

Trossachs Explorer Shuttle Bus Pilot

Evaluation Report

February 2026



Image: Chris Watt

This report was produced by Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority with support from Stirling Council and Tactran.

With thanks to the project funders:



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Executive Summary

The second year of the Trossachs Explorer shuttle bus pilot aimed to build on the success of the first year by continuing to promote and encourage sustainable transport within Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park.

The evaluation used a mixed method approach to capture feedback from the public, bus drivers, local businesses, McColls and delivery partner Stirling Council. The evaluation also analysed ticket data to capture travel trends, types of users and performance. This methodology ensured a balanced understanding of the service's impacts while uncovering areas for future enhancement.

The findings demonstrate the Trossachs Explorer has continued to deliver strong positive impacts for people who live, work and visit the area. Feedback shows high levels of satisfaction, growing confidence in public transport, and clear benefits for car-free access, rural access, social interaction and the visitor economy.

Key headlines from responses to the evaluation include:

- **Very high approval:** 94% of respondents felt positive about the service, and 92% are likely to use it again.
- **Increased confidence in public transport:** 90% said the service improved their confidence in public transport.
- **Wide range of trip purposes:** the service supported walking and hiking, tourism and leisure, car-free travel, local access, work and volunteering, and connections to other transport services.

“It's fantastic that you've got this service in place, for people without cars and for people wanting more sustainable transport options for their nature trips.

Thanks very much for the initiative, and I really hope it will be around in the future as well!” Survey respondent.

Feedback clearly supports continuation and expansion to build on this success. There is appetite for the service to become permanent, run year-round, offer more frequent journeys, improve connections with other transport services, review ticket pricing and provide clearer information to help even more people travel sustainably.

Overall, the Trossachs Explorer has shown how a well-designed, good quality shuttle bus service can support rural communities, boost the local economy and create memorable visitor experiences.



Figure 1 Trossachs Explorer at Loch Katrine
(Image: Chris Watt)

1. Introduction

This report evaluates the second-year pilot of the Trossachs Explorer launched by Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority (National Park Authority) in partnership with Stirling Council, local stakeholders and funders.

1.1 Purpose

Building on a successful pilot in 2024, the second year of the Trossachs Explorer shuttle bus service ran from Monday 7th July to 5th October 2025. The second year drew on extensive feedback and evaluation from 2024, when 91% of surveyed passengers said they would use the service again.

The service, operated this year by McColls, trialled further enhancements including an extended route and low emission buses as part of ongoing efforts by partners to provide sustainable travel options, reduce congestion, ease parking pressures and help visitors and residents connect and protect the National Park's special environment.

This year the Trossachs Explorer was supported with funding from the National Park Authority, Tactran through Transport Scotland's People and Place programme, Stirling Council and Callander Community Council through Braes of Doune Community Fund.

1.2 Evaluation

This report summarises the monitoring and evaluation carried out by partners to assess the impact of the Trossachs Explorer with the goal of supporting delivery of strategic objectives and the wider National Park Mobility Partnership programme.

The primary aim of the evaluation was to capture feedback from those who either used or did not use the Trossachs Explorer and from those involved in its delivery. The evaluation also captured data on usage and feedback from the extensive communications campaign.

Evaluation was also undertaken by Tactran to support delivery of Transport Scotland's People and Place programme which is designed to support sustainable and active travel behaviour change initiatives.



Figure 2 Trossachs Explorer 2025 launch (image: Chris Watt)

2. Evolution of the Trossachs Explorer

2.1 Year 1 (2024)

2.1.1 About

The first year of the Trossachs Explorer was delivered between 1st July and 30th September 2024, connecting Callander to Aberfoyle and served several remote visitor hotspot destinations which are otherwise only accessible by private car.

A primary aim of the service was to act as a proof of concept, demonstrating appetite, the value of brand and marketing, the ability to replace private car journeys (especially for leisure), and the value of such services which address car dependency.



Figure 3 Trossachs Explorer 2024 launch

After several years of attempting to secure an operator, the pilot was successfully delivered last year in partnership with Stirling Council with integral support from wider stakeholders and funders. The service was operated by Midland Bluebird, based in Bannockburn, which enabled the route to tie in with the X10A connecting Balfron/Glasgow with Aberfoyle and Stirling.

The project was supported with funding from BMW UK, as part of its Recharge in Nature partnership with UK National Parks and Paths for All's Smarter Choices, Smarter Places Open Fund, on behalf of the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland.

2.1.2 Key highlights

Key highlights of year 1 included:

- **5,137** passenger journeys.
- **52%** of passengers travelled for free under the National Concession Card schemes, including those under 22 and over 60.
- **75+** business and community organisations engaged to support with its delivery.
- **2** buses each with capacity for 63 people.
- **97%** of services ran as scheduled.
- **16** drivers were trained to operate on the route.
- **27** National Park Volunteer Rangers provided support on the ground.



Figure 4 Trossachs Explorer 2024 promotional leaflet

2.1.3 Evaluation findings

A comprehensive Evaluation Report was independently produced by Strathclyde University to identify the impact of the pilot included successes and improvements.

The **positive impact** of the service covered a range of themes including:

- Enhanced accessibility: the pilot opened up remote areas, new trails and destinations within the Park.
- Support for local communities and businesses: the pilot strengthened social and economic ties within the Park.
- Convenience and reliability: the pilot offered an easy-to use, friendly and dependable alternative to car travel for many.
- Environmental benefits: the pilot promoted sustainable tourism and encouraged responsible recreation within the Park.
- Strong branding: the pilot provided visually appealing, professional and cohesive branding to convey awareness, reliability and quality.
- Social atmosphere: the pilot promoted connections between people and created a friendly and welcoming environment.
- Alignment with strategic goals: the pilot contributed to sustainability efforts and accessibility goals within the Park and demonstrated the potential to balance environmental preservation with tourism growth.

The **recommendations/aspirations for enhancement** included:

- Enhance marketing and awareness: launch promotions earlier and extend marketing to regional transport hubs.
- Improve integration with other transport services: align timetables with wider services and offer integrated ticketing.
- Aspirations for operational enhancement: provide more sustainable vehicles, increase timetable frequency and consider more circular routes.
- Extend service season and coverage: extend the service to align with the tourist season and consider a year-round service.
- Towards enhancing accessibility and user experience: develop clearer signage, introduce onboard features like stop announcements and investigate options for facilitating bikes on board.
- Build community engagement and trust: highlight passenger success stories and partner with businesses to encourage greater uptake.
- Towards bolstering environmental commitment: transition to electric buses to reinforce sustainability efforts and develop initiatives to quantify the environmental impact of reduced car journeys.
- Facilitating digital solutions for ease of use: facilitate access to user-friendly digital tools such as an app or online platform for journey planning, ticket purchasing and real-time updates.
- Enhance inclusivity: continue to offer concession-friendly pricing while exploring additional discounts for families and youth groups.

2.2 Year 2 (2025)

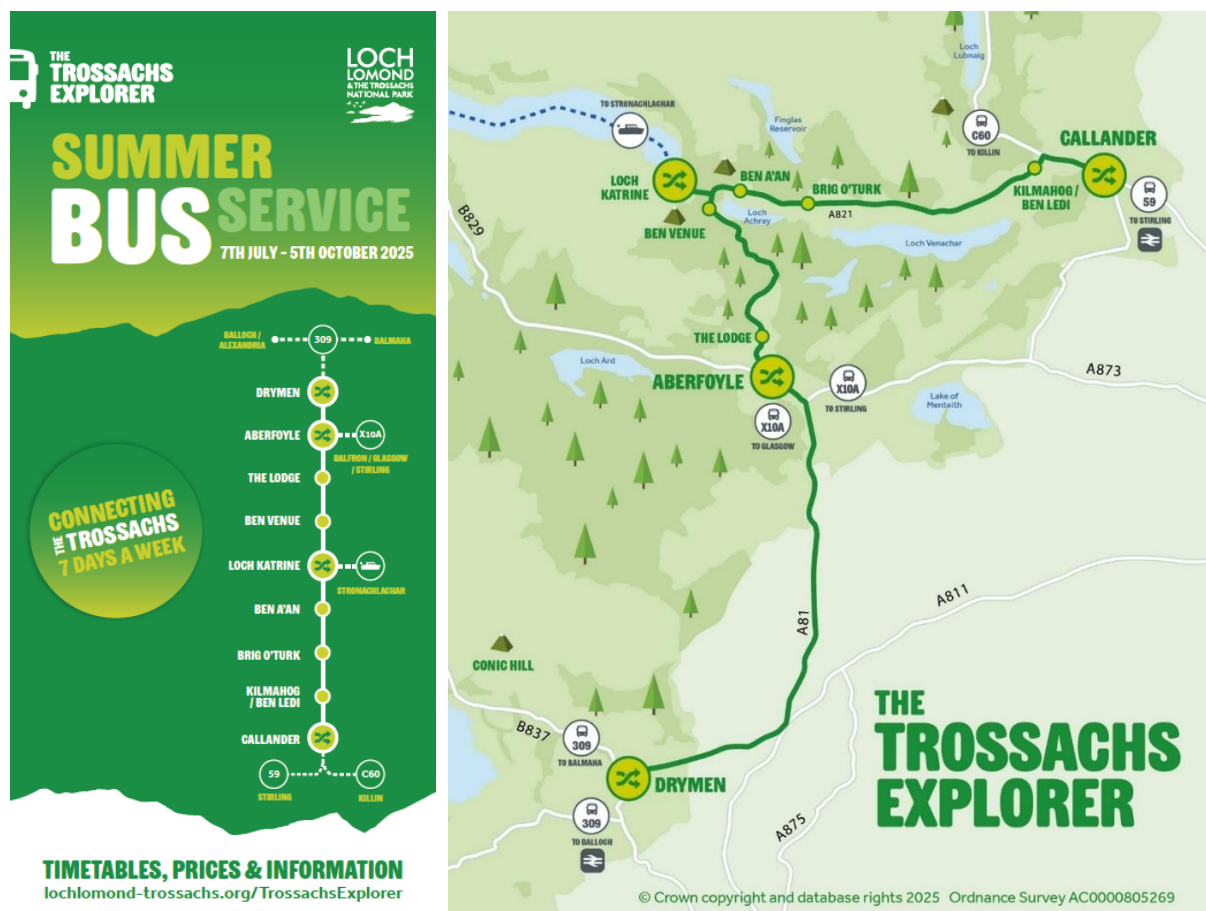
2.2.1 About

Building on the success and learnings of year 1, the second year of the pilot saw the route being extended to Drymen, improved connections, and included more modern, lower-emission buses. The service was operated by McColls, based in the Vale of Leven, which enabled the route to tie in with the 309-service connecting Alexandria/Balloch with Drymen.

The pilot ran from Monday 7th July to Sunday 5th October 2025 between Drymen and Callander (marked as the TEX service). The first and last two journeys of the day provided a direct connection to Alexandria and Balloch from Drymen (marked as the 309T service). Two 18-seated buses were used on the route with a third 30-seater bus available to strengthen reliability and increase capacity on peak days.

The service featured improved connectivity with coordinated timetables linking existing bus services to and from Killin, Stirling, Glasgow, Alexandria and Balloch, as well as sailings on Loch Katrine offered by Steamship Sir Walter Scott.

Figure 5 Trossachs Explorer 2025 promotional leaflet and route map



2.2.2 Funding

The total amount of funding awarded to the project was £145,321.28 which is broken down in Table 1. The shortfall in funding was covered by revenue generated by ticket sales to give the project a total budget of £156,825.

Table 1 Funding

Funder	Grant
National Park Authority	£ 74,815.28
Tactran People and Place	£ 50,560
Stirling Council	£ 10,000
Callander Community Council (Braes of Doune Community Fund)	£ 5,000
Ticket sales	£ 16,449.72
Total	£ 156,825

2.3 Cost comparison

The total cost of the project was £156,825 which is broken down in Table 2 alongside a comparison from year 1 of the pilot. The decision to go with a three-bus operation in the second year ultimately increased bus operational costs from year 1.

Table 2 Costs

Item	Cost	
	2024	2025
Bus operations	£ 103,263.61*	£ 143,745**
Engagement and comms	£ 9,458.52	£ 3,955
Infrastructure	£ 8,698.72	£ 645
Branding	£ 10,771.20	£ 8,480
External technical advice	£ 4,826	-
External legal advice	£ 1,197	-
Evaluation	£ 4,620	-
Total	£ 142,835.05	£ 156,825

*Cost of a 2-bus operation

**Cost of a 3-bus operation

2.3.1 Revenue comparison

The service generated £16,449.72 in revenue from ticket sales. This compares to £14,917.90 revenue generated in 2024.

2.3.2 Additional costs

Through capital funding from Tactran, the project also supported Stirling Council to upgrade bus shelters in Drymen, Aberfoyle and Callander. The total cost of this was £5,185 and is separate to the funding and costs shown above.

3. Evaluation of Year 2

3.1 Methodology

The methodology used to evaluate year 2 of the Trossachs Explorer is summarised in Table 3.

Table 3 Evaluation methodology

Method	Audience	Purpose	Analysed by
Survey	Public	To capture feedback from the public who either used or did not use the service.	Tactran / National Park Authority
	Drivers	To capture feedback from drivers of the service.	National Park Authority
	Businesses	To capture feedback from local businesses.	National Park Authority
Operational interviews	McColls Stirling Council	To capture feedback and lessons learned from the operational team.	National Park Authority
Communications	All	To capture feedback from a wider audience through email and social media.	National Park Authority
Tickets	Users	To capture data on usage, users and performance.	Stirling Council

3.2 Survey Results

For this report, a summary of the key responses from the surveys have been highlighted below. For a full breakdown of responses to all surveys, please see **Appendix A**.

3.2.1 Public survey

A survey was used to collect public feedback on the service. The survey was hosted by Survey Monkey and made available at visitor centres between 7th July and 2nd November.

A total of **185 responses** were received and are summarised below.

About respondents

Respondents were mostly local (38%), from the wider Stirling/Central Scotland area (33%) or from Greater Glasgow and Clyde Valley (23%). Other respondents came from elsewhere in Scotland (8%), rest of the UK (7%) and internationally (6%).

Most respondents were females (67%). While the age range of respondents was relatively varied, most were aged 55-64 (32%), 65 and over (25%) and 45-54 (16%).

Most respondents were ethnically white (88%). When asked if they had any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more, the majority said no (77%).

Respondents most recent trip

94% of respondents had used the Trossachs Explorer on their most recent trip.

Respondents had mostly travelled to the National Park on a Sunday (19%) followed by Monday (18%) and Saturday (17%). Most travelled alone (37%) or in pairs (33%). The majority had started their trip in Callander followed by Drymen, Aberfoyle, Balloch, Alexandria and Brig O'Turk. Respondents commonly ended their trip in Callander, Loch Katrine, Aberfoyle and Drymen.

The most common reasons for travelling were for leisure/holiday (70%), other (19%) and work (9%). Other reasons included travelling for recreation, errands, home and for school and volunteering activities.

For those who had used the Trossachs Explorer (94%), respondents commonly found out about the Trossachs Explorer through other means (40%) including social media/internet, word of mouth, media, leaflets, branding and visitor centres. They'd also heard from the community (24%), used the service last year (25%) and from local businesses (12%).

Respondents used the service for:

- Walking, hiking and outdoor recreation
- Day trips, tourism & leisure
- Car-free travel and sustainability
- Local access & community connectivity
- Connections to other transport services
- Work, volunteering & practical travel
- Exploring & discovering new areas



Figure 6 Young passenger using the Trossachs Explorer
(image: Richard Boddington)

In terms of connecting services, respondents had mostly used other services (49%) including Ember (E4 route) and car travel. Respondents also used the 309 (25%), Loch Katrine cruises (15%) and the 59 (13%).

Of those who hadn't used the Trossachs Explorer (6%), the main reasons were:

- Lack of awareness: not knowing the service existed
- Service limitations: inability to take bikes prevented usage
- Convenience / journey times: too slow/inconvenient for journey purpose

- Using other transport: didn't need to use it for the journey

Respondents suggested the following would help them use the service in the future:

- More frequent services
- Ability to take bikes on board
- Expand the route to take in more communities and locations
- Extend the season to include Easter and winter
- Lower fares for one-way trips
- Clearer guidelines on the ability of buses to carry dogs

Feedback on the Trossachs Explorer

Respondents said:

- **94%** were either very positive or positive about the Trossachs Explorer. This compares to 92% in 2024.
- **92%** were either very likely or likely to use the service again. This compares to 91% in 2024.
- **90%** said the service had increased their confidence in public transport.

Respondents noted the following reasons for why they liked the service:

- **Access to walks and outdoor recreation:** respondents used the bus to complete one-way walks, reach Loch Katrine, Ben A'an, Rob Roy Way, and access rural trailheads.
- **Car-free, low-stress travel:** respondents valued the ability to travel without a car, avoid parking stress, and reduce environmental impact.
- **Leisure and tourism:** respondents used the service to visit scenic locations and enjoy a day out.
- **Helpful drivers and friendly service:** respondents repeatedly praised driver interaction, engagement with other passengers and quality of buses.
- **Useful connections and access to remote places:** respondents valued the bus for enabling access where public transport is limited.
- **Ease, comfort and convenience:** respondents reported feeling relaxed and comfortable using the service.

“Brilliant reliable service. It's great to give our children independence when living in a rural village.”

Respondents suggested the following improvements:

- **Extend the operating season:** respondents requested that the service operate for a longer season, start earlier, and run later into autumn.
- **Increase capacity and frequency:** respondents expressed concerns about full buses, wished for more frequent service and capacity for carrying bikes.
- **Journey alignment and operational adjustments:** respondents requested better alignment between timetables and adjusted waiting times at stops.
- **Service continuity and funding stability:** respondents requested funding to be maintained and to secure the long-term operation of the service.

“Make it permanent, great to see so many people use it locally, not just tourists.”

Respondents were strongly positive about all the changes that had been made to the service since year 1 and provided the following comments:

- **Improved reliability:** consistently reinforced in all comments.
- **Simplified ticket prices:** viewed as good value and easy to understand although some felt this could be improved for one-way journeys.
- **Improved connections:** connection to Drymen contributed to overall satisfaction.
- **Partial branding:** many didn’t notice the difference to year 1.
- **More modern and accessible buses:** comfort and perceived upgrade frequently noted.

“I love seeing the branding when out and about - it's a great way to advertise the service to others who might be encouraged to use it themselves or suggest it to friends.”



Figure 7 Passengers and BBC Out of Doors Podcast presenter Mark Stephen using the Trossachs Explorer

3.2.2 Driver survey

A survey was used to collect feedback from the four McColls drivers dedicated to delivering the service. The survey was hosted by the National Park Authority through Microsoft Forms during October.

A total of **3 responses** were received.

Driver experiences

Respondents enjoyed working in a beautiful area, connecting with a variety of people and providing support to the local community.

“Driving the most beautiful route every day and meeting some amazing/interesting people. Also feeling like I was helping the local community directly.”

Respondents suggested minor adjustments to the timetable, providing more information and a review of hail and ride (informal) stops.

“Maybe more information on the routes we were travelling? I personally don't know the area, so was obviously unable to pass on any knowledge until maybe the last couple of weeks.”

Positive impacts

Respondents highlighted the strength of integration with connecting services, range of audiences using the service and reliability.

“The way the bus was integrated to the timetables of the buses from Callander, also was good to see local people use the bus to get to and from work/ school.”

Suggested improvements

Respondents suggested improvements for those travelling with bikes, earlier promotion, additional bus stop infrastructure and varying ticket prices.



Figure 8 Bus operator team from McColls (image: Chris Watt)

3.2.3 Business survey

A survey was used to collect feedback from local businesses. The survey was hosted by the National Park Authority through Microsoft Forms between October and December.

A total of **9 responses** were received.

About respondents

Respondents represented a mixture of businesses including hotels/B&Bs, shops, a holiday park, local music event and conservation charity.

Feedback on the Trossachs Explorer

Respondents noted the following positive impacts from the service:

- Improved accessibility for customers and visitors
- Positive impact on visitor experience and exploration
- Benefits for staffing and workforce access
- Support for rural businesses and communities

“We know that it already has brought significant benefits for rural businesses and fragile rural communities”

Respondents suggested the following improvements to strengthen this impact:

- Improved connectivity with wider transport network
- Need for a year-round or extended seasonal service
- Integration with other transport modes and attractions
- Marketing and advance timetable information

“Extension of the concept throughout the Park and its key gateways like Helensburgh, Dunoon, Stirling and Glasgow.”

Opportunities for future support

Responses indicate a willingness to actively support future services through:

- Promotion and marketing support: respondents expressed readiness to promote the service through their own communication channels.
- Distribution of timetables and route information: respondents highlighted the role of businesses as informal visitor information points.
- Partnership incentives and joint offers: one respondent proposed linking the bus ticket to business discounts.

“Trossachs Explorer ticket could offer a discount across many businesses and venues.”

3.3 Operational interviews

Interviews took place in October with the operational team including key project partners Stirling Council and McColls to review successes and areas for improvement.

3.3.1 Themes

The common themes from the interviews included:

Procurement and registration:

- Premarket engagement and request for a proposal enabled the operator to outline what could be delivered using experience and feedback from 2024.
- Building in more time between contract award, service registration and launch would enable processes to be strengthened.
- Driver introduction to the area and key businesses worked well and doing this prior to registration would help finalise the timetable with drivers.

Vehicles:

- Newer vehicles helped to strengthen reliability which is key to the success of the service.
- Difficult to predict demand for the service but more data over time will help to inform this.
- Branding looked professional and helped distinguish this from other services. Including branding on the bus could make more use of the internal space.

Route:

- Drymen provided a key link between the Trossachs, East Loch Lomond and further afield.
- Hail and ride worked well with many informal stops requested by passengers and could be advertised in the future.
- Potential to improve signage (e.g. at The Lodge), wayfinding (e.g. in Drymen) and bus stops.
- Adding more stops (including hail and ride) will put more pressure on the timetable/frequency of the service.

Timetable:

- Loch Katrine provided a key break within the journey for both drivers and passengers.
- Timetable missed out Loch Katrine during the first and last journey to ensure this met other bus connections, but this could be looked at to facilitate more staff travel to local employment.
- Difficult to align timetables with other operated routes therefore some connections need to be prioritised over others.
- Continue to engage with other operators over any updates to connecting service timetables (e.g. C60 and X10A) during the service.

Ticket structure:

- Prices compare well to similar routes but opportunity to look at attractiveness of one-way prices.
- Improvements can be made to further simplify structure.
- Opportunities for group tickets and OneTicket which can be used across different operated services but require significant promotion.

Reporting:

- Weekly reports worked well across operational team.
- Opportunities to look at demand across journeys and use this to highlight busier/quieter times for passengers to feel more confident in timing their travel.
- Data is limited to what the ticket machines can collect.

Communication and promotion:

- Strong communication between operator, delivery partners and key businesses.
- Opportunities to improve presentation of timetable, particularly connecting journeys.
- Strong availability of leaflets and media engagement.
- Opportunities for more journey itineraries to encourage wider journeys.

3.4 Communications campaign

In addition to the survey, feedback was also captured through email and social media as part of the communications campaign. For a full breakdown of the communications campaign, please see **Appendix B**.

3.4.1 Email

Enquiries and feedback were received through email and are summarised below:

- **Rural freedom:** many emails describe the service as transformative, particularly for those without access to a car.

“We have intended to send this feedback for a number of weeks now but wanted to truly test how this service has changed our rural living.

We have lived in the area 33 years but as we get older the chances of travelling to other local location...completely stress free of driving and parking especially during tourist months where we have frequently not been able to park within the locations of the Trossachs explorer route.

We thank you for this summers experience and would love this little lifeline to continue.”

- **Consistent praise for drivers and on-board experience:** many emails consistently praised driver interaction.

“Great entertainment by drivers, very informative.”

- **Lack of timetable alignment:** comments highlighted the difficulties trying to connect with other services including missed connections and long waits.

“To get people out of their cars you need a feasible journey from Glasgow and Balloch (ideally Helensburgh too). Few people I think will just decide to park at Drymen instead of Aberfoyle.”

- **Demand for bike capacity:** emails repeated demand for bike carriage.

“It would be so good to have an option of taking my bike on the Explorer bus. What about a tow bar and trailer?”

- **Clarity around fare structures and policy around dogs:** emails highlighted barriers to travel include the cost of a single fare and the policy on dog travel.

“On dogs, were I want to use the bus for a return with my dog, I risk not being allowed to travel back if another traveller has a dog on the bus already. As with the single fare price, this policy is discouraging use.”

- **Requests for additional stops:** emails enquired about additional stops particularly at Gartmore and McLaren Community Leisure Centre.

“Disappointed the bus isn’t calling into Gartmore after feeding back last year”

- **Strong support for continuation and expansion:** emails overwhelmingly support continuation of the service.

“How delighted I am at the service goes to Balloch, to Drymen, then Aberfoyle, Loch Katrine and then Callander. I’ve been on it several times. The bus is wonderful so comfortable drivers are lovely and I just hope that the service will continue. I think it’s absolutely magical and the more people hear about it I think they’re busier it will get to just to say wow, wonderful.”

3.4.2 Social media

Comments were received through Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn and are summarised below:

- **Strong positive sentiment and enthusiasm:** many comments expressed excitement and approval for the return of the service.

“Very exciting! Congrats for getting this up and running again”

- **Praise for drivers and customer experience:** many comments singled out drivers for friendliness, helpfulness, and professionalism.

“All the drivers are so friendly when I have my hands full of dog, toddler, and everything else!”

- **Enabling walking, hiking and outdoor recreation:** many comments highlighted the service’s role in supporting linear walks, hiking, and outdoor activities.

“Finally got the chance to climb Ben A’an because of this bus.”

- **Car-free access and sustainable travel:** many comments highlighted the service as a sustainable alternative to car travel.

“An excellent way to enjoy... without needing a car”

- **Connectivity and integration with other transport:** many commented positively on, or expressed desire for, connections with other services.

“Would love it even more if it could join up with the X10”

- **Questions around dog policy:** several comments enquired about access and policy for dogs travelling on the bus.

“Are dogs allowed on the bus?”

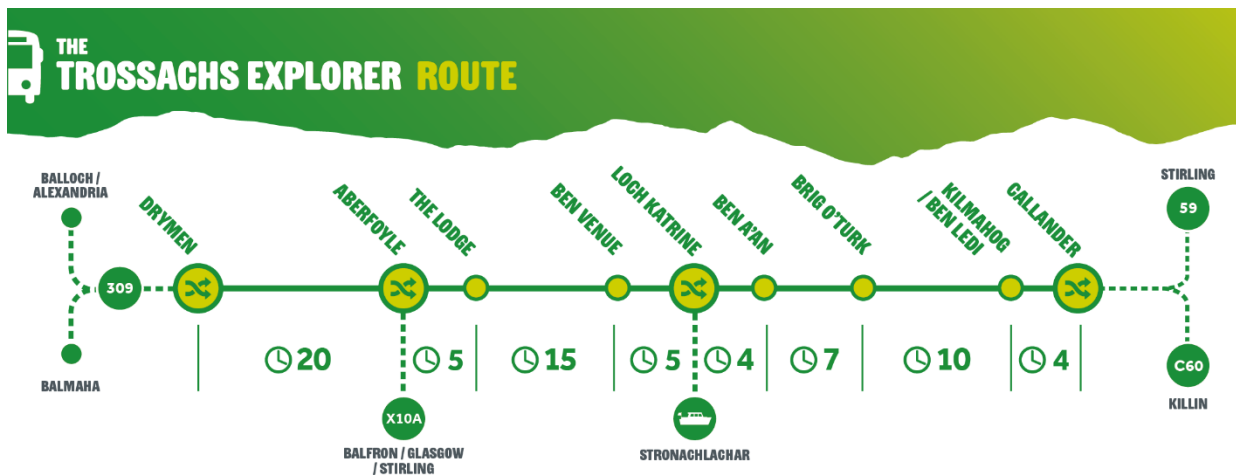


Figure 9 Trossachs Explorer 2025 route

3.5 Ticket Data

Ticket data was collected through ticket machines on the bus and provided by McColls at the end of the pilot. This data helps to understand travel trends, types of users and performance of the service.

As this year's Trossachs Explorer was registered as two routes, the data analysis has been separated into:

1. TEX (route between Drymen and Callander)
2. 309T (route between Alexandria and Drymen)*

**The first and last two journeys of the day only.*

For the purposes of this report, a summary of the key findings from the ticket data has been highlighted below. For a full breakdown of ticket data analysis, please see **Appendix C**.

Travel trends

Ticket data demonstrates how passengers used the service.

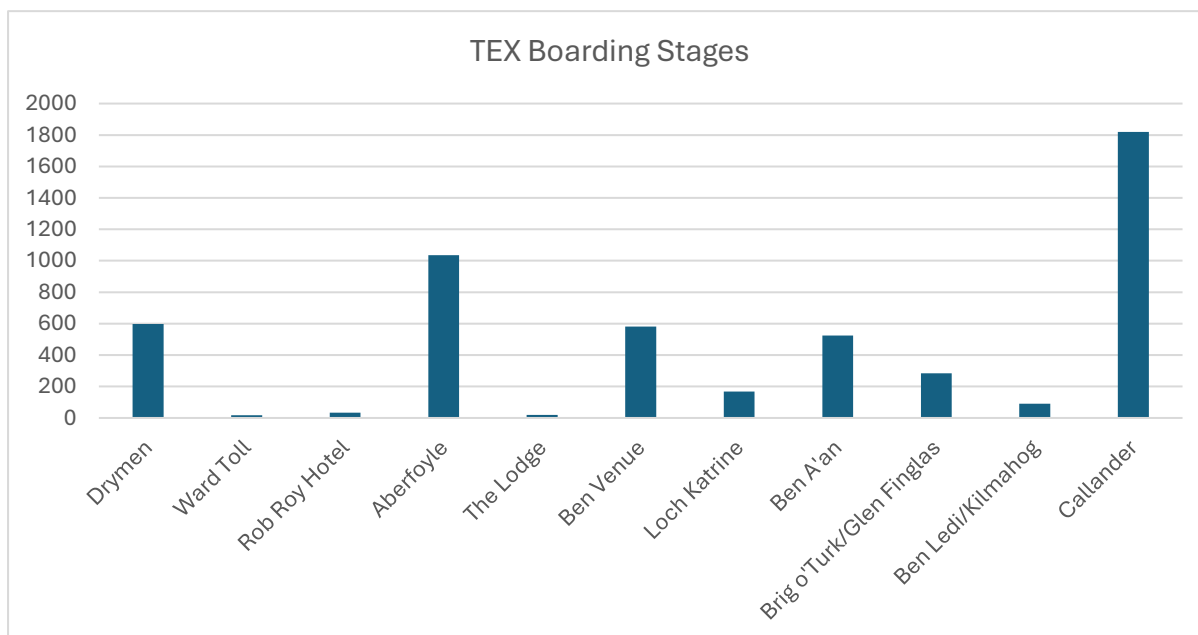
Between Drymen and Callander (TEX service)

Overall, demand on this section of the route was good, with 5,172 passenger journeys. Travel was evenly distributed across the service period, with slightly higher usage mid-week and at weekends, particularly Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. Passenger numbers were strongest at key stops, especially Callander and Aberfoyle, indicating these locations are important travel hubs. Despite perceptions that the service was full, ticket data shows that most journeys operated with low seat occupancy, with 93% of trips carrying between 0–8 passengers, indicating there was capacity available on most services. Concessionary travel formed a significant proportion of fares, with over half of passengers travelling free, highlighting the service’s importance for older and young passengers.

The key findings from ticket data on this section of the route include:

- 5,172 passenger journeys on this section.
- 17% of passengers travelled on a Wednesday and Saturday making these the most popular days to travel.
- 11% of passengers travelled on the first week of the service making this the most popular time to travel during the length of the service.
- 35% of passengers boarded at Callander and 20% at Aberfoyle making these the most popular starting points as shown in figure 10.
- 93% of journeys had between 0-8 seats occupied meaning there is capacity for more passengers to travel on most journeys.
- 51% of passengers travelled with a concessionary ticket and 49% of passengers paid a fare.

Figure 10 Trossachs Explorer boarding stages



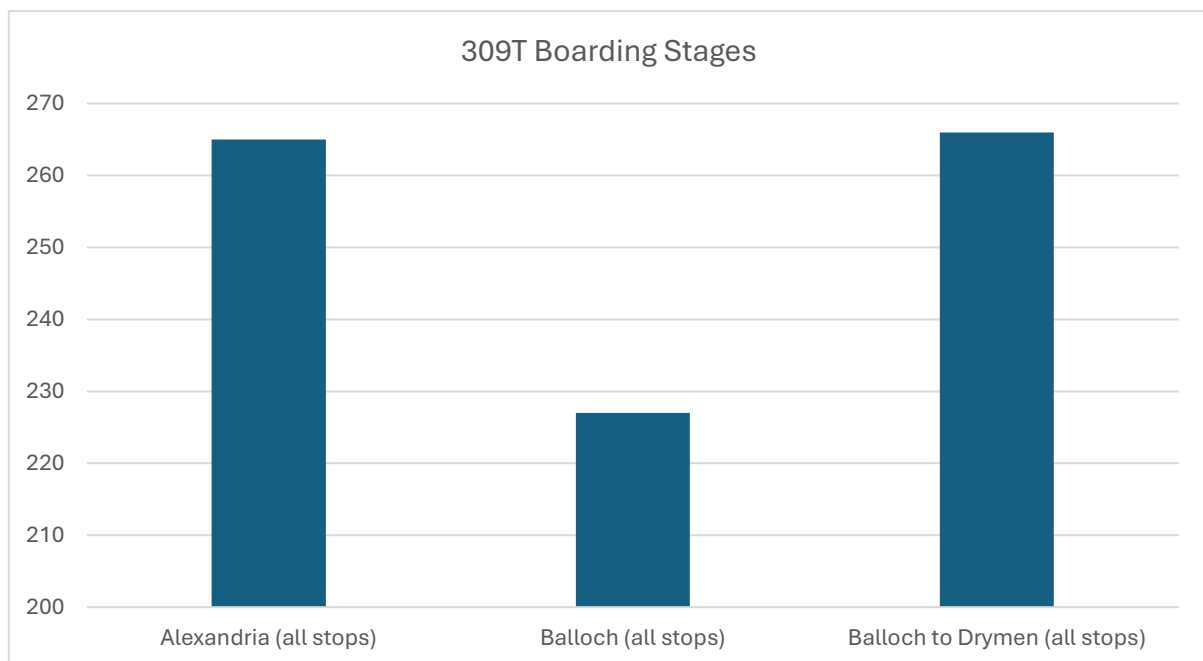
Between Alexandria and Drymen (309T service)

Overall demand on this section of the route, which operated during the first two and last two services of the day only, was good, with 758 passenger journeys. Travel was spread evenly across the week, with slightly higher usage on Fridays and steady demand from Tuesday through to Thursday, as well as on Saturdays. Passenger activity was spread evenly across all locations. Capacity was consistently available, with 99% of journeys carrying between 0–8 passengers. Concessionary and discounted travel made up a significant share of usage, with older and young passengers together accounting for over half of all trips, reinforcing the service’s role in supporting access for non-fare-paying passengers.

The key findings from ticket data on this section of the route include:

- 758 passenger journeys on this section of the route.
- 18% of passengers travelled on a Friday making this the most popular day to travel.
- 13% of passengers travelled on week 6 of the service making this the most popular time to travel during the length of the service.
- 35% of passengers boarded at stops between Balloch and Drymen and stops within Alexandria making these the most popular starting points, as shown in figure 11.
- 99% of journeys had between 0-8 seats occupied meaning there is capacity for more passengers to almost all journeys.
- 60% of passengers travelled with a concessionary ticket and 40% of passengers paid a fare.

Figure 11 309T boarding stages



Performance

Ticket data demonstrates how well the service performed in terms of punctuality including running on time, early or late.

The key findings are:

- 99% of journeys ran as scheduled*
- 91% of journeys were on time
- 6% of journeys were early
- 2% of journeys were late

* No services ran on Monday 4th August due to an amber weather warning which impacted this being 100%.

Service Monitoring

Bus Users UK conducted a monitoring exercise of the service at various periods throughout the 13-week pilot. This included preparing a compliance report on monitoring across the following dates:

- Dates of mystery travel:
 - Thursday 7th August
 - Tuesday 12th August
- Dates of monitoring:
 - Friday 22nd August
 - Tuesday 26th August
 - Saturday 6th September
 - Wednesday 10th September
 - Monday 15th September
 - Thursday 25th September

The compliance report highlighted the following:

- High standard of vehicle operations including branding, cleanliness and temperature on the bus.
- High standard of drivers including interaction with passengers, accessibility considerations and going above and beyond to add to the travel experience.
- Insufficient timings and transition between connecting services.
- Overall punctuality score of 96.88%.

“Very good punctuality score and a high-quality bus service provided to passengers.

Hopefully, the service is reinstated for next summer.” Bus Users UK

4. Key themes

4.1 Successes

Feedback indicates the following key successes of this years' service:

Strong public satisfaction and use

- Very high approval: 94% of respondents felt positive about the service, and 92% are likely to use it again.
- Increased confidence in public transport: 90% said the service improved their confidence using public transport.
- Wide range of trip purposes: The service supported walking and hiking, tourism and leisure, car-free travel, local access, work and volunteering, and connections to other transport.

Enabling car-free access and rural mobility

- The service was repeatedly described as transformative, particularly for people without access to a car.
- It enabled one-way and linear walks, access to rural trailheads, and visits to key destinations such as Loch Katrine and Ben A'an.
- Passengers valued the low-stress, environmentally friendly alternative to driving and parking.

High-quality customer experience and social interaction

- Drivers were consistently praised for friendliness, helpfulness and professionalism.
- Passengers reported feeling relaxed, comfortable and socially connected, with newer, smaller buses seen as a clear improvement.
- Improved reliability was repeatedly highlighted as a major strength.

Positive impacts for businesses and communities

- Businesses reported improved accessibility for customers and visitors, enhanced visitor experiences, and benefits for staff travel.
- The service supported rural businesses and community connectivity, with willingness from businesses to help promote and support future services.

Support for improvements since year 1

- Improved reliability, newer vehicles, simplified ticket pricing and better connections (notably via Drymen) were all positively received.
- Strong communication between operator, delivery partners and local businesses supported smooth delivery.

- Weekly reporting and engagement helped monitor performance and respond to issues.

4.2 Areas for improvement

Feedback indicates the following areas for future enhancement:

Capacity, frequency and demand

- Strong demand suggests a need for a frequent service and better capacity planning, supported by improved data over time.
- Inability to carry bikes was one of the most cited barriers to use.
- Ongoing uncertainty around dog policy and fare clarity (especially one-way fares) created barriers for some users.

Season length and service continuity

- Strong demand to extend the operating season, including earlier starts, later autumn running, and potential winter or year-round service.
- Passengers and businesses stressed the importance of long-term funding certainty.

Timetable alignment and connectivity

- Missed or poorly aligned connections with other services were a recurring issue.
- Requests for better alignment of timetables, clearer presentation of connections, and prioritisation of key links.
- Informal “hail and ride” worked well but could benefit from clearer communication and review.

Route coverage and infrastructure

- Requests for additional stops and wider route coverage, including communities, businesses and facilities.
- Need to balance additional stops with potential impacts on journey times, frequency and reliability.
- Opportunities to improve signage, wayfinding and bus stop infrastructure.

Marketing, awareness and information

- Lack of awareness remained a barrier for a small number of non-users.
- Calls for earlier and stronger marketing, clearer timetables, more journey itineraries, and better advance information.
- Businesses expressed willingness to support promotion, distribute information and explore joint incentives.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Opportunities

Given the clear and continued support for the service, work is underway by the National Park Authority and Stirling Council to secure the return of the Trossachs Explorer in 2026, subject to securing the necessary funding.

Continuing to build momentum into next year and beyond is crucial, ensuring this becomes a permanent service that runs year-round without reducing the quality of user experience built over the last two years.

5.2 Next steps

5.2.1 Funding

While work is underway to unlock revenue within the system, securing funding is critical to the continuation of the service in the short term.

Engagement is underway with partners to secure grant funding. Grants are not typically awarded until the start of the financial year which makes securing the services return and being able to promote this earlier in the year challenging.

The National Park Authority are engaging with businesses and community groups to seek commercial partnerships, donations and local grant funding. Money has also been set aside by Stirling Council through a community transport fund.

5.2.2 Operator

Securing an operator is the other critical element to the continuation of the service.

The Trossachs Explorer has been supported by two operators over the past two years which has influenced the route:

- In 2024, the operator Midland Bluebird was based in Bannockburn and the Trossachs Explorer was able to be aligned with the X10A-bus service between Balfron/Glasgow and Stirling via Aberfoyle.
- In 2025, the operator McColls was based in the Vale of Leven and the Trossachs Explorer was able to be aligned with the 309-bus service between Alexandria/Balloch and Drymen.

Due to the small number of operators and services with the National Park, it is important that routes are designed to complement rather than run on top of each other.

The landscape around operators is improving with growing interest in the delivery of services like the Trossachs Explorer however challenges remain in the short term around the operating cost and being able to secure reliable and environmentally friendly vehicles.

5.3 National Park Mobility Partnership

The Trossachs Explorer is an example of what the future transport system could look like for those who live, work and visit the National Park.

The National Park Mobility Partnership continues to develop to secure the investment, expertise and resources needed to deliver at scale. Providing an inclusive, low carbon travel network, through improved partnership working, new services and capacity building, will support the National Park's vision to be a thriving place that is both nature-positive and carbon-negative.

This will take a coordinated approach across strategic partners and coalition of stakeholders to collectively develop and deliver the programme including initiatives like the Trossachs Explorer.

Appendix A: Survey Analysis



Figure 12 Trossachs Explorer 2025 launch in Drymen (image: Chris Watt)

“Very clean, very comfortable. Bus driver was friendly, knowledgeable and a good driver. Could not be more pleased. What an amazing bus service.” Survey respondent.

A.1 Public Survey

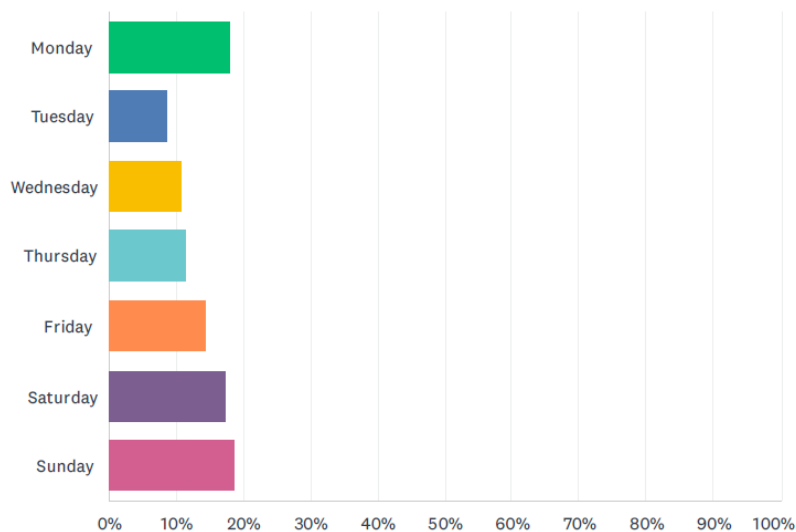
A survey was used to collect public feedback on the Trossachs Explorer. This was hosted by Tactran on Survey Monkey between Monday 7th July and Sunday 2nd November. All responses were anonymous.

A total of **185 responses** were received and are summarised below.

A.1.1 Section A Your most recent trip

Q1: What day did you recently travel on? Number of responses = 138

Figure 13 Q1: What day did you recently travel on?



Q2: For your recent trip, where did you start and end your journey? Number of responses = 138

Journey start points:

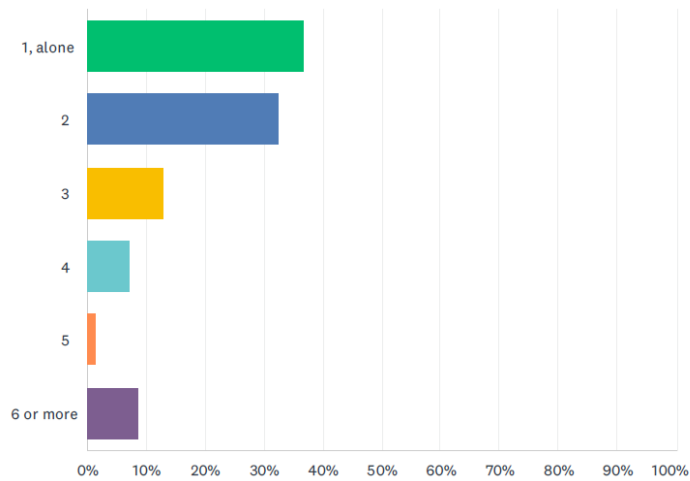
1. Callander was the strongest starting point for respondents.
2. Drymen, Aberfoyle, Balloch, Alexandria and Brig O'Turk were also recurring starting points for respondents.
3. A smaller number of other starting points for respondents included Ben A'an, Balmaha, Loch Katrine and Dunblane.

Journey end points:

1. Callander, Loch Katrine, Aberfoyle and Drymen were strong end locations for respondents.
2. Brig o' Turk, Ben A'an, Balloch, Loch Lubnaig and Loch Achray Hotel were also recurring end points for respondents.
3. A longer list of single-mentioned ending points for respondents indicates unique trips patterns.

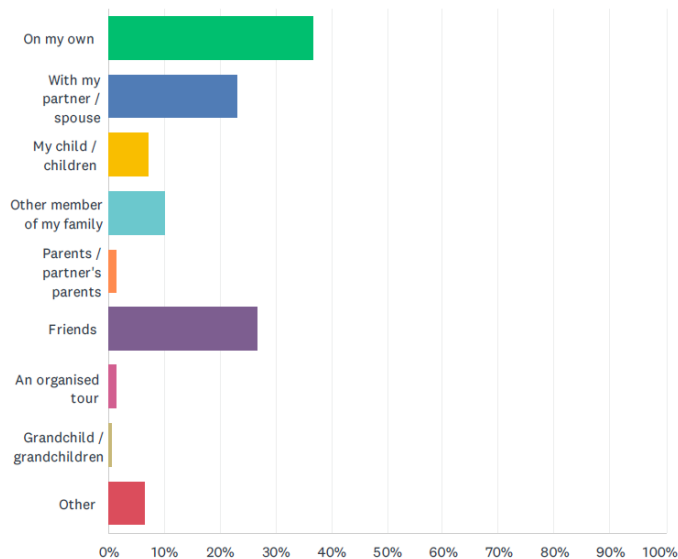
Q3: How many people were in your group? Number of responses = 138

Figure 14 Q3: How many people were in your group?



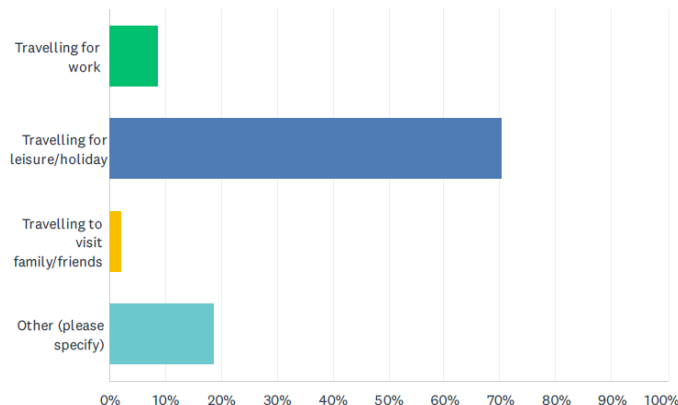
Q4: Who is/was in your group? Number of responses = 138

Figure 15 Q4: Who is/was in your group?



Q5: What was the purpose of your trip? Number of responses = 138

Figure 16 Q5: What was the purpose of your trip?

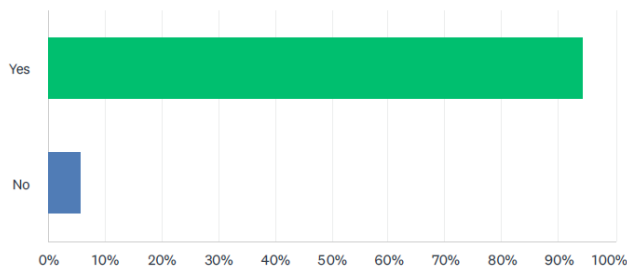


Other responses:

- Travelling for recreation
- Travelling for errands
- Travelling home
- Travelling for school-related and volunteering activities

Q6: Did you use the Trossachs Explorer on your most recent trip? Number of responses = 138

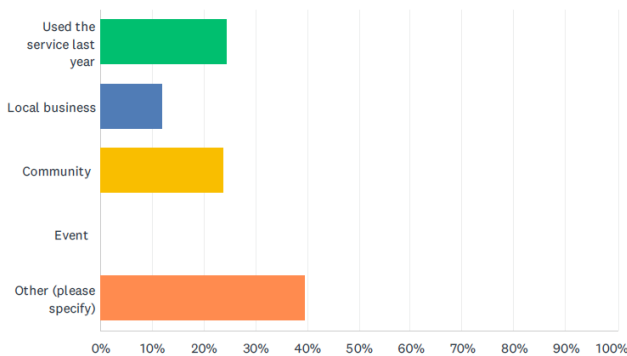
Figure 17 Q6: Did you use the Trossachs Explorer on your most recent trip?



I used the Trossachs Explorer on my most recent trip

Q7: How did you find out about the Trossachs Explorer? Number of responses = 126

Figure 18 Q7: How did you find out about the Trossachs Explorer?



Other responses:

- Social media and internet searches
- Word of mouth
- Media
- Leaflets
- Bus branding

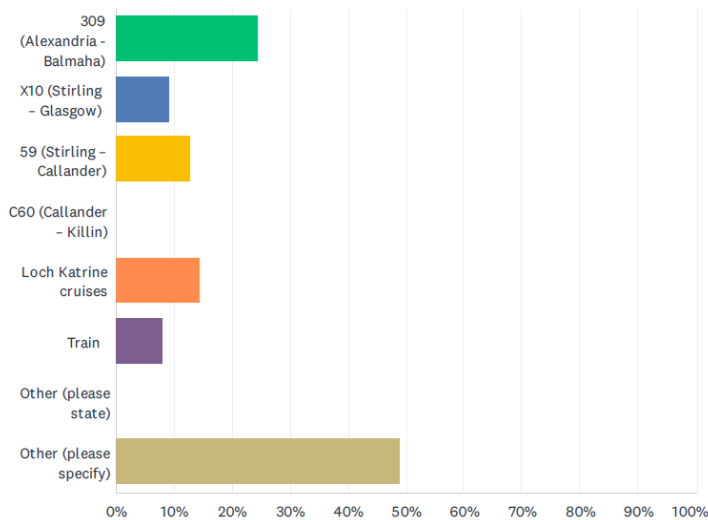
Q8: Please tell us the most relevant reason for your use of the Trossachs Explorer? Number of responses = 126

1. Walking, hiking and outdoor recreation: respondents used the service to access walks, routes, hills, and outdoor experiences.
2. Day trips, tourism & leisure: respondents used the service to travel for pleasure, sightseeing, and visit popular attractions.
3. Car-free travel and sustainability: respondents used the service to avoid driving or because they had no access to a car.
4. Local access & community connectivity: respondents used the service to get around locally and connect with friends/family.
5. Connections to other transport: respondents used the service to connect with other public transport services.
6. Work, volunteering & practical travel: respondents used the service to get to work, volunteering, and carry out essential tasks.
7. Exploring & discovering new areas: respondents used the service to explore new areas and destinations.

Q9: During your most recent trip, did you travel on any connecting services?

Number of responses = 110

Figure 19 Q9: During your most recent trip, did you travel on any connecting services?



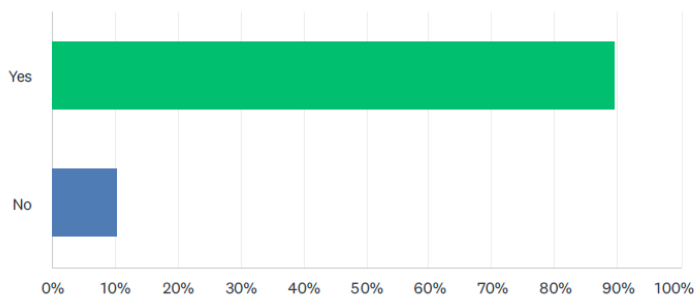
Other responses:

- Travelling by private car
- Ember E4 route
- Car travel

I did not use the Trossachs Explorer on my most recent trip

Q10: Were you aware that the Trossachs Explorer was available? Number of responses = 19

Figure 20 Q10: Were you aware that the Trossachs Explorer was available?



Q11: Please tell us why you did not use the Trossachs Explorer on your most recent trip? Number of responses = 15

Many respondents had in fact used the service. For those who didn't, the main reasons were:

- Lack of awareness: not knowing the service existed
- Service limitations: inability to take bikes prevented usage
- Convenience / journey times: too slow/inconvenient for journey purpose
- Using other transport: didn't need to use it for the journey

There was one complaint about the speed of the bus through Aberfoyle.

Q12: What would encourage you to use the Trossachs Explorer in the future?

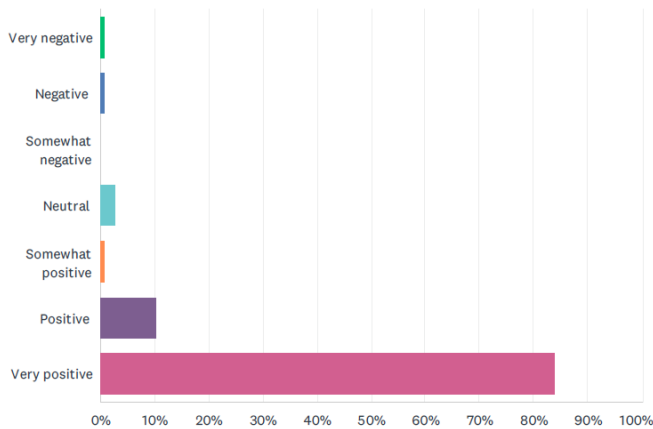
Number of responses = 16

- More frequent services
- Ability to take bikes and dogs on board
- Expand the route to take in more communities and locations
- Extend the season to include Easter and winter
- Lower fares for locals

A.1.2 Section B Feedback on the Trossachs Explorer

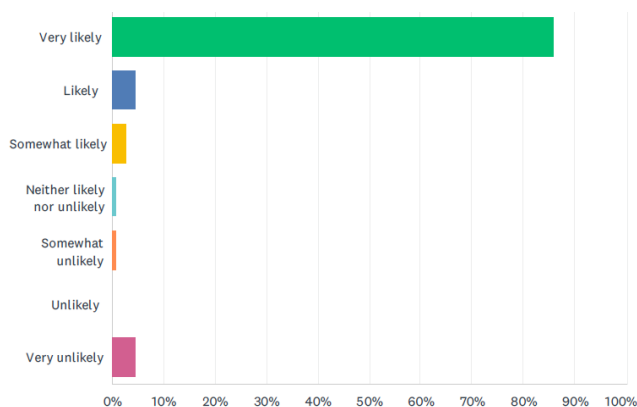
Q1: What was your overall judgment of the Trossachs Explorer? Number of responses = 106

Figure 21 Q1: What was your overall judgment of the Trossachs Explorer?



Q2: How likely would you be to use the Trossachs Explorer again? Number of responses = 106

Figure 22 Q2: How likely would you be to use the Trossachs Explorer again?



Q3: What did you like about the Trossachs Explorer? Number of responses = 106

- **Access to walks & outdoor recreation:** respondents used the bus to complete one-way walks, reach Loch Katrine, Ben A'an, Rob Roy Way, and access rural trailheads.

“Walking the Rob Roy Way.”

“To reach Loch Katrine and Ben A'an for walking.”

“It’s a fantastic service as links Brig O Turk to Callander and Aberfoyle. My partner and I enjoy walking and running so it’s fabulous to be able to go for a long run and get the bus back. Just having that option makes a difference.”

- **Car-free, low-stress travel:** respondents valued the ability to travel without a car, avoid parking stress, and reduce environmental impact.

“Being driven to locations I wouldn't be able to get to.”

“To enjoy a car-free journey from Callander through Aberfoyle to Trossachs.”

“Hassle free travel within the National Park, environmentally friendly, less pressure to find parking space in NP (especially Ben A'an).”

- **Leisure & tourism:** respondents used the service to visit scenic locations and enjoy a day out.

“I love the route and scenery on it!”

“Great timetable and route (now that Drymen/Balloch are included) Super friendly drivers, clean (and cool on a very hot day) buses, handy places to hop on/off, fair ticket prices.”

“Took us to places not served by public transport otherwise.”

- **Helpful drivers and friendly service:** respondents repeatedly praised driver interaction, engagement with other passengers and quality of buses.

“The bus drivers were so lovely and kind.”

“Friendly driver, smaller than a large bus, felt inviting, felt fun.”

“Our bus driver was very friendly, and you could tell he took pride in his job. He welcomed you as you joined the bus.”

- **Useful connections & access to remote places:** respondents valued the bus for enabling access where public transport is limited.

“Enables me to access many local places, including for work.”

“Took us to places not served by public transport otherwise.”

“Brilliant reliable service. It’s great to give our children independence when living in a rural village.”

- **Ease, comfort & convenience:** respondents reported feeling relaxed and comfortable using the service.

“Ease of travel around the National Park.”

“Very useful bus service.”

“It's very comfortable bus, so kind and chatty drivers, amazing route of The National Park.”

Q4: What would make the Trossachs Explorer better? Number of responses = 106

- **Extend the operating season:** respondents requested that the service operate for a longer season, start earlier, and run later into autumn.

“Starting earlier in the season.”

“Having it run through early March to October so it captures the springtime as well as summertime”

“Run it all year.”

- **Increase capacity & frequency:** respondents expressed concerns about full buses, wished for more frequent service and capacity for carrying bikes.

“Bigger bus (my bus was nearly full!).”

“Carry bikes on back like in the alps.”

“More buses.”

- **Journey alignment & operational adjustments:** respondents requested better alignment between timetables and adjusted waiting times at stops.

“Long dwell time at Katrine – not sure how necessary this is.”

“It needs to connect with train station (s) e.g. Balloch or Helensburgh. The connecting 309 service has proved unreliable.”

“More stops in the Callander area maybe starting from the doctors surgery area.”

- **Service continuity & funding stability:** respondents requested funding to be maintained and to secure the long-term operation of the service.

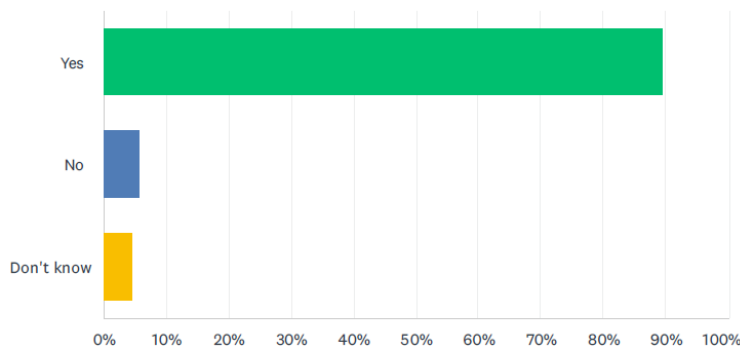
“If there is money available, we try and keep it going.”

“Make it permanent, great to see so many people use it locally, not just tourists.”

“More people using it so it can viably be more frequent.”

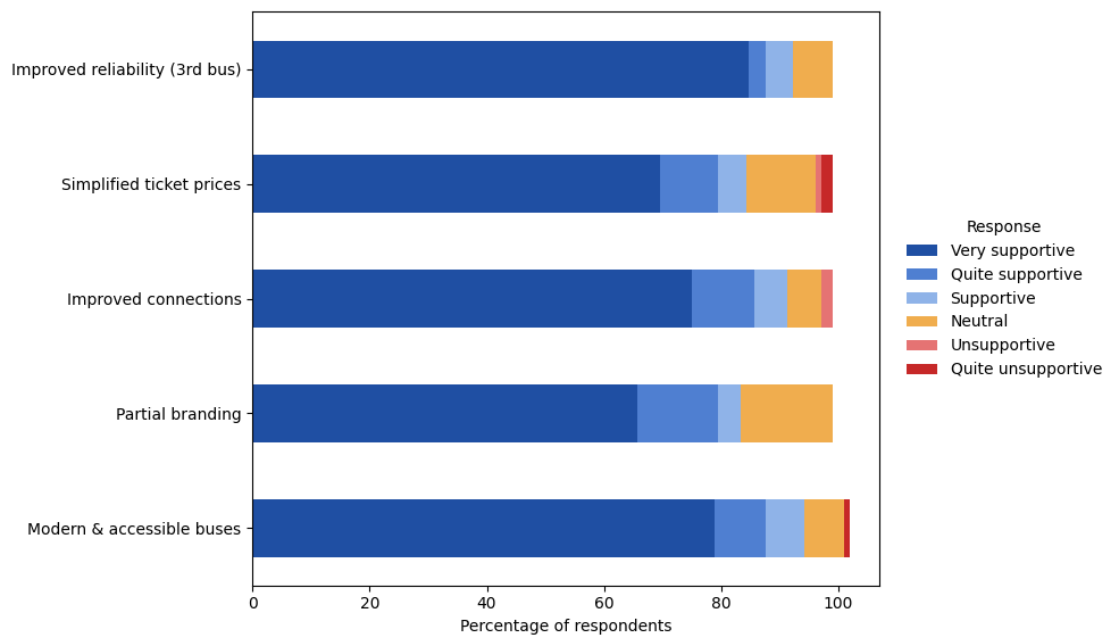
**Q5: Has the Trossachs Explorer increased your confidence in public transport?
Number of responses = 106**

Figure 23 Q5: Has the Trossachs Explorer increased your confidence in public transport?



Q6a: What do you think of the following changes that have been made since last year? Number of responses = 105

Figure 24 Q6a: What do you think of the following changes that have been made since last year?



Q6b: Please expand on your answers. Number of responses = 84

- **Improved reliability:** strongly positive; consistently reinforced.

“Reliability seems better.”

“More reliable than before.”

“When there is no public transport alternative it is essential that the service is reliable.”

- **Simplified ticket prices:** strongly positive; viewed as good value and easy to understand although some felt this could be improved for one-way journeys.

“Ticket is excellent value for a long journey, but then relatively very expensive for a short one-way journey.”

“Prices seem reasonable.”

“Ticket was simple and easy, an all-day ticket which I could also use on Alexandria bus. It is perfect that we can leave from Alexandria and the options to travel to Balfron, Stirling etc.”

- **Improved connections:** strongly positive; connection to Drymen contributed to overall satisfaction.

“I live in Balloch so the Drymen connection meant that I didn't need the car at all.”

“It met up with the times of the Sir Walter Scott.”

“Last year I had to get two trains to Milngavie and then a 2 hourly bus to connect at Aberfoyle. This year was a bit better with connection at Drymen. But this needs further improvement with connections to Balloch, Helensburgh, Stirling.”

- **Partial branding:** strongly positive; many didn't notice the difference.

“I love seeing the branding when out and about - it's a great way to advertise the service to others who might be encouraged to use it themselves or suggest it to friends.”

“I liked the branding and seeing the bus around even when we weren't using it - it gave me confidence to use it.”

“The buses were nice and bright and easily identifiable.”

- **More modern and accessible buses:** strongly positive; comfort and quality frequently noted.

“The bus was really comfortable...”

“More modern buses make long journeys pleasant.”

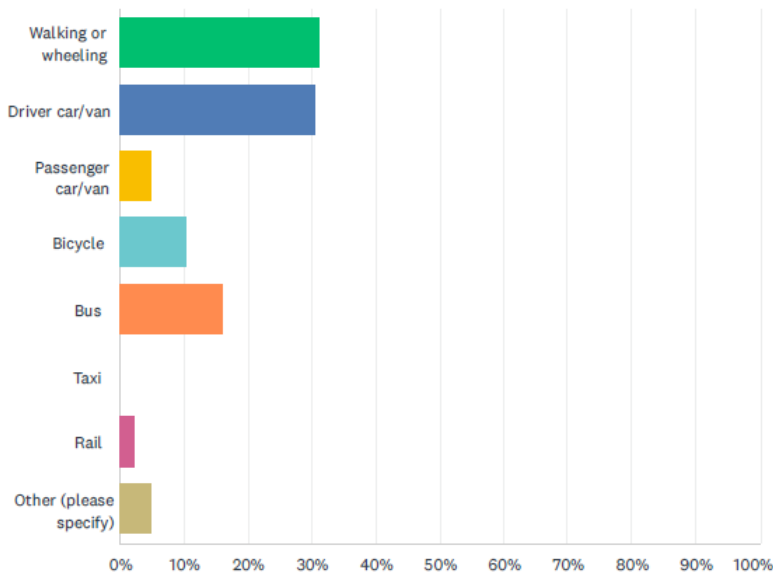
“The smaller buses have been much more in-keeping with the area.”

A.1.3 Section C Your travel habits

The following responses are used to help monitor and inform the Transport Scotland and Tactran People and Place funding programme.

Q1: How would you usually travel for journeys under 5 miles? Number of responses = 125

Figure 25 Q1: How would you usually travel for journeys under 5 miles?

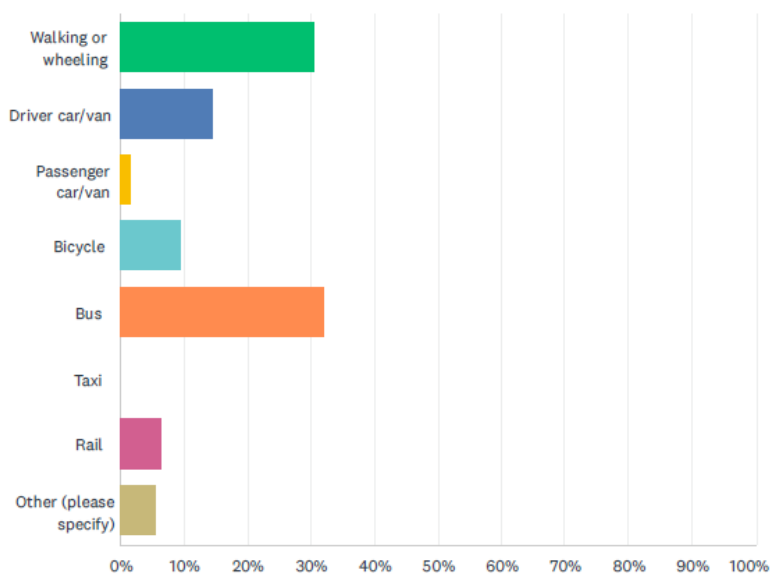


Other responses:

- Using multiple modes
- Depends on purpose of travel
- Electric car

Q2: How would you most like to travel for journeys under 5 miles? Number of responses = 125

Figure 26 Q2: How would you most like to travel for journeys under 5 miles?

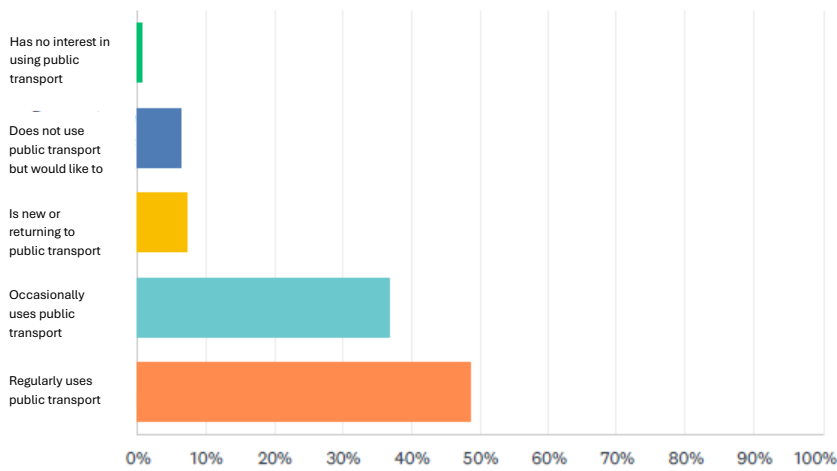


Other responses:

- Depends on weather, terrain, purpose of trip and time available.
- Using multiple modes (walking, cycling, bus)

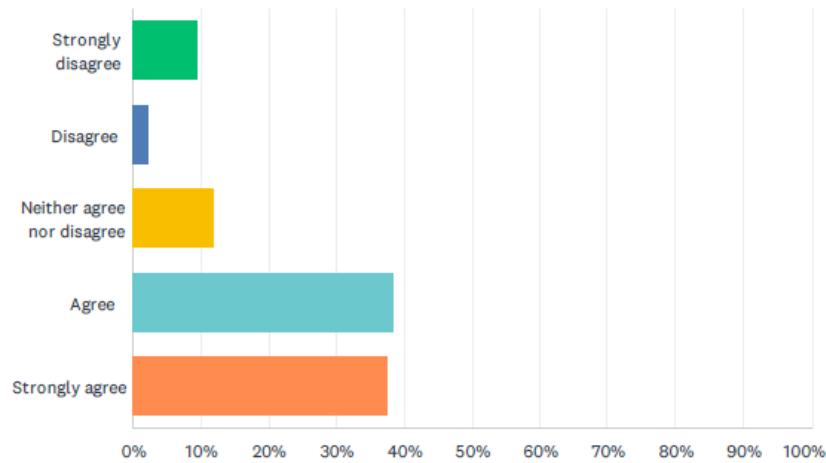
Q3: Which one of the following statements best describes you? Would you say you are someone who...Number of responses = 125

Figure 27 Q3: Which one of the following statements best describes you?



Q4: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I feel safe using public transport. Number of responses = 125

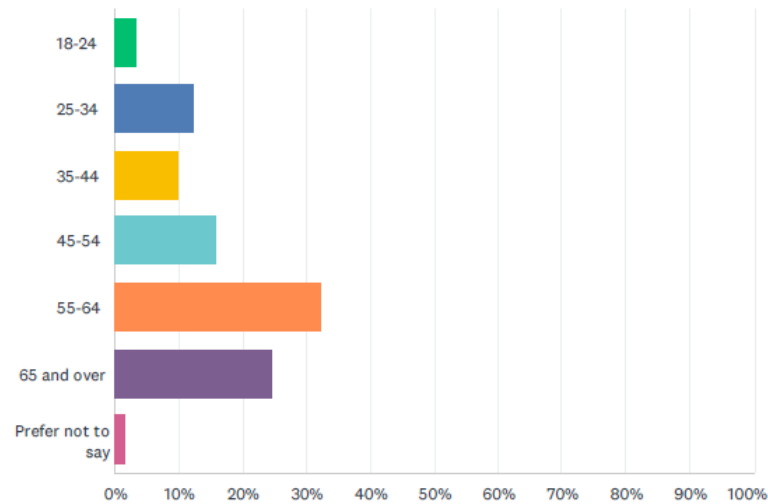
Figure 28 Q4: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I feel safe using public transport



A.1.4 Section D About you

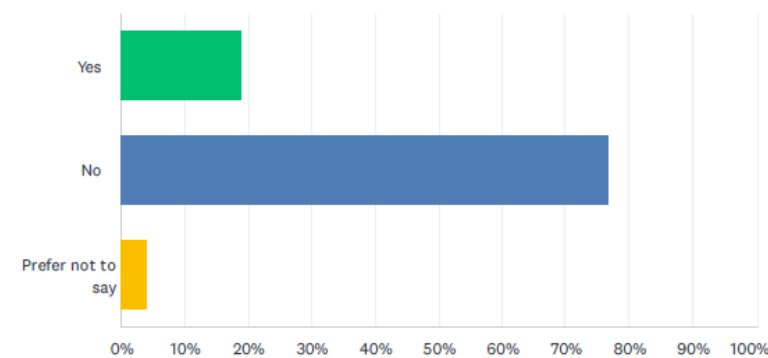
Q1: Which age group do you belong to? Number of responses = 121

Figure 29 Q1: Which age group do you belong to?



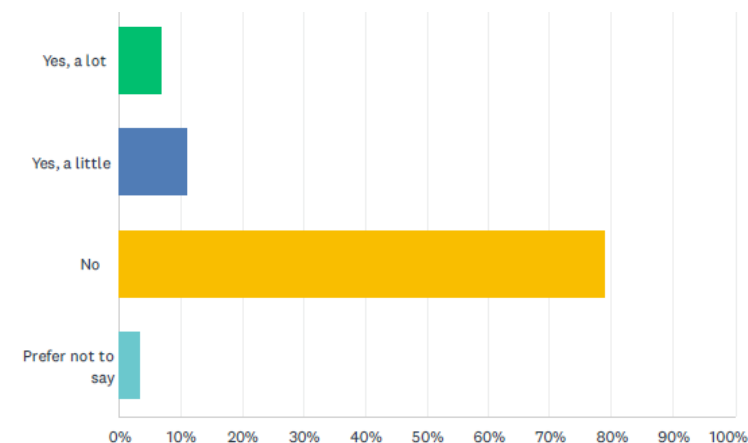
Q2: Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more? Number of responses = 121

Figure 30 Q2: Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more?



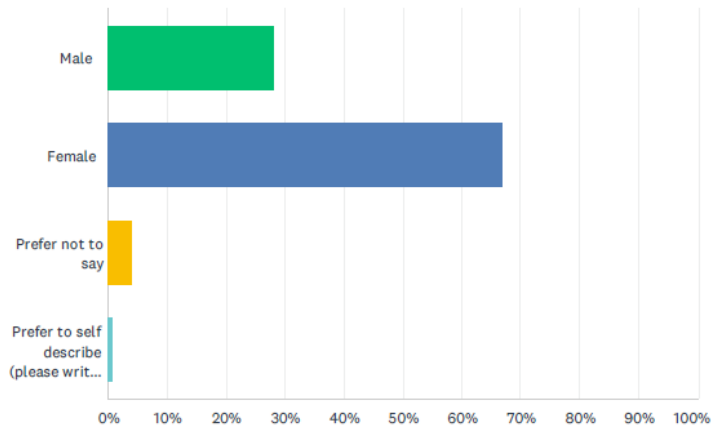
Q3: Do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities? Number of responses = 118

Figure 31 Q3: Do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?



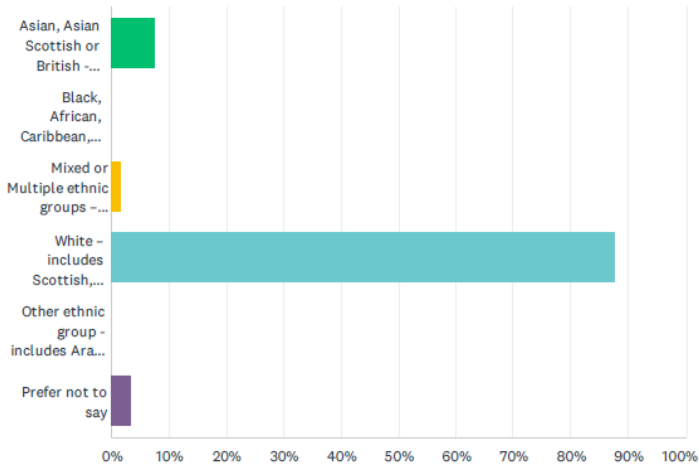
Q4: What is your sex? Number of responses = 121

Figure 32 Q4: What is your sex?



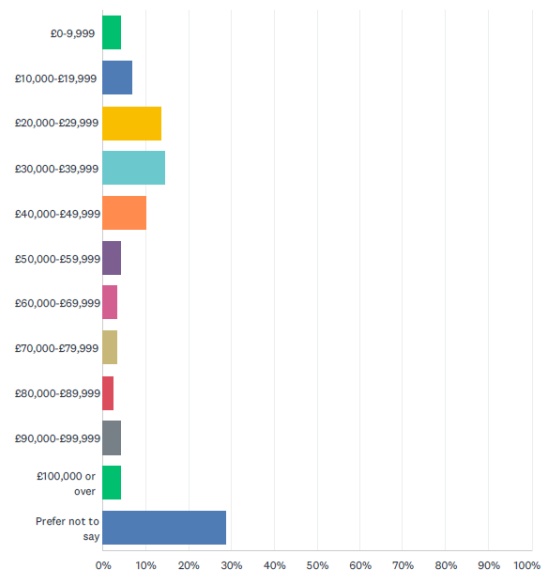
Q5: What is your ethnic group? Number of responses = 121

Figure 33 Q5: What is your ethnic group?



Q6: What is your total household income? Number of responses = 118

Figure 34 Q6: What is your total household income?



Q7: Where do you live? Number of responses = 121

Respondents were grouped into categories which are displayed in Table 4.

Figure 35 Q7: Where do you live?

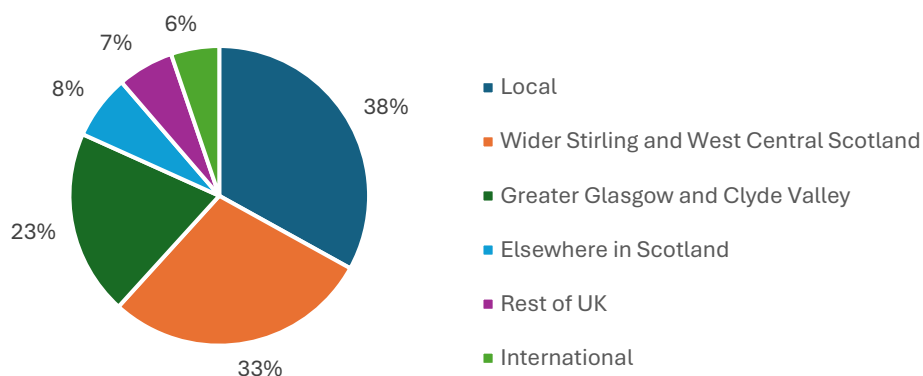


Table 4 Respondents locations

Category	Location
Local	Callander Brig o' Turk Drymen Aberfoyle Balloch Loch Achray
Wider Stirling and West Central Scotland	Stirling area postcodes Dumbarton, Alexandria, Helensburgh Clydebank Milngavie Cowie
Greater Glasgow and Clyde Valley	Anniesland, Knightswood and Yoker Whiteinch, Scotstoun and Yoker Maryhill, North Kelvinside, and Ruchill Cathcart, Croftfoot, King's Park, Muirend, and Netherlee Pacific Quay and Govan Bearsden Milngavie, Mugdock and Baldernock Balfron Bishopbriggs and Torrance North Lanarkshire South Lanarkshire
Elsewhere in Scotland	Edinburgh Dundee
Rest of UK	England Wales
International	Sweden Italy Germany

A.2 Driver Survey

A short survey was used to collect feedback from the 4 drivers of this year's Trossachs Explorer. The survey was hosted by Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park through Microsoft Forms during October. All responses were anonymous.

A total of **3 responses** were received and are summarised below.

Q1: What did you like about being a Trossachs Explorer driver?

- Working in a beautiful area
- Connecting with interesting and friendly people
- Providing support to the local community

“Driving the most beautiful route every day and meeting some amazing/interesting people. Also feeling like I was helping the local community directly.”

Q2: What could improve your experience?

- Minor adjustments to journey times
- More information to inform drivers about the local area
- Review of hail and ride (informal) stops

“Maybe more information on the routes we were travelling? I personally don't know the area, so was obviously unable to pass on any knowledge until maybe the last couple of weeks.”

Q3: What do you think worked well?

- Integration of the timetable with connecting services
- Local people use the service including travel for work and school
- Timetable ran to time

“The way the bus was integrated to the timetables of the buses from Callander, also was good to see local people use the bus to get to and from work/ school.”

Q4: What do you think could be improved?

- Opportunity for bike racks
- More publicity
- More bus stops
- Vary ticket pricing

“All the parks people were fantastic all at Loch Katrine and McColls went above and beyond to make it work and last but not least my fellow drivers. Thanks for the opportunity ”

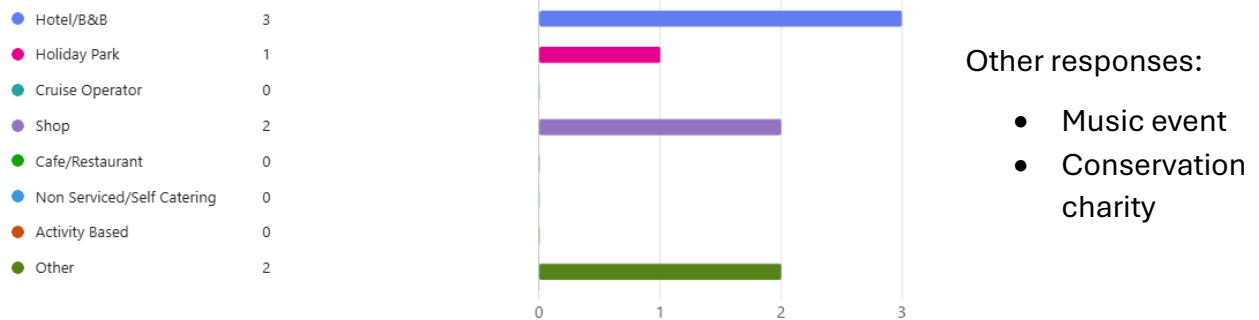
A.3 Business Survey

A short survey was used to collect feedback from local businesses along the Trossachs Explorer route. The survey was hosted by Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park through Microsoft Forms during October to December. All responses were anonymous.

A total of **9 responses** were received and are summarised below.

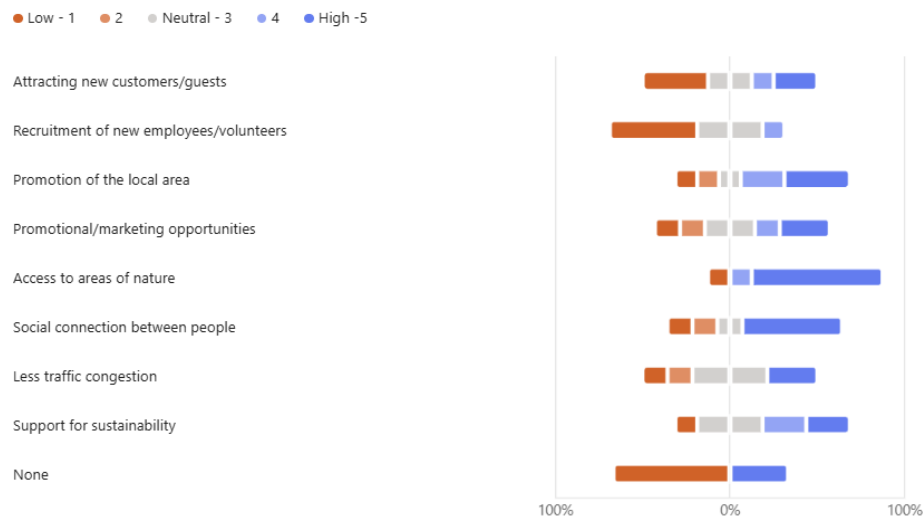
Q1: What is the purpose of your business?

Figure 36 What is the purpose of your business?



Q2: What impact did the Trossachs Explorer have on your business?

Figure 37 What impact did the Trossachs Explorer have on your business?



Q3: Please add any other impact and/or expand on your ratings below.

- **Improved accessibility for customers and visitors:** respondents reported that the Trossachs Explorer made it easier for visitors to access rural and remote destinations without relying on private cars.

“The bus... makes it much easier for customers staying at Callander or elsewhere to enjoy Loch Katrine without the need to use a car.”

“Access from Callander to rural venues at Trossachs Church, Loch Achray and the Steamship Sir Walter Scott.”

- **Positive impact on visitor experience and exploration:** respondents noted that the service enabled wider exploration of the area, particularly for tourists.

“The bus definitely helped us to help people explore the area more, especially if they didn't have transport whilst on holiday.”

“It already has brought significant benefits... for visitors to the area.”

- **Benefits for staffing and workforce access:** one respondent highlighted the role of the bus in supporting staff recruitment and retention in remote locations.

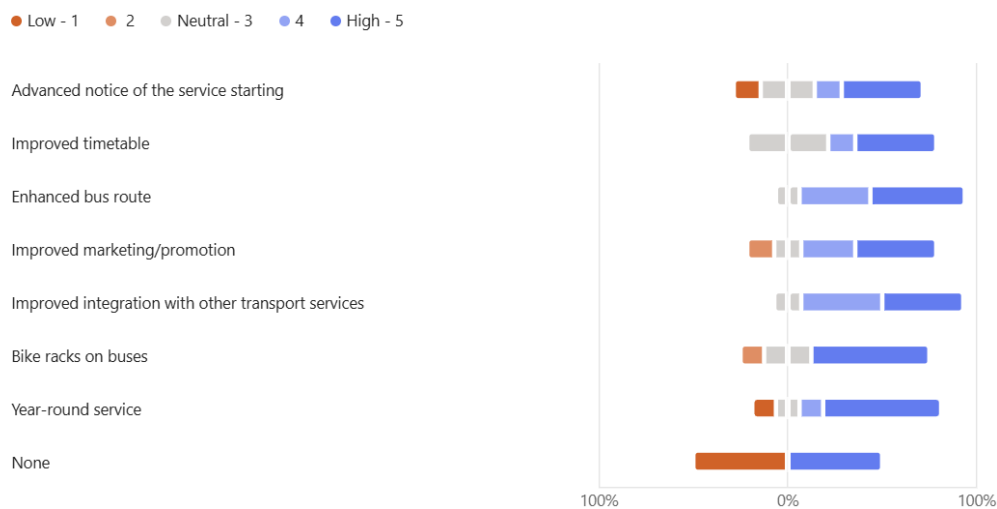
“Finding it easier to attract and retain staff to its relatively remote site at Loch Katrine.”

- **Support for rural businesses and communities:** respondents framed the service as beneficial to rural economies and fragile communities.

“We know that it already has brought significant benefits for rural businesses and fragile rural communities”.

Q4: What would help to strengthen this impact in the future?

Figure 38 What would help to strengthen this impact in the future?



Q5: Please add any other suggestions and/or expand on your ratings above.

- **Improved connectivity with wider transport network:** respondents emphasised that stronger connections to major hubs would significantly increase the service’s impact.

“Connections to Stirling and Glasgow buses would have a massive impact.”

“Extension of the concept throughout the Park and its key gateways like Helensburgh, Dunoon, Stirling and Glasgow.”

- **Need for a year-round or extended seasonal service:** respondents stressed the importance of operating beyond the current season.

“Year-round service would be amazing or at least start earlier April/May is already getting busier with tourism.”

“Year-round service is vital for this area.”

- **Integration with other transport modes and attractions:** respondents identified opportunities to coordinate with other visitor transport services.

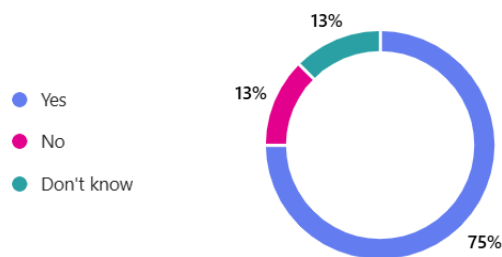
“Co-ordination of marketing, timetabling and ticketing with other transport modes especially cruise boats on Loch Katrine and Loch Lomond is an obvious next step.”

- **Marketing and advance timetable information:** respondents highlighted the value of early and coordinated promotion.

“Early promotion of timetable prior to service starting to coordinate events round.”

Q6: Would you be interested in future commercial partnerships (such as advertisements, donations or customer discounts) to support the running of the Trossachs Explorer?

Figure 39 Would you be interested in future commercial partnerships?



Q7: Do you have any other ideas for how your business could support the running of the Trossachs Explorer in the future?

Responses indicate a willingness to actively support through:

- **Promotion and marketing support:** respondents expressed readiness to promote the service through their own communication channels.

“Inclusion in our ‘Trossachs Trail’ printed and on-line information”

- **Distribution of timetables and route information:** respondents highlighted the role of businesses as informal visitor information points.

“We have naturally become the new Visitor information for visitors to Balloch and the surrounding area.”

- **Partnership incentives and joint offers:** one respondent proposed linking the bus ticket to business discounts.

“Trossachs Explorer ticket could offer a discount across many businesses and venues.”



Figure 40 Trossachs Explorer 2025 promotional asset

B.1 Website engagement

The Trossachs Explorer website was live between June and October 2025: <https://www.lochlomond-trossachs.org/the-trossachs-explorer/>. The level of engagement through the website is summarised in Table 5.

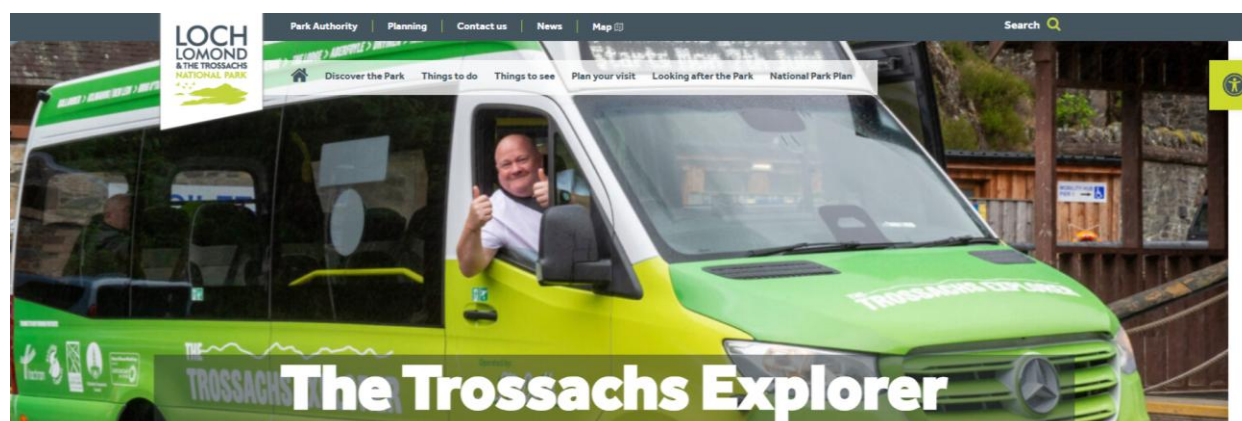
Table 5 Website engagement [comparison to year 1]

Page	Views	Users	Views per user	Average engagement time
Trossachs Explorer Landing Page	11,680 [15,677]	7,502 [11,521]	1.54 [1.36]	38s [33s]
Getting Around the Park – figures for comparison	2,740 [2,518]	2,159 [2,055]	1.27 [1.23]	19s [20s]
Timetables	8,231 [10,271]	3,791 [5,936]	2.17 [1.73]	1m 12s [54s]
Experiences along the route	1,895 [3,042]	1,277 [2,191]	1.48 [1.39]	1m 16s [1m 16s]
Prices	2,664 [1,875]	1,966 [1,480]	1.36 [1.27]	44s [39s]
FAQs	1,567 [1,622]	1,103 [1,212]	1.40 [1.34]	1m 12s [1m 10s]

Key reflections:

- The landing page views peaked on 25th and 26th June in line with press and social media activities. There were further peaks on 4th and 7th July which coincided with social media posts.
- As with 2024, ‘experiences along the route’ had the longest engagement time, followed closely by ‘FAQs’.
- Views to the Trossachs Explorer landing page accounted for 1.12% of all site traffic during the reporting period, compared to 1.78% in 2024

Figure 41 Trossachs Explorer 2025 webpage



B.2 Social media engagement

A social media campaign was undertaken between July and October to promote the service. The level of engagement through social media is summarised in Table 6.

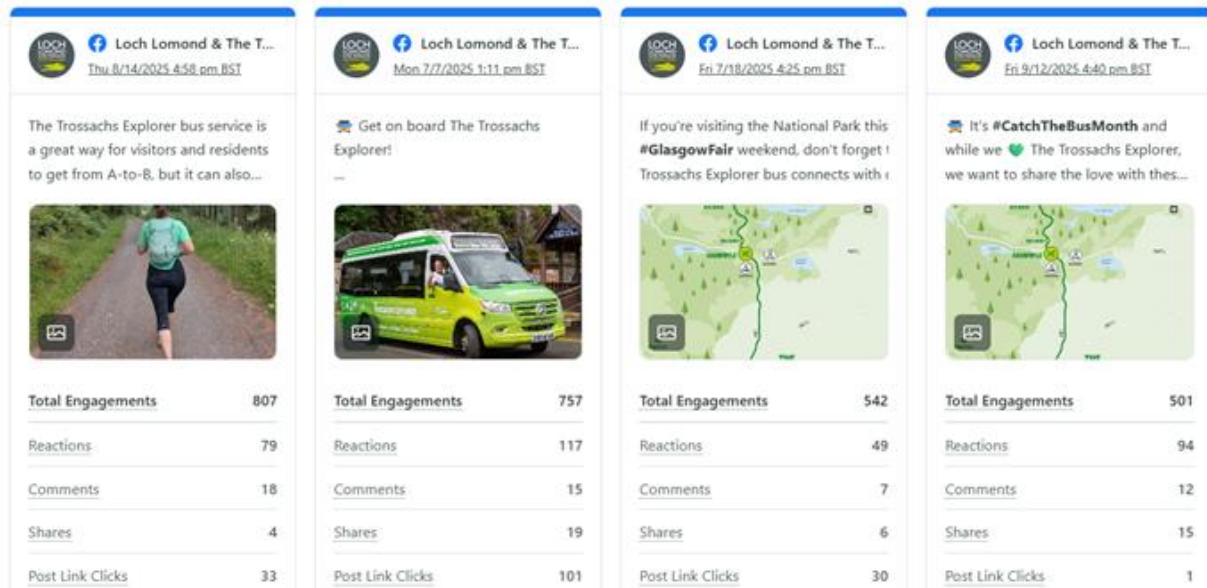
Table 6 Social media engagement [comparison to year 1]

	Channel		
	Facebook	Instagram	LinkedIn
Posts	21 [14]	21 [29]	5 [4]
Impressions	166,057 [179,096]	88,725 [49,655]	6,343 [7,822]
Average reach per post	6,358 [11,349]	2,751 [1,395]	n/a
Video views	1,545 [6,741]	2,282 [18,889]	783 [783]
Engagement	5,451 [13,234]	1,378 [1,856]	451 [761]
Shares	124 [250]	52 [43]	18 [25]
Post link clicks	483 [1,202]	59 [181]	289 [520]
Engagement rate (per impression)	3.3% [7.4%]	1.6% [3.7%]	7.1% [9.7%]

Key reflections:

- The top performing post in terms of engagement, reach and impressions was a follow-up collaboration with Helen.X.Outside.
- A graphic showing the route and connecting services was the 3rd and 4th top performing post, showing this type of information was well received.
- The partnership with Less Waste Laura performed well across platforms, with the video having almost 9k views on Instagram.
- Although there were more posts on Facebook this year, engagement was lower which could be because the service was not as 'new' as last year, and some of the target audience viewed it as 'business-as-usual'.
- Although there were less posts on Instagram this year, the algorithm pushed content wider, so reach and impressions increased.
- Engagement level decreased because most of the extra visibility likely came from non-followers who viewed but didn't interact.
- The social media campaign was supported by Stirling Council, SPT, Scotrail, Scot Gov, local communities, businesses and others.

Figure 42 Top performing posts through the 2025 social media campaign



B.3 Media engagement

A media campaign was undertaken between June and October to promote the service. Engagement with press and local media is summarised in Table 7.

Table 7 Summary of media engagement

Channel	Date	Article
Walk Highlands	3 rd July	Trossachs Explorer bus returns Walkhighlands
The Herald	7 th July	Sustainable bus pilot gets underway in National Park The Herald
Dumbarton & Vale of Leven Reporter	7 th July	Sustainable bus launched for Loch Lomond and The Trossachs Dumbarton and Vale of Leven Reporter
The Courier	9 th September	I went on the Trossachs Explorer bus - should it return next year?
Bus & Train User	18 th September	TEX & E11: two spectacular rides across Scotland's two National Parks – BusAndTrainUser
The Herald	9 th October	National park sustainable bus pilot hailed a success The Herald
Helensburgh Advertiser	10 th October	Trossachs Explorer bus hailed a success for National Park Helensburgh Advertiser
Daily Record	9 th October	Sustainable Loch Lomond bus service hailed a success after busy summer season - Daily Record

Key reflections:

- Earned press coverage secured across the campaign sentiment was 100% positive, aligning with the campaign's objectives.
- A total of 26 online, 13 print and 3 broadcast pieces were secured, including interviews with key spokespeople.
- Coverage reflected those target local and national titles as noted in the Comms Campaign, including The Herald, STV, BBC online, BBC Radio Scotland, Daily Record, Helensburgh Advertiser and The Stirling Observer.
- National coverage secured contributed to wider visibility and profile building, while local coverage maintained vital local engagement, visibility and engagement
- Total reach for coverage was 152,000,000.
- A paid campaign with YoungScot extended service visibility with a key target audience (young people) which included an e-newsletter to 110k members and content on YS socials reaching 55k users.
- Having a longer lead time to plan and deliver a media campaign would significantly improve coverage.

B.4 Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement was undertaken between June and November to promote the service and record feedback. Engagement took the form of:

- 13,000 leaflets distributed locally
- Four email updates to over 100 partners, community organisations and businesses stakeholders
- 18 hours of volunteer time by National Park Volunteer Rangers
- Ongoing meetings with partners, community organisations and business stakeholders.

An improved 'campaign toolkit' including key messages, FAQs and social media assets was shared with stakeholders at the start of the service. This resulted the service being shared more widely through partner newsletters, websites and on social media channels throughout the campaign, including VisitScotland, Scotrail, Stirling Council, Scottish Government, Walk the Highlands, SPT, local communities and business organisations.

Appendix C: Ticket Data Analysis

Ticket data was collected through ticket machines and provided by McColls at the end of the pilot. This data helps to understand travel trends, types of users and performance of the service.

This year the Trossachs Explorer service was registered in two parts:

1. TEX (route between Drymen and Callander)
2. 309T (route between Alexandria and Drymen)*

**The first and last two journeys of the day only.*

As each bus travelled to the bus depot in the Vale of Leven, the first two and last two buses of the day offered a direct connection between Alexandria/Balloch and Callander. This bus was marked as the 309T service and changed to the TEX service at Drymen.

As the ticket data was provided by service registration, the analysis of this has been done separately and is presented below.



Figure 43 Trossachs Explorer 2025 promotional asset

Travel trends

Ticket data demonstrates how people used the service including the number of people travelling and their travel patterns.

Number of passenger journeys

Trossachs Explorer

The total number of passenger journeys on the Trossachs Explorer was 5,172. This is shown in figure 44 on a daily and figure 45 on a weekly basis across the duration of the service.

Figure 44 Trossachs Explorer passengers (per day)

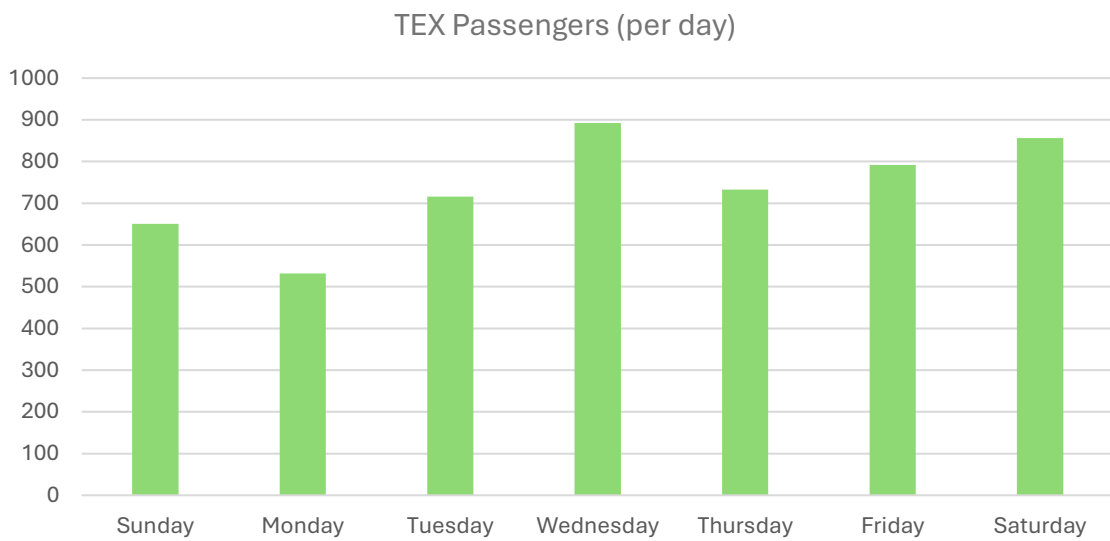
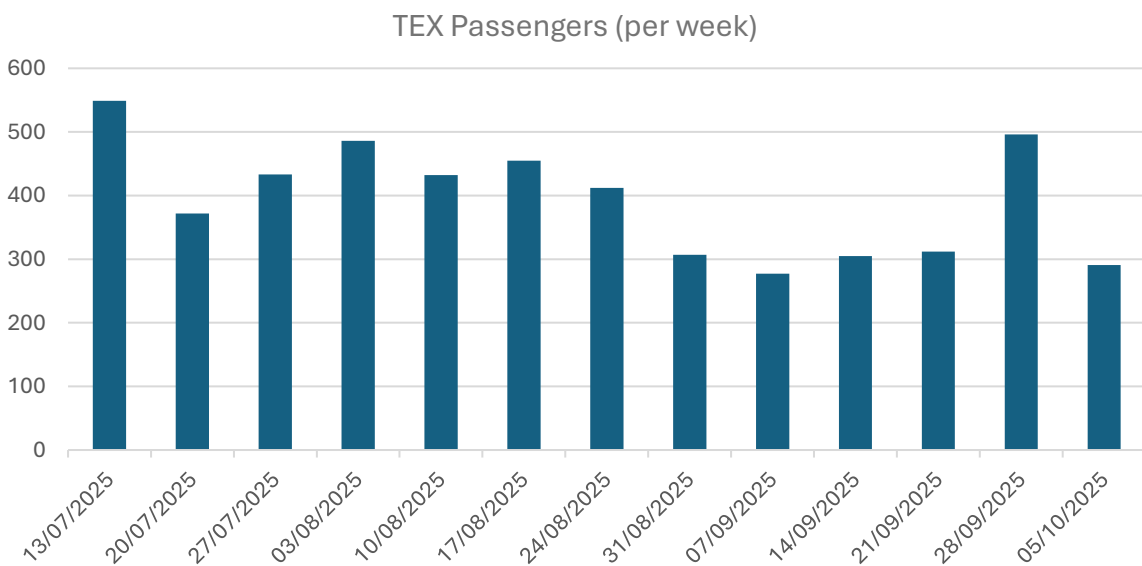


Figure 45 Trossachs Explorer passengers (per week)



309T

The total number of passenger journeys on the 309T was 758. This is shown in figure 46 on a daily and figure 47 on a weekly basis across the duration of the service.

Figure 46 309T passengers (per day)

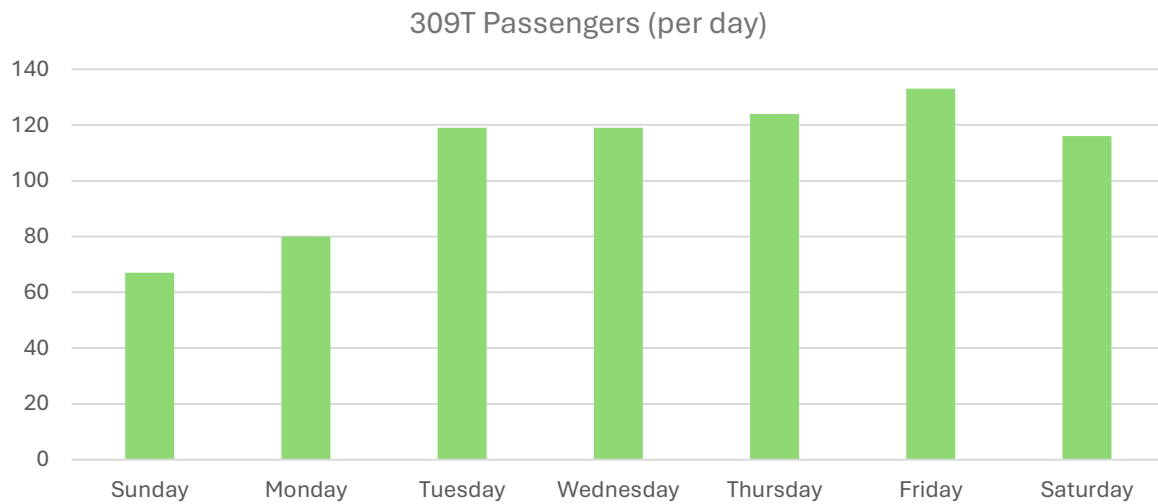
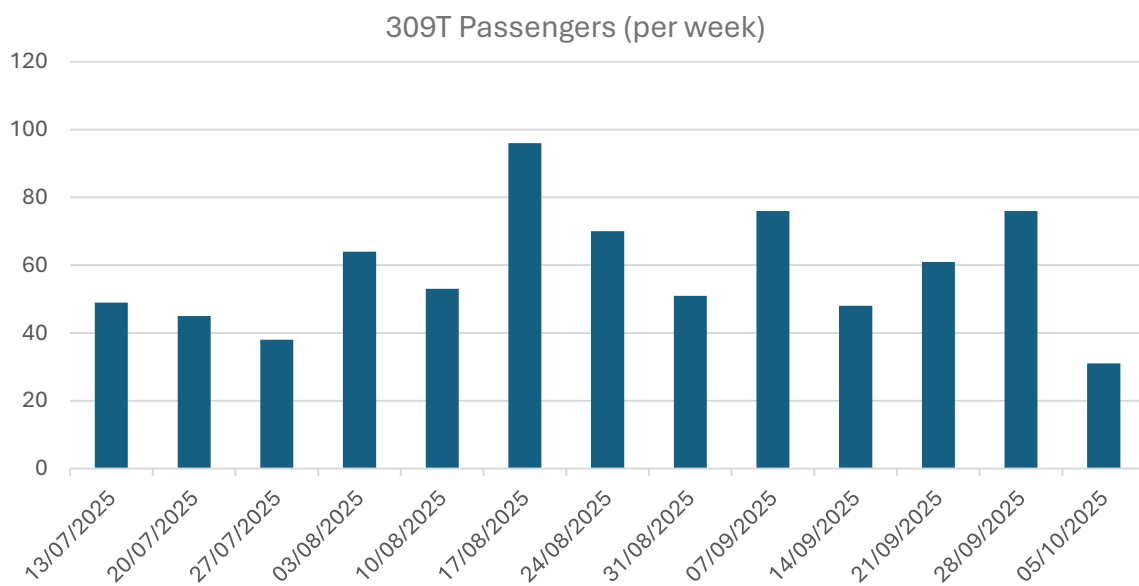


Figure 47 309T passengers (per week)

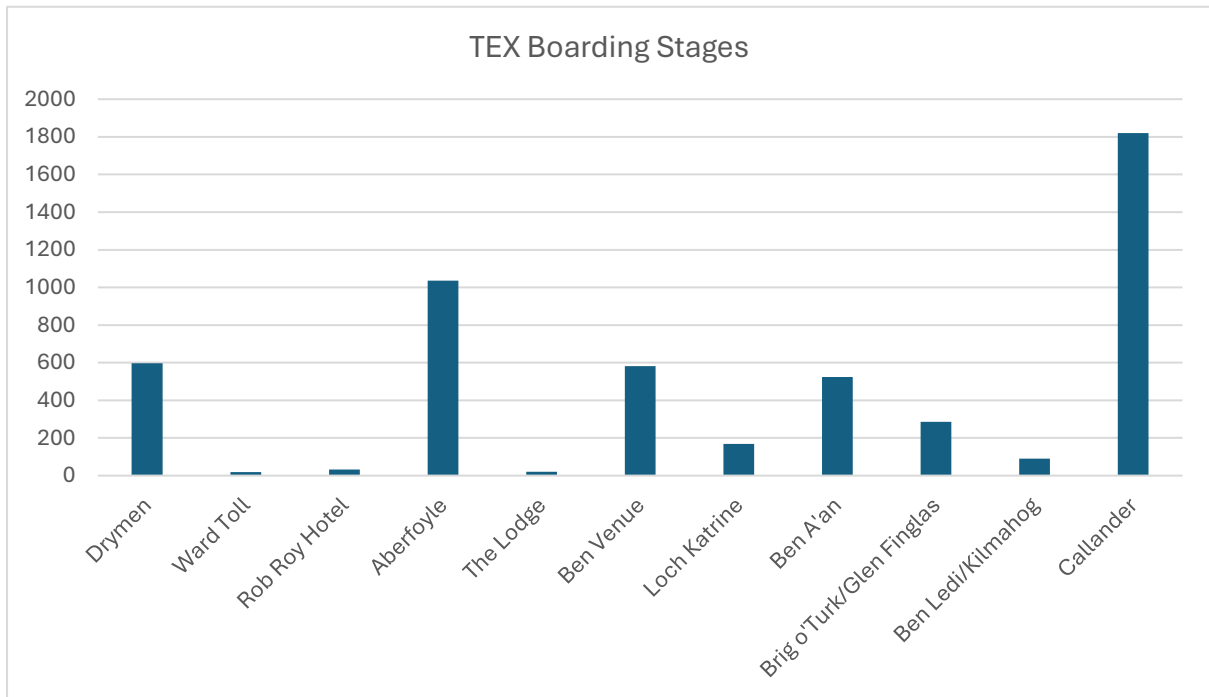


Boarding locations

Trossachs Explorer

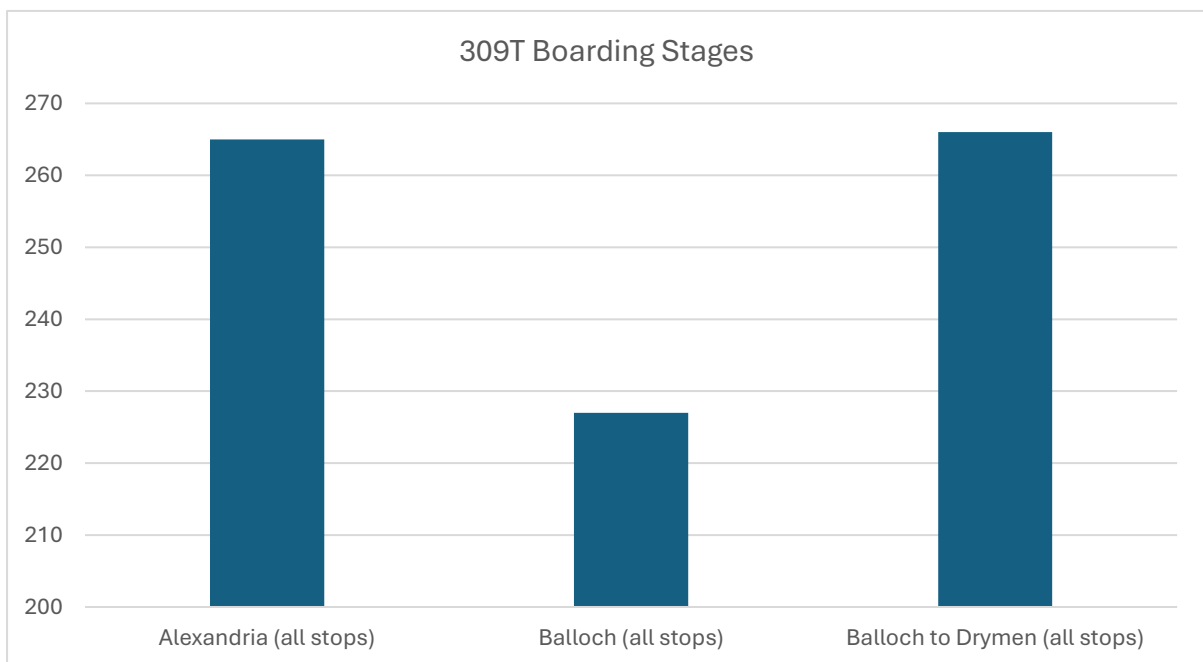
The locations of where passengers boarded the Trossachs Explorer is shown in figure 48.

Figure 48 Trossachs Explorer boarding stages



The locations of where passengers boarded the 309T is shown in figure 49.

Figure 49 309T boarding stages



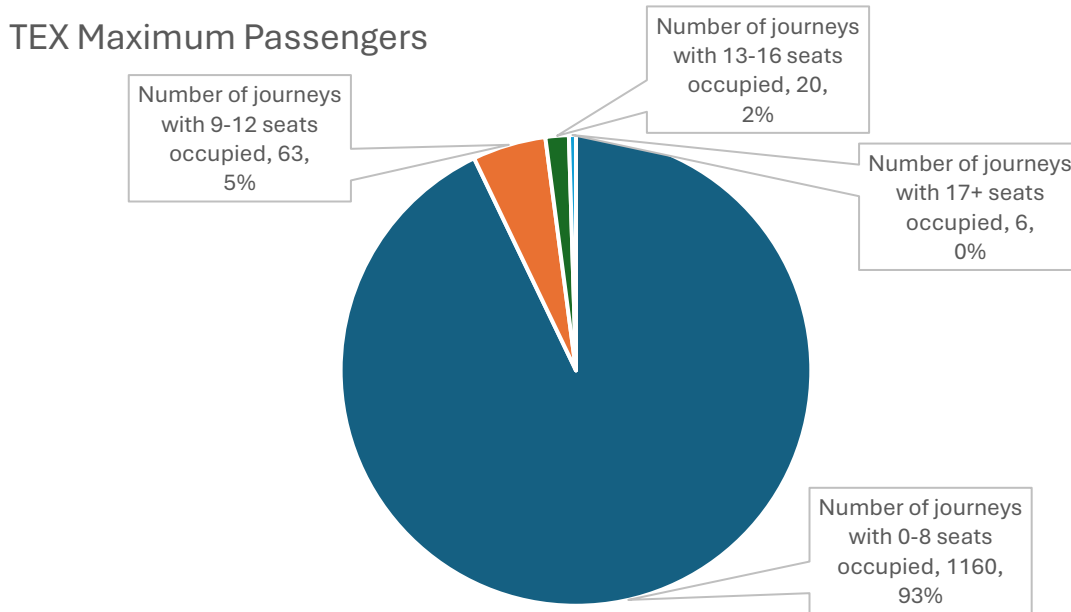
Number of occupied seats

The total number of seats available on the Trossachs Explorer bus was 18 seats.

Trossachs Explorer

The maximum number of passengers per trip on the Trossachs Explorer is shown in figure 50.

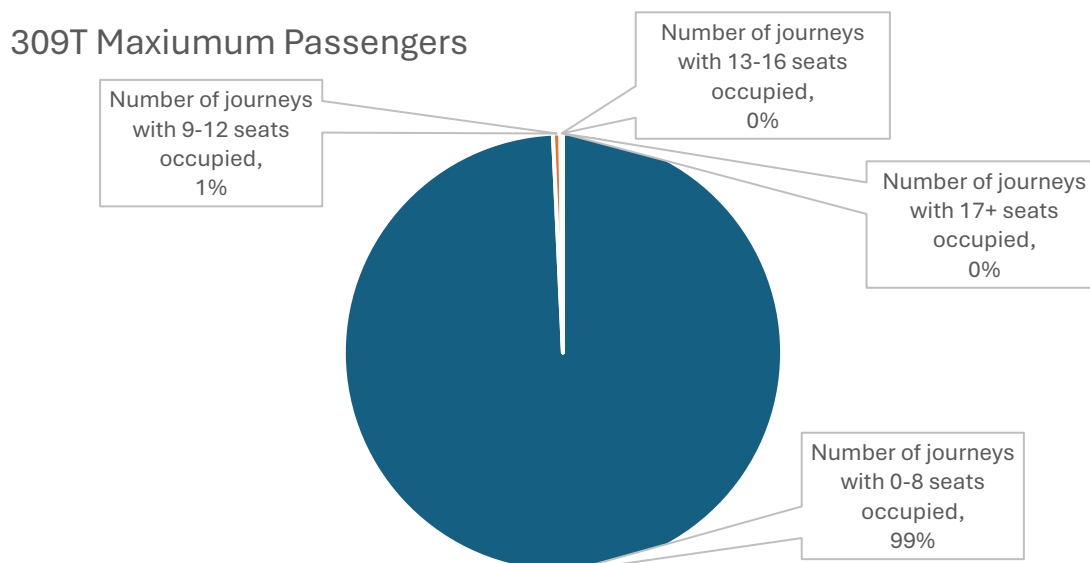
Figure 50 Trossachs Explorer maximum passengers per journey



309T

The maximum number of passengers per trip on the 309T is shown in figure 51.

Figure 51 309T maximum passengers per journey



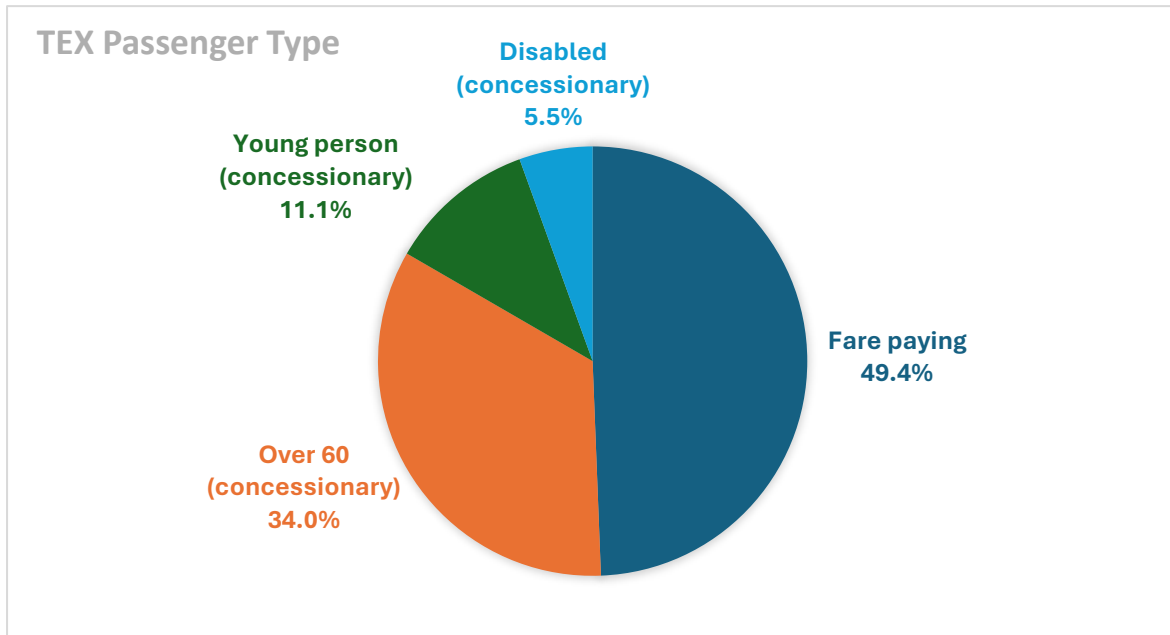
Types of users

Ticket data demonstrates the types of passengers that used the service.

Trossachs Explorer

The types of passengers travelling on the Trossachs Explorer is shown in figure 52.

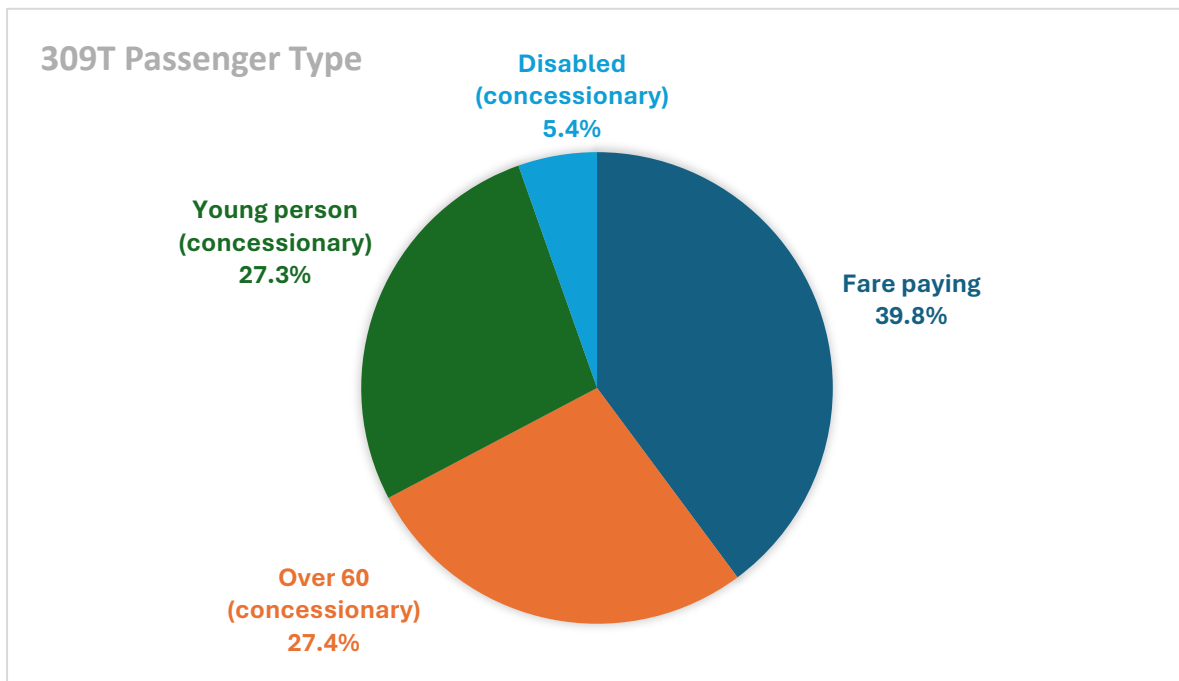
Figure 52 Trossachs Explorer passenger type



309T

The types of passengers travelling on the 309T is shown in figure 53.

Figure 53 309T passenger type



Performance of the service

Ticket data demonstrates how well the service performed in terms of punctuality including running on time, early or late.

Punctuality

The punctuality of the Trossachs Explorer (including the 309T) is shown in figure 54.

Figure 54 Punctuality of the service

