

# Transport key role in ensuring recovery from COVID

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SPT's chair of operations committee Councillor David Wilson has called on the Scottish Government to put transport at the forefront of this week's budget announcement.

All major forms of transport in the West of Scotland have seen a drastic drop in patronage since the beginning of the pandemic. Commercial Bus patronage across the West of Scotland is down by up to 80%, with service reductions & cancellations now being introduced under emergency provisions. SPT, however, has continued to run the majority of its subsidised bus services during the lockdown to assist those who need to travel, and ensure that many of our most isolated communities remain connected.

The Subway saw a drop of almost 97% patronage at the beginning of the pandemic and first lockdown in March 2020. During this current lockdown, Subway is currently experiencing a drop in patronage of around 90%.

Most recently, ScotRail has reported its passengers numbers have fallen by almost 80% in the last three months of 2020 and has cut 272 train journeys from its timetable.

Glasgow Airport passenger numbers are down by as much as 96% from 9 million per year pre pandemic. The airline industry has indicated that a return to 2019 figures could take up to 2026.

Councillor Wilson said: “We need to start looking now at a long term recovery plan for transport which will require considerable financial assistance going forward.

“We recognise that the Scottish Government has invested a considerable amount in transport already especially to compensate bus operators for the loss of revenue they have experienced during the pandemic. However, the Government must now think beyond subsidy and ensure transport is front and centre of the budget as transport will play a key role in getting our economy and lives back to normal when all this is finally over.

“There are many challenges facing transport, we must all now work together to look at a proper recovery plan. I have previously suggested to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport that we need a Bus Taskforce for Scotland so that we can work together to develop a collective, co-ordinated and multi-faceted response to this crisis facing public transport across Scotland.

“Among the first things the Taskforce could look at includes a review of the Transport Act, and in particular the opportunities presented by the Bus Service Improvement Partnerships; how we can support the Programme for Government pledge regarding the Scottish National Investment Bank and funding for zero emission buses as we approach COP26; and most importantly how we create more equality for those areas which do not have the access to bus services they need to participate in inclusive economic growth.

“This is vitally important going forward. The role of public transport in our everyday lives remains essential and as our lives return to normal, we must do all we can together to reassure and inspire confidence in the public to return to these key modes of travel.”

*Photo credit: Strathclyde Partnership for Transport*