



**TRANSPORT
SCOTLAND**
CÒMHDHAIL ALBA

Best Practice Guidance on Community Engagement

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Introduction

Background and Context

In October 2022, Jenny Gilruth MSP, the then Minister for Transport in the Scottish Government, established a new [Bus Taskforce](#) to bring national and local government together with public, commercial and non-profit operators as well as regulators, passenger representatives and other key stakeholders to address the immediate challenges facing bus networks.

Collaboration and partnership working were recognised as essential in the months and years ahead as Scotland recovers from COVID-19, tackles the cost of living crisis, responds to an evolving labour market and progresses towards net zero.

It was agreed that three sub-groups would be formed to focus on and take forward actions related to the three major issues of:

- **Patronage growth;**
- **Workforce retention and recruitment;** and,
- **Community engagement.**

The Sub-Group's participants were members of the Taskforce or their colleagues, as well as other relevant invited attendees with a specific expertise and interest in community engagement, such as Community Transport operators, accessibility advocates and public health specialists.

The Sub-Group was chaired by David Kelly, Director for Scotland at the Community Transport Association.

This guidance has been developed in collaboration with, and is supported by, the following organisations as members of the Taskforce or Sub Group, which commit to implement its principles in their work going forward:

- Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers (ATCO) Scotland
- Bus Users UK
- Citylink
- Community Transport Association (CTA)
- Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) Scotland
- Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA)
- First Bus
- Handicabs Lothian (HcL)
- Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS)
- Lothian Buses
- McGills / Xplore

- Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland (MACS)
- Office of the Traffic Commissioner
- Public Health Scotland
- Stagecoach
- Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT)
- Transport Focus
- Transport Scotland
- West Coast Motors

This guidance has also been developed with support and input from colleagues at other organisations, including:

- Glenfarg Community Transport Group
- Mental Health Foundation
- Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC)
- Sustrans
- Perth and Kinross Council
- West Lothian Council

Scope

The Sub-Group on Community Engagement was, therefore, established as a short-life working group during the lifetime of the Taskforce with the following key objectives:

- Identify the challenges and opportunities in improving community engagement on networks and changes;
- Discuss, review and co-ordinate activity to improve community engagement;
- Co-design best practice guidance for community engagement;
- Promote communication and collaboration between stakeholders; and,
- Recognise and represent the voices and interests of bus users and communities in the work of the Taskforce.

It was identified that the primary output of the Sub-Group should be to 'co-design' a 'published document of best practice guidance for community engagement on networks and changes' with 'specific guidance for bus operators, local authorities and communities'.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for anyone with a personal or professional interest in, or responsibility for contributing to or making decisions in, the design or delivery of bus services in Scotland, especially those tasked with engaging with or empowering local people and communities. It contains specific guidance for bus operators, local authorities and communities.

It outlines the active and positive role which local people and communities can and should play. It recognises that community engagement is a mutually beneficial, two-way process which entails rights and responsibilities for all parties as part of an approach which is open, fair and collaborative.

How can I use this guide?

This guide has been created to act as a point of reference and a source of inspiration to inform and improve policy-making and decision-making around community engagement in Scotland's bus sector.

However, it is not a comprehensive legal or regulatory document and should be utilised in conjunction with existing formal and official guidance issued by the Department for Transport (DfT), local authorities, the Office of the Traffic Commissioner, Transport Scotland and others.

Rather than providing a detailed blueprint which can be applied in diverse and distinct contexts or circumstances, this guide provides a framework of principles and ideas which can be applied flexibly and innovatively in a range of different scenarios.

This guide contains guidance and examples of best practice which can inform the policies and practices of large and small bus operators, whether they are in the public, private or third sectors, and local authorities and regional transport authorities (see Chapter 5).

There is signposting throughout to organisations which can offer advice, resources and support to community engagement with particular communities of interest, geography and/or practice, from individuals and groups to operators and sectors. The guide recommends engaging with these organisations, including:

- [Age Scotland](#) – works with and for older people in Scotland to tackle loneliness, support inclusion and deliver better lives
- [Bus Users UK](#) – champions the rights of bus and coach users
- [Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations \(CEMVO\) Scotland](#) – a national intermediary organisation which aims to build the capacity and sustainability of the ethnic minority voluntary sector and its communities
- [Community Transport Association \(CTA\)](#) – UK charity working to champion, connect, support and grow the local, non-profit Community Transport sector
- [Disability Equality Scotland \(DES\)](#) – a national organisation working to achieve full access and inclusion for every disabled person in Scotland
- [Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland \(MACS\)](#) – provides advice on the planning and regulating of transport facilities to ensure that they are accessible for those with a disability
- [Scottish Community Development Centre \(SCDC\)](#) – the lead body for community development in Scotland which also offers training on community engagement
- [Transport Focus](#) – the independent watchdog for transport users
- [Traveline Scotland](#) – timetables and journey planner for all bus, rail, coach, air and ferry services in Scotland

- [YoungScot](#) – Scotland's national youth information platform

Understanding Community Engagement

Definition of Community Engagement

Community engagement is a mutual commitment to each other. It is not simply about informing people about activities and changes outwith their control or merely consulting them to hear what they think.

It is an ongoing two-way process of communication, collaboration and co-production between local people and communities – such as bus passengers and users – and organisations and institutions providing public services – such as local authorities, bus operators and Community Transport groups – to make and implement decisions together.

Community engagement is defined by the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) as ‘a way to [build and sustain relationships between public services and community groups](#) – helping them both to understand and take action on the needs or issues that communities experience’.

Community engagement can be a larger or smaller scale process over the longer or shorter term, dealing with major, complex and contentious issues or ones which are much more consensual and straightforward.

The term ‘community’ is understood broadly and inclusively. Significantly, the concept shifts the focus from the individual to the collective, prioritising inclusivity and valuing diversity. It can apply to groups of people with many common characteristics, such as a shared:

- **Affiliation** (e.g. membership of a club or society);
- **Experience** (e.g. bus passengers or people with disability, on low-incomes or with refugee status);
- **Demographic and identity** (e.g. age, ethnicity or gender);
- **Interest and occupation** (e.g. employment, hobbies or membership of a professional body);
- **Set of values** (e.g. faith groups or campaigning organisations); or,
- **Geography** (e.g. living in, or belonging to, the same places and spaces, like streets, neighbourhoods and villages, towns, cities or even regions).

These can be referred to as [communities of place, communities of interest or communities of practice](#). Communities can communicate, connect or convene in face-to-face or online settings.

Successful community engagement is aligned with the seven principles developed by the SCDC with the Scottish Government (see Chapter 5). It facilitates an [open, participatory and rigorous process](#) which identifies the barriers, issues and needs experienced by the community in question and acts on them. It challenges mindsets, creates spaces for debate, discussion and consensus-building and helps to ‘achieve positive change’.

The academic literature and research on community engagement recognises that it ‘is not generally driven by a “model” so much as by a [framework of guiding principles, strategies, and approaches](#)’. This guide takes such an approach, providing a framework of strategic principles which can be put into action illustrated by successful examples.

In Scotland’s bus sector, community engagement takes place in a number of different scenarios. Firstly, and most frequently, it takes place when network changes, such as the alteration, reduction or removal of a service, route or timetable, are proposed or announced. Bus operators and local authorities have some statutory obligations to communicate and consult on network changes, although the level of community engagement is generally limited.

Secondly, it can take place to support strategy development or long-term planning, often alongside broader considerations around the wider transport system, understanding the aspirations, ideas and visions of local people and communities and developing action plans to make these a reality.

Thirdly, it can take place on an ongoing or routine basis as part of gathering feedback, such as through passenger experience surveys or convening specific user demographics, like groups of disabled people.

Benefits of Community Engagement

The Sub-Group believes that there are significant benefits of Community Engagement for all parties – whether national and local government, bus operators or local people and communities. These benefits have been evidenced by policy and practice in places across Scotland over many years and are also illustrated by the case studies in this guide.

For national and local government, community engagement can:

- **Ensure bus services are planned, developed and delivered according to the needs of local people and communities** by gathering evidence, ideas and views to inform policy-making and decision-making

- **Improve the design and delivery of bus services**, especially in terms of accessibility for older people and disabled people by listening to those with lived experience
- **Improve the passenger experience** by identifying challenges to seamless journeys and opportunities for improvement
- **Improve outcomes** in local communities by redesigning bus services to meet objectives related to health, housing, connectivity, the economy and the environment
- **Improving understanding of quality of life in local communities**, the nature of transport challenges and the role of bus services in offering solutions
- **Identify and support the creation of cost-effective mitigations to network changes**

For bus operators, commercial and non-profit alike, community engagement can:

- **Inform policy-making and decision-making** about local bus services with a robust and democratic evidence base, whether for bus network changes or as part of long-term strategic transport planning
- **Support patronage growth** by raising awareness and promoting use of new and existing services
- **Improve their understanding of the local community** by building a more comprehensive and detailed picture of local behaviours, needs and priorities
- **Facilitate quantitative and qualitative evidence-gathering** which provides useful knowledge and intelligence of new or evolving markets
- **Improve relationships with the local community** by building new connections and contacts which can sustain and support other work in the future
- **Lead to new collaboration and partnerships**, including with Community Transport operators
- **Signal the commitment of operators to passengers and the local community**
- **Demonstrate openness and transparency** and a willingness to listen and respond
- **Develop a more constructive, positive and forward-looking conversation** with local people and communities which is more focused on solutions than grievances

For local people and communities, community engagement can:

- **Make local people and communities feel heard** in conversations which matter to them and decisions which impact their lives and livelihoods
- **Inform local people and communities of, and support them to adapt to, network changes**, including identifying ways to mitigate negative impacts, such as connecting services or new Community Transport schemes
- **Help local people to better understand local policymaking and decision-making**, including the difficult choices and real trade-offs of budgetary decisions facing councillors and bus operators

- **Facilitate and promote new social connections** and a sense of neighbourliness or community spirit
- **Encourage residents to become more engaged and involved** with opportunities in their communities, from future community engagement processes to volunteering
- **Ensure diverse and fair representation** for specific demographics and under-represented groups through direct outreach, tailored approaches and inclusive methods
- **Democratise and decentralise power and control** to local people and communities at the grassroots level, empowering them to have a real and meaningful influence over the design and delivery of local transport services in line with the Community Empowerment Act (2015) and as part of the Community Wealth Building agenda

The Case for Change

Some excellent transport-related work on community engagement is being undertaken across Scotland. Community engagement and empowerment has risen further up the policy and political agenda in recent years. New legislation is in place, the use of online engagement methods has expanded to become mainstream and there is increasing experimentation with more innovative approaches to outreach.

[Statutory notice periods](#) mean that bus operators are required to give at least 70 days' notice to local authorities, 42 days' notice to the Office of the Traffic Commissioner (OTC) and 21 days' notice to passengers if they plan to change or cancel a bus service, with some exemptions for unavoidable short-term changes. There is no legal requirement for passengers to be consulted.

The [Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Act](#) became law in 2015. Its aim is to empower communities by strengthening their voices in decisions about public services and making it easier for them to own and manage land and buildings. Part 2 of the Act makes Community Planning Partnerships a legal requirement and requires local authorities to involve community organisations, including Community Transport operators, at all stages of community planning.

Improving community engagement is part of Scotland's community empowerment agenda, which represents a move away from weaker, less effective and more passive models of community consultation towards greater community control (see Case Study A).

The [National Standards for Community Engagement](#) were refreshed and updated in 2016 to be aligned with the ambition of the new legislation. These 'good-practice principles designed to support and inform the process of community engagement' are used as a framework for this guide (see Chapter 5).

A new [Community Wealth Building Bill](#) is being developed by the Scottish Government in partnership with the community sector and after extensive public consultation.

However, it is also clear that there is significant room for improvement and an 'implementation gap'. Our actions are falling short of our collective ambition, which go beyond minimum statutory requirements. The picture is mixed across the country, but the Sub-Group has identified a number of critical and common challenges:

- **Poor communication** with local people and communities
- **Very short timescales** which deny local people and communities timely opportunities to meaningfully engage with or respond to proposed network changes

- **‘Fait accompli’ proposals** which deny local people and communities timely opportunities to meaningfully engage with or shape decisions which have in fact already been made
- **Challenges with constructive engagement**, because the focus of participants can understandably be on specific complaints, experiences or grievances rather than strategies or solutions
- **A lack of collaboration and partnership working** with the community, third and voluntary sectors, particularly local Community Transport operators, which misses opportunities to improve engagement, identify alternatives or co-produce mitigation efforts
- **‘Consultation fatigue’** among local people and communities, depressing turnout at events and lowering participation levels
- **A lack of timely feedback** which means local people and communities often struggle to understand their impact, discouraging future participation
- **Inaccessible processes which do not promote equity, diversity and inclusion**, exclude some people and communities and lead to unrepresentative participants
- **A failure to review** community engagement processes to identify successes and areas of improvement, while implementing lessons learned for the future
- **A lack of capacity** in local government and the bus sector to develop and deliver community engagement processes which go beyond minimum statutory requirements

There is consensus that this is an area which requires improvement and deserves to be prioritised. Change is needed. Scotland’s bus sector needs to do more to engage with communities to deliver fundamental change. Implementing the principles at the heart of this guide offers an opportunity to do things better and do things differently. This document offers guidance of how to address these challenges over the long-term.

Significant network changes are anticipated in the months and years ahead. Bus services across Scotland may altered, reduced or cut entirely due to the current fiscal and operating environment. It is essential that community engagement is fit for purpose during this period to address, mitigate or prevent the negative impacts which will otherwise result.

Moreover, as Scotland acts to [reduce car use by 20% by 2030](#) and [achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2045](#), the public transport system will have to step up and the importance of a bus sector which meets communities needs will be even more essential.

Community Transport, which is all about community owned and led solutions to unmet transport needs, is one example of this agenda in action. Engaging with the sector and harnessing it’s potential should be a core part of community engagement in Scotland’s bus sector.

Case Study A: Community Planning in Aberdeen

In 2016, shortly after the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, Community Planning Aberdeen published a new and more ambitious [strategy](#) to ‘underpin all of the activities’ of community planning partners in the Granite City, from Aberdeen City Council and the Health and Social Care Partnership to Police Scotland, local colleges and universities and other public and third sector bodies.

It committed to ‘move significantly beyond’ what it called ‘the standard approach’ which saw organisations only ‘provide information and consult on plans that have already been developed’. It vowed to move up the participatory ‘ladder’, shown below, towards co-production, empowerment and self-determination, which would give local people and communities not just a real and meaningful say, but also real and meaningful power.



Figure 1: Diagram from Aberdeens [Engagement, Participation and Empowerment strategy](#) showing Participatory ‘ladder’.

Best Practice Principles and Case Studies

The Sub-Group agreed to utilise the National Standards for Community Engagement (NSCE) as the framework for this guide.

The NSCE were first launched in 2005. A decade later, after the passage of new Community Empowerment legislation, the need for a refresh and a relaunch was clear. In 2016, the new [NSCE](#) were published after being developed by a partnership of the SCDC, the Scottish Government, public sector bodies, the third sector, and community organisations.

The NSCE are important in supporting organisations in putting the Act into practice. They can be used to shape the participation processes of public bodies, as well as shape how community organisations can involve wider community interests.

The NSCE are clear principles that describe the main elements of effective community engagement. They provide detailed performance statements that everyone involved can use to achieve the highest quality results and the greatest impact. Alongside this, [VOiCE](#) is planning and recording software that assists individuals, organisations and partnerships to implement the NSCE.

The NSCE are not designed to replace existing community engagement or participation frameworks. They are intended to act as a central benchmark and reference point for best practice. They are designed to reflect the emerging policy commitments and requirements across a host of areas relating to participation, engagement and community empowerment in Scotland.

There are seven principles of best practice in community engagement which should be implemented by all bus operators and local authorities in Scotland: **Inclusion, Support, Planning, Working Together, Methods, Communication, and Impact.**

Inclusion

Inclusion is all about making sure to 'identify and involve the people and organisations that are affected by the focus of the engagement' from the earliest opportunity and in a meaningful way. Quality engagement should be prioritised over quantity.

Firstly, everyone should have an opportunity to participate and to be heard. Leaders or organisers of any community engagement should make a conscious and sustained effort to design and deliver a process which is open and accessible to all. There should be a conscious focus on promoting diversity to ensure that one or another demographic does not unfairly or disproportionately dominate. For example,

in-person meetings should take place in fully accessible venues and discussions should be safe, welcoming spaces free from discriminatory behaviour or language.

A mapping exercise should take place to recognise local people, communities and organisations with a stake in the issue, whether they are residents living nearby or along the bus route; members of an affected demographic group, such as younger, older or disabled people; or representatives of organisations with a relevant interest or expertise, such as community councils, local clubs, schools or employers.

Inclusive community engagement processes reveal and welcome a wide range of opinions, including minority and opposing views, which are encouraged, recorded and valued. All participants' contributions should be treated equally.

Secondly, however, an inclusive process must also be a pro-active one in which there are targeted efforts to engage with people and communities who are identified as being disproportionately affected, typically underrepresented or less-heard. Some communities or interests may be better organised or represented than others, including those who are not currently regular bus passengers, which could impact the extent to which participation is representative or useful.

Inclusion should be a means of increasing and promoting equality, diversity and representation. There could be, for example, specific outreach to people with protected characteristics to encourage them to participate or a distinct part of the process which is tailored to their particular needs. It could involve outreach to local or national representative bodies or organisations to provide advice and support on how best to do this (see examples on page 6).

An [Equality Impact Assessment](#) (EqIA) is best practice and could be informed by data and evidence gathered from participants during the process to improve equality, diversity and inclusion. The public sector equality duty requires public authorities such as local authorities to carry out an EqIA to evaluate the likely impact of the proposed policy or practice, whether it is new or revised, especially on people with protected characteristics.

Protected Characteristics

Equalities legislation means it is against the law to discriminate against anyone because of one of the protected characteristics – age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation.

Case Study B: Including Perth's Disabled Community

Stagecoach East Scotland have a strong and positive track record in Perth of engaging with disabled people in the community in an inclusive way. In recent years, they have worked with the [Centre for Inclusive Living, Perth & Kinross](#) (CILPK) to promote bus use to wheelchair users in the area, including as part of Disabled Access Day 2023. They have also held an Autism Engagement Day where passengers could share ideas and feedback based on their experiences of using local bus services.

This partnership is a strong example of a bus operator working with local groups, identified during a stakeholder mapping exercise, to develop targeted outreach to less-heard demographics and deliver engagement accessible to all in the community.

Checklist 1: Inclusion

- Community and stakeholders mapping exercise
- Open, accessible and welcoming to all
- Targeted outreach
- EqIA

Support

Providing support to 'identify and overcome any barriers to participation' should be an integral part of community engagement. Some individuals or groups may require more support than others to participate due to their background, circumstances or needs.

It should not be assumed that every community member or stakeholder identified through the mapping exercise has an equal ability or opportunity to engage. Addressing this inherent inequality of access requires concrete steps. It can be beneficial to go where people are rather than expect them to come to you and to work with local groups like community councils, Community Transport operators and others to help facilitate effective engagement.

An assessment of support needs, which ideally involves likely or potential participants, should be carried out at an early stage. This assessment will highlight action which can be taken to remove or at least reduce any practical barriers which make it costly, difficult or unattractive for people and communities to participate. Remember that disabilities and disadvantages can often be hidden or invisible.

Emerging best practice in co-production is to not only pay upfront or reimburse expenses, but also to [recompense participants for their participation](#). There are different approaches. Payment can be monetary or take the form of vouchers or other 'in kind' resources. An important consideration is the potential implications for an individual's tax obligations or benefits entitlement.

The location, timing and type of engagement can often address some support needs. For example, ensuring that in-person meetings or events are held at suitable and accessible premises with appropriate catering is essential and can enable older people, disabled people and religious minorities to participate. Online engagement can be an appropriate additional means of engagement, especially for younger people or communities spread across a large geographical area. Digital exclusion, however, can be a significant barrier to participation, especially for individuals on low incomes or communities in areas of poor connectivity.

Other potential support needs could include:

- **Transport** – How will attendees make it to your event or meeting? Working with your local Community Transport operator to provide accessible, door-to-door transport to your event or meeting could be an inclusive, sustainable and cost-effective solution, especially for older people or disabled people.
- **Expenses** – Costs incurred by participants are likely to deter participation, especially for those on low or fixed incomes. How will you pay upfront or reimburse out-of-pocket expenses?
- **Interpretation or Translation** – Will any of your materials or remarks need interpreted or translated for deaf and hearing-impaired people or participants whose first language may not be English?
- **Personal assistance** – Some participants may need personal assistance during the process. How will you accommodate those with personal assistants?
- **Childcare** – Parents or carers may not be able to attend due to childcare commitments. Could you schedule your engagement at a more suitable time? Is there a way to make it child-friendly? Could you even provide some kind of support for childcare for participants, or join the local playgroup?

Case Study C: Removing Barriers to Participation for Asylum Seekers and Refugees

In March 2023, the Community Transport Association (CTA) launched a new partnership with the [Mental Health Foundation](#) (MHF) to improve the transport system for asylum seekers and refugees in Glasgow by listening to and learning from their lived experiences of the city's bus, rail and active travel networks.

Significant potential barriers to participation were identified by CTA and MHF at the outset. For most, the financial cost of travel to attend in-person events would be

prohibitive. For some, English may not be their first language or they may require translation support. For others, they may lack confidence or trust in a new and unfamiliar process.

The engagement process was designed and resourced jointly by CTA and MHF to remove these barriers to participation in the focus group. All travel expenses were covered to ensure that cost was not a barrier to participation. It was scheduled to avoid clashes with community activities and during school hours to enable parents to attend. Although all participants had at least intermediate English, bilingual and multilingual Sessional Workers from MHF were on hand to assist with language where needed. Invitations were extended through them, who are all from refugee backgrounds and are trusted members of the community.

Partnering with organisations with expertise, as well as community leaders with broad networks and relevant lived experience, can address blind spots and shape plans early to help deliver more inclusive community engagement.

Checklist 2: Support

- Assess support needs
- Partner with other organisations to provide support to participants
- Reduce or remove barriers to participation
- Work with people with relevant lived experience

Planning

A well-planned community engagement process has a ‘clear purpose’ and a ‘realistic timetable’ based on a ‘shared understanding of community needs and ambitions’.

The focus and objectives of the engagement, such as what is within and outwith the scope to manage expectations and channel input, as well as how success will be measured, should be defined and agreed by partners and clearly communicated to the community. A plan to deliver the process with realistic timescales and sufficient resources should be in place and clearly communicated to the community.

The scale of the engagement should be appropriate for the scale of the task at hand based on what is necessary and achievable. Whether the subject is the wholesale renewal of a long-term transport strategy, the permanent removal of a major bus route or a temporary alteration to a minor route will be a determining factor.

Timescales are a major challenge for community engagement in Scotland’s bus sector, particularly when services are reduced or withdrawn on the basis of a lack of

commercial unviability. At present, [bus operators are required](#) to give at least 70 days' notice to local authorities, 42 days' notice to the Office of the Traffic Commissioner (OTC) and 21 days' notice to passengers.

The consultation or engagement which, therefore, occurs across Scotland around bus network changes is typically not effective, meaningful or worthwhile. This is due to a range of factors related to poor planning – very limited timescales, a lack of resource and weak communication and cooperation.

Local Community Transport operators, which could be supported by local authorities and bus operators to mitigate the negative impacts of withdrawn services; redesign connecting services; or deliver replacement demand responsive or scheduled community bus services, are rarely brought into these discussions.

Meanwhile, other key stakeholders like community councils or community planning partners often do not receive timely notification or are not even notified at all. There is often little or no time for public meetings to take place. There is, as a result, often a lack of data or evidence to understand the impacts of the decision or to prepare mitigations. Local employers, for example, may be able to adapt schedules or shifts to reduce the negative impact of network changes for workers.

There is currently no legal obligation for consultation or engagement with communities and changes are often presented as a *fait accompli*. Decisions should not be made before community engagement has taken place. Decisions should be informed and influenced by community engagement. If this cannot be the case, the reasons for this should be robust and should be communicated clearly.

Longer lead-in times beyond the current statutory minimums alongside earlier communication and a commitment to partnership working are essential to widen the scope for and improve the quality of community engagement. Therefore:

- **Bus operators and local authorities should seek to engage meaningfully with local people and communities as early as reasonably possible prior to making any decisions** about network changes;
- **Bus operators should seek to give more notice of proposed network changes to local authorities** than statutory requirements to allow time for community engagement;
- **Local authorities and bus operators should seek to give more notice of agreed network changes to local people and communities** to allow time for adjustments and preparations; and,
- **Local authorities should convene community planning partners and other local stakeholders** – like Community Transport operators, major employers, the NHS and others – **to identify impacts of network changes, discuss potential solutions and agree a joint response** – including

investing in Community Transport services to mitigate negative impacts, redesign connecting services or deliver replacements.

The [Public Service Vehicles \(Registration of Local Services\) \(Provision for Service Information\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2022](#), which came into force on Saturday 1 April 2023, aims to improve communication through a new information sharing process for specific information on services to be varied or cancelled between bus operators and local authorities.

This could be utilised to provide other operators with information if they wish to bid to provide a similar service to the one being withdrawn or varied. It also underlines the wider importance of information sharing, such as providing real-time data to Traveline Scotland so that it can be accessed by third party journey planners to encourage use of bus.

Local authorities and bus operators should have plans in place to engage with their local communities, bus passengers and community planning partners on an ongoing basis related to timetable and service design, as well as in the context of network changes, long-term strategic planning and environmental goals.

Ongoing engagement builds trust, relationships and patronage. It also creates opportunities for new partnerships to address emerging issues in a more responsive way, such as with Community Transport operators to develop new services to fill emerging gaps in the bus network.

Case Study D: West Lothian's Community Bus Pilot

During 2020 and early 2021, [Handicabs Lothian](#) (HcL), a non-profit Community Transport operator, and West Lothian Council conducted extensive engagement with local communities to gather data, evidence and views on local unmet transport needs. Significant gaps in the bus network were identified, such as connections to Broxburn's main retail street. Residents with mobility issues and seeking greater independence were identified as a target group.

In April 2021, a new Community Bus Service, the Broxburn and Uphall Town Service (2A/2B) funded by the local authority and delivered by HcL, was launched on a pilot basis. It was extended due to its great success in increasing patronage, tackling isolation, connecting with other services and supporting local businesses.

It is a great example of what can be achieved through planning and partnership between local authorities and Community Transport operators.

Case Study E: 'New Era' for Public Transport in Glenfarg

[Glenfarg Community Transport Group](#) (GCTG) was established in 2022 as a community response to dwindling public transport options in the local area and fill the gaps left by the loss of scheduled buses by commercial operators.

The contract for the 55 Bus was previously operated by Earnside Coaches, which ceased operations. It was then passed on to GCTG as part of a new Public Social Partnership with Perth and Kinross Council. The 55 Bus will develop into an hourly service throughout the day and a fully flexible, demand responsive service backed by new digital systems.

It has been heralded as the start of 'a new era in public transport for Glenfarg'. Perth and Kinross Council's investment in the service and the loan of a 16-seater minibus has been vital, as has support from Stagecoach, who recognised it will 'allow customers to make onward connections to Stagecoach services to/from Edinburgh at Kinross Park & Ride and to/from Perth at Milnathort'.

Checklist 3: Planning

- Agree focus, outcomes and indicators of success
- Agree realistic timetable
- Allocate sufficient resources
- Engage community before decision-making on network changes
- Convene community partners and local stakeholders
- Consider how service information sharing could inform or improve community engagement

Working Together

All parties involved in community engagement should 'work effectively together to achieve the aims' agreed collectively at the outset, which will vary by the nature, scale and complexity of the process. This applies equally to the leaders or organisers, participants and other stakeholders.

The ethos should be one of partnership and co-production, which necessitates sharing power and responsibility. Community engagement is a shared process which identifies joint challenges, opportunities and solutions.

Roles and responsibilities, as well as procedures for reaching decisions, should be clear, understood and followed by everyone. Communication between all participants needs to be open, honest and clear.

The process should be based on trust and mutual respect. This can often be challenging when participants hold opposing views or represent conflicting interests, but it is essential that local people and communities approach discussions with bus operators and local authorities constructively and in good faith.

Working with partners based in the community (whether local charities, community councils, Elected Members or employers) and support organisations from across the public and third sectors (such as organisations like CTA, MACS or SCDC and community planning partners) can secure access to capacity, expertise and networks to help facilitate more positive conversations and reach new or target audiences.

It can also offer opportunities to improve joint planning to combine or streamline engagement exercises by different partners to maximise efficiency and reduce the risk of consultation fatigue in the community. The same pool of people can often be asked the same or similar questions by different organisations over short timescales, when data and evidence could be easily shared. Quality engagement should be prioritised over quantity.

Community Planning Partners

Community planning is about how public bodies work together, and with local communities, to design and deliver better services that make a real difference to people's lives. A [Community Planning Partnership](#) (or CPP) is the name given to all those services that come together to take part in community planning. There are 32 CPPs across Scotland, one for each council area. CPPs convene local authorities, police, the NHS and others in the community and voluntary sector.

Case Study F: Engaging Target Groups

In 2022, proposals to close or reduce the opening hours of rail ticket offices across Scotland were released. Transport Focus sought to consult ScotRail passengers, understand how they might be affected and suggest improvements.

In addition to the traditional approach of notices at stations to encourage engagement, they worked with several organisations, including DES, MACS and the RNIB, to reach out directly to disabled people, who were a key target group. Local authorities and bus operators should work together with such groups to reach new audiences.

Checklist 4: Working Together

- Establish ethos of partnership and co-production between participants
- Agree roles and responsibilities
- Agree decision-making procedures
- Find partners who can help reach new or target audiences
- Identify joint actions and solutions

Methods

It is essential that the methods of community engagement are fit for purpose to maximise participation and support constructive dialogue. The methods utilised can determine which voices are heard – and which voices are heard can determine outcomes.

The methods should be acceptable, accessible and appropriate for participants with particular consideration for any target groups and protected characteristics. Some groups may lack the confidence or skills to engage.

A mix and variety of methods should be used throughout the engagement to make sure that many and diverse voices can be heard, as well as to gather quantitative data and qualitative evidence, like the rich stories of people's lived experiences.

There are a wide range of different methods for community engagement offering a flexible menu of different options, from the more traditional to the more innovative, which can be utilised according to circumstances. Different approaches are required for different audiences. Methods can include:

- Commissioned research like **focus groups** – a small group of carefully selected participants who participate in an organised, in-depth discussion
- **Public meetings** and 'town halls' open to all
- **'Mini-publics'** – an assembly of citizens, demographically representative of the larger population, brought together to discuss, learn and decide
- **Surveys** and questionnaires (online or paper-based)
- **Community action research** – research conducted by and for the community utilising more innovative methods
- **Digital and social media campaigns**
- **Charrettes** – a design-based planning process using maps, masterplans and other visuals to discuss places, neighbourhoods, developments or transport services in a short or intense period of time
- **Participatory budgeting** – a democratic process through which local residents are empowered to directly decide how public money is spent

The increasing use of digital tools to facilitate engagement has widened access and increased participation. Online meetings and surveys lower barriers to participation for many by eliminating the costs or challenges of travel, reducing the time required to participate and enabling 24/7 feedback.

However, it remains important to create in-person and face-to-face spaces and platforms for engagement. Digital exclusion can be a barrier for low-income groups or older people. Online methods should not be a replacement for face-to-face methods.

Hybrid or 'blended' approaches offer a useful balance. Recent experience suggests these are becoming best practice to allow more people to engage in a way and at a time which best meets their needs or preferences.

Commissioning Focus Groups

Focus groups can be commissioned from, and independently run by, research agencies to gather more and better evidence. Focus groups can convene people from specific target groups and demographics, for example, less-heard groups, such as young people, who are often excluded or under-represented in conversations about bus, or a representative sample of the community.

Case Study G: Reaching New Audiences in the Borders

In early 2023, Scottish Borders Council gathered very useful and more representative data about travel patterns, habits and asks to shape the future of the region's bus network by working with partners to reach a wider, more diverse audience, including many younger people who are often less-heard.

Bus Users UK provided support to reach bus passengers. Borders Buses included the survey in their app. Local employers promoted the survey to staff, while colleges and schools shared with pupils and students. Key challenges with bus services for young people emerged, such as uncoordinated and inconvenient timetables acting as a barrier to accessing education and employment.

Case Study H: Mass Online Participation in Fort William

The Highland Bus Partnership Fund commissioned research into options for enhancing bus priority, improving reliability of bus services and increasing patronage in and around Fort William. This included a study of local views through an online survey, which closed in February 2023.

A 'very healthy' response rate was secured. Over 7% of the total local population, or an estimated and remarkable 15% of households, completed the survey to have their say. This is a great example of the ability of online surveys to reach across a whole community and facilitate mass participation to gather more representative and robust data and insights.

Case Study I: Glasgow Disability Alliance's 'Purple Poncho Players'

In 2011, activists with Glasgow Disability Alliance created a new community theatre group, known as the ['Purple Poncho Players'](#), to use music, comedy and drama to

express their lived experiences of barriers and oppression, as well as challenge audiences to build a more accessible city and a better world.

Their work brings challenges with transport and other major issues to life in a creative and innovative way, leveraging entertainment to encourage participation in community engagement by those who might not otherwise.

Checklist 5: Methods

- Ask participants how they would like to be involved
- Identify and implement online/in-person methods
- Identify and implement qualitative/quantitative methods
- Consider methods to reach target groups and protected characteristics

Communication

Communication with the people, organisations and communities affected by the engagement should be clear, regular and transparent as part of a two-way process on realistic timescales. This should be planned in advance prior to the engagement and at an early stage of the process to maximise participation, ensure diversity of representation and identify any financial costs.

Information about the process, from how to participate to what decisions have been reached, should be easy to find and understand, both online and offline. Communication should be in plain English and everyday language without unnecessary, unexplained or overused acronyms, jargon and technical terms. Braille resources, Easy Read versions or other appropriate formats could be provided.

Content should be communicated in a way which is relevant and engaging to an audience with concepts, ideas and proposals placed firmly in a local context. Communications should 'make it real' for people in their daily lives.

Clear, regular and transparent communication is a useful tool to manage expectations and bring people with you. Participants and the wider community should be kept up-to-date on process and progress in a timely way, including good news or positive steps forward and, perhaps especially, delays or setbacks.

Feedback is a critical part of communication, but one which can often be neglected, whether due to capacity, priorities or timescale. Participants should be able to provide and receive feedback throughout the process, learning about the options which have been considered, the actions that have been agreed and why.

Participants should know where and how to share concerns, views or questions. Realistic timescales for receiving feedback should be shared and adhered to.

Participants should be asked for their consent and preferences in relation to communication. Systems and procedures must be in place to comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and other related legislation to protect the privacy and security of participants and their data.

Case Study K: Stagecoach's Customer Contact Centre

Stagecoach opened a [new Customer Contact Centre in Perth](#) as a 'one-stop phone and digital contact point' in 2022. Over 60 customer service advisors now operate an improved 7-day a week service answering high volumes of calls and social media traffic. The team answer questions about timetables, help with smartcards, find lost property and gather feedback on bus services, which is passed on quickly to depots and staff on the ground.

The Customer Contact Centre has improved communication with the communities which Stagecoach serves. It has created new opportunities and more effective channels for customers and passengers to share feedback and experiences, which can be utilised to improve services.

Checklist 6: Communication

- Communicate clearly, regularly and transparently
- Communicate in plain English
- Provide appropriate alternative formats
- Provide feedback and progress updates to partners/participants
- Create opportunities for feedback from partners/participants
- Comply with GDPR and related legislation

Impact

Once the community engagement is complete, it is time to **assess its impact and use the lessons learned to improve future community engagement**, which should be promptly shared with participants and the wider community to demonstrate how you have listened and acted.

Impact is central to the National Standards for Community Engagement, because monitoring and evaluation must take place to assess:

- Whether the aims, objectives and deadlines were met;

- To what extent decisions about strategy, policy or service design were shaped by participants and reflect the views of the community; and,
- How local bus services and outcomes were (or will be) improved as result of the community engagement.

Participants and partners should be involved in this process of review, as well as identifying areas of improvement and agreeing how future processes could be improved. Community engagement is an ongoing process of learning.

Feedback should be provided to the wider community on how the engagement process has influenced decisions and what has changed as a result. A lack of timely feedback can leave participants feeling that the process was tokenistic or their participation failed to actually change anything, encouraging distrust and 'consultation fatigue'.

On the other hand, investing the time and resources to take a 'you said, we did' approach to reporting back to participants and the wider community, builds credibility, goodwill, support and trust with the public.

Case Study J: Glasgow City Council's Public Conversation on Transport

During 2020 and 2021, Glasgow City Council lead a large-scale ['Public Conversation on the future of transport in your city'](#) with local residents.

An EqlA was conducted to 'identify people who are most impacted by transport' and then develop 'an engagement approach which would have the best chances of hearing their voices'. Sustrans and SCDC supported direct engagement with community organisations, community councils and their members.

After its conclusion, the local authority published a report with all of its findings, including participants' problems and solutions, such as 'more segregated cycleways' and 'better access to bikes', while also producing a 'quick read version' and sharing highlights on social media.

The impact of the community engagement on the city's Transport Strategy, Active Travel Strategy, City Centre Transformation Plan and Liveable Neighbourhoods Plan has been clearly demonstrated online and on the ground. In the months which followed, the city has rolled out major new active travel corridors and on-street bike storage facilities, with ambitions to go further in the years ahead.

Checklist 7: Impact

Review the process with partners/participants:

- Inclusion: How well did we identify and involve the people and organisations that are affected by the focus of the engagement?
- Support: How well did we overcome any barriers to participation? Did we reach a diversity of participants representative of the community?
- Planning: How well did we plan the engagement? Was there a clear purpose?
- Methods: Were the methods of engagement fit for purpose?
- Working Together: Did we work effectively together to achieve the aims of the engagement? Did we harness the expertise of partners?
- Communication: Did we communicate clearly and regularly with the people, organisations and communities affected by the engagement?
- Impact: What impact has the engagement process had? How have the views of the community changed our approach, plan, policy or strategy?

Review the outcomes with partners/participants:

- Assess how community engagement shaped decisions
- Assess how community engagement improved outcomes/services
- 'You Said, We Did': Report back to partners, participants and the wider community in a pro-active, timely way

Annexes

Useful tools

- [Plain English and Readability Tools](#) – mygov.scot
- [Stakeholder Mapping Template](#) – Adaptation Scotland
- [Resources for Stakeholder Mapping](#) – NHS Lothian
- [VOiCE Platform for Community Engagement](#) – Scottish Community Development Centre

Summary of key sources

- [National Archives \(2015\) Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Act](#)
- [Scottish Community Development Centre \(SCDC\) \(2016\) National Standards for Community Engagement](#)
- [Sustrans \(2022\) Places for Everyone: Community Engagement Guide 2022](#)
- [Transport Focus \(2021\) Passenger representation on Bus Service Improvement Plans](#)
- [Transport Focus \(2017\) Bus service reviews: consulting on changes to local services – Progress report](#)
- [Transport Scotland \(2022\) Provision of service information when varying or cancelling registration](#)
- [Transport Scotland \(2016\) Bus Service Registration Procedures: Developing best practice guidance](#)

Terms of Reference for Sub-Group on Community Engagement

Background and Context

The Bus Taskforce ('the Taskforce') was established by the Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth MSP, in October 2022 to bring together national and local government with operators, regulators and stakeholders to address the immediate challenges facing bus networks. It was agreed that three sub-groups would be formed to address the three major issues of patronage growth; workforce retention and recruitment; and community engagement.

According to the Scottish Community Development Centre, community engagement is 'a way to build and sustain relationships between public services and community groups – helping them both to understand and take action on the needs or issues that communities experience'. Engaging and empowering local people and communities on the design and delivery of local transport solutions will be vital to increasing patronage, improving connectivity and achieving net zero. It improves outcomes for operators, local authorities and bus users.

Significant changes to bus services and networks are anticipated in the months and years ahead across Scotland. It is essential that there is open, inclusive and transparent communication between operators, local authorities, bus users and communities about these changes and accessible, meaningful and timely engagement with bus users and communities to address, mitigate or prevent the challenges which may result. Community engagement is also an essential and helpful tool in shaping conversations and decision-making in more positive circumstances, such as long-term transport planning and network or service expansion.

There is evidently a need to improve the consistent and fair implementation of these processes of community engagement and empowerment across Scotland. All operators and local authorities have duties and responsibilities in line with statutory notice periods, the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and the National Standards for Community Engagement (2016). Alternative or superior solutions can be found through collaboration and partnership, for example, support for new Community Bus Services to bridge the gaps left by services which have been declared commercially unviable.

Purpose and Objectives

The Bus Taskforce's Sub-Group on Community Engagement ('the Sub-Group') has been established as a short-life working group during the lifetime of the Taskforce to:

- Identify the challenges and opportunities in improving community engagement on networks and changes

- Discuss, review and coordinate activity to improve community engagement
- Co-design best practice guidance for community engagement which are aligned with the seven principles of the National Standards for Community Engagement, applied in a transport context and supported by case studies
- Promote communication and collaboration between stakeholders
- Recognise and represent the voices and interests of bus users and communities in the work of the Taskforce

Outputs

The primary output of the Sub-Group will be a published document of best practice guidance for community engagement on networks and changes. It will contain specific guidance for bus operators, local authorities and communities and case studies of best practice. It will be aligned with the National Standards for Community Engagement.

Membership

The Sub-Group's participants are members of the Taskforce or their colleagues, as well as other relevant invited attendees with a specific expertise and interest in community engagement:

- David Kelly – Community Transport Association (Chair)
- Sara Collier – Confederation of Passenger Transport
- Craig Dennett – First Bus
- Daniel Laird – Stagecoach
- Greig MacKay – Bus Users Scotland
- Robert Samson – Transport Focus
- Nicola Gill – ATCO (West Lothian Council)
- Margaret Roy – ATCO (Perth and Kinross Council)
- Catherine Damen – CoSLA
- Gordon Dickson – SPT
- Ranald Robertson – HITRANS
- Kelvin Cochrane – Handicabs Lothian Limited
- Gary Toner – Handicabs Lothian Limited
- Margaret Douglas – Public Health Scotland
- Roisin Curran – Transport Scotland
- Freya Gillon – Transport Scotland
- Carole Stewart – Transport Scotland

Meeting Cycle and Format

The Taskforce will convene for a total of three meetings over the course of six months, after which progress will be reviewed. The Sub-Group will aim to meet every four weeks to hear updates from members and discuss a topic, theme or section of the best practice guidance under development.

Reporting

The Sub-Group will work on actions between meetings of the full Taskforce. The Chair and members will report back on its conclusions, discussions and progress at meetings of the Taskforce.



**TRANSPORT
SCOTLAND**

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