23 October 2019

**National Transport Strategy**

**Section A: The Vision, Priorities and Outcomes Framework**

**Q1: Is the Vision that is set out for the National Transport Strategy the right Vision for transport policy over the next 20 years? *Yes / No – please explain***

Yes. Age Scotland welcomes the publication of the draft new National Transport Strategy. Having worked closely with Transport Scotland throughout 2018 to ensure the voices of older people were heard in NTS2, it is welcome to see many provisions within the document which empower and support older people to live fulfilling and well-connected later lives.

Throughout 2018, Age Scotland worked with Transport Scotland to deliver 21 consultation workshops across Scotland. We spoke to around 500 older people about their thoughts on transport and what they need from the transport system.

For the vision to mean anything, however, it is essential that the reality matches the vision, and that Scotland’s transport system truly works for older people. It would be a major disappointment if the extensive and fruitful engagement with older people before the drafting of this vision did not lead to tangible improvements in Scotland’s transport provision.

**Q2a: Are the Priorities and Outcomes that the Strategy is trying to achieve the right Priorities and Outcomes for transport policy over the next 20 years? *Yes / No – please explain***

Yes. Age Scotland believes that promoting equality and improving health and wellbeing are particularly important for older people. The number of people in Scotland aged over 75 is set to increase by 71% over the next two decades to 2043. 14% of Scotland’s population in 2043 will be aged over 75, and 25% will be aged over 65. The number of people living with dementia is predicted to increase by 50% in the same timeframe. It is therefore essential that Scotland’s transport system is ready for these demographic shifts. If Scotland’s transport system is to be fit for purpose, it must meet the needs of older people.

**Q2b: Are some of these Priorities and Outcomes more important than others or are they equally important? Please explain**

Age Scotland believes that the rights and needs of older people are of paramount importance. We do recognise however that providing for older people’s rights and needs is not a zero-sum game; what works for older people, when it comes to for example accessible vehicles, better timetables, and toilet provision, works also for younger people. By creating a transport system that works for older people, Scotland will have a transport system that works for everyone and is truly fit for purpose.

**Q3: Are the Challenges the Strategy highlights in Chapter 3, the key Challenges for transport, or are there others the Strategy should focus on? Please explain your answer**

Age Scotland is concerned primarily with the interests and needs of older people. We will therefore focus our comments on the areas which we consider impact most on older people.

**Poverty**

150,000 Scottish pensioners (15%) are living in abject poverty, according to the Scottish Government’s own figures. Despite the highly popular National Concessionary Travel Scheme, which makes travel on public bus services free for people aged over 60, many thousands of older people in Scotland struggle to access the transport they need to live an independent and fulfilling life. This is particularly the case in rural areas, where bus services may be extremely limited, and therefore of little or no use to many potential passengers, or non-existent. There is a significant unmet demand for transport across Scotland which should be remedied.

Further, we believe that the National Transport Strategy should recognise and account for the significant demographic shifts taking place in Scotland. The proportion of people in Scotland aged over 75 is set to increase by 79% to 790,000 during the envisaged two-decade lifespan of NTS2. On current trends, which show no real signs of abating or reversing, levels of pensioner poverty will continue to grow at least proportionately as a social and political challenge. The National Transport Strategy should account for poverty in the older population.

**Loneliness and social isolation**

We welcome the commitment in the draft NTS to addressing “social isolation”. Social isolation is an objective measure, but it is not necessarily always a negative thing, i.e. solitude can be enjoyable. We would go further and name loneliness as the real challenge to be addressed as it better reflects the gap between a person’s desired level of social contact and the actual level they experience.

The Scottish Household Survey estimates that 282,000 older Scots feel lonely some or most of the time, and around 100,000 feel lonely most or all of the time according to Age Scotland research. We know that loneliness can and does affect a person’s mental and physical health, with research showing that loneliness can be as harmful to one’s life expectancy as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and increases mortality by nearly a quarter.

Loneliness can be described fundamentally as a lack of connection – at a social and emotional level – with other people. The definition provided in the Scottish Government’s strategy *A Connected Scotland* is:

*“****Loneliness****is a subjective feeling experienced when there is a difference between the social relationships we would like to have and those we have.”*

Transport exists to connect people and places. An effective transport system is one of the most effective and powerful tools society has for tackling loneliness. For it to be effective, Scotland’s transport system must meet the needs of older people.

**Ageing population**

The draft NTS2 mentions that “older people now are healthier, fitter, wealthier and more mobile compared with previous generations.” This is true for some older people, but by no means all older people. It is a fact that there is still a general correlation between ageing and increased frailty, declining health and reduced mobility. Falls remain a major risk to older people, and many older people report that suffering a fall and subsequently losing their personal independence is one of their biggest fears. There are currently around 90,000 people in Scotland living with dementia, and this is set to increase by 50% over the next two decades. The new NTS needs to ensure that these people are able to access the transport system to aid their social connectedness. It is essential that Scotland’s transport system does not leave anyone behind because of their age.

**Meeting the needs of older people**

Age Scotland consulted extensively with hundreds of older people on their transport needs throughout 2018. We identified a number of trends including those in response to the following questions:

**“What is the reason for the journeys you make?”**

The most popular reason given by respondents for travelling was for shopping. This was followed closely by socialising, and then by a need to attend medical appointments.

A striking finding was that 4 in 10 respondents travel for volunteer work, highlighting the extent of the valuable unpaid work which older people in Scotland carry out.

Attending medical appointments was a reason given by a clear majority of respondents. As Scotland’s population continues to age, medical conditions for which the prevalence increases with age will become more common. A transport system fully integrated with healthcare services is therefore deeply important.

**“Have you, or a family member, experienced difficulty in travelling to a medical appointment in the past year?”**

A significant 30% of respondents said they or a family member had experienced difficulty in travelling to a medical appointment in the past year. This highlights the importance of effective transport infrastructure in the delivery of healthcare.

**“What would help you use more public transport?”**

The single most important thing that would persuade a majority of respondents to use more public transport was more frequent services. This was more pronounced in rural areas where scheduled buses were few and far between, or in some cases, non-existent. In these cases, older people were effectively disenfranchised from the National Concessionary Travel Scheme; completely unable to use their entitlement to free bus travel. This puts people at a significant financial disadvantage and ultimately means they will make fewer journeys – increasing loneliness and social isolation.

Of roughly equal importance thereafter, respondents also cited later evening services, better access to public toilets on transport itself, and better access to toilets in stations and transport hubs as things that would make them more likely to use public transport.

Some of the suggestions under “other” included better integration in ticketing across different modes of transport, clearer and more accessible timetable information (online and app based information was not considered accessible for many people), and easy-access buses (i.e. no steps). Criticism of the layout of Inverness Station was a common theme in the northern workshops.

**Access to toilets across travel networks**

Only 30% of respondents were positive (rating as Good or Very Good) about public toilet access in stations and transport hubs. A significant 33% of respondents rated this as Poor, while some 37% expressed a neutral opinion.

We are deeply concerned about disparity in toilet provision in station across Scotland. While Network Rail made a welcome commitment earlier in 2019 to make toilet access free in major stations Edinburgh Waverley and Glasgow Central, Scotrail’s decision not to match that commitment in the stations where it has responsibility for toilet provision, including Glasgow Queen Street, Aberdeen, Inverness and Fort William, means passengers in these stations face an additional barrier to toilet access of up to 50p. Moreover, passengers will not readily understand why some stations provide free access to toilets and others do not, which complicates our transport system from the user’s perspective when it should be being simplified.

For people living with certain medical conditions, regular access to toilets is important, particularly on longer journeys with one or more changes. Organisations responsible for the delivery of transport solutions should consider how this need could be better served.

**Section B: The policies to deliver the NTS**

**Q4a: Are these the right policies to deliver the Priorities and Outcomes of the National Transport Strategy? Please explain your answer**

Yes.

We welcome the broad Priorities and Outcomes set out. It is essential however that the policies are matched with tangible actions.

**Q4b: Are some of these policies more important than others or are they equally important? Please provide details.**

Age Scotland believes that NTS2 should deliver a public transport system that works for older people. A transport system that works for older people – more frequent buses, later evening services, better access to toilets on longer journeys – works for everyone.

**Section C: Transport governance – democracy, decision-making and delivery**

**Q5a: Are there specific decisions about transport in Scotland that are best taken at the national level (e.g. by Transport Scotland or the Scottish Government), at a regional (e.g. by Regional Transport Partnerships), or at a local level (e.g. by Local Authorities)? Please explain your answer, by providing examples of where you believe transport related decisions should be taken.**

Age Scotland does not take a strong view on where power should lie in principle on these matters. Our primary concern is the delivery of services that work for Scotland’s older people, and that decisions are matched with the appropriate resources.

**Q5b: Should local communities be involved in making decisions about transport in Scotland? If so, how should they be involved, and on which specific issues should they be involved in making decisions on? Please explain your answer, by providing examples of which transport decisions local communities should be involved in, also suggesting how they should be involved**

Yes. Our job as a charity is to help to empower and amplify the voices of older people. On that basis we believe that local communities should have a meaningful role in deciding how they are best served by transport options. This could, for example, mean that a community has a meaningful say on changes to the local bus timetable, or the right to consultation on the design or location of new bus stops or shelters. However, this power must be genuine and not simply a way for service providers – be they councils or private companies - to shift the burden of making unpopular decisions, such as which bus route or service frequency to cut, onto local residents, as consultation fatigue could occur and very low consultation response rates could be taken as the view of the community.

**Section D: The Strategy as a whole**

**Q6: Does the National Transport Strategy address the needs of transport users across Scotland, including citizens and businesses located in different parts of the country? Yes / No - Please explain your answer**

Yes. Older people in rural and urban areas face many common challenges when it comes to using transport. A lack of bus routes and live signage, a need for more public toilets, and a lack of truly accessible vehicles were some examples of things that affect people right across Scotland. There was also a broad concern about the lack of any real form of integrated ticketing across different modes of transport.

People in rural areas however reported additional challenges. Infrequent bus services, a complete lack of any other form of transport, longer journeys to access public and commercial services like health appointments or banking services all contributed to the disadvantage of older people in rural areas.

We believe the draft NTS2 acknowledges many of these challenges and is therefore to be welcomed.

**Section E: Looking ahead**

**Q7a: What aspects of the transport system work well at the moment? Please provide details**

The National Concessionary Travel Scheme is extremely popular amongst Scotland’s older people. Age Scotland welcomed the Scottish Government’s decision in 2018 to maintain the scheme in its current form, with no rise in eligibility age, and we believe that the scheme should remain in place indefinitely. The social and economic benefits of free bus travel for older people are significant and are a crucial part of the fight against loneliness and social isolation.

Many older people report that their interactions with bus drivers are positive, and the social value of such interactions with people who meet very few people in the course of an average week should not be underestimated.

**Q7b: What practical actions would you like to see the National Transport Strategy take to encourage and promote these? Please provide details**

Free concessionary bus travel for older people aged from 60 should remain. This benefit has transformed life for older people in Scotland and is one of the leading tools we have in tackling loneliness and social isolation.

Bus operators should be mindful of the impact their drivers can have on the social wellbeing of their passengers. NTS2 should ensure that journeys are comfortable and safe for all passengers. We were disappointed that the amendment brought forward in the Transport (Scotland) Bill at Stage 3 by Colin Smyth MSP (amendment 154) was not accepted by MSPs. This would have made public subsidies for bus operators more conditional on driver training.

We would now hope that the Scottish Government, and indeed transport operators themselves, recognise the value of having drivers trained to a higher level in passenger safety and actively involve themselves in ventures such as the bus passenger safety pilot launched in the Scottish Borders in 2019 through collaboration between Scottish Borders Council, local company Borders Buses, Age Scotland and other partners.

**Q8a: What aspects of the transport system do not work well at the moment? Please provide details**

While there is much that works well in Scotland’s transport system, there is significant scope for improvement.

Nearly a third of respondents to the Age Scotland transport survey in 2018 said they or a family member had experienced difficulty in travelling to a medical appointment in the past year. This highlights the importance of effective transport infrastructure in the delivery of healthcare.

Well over a third of the older people Age Scotland surveyed said that a lack of evening bus services got in the way of their socialising and visiting friends and family. One person said that the limited, or indeed total lack of, public transport options in the evening meant they effectively felt under “curfew”; unable to lead a life as fulfilling as they would want to.

There are many concerns over safety on buses. Many older people have reported that they or an acquaintance had had suffered a light injury or a near-miss due to a bus pulling out of a bus stop into traffic, or braking suddenly, before they had taken their seat. NTS2 should emphasise the need for safer and more comfortable journeys.

There is also a concern among older people about a lack of integrated ticketing across different modes of transport, e.g. journeys involving a bus and a train. It was remarked frequently in our transport workshops that Scotland appears to be well behind many countries in mainland Europe where integrated ticketing is concerned.

**Q8b: What practical actions would you like to see the National Transport Strategy take to improve these? Please provide details**

Transport policy cannot be looked at in isolation. It must be central in housing policy, health and social care policy, and in planning frameworks across Scotland. NTS2 should position itself at the heart of Scottish infrastructure planning to ensure that the number of older people reporting difficulties attending medical appointments is significantly reduced.

Older people and the wider communities in which they live must have a meaningful say when changes to services are proposed. Their involvement in decision-making must be given serious weight if we are to avoid older people feeling under “curfew” due to cuts in timetabled services in the future.

Bus driver safety training standards should be set higher – with direct consultation with older people – and implemented across Scotland.

Real integrated ticketing – a simple, universal system across Scotland – should be rolled out. Consultation with older people in this process will be essential.

**Q9: Chapter 6 of the Strategy sets out immediate actions the Scottish Government will take in three key areas: Increasing Accountability; Strengthening Evidence; and Managing Demand. Is there anything you would like to say about these actions? Please provide details.**

No comment.

**Q10: Is there anything else you would like to say about the National Transport Strategy? Please provide details**

We broadly welcome he draft NTS2 and are pleased to have had the opportunity to feed in the views of older people at an early stage in its development. It is important that the aspirations set out in the strategy are backed up with funding and tangible improvements, otherwise the strategy will simply be reduced to meaningless words.

**Section F: Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)**

**Q11: What are your views on the accuracy and scope of the information used to describe the SEA environmental baseline set out in Section 5 of the SEA Environmental Report?  (Please give details of additional relevant sources)**

We have no comment on this.

**Q12: What are your views on the predicted environmental effects as set out in chapter 6.3 of the SEA Environmental Report?**

We have no comment on this.

**Q13: What are your views on the proposals for mitigation and monitoring of the environmental effects set out in chapter 6.5 and 7 of the SEA Environmental Report?**

We have no comment on this.

**Q14: Is there anything else you would like to say about the SEA Environmental Report?**

We have no comment on this.

**Want to find out more?**

As Scotland’s national charity supporting people over the age of 50, Age Scotland works to improve older people’s lives and promote their rights and interests. We aim to help people love later life, whatever their circumstances. We want Scotland to be the best place in the world to grow older.

Our Policy, Communications and Campaigns team research, analyse and comment on a wide range of public policy issues affecting older people in Scotland.

Our work is guided by the views and needs of older people themselves.

**Further information**

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