

Climate resilient businesses

Case study: FirstGroup UK Bus (Scotland)

Recognising the financial, safety and reputational consequences of extreme weather and climate change, FirstGroup UK Bus (Scotland) – together with ScotRail – participated in a pilot project run by Adaptation Scotland and backed by Scotland’s 2020 Climate Group. This case study shows how Adaptation Scotland helped FirstGroup to understand and start planning for long-term climate change.



Getting started

FirstGroup UK Bus (Scotland) has, from time to time, been prevented from operating normal bus services in Scotland due to extreme weather events such as heavy snow and rain, flooding and widespread ice. Measures have since been put in place to help deal with similar events, but as extreme weather events become more frequent and intense due to climate change, so will the consequences for FirstGroup.



Bus travel and the weather

This project was initiated in response by FirstGroup’s Head of Environment and Head of Corporate Social Responsibility. Employees from the Performance, Property and Quality departments also participated demonstrating the need for a business-wide response to climate change.

As a first step, Adaptation Scotland helped FirstGroup UK Bus (Scotland) to compile a record of weather events which had recently caused serious financial, safety and reputational consequences. Evidence was gathered from internal records, media reports and staff experiences.

Key impacts included:

- heavy rain, snow and high winds causing service delays or cancellations due to road closures and accidents;
- temperature extremes interfering with vehicle air systems, valves and brakes;
- high winds and fallen trees damaging bus windows; and
- severe snow/high winds/ice causing accidents.

FirstGroup UK Bus (Scotland): a critical transport provider

“FirstGroup is the leading transport operator in the UK and North America. With revenues of over £6.5 billion per annum and approximately 124,000 employees, FirstGroup transports more than 2.5 billion passengers every year. As a major transport operator, FirstGroup believes it has a role in supporting governments and communities to reduce the impacts of climate change from road transport.”

FIRSTGROUP CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY



Adaptation Scotland then helped FirstGroup UK Bus (Scotland) to visualise how current vulnerabilities might alter in light of projected climate change, and what threats and opportunities these pose to the business.



Committed to climate resilient growth

FirstGroup is committed to attracting more passengers to its services. However higher passenger numbers will increase FirstGroup's exposure to extreme weather and climate hazards, with more passengers to manage during periods of disruption. FirstGroup must therefore ensure that its growth strategy is designed with future weather and climate impacts in mind. The work completed in partnership with Adaptation Scotland is a step in the right direction.

ADAPTATION SCOTLAND

Prioritising and managing future climate change risks

Future threats were subject to a climate change risk assessment during a second workshop lead by Adaptation Scotland. Employees worked together to score the likelihood and magnitude of each threat, and agreed that most of the current threats were likely to remain high risk in future, with the exception of snow and ice-related threats. Meanwhile some threats ranked medium risk under current climate increased to high risk in future, including heavy rain and flooding causing road accidents and property damage, and increased temperatures causing servers to shut down.

Participants identified a number of actions to help manage climate risks, including:

- increase gutter sizes and number of downpipes to cope with increased heavy rainfall;
- consider rainwater harvesting to reduce exposure to water shortage;
- ensure tyre profiles can cope with increased wear and tear caused by temperature rise; and
- install tinted windows and improve natural ventilation to cope with increased summer temperatures.

FirstGroup UK Bus (Scotland) is already building adaptive capacity by improving passenger communications through the use of smartphones and social media. Keeping passengers up to date during weather-related service disruption will help to minimise reputational consequences.

Next steps

FirstGroup UK Bus (Scotland) has an opportunity to set a precedent in building a climate resilient business, as well as to influence suppliers to manage their own climate risks. The risk assessment completed in conjunction with Adaptation Scotland provides a good basis to start adaptation planning. Adaptation Scotland has recommended the following actions to increase FirstGroup's weather and climate resilience:

- review and strengthen existing controls to reduce current and future risks;
- integrate climate resilience into planned maintenance and investments, and existing plans and policies;
- monitor emerging risks by reviewing the climate change risk assessment regularly; and
- develop an adaptation plan using Adaptation Scotland's business adaptation plan template.



Information and support

The global climate is changing with far-reaching implications for Scotland. Greenhouse gases already emitted into the atmosphere mean that some climate change is unavoidable regardless of future emissions reductions. Climate change presents threats and opportunities, and businesses have an essential role to play in helping Scotland respond to these. Adaptation Scotland provides information, tools and training aimed at helping organisations understand and respond to the challenges and opportunities presented by climate change.



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