

14 February 2023

**Jenny Gilruth MSP
Minister for Transport
Scottish Government**

RE: The Future of the Plugged-In Communities Grant Fund

Dear Ms Gilruth,

I am writing on behalf of the Community Transport Association (CTA) and our members across Scotland in relation to Round 1 (2022/23) and a prospective Round 2 (2023/24) of the Plugged-In Communities Grant Fund.

We warmly welcomed your decision to continue and expand the Fund last year in Round 1 after a successful pilot round in 2021/22. We are delighted that 18 Community Transport operators will now benefit from a total of £1.6 million of funding from Transport Scotland to purchase Electric Vehicles (EVs). Your investment in Community Transport is supporting our sector to reduce carbon emissions, tackle car dependency and encourage modal shift in urban, rural and island communities from Orkney to East Ayrshire.

Our members have told us how much this investment means to them and their staff, volunteers and passengers, as well as just how big an impact their new EVs will have in their communities:¹

“If it was not for the Plugged-In Communities grant then it would be years before we could afford to purchase an EV ourselves... Hopefully this will be the start of changing our whole fleet to electric, which is difficult because of the costs involved. We hope the funding continues to enable other Community Transport groups to have the opportunity to have access to electric or hydrogen vehicles.”

Jayne Fraser, Buchan Dial-a-Community Bus (Aberdeenshire)

“Without this funding we would have been unable to replace our ageing diesel vehicle with an electric car, which will save 2.19 tonnes of CO2 emissions and benefit the whole community... It will be used to deliver our door-to-door demand responsive transport service and reduce the use of privately-owned cars. This is essential in our area where there is no alternative either due to little or no public transport or no affordable or accessible taxis.”

Janet Saunders, Annandale Community Transport Services (Dumfries and Galloway)

¹ www.ctauk.org/celebrating-scotlands-plugged-in-communities



We were also pleased that the constructive feedback from CTA and our members was taken on board to enhance the design and delivery of Round 1 after the smaller yet successful pilot round in 2021/22. We welcomed the opportunity to work closely with Energy Saving Trust to reform the application criteria, improve the assessment process and assist with scoring applications.

We now believe it is critical to build on the Fund's success to date by scaling up investment in 2023/24 and delivering Round 2 to empower more communities to take climate action, accelerate Community Transport's journey to net zero and close the sector's EV funding gap, as committed to in the Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 (STPR2). Round 1 has strongly demonstrated the scale of demand and the level of need for funding for EVs from Scotland's Community Transport operators, as well as the strength of their commitment to climate action.

Our *More Than a Minibus* report published in September 2022 found that 12% of Scotland's Community Transport fleet was electric or hybrid and estimated that the sector therefore faced a net zero funding gap of nearly £90 million.² Round 1 made a small but significant contribution to closing this gap. However, it was heavily over-subscribed with a total of 52 applications worth over £7 million, more than 4 times the total value of the Fund.

Community Transport is always for a social purpose and never for a profit. Many operators are small charities and local community groups with limited budgets and without significant reserves. The high up-front capital costs associated with purchasing and retrofitting EVs – exacerbated by inflation – are prohibitive for many operators. We recognise the challenges facing Transport Scotland in the current fiscal context, but further financial support to meet these costs will be necessary to ensure that no operator, community or passenger is left behind as part of a Just Transition.

The Community Transport sector is committed to the transition to EVs and sustainability is at the heart of CTA's vision for its future. We have launched a new Climate Action programme which will advise and support operators on their transition to net zero, as well as create new platforms for collaboration, partnership and peer-to-peer learning in areas like active travel, car clubs and EVs.³

At CTA, we look forward to working again with you, Transport Scotland and Energy Saving Trust to ensure the Community Transport sector receives the financial support it needs and deserves to accelerate its progress towards a nationwide zero-emissions fleet.

I would be pleased to meet with you to discuss this further or to provide any further information which may be required by you or your officials – or to facilitate a visit to one of our members to see the new EVs in action once they have been delivered.

Yours sincerely,

David Kelly
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Community Transport Association
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² www.ctauk.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/More-Than-a-Minibus-CTA-2022.pdf

³ www.ctauk.org/climateaction

