



the
**POVERTY
ALLIANCE**

WORKING TOGETHER TO COMBAT POVERTY

EVERYONE ABOARD

**Campaign document for partners and
supporters**

ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN

Everyone Aboard is a campaign by the Poverty Alliance to extend free bus travel to those with a Universal Credit entitlement and other low-income benefits, and to all young people under 25. Addressing transport poverty in Scotland is a vital part of building an environmentally sustainable society, ensuring everyone's human rights can be realised, and of combatting poverty and inequality.

We are calling for the proposed policy to be implemented and fully funded as a necessary investment in building a more just and compassionate Scotland. We will make the case for extending the concessionary bus travel scheme based on evidence and consultation with our members, as well as external research, that shows:

Poverty Alliance Activist

“As a young person with experience of living on Universal Credit I know what a difference such a policy could make.”

1.

Bus travel is essential to accessing vital services and employment, especially for those living on a low income.

2.

Fares are too high for many people living on low incomes, creating unjust barriers to accessing services and to realising human rights.

3.

Removing the financial barrier to accessing public transport will increase opportunities for people living on low incomes, including young people under 25, and aid them in participating fully in society.

The campaign launches on 24th March 2021. In the first instance, the campaign will seek commitments from Scotland's political parties to adopt the policy in their manifestos for the Scottish Parliament elections in May 2021. We aim to advance the campaign by securing partners and supporters from a broad cross-section of organisations in Scotland whose work relates to the many overlapping issues related to the policy, such as poverty, employment, the climate emergency, gender, rurality, and age.

Why a cost-focused transport campaign?

The Poverty Alliance are a member-led organisation and we work closely with people with experience of poverty. Our engagement over a long period has consistently shown that the cost of transport, particularly bus travel, is a priority issue for people living on low incomes and for communities across Scotland. This is because public transport plays a crucial role in the lives of those living in poverty yet presents significant cost-related barriers.

A barrier to public transport is a barrier to health care, employment, advice services, education, recreational and social activities, and to realising human rights. Addressing the unaffordability of public transport will play a central role in reducing poverty and inequality in its many forms, as well as encourage a move towards more environmentally sustainable travel patterns.

In 2019 Transport Scotland found that bus fares in Scotland had increased by almost 18% in the preceding five years. The cost of bus travel also varies geographically.

Research by Citizens Advice Scotland in 2016 found that the price varied across Scotland's bus routes ranging from 7p per mile to £1.80 per mile. The costs of travel to essential services were generally much higher in remote rural areas; the average return cost of travelling to college in Scotland was £6, for example, but was £10.50 in remote rural areas. If we want to address poverty and inequality in Scotland, we must address the unaffordability of bus travel.

Why Universal Credit entitlement?

The rationale for extending concessionary travel to those with a Universal Credit entitlement – and other low-income benefits – takes account of both costs and incomes. A decade of austerity has seen the value of social security benefits decrease, putting mounting financial strain on household budgets and tightening the grip of poverty. This has coincided with rising living costs – especially for the poorest tenth of households – including bus fares which have risen year on year since 2007.

Low rates of social security benefits and rising living costs, including bus fares, means low-income households face impactful choices about whether they can afford to ride the bus. Taking a bus journey will often mean the ticket cost being recouped from elsewhere in an already tight budget; skipping a journey can mean paying higher food prices when shopping locally, walking home from work in the dark, or missing a job interview. Night shift workers can be unable to take advantage of cheaper day tickets because their shift cuts across two days. This 'poverty premium' also impacts low-income households that are often unable to afford the up-front cost of cheaper weekly passes.

Pandemic-related economic shocks have hit low-income households disproportionately hard. Low-income working households have seen their income fall furthest and unemployment rates have risen highest and fastest for this group. Additionally, among those groups accessing Universal Credit there has been a worrying rise in problem debt, a decline in mental health, and a widening of inequality across all measures that intersect with poverty is forecast. The pressures must be eased for these households and free bus travel would form part of the solution.

Why under 25s?

The Scottish Government has already committed to extending free bus travel to all under-22s. This is welcome, but we are calling for a more ambitious extension of the scheme to meet the needs of more young people.

The rationale for expanding free bus travel to more young people is that transport is a lifeline for many, especially in areas of deprivation and rurality. As the Social Renewal Advisory Board found in their January 2021 report, access to transport was particularly important to young people in supporting their wellbeing and ensuring they are connected to society. High fares, however, present a financial barrier.

The rationale for expanding the policy to include all under-25s is based on earnings, employment issues, and access to social security benefits. Under twenty-fives have been hit hardest financially since the pandemic hit with sharp rises in unemployment. Therefore, it is only right that action is taken to ensure that no young person, who has suffered disproportionately throughout the pandemic, is left behind.

ARGUMENTS AND EVIDENCE

Extending free bus travel to everyone receiving a universal credit entitlement and to all under 25s would represent a significant investment in improving the lives of young people and those living in poverty. It is part of the solution we need to ensure Scotland becomes a country where no one is restricted from accessing their human rights, and where progress on child poverty reduction targets and progress on advancing equality is not undermined by an unaffordable and inaccessible transport system.

A key source of evidence for the proposed policy comes from people with direct experience of poverty and from Poverty Alliance member organisations who work with low-income households. We have gathered significant evidence in recent years that consistently makes clear the pressing need to lower or eradicate the cost of public transport to ease financial pressures on low-income households and to address inequalities.

18%

*how much bus fares in
Scotland rose between
2014 and 2019*

£66

*how much less single
parents under 25 receive
from Universal Credit*

9 KEY ARGUMENTS

1. Transport poverty is a major issue for the least well-off in our society

The argument for extending free bus travel to those on Universal Credit and other low-income benefits centres around two points. First, this group – some of the poorest in our society – are the least able to afford the rising cost of bus travel and therefore much more likely to experience transport poverty. Second, for this group bus travel is an especially vital part of their lives.

Our social security system, including Universal Credit and other income-related benefits, does not prevent people falling into poverty, and often works to tighten the grip of poverty on people's lives. While the inadequacy of social security payments must be addressed, providing free transport can help mitigate the impact and help loosen the grip of poverty.

In 2019 the Poverty Alliance teamed up with Oxfam for an event in Glasgow focused on transport and poverty, consulting a range of individuals with lived experience of poverty. It was reported that transport often represents a significant proportion of the expenditure of working low-income households and contributed towards a further entrenchment of the in-work poverty they may be experiencing. The prohibitive cost of transport also locks the poorest out of accessing higher paying jobs.

Evidence from Transport Scotland shows that people in lower income households are more likely to take the bus. 44% of people with an income of less than £10,000 travelled by bus once a week or more compared to 16% of those with an income over £40,000.

2. Access to services and opportunities is key to reducing child poverty

During the next Parliament the Scottish Government will have to meet the interim child-poverty target of reducing relative child poverty to below 18%. The Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2018 – 2022 recognises the importance of transport in meeting Scotland's statutory child poverty reduction targets, both through its impact on income and costs. Whether in work or not, most low-income households with children will be entitled to some type of low-income supplement, therefore would qualify for free bus travel under the proposed policy.

Poverty Alliance's 2019 event with Oxfam found that, particularly for families with children, transport can exert significant pressure on household budgets and limit the opportunities and options available. For people seeking employment, the cost of transport was said to represent a major consideration when assessing possible employment options, with it limiting the scope of realistic and feasible employment options.

One person spoke of how the cost of transport acted as a barrier to their children being able to regularly participate in after school or extra-curricular activities, something which could have a detrimental impact on educational attainment and social connections.

School holidays were said by participants to be a particularly challenging time, with there being a greater need to rely upon public transport when their children are not in school. While some bus companies were reported to provide discounted ticketing schemes for families during the school summer holidays, there was very low awareness of these schemes among participants, and they were limited to only a small number of bus companies. They were also said to not be available during non-summer school holidays.

A new campaign by One Parent Families Scotland also highlights that young single parents under 25, who are on Universal Credit, get less financial support than parents over 25. They are up to £66.13 worse off per month under Universal Credit compared with the legacy system – a drop of 20%. Costs are no lower for young single parent families, and access to opportunities no less vital than for those over 25.

Providing free transport for young people and parents on Universal Credit and low-income benefits would go a long way to addressing these vitally important issues.

3. Under 25s have been hit hardest by the Covid-19 pandemic

While welcome, we do not believe that it is sufficient to extend the policy only to under-22s, because research shows age-related impacts of the pandemic, and of poverty and inequality more generally, extend to under 25s.

Young people under 25 have been hit hard by the Covid-19 crisis. A higher chance of furlough (and furlough ending in termination of contract), precarious employment, unemployment and disrupted education are just some of the issues they have struggled with. Under 25s are the most likely to work in low-paid sectors such as hospitality and retail. Research by the IFS at the beginning of the pandemic found that sectors most affected by lockdown employed nearly a third of all employees under the age of 25.

Additionally, research shows under 25s have been most affected by mental health decline since the beginning of lockdowns. The Resolution Foundation found that people aged between 18 and 24 were more likely to report not enjoying daily activities as much, rising anxiety, and that they were finding it harder to focus.

Free bus travel removes a financial barrier to accessing opportunities and affords young people the freedom to socialise and engage fully in society, both of which are vital for the health, wellbeing, and prospects of our young people.

4. Public transport is essential in meeting Scotland's climate change targets

Scotland has ambitious targets addressing the climate emergency, but without a step-change in how we plan and deliver our public transport systems, we will fail to meet our targets as set out in law. Transport is the biggest emitting sector in Scotland. Greater use of public transport will be vital if we are to address climate change, and addressing affordability will play a vital role in ensuring that more people can make the shift from private cars.

The Scottish Youth Parliament found that young people would be more likely to use the bus if fares were less expensive. Extending free bus travel to all young people under 25 would accelerate the normalisation of bus use, in place of cars, now and into the future. It would mean many who are in low-income employment or have caring responsibilities would no longer see car ownership as a cheaper option than taking the bus.

5. Affordable Public transport is essential to realising Human Rights

While access to public transport is not in itself a human right, it is a necessary requirement in order to achieve other human rights such as the right to work, right to education, right to take part in cultural and public life and the right to the highest standard of physical and mental health.

Evidence shows that people on low incomes are significantly more dependent on public transport to enable them to exercise their rights. For example, Poverty Alliance members have told us that cost is often an insurmountable barrier to accessing health services or advice services that help them access their right to social security.

Scotland must be a country where everyone's human rights are realised. Improving access to public services and employment, like through an extended concessionary bus travel scheme, is an important way to help achieve this goal.

6. Public transport can play a key role in reducing inequalities

The Scottish Government's National Transport Strategy (2020) rightly recognises that transport plays a vital role in the lives of people experiencing poverty, and that an affordable transport system forms part of the solution.

As the strategy recognises, unlocking barriers to transport is critical in achieving a more equal Scotland. It is an essential service, especially for those on low incomes and who live in areas of high deprivation, for accessing employment, education, public services, sports, green spaces, and for enjoying social and recreational activities; and it is precisely the unequal access to these services that produces the detrimental inequalities in our society.

That is why addressing the affordability of Scotland's bus services for low incomes households is a crucial step in addressing inequality.

7. Expanding free transport can help address rural transport poverty

Rural areas in Scotland have the highest risk of experiencing transport poverty. In 2019 the Poverty Alliance held an event in partnership with HUG Action for Mental Health and the Poverty and Inequality Commission in Lairg to explore experiences of transport and poverty. One of the primary issues raised was affordability. A 'rural transport premium' was said to compound the poverty experienced that people and exacerbate inequalities between and within communities, because people living in rural areas are often forced to pay significantly more for journeys than people living in more urban areas.

It was felt that young people in rural communities are particularly impacted by the high cost of travel, particularly given that they generally have lower incomes due to lower levels of pay and lower levels of social security entitlements. Some participants at our community discussion in Lairg reported that the cost of transport was so high that they knew of people in their community who had missed hospital appointments due to being unable to afford the up-front cost of transport.

8. Free transport can help advance gender equality

Many of the issues that contribute to the inequality that women experience intersect with the cost of public transport. This includes cuts to social security, disadvantages in the labour market, pressures of unpaid care, and violence against women. Because women disproportionately work in retail and hospitality, Covid-19 is likely to have a bigger effect on their earnings. Additionally, women are more likely to use orbital transport routes across various bus providers when balancing work and care commitments, increasing their travel costs. Lone parents also disproportionately rely on busses.

Addressing the cost of bus travel for women on Universal Credit and other low-income benefits, as well as young women under 25, would have a significant and positive impact on their access to employment and education, increase their free time, reduce the risk of isolation and social exclusion and risks associated with walking alone (especially at night), and relieve some of the financial pressure of poverty.

9. Free transport can help bring our communities back together post-pandemic

When you are living in poverty, unaffordable and ever-rising bus fares not only mean your opportunities are restricted, but it also means being locked out of the human connections that have become even more important to us all during the pandemic. Studies suggest that living in poverty can lead to feelings of loneliness and social isolation, and people suffering from social isolation are at risk of experiencing poverty, issues that have been exacerbated by the impact of social distancing measures.

Various groups that face a higher risk of poverty are more likely to experience feelings of loneliness and isolation. A Carers UK survey found that 8 in 10 unpaid carers surveyed (who are disproportionately vulnerable to experiencing poverty), particularly young carers, described themselves as “lonely or socially isolated” due to their caring responsibilities. Increased access to social and recreational activities, as well as to education and employment, were identified as ways their isolation and loneliness could be alleviated.

One Parent Families Scotland have highlighted that single parents, who are overwhelming women, are more likely to experience loneliness than the general population, especially young single parents and single parents who are not in, or in part-time, employment. Office for National Statistics found that 27.5% of children who received free school meals said they were “often” lonely, compared with 5.5% of those who did not.

As a society we recognise, more than ever, the importance of being able to meet with friends and family, to take part in social and community activities, and to getting out and getting active. We must ensure that those who are already much more vulnerable to isolation and loneliness do not face unjust barriers to accessing this basic human need. Free bus travel for those vulnerable groups is a simple way to make sure this is the case.

Summary

For all the reasons outlined above, implementing the policy would act as a significant investment in Scotland, improving lives and opportunities across the country. As such, we call on the Scottish Government to fully fund the policy as an investment in achieving a green and just recovery from the crisis for everyone in Scotland, including young people on the lowest incomes.

CAMPAIGN TIMELINE

The campaign will launch on Wednesday 24th March 2021. Members and supporters will be sent all the resources they need to get involved.

STAGE 1

March - May

In stage one the campaign will be aimed at securing support of the policy by Scotland's political parties ahead of the Scottish Parliament elections in May. We will campaign, alongside partners and supporters, by lobbying, raising awareness and building policy support in the public through media and social media activity.

If the young person element of the campaign policy ask is adopted by the winning party, we will continue to campaign for the Universal Credit element to be adopted.

We will seek to build support for the policy with newly elected MSPs, engage with the new Scottish Government, and seek opportunities within the programme for Government to highlight the campaign.

STAGE 2

May - December

We hope the policy will be adopted by the main political parties during the election campaign. If so, we will engage with all MSPs and with the new Scottish Government (and partners, if appropriate) to ensure the policy is implemented and meets the needs for which it was created.

If the campaign is not adopted at the early stage, we will continue to lobby for it and raise the profile of the campaign, supported by those wishing to continue campaigning for the policy.

THE ROLE OF PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

PARTNERS

We are seeking organisations, whose work relates to any overlapping issue relevant to the campaign, to become partners with the campaign to help the Poverty Alliance advocate for the proposed policy. Being a partner means helping advance the campaign by:

- Highlighting and advocating for the campaign, where appropriate, with policy makers.
- Taking part in media interviews, where appropriate.
- Adding a supporting quote and logo to our campaign resources (e.g., webpage, briefings).
- Posting in support of the campaign on social media, newsletters, etc.
- Adding your support/signature/quote to letters, articles, etc.
- Contributing to campaign actions, such as signing joint letters to political parties.
- Aiding the campaign through contributing relevant research and resources.

SUPPORTERS

Supporting the campaign means helping the Poverty Alliance and partner organisations to advance the campaign but involves less commitment. .

Supporting the campaign means helping the Poverty Alliance and partner organisations to advance the campaign but involves less commitment. Becoming a supporter might be right for your organisations if, for example, you want to be part of helping get the policy implemented but do not have sufficient resources to take part in some of the actions listed above.

We are asking supporters to:

- Post in support of the campaign on social media and in newsletters.
- Add their support/signature/quote to campaign activities like public letters, articles, etc.
- Contribute to campaign actions, such as emailing MSPs, etc.

RESOURCES

Partners and supporters will be sent a campaign pack for public-focused activities. The campaign pack will provide all the resources you will need to get involved, including key lines, suggested social media posts, and graphics. We will be in touch if/when any further resources or information becomes available and will ensure that all supporters and partners are updated on key dates for campaign actions.

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If you would like to get in touch about the campaign please contact:

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THE POVERTY ALLIANCE

The Poverty Alliance is the national anti-poverty network in Scotland. We are an independent organisation with over 380 members drawn from the voluntary and public sectors, trade unions, researchers, faith groups and individuals with direct experience of poverty. Our aim is to work with civil society organisations and others to enable communities and individuals to tackle poverty. We have a number of key policy areas that provide the focus for our activities: addressing low incomes; supporting services to address poverty; enhancing the participation of people with direct experience of poverty in policy development; and addressing attitudes to poverty.

This document is for campaign partners, supporters, and potential partners and supports. It is not for circulation.