

## **PE1626/B**

Scottish Association for Public Transport letter of 7 February 2017

The Scottish Association for Public Transport (SAPT), a non-political organisation, believes that a new framework for public transport in Scotland is needed. Issues we have identified following discussions are:

1. Bus journeys have fallen by 10% in 5 years in Scotland (but only by 1% across Great Britain)
2. Bus fares have risen by only 2% in real terms over the last 5 years
3. Government support (including local authorities) at £297m has fallen in real terms by 14% over 5 years
4. Passenger revenue (excluding government support) at £357m has fallen in real terms by 2% over 5 years
5. Road congestion affects bus journey times and punctuality in urban areas. This is worsened where road works are being carried out. Operating costs rise as extra buses are needed to maintain schedules.
6. Town and city centre streets can be unpleasant and unhealthy for people due to pollution and congestion caused by road vehicles including buses. Competing buses can unnecessarily increase traffic
7. There is little or no co-ordination between buses, trains, subway and trams, unlike in other countries.
8. Local bus use in rural areas is declining. Better bus/rail connections could attract long distance users.
9. The quality and accuracy of timetable information at main bus stops is variable or non-existent
10. The fall in bus use is greatest in the SPT area (-21% in 5 years), but around Edinburgh traffic grew by 1%

### **Conclusions:**

A number of initiatives could improve bus travel, without requiring regulation or changing ownership:

- Review bus lanes, road junction and bus bay designs and traffic light priorities to raise urban bus speeds. This could be achieved through Quality Partnerships or Quality Contracts with local authorities
- The Road Works Commissioner should liaise with contractors and bus operators to minimise disruption
- Bus stop service information should be maintained and updated to a high standard throughout Scotland. This could be funded by the Scottish Government through Traveline Scotland, subcontracted to bus operators where appropriate, with a quality assurance penalty regime to ensure accuracy.

Buses in the SPT area (where there is competition between three main operators and many smaller bus companies) have performed worse than around Edinburgh where Lothian Transport predominates. This suggests that an integrated metropolitan transport network (as in London and many continental cities) attracts greater use than a deregulated bus market with multiple competing operators.

Our Association believes that greater transport integration would benefit passengers and boost usage by:

- Enabling interchange from bus routes to rail, subway or tram services using one ticket or smartcard
- Rationalising routes to minimise duplication, and road congestion in town and city centres
- Co-ordinating timetables, with common periods of validity, to provide reliable connections

This could be achieved through four alternative frameworks:

- a) Enhance the Quality Partnership or Quality Contract mechanism and simplify the procedures. The *Strathclyde Bus Alliance* is a promising initiative with bus operators in the west of Scotland.
- b) Introduce a bus concession model as in London, with a fixed percent profit margin for the operators
- c) Franchise routes
- d) Common ownership. But note that the nationalised Scottish Bus Group never integrated bus services with British Railways trains. Bus traffic dropped by 66% over the last 20 years of nationalised operation.

Option (a) above would probably require the lowest level of public funding.