

# Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

4th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday 9  
March 2022

PE1866: Introduce legislation to improve bus  
travel for wheelchair users

## Note by the Clerk

**Lodged on** 20 May 2021

**Petitioners** Daryl Cooper

**Petition  
summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to  
introduce legislation so that wheelchair users are able to face  
frontwards when travelling on a bus.

**Webpage** <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1866>

## Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [1 December 2021](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received a new response from Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP which is set out in **Annexe C**.
4. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
5. The Scottish Government's initial position on this petition can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).

## Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

**Clerk to the Committee**

## Annexe A

# PE1866: Introduce legislation to improve bus travel for wheelchair users

## Petitioner

Daryl Cooper

## Date Lodged

20 May 2021

## Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce legislation so that wheelchair users are able to face frontwards when travelling on a bus.

## Previous action

I have taken the issue to my local MSP, who just advised me to take it up with disability charities. I didn't feel this response was adequate, or that the issue was really treated that seriously. Also, as this is a travel issue, I tried to go through the transport minister's office but as I do not live within the local constituency, to my shock I got told they couldn't take it up.

## Background information

Currently wheelchair users are required to face backwards on buses. This is unfair as other passengers have the option. It is not very dignifying facing everyone else on a bus and also for people who suffer from travel sickness, travelling backwards can make this worse. People like me are missing out as they can't travel on buses. Let's make it equal, give wheelchair users the same choice as other passengers.

## Annexe B

Extract from Official Report of last consideration of  
PE1866 on 1 December 2021

### Wheelchair Users (Improvements to Bus Travel) (PE1866)

**The Convener:** The next petition, PE1866, which was lodged by Daryl Cooper, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce legislation so that wheelchair users are able to face frontwards when travelling on a bus. The petition was previously considered at our meeting on 8 September—I am pleased that we have moved on from our meeting on 1 September.

At that meeting, we decided to write to the Scottish Government to seek clarification on whether a requirement to provide forward-facing wheelchair-accessible spaces on buses could be addressed via non-legislative means. The Scottish Government had previously stated that the matter is reserved and, in its response, the Government reiterates that the Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations 2000 are reserved legislation. The UK Government has committed to a review of the regulations by the end of 2023.

The Scottish Government notes that the provisions in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019

“operate in such a way as to place the setting of any service standards for local bus services within the competence of local transport authorities”,

and that

“Whilst there is no provision for Ministers to intervene directly, we would expect local transport authorities and bus operators to work closely together to ensure that the required service standards meet the needs of local communities including people with disabilities.”

In the light of what we have heard, do members have any comments or suggestions for actions?

**Paul Sweeney:** I do not find the Scottish Government’s response remotely convincing. There are extensive means by which ministers in Scotland can exert influence on the bus sector to change its practices, given the significant level of public funding that the sector enjoys, which is vital to its operation.

Furthermore, it seems like a bit of a cop-out for the Government to say, on the one hand, that the regulations are reserved and, on the other, that the operating administration is dealt with by local councils. That is not convincing. The Government

is basically trying to bat away the issue. More can be done, and more scrutiny is required.

My Glasgow region colleague Pam Duncan- Glancy has given testimony that she has had significant issues with access to buses in Glasgow. In particular, First Bus Glasgow has a policy that only one wheelchair user is permitted per bus. Her husband is also a wheelchair user, so they are regularly split up and have to take two different buses to get somewhere by public transport. That seems appalling, given that there is inadequate space on buses for both wheelchairs. Apparently, the company does that in order to preserve space for a potential pram user.

Those things are problematic and need further investigation, so I am minded to invite our colleague to address the committee on this and potentially consider additional submissions.

**Alexander Stewart:** I agree with that. Although we were advised that a review will take place by 2023, there is a duty of care for transport authorities and bus operators to ensure that individuals are not discriminated against if they attempt to use transport in situations similar to the one that Paul Sweeney has just described. We should investigate other ways to take further evidence from individuals who have experienced that kind of situation, to see whether we can clarify the situation and put some pressure on.

**The Convener:** Yes, I am happy to do that. The Parliament has a proud record of support for wheelchair users. In my first parliamentary session, Trish Godman led on the subject of bespoke wheelchairs. At that stage, Scotland provided a very poor service, but the Scottish Government introduced significant additional funding, which has transformed the lives of many people. However, sometimes, we forget that those better, bespoke wheelchairs have to be able to be deployed in a practical way in order for the individual to get the additional access. Some things are out of sight and out of mind. We have previously heard about issues relating to taxi access for people with wheelchairs, but there is something here for us to hear about as well and I would welcome any evidence that our colleague Pam Duncan-Glancy might be able to give to the committee. I suggest that we hold the petition open on the basis that we hear from her, and see whether that stimulates anything further that we might be able to do. Are we agreed?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Annexe C

### Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP submission dated 29 December 2021

### PE1866/D - Introduce Legislation to Improve Bus Travel for Wheelchair Users

Thank you for inviting me to give evidence on this crucial matter. I trust that the committee will consider my short evidence, alongside more detailed evidence from organisations of disabled people, who will be able to provide more wide ranging evidence and represent their members diverse views. However, as a disabled person, and as a member of this Parliament with lived experience, I think it is important to provide the evidence I have to assist your work. I thank you for inviting me to give the evidence.

#### **The problems**

For too long, and too often, disabled people have been excluded from bus travel for a variety of reasons, including but not restricted to:

- a lack of accessible buses that can lower to allow wheelchairs on board. This means that disabled people have less access to already stretched routes and fewer buses to get
- poor joined up transport meaning that some routes are only partly accessible by bus, a connecting bus is inaccessible or other forms of connecting transport is inaccessible thus the disabled person cannot complete their journey
- no seating at some bus stops, meaning people with mobility problems cannot wait for the bus without being in significant pain or distress
- only one wheelchair user being allowed on a bus at a time, largely due to problems in policy, and outdated paternal views on health and safety as opposed to a design issue with much of the fleet, which, has space for more than one wheelchair user. This reduces the services available to wheelchair users significantly. It also means wheelchair using friends/couples/colleagues cannot travel together.
- My husband and I are both wheelchair users and have been split up at 3am to get on different buses, meaning we travelled alone and one of us to wait, alone, at either end of the journey. This is not safe. It also means that when we are travelling for a special occasion, we can't arrive together
- inaccessible information on bus times and routes for people with communication impairments, including sensory impairments meaning many disabled people have no way of knowing what transport is available and when
- lack of information on what buses and routes are accessible, meaning disabled people find it hard to plan journeys

This has a huge impact on disabled people's ability to get to work, visit family and friends, enjoy a social life, participate in society and lead a life on an equal basis to non-disabled people. It also means that disabled people have to rely on private cars and are restricted in their ability to contribute to a carbon free society.

The outcomes of such restrictions on disabled people's use of buses, added to the many other ways that disabled people are denied equal opportunities, are seen in the persistently lower employment and participation rates of disabled people, their lower representation in education, and representation rates in public office and in all other aspects of public life – details of which are widely available to the committee. For these reasons, it is important that this discrimination is addressed. It is also important to remember that discrimination on the grounds of being a disabled person can constitute a breach of the law.

### **Suggested actions and next steps for the committee**

I'd suggest the committee take evidence on ways to ensure that:

- a significantly higher proportion of buses are accessible to many more people
- disabled people can wait for a bus without being in significant pain or distress
- several wheelchair users can travel together (Sweden has a good model for this that the committee may wish to explore)
- accessible information on bus times and routes for people with communication impairments, including sensory impairments are mandatory and provided in all circumstances
- information on what buses and routes are accessible is clearly set out so that disabled people can plan journeys

To do this, I would suggest that the committee invite evidence from the following groups of people:

- Disabled People's Organisations on their experiences and ideas for solutions
- Bus companies on their responsibilities, understanding of these and views on the current situation for disabled people
- Local transport authorities on their responsibilities, understanding of these and views on the current situation for disabled people
- The Minister for Transport to outline their responsibilities, understanding of these and views on the current situation for disabled people