

Appendix 1

Scottish Government and COSLA Local Governance Review – SPT response

About SPT

Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) is the Regional Transport Partnership and public transport authority for the west of Scotland, covering 11 full council areas and part of one other: Argyll & Bute (Helensburgh and Lomond area), East Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow, Inverclyde, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire. SPT has a range of operational and planning responsibilities including the statutory Regional Transport Strategy, operating the Subway, bus stations, supporting socially necessary bus services, project development and delivery, and others. More information on SPT is available at www.spt.co.uk.

Response

SPT welcomes the Local Governance Review (LGR) by the Scottish Government and COSLA. We believe that the public sector in Scotland must evolve and adjust to better meet the current and future demands of the society we serve. Over recent years, those needs have changed significantly – economically, socially, environmentally, technically – and are predicted to continue to change at pace over coming decades.

However, it is essential that we get the changes needed right; and that requires an objective, thorough, reasoned, and balanced approach. We believe that this initial phase of the LGR should be the beginning of a conversation among partners about how best to approach the future. We have therefore deliberately kept our response to five high-level, key points which we believe should guide discussions in the LGR in relation to the transport sector.

Before that, however, it is worth noting SPT's experience of planning and operating transport over recent years. We believe our long track record of success speaks for itself, highlights of which include:

- Subway Modernisation – a circa £300m investment, refurbished stations, new signalling, new trains, new infrastructure;
- Smartcard ticketing – delivered as part of the above, in partnership with the private sector through our Nevis Technologies joint venture, and being rolled out to other modes;
- Project Delivery – many examples of successful development and delivery of projects (often in partnership with others) including Croy Park and Ride, Govan Interchange, Partick Bus Station, Dalmarnock Station, Johnstone Park and Ride and many more; and
- A Step-Change for Bus – SPT has invested significantly in bus services, standards and infrastructure over recent years. Recent successes include Fastlink and bus facilities/traffic management measures on Union Street in Glasgow.

In addition, there are the various operational activities we undertake providing economies of scale and expertise at a regional level, including school transport (on an agency basis, for councils), supporting socially necessary bus services, and operating and administering

Zonecard, the Strathclyde area multi-modal, multi-operator ticket. We believe our partnership-focused, multi-modal, integrated approach has paid dividends in delivering improvements to the west of Scotland transport network.

Notwithstanding that, however, we believe there are factors within our sector which could be improved, creating a more positive outcome for the people and communities of the west of Scotland. For example, there is more we could collectively do to arrest the decline in bus patronage in our region if the framework for delivery was fit for purpose. That's why we have welcomed the new Transport Bill and, while we believe there should be amendments to the Bill as it stands to make it more effective in practice, we will explore every opportunity the Bill presents to deliver positive results. Similarly, with regard to rail, we have long believed that the planning and delivery of improvements in rail is overly complex, costly and cumbersome, and must be improved. Further, at a strategic level, there is still more to be done in integrating planning for transport, land-use developments, economic development, healthcare, and other sectors.

These are just some of the areas for improvement we think exist at the moment, and must be addressed through initiatives such as the Local Governance Review, and the new Regional Transport Strategy for Strathclyde, which SPT and partners are currently in the process of developing.

In that regard, our five key, high-level points for guiding the Local Governance Review conversation on how the transport sector needs to change in future are noted below:

1. There is a case for change.

We believe there is a demonstrable and robust 'case for change' to review and improve how transport works in Scotland: across modes, and at national, regional and local levels. As the Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) of Scotland have made clear on numerous occasions¹ over recent years, the RTPs are flexible and agile organisations ready, willing and able to change to meet future needs.

2. Change should enhance the regional model.

There is a current focus on 'regions' through the various city/growth deal style initiatives and emerging regional economic partnerships which are in process across Scotland. We believe this firmly points us towards a future policy, planning and delivery model for transport which is likewise firmly based on enhancing the regional model of which SPT and the RTPs are part. Indeed there is a wealth of evidence and best practice from across Europe which backs this up. While there is ongoing debate over the most appropriate geographical boundaries for these, SPT's view – again based on best practice – is that transport at a regional level works best when centred on a city and its regional travel to work area.

¹Scottish Government/COSLA/RTPs of Scotland report: "Develop to Deliver – Maximising the role of RTPs in furthering improvements to transport in Scotland" - <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/10266/sg-rtp-working-group-report-final-august-2015-pdf.pdf>

3. Improve the integration of policy, planning and practice at regional level across sectors such as transport, economic development, strategic land-use planning, and healthcare.

A move towards a 'regional' model provides a useful opportunity to tackle this longstanding issue. Despite some positive - and successful - attempts to deal with this, it remains far from mainstreamed (particularly transport's status in other sectors' priorities) and this significantly hampers the integrated and complementary approach the public sector in Scotland so badly needs to be able to deliver effectively and efficiently for the people and communities we serve.

4. Public authorities must have the ability to access appropriate levels of funding and empowered to deliver.

A real barrier to effectiveness for many public authorities including those in transport has been both a lack of access to funding and a lack of power to deliver change required. For example, while the new Transport Bill should go some way in addressing this, even in that there is little acknowledgement of the role of the transport authority in bringing about change. Further, and again in relation to the new Bill, there is no clear route to the significant finance required should an authority wish to pursue one of the stronger levers available to it. This experience with the new Bill is endemic of the wider issues authorities face in terms of powers and funding, where public, and often political, expectation to deliver is unmatched by the powers and resources available.

5. Greater recognition should be given to the role of democratically-elected, publicly accountable regional and local authorities in representing the views of people and communities.

SPT very much welcomes the other strand in the Local Governance Review which seeks to better engage communities in decision-making that affects their areas. However, the publicly-accountable, democratically-elected nature of organisations such as SPT is often not given enough credence in that regard. SPT is guided and overseen by a Partnership Board made up primarily of Councillors from across the west of Scotland, supplemented by appointed members providing additional expertise, and is duty bound to be transparent and open in its decision-making processes. Further, SPT is a statutory partner in Community Planning, and regularly engages with community representatives across our region through that framework. We believe such current arrangements as these are given too little profile in debates about community engagement, and while there is always room for improvement, we believe that the democratically-elected, publicly-accountable current arrangements must prevail to ensure such engagement is done in a co-ordinated and representative manner.

Conclusion

SPT remains an organisation open to change in order meet the needs of the people and communities of the west of Scotland, and our response has been written from that perspective. We look forward to further dialogue with partners in taking the Local Governance Review forward, and would welcome the opportunity to meet with the Scottish Government and COSLA to talk through our response in more detail.