



Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy

A Response from CTA

May 2024

www.ctauk.org

Summary

The Community Transport Association (CTA) welcomes the proposals of [Strathclyde Partnership for Transport \(SPT\)](#) to reform and improve local buses in the West of Scotland as part of a new [Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy](#). We agree that it is **time for a new and more ambitious approach, because the status quo has failed**.

The current deregulated, fragmented and **privatised model of delivering bus services does not work for the people and communities of the West of Scotland**, which is a diverse area with a significant economy and large population. In many ways, the need for [the region's extensive Community Transport sector](#), including 5 community-owned bus services, which plugs network gaps and addresses unmet transport needs, is evidence of this failure.

Local bus routes, frequencies and use are all in decline and have been falling for years. **These trends need to be urgently reversed through greater control, investment and regulation in the public interest** to tackle climate change, transport poverty and unequal access to amenities, education, employment, healthcare, public services and recreation.

On behalf of, and after consultation with, 44 CTA members in the West of Scotland, we believe that SPT should:

- **Rule out a 'business as usual' approach** which is not working;
- **Rule out voluntary partnerships** which cannot be enforced and therefore are unlikely to be sufficient to deliver change at pace or at scale;
- **Take forward local bus services franchising** while carefully considering integration with and opportunities for Community Transport and Demand Responsive Transport. **But there will always remain a need for and value in Community Transport;**
- **Not take forward Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIPs)** which are unlikely to deliver transformational change. Limited budget and capacity should be focused on accelerating and improving progress on priorities like franchising;
- **Investigate creating small-scale municipal bus operations to complement and run alongside locally-owned, non-profit Community Transport operators;** and,
- **Ensure the process of developing and implementing its proposals is open, transparent, inclusive and accessible** and reflects the new [Best Practice Guidance on Community Engagement](#) in Scotland's bus sector.

We look forward to working with SPT to ensure that the voices of local communities are heard and the region's Community Transport sector can participate as its proposals are progressed.

STRATHCLYDE REGIONAL BUS STRATEGY:

A CONSULTATION ON THE RECOMMENDED OPTIONS FOR IMPROVING OUR FUTURE BUS NETWORK

Business as Usual and Voluntary Partnerships

- 1. To what extent do you support or oppose SPT's recommendation to rule out 'business as usual' and 'voluntary partnerships' for further consideration in the bus strategy?**

Rule out business as usual – Strongly support.

Rule out voluntary partnerships – Strongly support.

Local services franchising and Bus Service Improvement Partnerships

- 2. To what extent do you support or oppose SPT's recommendation to take forward local services franchising and BSIPs?**

Take forward local services franchising – Strongly support.

Take forward BSIPs – Somewhat oppose.

Municipal bus company

- 3. To what extent do you support or oppose SPT's recommendation to further investigate the opportunities offered by the creation of a small-scale municipal bus operation?**

Strongly support.

- 4. If you wish, please use the boxes below to explain why you support or oppose any of SPT's recommendations.**

Rule out business as usual

We agree that a 'business as usual' approach, which is not working, should be ruled out.

Rule out voluntary partnerships

We agree that voluntary partnerships, which cannot be enforced and therefore are unlikely to be sufficient to deliver change at pace or at scale, should be ruled out.

Take forward local services franchising

We agree that SPT should take forward local services franchising.

We believe that everyone should have access to local transport which meets their needs no matter who they are or where they live. Public transport should put people first, not profit. Services should be designed and delivered in the public interest, rather than according to private interests, to meet the needs of people and communities. These values are at the heart of the [ethos and mission of Community Transport](#), which is always for a social purpose and never for a profit.

The current deregulated, fragmented and privatised model of delivering bus services is not working for the people and communities of the West of Scotland, which is a diverse area with a significant economy and large population. In many ways, the need for [the region's extensive Community Transport sector](#), including 5 community-owned bus services, which plugs gaps and addresses unmet transport needs across the bus network, is evidence of this failure.

Moreover, local bus routes, frequencies and use are all in decline in the West of Scotland and have been falling for years. Across Scotland as a whole, 25 million miles of bus routes have been lost since 2019 and, as a result, bus passenger numbers have fallen by a third. Across the region, this means 70 million fewer bus journeys.

These trends need to be urgently reversed through greater control, investment and regulation to tackle climate change, transport poverty and unequal access to amenities, education, employment, healthcare, public services and recreation. Only by improving the accessibility, affordability and reliability of local bus services can we reduce private car use, increase public transport use and decarbonise our transport system.

Franchising will not by itself end all of the challenges facing the bus sector, such as a lack of reliable and timely services caused by congestion or a lack of bus priority measures, such as bus gates and lanes. It is necessary for the Scottish Government to urgently reverse its decision to [reduce funding for SPT's capital spending to zero](#) and to release the remaining part of the [Bus Partnership Fund](#) for accelerated investment in this kind of essential infrastructure to improve journey times and the passenger experience. Less than £30m of the total £500m has been spent to date before a damaging 'pause' in the Fund was announced.

Nevertheless, franchising will give SPT more of the tools it needs to address other significant challenges. Franchising will enable routes to be set according to need, rather than profitability, and should be accompanied by network changes and expansion on this basis. Franchising will enable a minimum level of service and quality standards of accessibility, affordability and

sustainability to be set and delivered across the board, ensuring fairness for all passengers and communities across the region.

This is not the case at present. Passengers and communities in the West of Scotland suffer from inconsistent and confusing local bus services with complex and unfair ticketing due to the differing approaches, performance and standards of multiple competing operators.

In the transition to franchising, there will need to be careful consideration of how and where Community Transport and Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) services, including but not limited to community-owned buses, fit into this new landscape. This did not take place in Greater Manchester, for example, and was a missed opportunity to improve accessibility, collaboration and integration.

SPT will need to discuss with the Community Transport sector whether or how it will be integrated into or with a new bus network of franchises, as well as whether or how non-profit operators can bid to run a franchise. The franchise framework design process must recognise Community Transport's role and involve representation from our sector. It could support more local charities and community groups to deliver high-quality, community-owned local bus services. Franchising packages should not be designed to disadvantage or exclude smaller operators. Some Community Transport operators deliver franchises elsewhere in the UK.

CTA members believe that there is the potential for franchising to reduce the demand or need for some Community Transport services, if implemented properly. A modern bus network should minimise the gaps in our transport system and minimise the number of people with unmet transport needs.

However, this is not inevitable and is likely to be an uneven and gradual process across the region. There will, regardless, always remain a need for Community Transport – especially for older people and disabled people who rely on accessible transport – and value in Community Transport – because community ownership tailors transport solutions to very specific local needs, while delivering significant social, economic and environmental benefits. This must not be lost through centralisation or standardisation. Funding for Community Transport should be protected.

Take forward BSIPs

We do not believe that SPT should take forward Bus Service Improvement Partnerships (BSIPs).

The Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy itself notes that BSIPs are 'unlikely to deliver major improvements to service levels across the network or major beneficial impacts on fares'. This should also be seen in the context of limited staff capacity and the need for prioritisation.

A genuinely impactful BSIP also relies on significant public funding to achieve outcomes, which does not appear to be forthcoming, and could otherwise be better directed to accelerating and

improving progress on franchising. CTA members have raised concerns about the projected timeline for the transition to franchising.

The recent [Miles Better report](#) by the Centre for Cities comes to a similar conclusion that there is no available public-private partnership model capable of delivering the transformational change which is required. None of the city regions in England which are pursuing franchising (Greater Manchester, Liverpool, South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire), entered into the English equivalent of a BSIP before or during the franchise framework design process.

Further investigate municipal bus operations

We agree that SPT should investigate the opportunities offered by the creation of small-scale municipal bus operations to deliver socially necessary services where private operators are limited.

However, Community Transport operators could potentially deliver some of these services. Therefore, publicly-owned, municipal bus operations should complement and run alongside locally-owned, non-profit operators. There are already 5 community-owned bus services across the region. The new bus network under franchising will be most successful and deliver greatest community benefit where provision is delivered by a mix of municipal and community operators.

5. Have you read any of the impact assessments that accompany the bus strategy consultation document?

Yes.

6. If you would like to make any comments on the impact assessments, please leave these below.

The [Equality Impact Assessment](#) (EqIA) and the [Fairer Scotland Duty Impact Assessment](#) note that a franchise agreement or a municipal ownership agreement 'would have the ability to specify consistent vehicle standards, fleet specifications and depot management systems into its contracts'.

We agree that this would create opportunities to 'raise... standards' of accessibility and inclusion across all bus services in the West of Scotland to ensure everyone has access to 'modern or more accessible bus fleets' which can be used by older people and disabled people.

We believe that these standards should be set as high as possible and should be accompanied by better accessibility training for drivers, passenger assistants and other frontline staff. We believe that any 'suitable transition period' should be as short as possible and as long as necessary to ensure new and more accessible vehicles are in use quickly.

7. Finally, if you have any further comments related to the consultation on the bus strategy recommendations, please enter them here.

We would like to thank SPT colleagues for participating in some initial engagement with CTA members during the consultation period. We are happy to facilitate further engagement going forward.

We look forward to working with SPT to ensure that the voices of local communities are heard and the region's Community Transport sector can participate as its proposals are progressed with the needs of local people at their heart. As a democratic process, it is essential that it is open, transparent, inclusive and accessible.

In April 2024, new [Best Practice Guidance on Community Engagement](#) in Scotland's bus sector was published by Transport Scotland. The new guidance was co-produced by the Sub-Group on Community Engagement as part of the Transport Minister's Bus Taskforce. SPT was represented on both advisory bodies and signed up, along with all other stakeholders, to 'adopt and use the guidance and report any feedback to Community Transport Association'.

Further information

David Kelly, Director for Scotland: david.kelly@ctauk.org

The Community Transport Association is a UK member-based charity providing leadership, training, advice, and operational support to transport related charities, community groups and social enterprises in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

We support and advocate on behalf of our members so they can deliver innovative and flexible transport solutions to achieve social change and remove transport barriers facing their communities. We promote excellence through training, resources, publications, advice, events, consultancy and project support.

We believe everyone should have access to local transport which meets their needs.