

Scottish Government Consultation on Social Isolation and Loneliness – SPT response

Committee Strategy and Programmes

Date of meeting 18 May 2018

Date of report 25 April 2018

Report by Assistant Chief Executive (Operations)

1. Object of report

To recommend approval of the draft SPT response to the Scottish Government consultation¹ on its draft strategy “A Connected Scotland: Tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger communities”. SPT’s draft response is attached at Appendix 1. The closing date for the consultation was 27 April 2018 and SPT’s response was submitted as draft subject to approval by this Committee.

2. Background

The draft strategy was developed following the Scottish Parliament’s Equal Opportunities Committee Inquiry into Age and Social Isolation². It sets out a vision of Scotland where community connections are increased and no-one is excluded from participating in society. The draft strategy acknowledges that the Scottish Government has an important role to play in creating the conditions for change, but that everyone has a responsibility to help tackle loneliness and social isolation. The strategy commits the Scottish Government to empowering communities to lead in this area.

3. Outline of proposals

SPT’s draft response to the consultation is attached at Appendix 1. The key points of our response are noted below:

- The key role of transport in helping to promote cohesive communities, inclusive growth and health and wellbeing is often overlooked. Well designed, affordable, high frequency transport keeps people and their communities connected;
- The projected rise in the numbers of older people (with around half having no access to private transport³) will have significant implications for public transport. This will include pressure on supported and concessionary travel budgets and greater demands for services such as MyBus. Given these challenges, there is likely to be an increasing role and demand for Community Transport.

¹ <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0053/00530204.pdf>

² <http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/85810.aspx>

³ Public Transport for an Ageing Population, IME, <https://www.imeche.org/docs/default-source/1-oscar/reports-policy-statements-and-documents/public-transport-for-an-ageing-population.pdf?sfvrsn=0>

- Bus, which is the most used public transport mode and upon which many vulnerable people and communities rely, is in decline. At the same time, the level of investment in bus infrastructure and services is significantly less than that for rail or road. This must be addressed if social isolation is to be tackled;
- Supported bus services, demand responsive services (such as SPT MyBus) and Community Transport are part of a vital transport mix crucial to keeping people and communities connected;
- Decisions about development, the location of public services and indeed commercial services such as banking and post offices must take into account how accessible they are to service users;
- Better use of existing transport fleets will create efficiencies and improve vehicle utilisation in turn supporting people and communities;
- Active travel has beneficial impacts on people's health and mental wellbeing and is important to reducing social isolation and loneliness; and
- The forthcoming Transport Act could potentially present Regional Transport Partnerships like SPT, working with operators and councils, with the opportunity to have greater input into local bus services including service levels, frequencies and fares to ensure people, including vulnerable citizens and communities, are connected.

4. Conclusions

The Scottish Government is seeking views on its draft strategy on Social Isolation and Loneliness which sets out a vision of a Scotland where no one is excluded from participating in society. SPT's response highlights the critical importance public transport, particularly bus services including MyBus, plays in keeping people and communities connected.

5. Committee action

The Committee is recommended to approve the draft SPT response at Appendix 1.

6. Consequences

Policy consequences	<i>This response is in line with the RTS outcomes of Access for All</i>
Legal consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Financial consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Personnel consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Equalities consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Risk consequences	<i>None at present.</i>

Name Charles Hoskins
Title Senior Director

Name Gordon MacLennan
Title Chief Executive

For further information, please contact *Bruce Kiloh, Head of Policy and Planning* on 0141 333 3740.

Appendix 1

Scottish Government Consultation on Social Isolation and Loneliness – SPT response

“How can transport services play their part in reducing social isolation and loneliness?”

SPT Response:

Key points:

- The key role of transport in helping to promote cohesive communities, inclusive growth and health and wellbeing is often overlooked. Well designed, affordable, high frequency transport keeps people and their communities connected.
- The projected rise in the elderly population is and will have major implications for transport, such as concessionary travel budgets and the accessibility of transport networks.
- In the west of Scotland, patronage on bus services, which is the most used public transport mode and upon which many vulnerable people and communities rely, is in significant decline – down 60million passengers per annum over last 10 years. At the same time the level of investment in bus infrastructure and services is significantly less than that for rail or road. This must be addressed if social isolation is to be tackled.
- Supported bus services, demand responsive services (such as SPT MyBus) and Community Transport are all part of a vital transport mix crucial to keeping people and communities connected.
- Decisions about development need to be taken with sustainable transport considered as a priority.
- Decisions about the location of public services and indeed commercial services such as banking and post offices must take into account how accessible they are to service users.
- Better use of existing transport fleets will create efficiencies and improve vehicle utilisation in turn supporting people and communities.
- Output from the Place Standard Tool should be screened for accuracy and reflect regulatory contexts.
- Active travel has beneficial impacts on people’s health and mental wellbeing and is important to reducing social isolation and loneliness.
- The forthcoming Transport Act could potentially present Regional Transport Partnerships like SPT, working with operators and councils, with the opportunity to have greater input into local bus services including service levels, frequencies and fares to ensure people, including vulnerable citizens and communities, are connected.

Introduction

SPT is the Regional Transport Partnership for the twelve Councils of the west of Scotland. Our area covers densely populated urban areas to remote rural and island communities, and includes some of Scotland’s most disadvantaged communities. SPT’s responsibilities include the Regional Transport Strategy, developing and delivering regional transport projects, operating bus stations, providing bus infrastructure, providing socially necessary

bus services, operating the Subway, providing school transport on behalf of our partner councils, providing integrated ticketing and promoting active travel.

The Regional Transport Strategy¹ commits SPT and its partners to achieving a transport system that is accessible to all and prioritises access to healthcare and education, supports socially necessary transport, improves connections for rural areas and promotes equality and transport affordability. All of these are critical to reducing social isolation and loneliness.

SPT is also a statutory Community Planning Partner (CPP) and we are members of Community Planning Partnerships across the west of Scotland. Tackling social isolation and loneliness has emerged as an important theme in the Local Outcome Improvement Plans developed by CPPs and Community Planning provides an excellent platform for both identifying and tackling social isolation on a partnership basis.

Sustainable transport plays a key role in helping to promote cohesive communities, inclusive growth and health and wellbeing. Well designed, affordable, high frequency transport keeps people and their communities connected.

SPT welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to tackling social isolation and loneliness and the recognition that transport is an important factor in achieving this. We have restricted our response to Question 22, "How can transport services play their part in reducing social isolation and loneliness?", however, our comments will hopefully inform across the range of the strategy.

Context

A recent report² shows that city region populations are forecast to grow and also age with the number of people over 75 in UK city regions expected to grow by 80% between 2014 and 2039. In addition, around half of the growing older population will have no access to private transport³. The projected rise in the older population could have significant implications for urban transport, such as concessionary travel budgets and the accessibility of transport networks.

At the same time, bus services are in decline. While bus still accounts for around 70% of all public transport journeys, bus patronage in the city regions outside of London has fallen by 11% from 1.1 billion in 2009/10 to 937 million in 2016/17⁴. In Scotland the number of journeys has fallen by 10% in the past five years⁵ while the fall has been even steeper in the west of Scotland over the past decade with 60 million fewer bus trips. This is important since the people who rely most heavily on bus services are often those who are most vulnerable and socially isolated. Without tackling the decline in the bus industry there is little chance we can effectively tackle social isolation.

¹ http://www.spt.co.uk/wmslib/Documents_RTS/catalyst_for_change.pdf

² <http://www.urbantransportgroup.org/resources/types/reports/number-crunch-transport-trends-city-regions>

³ Public Transport for an Ageing Population, IME, <https://www.imeche.org/docs/default-source/1-oscar/reports-policy-statements-and-documents/public-transport-for-an-ageing-population.pdf?sfvrsn=0>

⁴ <http://www.urbantransportgroup.org/resources/types/reports/number-crunch-transport-trends-city-regions>

⁵ <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/scottish-transport-statistics-no-36-2017-edition/chapter-2-bus-and-coach-travel/>

It is essential that greater acknowledgment is given to how important bus services are to our economy and in tackling social isolation through providing access to employment, services, retail and leisure. The Urban Transport Group⁶ notes that:

- More people access high streets by bus than by any other mode in the UK, bringing a combined retail and leisure spend of £27.2bn;
- In British cities outside London, 77% of jobseekers do not have regular access to a car, van or motorbike;
- Public support for socially necessary bus services can generate benefit in excess of £3 for every £1 of public money spent;
- In UK metropolitan areas, bus networks generate an estimated £2.5bn in economic benefits against public funding of £0.5bn; and
- The best used bus services in urban centres may be reducing carbon emissions from road transport by 75% or more.

How and where we live are also important factors in social inclusion and loneliness. Decisions about development need to be taken with sustainable transport considered early and as a priority. Decisions taken in one area can have inadvertent impacts elsewhere, and all too often decisions are made with little consideration for people who do not have use of a car⁷. The increasing centralisation / reduction of services represents a significant barrier for people accessing health care, retail, banks, post offices, libraries and council services and other vital facilities. This demonstrates the importance of getting decisions on land-use right including where housing and businesses are located. We must ensure that best use is made of existing infrastructure by e.g. utilising brownfield land for housing and development rather than greenfield land or land which is removed from existing transport infrastructure. Moves towards greater liberalisation of the planning system run the risk of exacerbating isolation if planning rules are relaxed and more development is permitted in places that are hard to reach without access to a car.

Socially Necessary Bus Services

The provision of supported bus services is also critical to keeping people connected. Most bus services are provided on a commercial basis but there are gaps often in the evenings and weekends and in more rural areas where it is not commercially viable to operate. To plug these gaps SPT invests circa £12 million annually to provide socially necessary bus services. These services keep people in our most isolated and socially deprived areas connected but they also provide services for people in more affluent or, in some instances, less remote areas who may not have access to a car and for whom the bus is essential. While around 95% of bus mileage is operated commercially, one third of bus services are support in whole or in part, and with the commercial sector declining over the past decade in the west of Scotland, pressure to plug gaps is on the increase. A key challenge will be ensuring that sufficient funds are made available to maintain these essential services. In straitened financial times there is significant competition for budgets, but all services rely in some form on a good quality, accessible, frequent and affordable transport system and that therefore should be at the heart of any future decision-making.

⁶ The Urban Transport Group was formerly known as PTEG. The report is "Making the connections: The cross-sector benefits of supporting bus services", available at <http://www.urbantransportgroup.org/system/files/generaldocs/10210%20Pteg%20Benefits%20of%20the%20bus%20web%20FINAL.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.urbantransportgroup.org/system/files/generaldocs/pteg%20Isolated%20communities%20response%20FINAL.pdf>

Community Transport

The references to Community Transport (CT) in the consultation paper are to be welcomed. CT is an increasingly important part of the transport mix both in rural and urban areas and represents a lifeline for vulnerable people and remote and disadvantaged communities. As the consultation paper notes people need good access to community facilities and places to meet, and towns and high streets act as a focal point for social and economic interactions. Investing in CT also makes good business sense. A report by the ECT Charity⁸ has estimated that a wide-scale roll-out of services by CT operators across the UK could reduce the number of older people experiencing loneliness and isolation and mitigate the health and social care costs, leading to annual cost savings of around £0.75bn each year.”

CT provides services not filled by traditional public transport and enables affordable trips for voluntary and community groups. It also offers a range of people, particularly elderly people but also people with a disability and young people, the opportunity to lead their lives by maintaining social links and accessing services. CT services can also provide access to GP and other healthcare facilities and help people to live independently for longer, reducing demand on social and health care services and at the same time help reduce non-attendance for health services as well as enabling people to be discharged earlier from hospitals by providing a solution to get people home. CT can also provide services such as prescription delivery and drivers can provide an early warning where passengers perhaps miss a journey unexpectedly or appear more frail than usual.

SPT provides support for the CT sector in the west of Scotland and has established the West of Scotland Community Transport Forum⁹ to share best practice, encourage new volunteer drivers and to improve vehicle and customer care standards.

In a similar way to CT, SPT MyBus¹⁰ provides demand responsive, door-to-door transport for people across Strathclyde particularly those for whom mainstream public transport is challenging. The service enables people to book their journey ahead, whether it is for a GP or dental appointment, a trip to the shops or meeting family or friends, MyBus will collect people and take them back home in modern, accessible vehicles. In addition to connecting people to the services they need, MyBus is a form of social interaction itself as users are able to chat with neighbours and other passengers. For some people this may be the only regular interaction they have.

Affordability

Seeking to ensure affordability is another important, but challenging, area for linking people and services. On behalf of our partner Councils, SPT operates the Strathclyde Concessionary Travel Scheme which provides discounted travel on rail, ferry and Subway for some of our most vulnerable residents. Along with the National Concessionary Travel Scheme (NCTS), this provides opportunities for people to better access goods and services. Research undertaken on the NCTS indicates clear benefits, “...the Scheme is greatly valued and works well for bus pass holders for a number of reasons including financial savings, reducing isolation, giving a sense of greater independence and increasing confidence in their own ability to travel. It also highlights how bus pass holders see the Scheme as having

⁸ https://ectcharity.co.uk/files_uploads/ECT_Why_community_transport_matters_Final_version4.pdf

⁹ <http://www.spt.co.uk/community-transport/>

¹⁰ <http://www.spt.co.uk/bus/mybus/>

improved their mental and physical well-being and has encouraged modal shift from car to public transport and increased use of the bus”¹¹.

We should also make best use of what we have. In making decisions about how best to prioritise scarce resources we should promote better use of existing fleets to create efficiencies and improve vehicle utilisation. Potentially, this could cover everything from commercial bus fleets, social fleets, CT and non-emergency transport. More efficient use of driver time and vehicle scheduling could free resources and increase the scope and scale of service delivery. All of this could help to ensure we can deliver more and better services for our most vulnerable residents. SPT has already worked with partner Councils to improve the scheduling of social transport fleets including in Glasgow.

Transport Planning and Accessibility Analysis

SPT utilises its transport models to review the transport network and in seeking to ensure communities are connected by bus services. It is important to take an objective approach to transport planning to ensure that services are delivered efficiently. Part of this process involves consultation with local communities. SPT regularly takes part in community events where transport is an issue. For this reason, we welcome the introduction in recent years of the Place Standard Tool which provides local people and communities the opportunity to help shape their local community. However, the tool is only as good as the information that goes into it. Often input to the process is inaccurate or based on anecdote or opinion given as fact. Where such input goes unchallenged or is stated without an understanding of regulatory contexts then it will produce outputs that do not reflect reality and in turn this will skew policy-making and deliver sub optimal results. SPT would welcome a review of the Place Standard Tool to build on its benefits while helping to develop a more robust process.

It is critical to have an effective evidence base when making decisions about how to ensure people and communities are connected. Accessibility analysis aims to identify gaps in the transport network and improve people’s access to key services and employment, health care, retail and leisure. Accessibility analysis is intended to deliver both transport and non-transport solutions to accessibility problems, recognising that changes to where and how key services are delivered can be as important as the provision of transport itself¹². As part of the development of the new Regional Transport Strategy, SPT will be working with partners to roll out a programme of accessibility planning with a particular focus on those Locality Planning Areas identified in Local Outcome Improvement Plans.

Technology

The consultation is right to note the importance that technology can play in keeping people connected. The roll out of broadband and digital participation is clearly important from both a social and economic perspective. SPT is investing in real time passenger information at bus stops, we have introduced smartcard to the Subway and other modes, the most successful product of its kind in Scotland which can now be purchased online; and SPT provides public transport information that helps to support Traveline Scotland, the national online journey planner. However, the importance of person-to-person contact remains and for many people this can only be achieved by access to public transport, including through demand responsive services such as MyBus and CT. It is therefore essential that we continue to invest in these services and that we look to increase the level of resource

¹¹ www.transport.gov.scot/publication/concessionary-travel-customer-feedback-research-year-one-report/

www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20160104171742/http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/system/files/j329860.pdf

¹² <http://www.urbantransportgroup.org/system/files/general-docs/pteg%20Isolated%20communities%20response%20FINAL.pdf>

available given the social, health and wellbeing and economic benefits these deliver. For example, it is estimated that for every £1 invested in the local bus network will typically generate over £3 of net economic benefit with further benefits in related policy areas such as social welfare and public health¹³.

Active Travel

Another important area is active travel which has beneficial impacts on people's health but also on their mental wellbeing and these are two areas which are strongly linked to social isolation and loneliness. While the doubling of Scottish Government funding on active travel is welcome, more needs to be done to make walking and cycling an attractive, safe and practical option, particularly for shorter trips. As the Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) states in its report on Active Travel in Glasgow, "Without adequate public transport and active travel infrastructure in more deprived areas, residents risk isolation from important amenities and opportunities"¹⁴. GCPH point to the harmful impacts of a transport system dominated by individual motorised vehicles including ill health, road traffic accidents; respiratory disease from air pollution; and community severance and isolation.

GCPH conclude that, "Initiatives should be developed that encourage a greater understanding of the interrelationships between some of the common challenges Scotland faces such as climate change, air pollution, physical inactivity, obesity and social isolation and how all of us can contribute to addressing these by changing the way we move about and live our lives. Initiatives should also seek to help shift societal norms by encouraging people to try different modes of travel and to raise awareness and acceptability of the public transport and active travel options available for everyday commuting journeys."

SPT in partnership with councils and Sustrans has invested significantly in walking and cycling projects across the west of Scotland. We would like to see more investment here but there is a danger that investment could be undermined if tough choices to discourage inappropriate car use are not taken. Continuing to invest in transport infrastructure and services is vital but doing so while encouraging unnecessary car use through cheap and freely available urban parking¹⁵, ill-thought out development which excludes those who cannot access a car, and enabling cars unfettered access to town and city centres at the expense of public transport and active travel is both unsustainable and counter-productive.

Conclusions

As our response notes, responsibility does not lie with one single policy area. Only a joined-up approach with different agencies playing their part and working with local communities will begin to tackle the problem of social isolation but with a growing elderly population the challenge will be considerable. Efforts to reduce social isolation should also focus on ensuring sustainable transport solutions, in particular ensuring that local bus services are maintained and improved.

The decline in bus use, which is a trend across the UK, has the potential to undermine efforts to achieve progress on social isolation and loneliness. If people do not have access to the people and services they rely on then things will only get worse. The situation is exacerbated outside London where transport authorities have limited or no powers to direct bus services, to set frequencies, to set fares or to intervene where services are falling below par.

¹³ <https://greenerjourneys.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Bus-infrastructure-report-June-2014.pdf>

¹⁴ http://www.gcph.co.uk/assets/0000/6211/Active_travel_synthesis_WEB.pdf

¹⁵ https://getonboardwithbus.scot/wp-content/themes/minimum/doc/Trends_in_Scottish_Bus_Patronage.pdf

We look forward to the Scottish Government's forthcoming Transport Act which will hopefully address some of these shortcomings and enable SPT to promote greater partnership working with bus operators from a position of strength. Allied to improvements to the regulatory framework must be greater investment in sustainable transport including bus services. While investments in rail are very welcome, a comparison between relative levels of investment between north and south and between bus and rail shows the north and bus to be the poor relations in terms of capital and revenue investment¹⁶. This is despite the fact that bus is the single most used mode and, as noted, the one that our most vulnerable citizens very often most rely on. In Scotland, while 45% of operators revenue comes from central or local government subsidy¹⁷, all government support for bus services has decreased by 15% over the 5 years to 2014/15¹⁸. For comparison, 56.1% of the rail industry in Scotland's income comes from government sources¹⁹.

However, addressing social isolation is highly complex and covers a range of individual, community and societal factors to take into account²⁰. It cannot be the responsibility of transport alone although transport must play its part. More determined efforts must be made to tackle poverty and poor health including poor mental health²¹ as these are often at the root of problems around isolation and loneliness. As our response notes there is much already being done to keep people and communities connected but there is also a range of measures including enhanced partnership working, more efficient use of existing resources, greater investment in services and regulatory change that will enhance the role transport can play in helping to tackle social isolation and loneliness.

¹⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/aug/16/trains-too-expensive-transport-problem-subsidies-london>

¹⁷ Source: Scottish Transport Statistics No. 34, 2015.

¹⁸ Source: Scottish Transport Statistics No. 34, 2015. At 2014/15 prices.

¹⁹ Source: Office of Rail and Road: GB rail industry financial information 2014/15.

²⁰ <https://iotuk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Social-Isolation-and-Loneliness-Landscape-UK.pdf>

²¹

http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/112828/9789241506809_eng.pdf;jsessionid=F960F59F3B91015C5CA11C0C9428866C?sequence=1