

PE2116/R: Accelerate the implementation of bus franchising powers

Petitioner written submission, 15 September 2025

Mass Public Support for bus franchising

In February this year Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) published decisive plans to take forward the bus franchising powers in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 as central to their [Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy](#). (SPT began developing the Strategy in June 2023 and it is [due to be approved by their Board this Friday 19 September 2025](#)).

Through implementing bus franchising, SPT aim to deliver the fully-integrated, affordable and reliable public transport network urgently needed by our region, which has the most bus users in Scotland.

There is mass public support for this policy. This is evidenced by the unprecedented number of responses to SPT's two public consultations on bus reform – [3,072 in 2024](#) and [4,091 in 2025](#) – and in the success of our Better Buses for Strathclyde campaign (launched September 2023) which is now supported by more than [12,000 people](#) and [50 organisations](#) – nearly 5,000 of whom have also signed this Scottish Parliament petition.

As highlighted in [our last written evidence on 12 November 2024](#) – there is **cross-party support from MSPs for bus franchising**, including from the Scottish Government, with Minister Jim Fairlie MSP telling the [NZET Committee on 29 October 2024](#): “our position is that we want to get franchising done, and we want it to work.”

This cross-party support was demonstrated at the [first consideration of this petition on 27 November 2024](#), when five MSPs came to speak in support of our aims and through the many contributions from MSPs at the special hour-long debate on “[The Future for Glasgow’s Bus Services](#)” in the Chamber on 26 June 2025, where Paul Sweeney MSP stated:

“...**there is a consensus across the region** that the continued situation is unsustainable and socially unjust. That is ultimately what has come across in the debate.”

Mounting frustration at continued delays

Despite all of this – in the ten months since this petition was first considered – all we’ve seen from the Scottish Government is **further delays** and what [Audit Scotland has described](#) as a complete “lack of leadership”. The statutory guidance [promised “before the end” of 2024](#) has since been [delayed three times](#), and still has **no concrete timeline** for publication. The Minister’s latest position seems to be that:

“the draft statutory guidance is currently undergoing an internal review prior to final engagement with key parties on the franchising process... Once that process is completed, it is my intention to share the draft guidance with the NZET Committee along with affected parties... Final timescales for publication will depend on the

capacity of these stakeholders to consider and engage with the draft document.” – [Letter to the NZET Committee](#), 25 June 2025

These continued delays are completely unacceptable. As other evidence shows, they are affecting SPT’s (and other RTPs’) ability to progress plans and/or properly consider using the powers in the 2019 Act. In contrast to the Scottish Government’s now near **six-year delay** in publishing the guidance, the [equivalent guidance for England’s Bus Services Act 2017](#) was ready within just two months and last year was refined *twice* to make it “easier, quicker and cheaper for local authorities to intervene on bus routes.”

One possible reason why the guidance is taking so long, is the Scottish Government finally realising just how unworkable and costly the processes they have created in the Act are. A good illustration of the **significant issues with the legislation** is set out in [SPT’s draft Strategy](#) (p.78), which highlights the risks inherent in the panel approval process and also the “tight and onerous timescales” enforced by [Sections 13K\(2\) and 13Q\(1\)](#) – neither of which exist in the [equivalent English legislation](#).

The [costs of convening the panel](#) – if similar to that which rejected the NEXUS proposal in 2015 (a national embarrassment that led to the removal of the panel process from the English legislation in 2017) – could be around £280,000 (allowing for inflation) and delay the process by a year. These **significant and unnecessary costs** created by the Scottish legislation are now subject to “negotiations” between the Scottish and UK Governments over who will foot the bill, as the Traffic Commissioner for Scotland (the person empowered to convene the panel) is appointed by Westminster. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the parties [should be provided to the NZET Committee later this year](#).

How can the Scottish Government justify wasting this significant sum on [a completely unnecessary step already proven not to work in England](#)?

This summer, Get Glasgow Moving published “[The Long Road to Bus Franchising](#)” – research illustrating the extent to which **Scotland now lags behind other parts of the UK** in delivering bus franchising, as a result of these severe delays and the complexities and risks created by the Scottish legislation ([download a PDF of the graphic here](#)).

SPT’s timeline, taken from [their draft Strategy](#) (p.76), estimates it will take three years (from the Strategy’s approval on 19 September 2025) to get through the complex processes in the Act (see [Section 13C for an overview](#)) and then up to another two-and-a-half years to implement bus franchising, taking us up to 2030-2031. By this date, bus franchising will have been [rolled-out across the whole of Wales](#), and in up to eight of England’s biggest city regions, improving the lives of nearly 19 million people.

As Sarah Boyack MSP told the [NZET Committee on 27 May 2025](#) when the final bus franchising SSI was being discussed:

“...the issue is about the sheer length of time that the franchising process will take. The requirements are too onerous. The process needs to be simplified –it is too complex and too time consuming... Compared with the process in England... **We... need a reality check**, because it could be 2030 before we see bus franchising in Scotland. That means that people will not get the bus services that they need.”