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Transport in Scotland

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This subject profile provides an introduction to legislation, key policies, significant statistics, institutional structures, and issues of interest on aviation, buses, everyday cycling, rail, road, shipping, and walking as a form of transport in Scotland.



3 November 2026
SB 26-70

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Introduction

This subject profile includes sections on the following modes of transport:

- Aviation
- Bus and Coach
- Cycling
- Rail
- Road
- Shipping
- Walking

Each section highlights legislative and administrative frameworks, main agencies and organisations, key statistics, and major ongoing developments. It starts by providing a brief overview of transport governance arrangements that apply across all these modes of travel.

All statistics quoted are taken from either Scottish Transport Statistics 2025 or Transport and Travel in Scotland 2024, the latest editions of these annual publications available at the time of writing, unless otherwise stated.

This subject profile provides basic facts and figures about the various modes of transport used in Scotland. Readers may also be interested in the SPICe Spotlight post Thinking about Transport, which outlines broader themes and concepts that explain why people choose to travel the way they do, and what this means for transport policy delivery.

Transport Governance

Transport matters devolved to the Scottish Parliament are governed through a three tier system - national, regional, and local, as briefly described below. Instances where UK and international governments or agencies are involved in Scottish transport governance are highlighted in the following chapters, which deal with individual modes of transport.

National: Nationally, transport is governed by Transport Scotland, which was established as an executive agency of the then Scottish Executive in January 2005. Its role was substantially expanded when it merged with the Scottish Government's Transport Directorate in August 2010, while remaining as a separate agency. Transport Scotland's main responsibilities include:

- Specification, management and funding of the ScotRail and Caledonian Sleeper contracts.
- Setting the strategic direction and funding for Network Rail activity in Scotland.
- Management of the Scottish trunk road network, including major projects.
- Management of the national concessionary fares schemes for elderly and disabled

people and young people.

- Involvement in the delivery of railway capital projects.
- Providing advice to Scottish Ministers on transport issues.
- The National Transport Strategy.
- Liaison with regional transport partnerships and local authorities on transport matters.
- Sustainable transport, road safety and accessibility policy and funding.
- Local roads policy.
- Aviation, bus, freight and taxi policy.
- Ferries, ports and harbours, particularly the specification and funding of Clyde and Hebrides and Scottish mainland-Northern Isles services.
- The Blue Badge Scheme (disabled persons' parking permits).

Transport Scotland sets out the Scottish Government's national transport policies and priorities in the National Transport Strategy 2, which was published in 2020, with priorities for infrastructure investment set out in the final report of Strategic Transport projects Review 2, published in 2022. The Programme for Government 2026-2031, states that Scottish Ministers intend to bring Transport Scotland back into the core Scottish Government, effectively returning to the pre-2005 administrative arrangements.

Regional: Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) were established on 1 December 2005 under the provisions of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005. The primary function of each RTP is to produce a regional transport strategy. These strategies set out a vision for the development of transport infrastructure and services within each region for the next 10-15 years.

RTPs are independent bodies corporate, similar to local authority joint boards, that bring together local authorities to perform functions collectively over a large area. All local authorities in Scotland are members of one or more RTP. RTP boards can also include non-Councillor members, who perform a function similar to the non-executive directors of a company.

The seven RTPs, which cover the whole of Scotland, are:

- Shetland Transport Partnership (ZetTrans)
- Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS)
- North-East of Scotland Transport Partnership (NESTRANS)
- Tayside and Central Scotland Transport Partnership (TACTRAN)
- South-East of Scotland Transport Partnership (SEStran)
- Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT)
- South-West of Scotland Transport Partnership (SWestrans)

RTPs can take three forms, referred to as ‘models’, with each model exercising a different amount of control over transport planning and delivery within their region. These are:

- **Model 1:** Produces a Regional Transport Strategy with very limited transport powers transferred from constituent local authorities.
- **Model 2:** Produces a Regional Transport Strategy with some transport powers transferred from constituent authorities.
- **Model 3:** Produces a Regional Transport Strategy with significant transport powers transferred from constituent authorities.

Currently, there are four Model 1 and three Model 3 RTPs in Scotland. The model 3 RTPs being SPT, SWestrans and ZetTrans. It is worth noting that SWestrans and ZetTrans have only one constituent local authority each.

The current SPT (Strathclyde Partnership for Transport) was preceded by the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority and Executive (PTA/PTE) which was created in 1983, itself replacing the Greater Glasgow Passenger Transport Executive established in 1972. These bodies exercised significant control over rail services, the Glasgow Subway, local ferries, and buses in the Strathclyde area, although bus powers were significantly reduced in the mid-1980’s on deregulation, rail powers were assumed by Scottish Ministers in 2005, and ferries either replaced by fixed links or ownership/management assumed by CalMac or other operators.

SPT continues to own and operate the Glasgow Subway, owns and manages Buchannan Street (Glasgow), East Kilbride, Greenock and Hamilton bus stations plus the region’s bus stops and shelters, manages subsidised bus services, and operates the ZoneCard integrated ticket, in addition to its transport planning functions.

Local: Scotland's 32 local authorities perform a number of transport functions, including the management and maintenance of local public roads, management and maintenance of bus lanes, bus stops and bus shelters, management of on-street parking (including enforcement where this has been decriminalised), the development of walking, wheeling and cycling networks, local road safety, financial support for essential bus services that cannot be provided on a commercial basis, and local transport planning. Some authorities also run ferry services, scheduled air services, trams, and demand responsive transport services.

The Scottish Government published a Public Sector Reform Proposal on 21 September 2026, which proposed the replacement of Scotland's 32 unitary authorities with six to 10 regional authorities and between 120 and 160 community authorities. In this, the Scottish Government proposed that RTP functions would be assumed by the regional authorities, although it is currently unclear what would happen to the transport functions exercised by existing local authorities.

Aviation

Passenger air services in Scotland provide lifeline links within the Highlands and Islands, serve an extensive network of domestic routes within the UK (some in direct competition with intercity rail travel), serve destinations across Europe, and provide links to major international aviation hubs such as London, Amsterdam, and Dubai that provide connections across the globe.

Regulation of aviation is a reserved matter, with the UK Department for Transport being the lead department for aviation matters. Scottish Ministers and local authorities do have limited aviation related powers, including:

- **Planning:** Significant airport developments are subject to planning control. Decisions on proposed developments are taken by the appropriate planning authority, or by Scottish Ministers where an appeal has been lodged or an application called-in.
- **Public Service Obligations:** The Scottish Government and local authorities can designate air routes serving a peripheral region, which would not normally be provided on a purely commercial basis, as a Public Service Obligation (PSO). A PSO can only be created where the maintenance of regular air services is considered vital to the economic development of the peripheral region where the airport is located.
- **Air Discount Scheme:** The Scottish Government operates an air discount scheme for residents of Colonsay, Orkney, Shetland, the Western Isles, Islay, Jura, Caithness and parts of Sutherland. This scheme offers discounted air fares on routes between certain highland and island airports and Aberdeen, Bergen, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, London Southend, and Manchester.

Legislative and Administrative Framework

Much of the overarching framework for aviation law is set at the international level by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), an agency of the United Nations. Domestically, air travel and airport legislation is largely reserved to the UK Government, which also sets the overall strategy for airspace use and management, and the regulatory regime for airports. The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) is the UK's aviation regulator. It is responsible for safety, consumer protection, the ATOL air package holiday financial protection scheme, the economic regulation of some airports, and certain aspects of air traffic control. Scottish Ministers have limited powers to intervene on airport noise and pollution matters.

Key legislation governing the operation of the aviation industry includes the Carriage by Air Act 1961, the Carriage by Air (Supplementary Provisions) Act 1962, the Carriage by Air and Road Act 1979, the Civil Aviation Act 1982, the Aviation Security Act 1982, the Airports Act 1986, the Transport Act 2000 and the Civil Aviation Act 2006 and the Civil Aviation Act 2012.

Main Agencies and Organisations

International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO): ICAO, an agency of the United Nations,

co-ordinates the development of international aviation standards between the 193 governments, including the UK Government, that are signatories to the Chicago Convention on International Civil Aviation.

European Civil Aviation Conference(ECAC): ECAC provides a focus for inter-governmental co-operation in air transport matters in Europe. It currently has 44 members, including the UK - which was a founder member, and its main aim is to harmonise civil aviation policies and practices between member states.

Department for Transport (DfT): The DfT is the UK Government department responsible for aviation policy.

Civil Aviation Authority (CAA): The CAA is a public corporation responsible for safety and economic regulation of aviation industries; including airlines, airports, and national air traffic services. It also manages the Air Travel Organiser's Licensing (ATOL) scheme.

National Air Traffic Services Ltd (NATS): NATS, a public/private partnership between the Airline Group, a consortium of airlines, which holds 42% of shares, NATS staff who hold 5%, LHR Airports which owns 4% and the UK government which holds 49%, provides 'enroute' air traffic control over the UK and air traffic control services at 15 UK airports.

Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd (HIAL): HIAL, a company owned entirely by the Scottish Ministers, owns, and manages eleven airports across the Highlands and Islands.

Statistics

There were 28.9 million air terminal passengers in Scotland in 2024. 4% of these travelled to/from other Scottish airports, 34% to/from other parts of the UK, 54% between Scotland and mainland Europe, and 8% to the rest of the world. 55% of passengers travelled to/from Edinburgh airport, 29% to/from Glasgow airport, and 8.2% through Aberdeen.

In 2024, 365,526 aircraft movements, and 59,693 tonnes of air freight passed through Scotland's airports.

Ongoing Developments

The Scottish Government has proposed the replacement of Air Passenger Duty (an excise duty levied on the carriage of chargeable passengers from UK airports - although flights departing Highlands and Islands Airports are exempt. The rate of duty is determined by the distance to a passenger's final destination and the class of travel), with a Scottish Air Departure Tax from 1 April 2027.

Bus and Coach

Bus and coach is the most popular form of public transport in Scotland, with buses carrying around four times as many passengers as ScotRail trains. However, neither the Scottish Government nor councils have any direct role in the provision of the vast majority of Scotland's scheduled local bus and inter-city coach services. These are largely provided by private sector operators on a commercial basis. The main exception is Lothian Buses (which includes Lothian Country and East Coast Buses) - which is local authority owned but operates on a purely commercial basis at arms-length from its owners. Fares, routes, and timetables for commercially operated services are decided by the operator.

Local authorities can offer a subsidy for the operation of socially necessary services which cannot be provided on a commercial basis.

Legislative and Administrative Framework

Many aspects of the regulation of bus and coach services, including matters such as health and safety, vehicle design, driver working conditions and vehicle inspection are reserved. The Scottish Government is responsible for national concessionary fares schemes and legislation governing the regulation of bus service provision in Scotland.

Significant bus and coach legislation includes:

Transport Act 1985: Two key features of the 1985 Act still in force today are:

1. Bus operators are required to register each local bus service with the Traffic Commissioners.

2. Local authorities must only award subsidies for the provision of socially necessary bus services, which are commercially unattractive, after tenders have been sought from different bus operators.

Transport (Scotland) Act 2001: The 2001 Act established systems for setting up formal Bus Quality Partnerships (voluntary agreements between local authorities and bus operators aimed at improving bus services) and Bus Quality Contracts (where local authorities specify, manage and support bus services in a specific area, with services provided by bus operator(s) following a competitive tendering exercise).

Transport (Scotland) Act 2005: The 2005 Act provided the legislative basis for the national concessionary fares schemes for elderly and disabled people and those aged under 22, which are administered by Transport Scotland.

Transport (Scotland) Act 2019: The 2019 Act included a number of bus related provisions, such as clarifying the law regarding the provision of bus services by local authorities, replacing statutory Bus Quality Partnerships with Bus Service Improvement Partnerships and Bus Quality Contracts with Local Service Franchises, and arrangements for smart and integrated ticketing schemes.

Main Agencies and Organisations

Department for Transport: The DfT is responsible for bus operator licensing and enforcement, which is mainly provided through the offices of the Traffic Commissioners and associated agencies.

Transport Scotland : Transport Scotland sets the policy framework for the provision of bus services in Scotland. It also administers and funds the national concessionary fares schemes and other funding streams that support the provision of local bus services, e.g. the Network Support Grant.

Local Authorities: Local authorities are responsible for the provision of bus infrastructure, e.g. bus shelters and bus priority measures, and the provision of subsidies for socially necessary bus services that cannot be provided on a purely commercial basis.

Bus Operators: Bus services in Scotland are largely provided by private sector companies, including First and Stagecoach and many smaller local companies, although the largest bus operator by patronage (Lothian Buses) is publicly owned. Most bus operators are members of the industry representative organisation the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT).

Statistics

There were 334 million local bus journeys in Scotland during 2024-25. This represents a fall in total bus trips of 80 million (19.3%) since 2014-15. During 2024-25, 184 million (55%) trips were made under a national concessionary fares scheme.

Bus fare income for 2024-25 was £391 million, with Scottish Government support for concessionary fares amounting to £392 million, Network Support Grant totalled £44 million, while local authority support for socially necessary bus services amounted to £63 million. This means 56% of total bus industry income came from the taxpayer.

Ongoing Developments

The Scottish Government has committed to extending the current 12-month pilot £2 bus fare cap in place across Orkney, Shetland, the Western isles, Highland, Moray, and Argyll and Bute to the whole of Scotland during Session 7 of the Scottish Parliament. The scheme was extended to cover the Strathclyde Partnership for Transport area on 7 September 2026, and will apply across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire from April 2027.

Several local authorities and Regional Transport Partnerships, most notably Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT), are investigating the feasibility of using Bus Improvement Partnership and local service franchising powers.

The Programme for Government 2026-31 included a committed to introducing a "Better Buses Bill" during Session 7 , which will aim to:

> “ ...provide communities across Scotland with better bus services for commuting, shopping, socialising and accessing public services.”

The First Minister stated in his speech to the SNP conference on 17 October 2026 that:

> “ I can therefore announce today that by the end of this parliament, through franchising and regulation, the SNP will bring the bus network back into public control. ”

It is important to note that Scotland's most successful bus company, the publicly owned Lothian Buses - which accounts for more than one-third of all bus trips taken in the country, has achieved its current status under the existing legislative framework.

Cycling

Cycling is an active form of transport which produces zero emissions, minimal noise, and requires little road space. While cycling accounts for a small proportion of trips taken in Scotland, every Scottish administration of the devolution era has supported its development - as a means to deliver car use reduction and for its significant environmental, social, and health benefits. These benefits can produce significant savings, e.g. academic research into the effect of investment in cycling infrastructure in the Netherlands (where cycling accounts for around 28% of all trips) has found that:

> “ Cycling prevents about 6500 deaths each year, and Dutch people have half-a-year-longer life expectancy because of cycling. These health benefits correspond to more than 3% of the Dutch gross domestic product. Our study confirmed that investments in bicycle-promoting policies (e.g., improved bicycle infrastructure and facilities) will likely yield a high cost–benefit ratio in the long term.”

While cycling is particularly suited to shorter journeys, the growing uptake of e-bikes and cargo bikes is extending both the distance that can be easily travelled and the loads that can be carried by bike, while the ongoing roll-out of public e-bike hire schemes in Scotland's cities is driving significant growth in cycling as a mode of transport. More information on legislation governing the design and use of e-bikes can be found in the SPICe Spotlight post "EV Rider".

Legislative and Administrative Framework

Legislation governing the design and use of bikes, including e-bikes, is reserved. The principal regulations being the Pedal Cycles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1983, the Electrically Assisted Pedal Cycles Regulations 1983, and the Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1989.

The use of public roads by cyclists is subject to the provisions of the Road Traffic Acts, which are also reserved.

Main Agencies and Organisations

Transport Scotland: Scottish Government agency responsible for national policy on cycling.

Local authorities: responsible for local, and regional, transport policy and the development and maintenance of cycle paths on local public roads plus associated infrastructure.

Cycling Scotland: a Scottish Government funded organisation which aims to encourage cycling and manages the national Bikeability cycle training programme.

Walk, Wheel, Cycle Trust (formerly Sustrans): charitable organisation which provides cycling policy and design expertise to local authorities, manages the development of the National Cycle Network, and helps promote sustainable travel.

Cycling UK in Scotland : Scottish branch of a national UK cycle campaign and tour cycling organisation, with a network of local branches across Scotland.

Spokes (Lothian), **Go Bike** (Strathclyde), **Highland Cycle Campaign** , **Aberdeen Cycle Forum** and **Cycling Dumfries** : Regional cycle campaign organisations.

Statistics

During 2024, bike was the main mode of transport for 1.3% of all trips in Scotland, at a more local level this ranged from an effective 0% in the Angus and Midlothian council areas up to 5% in Edinburgh. Across Scotland, 2.3% of people who worked outside of their home cycled as their usual method of travel to work, again this national figure hides significant variations across the country, with 10% of trips to work in Edinburgh being made by bike down to an effective 0% in several local authorities.

Ongoing Developments

Several local authorities are pursuing significant investments in developing comprehensive networks of on-street segregated cycling infrastructure, the most significant of which is Glasgow City Council's Connecting Glasgow programme. This aims to develop 54km of high-quality walking, wheeling and cycling routes between 2026 and 2032, as part of a wider project to deliver a 270km long city-wide network.

Rail

Railways are best suited to transporting:

1. high numbers of passengers between larger population centres over relatively long distances at high speed.

2. very high numbers of people within a city region through metro-style services.

Railways also carry a significant amount of freight, with the majority of UK rail freight being either shipping containers or heavy bulk goods such as grain, gravel, sand, and biomass. There is also growing interest in moving parcels and other goods into city centre locations by rail.

The Scotland Act 1998 defines rail transport as a reserved matter. However, the power to provide Scottish passenger rail services (currently ScotRail and Caledonian Sleeper) and decide the strategic direction, and funding, for the maintenance, renewal and expansion of national rail infrastructure in Scotland has been devolved to Scottish Ministers. In addition, the Scottish Parliament can consider Bills for the construction of new rail lines entirely within Scotland, e.g. the Waverley Railway (Scotland) Bill (2006). However, it is likely that any new rail lines would be approved under the Transport and Works Order system established by the Transport and Works (Scotland) Act 2007.

Legislative and Administrative Framework

The British railway system is currently in a state of legislative flux, while it continues to operate under the provisions of Railways Act 1993, as amended. A Railways Bill is currently (Autumn 2026) being considered by the UK Parliament. The Bill will establish a new publicly owned body, Great British Railways (GBR), which will act as a ‘guiding mind’ for the rail industry. GBR will run the passenger train services currently managed by the UK Secretary of State for Transport alongside the national railway infrastructure, currently owned by Network Rail – which is already an arms-length body of the UK Department for Transport. The Bill will also update the constitution and railway functions of the statutory passenger representative group Transport Focus.

Scottish Ministers will continue to own and operate ScotRail and Caledonian Sleeper services, and specify and fund GBR infrastructure management, maintenance, and enhancement in Scotland – as currently happens with Network Rail. The UK and Scottish Governments will be required to agree a Memorandum of Understanding setting out how they will work together. Scottish and UK Ministers will have powers to issue directions to GBR in relation to the exercise of its statutory functions, with a requirement to consult or obtain consent from the other prior to issuing such directions.

Key documents which relate to Scotland’s railway include:

High Level Output Specification (HLOS): This document sets out what ‘outputs’ Scottish Ministers wished to purchase from the rail industry for “control period 7” (April 2024 to March 2029). The funds available for the delivery of these outputs are set out in the associated Statement of Funds Available (SoFA).

Rail enhancements and capital investment strategy : This document sets out the Scottish

Government's approach to planning and funding rail enhancement projects.

ScotRail Grant Agreement: This sets out the terms of the agreement between Scottish Ministers, ScotRail Trains Ltd, and Scottish Rail Holdings , governing the provision of ScotRail services operation of the ScotRail franchise. The agreement commenced in June 2022 and is due to run for a period of 10 years.

Caledonian Sleeper Grant Agreement : This sets out the terms of the agreement between Scottish Ministers, Caledonian Sleeper, and Scottish Rail Holdings governing the operation of the Caledonian Sleeper franchise. The agreement commenced in June 2023 and is due to run for a period of 10 years.

Main Agencies and Organisations

Transport Scotland : Transport Scotland, acting on behalf of Scottish Ministers, is responsible for the specification of ScotRail and Caledonian Sleeper services. It is also responsible for setting the high-level strategy for the maintenance and enhancement of the Scottish rail infrastructure by Network Rail. In common with other national rail networks, the Scottish rail network cannot cover its costs through fare and freight carriage revenue alone, so the Scottish Government provides funding to ScotRail, Caledonian Sleeper and Network Rail to allow them to carry out their respective tasks.

Department for Transport : The Department for Transport (DfT) is responsible for UK rail policy and the letting and management of English and cross-border rail services (excluding Caledonian Sleeper services), including the east and west coast mainline and cross-country franchises which extend into Scotland. Network Rail is an arms-length public body owned by the DfT, which provides funding to Network Rail for operations in England and Wales and is responsible for drafting HLOS and SOFA documents covering the network outside of Scotland.

DFTO : The Department for Transport Operator Limited is responsible for bringing all DfT managed train operators into public ownership, and managing their operations prior to the establishment of Great British Railways.

Great British Railways (GBR): The Railways Bill, being considered by the UK Parliament during 2026, will establish a new publicly owned body, Great British Railways (GBR), which will act as a 'guiding mind' for the rail industry. GBR will run the passenger train services currently managed by the UK Secretary of State for Transport alongside the national railway infrastructure, currently owned by Network Rail.

Train Operating Companies (TOCs): Six passenger TOCs operate in Scotland, these are:

- ScotRail: ScotRail operates approximately 95% of passenger rail services in Scotland.
- Caledonian Sleeper: Caledonian Sleeper provides overnight rail services linking northern and central Scotland with London.
- London North Eastern Railway (LNER): LNER operates intercity services between Scotland, the north of England and London along the East Coast Mainline. LNER is owned by the DFTO.

- Avanti West Coast: Avanti West Coast operates the West Coast Mainline services between Glasgow/Edinburgh, the north west of England and London. Avanti West Coast is a joint venture between First Group and Italian national train operator Trenitalia. Avanti West Coast is expected to be brought into public ownership in spring 2027.

- CrossCountry Trains: CrossCountry provides inter-regional rail services across the UK. CrossCountry is part of the Arriva Group. CrossCountry Trains is expected to be brought into public ownership in summer 2027.

- TransPennine Express: TransPennine Express operates services between Edinburgh/ Glasgow and destinations in northern England. TransPennine Express is owned by DFTO.

Freight Operating Companies (FOCs): Several privately owned FOCs are licensed to operate on the UK rail network, the largest of which are DB Cargo UK, Freightliner and GB Railfreight. The UK Government, through the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, owns Direct Rail Services (DRS), which provides general freight services, as well as specialist nuclear transport.

Rolling Stock Leasing Companies (ROSCOs): Most of the rolling stock operating on British railways is leased by TOCs and FOCs from three major ROSCOs. These are Porterbrook, Beacon Rail, and Angel Trains .

Network Rail : Network Rail owns, operates, and maintains the national rail infrastructure, which includes track, signalling, bridges, tunnels, and stations. Network Rail is also responsible for the development of the national rail timetable and long-term planning for the development of the rail network. Network Rail is an arms-length body of the UK DfT. Scottish Ministers are responsible for specifying and funding Network Rail operations in Scotland. Network Rail will become part of Great British Railways on its establishment.

Office of Rail and Road (ORR): The ORR is the economic and safety regulator for the British rail industry. Its main tasks are:

- To ensure that Network Rail manages the network efficiently and in a way that meets the needs of its users

- To encourage continuous improvement in health and safety performance

- To secure compliance with relevant health and safety law, including taking enforcement action where necessary

- To develop policy and enhance relevant railway health and safety legislation

- To license operators of railway assets

- To set the terms for access to the network and other railway facilities by operating companies

- To enforce competition law in the rail sector.

The role and responsibilities of the ORR will change on formation of Great British Railways (GBR), with it monitoring and reporting on GBR performance to UK and Scottish Ministers, advising on rail funding and finance, but with reduced roles in track and infrastructure

access, and enforcement matters.

Scottish Rail Holdings (SRH): SRH is an arms-length holding company owned by Scottish Ministers. It is responsible for the ownership and oversight of TOCs ScotRail Trains Ltd and Caledonian Sleeper.

Statistics

In 2023-24 Scotland's rail network extended to 2,734 kilometres, of which 898 kilometres (33%) were electrified. There were 363 passenger railway stations in Scotland. ScotRail carried 84.71 million passengers in 2024-25, a fall of 13.7 million passengers (14%) from the all-time high of 97.78 million passengers in 2018-19. 4.285 million tonnes of freight was lifted by rail in Scotland during 2024-25.

Ongoing Developments

There are no plans to extend the Scottish rail network during session 7 of the Scottish Parliament.

Procurement exercises are currently underway for rolling stock to:

- replace the High Speed Trains (Class 43 power cars and Mark 3 carriages which are now over 40 years old) used by ScotRail on its Inter7City services that connect Glasgow, Edinburgh, Perth, Stirling, Dundee, Inverness and Aberdeen. It was announced in March 2026 that refurbished Class 222 rolling stock (around 25 years old) will begin to replace the High Speed Trains from late 2027, with full feet deployment by the end of 2028.
- Replace existing diesel trains on the Borders and Fife lines. The intention being to procure bi-mode trains that can be powered by overhead line equipment and batteries, when running on route sections without overhead lines. Work to electrify sections of these routes is currently (2026) underway to allow for the operation of bi-mode rolling stock.

Road

The private car is the dominant form of transport in Scotland, both by number of trips taken and distance travelled, although it is important to note that in 2024 some 27.4% of households in Scotland did not have access to a car. This national figure hides some significant local disparities in car access, e.g. 50% of households in Glasgow and 41% in Edinburgh do not have access to a car, while only 12% of households in the Shetland Islands do not have access to a car.

Heavy goods vehicles (HGVs - trucks with a gross weight of 3.5 tonnes or more) are the dominant mode of freight transport in Scotland. In 2024, an estimated 138.7 million tonnes of goods were lifted by HGV in Scotland, compared with 4.3 million tonnes lifted by rail.

The UK Government retains responsibility for road traffic law, vehicle and driver licensing and taxation, public service vehicle operators and goods operators licensing and the regulation of road safety. Responsibility for all aspects of road building, maintenance, and speed limits are devolved.

Main Agencies and Organisations

Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA): The main responsibilities of the DVSA include:

- conducting driving theory and practical tests.
- approving driving and motorcycle instructors and checking their standard of tuition.
- approving MOT testers and test centres. DVSA staff carry out MOT testing of HGVs, buses and coaches.
- carrying out roadside checks on commercial drivers and vehicles.
- monitoring recalls of vehicles, parts and accessories.
- approving training courses for qualified drivers, such as Driver Certificate of Professional Competence courses for lorry, bus and coach drivers, and drink-drive rehabilitation courses.
- supporting the Traffic Commissioners to license and monitor companies who operate lorries, buses and coaches, and to register local bus services.

Traffic Commissioners : The Traffic Commissioners are appointed by the Secretary of State for Transport and have responsibility in their region or nation for:

- the licensing of the operators of heavy goods vehicles (HGVs)) and of buses and coaches (public service vehicles or PSVs).
- the registration of local bus services.
- granting vocational licences and taking action against drivers of HGVs and PSVs.
- the environmental suitability of centres designated as parking locations for HGVs.

The Traffic Commissioner for Scotland is also responsible for dealing with appeals against decisions by Scottish local authorities on taxi fares and appointing parking adjudicators to the Parking and Bus Lane Tribunal for Scotland - which considers appeals against Penalty Charge Notices issued by councils for contravening parking restrictions, Low Emission Zone standards, or double parking, pavement parking or parking across a dropped kerb. It also handles appeals against bus lane enforcement notifications issued by Aberdeen, Edinburgh, and Glasgow Councils.

Transport Scotland : Transport Scotland is responsible for the development, management, and maintenance of the trunk road network, that is the strategic road network which connects Scotland's towns, cities, airports and ports. It has contracted out the maintenance of four geographic trunk road units to the following private companies:

- North West: BEAR Scotland
- North East: Amey
- South East: BEAR Scotland
- South West: Amey

Transport Scotland has contracted out responsibility for certain major trunk road projects to private concessionaires, that is private companies that design, build and maintain the road for a set period (typically 30 years), under Design Build Finance Operate (DBFO) contracts. These roads include:

- A74(M) from Junction 12 to the English Border: Autolink Concessionaires (M6) PLC
- M77 from Junction 5 to Fenwick: Balfour Beatty Construction Services Ltd
- M80 from Stepps to Haggs: Highway Management Scotland (HMG)
- Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route/Balmedie-Tipperty (AWPR/ B-T): Aberdeen City Council
- M8 M73 M74 Motorway Improvements Project: Scottish Roads Partnership (SRP)

Local Authorities: Each local authority is, under the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984, designated as the roads authority for its area. They are responsible for the management and maintenance of all public roads within their area, with the exception of trunk roads.

Legislative and Administrative Framework

The main pieces of road transport related legislation reserved to the UK Parliament, including the Motor Vehicles (International Circulation) Act 1952, the Public Passenger Vehicles Act 1981, the Transport Act 1985, certain sections of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, the Road Traffic Act 1988, the Road Traffic Offenders Act 1988, the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994, the Road Traffic (New Drivers) Act 1995 and the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Act 1995.

There are four main roads-related Acts which fall within the competence of the Scottish Parliament, these are:

Roads (Scotland) Act 1984: Governs the development, maintenance, improvement, and operation of public roads in Scotland.

Transport (Scotland) Act 2001: Allows local authorities to establish statutory bus quality partnership and quality contract schemes, introduce local road user charging schemes and other more minor transport related matters.

Transport (Scotland) Act 2005: Established Regional Transport Partnerships, the Scottish Roadworks Commissioner (an independent public official appointed by Scottish Ministers, charged with monitoring road works performance, and promoting and encouraging good practice across both utility companies and roads authorities) and allowed for the development of national concessionary travel schemes and other more minor transport related matters.

Transport (Scotland) Act 2019: includes provisions on a range of transport matters, including low emissions zones, pavement, double parking and dropped kerb parking prohibitions, bus service partnerships and local service franchising, regulation of road works, and the workplace parking levy.

Statistics

There were 3.174 million vehicles in Scotland in 2024, of which 2.748 million (86%) were cars or vans. This is the highest number of vehicles ever recorded, with the total increasing by 353,000 (12.5%) since 2014.

There were 5,171 licensed operators of heavy goods vehicles in Scotland in 2025, a fall of 1,162 (18.3%) since 2015.

There were 324,826 blue badges (blue badges provide a range of parking benefits for disabled people who travel as drivers or passengers) on issue at the end of March 2025, an increase of 92,999 (40%) from March 2015.

The total distance travelled by all vehicles in Scotland during 2024 was 49,313 billion kilometres, the highest level ever recorded and an increase of 4.537 billion kilometres (10.1%) from 2014.

Details of the size of Scotland’s road network, as of 2024, are as follows:

- Trunk road network length: 3,736 km, of which 653 km are motorways and motorway slip roads.
- Local authority road network length: 53,716 km.
- Total road network length: 57,452 km.

During 2024-25, the condition of 7% of local authority managed roads was categorised as "red", that is the road has deteriorated to the point that repairs to prolong its future life should be undertaken, and 28% was classed as "amber", i.e. further investigation should be undertaken to establish if repairs are required.

During 2024-25, 20.4% of motorways, 15.6% of dual carriageway trunk roads and 14.1% of single carriageway trunk roads were defined as requiring "close monitoring", i.e. the

road had exceeded its expected residual life.

Ongoing Developments

The Scottish Government is committed to a programme of trunk road upgrades and expansion, the most significant of which are are the dualling of the single carriageway sections of the A9 between Perth and Inverness by 2035, the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen (with initial work focused on the 15 mile Inverness-Nairn section), and a permanent fix to the landslide prone section of the A83 at the Rest and be Thankful. Information on these projects, including the latest developments, is available at:

- A9 dualling
- A96 dualling (A96 Inverness-Nairn)
- A83 Rest and be Thankful

Shipping

Regulation of shipping is a reserved matter, with the Department for Transport taking the lead role in policy making and implementation. However, the Scottish Government has powers to specify and fund lifeline ferry services, and set national planning policy, which has implications for the development of ports and harbours.

Scottish Ministers specify, fund and manage Clyde and Hebrides ferry services, currently operated by CalMac Ferries Ltd, and services linking the Scottish mainland with Orkney and Shetland, currently operated by Serco Northlink.

Scottish Ministers also have the power to award freight grants to support the switch of freight transport from road to water. The Scottish Government also sponsors Scottish Canals, the public corporation which manages the Scottish canal network.

Legislative and Administrative Framework

Much of the overarching framework for maritime law is set at the international level – by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). Domestically, maritime transport is largely reserved to the UK Parliament. Financial assistance for shipping services which start and/or finish outside Scotland is also reserved, as is legislation governing navigational rights and freedoms.

In addition, legislation governing UK shipping, including registration, manning and command, safety, pollution and liability is reserved, along with the relevant provisions relating to navigation (lighthouses), salvage and wrecks, and security. These laws largely incorporate international commitments entered into by the UK Government for the whole of the United Kingdom.

There is a considerable body of legislation governing maritime transport, the main Acts being the Coastguard Act 1925, the Hovercraft Act 1968, the Carriage of Goods by Sea Act 1971, the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973, the Merchant Shipping (Liner Conferences) Act 1982, the Dangerous Vessels Act 1985, the Aviation and Maritime Security Act 1990, the Carriage of Goods by Sea Act 1992, the Merchant Shipping Act 1995 and the Shipping and Trading Interests (Protection) Act 1995.

The Scottish Government sets out its policy on the development of Scottish ferry services in the Islands Connectivity Plan. UK ports policy is set out in the Department for Transport's National Policy Statement for Ports.

Main Agencies and Organisations

International Maritime Organisation (IMO): The IMO is a United Nations specialised agency responsible for improving maritime safety and preventing pollution from ships. It is also responsible for technical co-operation between members.

Department for Transport: Responsible for formulation and implementation of UK shipping policy, and certain aspects of ports policy that extends across the United Kingdom.

Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA): The MCA is responsible for search and rescue operations, vessel safety inspections and marine pollution reduction and response.

(CalMac): A company wholly owned by Scottish Ministers which provides ferry services to 22 islands and four peninsulas on Scotland's west coast. CalMac Ferries operate Clyde and Hebrides ferry services under a contract directly awarded by Scottish Ministers.

Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL): A company wholly owned by Scottish Ministers which owns 37 ferries, 32 of which are leased to CalMac Ferries and five to SERCO Northlink. It also owns 17 Clyde and Hebrides harbours and owns or leases properties and port infrastructure at 10 other Clyde and Hebrides locations.

Western Ferries: Private operator of unsubsidised vehicle ferry service between Dunoon (Hunter's Quay) and Gourock (McInroy's Point).

Pentland Ferries: Private operator of unsubsidised vehicle ferry service between Gills Bay in Caithness and St Margaret's Hope in South Ronaldsay (Orkney).

Orkney Ferries: Entirely owned by Orkney Islands Council, Orkney Ferries links the Orkney mainland with 13 of the smaller Orkney Islands.

Shetland Islands Council: Shetland Islands Council operate a network of ferry services linking the Shetland mainland with Yell, Skerries, Bressay, Fair Isle, Foula and Papa Stour. A service also links Yell with Unst and Fetlar.

Northlink Ferries: SERCO Northlink operate ferries from Aberdeen and Scrabster to Orkney and the Shetlands under contract to Scottish Ministers.

Statistics

In 2024, a total of 52 million tonnes of freight was handled by Scottish ports, a fall of 18.93 million tonnes (26.5%) since 2014. 1.653 million passengers were carried on ferry services between Scotland and Northern Ireland, a fall of 141,000 (8%) from 2014. CalMac Ferries carried 5.037 million passengers, an increase of 383,000 (8.2%) since 2014. SERCO Northlink Ferries services between northern Scotland and the Northern Isles carried 416,000 passengers, an increase of 127,000 (44%) from 2014.

Shetland Islands Council services carried 749,000 passengers in 2024 (1% more than in 2014) and Orkney Ferries services carried 260,000 (12.5% more than in 2014).

Ongoing Developments

The Scottish Government is currently funding a major vessel replacement programme for Clyde and Hebrides (CalMac) and Northern Isles (Northlink) ferry services, which includes:

MV Glen Rosa: The MV Glen Rosa is a dual fuel roll-on roll-off ferry being built for CMAL at the Ferguson Marine (Port Glasgow) shipyard. It is the sister ship of MV Glen Sannox. The MV Glen Sannox was due to be delivered in July 2018 at a fixed cost of £48.5 million. The vessel is now five times over budget and over eight years late. Delivery is currently slated for late 2026.

Vessels being built at the Cemre shipyard: CMAL has awarded contracts for the contruction of four large vessels at the Cemre Marin Endustri shipyard in Yalova, Turkey. These are the MV Isle of Islay, MV Loch Indaal, MV Claymore and MV Lochmor. The MV Isle of Islay entered service in March 2026, with the other vessels due to enter service thorughout 2026 and/or 2027. The contract for MV Isle of Islay and MV Loch Indall was for £91 million, while the contract for the MV Claymore and MV Lochmor was for £115 million, which also includes minor port infrastructure works to accommodate the two new vessels.

Northlink Freight Vessels: CMAL awarded the contract for the construction of two new freight vessels to Guangzhou Shipyard International Co Limited (GSI) in March 2026. These vessels will replace the existing Helliar and Hildasay, providing extra freight capacity and capability for quicker crossings, plus flexible spaces allowing for the carriage of up to 200 passengers during peak periods. The vessels are expected to be delivered by 2029 at an estimated cost of around £200 million.

Small Vessels Replacement Programme (SVRP): The Small Vessel Replacement Programme (SVRP) is a 10-year, two-stage project being led by CMAL to replace up to ten ageing vessels used by CalMac on Clyde and Hebrides routes. The first stage of the programme involves the construction of seven electrically powered vessels, the contract for which was awarded to Remontowa Shipbuilding on 28 March 2025, with a total value of £147.5 million, plus an additional 3% contingency fund. Construction of the first vessel began in September 2025. Delivery of the first vessel is expected in summer 2027, with all vessels due to be delivered by the end of Q1 2029.

CMAL launched phase 2 of the SVRP in August 2024, which will see new vessels procured for two routes, with options for a further two vessels. Both phases of the SVRP project involve port improvement works.

CMAL had planned to begin SVRP phase two procurement in Q2 2026. However, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport announced in the Chamber on 3 March 2026 that:

“…ministers propose to include the two new vessels for the Sound of Harris and the Sound of Barra from the next phase of the small vessel replacement programme as a direct award to Ferguson Marine as part of a wider suite of publicly funded and directly awarded vessel projects. The proposal is subject to a detailed internal due diligence process...".

Ardrossan Harbour: Ardrossan is the mainland port for the principal Isle of Arran ferry service, which calls at Brodick and is operated by CalMac. Ardrossan harbour was due to be upgraded to accommodate the MV Glen Sannox (and now its sister ship MV Glen Rosa), which was originally due to be delivered in 2018 but only entered revenue service in 2025. The harbour upgrade is yet to begin and, following years of fruitless negotiations about the upgrade between Transport Scotland, harbour owners Peel Ports, and North Ayrshire Council, CMAL negotiated the purchase of Ardrossan Harbour in March 2026 for a total of £17 million.

CMAL expects to present Scottish Ministers with an Outline Business Case for the harbour upgrade in late 2026. If approved, it is anticipated that work will start in 2027 and take around two years to complete, depending on the project scope and contract phasing. Only then will MV Glen Sannox and MV Glen Rosa be able to serve Ardrossan - currently they can only serve Brodick (Arran) from the mainland port of Troon - which has no direct connection to rail services and requires a longer journey time.

Walking and wheeling

Walking, and wheeling, is a healthy and environmentally friendly form of transport, that is particularly suited to shorter trips and in facilitating travel by public transport. It produces zero carbon emissions, minimal noise and requires little road space.

Walking is at the top of the Scottish Government's sustainable transport hierarchy, as described in the National Transport Strategy 2, which is intended to guide national and local transport policy and budget decisions towards walking and other sustainable travel modes, in preference to interventions that facilitate car use.

As with cycling, walking and wheeling produce significant co-benefits. The Scottish Government Climate Change Plan, when considering the impact of walking, wheeling and cycling (page 16) states

> “ All co-benefits they [the University of Edinburgh] identify taken together could deliver over £6.3 billion worth of value to Scotland between 2025 to 2040, which is a per capita benefit of £1,150 over the 15-year period.”

Of this, it predicts that health benefits flowing from increased physical activity from more walking, wheeling and cycling could produce £4 billion in co-benefits, that is 63.5% of total Climate Change Plan co-benefits – with additional benefits also accruing from noise reduction, reduced traffic congestion, and increased road safety.

Legislative and Administrative Framework

As might be expected, walking and wheeling is not subject to many legislative constraints. The regulations that do exist govern the operation and use of zebra, pelican, and puffin (pedestrian light controlled crossing where the lights are on the same side as the crossing user) crossings and ban walking on motorways except in an emergency. These regulations are set out in the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, the provisions of which are reserved.

Legislation governing the construction of new footways and footpaths is devolved to the Scottish Parliament and regulated through the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984.

There is no specific national policy document for walking and wheeling in Scotland, although Transport Scotland's Long-Term Vision for Active Travel in Scotland 2030 does set out the Scottish Government’s ambition that "walking or cycling [are] the most popular choice for shorter everyday journeys". This is accompanied by the Active Travel Framework, which sets out the approaches that will be used by Transport Scotland and other active travel stakeholders to increase the uptake of walking in the period up to 2030.

Main Agencies and Organisations

Transport Scotland: Scottish Government agency responsible for national policy on walking and wheeling. It is also responsible for pedestrian infrastructure that forms part of the trunk road network.

Local authorities: Councils are responsible for local transport policy and the development

and maintenance of footways, footpaths, and associated infrastructure such as street lighting, seating, and pedestrian crossings.

Living Streets Scotland and Walking Scotland (formerly Paths for All): charitable organisations promoting walking and wheeling in Scotland.

Statistics

During 2024, 25% of all trips in Scotland were made on foot, with walking accounting for 50% of all trips under two miles long. 12% of trips to an from work were made on foot, although this Scotland-wide statistic hides some significant local differences, e.g. the proportion of trips to work made on foot ranges from 24% in the Scottish Borders down to just 2% in West Lothian.

The Walk Wheel Cycle Trust's annual Hands Up Survey shows that during 2025 walking was the most common means of getting to school, accounting for 38.8% of trips - with a further 2.9% travelling by scooter, and 10.2% "park and stride", i.e. Being driven part of the way and then walking the rest.

Ongoing Developments

Investments in walking infrastructure, and associated behaviour change programmes, are typically small scale and carried out at a very local level, meaning it is not possible to identify any particular ongoing developments of interest at the national level.

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