



The role of local government and its cross-sectoral partners in financing and delivering a net-zero Scotland

A Response from CTA

January 2022

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Summary

The Community Transport Association (CTA) represents over 160 members across Scotland and champions accessible, inclusive and sustainable transport for all. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee's call for views on the role of local government and its cross-sectoral partners in financing and delivering a net-zero Scotland.

The key points of our submission are:

- The Community Transport sector will be a key partner for local government in decarbonising transport systems and delivering a net zero Scotland
- Community Transport is leading the way to net zero by delivering shared transport services and transitioning to zero-emissions vehicle fleets. But the sector needs the continued financial support of local government
- Community Transport operators can design and deliver accessible, cost-effective, innovative and sustainable transport solutions which can facilitate modal shift and reduce carbon emissions. However, the sector's potential has yet to be maximised
- Levels of engagement with the voluntary sector and support for community-led initiatives by councils varies significantly across Scotland. There is room for improvement and opportunities for collaboration and partnership
- Local authorities should help Community Transport operators to expand their services – for example by creating new electric car share schemes or innovative micro-mobility solutions with e-bikes or e-scooters – to expand their capacity to decarbonise transport and increase modal shift

Council planning, decision-making and capacity in relation to net zero

1. How effective are councils at strategic planning, budgeting, and making procurement decisions that align with net zero goals? If there are barriers, what are they?

Local government has a critical role to play in financing and delivering a net zero transport system in Scotland. A number of Scottish local authorities have declared a Climate Emergency and many have set ambitious net zero goals which will be stretching to achieve on time. In general, however, the guidance, frameworks and policies which Elected Members and council officers use to make budgetary, planning or procurement decisions do not align with or help to achieve the strategic objective of net zero.

Few local authorities currently appear to have the necessary capacity or the right mechanisms in place to rigorously assess whether decisions are compatible with net zero goals. For example, commercial and residential developments which lock-in car dependency, or infrastructure investments which

encourage private car ownership rather than active travel and the use of public, community or shared transport, continue to be approved by councils which are rhetorically and strategically committed to net zero, as well as other related strategic objectives such as 20-minute neighbourhoods.

There is a need for guidance, frameworks and policies, whether local or national, to be updated to be fit for purpose in delivering net zero. Councils will need the right policies, skills and, crucially, political will.

2. What role can the local government planning system and local development plans do to help us reach net zero? Could the planning system do more?

Local government planning and local development plans can help us reach net zero by preventing developments which are incompatible with net zero and supporting the right developments in the right place which build more sustainable communities.

Planning decisions and policies will need to change in order to be compatible with net zero, the sustainable transport hierarchy and the forthcoming National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4). For example, commercial or residential developments should not be approved if they lock in car dependency, fail to facilitate active travel and the use of community, public or shared transport or are inaccessible.

Local development plans can contain clear requirements to this effect which are necessary for approval. Local development plans can also facilitate the spread of best practice in relation to more ambitious Section 75 agreements between developers and local authorities with a stronger focus on sustainability, in partnership with local Community Transport operators (*see Case Study below*).

Case Study: Developer Contributions to Electric Car Clubs in Aberdeen

In partnership with CoWheels, Aberdeen City Council is utilising Section 75 agreements to require developers to contribute to the creation of car share schemes which help to build people-friendly places. New residential developments in Dyce on Aberdeen's outskirts and on Pittodrie Street in the city have been approved with very limited parking spaces and three years of funding from the developer for a new electric car club for residents with EV charging points on site.

Local authorities could leverage Section 75 agreements to require developers to invest in sustainable transport through contributions to existing or new Community Transport operators in their local area, including electric car clubs.

Replicating this approach across Scotland would help to accelerate the modal shift required for net zero by discouraging private car ownership, making shared transport accessible, affordable and convenient and encouraging active travel. Every shared car takes 10 private cars off the road.¹

¹ <https://como.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/CoMoUK-Scotland-Car-Club-Summary-Report-2020.pdf>

Council partnering to achieve net zero goals

5. How well do councils partner with the voluntary sector and social enterprises to work towards net zero goals? Are there instances of good practice you can point to or areas where opportunities are being missed?

Levels of engagement and partnership with the Community Transport sector – which is a critical part of Scotland’s voluntary sector with a mix of volunteer- and staff-led schemes – varies significantly across Scotland. Some local Community Transport operators have developed effective, mature and mutually supportive relationships with their local authority.

Some local authorities facilitate engagement with their local Community Transport operators, for example through regular local forums. However, the picture is patchy across Scotland, with other local authorities failing to engage with or involve the local Community Transport sector. This is often due to a lack of awareness or understanding of the Community Transport sector, its role and its potential at local government level.

CTA is exploring how we can work with our members and councils to identify and plug these gaps and to help facilitate useful dialogue – including through our ongoing ‘Mapping Scotland’ project, which will produce a comprehensive and up-to-date nationwide picture of our sector.²

Financial support from local government is vital. Many Community Transport operators receive essential grant funding from their local authority. It has been critical that this grant funding has been protected during the COVID-19 pandemic, because most are also partially reliant on passenger revenue, donations and additional grant funding secured from other sources, which have been severely impacted by reduced passenger levels.

Local authorities commission services from the Community Transport sector. Some Community Transport operators are contracted to operate scheduled bus routes by their council, often to replace services which have been withdrawn by or proven unviable for commercial operators. Others have developed partnerships which enable them to collaborate with local government on a wider range of community projects beyond transport.

Working in partnership with the Community Transport sector will help local government to deliver net zero. Some local authorities are confronting an implementation gap between policy ambition and delivery of outcomes, partly as a result of a highly constrained fiscal environment eroding capacity and resources. Community Transport can help bridge this gap by being a reliable delivery partner to local authorities for accessible, cost-effective, innovative and sustainable transport services across all modes.

² <https://ctauk.org/mapping-scotland-project>

6. How well do councils involve local communities in decision-making on major net zero projects and how do they support community-led initiatives?

Again, the picture varies across Scotland and there remains room for improvement. Engaging with and investing in their local Community Transport operators would be a useful and impactful way for every council to involve local communities in decision-making on net zero, as well to support community-led initiatives. Community Transport operators are community-led providers of accessible, inclusive and sustainable transport solutions. They are always for a social purpose and never for a profit.

We have over 160 members in Scotland – including charities serving or supporting elderly, disabled and vulnerable people; schools, colleges, universities and youth groups; day care centres; and faith groups. They operate in rural and urban communities in almost every local authority area. About a third of our members offer transport as their primary activity, the rest as a secondary purpose as part of their charitable or community activities.

Our members utilise a wide range of transport modes – from minibuses and cars, to mopeds and bikes – to deliver a diversity of services – including dial-a-ride, electric car clubs, non-emergency transport for health and social care, ‘wheels-to-work’, group hire and bicycle or e-bike schemes. Their services meet otherwise unmet transport needs and bridge gaps or tackle inequalities in public transport provision. Many community transport vehicles are wheelchair accessible, with rear passenger lifts and convertible spaces, while drivers and passenger assistants are professionally trained to assist passengers with health or mobility issues.

As community-led solutions, Community Transport providers are at the heart of their local community and led by local people, often by volunteers. They understand the transport needs of their community – especially older, disabled or excluded people – and have a proven track record of designing and delivering services and interventions in response which work. Their insights and support can contribute to decision-making by councils on major net zero projects.

Local government work on net zero in particular areas

10. How are councils working with cross-sectoral partners to decarbonise transport (including encouraging active travel) and to improve air quality?

The Community Transport sector will be a key partner to help local government to decarbonise local and regional transport systems and to deliver a net zero Scotland. The Community Transport sector is leading the way to net zero – firstly, by delivering shared transport services, such as minibuses, e-bikes and car clubs, which facilitate modal shift; and, secondly, by transitioning to zero-emissions vehicle fleets, which decarbonise their services. Some Community Transport operators have received support from councils to do so (*see Case Study below*).

However, we believe that the full potential of the sector to decarbonise transport and improve air quality has yet to be maximised by local government. By supporting Community Transport operators to expand and improve their services – such as creating new electric car share schemes or innovative micro-mobility solutions like e-bike or e-scooter schemes – local authorities could significantly expand and improve their ability and capacity to decarbonise transport through modal shift towards shared transport and active travel.

Local authorities should consult the Community Transport sector as they invest in public EV charging points to ensure that the right infrastructure is in the right place for accessible, sustainable journeys. The Community Transport Association is happy to work with local authorities to facilitate this engagement.

Case Study: Community Transport Glasgow

Community Transport Glasgow – which works closely with Glasgow City Council and Strathclyde Partnership for Transport – has a fully zero-emissions fleet of vehicles thanks to funding from Scottish Power Energy Network. Its all-electric fleet of 7 low floor minibuses, 4 standard minibuses, 2 people carriers, 1 van and 1 car has improved local air quality and reduced carbon emissions by 188 tonnes.

Further information

To discuss this consultation response further, or to engage with the CTA and our members in Scotland on any other issue, please contact:

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The Community Transport Association (CTA) is the UK charity that represents and supports providers of Community Transport.

Our 160 members in Scotland are local charities and community groups which provide transport services which fulfil a social purpose and community benefit.

We believe in accessible, inclusive and sustainable transport for all.