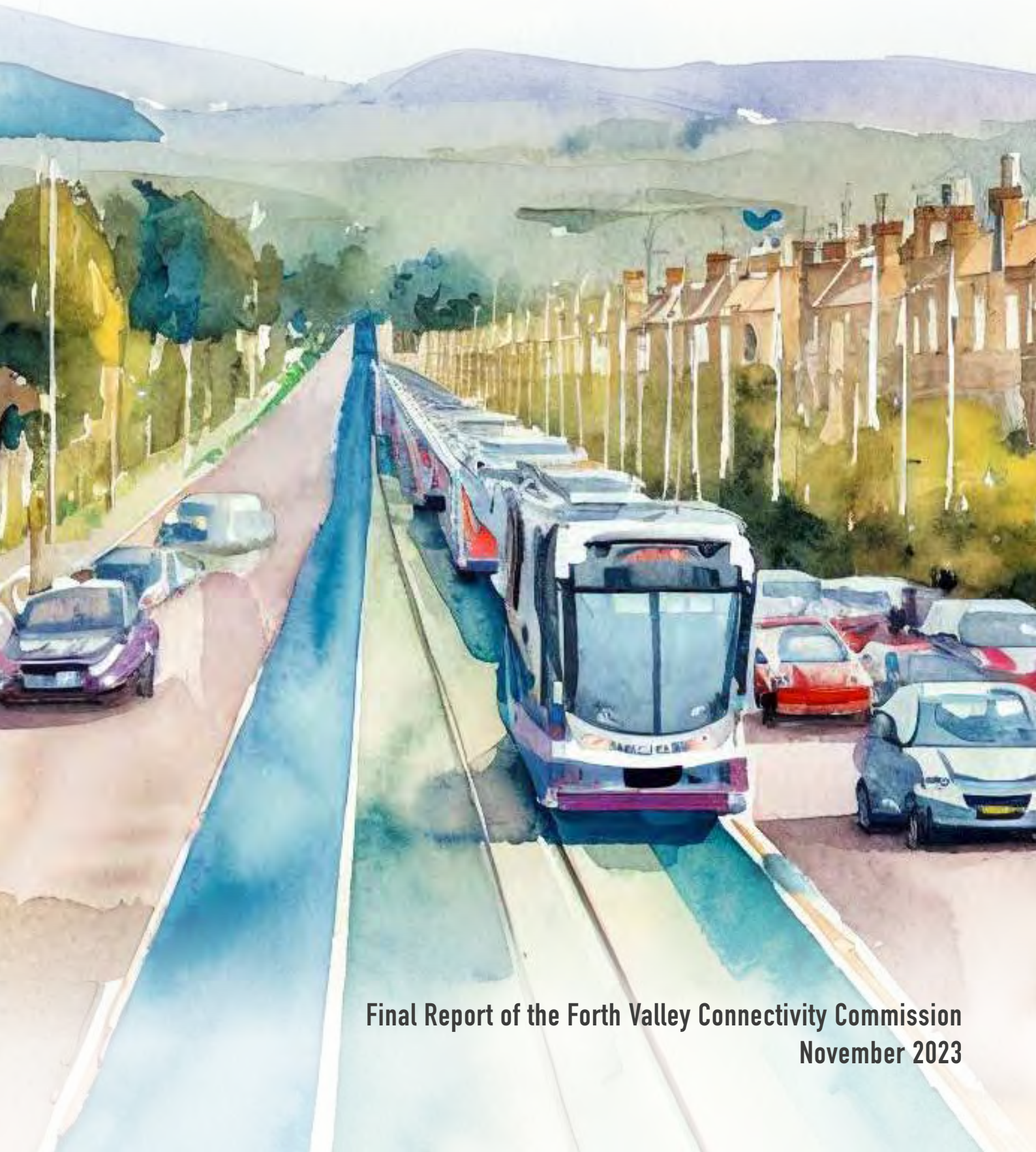


Bridging Divides: Connecting Communities across the Forth Valley



**Final Report of the Forth Valley Connectivity Commission
November 2023**

Chair's Foreword

The Forth Valley Connectivity Commission was established in September 2021 to consider how the region's economic potential can be maximised through enhanced connectivity. The substantive conclusion of the Commission's final report is that there needs to be much more meaningful collaboration, at regional level, to solve the transport and connectivity challenges facing Stirling, Clackmannanshire and Falkirk.

Our February 2022 Issues Report explained how better connectivity could unlock the full economic potential of the Forth Valley and improve the quality of life for its people. The report also set out a challenge to the region's citizens, businesses, service providers, and political leaders: should we settle for a transport system that is merely good enough, or do we have the vision and commitment to move from good to great, and to create something matching best practice around the world?

Our Final Report sets out a region-wide agenda for transformational change in the level and quality of connectivity across the Forth Valley. We propose three 'big moves' for the region's urban centres, including radically enhanced and fully integrated bus services and active travel networks linking them closer together. Without these, the region will struggle to maximise its future performance, play its part in delivering Scotland's climate change obligations, and move towards an economy that is more sustainable and inclusive.

These changes would drive quick wins for each of the region's three local authority areas, setting an exciting direction for regional transformation in the years ahead. There are significant opportunities for the Forth Valley if it can overcome divides between competing interests, embrace effective collaboration, and deliver the kind of transport and connectivity that it deserves.

Bob Duff
Chair, Forth Valley Connectivity Commission
November 2023



About the Commission

The Forth Valley Connectivity Commission is an independent group of transport professionals, regional leaders and community representatives brought together to set out a future vision for transport and mobility across Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Stirling. The Commission was set up to help the region's three Local Authorities collaborate to develop a shared vision for transport and mobility that complements the investment priorities of the Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Region Deal, the Falkirk Growth Deal and the forthcoming Regional Economic Strategy. Moreover, the Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2023-4 maintains a focus on thriving regional economies, with an emphasis on collaboration and re-gional empowerment¹. Better transport in the region will add value to the economy by leveraging additional private sector investment and

developing the green skills base that the region will need in future to decarbonise and sustain a strong base of highly skilled, well paid jobs as part of the 'Just Transition' to Net Zero.

The Commission was formally launched on 27 September 2021 with a clear remit:

“To develop a coherent and compelling vision for transport and connectivity which will benefit the people and places of the Forth Valley.”

Details about the members of the Commission can be found at Annex 1.

How did the Commission operate?

The vision and recommended actions contained in this report have been developed over a period of almost two years. The Commission's findings are based on analysis of available datasets and evidence gathered from a range of stakeholders who were invited to speak to members of the Commission. Initial findings from this process were detailed in the Commission's February 2022 Issues Report.

In addition to inviting written evidence from local industry and commerce, public transport providers, further and higher education institutions, land use and planning bodies and the wider public sector², the Commission made a particular effort to engage those sections of society that are not always heard in similar exercises. Searching out these voices was essential to understand the complex needs of

the region's communities. This meant hearing directly from community-based and third sector organisations whose footprints extend and overlap, from rural Stirlingshire in the north and west to the industrial and urban clusters in the south and east.

The Commission gathered evidence in autumn 2021, using committee-style oral evidence sessions alongside targeted calls for written evidence³. Community participation involved a workshop organised through third sector partners, while special provision for the voice of the next generation was made through 1Future, a young people's forum organised in conjunction with Forth Valley College.

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/programme-government-2023-24/pages/4/>

² See Annex 2 for those who gave evidence to the Commission.

³ See Annex 3 for the questions posed to those supplying evidence.

Introduction

Planning for transport and connectivity is assumed to be a patient business, characterised by stability and long-term trends; mindsets are about managing traffic levels, and major, long-term projects to improve or reshape transport provision.

The Covid-19 pandemic shattered this.

Overnight, we witnessed the biggest changes in travel behaviour in modern times. Demand for public transport collapsed. More people walked in their communities or drove to retail parks to access services. Patterns of consumption, underpinned by transport systems, were upended as economic activity shifted away from town and city centres.

Climate change presents another challenge. With only seven years until the 2030 emissions reduction target that Scotland must meet to reach Net Zero in line with international commitments, transport emissions remain stubbornly high, and key trends are moving in the wrong direction. Scotland has failed to match the rhetoric of its bold emissions reduction targets with the actions necessary to achieve them⁴.

Transport and connectivity planning is therefore no longer about patience. Meeting our climate commitments will require radical behavioural change within the planning horizon of an average infrastructure project. Economic restructuring and the 'cost of living crisis' bring into focus how opportunities that are available to people in terms of work, education, healthcare and leisure depend on transport. For all too many, no bus means no job.

These are national and international challenges, but also regional challenges. Meeting climate commitments through measures such as the 20% reduction in road traffic km

cannot be the responsibility of someone or somewhere else; it has to happen here, too. Just because during the last 40 years the Forth Valley has been dominated by car-dependent development does not mean that there is an opt-out from doing things differently. Each part of Scotland must play its role, to the fullest extent possible, no matter how challenging.

This also necessitates behaviour change within the region's institutions. Delivering the changes we need will require an intensity of collaboration absent for some time. Investment decisions must benefit the region wholesale, rather than reinforce a zero-sum game of competition between its three local authorities.

There are, however, enormous opportunities. The relatively small size of the communities in the Forth Valley means that the potential for active travel (bringing improved health and wellbeing, and more vibrant, local economies that retain more of their spending power) is clear. The polycentric nature of the region's geography means that by focusing on the bus, a better public transport system can be built incrementally, with early wins creating the conditions for substantive, sustainable transformation.

The Forth Valley is at a crossroads. Critical choices about its future must be made now. Scotland's journey to Net Zero will involve far-reaching, disruptive changes to our established ways of living, working, and travelling. The challenge for the Forth Valley is to respond to this game-changing shift by developing a fully-integrated transport and connectivity system that contributes to the national decarbonisation effort and provides the maximum possible benefit to its people and places. The Commission's recommendations set out how this challenge can be met, head on.

⁴ Scottish Emission Targets & Progress in reducing emissions in Scotland – 2022 Report to Parliament- Climate Change Committee (theccc.org.uk)

Challenges and Opportunities: a regional approach to tackling the Forth Valley's connectivity 'trilemma'



The Commission was set the task of exploring how enhanced connectivity in the region could support the Forth Valley economy as it transitions to Net Zero, driving enhanced prosperity and delivering cleaner, more inclusive growth. This is particularly important alongside the major investments in the regional economy including through the Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Region Deal, and the Falkirk Growth Deal, which provide a package of multi-million pound, targeted state investment in innovation, employment, skills and infrastructure, aimed at putting the regional economy on a sustainable footing.

By considering the region's connectivity needs against radical changes in travel behaviour, stretching national decarbonisation commitments and the distinctive perspective of the Growth Deals, the Commission believed it was imperative to develop bold and innovative transport solutions that were closely aligned to these national policy frameworks, but also of a scale to match their ambitions. Without a clear, long-term focus on developing significantly improved connectivity, the Forth Valley risked constraining the benefits of the Growth Deal investment, failing to make its contribution to decarbonisation, and falling behind as

other regions within Scotland provide more efficient and desirable places to live and do business.

These objectives cannot be delivered unless a regional blueprint for improving connectivity is put in place. Regional working on the Growth Deals and the emerging Regional Economic Strategy will enable policies in the National Strategy for Economic Transformation⁵ and the fourth National Planning Framework⁶ to be implemented successfully and at pace.

In determining its recommendations, the Commission has considered how improved connectivity can support local communities and livelihoods, boost national productivity, and provide a global example of how a region anchored to a carbon-intensive economy can make a just, inclusive transition to carbon neutral prosperity.

The issues facing the Forth Valley in achieving this transition were set out in the form of a **'Trilemma'**: three interlocking challenges demanding an integrated response. The region needs to tackle these challenges directly, seizing the opportunities for transformation.

⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-national-strategy-economic-transformation-delivery-plans-october-2022/>

⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-planning-framework-4/>

City Region and Growth Deals in the Forth Valley

Investment in the Forth Valley through the Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Region Deal and Falkirk Growth Deal aims to transform the region's economic trajectory, building robust foundations for productivity and inclusive growth.

The Stirling and Clackmannanshire Deal is a £214 million investment bringing together £90.2 million of funding from the Scottish and UK Governments and a further £123.8 from regional partners, including Stirling and Clackmannanshire councils and the University of Stirling.

The Falkirk Growth Deal will combine a package of £80 million investment from the UK Government and Scottish Government, along with £50.8 million from local partners, resulting in a total investment package of £130.8 million.

The two deals will collectively unlock a projected £1.65 billion in additional private investment across Forth Valley and deliver an additional 7,000 jobs.



The full Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Region Deal was signed in February 2020. The Heads of Terms Agreement for the Falkirk Growth Deal was published in December 2021.



1. Supporting a Net Zero Region

The Forth Valley's industrial base is one of Scotland's economic hotspots. The activity centred on Grangemouth is a major source of regional employment, but its place as an anchor for the regional economy is an issue at the heart of the transition to Net Zero. Investment in the future of Grangemouth's industry, as part of a transition away from a carbon-intensive economy, has the potential to lead the re-shaping of the region's economic footprint through the pioneering of innovative new technologies and services. However, in doing so, these new employment opportunities need to be available to all, including those isolated from Grangemouth's jobs by the existing transport system. A genuinely integrated system would better connect key economic centres such as Grangemouth with the wider region, including communities and individuals currently excluded due to a lack of service or prohibitive travel costs.

2. Making people and places more productive

Stirling, Falkirk and Clackmannanshire are well connected to surrounding economic centres, in particular Glasgow and Edinburgh. It is often easier to travel in and out of the region to these cities than it is to travel within or between local communities in the region itself to access employment, healthcare or other services. As Scotland's town and city centres look to recover following the pandemic, and assess their future in an increasingly digital economy, there is an opportunity to re-evaluate and respond to the region's connectivity needs in a way that supports a recentring of economic activity to support vibrant and viable places. Both Glasgow and Edinburgh are already seeing significant redevelopment proposals for their city centres, envisaging the replacement of car-dependent retailing, business and leisure areas with dense, multi-use districts designed for active travel and public transport access.



⁷ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-planning-framework-4/>

3. Planning for inclusive growth across the region

Intersected by motorways and major roads connecting larger urban centres, the Forth Valley has witnessed a proliferation of housing developments that are car-dependent and reinforce the number of longer journeys by private vehicle, rather than shorter journeys by public transport or active travel. The Scottish Government's Fourth National Planning Framework⁷, adopted as Policy in February 2023, has 'Living Locally' as a key objective. 'Living Locally' is an expression of the '20-minute neighbourhood' idea and envisages that communities provide a diverse mix of housing, employment, shopping, education and healthcare services close at hand, and accessible on foot or by bike. Scotland is not alone in pursuing these objectives. Across Europe and beyond, planning for enhanced regional connectivity will be linked to supporting communities that are healthier, greener and more prosperous, and facilitate more agile ways of working.

Our Issues Report concluded that in future, more low-density, spatially distributed patterns of development would impede rather than facilitate prosperity. Better connectivity between denser, high-quality places will make it easier for people to access what they need without having to leave the region. Investment in connectivity needs to support the regional economy and ensure that moving about within the region is as easy as it is to travel in and out of it.

The Commission was in no doubt that this shift in emphasis would require significant changes to behaviour, funding profiles and service design, but these changes are essential if we are to move to low carbon connectivity.

Our Issues Report culminated by posing with three key questions arising from the Trilemma:

1. Which current practices must we stop, which emerging ones must we accelerate, and which new ones must we initiate to transition the Forth Valley from carbon intensity to carbon neutrality?
2. How can better connectivity across the Forth Valley support changes to the way in which we work, in light of both the Covid-19 pandemic and the Climate Emergency, to improve the productivity of our people and the quality of our places?
3. What changes must we make to our transport networks to support sustainable, inclusive growth and ensure that all communities across the Forth Valley are afforded the opportunity to benefit from new technologies afforded by the move to Net Zero?

Below: Out of town retail developments exacerbate reliance on the use of private cars



From Challenges to Action – Delivering High Quality Connectivity

What ‘big moves’ do we recommend?

Move 1: Stop making things worse

Transport is a derived demand; we travel because we have to in order to go to school, to work, to socialise, and access services. This means that where we put things (e.g., employment, hospitals, colleges, shops) really matters. Housing is most critical because residential location frames the choice of transport people use for almost all of the trips they make.

Our Issues Report highlighted how over the last 40 years, housing development in the Forth Valley has steadily moved towards sites, especially those close to the motorway network, that offer the best accessibility by car. We know that if we build houses without good public transport access then people will use their cars for as many trips as they can. Despite people owning more bikes than ever before, if we build houses with no safe, high quality active travel access, then the only time those bikes are used is when they’re taken on holiday in the car. We know that car-dominated places are less safe (especially for children) and that people (especially women and girls) are less likely to walk in them because they do not feel safe.

When people leave their homes, the most common purpose for their trip is to go shopping⁸. Yet retailing is, after housing, perhaps the best example of how we have made it more difficult to access what we need in daily life without a car, due to poor planning decisions. Retailing is essentially a redistributive function: the size of the retail sector is dependent on the overall size of economy. New shopping developments are often promoted in terms of the number of jobs they will create, but in reality spending is simply moved around rather than grown. Lockdown provided an immediately visible example, as spending moved out of larger town and city centres to neighbourhood shops, and online. However, for several years, the proliferation of supermarkets,

retail parks and more recently drive-through cafes and restaurants in ‘out-of-town’ locations has had a slow, steady and profound effect on where we shop, precipitating the decline of town centres.

Planning decisions in the Forth Valley originate in proposals made years ago, in a wholly different context, but are still being implemented today. The region is becoming more car dependent rather than less, despite the pressing environmental imperative to reduce car use. When key services move to car-dominated locations, that are served poorly by public transport, problems of social exclusion are exacerbated and quality of life for many, especially the vulnerable, declines.

The need to make transport and land use more joined-up has been apparent for some time, yet the relationship between the Forth Valley’s three councils is still characterised by competition for development. New housing and retailing is still being developed on sites that are quick to bring to market but make car dependence worse. Drawing a line under the development of new housing and retailing in the wrong places is the first and most important decision that the region’s local authorities must take to set the region on a path to becoming better connected, more prosperous and sustainable. All three councils must insist that all future development contributes towards a transport system that improves economic, environmental, and social outcomes, and helps the region progress towards a Just Transition to Net Zero.

This is a challenging move, and a change in mindset will be required. Without this, however, it will be difficult - if not impossible - for the region to fulfil its environmental and social obligations.

⁸ See <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/transport-and-travel-in-scotland-2019-results-from-the-scottish-household-survey/personal-travel/> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-travel-survey-2021/national-travel-survey-2021-trips-by-purpose-age-and-sex>

Move 2: Fix the region's urban centres

Town and city centres all over Scotland and the UK are struggling; the Forth Valley's key urban places are no exception. The stark truth is that Alloa, Falkirk and Stirling have been hit hard by economic restructuring and have become unattractive places to spend time and money. Some of this has been due to the impacts of the pandemic, and some due to longer term structural weaknesses in local economies that have played out over time. Successive planning decisions privileging car dependent development on out-of-town sites have also played an important role. Vacancy rates are high, the streetscape is decaying, and there are substantial tracts of disused or underused land in each place because the region has chosen to pursue car dependent development, sometimes strangling the vitality of local centres with oversized roads.

Fixing the region's urban centres will not be easy. It will take commitment on the part of local authorities, and partners in the public and private sectors, to work together to reverse decline; ensure new, high-quality development; includes affordable housing; stimulates economic investment; and creates a genuinely 'liveable place'. It will also require courage to take the kinds of decisions to reduce the impact of the car that are deemed 'difficult' by those that benefit most from the status quo. However, it is essential because reversing the decline of region's urban centres – or what might be called 're-urbanising' them – is the single most transformative action that can be taken to reduce demand for car travel, encourage walking and cycling, improve the financial sustainability of public transport, and create the conditions for the development of affordable housing.

Re-urbanising the Forth Valley's three key centres would:

- Stop further erosion of the town and city centre service base and begin the process of redeveloping it;
- Increase the number of people who live in denser environments with services close to hand, making access without a car easier, and contributing directly to the Scottish Government's car use reduction target;
- Increase the catchment of core public transport nodes, particularly railway stations, accessible by walking and cycling, making public transport more attractive for longer trips.

We should be clear that by 'fixing' urban centres we mean developing a vision for change and implementing a scale of transformation that goes significantly beyond the piecemeal redevelopment or regeneration on a plot-by-plot basis seen to date.

The centres of Alloa, Falkirk and Stirling are each dominated by physical form designed to accommodate as much car use (particularly to access retailing) as possible. Delivering a Net Zero future in which transport provision is reorientated to support active travel and public transport use as much as possible will require a much more ambitious approach than incremental rehabilitation of existing built environment: it will require comprehensive redevelopment, replacing inefficient use of space such as supermarket surface car parking, and restoring the street pattern and built density to their pre-car forms. This kind of redevelopment is already underway in Edinburgh and Glasgow. Although the scale in the Forth Valley will be smaller, the drivers of change are the same and happening on a smaller scale (see artist's impression of East Kilbride, below). There is a clear risk that the region will become a relatively less attractive place to live and work if its key urban centres do not renew themselves so that they are ready for the Net Zero future.



⁹ <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/48138/transport-and-travel-in-scotland-2019.pdf>



Move 3: Set out on the journey to creating the future transport network we need

Focusing on improving the transport system itself is our third ‘big move’ because, without first transforming the region’s approach to its places and communities to make them more resilient and sustainable, transport investment will not deliver the improvements in economic performance and quality of life that it has the potential to achieve.

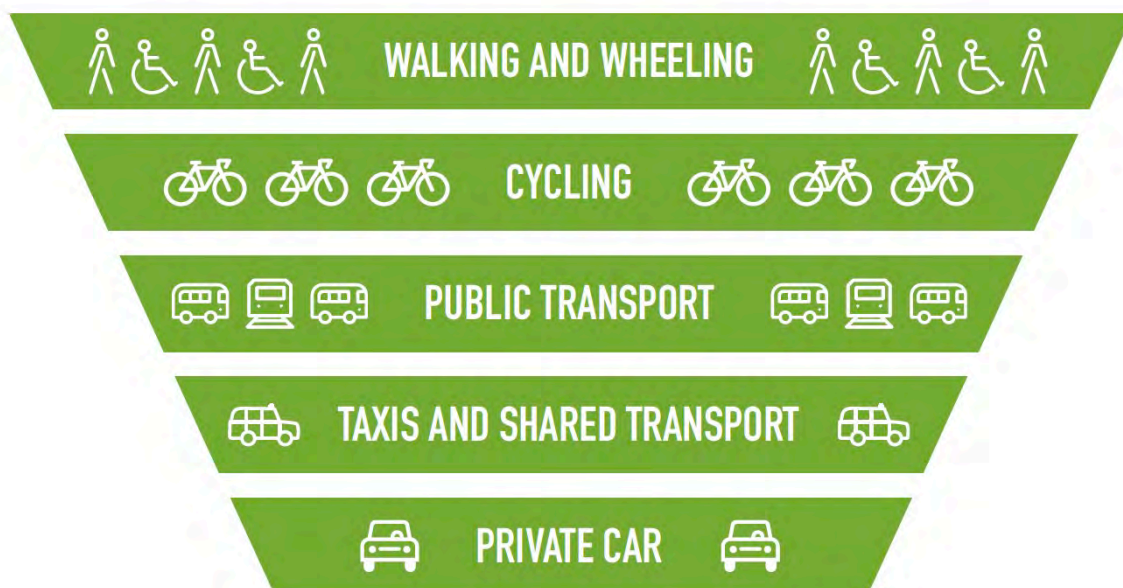
The Forth Valley has good strategic transport infrastructure: it is well served by the motorway and rail networks, with significant recent investment by the Scottish Government in both, but particularly in the electrification and upgrading of the train service. This rail investment is crucial for freight as well as passenger use, and offers potential to support the development of new economic activity at key locations, e.g. the potential for green hydrogen at Grangemouth. However, in common with other parts of Scotland, it is the network for shorter, more local trips that are more likely to be made by bus that has been relatively neglected. Given the median bus and rail journeys in Scotland are around 6 and 20km respectively⁹, it is easy to understand how the poor quality of local infrastructure networks can be a significant constraint on the level of connectivity between key places.

Throughout its work, the Commission has sought to develop recommendations that ensure the Forth Valley is prepared for the transition to Net Zero, and also that it ensures that transition is as fair as possible. Given the timescales over

which climate action is required and considering those people and places in the region that are least well served by the existing transport network, investment in the bus system and active travel will make the biggest and fastest difference to prosperity and quality of life in the region for the most people. Both networks should have ambitious and comprehensive visions to be best in class, with a programme of improvements that can be implemented consistently in deliverable packages, starting as soon as possible. Longer term, the importance of digital connectivity should also be considered.



Prioritising Sustainable Transport



Active travel



Transforming the quality of our active travel networks is an important part of Scottish Government policy¹⁰, and internationally¹¹. Walking, wheeling and cycling are accessible to almost everyone, low cost, and promote healthy lives. More money is retained in local neighbourhoods that are easily accessible on foot or by bike, and social cohesion is improved when people interact in their communities. Safer cycling infrastructure that is properly segregated from road traffic is much more likely to be used and to tempt people away from the car for short trips.

There is significant scope in the Forth Valley to accelerate the ongoing development of high-quality cycling infrastructure and to link up and enhance the networks currently being developed by each of the three councils. There are clear opportunities where joining up efforts across boundaries would deliver meaningful improvements, such as in providing high quality cycle access to the University from Clackmannanshire. More widely, the creation of a genuinely regional network that links communities to key economic, healthcare and educational

locations effectively, irrespective of boundaries, and is designed to capture the benefits of emerging technologies such as e-bikes, would provide real improvements to connectivity at an affordable cost.

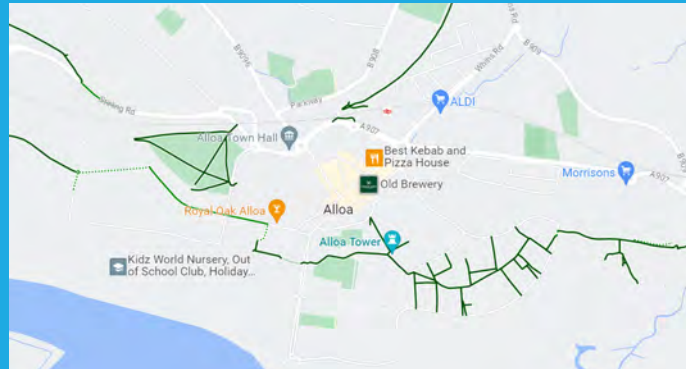
Crucially, active travel doesn't have to be about cycling: walking is the most accessible form of exercise, has immediate, tangible health benefits, and improving the pedestrian environment as part of fixing urban centres can play an important role in creating a virtuous cycle of investment. Many key locations in the region are so dominated by car traffic that it is unattractive or even impossible to walk safely. Improving the public realm so that people feel safe walking and wheeling is also one of the single most important things that can be done to help ensure disabled people and others with additional mobility needs are included in local community life¹². Such design must begin from the understanding that the population is diverse, and that places must be fully accessible to all irrespective of age, gender or mobility, and have appropriate service provision from signage to seating and toilets available.

¹⁰ <https://www.transport.gov.scot/active-travel/>

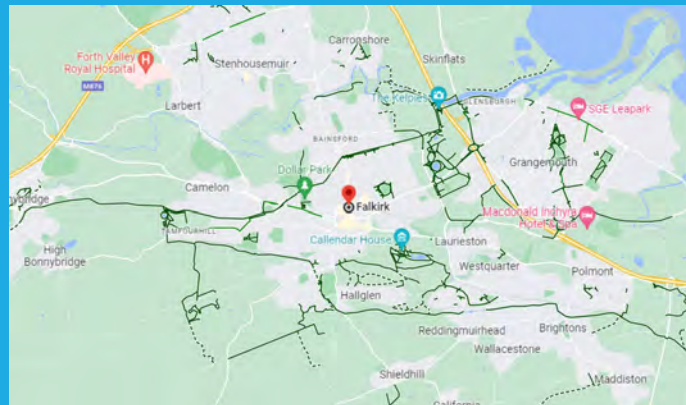
¹¹ <https://www.itf-oecd.org/increasing-walking-cycling-cities-roundtable>

¹² https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1044542/inclusive-mobility-a-guide-to-best-practice-on-access-to-pedestrian-and-transport-infrastructure.pdf

Existing segregated cycle routes, Alloa



Existing segregated cycle routes, Falkirk



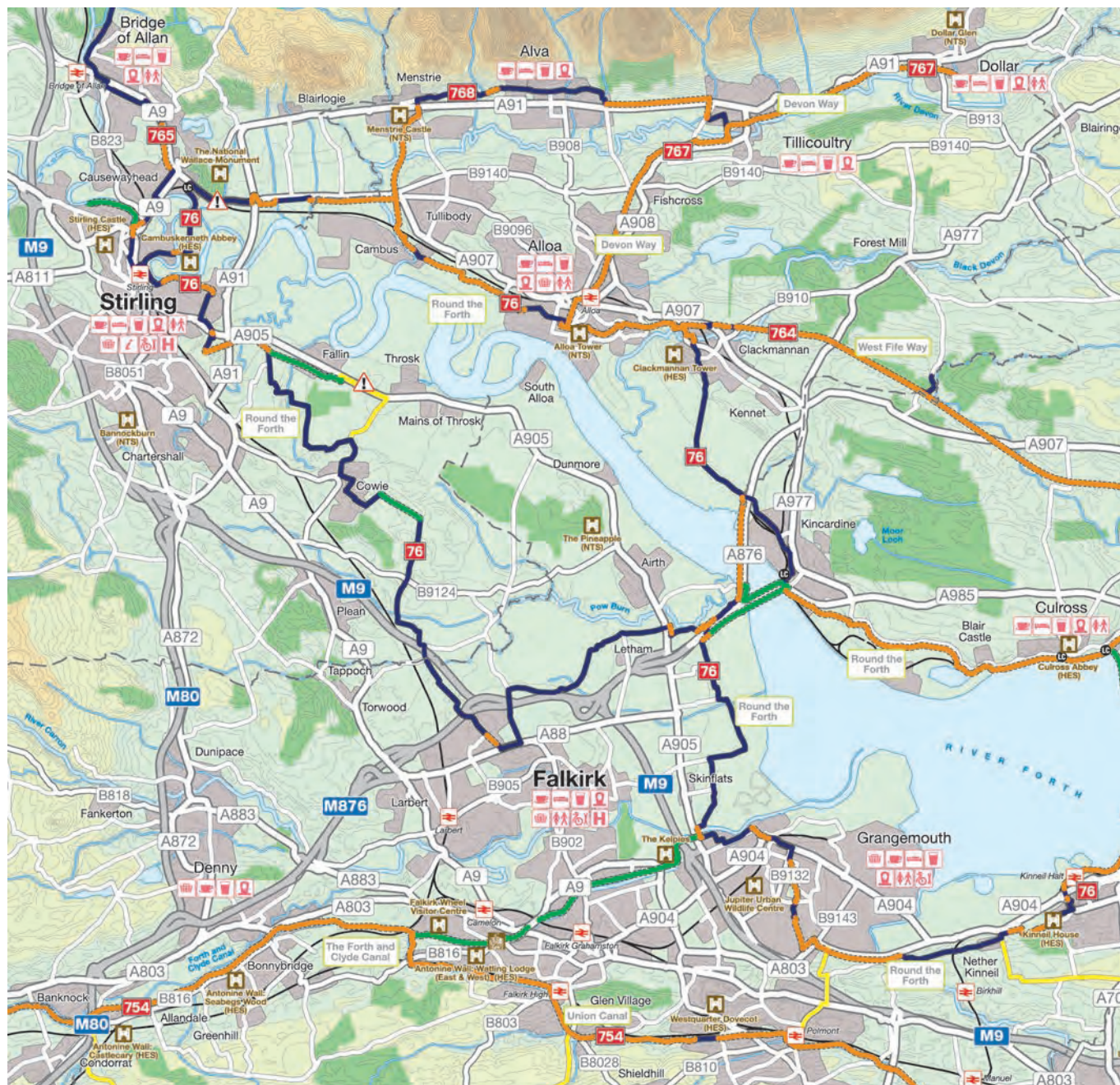
Existing segregated cycle routes, Stirling



Existing segregated or off-road cycle routes in all three of the region's urban centres are piecemeal, and don't connect communities to each other or existing transport hubs. The Commission welcomes ongoing strategic improvements to active travel networks currently planned or underway, but there is significant scope to further improve the connectivity within and between individual communities.

Active travel networks – both for safe cycling and safe, inclusive walking and wheeling – should be planned intelligently to link all communities with existing regional transport hubs e.g., rail stations, and other public transport interchanges.

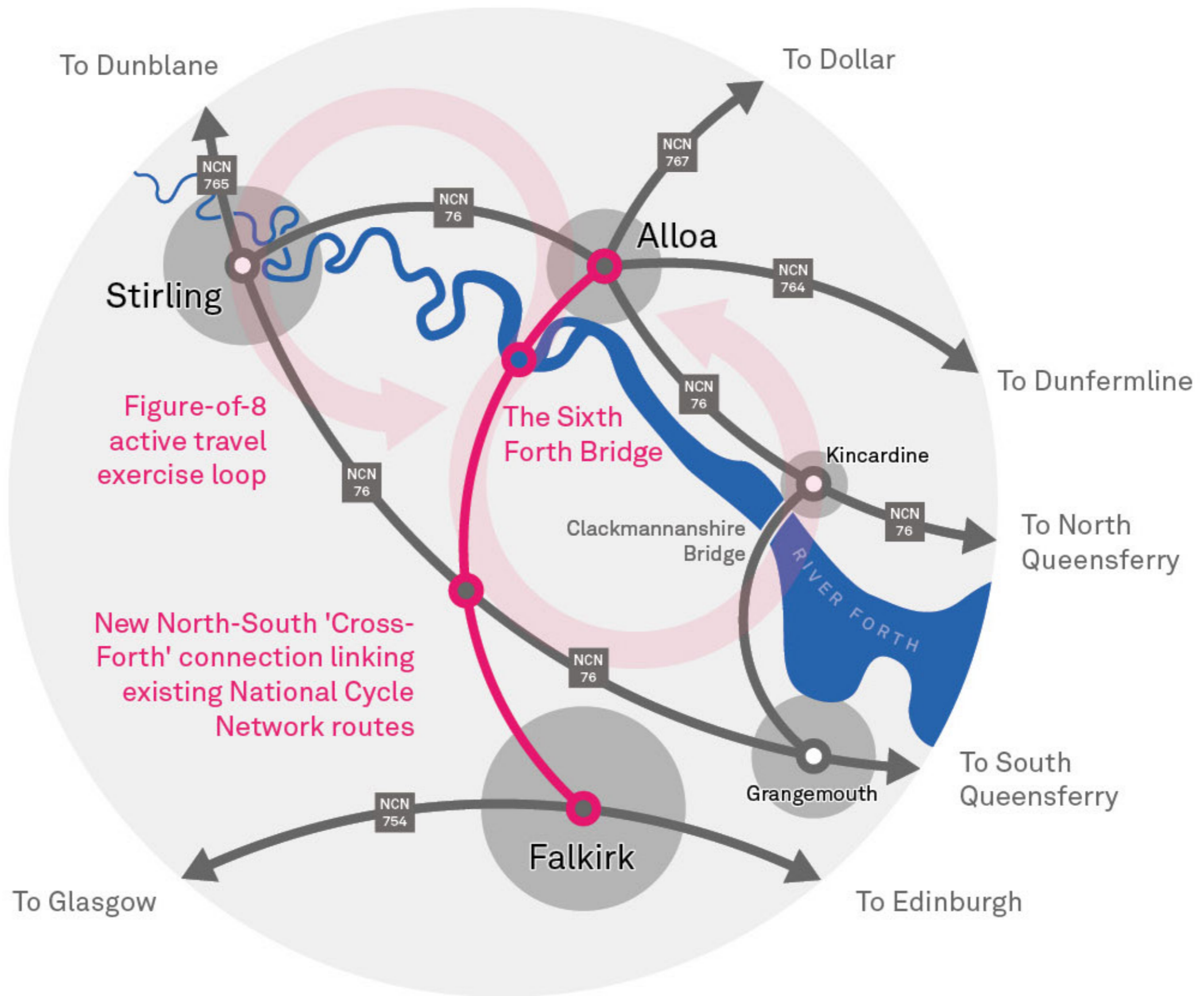
The Forth Valley's existing regional, long-distance cycle network



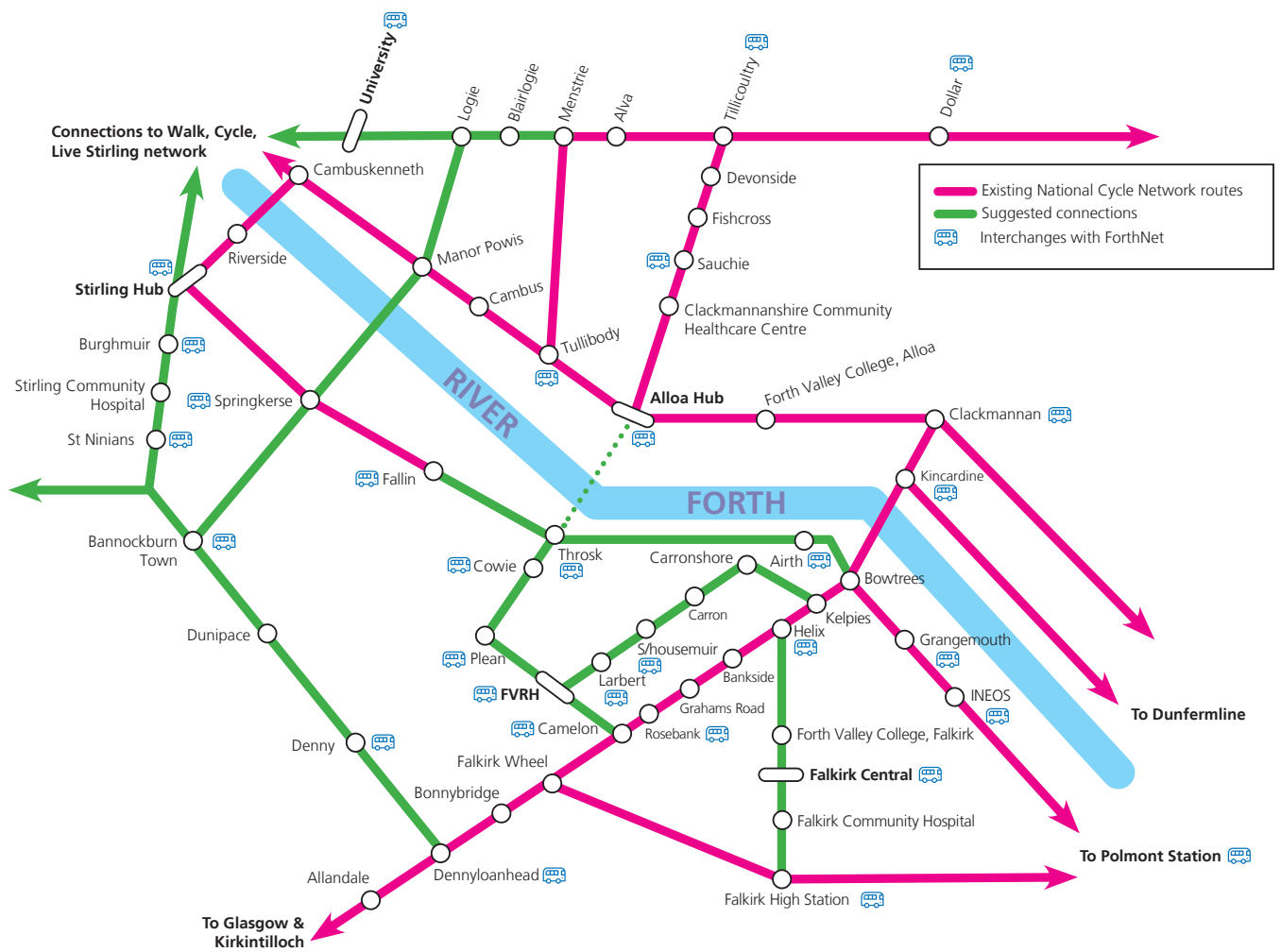
Longer-distance active travel routes should also be enhanced. The existing regional cycle network features significant sections of on-road routes, which avoid heavy traffic but in doing so, create longer journeys or bypass communities. More direct, segregated routes should be considered where appropriate, connecting into community interchanges served by other modes of public transport. Specific attention should be paid to gaps between the strategic networks in each local authority, to create safe, seamless journeys across local authority boundaries.

Consideration should be given to improving linkages between unconnected communities, including new

connections north and south of the Forth. The image overleaf displays existing plans, published by Knight Architects and S82 consulting, demonstrating how a 'sixth Forth Bridge' rebuilt on the site of a former railway crossing can enhance the existing active travel network, linking National Cycle Network routes north and south of the river and providing a 'figure of eight' active travel loop. The benefits of such a new connection would be felt particularly in communities in south Clackmannanshire, west Falkirk, and Stirling's eastern villages, at the intersection of all three local authorities, where there are existing plans for economic development.



Potential upgraded Forth Valley active travel network



Buses

Evidence shows that investment in buses is often the most effective transport intervention we can make to improve access to jobs, promote inclusive growth, and reduce the unfairness in accessibility to opportunities that generates inequality¹³. Improving bus services is also scalable: provision of new vehicles, enhancing bus priority on existing routes, and constructing new dedicated bus infrastructure can be done in stages and in packages of different sizes and costs as finances permit. The crucial elements of a high-quality bus system are to set a vision that places buses at the heart of the transport network rather than a last resort, and then to get on and deliver improvements consistently towards achieving that vision. Bus services must also be designed to be inclusive and open to as wide a range of people as possible¹⁴.

The Commission recommends that the Forth Valley should develop a rolling, five-year plan for buses in the region, focused on achieving net zero and delivering improvements from year one, and which over time will put in place a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) network, which we call ForthNet, linking all of the region's communities together with a quality of service matching the best in similar regions internationally.

The vision for ForthNet should be to:

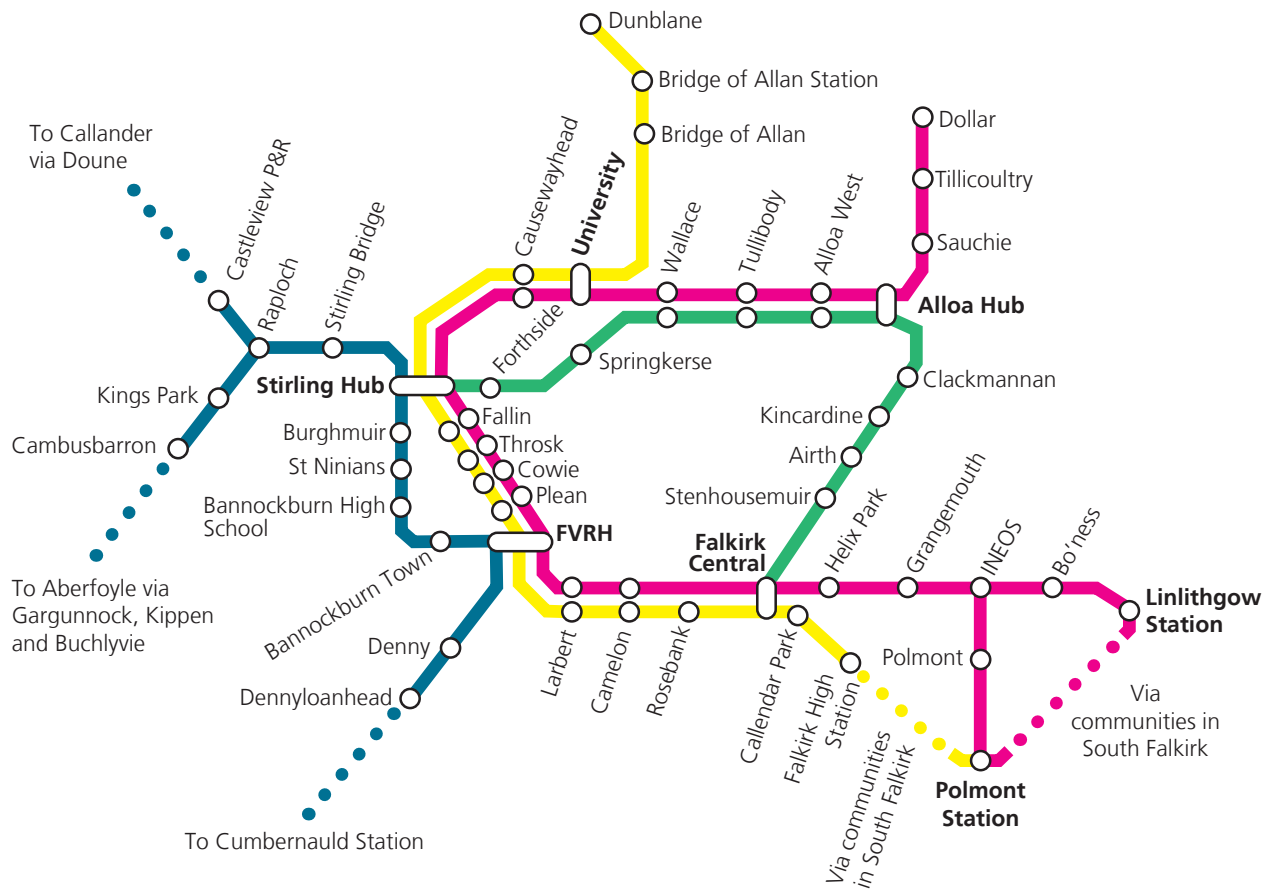
- Identify key opportunities to implement bus priority measures on the existing road network as soon as possible so that current bus services are made more reliable and sustainable as a matter of urgency;
- Work with the Scottish Government to plan for a reformed fares structure that maximises the use of the bus network in the Forth Valley, makes new services viable, and supports socially necessary, early morning and late night routes;
- Develop a strategy to decarbonise the region's bus fleet and support local vehicle manufacturing;
- Institute a rolling five-year plan to build, incrementally, a new, dedicated bus infrastructure, including segregated alignments where justified, to deliver a long-term vision in which the bus rapid transit system is used intensively by people across the region to access employment, education and other opportunities. Existing funds identified for road improvements should be redirected to kickstart this transformation.
- Integrate fully with an enhanced active travel network, with appropriate interchanges, so that multi-modal journeys can be planned and completed with ease.



¹³ <https://urbantransportgroup.org/system/files/general-docs/Bus Policy Briefing Sept 2022 FINAL.pdf>

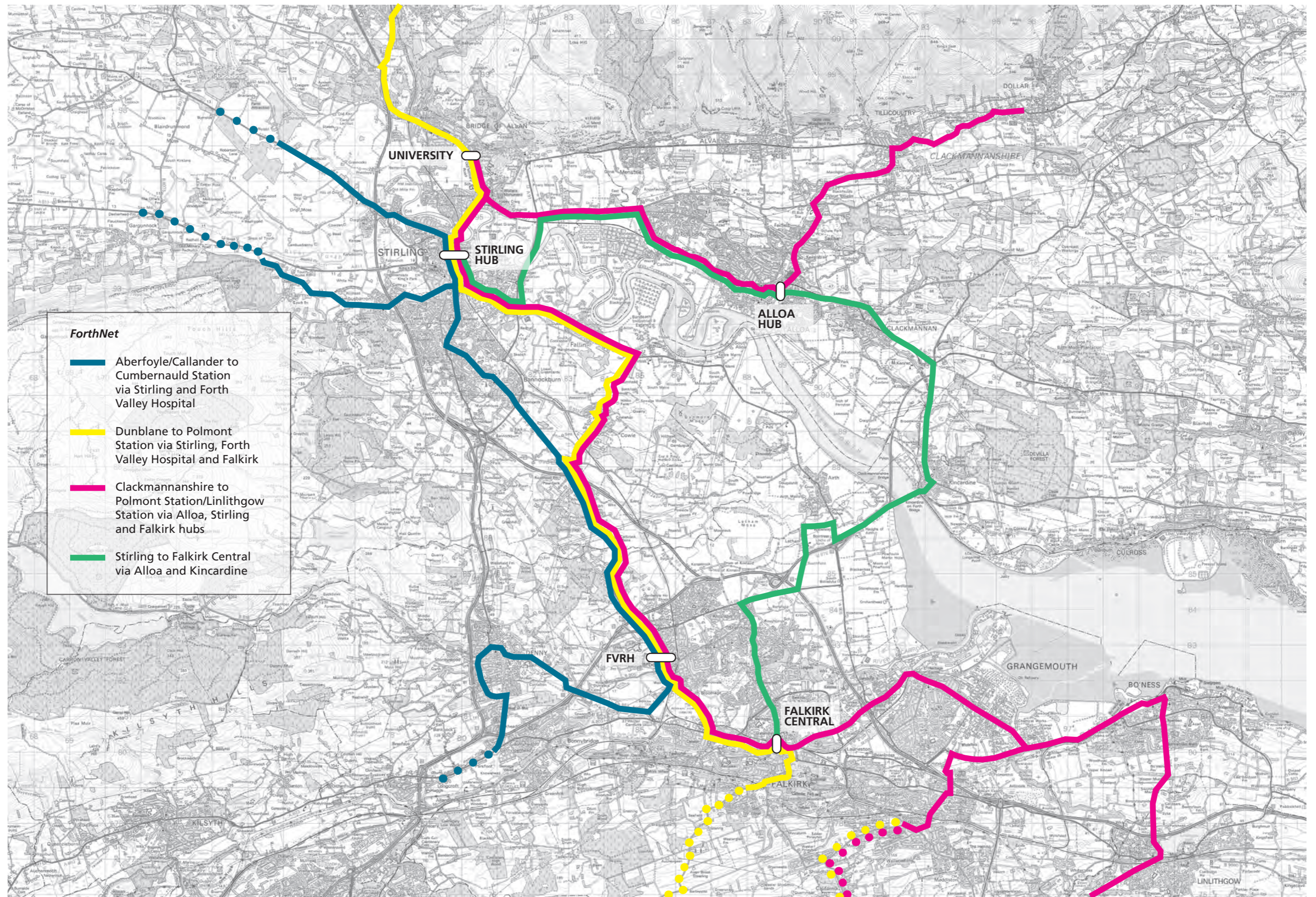
¹⁴ https://www.urbantransportgroup.org/system/files/general-docs/Arup UTG Equitable Mobility_final.pdf

Potential *ForthNet* Bus Rapid Transit network





Potential *ForthNet* network map



A note on rail

The Forth Valley has a well-developed rail infrastructure that has seen significant investment in recent years, most importantly the electrification of the core triangle of central belt routes to/from Edinburgh and Glasgow to Alloa and Dunblane. There is significant unused capacity on these modernised routes, for both passengers and freight. The economics and operational imperatives of the railway mean that this capacity is best used for longer journeys between different regions of Scotland, including to/from the Forth Valley to Edinburgh, Glasgow, Perth and beyond, rather than providing slower local services that call at all stations. This is because stopping trains significantly reduce capacity for other flows, and importantly the rail freight that will have a crucial role in reducing carbon emissions by reducing the number of HGVs on the road.

For this reason, the role of the railway in providing the kind of high frequency public transport service transforming accessibility within the region is likely to be relatively limited. Bus rapid transit like ForthNet is better suited to providing the kind of high-quality service for shorter trips that improves access to services and jobs and can serve many more stops than is possible by rail. This is not to say that the railway will not have an important role in the overall mix of transport services in the region, however: rail will maximise the catchment of key employment hubs beyond the region's own boundaries. Principal stations

within the region will act as nodes on both the ForthNet and active travel networks, so fast connections between these stations will support wider regional connectivity. Depending on funds available, the reopening of the line from Alloa to Dunfermline, perhaps including new stations in Clackmannanshire and east of Stirling in or near Causewayhead, could take our proposals further, providing a new strategic route for the region, opening up access to Fife and development potential for new industrial development in and around the former Longannet power station, which could provide highly accessible jobs to the region's residents. The industrial sites at Grangemouth already have a rail connection to the core network, and this represents a significant competitive advantage for the area's future development as it seeks to decarbonise.

A note on digital connectivity

Digital connectivity will be critical to a thriving, inclusive future economy. Commissioners agreed that digital networks and interoperability will also underpin world-class transport infrastructure in the age of automation. Digital connectivity is outside the scope of this report. However, if the region's transport infrastructure is to be 'best in class', the Commission suggests that any future regional digital strategy appreciates the full extent of possibilities that digital advancements provide.



Making it happen

The National Strategy for Economic Transformation notes that if Scotland is to succeed in the low carbon economy, it must:

“realise the potential of the different economic and community assets and strengths of Scotland’s regions: This will focus on supporting our regions and communities to maximize their assets through working with Scotland’s Regional Economic Partnerships to deliver strong regional economic policies and tailor interventions to evidenced regional strengths and opportunities.”¹⁵

The changes necessitated by Covid-19 have given us all an insight into how radical change is possible, and the scale of potential for more inclusive growth if we reconnect people and places effectively. The key building blocks of the Stirling & Clackmannanshire City Region Deal and Falkirk’s Growth Deal are in place; now the region’s key stakeholders need to bridge the divides between them and act collaboratively to maximise the investment attracted to the region and the benefits of this investment for its people. There are significant economies of scale, and the region stands to deliver more improvements to its transport and connectivity more quickly if it can set aside competition and embrace collaboration fully, both between its constituent local authorities, and across the urban region of central Scotland.

This report sets out the big moves that can be made, through working collaboratively, to achieve the scale of change that the Forth Valley needs and deserves. The time has come to challenge pre-existing practices, and make it easier for people to get the most from their region, without it costing the earth.

Change of the scale we will need to achieve can appear daunting, but we know that important transformations are possible when collective decisions are made to pursue them. We can already see how the electricity network in Scotland is being decarbonised at a rate faster than many people doubted would be possible. Transport needs to do the same, not just to ensure it plays its role in meeting our climate commitments, but also because by changing the way we move around, we can make the people and places of the Forth Valley healthier and more prosperous. The three ‘Big Moves’ we set out in this report would transform the transport system in the region and its economic potential, improving quality of life substantially to the benefit of everyone. The time to start making them is now.

Other similar regions in Europe and beyond are further ahead of us in this process and have already seen the benefits. They understand that change looks difficult at the beginning, but as soon people experience the rewards of doing things differently, they begin to ask why the transformation isn’t coming faster still. Don’t be daunted, make a difference.

The case for change is compelling. The choice for our leaders is clear.



¹⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-national-strategy-economic-transformation-delivery-plans-october-2022/pages/4/>

Annex 1

The members of the Commission were:

- **Chair: Bob Duff**, Former Group Vice President, Jacobs
- **Joan Aitken OBE**, Former Traffic Commissioner for Scotland
- **Lynn Blaikie**, President & Acting Chief Executive, Forth Valley Chamber of Commerce
- **Fergus Cloughley**, Chief Executive Officer, Obashi
- **Professor Iain Docherty**, Dean for the Institute for Advanced Studies, University of Stirling
- **Ross Martin**, Adviser on Regional Economies, ScotIncGrowth
- **Clara Walker**, Executive Director, Forth Environment Link
- **David Reid**, Programme Director, Fuel Change
- **Christie Frail**, Young People's representative, 1Future
- **Stefanie O'Gorman**, Director of Sustainable Economics, Ramboll

Local authority consultees:

- **Pete Leonard**, Strategic Director for Place, Clackmannanshire Council
- **Stuart Oliver**, Senior Manager for Economic Development and Communities, Stirling Council
- **Pete Reid**, Head of Economic Development, Falkirk Council

Secretariat:

- **Matt Francis**, Public Affairs Manager, University of Stirling
- **Laura Calder**, Project Support Officer, Forth Valley College
- **Stephen Jarvie**, Corporate Governance and Planning Officer at Forth Valley College
- **Paul Smart**, former Civil Servant

Annex 2

The following stakeholders provided written and oral evidence to the Commission:

Local industry and public bodies

- Ineos
 - Forth Ports
 - WH Malcolm
 - Diageo
 - Graham's Dairy Ltd
 - Cisco
 - Clackmannanshire Council
 - Falkirk Council
 - Stirling Council
 - Fife Council
 - NHS Forth Valley
 - University of Stirling
 - Scottish Canals
 - Scotland IS
 - Driven to Deliver/MaaS
 - Alexander Dennis Limited
-

Public transport

- Scotrail
- First Bus
- McGill's

Commission Member Christie Frail also convened '1Future', a satellite group of young people from the region, to ensure that the distinct needs of this group are considered.

Annex 3

The following questions were posed to stakeholders as part of the Commission's evidence gathering:

Questions for all stakeholders

1. In which ways are transport and connectivity important to your organisation?
 2. What improvements in connectivity will you need to ensure your organisation achieves Net Zero ways of working?
 3. If more people walk and cycle to/from work, or to shops or to access public services, how will this impact your organisation?
 4. Digital technology is playing an increasing role in how we conduct our business, access services, and communicate with each other. How is this increase impacting your organisation?
-

Targeted questions

- As a Forth Valley-based businesses what are your key transport and connectivity considerations? (Industry)
- How do you expect technological innovation, behaviour change and government policies to impact on the transport marketplace in the future? (Transport manufacturing and transport providers)
- How can the Forth Valley's public transport system better meet the region's transport and connectivity needs? (Public transport providers)
- How can we create more 20-minute neighbourhoods across the Forth Valley region? (Planning and land use sector)

Annex 4

Image acknowledgements

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