

# **Cross-Party Group on Sustainable Transport**

**Tue 4 March 2025, 18:00 - 19:30**

Minute

Present

MSPs

Graham Simpson MSP, Convenor  
Sarah Boyack MSP, Vice-Convenor  
John Mason MSP, Vice-Convenor  
Mark Ruskell MSP, Vice-Convenor

Invited guests

Hussein Patwa, Independent accessibility consultant  
Douglas Bryce, Disability Equality Scotland

Non-MSP Group Members

In-person

- Abigail Fletcher (Graham Simpson MSP office)
- Craig Horne (John Mason MSP office)
- Colin Howden (Transform Scotland)
- Laura Hyde-White (Transform Scotland)
- Mark Shields (Sustrans)
- Robert Macbean (Sustrans)
- Fatima Durrani (Living Streets)
- Kate Joester (Living Streets)
- Lawrence Marshall (Capital Rail Action Group)
- Aaron McHale (Individual)
- David Giles (Scottish Association for Public Transport)

- Olivia Carson (ScotRail)

## Online

- Alastair Dalton (The Scotsman)
- Andrea Thompson (SPT)
- Anya Kettles (MACS)
- Paul Baines (Siemens Mobility)
- Chris Thompson (Living Streets Scotland)
- David Hunter (Living Streets Edinburgh)
- David McGill (Scottish Youth Parliament)
- David Jackson (Consumer Scotland)
- Dave du Feu (Spokes)
- Ellie Harrison (Get Glasgow Moving)
- Ewan Tait (ScotRail)
- Harry Fisher (Motability Foundation)
- Greg Kinsman-Chauvet (Bike for Good)
- Greig Hawke (Lanarkshire Climate Action Hub)
- Keith Irving (Cycling Scotland)
- Heather Noller (Network Rail)
- Islay Jackson (Scottish Youth Parliament)
- Keith Irving (Cycling Scotland)
- Ken Haig (Levenmouth Rail Campaign)
- Maria McCafferty (Access Panel Edinburgh)
- Micheal Harrison (Midlothian Disability Access Panel)
- Kenny Morton (Motability Operations)
- Naghat Ahmed (MACS)
- Peter Ovenstone (Heritage Railway Association)

- Rachael Prothero (Paths for All)
- Rhona Malcolm (Scottish Youth Parliament)
- Eloise Richmond (Scottish Parliament)
- Robin Wickes (Access Panel Edinburgh)
- Ruth White (City of Edinburgh Council)
- Scott Runicman (Cycling UK)
- Olivia Sklenar (Lothian Buses)
- Suzanne Forup (Cycling UK)

## Apologies

- Kevin Hobbs (CMAL)
- Robert Samson (Transport Focus)
- Paul Tetlaw (Transform Scotland)
- Chris Day (Edinburgh Bus Users Group)
- Cllr Mark Flynn (Dundee City Council)
- Ruth Rice (CMAL)
- Kevin Hobbs (CMAL)
- Craig Laws (Enterprise Mobility)
- Sara Collier (CPT)

## Agenda item 1: Introductions and new membership

Graham Simpson MSP opened the meeting at 18:05, welcoming members and introducing speakers Hussein Patwa and Douglas Bryce on the theme ‘transport & disabilities’.

New members were proposed to the group. Bike for Good were approved.

## Agenda item 2: ‘Equity & Sustainability: The Moral Case’ — Hussein Patwa, independent accessibility consultant

## **Introduction**

Hussein Patwa introduced himself as an independent accessibility consultant with expertise in technology, transport, and inclusive communication. He has served on various advisory boards, including the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland and the National Smart Ticketing Advisory Board, and is involved in accessibility work across rail, air, and local government.

He highlighted that transport is a fundamental enabler of equality and inclusion, stressing the importance of embedding accessibility into all sustainability discussions.

## **Sustainability and accessibility in transport**

Hussein acknowledged progress in sustainable transport, including:

- Decarbonisation and electric vehicles – but noted a missed opportunity in failing to mandate noise-making devices to assist visually impaired and neurodiverse individuals
- Rail accessibility improvements
- Efforts to integrate ticketing systems via the Smart Ticketing Advisory Board
- Bus operators engaging with disabled groups – but with varying levels of progress and coordination

Despite these advancements, he noted that empowerment of transport staff in understanding accessibility remains inconsistent. This issue is particularly critical during times of disruption and crisis, which are becoming more frequent due to climate change.

## **Challenges in active travel and accessibility**

Hussein argued that while most disabled people support active travel, current infrastructure decisions are creating serious tensions between sustainability and accessibility. Key issues include:

- Cycle lanes and floating bus stops, which force disabled pedestrians to cross cycle lanes to access public transport
- Lack of trust in all road users, creating safety concerns for visually impaired and disabled pedestrians
- Absence of clear crossing points, such as signalised crossings, due to cost barriers faced by local authorities

He stressed that if infrastructure feels unsafe, disabled people will avoid public spaces, leading to isolation.

## **Moral and financial dilemmas in transport planning**

Hussein framed the debate as a moral and financial challenge, asking, as an example, whether transport policy should prioritise: (i) the *need* for pedestrian safety

over the *wants* of sustainable transport users, such as cyclists and (ii) *accessibility* for all users over *speed* of active travel implementation.

He argued that the current funding model forces local authorities to prioritise active travel to access national funding, often at the expense of accessibility measures. This has resulted in short-term decision-making, where accessibility concerns are acknowledged but not immediately addressed.

## **Call for balanced decision-making**

Hussein called for a compromise in transport planning that:

- Recognises disabled pedestrians have fewer route choices than cyclists
- Ensures active travel infrastructure does not unintentionally exclude disabled people
- Moves beyond temporary solutions to long-term, inclusive transport planning

## **Final reflections**

Hussein concluded by urging decision-makers to have difficult conversations now rather than postponing accessibility improvements. He stressed that disabled people cannot afford to wait years to see if accessibility issues become a ‘real problem’ – they already are one.

He called for:

- A shift in transport funding priorities to better integrate sustainability and accessibility
- Greater inclusion of disability groups in transport planning to avoid accessibility concerns being sidelined
- Bravery in policymaking to balance climate goals with equity and inclusion

## **Agenda item 3: ‘Towards Accessible Transport’ — Douglas Bryce, Disability Equality Scotland**

### **Introduction**

Douglas Bryce noted that 2025 marks the 30th anniversary of the Disability Discrimination Act and the 15th anniversary of the Equality Act, reflecting on progress in transport accessibility. Disability Equality Scotland, a pan-disability membership organisation, follows the social model of disability and works nationally to improve accessibility. He noted that 20% of the Scottish population are disabled.

### **Disabled people and transport**

A recent survey by DES highlighted the top concerns of disabled people regarding transport:

- **Accessible transport:** 96.7% identified this as their primary issue
- **Inclusive communication:** Ranked second, particularly affecting those with sensory impairments
- **Disability equality training:** 89.7% supported mandatory training for transport staff

## **Review of the accessible travel framework (2016)**

DES conducted a review of the Accessible Travel Framework introduced in 2016. Findings indicated uneven progress in implementation, with some improvements but a lack of consistency across all transport modes. Douglas outlined the review's key recommendations:

- 1. Improved data collection & public accountability**
  - Need for better qualitative and quantitative data to measure accessibility progress
  - Clear indicators should be publicly communicated to track improvements or highlight gaps
- 2. Inclusive communication**
  - Transport projects should prioritise inclusive communication for all passengers
  - Operators need training and support to improve accessibility for disabled people
- 3. Mandatory disability equality training**
  - All customer-facing staff, including drivers and station employees, should receive training delivered by disabled people
  - Training should extend to operational teams (e.g., control rooms, planners)
- 4. Expanding accessibility planning**
  - The original framework overlooked active travel, sustainable transport, and community transport, all of which are now key priorities
  - Greater attention needed on street clutter, pavement accessibility, and rural transport barriers

## **Hate crime and safety on public transport**

Douglas reported on disabled people's experiences of hate crime on public transport, noting that:

- 50% of disabled people worry about harassment on public transport
- Disability hate crime reports have increased 22% in the past year, yet 97% of incidents go unreported

- The Hate Crime Charter has been signed by 26 transport providers, including ScotRail and Lothian Buses, committing to a zero-tolerance approach
- Despite progress, only a few operators provide disability hate crime training

## The future of accessible transport policy

- The Accessible Travel Framework is due to expire within 12 months, raising questions about its replacement or integration into the national transport strategy
- The Just Transition Plan aims for a fully inclusive transport system by 2045, but Douglas argued this timeline is too slow for disabled passengers who need immediate improvements
- He urged a shift towards fully integrated, accessible transport across all modes, including buses, taxis, ferries, and rail

Douglas concluded by noting that a truly accessible transport system should allow spontaneous, independent travel without the need for pre-arranged assistance. He called for continued collaboration to embed accessibility into transport policy and design at every level.

## Agenda item 4: Q&A

The discussion during the Q&A session centred around various key themes related to improving transport safety and accessibility, particularly for women and vulnerable groups.

### Key themes and questions:

- **Integrated assisted travel services:** Aaron McHale (individual) highlighted the challenges of fragmented assisted travel services, where each operator has its own approach, creating inconsistencies — especially for blind and partially sighted passengers. He proposed a centralised information service, potentially including taxis, to streamline accessibility. He also emphasised the need for national standards, citing the Netherlands as a model.
- **Barriers to accessibility improvements:** Hussein Patwa used the example of Aberdeen's disconnected rail and bus stations to illustrate the systemic barriers to accessibility, including insurance liabilities and staffing shortages. Despite widespread agreement on the issue, legal and funding constraints continue to prevent a solution. He questioned whether government intervention could help bridge the gaps.
- **Concerns over floating bus stops (FBS):** There was significant discussion on FBSs and Hussein noted that Transport for London is reviewing the impact of floating bus stops due to accessibility concerns. Living Streets has also highlighted potential risks. Greg (Bike for Good) proposed a redesign where pedestrians feel they are on a continuous pavement rather than crossing a cycle lane. Hussein Patwa cautioned against vague language like "give pedestrians priority," warning that it could be used to justify pedestrianisation policies that may create unintended accessibility barriers.

- **Active travel and inclusion:** Kate Joester (Living Streets) argued that accessibility discussions should not pit disabled people against active travel but instead focus on viewing disabled people as active travellers. She stressed the importance of maintaining pavements, clearing snow and leaves, and fixing potholes rather than focusing exclusively on new infrastructure. She also highlighted the need for consistent signage and predictable street layouts to improve accessibility.
- **Improving accessibility and accountability:** Sarah Boyack MSP questioned how to ensure recommendations translate into real change, particularly in engaging transport operators on accessibility. She suggested reviewing bus pass funding and using successful operators as benchmarks. Islay Jackson MSYP (Scottish Youth Parliament) shared findings from a survey of young disabled people, where two-thirds reported feeling unsafe or that public transport was inaccessible. She raised the question of whether responsibility for accessibility improvements lies with operators or the government.
- **Signage and communication issues:** John Mason MSP highlighted inconsistent signage and announcements on public transport, particularly the Glasgow Subway's lack of visual indicators for deaf passengers and ScotRail's unreliable station announcements. SPT confirmed that visual station announcements for the Subway are planned for summer 2026.
- **Role of co-design and access panels:** Robert McBean (Sustrans) emphasised the value of co-design and co-production in transport projects, citing successful examples like Sighthill Bridge in Glasgow and street design initiatives in Winchburgh. He highlighted that engaging disabled people from the outset leads to better accessibility and safety outcomes. Douglas Bryce acknowledged the importance of access panels and stressed that designing infrastructure for disabled people first would benefit everyone.
- **Systemic challenges:** Hussein concluded that while the core challenges in transport accessibility are well understood, solutions remain hampered by funding mechanisms, local and national government roles, and the avoidance of difficult conversations. He urged a more honest dialogue about trade-offs in transport policy, particularly when financial pressures lead to compromises on accessibility.

## Close

Graham Simpson thanked all attendees and speakers, and advised that a summary report of the four evidence sessions in this series on tackling transport inequalities would be prepared ahead of the Group's final meeting before recess on 11 June 2025.

Graham Simpson closed the meeting at 19:25.