

PE2116/S: Accelerate the implementation of bus franchising powers

Petitioner written submission, 15 September 2025

We need to see action now

There is now a **small window of time** before the 2026 election in which to make progress. We need the Scottish Government to admit there are significant issues with the bus franchising legislation and take steps to fix them.

We stand by the ‘course of action’ outlined in [our written evidence on 12 November 2024](#) (p.2). Firstly, we demand the **immediate publication of the statutory guidance** – without this the Scottish Government is *solely responsible* for further delaying [SPT’s timeline for delivering bus franchising](#).

Then, we must see a short ‘**Transport (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill**’ introduced to simplify the Scottish legislation and bring it into line with England’s now tried-and-tested Bus Services Act 2017 ([we have drafted the necessary amendments here](#)). As SPT say in [their evidence to the Committee](#) this must be done “timeously and without delay” to support and accelerate their pioneering work.

If the Scottish Government really wants “[to get franchising done, and \[for\] it to work](#)” then it must **provide financial support to SPT** and other RTPs wishing to deliver it.

On 4 June 2025 [Rachel Reeves announced £15.6bn investment](#) in public transport for England’s big city regions, with each receiving **between £1bn-2.5bn** over five years to deliver and/or enhance bus franchising and build new infrastructure. This announcement should result in [Barnett Consequentials for the Scottish Government](#) of approximately £1.3bn. It is vital that **these funds are spent in the same way in Scotland** or the Glasgow city region will fall even further behind our English comparators. As [Centre for Cities’ research](#) shows, Glasgow’s economy **currently underperforms by £7bn annually** in part due to poor public transport connectivity. Supporting SPT to deliver bus franchising is the first step towards rectifying this. Indicative costs are set out below:

Between 2025-2028: [SPT estimate they need up to £15m](#) to complete the complex processes set out in the Act (this sum would be significantly reduced if the Act was simplified). Although SPT have managed to [reclassify £12m reserves](#) to meet most these costs, specific support from the Scottish Government would expedite the process and recognise SPT’s role as the “trailblazer for future possibilities” (as [described by the Minister](#)) creating a blueprint for other RTPs to follow.

Between 2028-2031: we estimate SPT require **between £100-200m** to roll-out bus franchising plans, based on estimates in [Centre for Cities’ report](#) (p.27) and the useful [figures provided in CPT’s evidence](#) for the transition and depot acquisition/fit-out costs in the first three English city regions to pursue bus franchising.

It is useful to contextualise this figure with the population of the SPT area (roughly 40% of Scotland) and the current total annual bill for bus services – £468.2m in the [2025-26 budget](#). As shown in [our first evidence submitted on 11 October 2024](#), this is currently being spent in a completely inefficient way under the deregulated system. Implementing bus franchising would help create clear accountability and better value

for money going forward.

From 2031 onwards: the rest of the £1.3bn (from the Barnett Consequentials) should be used to deliver the [steps set out for years 5-10 in Centre for Cities' plan](#) for improving public transport in the Glasgow city region, with transport governance issues resolved by new legislation (see details below).

This would be a significant first step towards delivering [Clyde Metro](#) (one of the [STPR2 recommendations](#)). It is vital that the Scottish Government understands that **bus franchising is phase one of Clyde Metro**. Billed as “A fully integrated mass transit public transport system” – Clyde Metro will be impossible to deliver without SPT first having full control of the bus network.

With clear political will, it is possible to get commitments for the initial funding and the Amendment Bill before the election. With or without this, bus franchising looks set to become a big election issue. We would expect any new government to introduce the Amendment Bill within its first 100 days.

New legislation

Once the ‘Transport (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill’ has been enacted, the new government should begin work on a larger Transport (Scotland) Bill. This should be informed by good practice from the [Welsh](#) and UK Governments, whose new [Bus Services Bill](#) (scheduled for Royal Assent this autumn) seeks to “[reduce the barriers to franchising, including costs](#)” for English regions.

Any new Transport Bill for Scotland must resolve the **ongoing transport governance issues** glaringly apparent in evidence submitted by the RTPs. SEStran write: “It is worth noting that all Regional Transport Partnerships are not created equally”, as they, along with Nestrans, Hitrans and Tactran, remain the most ineffectual ‘Model 1’ RTP with c. 6-10 staff each, compared to [SPT \(a ‘Model 3’ RTP\) which has c. 480 staff](#).

In a country whose [National Transport Strategy](#) is based around “reducing inequalities” this situation cannot be allowed to persist.

It is now clear that, at the time of writing the 2019 Act, the Scottish Government gave zero thought to how new bus franchising powers could interact with, and be used to enhance, the regional governance structures that the RTPs provide. In fact, it wasn’t until the passing of [The Transport Partnerships \(Transfer of Functions\) \(Scotland\) Order 2024](#) that ‘Model 3’ RTPs – SPT, Swestrans and ZetTrans – were even given permission to use the powers (the other RTPs still cannot).

Our petition ultimately aims for RTPs to be the public bodies which are empowered to use bus franchising powers (as opposed to single local authority areas) to help spread the benefits and costs and deliver regional connectivity. As highlighted by Get Glasgow Moving in [evidence submitted to the NZET Committee on 22 October 2024](#) (p.4), the successful implementation of bus franchising at a regional level by RTPs would be a significant step towards resolving Scotland’s transport governance issues.

If the Petitions Committee lacks the expertise or capacity to progress these demands, we ask that our petition is **urgently referred to the NZET Committee**

who will be considering the statutory guidance for bus franchising and the MOU on the costs of the panel imminently.