



REPORT OF THE *IMAGINE IF BUSES WERE FREE...* ONLINE CONFERENCE September 19th 2020

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Introduction

This conference was organised by the Free Our City coalition of community organisations, unionists and climate activists. It was attended by a wide range of people from across Greater Glasgow, from elsewhere in Scotland, and by others active in campaigning for free public transport in UK cities. 100 people attended in all, from 258 who had registered in advance.

Very unfortunately a significant number of additional people who tried to join the conference found themselves locked out by the limit of the Zoom platform we were using. To those of you who had this frustrating experience, we sincerely apologise, and hope this report, together with the opportunity to view the video of the contributions from the invited speakers, will help you to understand our campaign and to contribute to it if you can.



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Speakers

You can watch all the speakers' contributions at:

[facebook.com/FreeOurCityGlasgow/videos/752290398946502](https://www.facebook.com/FreeOurCityGlasgow/videos/752290398946502)

The speakers were:

- Xavier Dairaine, Director of Engineering in Urban Communities in Dunkirk, France (where free public transport was introduced in 2018) with live translation from Babs MacGregor
- Jackson Cullinane, Unite Scotland (union representing Glasgow's bus drivers)
- Ellie Harrison, Get Glasgow Moving (local public transport campaign)
- Katrin Winter, citizen of Tallinn, Estonia (where free public transport was introduced in 2013)
- Helen Jackson, Scottish Youth Climate Strike

Speakers' answers to questions

Time wasn't allocated for direct questions to speakers, the organisers having decided it was more important to give maximum time to break-out group discussions. Participants were encouraged instead to put questions to speakers in the chat box. These questions were answered by the speakers either at the time in the chat box, or subsequently by email to the organisers.

Here are the questions and the answers:

Xavier Dairaine (with translations by Babs MacGregor):

- 11:36:26 From Tom S (Leeds): are the buses in Dunkirk electric?
- 11:36:38 From NJ Roslund: Are any other French cities following Dunkirk's remarkable lead?
- 11:37:11 From Danny Alderslowe: Did you have to improve the design of the buses in Dunkirk to make them more user friendly.
- 11:37:17 From Mathilda: Before the buses in Dunkirk were free were they run by the city or a private company?
- 11:38:28 From Neil Rothnie: I'd like to ask Xavier how they made the busses "safe" in this COVID19 period.
- 11:41:27 From Dave Holladay - Glasgow: Question pour Xavier comme securite du chauffe
- 11:45:39 From Dave Holladay - Glasgow: Was the driving cab sealed apart from the passenger saloon? In the UK the lack of a secure sealed cab has seen bus driver death rate at 3 x that of NHS staff
- 11:53:20 From Xavier: @NJ Roslund La gratuité des transports en France est ancienne, elle a commencé dans les années 80. Dunkerque n'est donc pas la première ville à le faire, elle est juste l'agglomération la plus importante à le faire (200000 habitants), et en améliorant l'offre de transport de manière aussi importante.



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11:55:16 From Xavier: @Danny Alderslowe, nous avons complètement changé les bus pour la gratuité, ils sont colorés et au confort amélioré. Nous avons également changé la motorisation, ils roulent maintenant au Gaz Naturel. Nous sommes en train de passer à la motorisation Hydrogène (décarbonné).

11:57:19 From Xavier: @Mathilda, en France l'autorité organisatrice des transports est la puissance publique qui soit crée une société publique pour faire fonctionner le réseau soit le délègue à une entreprise privée. A Dunkerque c'est délégué à une entreprise privée (TRAN)

This question was not translated at the time, but Babs has confirmed as accurate this Google translation: @Mathilda, in France the transport organizing authority is the public authority which either creates a public company to operate the network or delegates it to a private company. In Dunkirk, it is delegated to a private company (TRAN)

11:57:48 From Babs Nicgriogair: Design of Dunkirk buses improved when free bus offering kicked in. More comfortable, more aesthetically pleasing. They now run on natural gas and are in the process of moving to hydrogen - carbon neutral.

11:58:09 From Xavier: Concernant la sécurité pendant la crise sanitaire, nous avons interdit la montée par l'avant, à proximité des conducteurs et avons protégé les conducteurs par un écran transparent

11:59:32 From Babs Nicgriogair: Re: safety of bus drivers in Dunkirk during Covid. Entry only permitted via the back of the bus, and bus drivers protected by a screen.

Jackson Cullinane:

11:47:15 From Jeff Turner, Transport Consultant, Leeds: Jackson, does that mean that we need bus franchising as well as free buses?

The latest Transport Act in Scotland provides the ability for local councils to use franchising. As indicated on Saturday, it also provides a right for councils to municipally own buses – which would be our preference. However, councils have not been provided with the funding to acquire buses or the expertise to run them – hence my call for the Scottish Government to make start-up funding for this available to councils.

Ellie Harrison:

11:59:43 From Matt Noble: Is that £300m in subsidies in Scotland or in Glasgow?

Across Scotland, not just Glasgow.



Katrin Winter:

12:08:56 From Tom S (Leeds): in Tallin do users have to show proof of registration to use bus free?

Yes. Every public transport user has to buy what we call a 'Green card'. This costs 2 euros and can be purchased in a number of newspaper kiosks in town. The green transport card is then tied to your ID card at point of sale. They use some kind of software to do it. Each bus, train, tram and trolleybus is equipped with machines against which the green card has to be touched upon entering. This is a way for the government to collect statistics and data I think. Public transport is occasionally checked by the municipal police and they ask for the green card and ID card. The green card can also be used by non-residents and they can load money on to it, sort of like Oyster card in London.

12:09:18 From Neil Rothnie: Katrin, What's happened to financing the rural areas that you (and others I presume) de-registered from for tax purposes?

I have to say I do not really know the answer to this. The fact is that financing reduced, but I believe it wasn't a drastic change. This Guardian article touched upon the issue a bit:

theguardian.com/cities/2016/oct/11/tallinn-experiment-estonia-public-transport-free-cities

Analysis of break-out group discussions

The groups were given two questions to answer and were asked to feed back three main points from their discussion on each question. There were nine groups.

Question 1: How would free buses make your life easier or better?

Groups tended to make the point during their discussion of this question that buses would have to be not only free to make their lives easier or better, but also reliable, frequent, quick, safe, clean, better integrated with other forms of public transport, and with more connections between radial routes. In this context they chose the following points which were most important to them, listed here in order of the number of groups who made each point:

- Social benefits – a more equal and connected society, with less social isolation (7 groups)
- Saving household costs (5 groups)
- Less car use (4 groups)
- More space in the city – with fewer cars in streets, and green spaces replacing car parks (2 groups)
- Less air pollution (2 groups)
- Less walking and cycling dauntingly long distances (1 group)
- A great help for disabled people (1 group)
- Would make life easier in general (1 group)
- Safer for pedestrians (1 group)
- Addressing climate change (1 group)
- An example for visitors and people travelling from other parts of Scotland (1 group)



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Question 2: How do we make that happen?

The answers to this question were more diverse, groups giving the following points which they thought were most important, listed here randomly:

- It has to be an 'all or nothing' demand (the same conditions which would have to be met for lives to be easier / better: buses would have to be not only free, but also reliable, frequent, quick, safe, clean, better integrated with other forms of public transport, and with more connections between radial routes)
- Start with making buses free during the Covid epidemic
- Be more ambitious, rather than less
- Promote reduced waiting time
- Tax businesses, whose trade would benefit, to fund the new bus service, not citizens
- Focus on public buy-out of First Bus
- Solve the problem of how to pay for the new service
- Continuous pressure through lobbying and street protest
- Build bridges with key partners – public bodies, unions, workers
- Engage people at the periphery
- Engage young people
- Promote reducing social exclusion
- Get out and talk to people
- Spread through social media
- Creative direct action (e.g. charter buses for a day and make them free)
- Grass-roots campaigning with local surveys
- Promote air quality
- Survey bus-users
- Use the COP26 big opportunity, particularly pointing to the shaming of Councils if they still have their current shoddy services at that point
- Bring together case studies from round the world to strengthen our case
- Make the case to workers
- Accessibility is key

