

Transport Committee
Wednesday 23 September 2026
6th Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

Regional Transport Partnerships

Introduction

This paper provides background briefing for a session with three Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs), Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT), Shetland Regional Transport Partnership (ZetTrans), and the Tayside and Central Scotland Transport Partnership (TACTRAN), plus the Scottish Collaboration of Transport Specialists (SCOTS), which represents senior local authority transport officers and RTP staff.

Background

Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) were established on 1 December 2005 under the provisions of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005. The primary function of each RTP is to produce a regional transport strategy. These strategies set out a vision for the development of transport infrastructure and services within each region for the next 10-15 years.

RTPs are independent bodies corporate, similar to local authority joint boards, that bring together local authorities to perform functions collectively over a large area. All local authorities in Scotland are members of one or more RTP. RTP boards can also include non-Councillor members, who perform a function similar to the non-executive directors of a company.

The seven RTPs, which cover the whole of Scotland, are:

- Shetland Transport Partnership ([ZetTrans](#))
- Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership ([HITRANS](#))
- North-East of Scotland Transport Partnership ([NESTRANS](#))
- Tayside and Central Scotland Transport Partnership ([TACTRAN](#))
- South-East of Scotland Transport Partnership ([SEStran](#))
- Strathclyde Partnership for Transport ([SPT](#))
- South-West of Scotland Transport Partnership ([SWestrans](#))

RTPs can take three forms, referred to as ‘models’, with each model exercising a different amount of control over transport planning and delivery within their region. These are:

- **Model 1:** Produces a Regional Transport Strategy with very limited transport powers transferred from constituent local authorities.
- **Model 2:** Produces a Regional Transport Strategy with some transport powers transferred from constituent authorities.
- **Model 3:** Produces a Regional Transport Strategy with significant transport powers transferred from constituent authorities.

Currently, there are four Model 1 and three Model 3 RTPs in Scotland. The model 3 RTPs being SPT, SWestrans and ZetTrans. It is worth noting that SWestrans and ZetTrans have only one constituent local authority each.

The current SPT (Strathclyde Partnership for Transport) was preceded by the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority and Executive (PTA/PTE) which was created in 1983, itself replacing the Greater Glasgow Passenger Transport Executive established in 1972. These bodies exercised significant control over rail services, the Glasgow Subway, local ferries, and buses in the Strathclyde area, although bus powers were significantly reduced in the mid-1980's on deregulation, rail powers were assumed by Scottish Ministers in 2005, and ferries either replaced by fixed links or ownership/management assumed by CalMac or other operators.

SPT continues to own and operate the Glasgow Subway, owns and manages Buchanan Street (Glasgow), East Kilbride, Greenock and Hamilton bus stations plus the region's bus stops and shelters, manages subsidised bus services, and operates the ZoneCard integrated ticket, in addition to its transport planning functions.

Issues raised in written evidence

The committee has received written evidence from SPT, TACTRAN, and ZetTrans. Key issues raised in these submissions are outlined below, alongside additional background information:

SPT: SPT provide an overview of the geography and demographics of the Strathclyde region, and go on to summarise the key outcomes they hope to deliver through from the current [Regional Transport Strategy](#), these are:

- A transport system that is accessible, affordable, available and safe
- A public transport network that is a desirable and convenient choice for everyone
- A transport system that enables everyone to choose walking, cycling or wheeling for shorter, everyday journeys
- A decarbonised and cleaner transport system
- Better strategic connectivity to key economic centres and transport hubs - across the region and to other regions

The submission goes on to list current major SPT projects, which are:

- **Subway modernisation:** The Glasgow Subway, a ten-mile circular line serving 15 stations across Glasgow city centre and west end, is the third

oldest underground railway in the world. There are two lines - an Outer circle running clockwise and an Inner circle running anticlockwise. All trains stop at all stations no matter the direction. The Subway opened in 1896 and was modernised between 1977 and 1980, with a second modernisation beginning in 2011. This recent modernisation has seen the delivery of smartcard ticketing, the refurbishment of all stations, the delivery of 17 new Stadler trains, plus a new signalling and control system. Work is ongoing to provide all stations with platform edge doors and communications-based train control, allowing for the possibility of driverless operation.

- **Bus reform and franchising:** SPT published its [Regional Bus Strategy](#) in 2025. The key policy being the development of bus franchising across the region, as it "...will better align incentives across all bus stakeholders, drawing upon the expertise in the private sector to deliver better bus services for passengers, making bus more accountable to the public and securing commitment to delivering bus priority." It goes on to argue that the benefits of bus franchising can only be fully realised when supported by on-street bus priority measures and smart/integrated ticketing products.
- **Transport and 'regionalisation':** SPT supports a strong regional transport function, arguing that the current RTP arrangements are sufficiently robust and flexible to deliver this ambition.
- **Funding:** SPT argues for a "consolidated regional transport settlement, linked to regional outcomes". It also argues for multi-year funding to increase certainty, allow for long-term project delivery, and to drive out inefficiency. It also asks for revenue funding of public transport services, including concessionary fares, to be considered on a whole network basis – rather than by individual mode or routes, which can lead to one publicly supported mode cannibalising patronage from another.

TACTRAN: TACTRAN provide an overview of the geography and demographics of the Central Scotland and Tayside region, and go on to describe their role (as a Model 1 RTP) in regional transport planning, co-ordinating and supporting both local and national policy delivery, and stakeholder engagement.

The submission goes on to briefly describe the aims of the [Tayside and Central Scotland Regional Transport Strategy 2024-2034](#) which is focused on the Scottish Government's four priorities of taking climate action, reducing inequalities, improving health and wellbeing, and delivering sustainable, inclusive economic growth. To this end, the plan aims to deliver policies and programmes that change travel behaviour, increase the provision of public transport and shared transport options (e.g. car clubs and public bike hire), implement appropriate demand management measures, and the establish land use policies that create places which allow residents, workers and visitors to choose transport options other than the car. These policies are, in turn, reliant on collaboration between delivery partners and additional public and private funding. The plan acknowledges the need for different approaches in urban and rural areas.

TACTRAN go on to highlight their role in co-ordinating [People and Place](#) funding, these are funds provided by Transport Scotland to RTPs used to provide grants for community driven active travel infrastructure and behaviour change schemes focused on encouraging active travel to schools and workplaces, with a focus on accessibility and inclusion, and building community capacity and capability. They also outline ongoing work on tackling accessibility to work issues faced by families in poverty, work to provide Mobility as a Service (MaaS – typically an online multi-modal travel planning and payment system intended to provide seamless non-car travel), work with SEStran on the development of bus quality improvement partnerships (voluntary arrangements between bus operators and local authorities aimed at improving service levels and encouraging modal shift), and initial research to understand how best to deliver car use reduction in the RTP area.

TACTRAN end, on a similar note to SPT, by supporting the current RTP set up. They also call for greater co-ordination between regional transport planning, economic development, and other public service planning and delivery mechanisms to ensure best value and coherent policy delivery.

ZetTrans: ZetTrans, the RTP for the Shetland Islands, briefly outline the key themes of its [2040 Regional Transport Strategy](#). This aims to address barriers to internal travel within the islands, and barriers to travel between the islands and mainland Scotland – while also focusing on the development of sustainable and active travel.

They go on to highlight the [Inter-Island Connectivity Programme](#), which is considering the future development of inter-island links, including the possibility of sub-sea tunnels replacing some current ferry routes.

ZetTrans go on to highlight that they specify and procure the entire local bus service network (including school services) across the islands, which cannot be provided on a commercial basis, on a five-year cycle. This exercise involves the development of robust business cases and community engagement. This is the closest there is to a bus franchise currently operating in Scotland – although it exists due to the geography, population density, and economics of public transport operation in remote island communities that is far removed from that found in areas such as Strathclyde, where bus franchising is being considered.

The submission goes on to describe ZetTrans role in the Highlands and Islands £2 bus fare cap pilot, a transport to employment project, supporting active and sustainable travel development, and in transport decarbonisation – highlighting electric bus trials and the challenges of wide-spread roll-out in remote island communities.

ZetTrans also support the current RTP system, arguing it works best when flexibility allows for local approaches to be adopted. However, it does go on to highlight both capital and revenue budget challenges facing both the RTP and Shetland Islands Council in transport development and delivery.

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