

Minutes for Bus Taskforce meeting 6 October 2022

Attendees

Minister for Transport - Jenny Gilruth (JG)

Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) Scotland, Director - Paul White (PW)

West Coast Motors and Borders Buses, CEO and Managing Director - Colin Craig (CC)

First Bus Scotland, Managing Director & CPT, Chair - Duncan Cameron (DC)

COSLA, Policy Officer [redacted]

HiTrans, Director - Randal Robertson

Stagecoach West Scotland, Managing Director - Fiona Doherty (FD)

Community Transport Association, Director for Scotland – David Kelly (DK)

Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers, Vice-chair [redacted]

Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers, Chair [redacted]

Bus Users Scotland, Director – Greig Mackay

McGill's, CEO - Ralph Roberts (RR)

Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, Head of Bus Strategy & Delivery [redacted]

Transport Focus, Senior Stakeholder Manager [redacted]

Lothian, Managing Director – Sarah Boyd (SB)

Transport Scotland, Director of BAAT - Bettina Sizeland (BS)

Transport Scotland, BAAT officials representing bus regulatory and funding policy teams

Agenda

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Terms of Reference
3. Funding for Bus Services
4. AOB
5. Summary and Way Forward

1. Welcome extended to all attendees from Minister for Transport

Points to Note:

- The meeting is to formally agree the terms of reference for the Taskforce, and discuss the impacts of NSG plus funding ending, and existing issues for the industry.
- JG proposed to move agenda item 3. "Funding for Bus Services" to the start of the call to hear feedback on NSG plus ending.

2. Funding for Bus Services

Points/Actions agreed:

- PW explained that NSG and NSG plus were critical to the sector for recovery. The position is not materially different to earlier this year, with significant impacts on service levels, fares and job losses if funding ended now.

- DC highlighted that government led marketing on return to public transport could raise awareness and confidence, and help to increase patronage alongside the U22's marketing campaign.
- PW advised that if NSG plus was extended, conditions would be agreed and CPT would work with operators to pause any registration changes.
- FD highlighted current trends: U22s encouraging; commercial situation improving; over 60s still a concern but demand growing.
- DK pointed out that 35% of CTA members are in receipt of NSG, and as bus services reduce, people turn to Community Transport (CT). CT operators are struggling to obtain the drivers and funding required to meet demand.
- SB suggested a piece of work to raising the profile of bus driver as a profession.
- The Minister asked for views on other parts of the UK introducing a £2 fare cap.
- DC said there is not much detail on the cap beyond headline announcements. In Scotland, operators would freeze fares if NSG plus was extended.
- [redacted] highlighted that people are either not coming back to bus, or having one bad experience and not returning. LTAs are trying to retain budgets but non-statutory provisions such as bus are first in the firing line, and they do not have the resource to fill the gaps.
- [redacted] suggested operators should consider changing registered services to improve the information available to the public so that services are more reliable.
- [redacted] raised a project that reduced fares in Cornwall by 1/3 and saw a 30% rise in passengers. He offered to send details of scheme. **(Action – [redacted])**
- The Minister noted that UKG has been invited to attend the taskforce meetings.
- PW advised that CPT will launch “Thank You Driver” campaign from 18th October. CPT would look to match funding for any marketing. **(Action – TS to investigate overall marketing campaign)**
- CC pointed out that demand is definitely coming back. The sector is just on the cusp of demand returning and the loss of NSG plus at this time would jeopardise this progress.
- The Minister raised training programmes, and working with skills minister to try to address the systemic challenge of labour shortages. **(Action – TS officials to contact employability colleagues)**
- The Minister agreed to consider the case for NSG plus extension in response to the feedback received from taskforce members **(Action - TS officials to work with finance to consider options)**

3. Terms of Reference

Points Agreed:

- Taskforce members agreed the Terms of Reference for the Taskforce, and the following volunteered as sub group chairs:
 - Patronage growth – PW
 - Driver shortages – SB
 - Community engagement – CC.
-

4. AOB

Points/Actions agreed:

- The Minister asked for feedback on the impact of the concessionary schemes on school transport.
 - [redacted] advised that LTAs are picking up rising costs, and highlighted driver availability issues for: local bus, minibus, right down to taxis. Also many U22's are travelling on buses and still paying fares.
 - The Minister proposed that TS officials speak to education officials in SG to help address this. **(Action – TS)**
 - CC said U22s has been slow but are seeing the demand pick up. Universities coming back has helped.
 - RR advised they are seeing 25-30% of U16s still paying fares.
 - [redacted] said that officials engagement has really helped. Initially there was an additional administrative burden creating difficulties with limited resources, but the slower roll-out has helped in that regard.
-

5. Summary and Way Forward

- Actions as noted above.
- Points raised in meeting to be taken forward by sub groups.
- Previously agreed joint letter on driver shortages is ready to send now the new Westminster appointments have been made. Officials will send to CPT for final sense check. **(Action- TS)**
- The Minister suggested the next meeting be held in parliament in person for 1 hour with a focus on one of the sub groups.

-----End Of Meeting Note-----