

Reducing car kilometres in Scotland - public perceptions as to what needs to be in place

Summary report

▶ Dr Llinos Brown and Professor Jillian Anable, University of
Leeds
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Key findings

Focus group participants would like to see:

- **improvements to public transport**, making it '*more accessible, more affordable with a reliable and frequent service*' (quote from focus group)
- **a central place for information on travel options** and alternatives to car travel
- **more services come to the home** e.g. grocery, takeaways, non-food deliveries
- **a continuation of working from home** and flexible working options
- **car pooling and car sharing for work**
- **improvements in cycle infrastructure** especially in rural areas
- **electric vehicle (EV) options for mobility vehicles and accessible EV charging infrastructure**

There are also **some journeys which participants are less willing to adapt**, such as grocery shopping, leisure journeys which involves transporting equipment, and journeys with 1+ children. There is also some hesitation about changing journeys over winter.

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to gain an insight into public perceptions of the Scottish Government's commitment to reduce car kilometres by 20% by 2030. **This summary reports on suggestions from participants as to what needs to be in place, or what could assist them with reducing their car kilometres.**

Six focus groups, each of two hours, were held virtually between 26 July and 4 August 2021. Each focus group was attended by between three and seven members of the public, and two facilitators from the University of Leeds. Table 1 provides further details of each group.

Most of the findings in this summary are in response to the questions:

- What needs to be in place, or what could be done, to encourage you to use your car less?
- What trips do you currently make that you might be able to change?
- Are there any trips that you could not change?

Table 1: Summary of focus groups

*Aspiring car owners – people looking to gain a car in the next two years

Focus Group	Date	Attendees	No. Aspiring Car Owners*	6-Fold Urban Rural Classification
Glasgow Semi-Urban	26 July	6	2	2 and 3
Glasgow Urban	27 July	7	2	1
Aberdeen Semi-Urban	2 August	7	2	2 and 3
Aberdeen	4 August	7	2	1
Rural 1	28 July	3	0	5 and 6
Rural 2	3 August	4	0	5 and 6

Findings

Public transport

All the focus groups made comments about the need to improve public transport to help them reduce their car kilometres. These comments can be summarised as a need to:

- **reduce the cost** of public transport for everyone
- **improve connectivity** between existing services
- improve **frequency and timing of services (particularly in rural areas)**
- modify existing fleets to **accommodate leisure equipment, luggage and bikes** especially outside of urban areas
- **make it easier to access information** about existing services (more information below)
- require **events of all sizes to promote public transport options** to attendees
- **provide integrated ticket options** for travel in cities, for example Edinburgh – a combined train/tram/bus ticket
- **provide discounts for other services when using public transport** to act as an incentive for using public transport. For example, provide a percentage discount or money off in local shops, or for services and events.

There were some specific place-based suggestions for Glasgow which related to:

- changing subway opening times and ensure a regular weekend service
- improving bus lanes into the city to reduce bus congestion and enable faster travel

All the above points can be summarised well by an extract from one of the rural focus groups where a participant explained how transport options need to be:

'more accessible, and more affordable, with a reliable and frequent service' [R1A]

There were also several positive comments about existing public transport initiatives and services:

- **Integrated ticket payment options** – one participant in Aberdeen praised the option to use their debit card as a method of payment. They explained how it was easy to use, and that they liked the fact it only charges for one ticket even if using multiple buses in one day. This saves users money compared to buying individual tickets
- **Free travel for people under 21** – this was announced during the week of the focus groups and was brought up by some of the participants. Where it was mentioned, participants generally supported this scheme, liking how it would make public transport more accessible for younger people and families
- **Golden Bus by Scottish CityLink** – this is a service which takes passengers from Glasgow to Aberdeen, and Glasgow-Aviemore-Inverness. Participants who had used this service spoke very fondly of it; they liked the luxury provided and the affordability of the service.

Accessing information on alternative options to car travel

One observation from facilitating the focus groups was that the sessions acted as a knowledge-sharing space for participants, where participants found out about alternative transport options from each other. For example, during the Glasgow focus group, a participant mentioned the 'Golden Bus' (see above); others commented they were not aware of this service. This observation, of lack of awareness of services, was noted by other participants in the session and prompted some to suggest there needs to be a central place where they can find reliable, easy-to-view information on alternatives to driving a car.

Some participants wanted to see:

- **An app for transport options** which suggest the cheapest and most economic option for a journey. This was echoed by another participant in a different focus group who wanted an app to enable them to track their progress with the 20% reduction in car kilometres.
- **Central place website or app for timetable information** – one participant praised some of the individual bus companies for the usefulness of their apps but went on to highlight how you are required to download multiple apps to serve all the different bus companies. They explained how this can be confusing.

*'...an app where you can put in a journey and it'll give you 1) the **cheapest option, and the most economic option as well,** something like that I think would really help people, and **it would start from people that are younger also,** and that's really where you want to start embedding all this, and to me that's the way forward, **you've really got to drill in advertising it better'***

[GU7]

Figure 1: Extracts from Glasgow Urban Focus Groups

Other suggestions

The above comments represent suggestions that received multiple comments from various focus group participants. The following comments were mentioned to a lesser extent:

- **Increase in services coming to participants in their homes**

Some participants commented that to reduce their car kilometres they would like to see more services coming to them, for example, through supermarket deliveries and wider delivery of goods (e.g. Amazon). However, some participants did comment that they find costs associated with grocery deliveries expensive.

- **Encourage more working from home**

Participants who had experienced working from home during the pandemic suggested an encouragement to continue to work from home would help them reduce their car use. They commented that they had noticed a significant decrease in their annual car kilometres since the start of the pandemic due to home working.

- **Car sharing/car pooling**

In addition to the findings on car clubs (see other summary document), some participants suggested the opportunity to reduce car kilometres with car sharing or car pooling with friends and colleagues in environments such as:

- Attending and participating in weekend football games/activities– share lifts with team mates
- Trade people work environments – once set up on a site establish lift shares with other trades people
- Travel to work in rural areas – where there is often one large employer and lots of people commuting from similar locations

- **Improve cycling routes especially in rural areas**

Some participants expressed interest in wanting to cycle more, but the accessibility of safe cycle routes in rural areas was limited. One participant stated some of the existing cycle infrastructure does not take a direct route, and they did not feel safe on the wider road network.

- **Mobility electric vehicles and accessibility**

During the focus groups, the facilitators were careful to remind participants that the 20% reduction in car kilometre commitment is additional to the phase out of petrol and diesel cars. However, on several occasions the conversations were brought back to EV use. Wider findings will be reported in the final report, but one point of interest is regarding mobility vehicles.

Figure 2 highlights a concern that all mobility vehicles are currently petrol and diesel. For people who do not have alternatives to using the car, not having access to EVs limits their ability to travel in a more sustainable way.

'For disabled drivers, and each and every [car] is petrol or diesel, why aren't they switching to electric modes of transport for people with mobility problems?'

Figure 2: Extract from Glasgow Urban focus group

Trips that people would not change

During the focus group there were several comments about trips that people are unable and/or unwilling to change. These include:

- Large grocery shops/ weekly food shopping
- Camping holidays
- Trips to rural Scotland for example hiking trips
- Activities/trips with children, particularly younger children
- Journeys in winter – some participants expressed concern that they would not be able to conduct active travel during winter months when the weather worsened

Further information on these journeys will be provided in the end of project wider focus group findings report.

Contact

This document serves as a summary of findings. If you would like further information on any of the points raised, or wider findings on the focus group please get in touch with Dr. Llinos Brown L.V.Brown@leeds.ac.uk

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Scotland's centre of expertise connecting
climate change research and policy

✉ info@climatexchange.org.uk
☎ +44(0)131 651 4783
🐦 @climatexchange_
🌐 www.climatexchange.org.uk

ClimateXChange, Edinburgh Climate Change Institute, High School Yard, Edinburgh EH1 1LZ