



cta

community transport
association

For, and about, accessible
and inclusive transport

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2 April 2024

Fiona Hyslop MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Transport

Jim Fairlie MSP
Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity

Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

transform
scotland



RE: Plugged-In Communities – Investing in Community-Led Climate Action

Dear Ms. Hyslop and Mr. Fairlie,

We are writing to you as champions of communities, volunteers and sustainable transport from across Scotland to urge you to extend and expand the Plugged-In Communities Grant Fund in 2024/25.



In our work to tackle climate change, end poverty and build a more equal society, we know how essential Community Transport is to ensure everyone has access to local transport which meets their needs, no matter who they are or where they live.

By plugging gaps in our public transport network, especially in rural and island places, community-owned buses, minibuses and shared cars remove transport barriers, reduce transport poverty and empower people to travel more sustainably.

Community Transport has a major role to play in decarbonising our transport system and ensuring that no one and no community is left behind in Scotland's Just Transition to net zero. If your government is to achieve its targets of reducing car kilometres by 20% by 2030 and reducing carbon emissions to net zero by 2045, it is essential that you continue to invest in community-led climate action and Community Transport's transition to zero-emission fleets.

This transition is well underway. 18% of Scotland's Community Transport fleet are now Electric Vehicles (EVs), up from 12% in 2021, which demonstrates the sector's commitment to climate action despite an extremely challenging financial and operational context, as well as the positive and lasting impact of the Plugged-In Communities Grant Fund to date.

However, affordability remains a major and growing barrier. Some local charities, community groups and social enterprises are replacing their petrol or diesel vehicles with EVs, but many more will need financial support to do so. 54% say that EVs are unaffordable due to a lack of funding.

New vehicles are a significant outlay for most operators, particularly when modifications are required to ensure they are fully accessible for wheelchair users. The higher up-front costs of new EVs can be prohibitive, particularly for smaller groups. Average Community Transport vehicle costs have increased by 17% over the last 12 months.

We welcome the fact that over £3.92 million has been invested over the past three years through Plugged-In Communities to enable 43 Community Transport operators to replace their ageing, polluting vehicles with 52 new, modern EVs. Passengers, communities and organisations from Galloway to Perthshire to Orkney are thrilled to be benefiting from cleaner, smoother journeys:

"The funding has made a huge difference to LEAP Car Club. We've been able to replace two seven-year old, hybrid cars with brand new Nissan Leafs, making our five-car fleet 100% electric. The new cars have been extremely popular. It has made a massive difference to both our environmental and financial sustainability."

Mike Callaghan, LEAP Car Club (Renfrewshire)



"This funding is incredibly important in supporting us to form an environmentally sustainable fleet for our passengers. We are delighted to be able to offer more shared, zero-emission journeys throughout the Lothians."

Dolina Gorman, Handicabs Lothian (West Lothian)

"We are delighted to have been successful with our application to Plugged-In Communities. Caithness is at the forefront of the renewable revolution and we are playing our part in reaching net zero. Access to this funding is vital."

Alan Tait, Caithness Voluntary Group (Highland)

In 2021, CTA's research revealed a net zero funding gap of £87.4 million in Community Transport to achieve a 100% zero-emission fleet across Scotland. This gap has likely closed to £84 million thanks to the £3.02 million invested through Plugged-In Communities in 2022/23 and 2023/24.

But the need for financial support remains high with each round of the Fund to date heavily over-subscribed. In 2022/23 alone, communities submitted applications worth over £7 million, more than 4 times the total value of the Fund in that year. We believe Plugged-In Communities must be extended and expanded in the years ahead to close the net zero funding gap and ensure more communities can benefit.

We urge you to invest in community-led climate action and maximise the potential of Community Transport to reduce carbon emissions, reduce private car use and accelerate modal shift.

Yours sincerely,

Bridie Ashrowan, Chief Executive, Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations' Council

Diane Cooper, Chief Executive Officer, Scottish Women's Institutes

Richard Dilks, Chief Executive, CoMoUK

Anna Fowlie, Chief Executive, Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations

Angus Hardie, Director, Scottish Community Alliance

Colin Howden, Director, Transform Scotland

David Kelly, Director for Scotland, Community Transport Association

Becky Kenton-Lake, Coalition Manager, Stop Climate Chaos Scotland

Chris Martin, Chief Executive, Social Enterprise Scotland

Jenny Milne, Founder and Director, Scottish Rural and Islands Transport Community

Artemis Pana, National Coordinator, Scottish Rural Action

