



Scottish Government - Scottish Bus Taskforce

Committee Operations

Date of meeting 4 November 2022

Date of report 25 October 2022

Report by Chief Executive

1. Object of report

To inform the Committee of the establishment of the Scottish Bus Taskforce by the Scottish Government.

2. Background

The Scottish Government has stated that the reason for establishing the Taskforce is the crisis facing the bus industry across Scotland, with passenger volumes yet to return to pre-Covid levels, widespread shortages of drivers impacting on service delivery and network recovery funding which came to a close on 9 October 2022. The Taskforce will seek to explore solutions to these issues and encourage progression of longer-term strategic goals to improve bus services. This is in the absence of any national bus strategy.

Members of the Taskforce include Transport Scotland, the Traffic Commissioner for Scotland, Large Bus Operators, SME Bus Operator representatives, Bus Passenger representatives and Regional Transport Partnership representatives (namely SPT & HITRANS). A full membership list is provided in Appendix 1 for reference.

The initial meeting of the Scottish Bus Taskforce, Chaired by Minister for Transport Jenny Gilruth MSP, was held on 6 October 2022 online via MS Teams. It is understood the Taskforce will be convened for an initial period of around 6 months.

The timing of the commencement of the Taskforce coincides with the end of the Network Support Grant (NSG) scheme by Transport Scotland which ceased on 9 October 2022. Members may recall additional NSG funding of £25.7 million was announced in June 2022, further details being available at: <https://www.transport.gov.scot/news/financial-support-for-bus-operators-continues/>

It is worth highlighting that during the Covid 19 pandemic, SPT recognising the significant impact on the industry, wrote to Transport Scotland recommending the establishment of a national bus taskforce and so this current initiative is to be welcomed. The Scottish Bus Taskforce will prove useful in terms of the development of the proposed Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy, details of which will be presented to the Strategy & Programmes Committee on 25 November 2022.

3. Outline of proposals

Transport Scotland prepared the Taskforce Terms of Reference which outlines the role, remit and responsibilities of the group. The Taskforce has been established with three main areas of focus, namely:

- Patronage growth;
- Driver shortages; and
- Community engagement.

Subgroups are to be established on each of the above three topics with the following desired outcomes set out in the Terms of Reference:

- Set out a collaborative pathway for increasing patronage long term;
- Co-design a pathway(s) to address driver shortages; and
- Co-design best practice guidance for community engagement on bus networks and changes.

In addition, further outcomes the Taskforce seeks to achieve are stated as follows:

- Begin discussions on progressing longer term strategic goals; and
- Establish Regional Steering Groups to support implementation of immediate actions, and to review local bus networks - giving consideration to the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 powers and emerging travel patterns.

Specifically, on the establishment of Regional Steering Groups, it is understood that these are likely to be broadly based on Regional Transport Partnership boundaries (i.e. up to 7 groups across Scotland). In the SPT area, representation and input would be sought from all twelve partner Local Authorities and other key stakeholders as appropriate.

The exact format and membership and work programme for the Regional Steering Groups is yet to be confirmed by Transport Scotland. Similarly, a detailed work programme requires to be scoped out. This work programme will need to have due reference and consideration of the roll out of regulations & guidance in respect of the provisions of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, namely Bus Service Improvement Partnerships (BSIP's) and Franchising, expected in 2023.

It is intended that SPT and Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS) will represent all Regional Steering Groups on the Scottish Taskforce, providing feedback and progress updates in due course. In terms of timescales it is envisaged the Regional Steering Groups will commence in early 2023. Officers will update the Committee on the progress of the Taskforce.

4. Committee action

The Committee is recommended to note the contents of this report.

5. Consequences

Policy consequences	<i>In line with the Regional Transport Strategy.</i>
Legal consequences	<i>None directly.</i>
Financial consequences	<i>None directly.</i>
Personnel consequences	<i>None directly.</i>
Equalities consequences	<i>None directly.</i>

Risk consequences *None directly.*
Climate Change, Adaptation & Carbon consequences *None directly at present.*

Name Neil Wylie
Director of Finance & Corporate Support

Name Valerie Davidson
Chief Executive

For further information, please contact Gordon Dickson, Head of Bus Strategy & Delivery on 0141 333 3407.

APPENDIX 1

Membership

Chair: Minister for Transport

Secretariat: Transport Scotland

Transport Scotland representatives:

Transport Scotland representatives for each subgroup

Office of the Traffic Commissioner

Traffic Commissioner

SME Bus Operator representatives:

Confederation of Passenger Transport

Community Transport Association

Large Bus Operators

First Bus

Stagecoach

Citylink

McGills/Xplore

West Coast Motors:

Lothian

Bus Passenger representatives:

Bus Users Scotland

Transport focus

Local Government

ATCO

CoSLA

Regional Transport Partnership representatives

SPT

HiTRANS