

Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT)

‘Catalyst for Change’ - the draft Regional Transport Strategy for the West of Scotland 2007-2021

Response on behalf of the Scottish Accessible Transport Alliance (SATA)

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Information on the RTS on the SPT website www.spt.co.uk/rts

Available in different formats: tel. 0141 333 3219 or email. rts@spt.co.uk

Matters in the document of special interest to SATA

1. Goals

These reflect the National Transport Strategy and are (a) to develop the economy (b) promote social inclusion and equity (c) improve health and protect the environment.

2. Transport in Strathclyde (Section 1.6)

The area contains 42% of Scotland’s population – around 2.14 million people. It contains 74% of the most deprived areas in Scotland and this is not only an urban problem as there are significant rural areas.

The west of Scotland accounts for more than 50% of all public transport trips in Scotland. By far the most significant mode is the bus and the area is the most competitive bus market in the UK with about 135 private operators carrying 222 million passengers annually. There is ‘significant scope to increase the provision of demand responsive bus services’ but ‘the ability to do so will be reliant on funding to increase investment in supported services’.

Taxis and private hire vehicles play an important role in complementing and supporting other modes and ‘make a valuable contribution to social inclusion, especially for those without access to a car, and offer another travel option for people with disabilities’.

The area has the largest commuter rail network in Britain outside London carrying some 50 million passengers a year on over 400 rail vehicles. It has 4 of the 6 busiest rail stations in Scotland amongst a total of 189 stations over 700 km of route. Over 13 million passengers a year use the Glasgow subway.

3. Transport and Equalities Groups (Sections 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6)

SPT says it shares the aspirations of MACS and acknowledges that there are areas where there is limited public transport suitable for many people with disabilities. Accessibility to key regional needs such as health care and education are unequal. The affordability of transport and the transport infrastructure are problems. These need to be fully addressed in the strategy.

4. Development of 13 sub-strategies (Chapter 6)

These sub-strategies are subject to separate and on-going consultation. Outputs will include sub-objectives and options for interventions to be fed into the overall RTS prioritisation process. What is the timetable for this and who will be involved?

The sub-strategy on **Equalities (Section 6.11)** is for those identified as ‘experiencing more difficulties than most’ when engaging with the transport system such as ‘people with disabilities’. There is no analysis of this or an indication of the nature and scale of the problem.

There are ‘emerging recommendations’ for regular assessment of travel demands, personalised travel planning, initiatives to increase accessibility, partnership and consultation, including a ‘People’s Panel’ on transport issues. Details of this are not given.

There are matters of interest to disabled people in the other sub-strategies and they are to be welcomed. For instance:

- **Access to Health Care (Section 6.4)** recommends an ‘index of groups excluded from healthcare because of transport problems’ and also ‘systematic audit and review of existing Demand Responsive Transport and Community Transport services across the SPT region, the indexing of eligibility criteria within and between local communities.
- **Parking (Section 6.6)** recommends ‘a consistent policy for the issue of blue badges and ensuring their appropriate use’.
- **Public Transport information (Section 6.7)** recommends seeking ‘innovative ways of delivering accessible public transport information throughout the region’.
- **Supported Bus Services (Section 6.8)** notes (a) subsidies are provided for 140 mainstream bus services throughout the region representing c 7% of total registered bus mileage for essential ‘socially necessary’ services and (b) the provision of 23 Dial-a-Bus services for those with mobility impairment. Recommendations include lobbying of a change in the legislative framework and ‘using the planning approval process to seek funding for securing satisfactory public transport accessibility, setting up and running new services’. This is vitally important for disabled people.
- **Smarter Choices, including Walking and Cycling (Section 6.9)** looks at measures designed to support dependency on the car and improving the environment but other than recommending personalised travel plans, better partnership working and planning, it does not specifically recognise the importance of the transport environment for people with disabilities and areas of conflict between different interests.

- **Ports, Ferries and Airports (Section 6.10)** talks about ‘improved access’ – including by rail – but there is no specific reference to the needs of people with disabilities.
- **Subway (Section 6.15)** which says ‘plans are also being developed for asset enhancement, compliance with the DDA and a capital programme for replacement and upgrading of rolling stock and infrastructure’. This is welcome.

5. Improving Data and Understanding Issues (Section 5.9)

A key theme emerging from consultation was that ‘the value of future work would be improved significantly by improving the data available and increasing the overall level of understanding of certain important issues’. The examples given include to ‘develop a full understanding of barriers faced by minority groups when using transport’. Accordingly it is intended to develop a ‘structured data gathering and research programme’. This is strongly supported and it is hoped it will receive the required funding.

Some other questions to be asked/points to be made.

1. How will the RTS deliver improved mobility for people with disabilities especially those who currently have no or very limited travel opportunities? There is recognition in several places that people are being socially excluded from opportunities and services by the present transport system. But as yet there is not a joined-up comprehensive plan across the whole strategy to put this right.
2. A sub-strategy on a flexible demand responsive transport system is proposed but there is only a commitment to review access to DRT services in the context of health care rather than more widely.
3. Access and affordability were issues for people in all areas and not only for those in deprived areas. This appears to be recognised but in fact, whilst pointing out the existence deprived urban and rural areas, the RTS has no specific plan for addressing their transport needs.
4. Promoting choice and modal shift may not be applicable to many disabled people for whom the car may be the only option. The RTS does not address this point when it indicates a wish to reduce dependency on the car and improve the environment. In fact the needs of road users feature heavily in the large and medium scale projects and schemes (Table 5.2) and also in the need for a parking sub-strategy.
5. The mobility needs of those excluded from the existing transport system need to be understood and addressed. There is still a strong emphasis in the RTS on how to improve existing services rather than engage in a fundamental analysis and come up with radical solutions. However the commitment to develop a research programme offers an opportunity for this to be rectified.

Other matters which we should like to raise

1. Presentation – it is not easy for everyone to read and there is need for a summary version.
2. More emphasis should be placed on the development of bus services.
3. All service modes need to be integrated with good interchange.
4. Integrated ticketing – these needs to go beyond the region.
5. There should be a sub-strategy for developing taxis and private hire services including issues of accessibility and affordability.
6. Projects – there is too much emphasis on these and priorities need to be justified.
7. All projects need to comply with the DDA.
8. Funding issues – proposals should be costed and an indication of funding sources given.
9. Targets need to be set and performance monitored and assessed.
10. People need to be engaged more on considering alternatives, options and choices.

Alan Rees MBE
Secretary
Scottish Accessible Transport Alliance (SATA)
20 Seaforth Drive
Edinburgh EH4 2BZ

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