORT

This section relates to questions 3 and 4

Public transport has been hit hard by COVID-19. Just 30% of workers in Scotland travelled to their normal workplace during lockdown, and demand for public transport fell by 85% - 95%¹. Rail journeys in Scotland are down by 70% and concessionary bus journeys are down 50% this month, compared to September 2019².

At the same time, the number of car journeys in Scotland has been steadily rising as restrictions have been lifted: journeys were down by 75% in April 2020 compared to April 2019, but by August 2020, that figure was just 10%³.

This presents a significant challenge for the Scottish Government; protecting the long-term survival of public transport, keeping passengers safe, and delivering on climate change policies.

CoMoUK welcomes the action taken by the Scottish Government to support public transport during lockdown to help keep services running and increase capacity to allow for social distancing.

However, as we emerge from this current crisis, we need a reappraisal of the contribution of transport modes across the board, particularly in relation to decarbonisation.

- Bike share offers a carbon free, healthy and sustainable way to get around, without having to own and store a bike.

¹ Transport Transition Plan, Transport Scotland, 2020 <https://www.transport.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/transport-transition-plan/>

² Transport Scotland Covid-19 Transport Trend Data <https://www.transport.gov.scot/our-approach/statistics/#63626>

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- Sharing cars that are lower in emissions, and more intensively used for necessary journeys, where a car is the only viable option, can help cut carbon emissions and reduce the number of private cars on our roads. Car clubs saved almost 4,000 tonnes of CO₂ last year due to driving lower emission vehicles and car club members reduction in mileage⁴.
- Flexible bus, or demand responsive transport as it is often referred to, can improve public transport efficiency and therefore reduce private car dependency, particularly in rural areas and places currently poorly served by public transport.

Shared transport is already making an important contribution to decarbonisation; and it could be making a greater one. CoMoUK has conducted research into the potential scale and benefits of shared transport in Scotland. It showed that there are 634,000 households in Scotland that could potentially switch from car ownership to car club membership. This would save 87,000 tonnes of carbon per year through reduced mileage and the cleaner vehicles in car club fleets⁵.

Similarly, bike sharing offers the potential to switch car trips of 5km or less to cycle journeys⁵, saving another 64,000 tonnes of carbon per year without participants needing to buy, maintain or store their own bike. In addition, it was found that 49% of commuter car trips in Scotland could be shared. This would save even more carbon (135,000 tonnes per year) based on commuters currently driving to work in Scotland sharing the trip with one other person⁶.

As a matter of priority, the Scottish Government should analyse how shared transport can deliver on decarbonisation. The Scottish Government should set a policy direction for the inclusion of shared transport in transport decision-making in a sustained way, adopting the five-year rhythm and pipeline now commonplace in rail, road and walking and cycling. It should examine the case for subsidy to shared transport in certain locations for public policy purposes, and consider investing in climate resilient infrastructure including mobility hubs to encourage more people to travel sustainably.

ACHIEVING MODAL SWITCH, INCREASING USE OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND REDUCING PRIVATE CAR USE

This section relates to question 5

We are at a critical point, there is a significant opportunity to embed the modal shift that occurred during the lockdown, to erode the dominance of the private car and create a sustainable, inclusive and affordable transport system.

Shared transport is a vital ingredient in supporting the Scottish Government's goal for modal switch, increasing the use of public transport and reducing private car use.

⁴ Car Club Annual Survey for Scotland 2019/20 https://como.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/80264-Comouk-Car-Club-Survey_final-WEB-R-Edit.pdf

⁵ A shared mobility vision: a greener, fairer and healthier Scotland 2020 <https://como.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/CoMo-Scotland-Vision-Summary-Final-19.03.20.pdf>

⁶ A shared mobility vision: a greener, fairer and healthier Scotland 2020 <https://como.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/CoMo-Scotland-Vision-Summary-Final-19.03.20.pdf>

- **Bike share**

Bike share schemes boost public transport use. Research shows that It is used interchangeably with public transport, 27% of bike share members use it in conjunction with the train, and 19% with bus services. It is particularly strong at re-engaging lapsed cyclists, with 44% of bike share users in Scotland saying it was their trigger to start cycling again⁷. Bike share schemes encourage healthier lifestyles, with over half of users reporting health benefits as being a reason they chose a scheme and over a third citing the mental health benefits of bike share⁸.

The Scottish Government should expand and optimise bike share schemes through revenue funding and capital funding for bike share infrastructure.

- **Car sharing**

Car clubs lead to a reduction in private car ownership and use, with each car club car vehicle taking around 14 private cars off the road in Scotland. They are far cleaner than the general vehicle fleet - 43% lower than the average UK car, and 98% of car club cars are compliant with low emission zones. By driving newer, more environmentally friendly vehicles, car club members in Scotland saved 354 tonnes of carbon last year and disposed of 6,700 vehicles that would have otherwise been on Scotland's roads⁹. They drive modal shift and are used much more efficiently than private cars; our research finds that car club members walk, cycle and use public transport more¹⁰.

The Scottish Government should expand and optimise car clubs through revenue funding and provide capital funding for communities to purchase electric vehicles for shared use.

- **Mobility hubs**

The planning system needs to change to design-in sustainable development via measures such as mobility hubs (where shared, active and public transport come together) and design- out unsustainable movement patterns.

Mobility hubs co-locate demand with the supply of sustainable transport modes. Bringing together supply options in one highly visible place – shared bikes, owned bikes, walking routes, rail, bus, electric charging facilities are all examples. They support low car lifestyles and the reallocation of space from car parking to housing or public realm improvements.

They also have the potential to provide a community purpose that enables a greater degree of local working and offers community facilities for example community pharmacies, post offices, cafés, bike repair centres and parcel collection points.

⁷ Scotland Bike Share Users Survey 2019/20 https://como.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CoMoUK-Bike-Share-Survey-2020-FINAL_compressed-1.pdf

⁸ Scotland Bike Share Users Survey 2019/20 https://como.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CoMoUK-Bike-Share-Survey-2020-FINAL_compressed-1.pdf

⁹ Car Club Annual Survey for Scotland 2019/20 https://como.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/80264-Comouk-Car-Club-Survey_final-WEB-R-Edit.pdf

¹⁰ Car Club Annual Survey for Scotland 2019/20 https://como.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/80264-Comouk-Car-Club-Survey_final-WEB-R-Edit.pdf

As part of the Infrastructure Investment Plan, the Scottish Government should oversee the creation of a network of mobility hubs to build sustainable places, encourage sustainable travel and help achieve climate targets.

- **Flex bus**

There was a sharp and severe drop in bus passenger numbers during lockdown, and with bus capacity still significantly lower due to social distancing measures it is expected that there will be a long term impact on ticket revenues. This is against the backdrop of a longer term trend of falling passenger numbers. The number of people travelling by bus in Scotland has fallen by almost 100 million since 2008¹¹, and as a result routes have been cut, leaving communities disconnected and increasingly reliant on private cars.

CoMoUK welcomed the Scottish Government's support for bus services in its 2020-21 budget, including the £500 million investment in bus priority infrastructure and support for greener, less polluting vehicles.

However, in order to build back better, we need to make sure our public transport system is efficient, convenient and accessible, to encourage more people to travel by bus and rail and increase passenger numbers.

There are good case studies of flex bus services in operation across the UK. The Welsh Government has developed the 'fflecsi' app and is working with local bus operators to deliver on-demand bus services across Wales to enable more people to use public transport. Flexible bus services have also been developed in Wellingborough in Northamptonshire and the Tees Valley in the North East of England to connect passengers in more rural areas to essential services, workplaces, shops and amenities.

The Scottish Government should explore flexible bus models and look at opportunities for increasing bus passenger demand and improving services.

GREEN RECOVERY

This section relates to questions 7 and 8

Welcome steps towards building a green recovery were announced in Scottish Government's Programme for Government, particularly the £500 million investment in active travel and the £275 million investment in communities, including '20 minute neighbourhoods'.

CoMoUK welcomed the Scottish Government's investment to make essential travel and exercise safer during COVID-19 via the Spaces for People programme. Investment in cycling capacity and infrastructure is vitally important for encouraging more people to cycle for everyday journeys and the measures have been implemented quickly to allow for social distancing on public transport and active travel.

¹¹ Scottish Transport Statistics <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/47196/scottish-transport-statistics-2019.pdf>

However, CoMoUK wants to make sure that everyone, from all walks of life, can benefit and be part of the green recovery. Bike share removes some of the barriers to cycling including the cost of buying and maintaining a bike, and having somewhere to store one.

As bike share is accessible, affordable and flexible it can play an increasingly important role in Scotland's green recovery by providing an alternative to private car journeys and helping to ease pressure on public transport.

CoMoUK worked in partnership with Transport Scotland, Paths for All, Glasgow City Council, City of Edinburgh Council and Transport for Edinburgh to increase access to cycling through the provision of free bike share services in Glasgow and Edinburgh over the summer. In order to encourage the use of the cities' cycle hire schemes, the first 30 minutes of bike share rides in Glasgow and Edinburgh were free for all users. In Edinburgh, a four month discounted 'back to work' pass was also offered. Cycle hire is proving increasingly popular in both cities since the offers were introduced, with rental numbers more than doubling in Edinburgh in July 2020, compared to July 2019. In Glasgow, the number of trips increased by 12% in July 2020 compared with July 2019.

The scheme has been extended in Glasgow until 2021 and it is anticipated that extending the free offer for standard bike hire, particularly as lockdown eases, will contribute further towards an uptake in active travel.

Shared transport can also play a key role in achieving a more inclusive and accessible transport system. Car share, bike share and ride sharing offer the choice of flexible journey access without the cost and practical barriers of owning a car or bike including, MOTs, insurance, road tax, and parking costs for cars, and storage for bikes.

CoMoUK worked in partnership to create the Bikes for All scheme in Glasgow, which is the UK's first social equity bike share project, focusing on low income and marginal communities to address a range of issues including transport poverty, social inclusion, health and wellbeing and reducing inequalities. The initiative, which is evaluated by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health, has demonstrated an effective approach for encouraging participation among under-represented groups in cycling and minority communities. During the period July 2017 – July 2019, 414 participants signed up and 10,253 bike rentals were made. Almost half (49%) of the participants identified as Black and minority ethnicity (BME), 26% were seeking asylum, 10% were refugees, 28% were unemployed, 9% were homeless and 61% were from the most deprived 20% of communities in Scotland¹².

The Scottish Government should seize the opportunity to build on these successes by incentivising more people to use shared transport to help reduce congestion and carbon emissions, get people fitter and healthier, and ultimately turn the positive changes we've seen people make throughout the lockdown into long term habits.

¹² Bikes for All Evaluation Report

https://www.gcph.co.uk/assets/0000/7743/Bikes_for_All_evaluation_report.pdf