

A Consultation on Scotland's National Transport Strategy: YouthLink Scotland Response

YouthLink Scotland is the national agency for youth work. We are a membership organisation, representing over 100 regional and national youth organisations from both the voluntary and statutory sectors. We champion the role and value of youth work and represent the interests and aspirations of both the voluntary and statutory sector. Our vision is of a nation which values its young people and their contribution to society, where young people are supported to achieve their potential.

Scotland's youth work sector consists of 80,000 youth work practitioners reaching in excess of 380,000 young people in youth work opportunities each week. While the activities, venues, and approaches utilised to deliver youth work are varied – and include youth clubs, youth projects, specialist or targeted provision, social activism, outdoor learning, awards programmes, uniformed organisations, and democratic participation – youth work in all its forms provides fundamental support to young people across Scotland's local authorities.

YouthLink Scotland is pleased to respond to the consultation on Scotland's National Transport Strategy and for the opportunity this provides to highlight the importance of affordable, efficient and accessible transport for the effective delivery of youth work services and in order to ensure young people have equity of access to youth work opportunities - which make a significant difference to the lives and prospects of young people across Scotland.

The Transport System: A key structure to facilitate youth work participation

We are heartened by the National Transport Strategy's vision for a: *"sustainable, inclusive and accessible transport system helping to deliver a healthier, fairer and more prosperous Scotland for communities, businesses and visitors"*, particularly the emphasis on climate action and improving lives. In relation to the latter, we encourage the Government to consider the importance of the transport strategy in sustaining and optimising participation of children and young people in youth work, as well as furthering the rights and opportunities of young people in Scotland. This is fundamental if the strategy's vision to deliver a healthier and fairer Scotland is to be realised. Access to safe, reliable, efficient and affordable transport is fundamental for young people to access opportunities. Transport connects young people to college/university, work, volunteering, hobbies and leisure activities, social networks and key youth work services and a lack of access to transport isolates young people from friends, education and work opportunities.

At the Third annual Cabinet meeting with children and young people held on 5 March 2019, one of the issues raised by the young people present was the legacy of the year of young people 2018, particularly around budget cuts to youth work services. One of the eighteen actions agreed by the Cabinet Ministers was that: *"[w]e will consider resourcing for participation of children and young people, including examining current funding streams, to ensure that participation is sustainable. In doing so, we will consider how national approaches to participation are reflected in the local structures which can facilitate participation"*¹.

While financial resourcing for youth work services is crucial, transport is also an important structure for facilitating youth work participation - with issues of affordability, accessibility, safety and reliability often presenting a significant barrier to participation. We know that youth work has changed the lives

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/third-annual-cabinet-meeting-with-children-and-young-people/>

of more than 1 in 10 of the Scottish population². Engaging in positive activities and new opportunities through youth work has many short term and long term benefits³ for young people and it provides early intervention and prevention on a range of issues. It provides opportunities to develop skills, gain qualifications, develop resilience, build relationships and it reduces social isolation. The value of youth work lies not only in the difference it makes directly to the lives of the young people who engage with services, but extends further to the many benefits it provides to wider society by tackling inequalities and promoting positive outcomes for individuals. The “*common weal*” benefits from having young people who are engaged in positive activities – they make valuable contributions to their communities. The transport strategy promotes ‘creating vibrant communities’ as one of the key outcomes it wants to achieve and the evidence is that youth work services contribute to this vision. Considering all these benefits, it is clear that for the transport strategy to ‘*deliver a healthier, fairer and more prosperous Scotland for communities, businesses and visitors*’ then it is necessary to ensure that transport is not a barrier to young people’s participation in youth work opportunities.

It is worth noting here the concerns of the youth work sector in relation to transport, to highlight how transport issues prevent inclusivity of young people in youth work opportunities and impacts on young people’s wellbeing and equality. We would urge that these issues are given full consideration in the development and implementation of the new strategy. Youth workers’ and volunteers tell us that transport alienation is common. The cost and timing of travel, particularly in rural areas, can preclude young people from gaining youth work opportunities. It can also impact on youth workers, as the expense of covering transport expenses (to ensure young people, staff and volunteers can attend activities and other opportunities) can place added pressure on already constrained youth work budgets. Youth workers tell us of young people who cannot access their service as they do not have the budget to cover travel expenses, they are often unable to provide travel to events and other opportunities for young people due to budget cuts combined with the lack of affordable transport options. The cost of travelling to training courses can limit opportunities for professional development, particularly for those working in rural areas where travel to such courses is more costly. The youth work sector is underpinned by a large number of volunteers, and transport issues and/or expenses can also prevent them from travelling to assist young people and/or to do so safely.

YouthLink Scotland is pleased to see that the new draft National Transport Strategy includes a commitment to improving health and wellbeing, including that it ‘*will help make our communities great places to live*’. However, when transport presents a barrier for young people’s participation in youth work, and when the burden of travel expenses constrains youth work budgets, then it is contributing to social exclusion and isolation, limiting opportunities for young people and this has negative consequences for our communities. This is all the more important when we know that growing inequality and poverty is impacting on young people and there an increasing prevalence of poor mental health. Those hit the hardest are from deprived backgrounds, and often have fewer educational and employment prospects. For those experiencing poverty, lack of affordable transport is a significant barrier to education, work, volunteering, attending services including youth work opportunities and the benefits these provide. Addressing this provides an opportunity for the transport strategy to promote greater equality for young people.

² Hall Aitken, *Social and economic value of youth work in Scotland: initial assessment*, January 2016, <http://www.youthlinkscotland.org/index.asp?MainID=21159>

Promoting Equality: Affordability

YouthLink Scotland supports the ‘promotes equality’ is one of the four priorities of the new strategy. We are encouraged that the new transport strategy will address equality issues, as we know that issues of affordability, safety and accessibility are at the forefront of young people’s concerns in relation to transport. We note the draft strategy states that: *“Transport plays an important part in delivering the fully inclusive society we want – outcomes are as important as opportunities. While we promote equality, our actions will simultaneously tackle inequalities and help reduce poverty, in particular child poverty”*.

For young people to benefit from a modern and accessible transport system, it is crucial that public transport costs are addressed. This is often a significant issue for young people, particularly for those in rural issues, and for young people who may not be earning or may be in receipt of the lower level of national living wage. Our partners at the Scottish Youth Parliament produced their ‘All Aboard’⁴ research based on consultation with 1,329 young people across Scotland, and found that one third of respondents pay more than £12 a week to travel to school, college or university. For many there are also additional travel expenses for work/apprenticeships, volunteering, attending clubs and hobbies, visiting family and friends and attending medical or other appointments. This highlights how transport expenses can quickly become a barrier to young people, especially for those living in poverty - and prevent them from undertaking educational or other opportunities which can improve their health and wellbeing and their long term outcomes and potential. As one respondent in SYP’s research stated: *“It costs me two hours’ worth of wages a week on average to get to work. I get paid less than an adult, and am expected to pay the same for transport as an adult”*⁵.

On the issue of affordability, we would also highlight the vision put forward by the Poverty and Inequality Commission⁶ which called for a rights based approach to transport. That is: *“access to suitable transport, no matter your level of income or where in Scotland you live, should be seen as 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 right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health”*⁷. In relation to young people, a rights based approach to transport also ties in with the aims of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) by improving young people’s opportunities and furthering health, wellbeing and equality for young people. Addressing affordability of transport would be a crucial step forward in creating greater equality for young people and furthering their rights.

The draft strategy states that transport *“will be affordable for all: people have different incomes and our transport system will not exclude people from mobility by making it unaffordable. We will target action to deliver the Strategy towards those needing most help”*. In delivering on this aim, we urge the new transport strategy to implement the recommendations made the Scottish Youth Parliament calling for reduced fares⁸ – they suggest improving existing concessionary rates on public transport

⁴ Scottish Youth Parliament (2018) “All Aboard”: <https://syp.org.uk/campaign/all-aboard/>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Poverty and Inequality Commission (2019) Transport and Poverty in Scotland: Report of the Poverty and Inequality Commission. Available at: <https://povertyinequality.scot/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Transport-and-Poverty-in-Scotland-Report-of-the-Poverty-and-Inequality-Commission.pdf>

⁷ Insert reference

⁸ Scottish Youth Parliament (2018) “All Aboard”: <https://syp.org.uk/campaign/all-aboard/>

for young people in Scotland up to their 26th birthday. At present, where there are concessionary fares available for young people they may not include peak time travel which means they will not benefit those travelling to work or college. We also support their recommendation that transport companies should raise the age of child fares to include young people up to the age of 18. This is also a recommendation from the Poverty and Inequality Commission's recommendation who recommend radically widening access to concessionary travel, (such as to low income workers in the first few months of taking up a new job, to all young people as recommended by the SYP etc).

Promoting Equality: The Rural Dimension

The issues of affordability and availability of transport are particularly pronounced in rural areas of Scotland. We are pleased the strategy will *"account for our different regional needs to ensure that those living in rural, remote or island communities are well connected and have equitable access to services as those in the rest of the country"* and that it acknowledges that *"[a] particular issue for rural areas is the lack of transport acting as a barrier for young people accessing education, training and employment and link to long term outmigration"*. A survey of young people aged 16-26 by Scottish Rural Action found that almost half of the respondents said that transport costs had prevented them from accessing suitable employment, and a fifth said they had missed out on education opportunities⁹. The campaign found that the cost of travel is excluding young adults living rurally from education and employment, ultimately affecting quality of life and impacting on rural communities. However, 32% of respondents stated that they would be willing to travel more than 50 miles per day for education or employment if public transport was free and 24% would be willing to travel 30-40 miles. In Young Scot's research, reliability, frequency and accessibility in rural areas was raised by the young people as a key issue to be addressed over the next twenty years¹⁰. We would urge this rural dimension for young people to be prioritised within the new strategy, to ensure that young people are not disadvantaged because of where they live. In order for young people in rural communities to access training, educational and other opportunities, they need equality of access to transport services and the cost barrier must be addressed – further highlighting the importance of a rights based approach to transport. Scottish Rural Action have campaigned for free travel for young people living rurally, which would be in line with a rights based approach to transport.

Promoting Equality: Accessibility for young people with disabilities

We agree with the emphasis in the draft strategy on improving accessibility for disabled people. Disabled people have the same rights as every other citizen, yet transport issues around accessibility and safety can present a significant barrier. In the Scottish Youth Parliament's 'All Aboard' research with young people, nearly two in three respondents with a disability or access requirement stated they do not feel comfortable using public transport. We are encouraged by the Draft Transport Strategy's commitment to removing transport barriers for disabled people.

⁹ Scottish Rural Action (2018) *#Fare Enough? The impact of public transport costs on education and employment opportunities for young people in rural Scotland*

<https://www.sra.scot/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/FareEnough-Report-2018.pdf>

¹⁰ Young Scot (2019) *National Transport Strategy Review*: <https://youngscot.net/observatory/national-transport-review?rq=transport%20strategy>

Including young people in decision making

The consultation paper asks if local communities be involved in making decisions about transport in Scotland, and we would urge that young people should be meaningfully included in decision making around transport issues which affect them. We are encouraged by the significant involvement of young people in the design and delivery of the National Transport Strategy Review and in the development of the draft of the second National Transport Strategy, through Young Scot's research in partnership with the National Transport Review Team¹¹. Through this, Young Scot explored how transport impacted young people's access to jobs, education, public services, social and support networks and identified their main concerns as being access to transport and how lack of access can prevent young people from accessing opportunities. Young people discussed seven areas which can impact their ability to use the transport they need: cost, accessibility, frequency, reliability, connectivity, infrastructure, and customer experience.

Climate Action

YouthLink Scotland fully supports that 'Takes Climate Action' is one of the four priorities of the new strategy and with the outcomes that the strategy: will adapt to the effects of climate change, help deliver net-zero target and will promote greener, cleaner choices. It is imperative urgent action is taken to limit the impact of climate change for future generations.

Conclusion

YouthLink Scotland are keen to explore how the youth work sector's vast network can support a fairer transport system for all Scotland's children and young people.

ENDS

¹¹ Young Scot (2019) *National Transport Strategy Review*: <https://youngscot.net/observatory/national-transport-review?rq=transport%20strategy>

Our Vision

We will have a sustainable, inclusive and accessible transport system, helping deliver a healthier, fairer and more prosperous Scotland for communities, businesses and visitors.



Promotes equality

- Will provide fair access to services we need
- Will be easy to use for all
- Will be affordable for all



Takes climate action

- Will adapt to the effects of climate change
- Will help deliver our net-zero target
- Will promote greener, cleaner choices



Helps our economy prosper

- Will get us where we need to get to
- Will be reliable, efficient and high quality
- Will use beneficial innovation



Improves our health and wellbeing

- Will be safe and secure for all
- Will enable us to make healthy travel choices
- Will help make our communities great places to live