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15 December 2023

Claire Baker MSP
Convenor
Economy and Fair Work Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh EH66 1SP

Sent by email:

economyandfairwork.committee@parliament.scot

First Aberdeen Limited
395 King Street
Aberdeen
AB24 5RP
Tel: 01224 650000
www.firstgroupplc.com

Dear Ms Baker

Thank you for your letter of 30 November 2023. I do appreciate your understanding with regards my unavoidable absence at the Committee meeting on 22 November and again, may I offer my apologies for not being able to join you. However, I am pleased to have the opportunity to provide my insights and comments on transportation and infrastructure points, which I believe are crucial for the development of sustainable public transportation in our region.

Sustainable Transport

First Bus Scotland is fully committed to environmental sustainability and the reduction of carbon emissions from our operations. I am proud to be part of a national business that has set an ambitious target to operate a zero-emission fleet by the year 2035. In line with this commitment, we have already made significant investments in our depots and in new zero emission buses (ZEBs), ensuring that our fleet becomes increasingly sustainable and environmentally friendly.

This year we have completed the transformation of our Caledonia & Scotstoun depots in Glasgow and King Street in Aberdeen, with state of the art, rapid charging points now installed. The business has pioneered business to business charging facilities with a wide range of partner and local community opportunities across all three sites – which is a great example of the circular economy in action. Following an investment co-funded through ScotZeb, 50 new ZEBs have been delivered in the first half of the year providing a total fleet of 200 ZEBs meaning that almost a third of the fleet is now electric. This progress not only facilitates the charging of our electric buses but also supports partner charging infrastructure, a concept that was conceived during the Glasgow COP26 summit and which spreads the benefits of decarbonisation beyond the bus. Additionally, we have installed solar panels on our depots, further reducing our carbon footprint and contributing to the generation of clean energy.

Infrastructure

Buses play a crucial role in supporting the local economy, improving air quality, and encouraging sustainable transportation choices. They enable a modal shift away from private vehicles, reducing congestion and harmful emissions. However, for these benefits to be fully realised, it is essential for infrastructure interventions to prioritise buses. We strongly believe that bus priority measures, such as dedicated bus lanes and traffic signal prioritisation, are vital for enhancing the efficiency and reliability of bus services. To achieve our shared goals of sustainable transport and improved air quality, we urge the Scottish Parliament to further support and invest in infrastructure interventions that prioritise buses. By providing dedicated bus lanes, enhancing bus stops and shelters, and implementing traffic signal prioritization, we can significantly enhance the attractiveness and efficiency of bus services. These measures are necessary to address bus journey speeds that have been slowed down due to increasing traffic congestion in recent years. This negatively impacts the

operating cost and affordability of public transport. Such priority measures will therefore help improve reliability and punctuality and encourage more people to choose buses as their preferred mode of transportation, leading to reduced congestion and emissions. The recent introduction of bus priority measures at Guild Street / Bridge Street has seen a 9% increase in passenger footfall through the city centre with bus journey speeds improving by 25%. In addition to carrying additional passengers, I'm also pleased to confirm that we are reinvesting this saving in a fares reduction in 2024 to attract more customers to travel by bus and further support modal shift.

Hydrogen

With regards your specific questions on hydrogen powered vehicles. As you will be aware we are delivering a hydrogen project in partnership with Aberdeen City Council with 25 Wrightbus Streetdeck Hydroliners. The project is funded by council-secured grants from the EU and Scottish Government with the vehicles owned by Aberdeen City Council and leased to First Bus Scotland. With regards fuel efficiency, the miles per kilogram (m/kg) varies seasonally, but annually is ~9m/kg.

Finally, I would like to apologise once again for my absence at the committee meeting and thank you for the opportunity to respond. We are pleased to highlight First Bus Scotland's commitment to working with the Scottish Government and our partners in delivering high quality reliable bus services, supporting local economies & our communities, improving air quality and encouraging modal shift. We firmly believe that with the necessary infrastructure interventions, we can further enhance the sustainability and efficiency of our public transportation system.

Thank you for your understanding and consideration. I am more than willing to provide any further information or participate in future discussions regarding these matters.

Yours sincerely



Duncan Cameron
Managing Director Scotland