



Strategic Issues Update for the SPT area

Date of meeting 21 February 2025

Date of report 31 January 2025

Report by Head of Policy and Planning

1. Object of report

The object of this report is to provide an update on strategic-level issues affecting transport in the west of Scotland.

2. Background to report

Members will be aware that a wide range of policy, planning and delivery initiatives are currently underway within transport and related sectors across Scotland at national, regional and local levels. The effects of these initiatives on the people, communities and transport network of the west of Scotland could be significant and it is therefore important that SPT continues to monitor developments and seek to influence outcomes in order to maximise benefits for our area. This report summarises current key workstreams and SPT activity in that regard.

3. Outline of proposals

3.1 National

3.1.1 The Scottish Parliament Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

The Scottish Parliament's Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee (CPPPC) received a petition from the campaign group Better Buses for Strathclyde calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to improve the process for implementing the bus franchising powers contained in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 by:

- Introducing, without delay, the regulations and statutory guidance required to give bus franchising powers full effect.
- Amending the 2019 Act to remove the requirement for proposed franchising frameworks to be approved by a panel appointed by the traffic commissioner, instead empowering Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) to have the final say on approving proposals.
- Providing additional funding to help support RTPs in preparing franchising frameworks and assisting them with initial set-up costs once frameworks are approved.

SPT was contacted by the CPPPC requesting our response to the Petition by 10 January 2025. A copy of SPT's response to the Committee is included in the Appendix to this report. In responding to the request, SPT noted that we are keen to see the Regulations and Guidance associated with the Act complete and published in full particularly given that SPT is currently undertaking work to develop

the Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy (SRBS) which may result in utilisation of the Act's Bus Powers. A separate report on SRBS progress is included on the agenda for this Committee.

In the response, SPT also noted that we have engaged with Transport Scotland and ATCO (Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers) through a Working Group to support the preparation of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 Regulations and Guidance and that we welcomed the opportunity Transport Scotland has provided to gather and reflect feedback by key partners as the process has developed.

SPT's response to the petition notes that we had previously expressed concerns about the proposed panel structure in our response to consultation undertaken by Transport Scotland on the Act's Bus Powers in 2021¹. Our response, notes that the Act's Regulations and Guidance are at an advanced stage and that any change at this late stage may result in further significant delay. This would potentially introduce additional or new risks to any local transport authority such as SPT considering taking forward a franchising framework at this time. Should the Scottish Parliament move to amend these provisions, SPT would seek assurances from the Scottish Government that any change can be made timeously and without delay.

In relation to the provision of additional funding to support RTPs in preparing franchising frameworks, SPT's response notes that appropriate funding should be made available by the Scottish Government/Transport Scotland to ensure that Local Transport Authorities intending to review and potentially take forward the Bus Powers contained in the Transport (Scotland) Act can do so effectively. SPT has already raised this issued directly. SPT's response notes that to date no additional or specific resources have been made available to SPT at this time, and this has been identified as a key risk to the successful delivery of the bus reform agenda.

SPT officers await the outcome of the CPPPC discussions and will report back to this Committee on these once completed.

3.1.2 Changes to ScotRail Ticket Offices

In 2022, Transport Focus, in line with the National Rail Ticketing and Settlement Agreement, undertook consultation on behalf of ScotRail on proposed changes to ticket office opening hours. In summary the main proposed changes included:

- Full closure of Clydebank, Cartsideyke and Woodhall station ticket offices;
- A total of 50 booking offices at stations in the SPT area to have their opening hours reduced (including full day closures on specific days of the week in some instances); and
- Changes to ticket office opening hours at major stations/transport hubs, including Partick, Helensburgh Central, Greenock Central and West, Motherwell, Hamilton Central, Port Glasgow Milngavie and Motherwell.

ScotRail emphasised that there were to be no job, or hours of work, reductions as part of the proposals.

ScotRail's Ticket Office consultation was reported to this Committee in February 2022². At that time, SPT's response highlighted the impact of the proposed ticket office closures and reduction of opening hours at stations on the Strathclyde network. Specifically, the response emphasised the importance of safety and the

¹ https://www.spt.co.uk/media/x0jhynz1/sp261121_agenda12.pdf

² https://www.spt.co.uk/media/cwtalnsu/sp180222_minute-1.pdf

perception of safety for passengers. SPT urged that consideration be given to the production of an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) to help address or mitigate any issues. SPT also noted the importance of revenue protection and sought assurances that the impact of the proposals was designed to ensure that this was not diminished.

Following the initial consultation, amended proposals emerged³. These included some changes to opening hours and a reversal of the proposal to close the three booking offices subject to further review. ScotRail also amended its' proposals for stations that serve hospitals by maintaining current staffing hours at Dalmuir (for Golden Jubilee Hospital), Hyndland (for Gartnavel Hospitals) and also agreed to open Wishaw ticket office (for Wishaw Hospital) on a Sunday, giving a seven-day staff presence (an increase on current opening hours). Overall, the updated proposals will see a reduction in staffed ticket office hours and redeployment of staff across the network for revenue protection and other duties proposed.

ScotRail has announced that it intends to implement these changes to ticket office opening hours. National Rail Industry Regulations dictate that the proposed changes must now be agreed between operator and staff with that consultation now underway. Subject to the outcome of staff consultation, ScotRail intend to implement these changes during 2025 but have committed to provide significant notice to customers before the changes to ticket office opening hours takes place.

SPT welcomes the changes made to the original proposals and recognises the need for ScotRail to ensure that resources are used effectively and efficiently in delivering the rail system in Scotland. However, SPT has ongoing concerns about the impact of the revised proposals and SPT's Chief Executive has written to ScotRail's Managing Director seeking assurances that the proposed changes to booking office hours will:

- Not adversely impact customers, particularly those who might experience challenges when using public transport and accessing stations;
- Not impact adversely on issues covered by equality legislation, or on passenger safety and passenger perception of safety including for women and girls; and for those people who require assistance with travel;
- Ensure that all consideration has been given to the potential impact on revenue protection;
- Ensure that there will be availability to purchase tickets which are not available via station ticket machines and the ability to make cash purchases will be retained; and
- Ensure that provision of information and advice in instances of disruption will be readily accessible for all station users.

Request was also made for attendance at today's Committee by a senior officer from ScotRail to respond to any questions from Board Members.

We await the outcome of this correspondence and will report back to a future meeting of the Committee.

³ https://www.scotrail.co.uk/about-scotrail/news/scotrail-implement-frontline-customer-service-improvementshttps://www.spt.co.uk/media/cwtalnsu/sp180222_minute-1.pdf

3.1.3 Audit Scotland Report: Sustainable Transport: Reducing car use

On 30 January 2025, Audit Scotland published a report⁴ on Sustainable Transport reviewing progress that the Scottish Government and local authorities are making towards the target to reduce car use by 20%.

The report notes that the Scottish Government is unlikely to meet its target and makes a number of recommendations to improve delivery of reduced transport emissions, nationally, regionally and locally including recommendations of direct relevance to Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs), as follows:

- By the end of 2025, at the latest, Transport Scotland should publish a delivery plan that sets out how it will work with partners to achieve the target. This should include the impact Scottish Government, councils and RTPs are expected to have, clear roles and responsibilities, timescales, costs, and an appropriate monitoring and evaluation plan.
- From 2025, Transport Scotland to report progress annually through the climate change monitoring report.
- As part of their Local Transport Strategies and Regional Transport Strategies, Councils and RTPs should set out to what extent they will contribute to the 20 per cent car kilometre target.

SPT has recently published the Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) Delivery Plan⁵ which will be reported annually. The Delivery Plan sets out our forward programme and how we will monitor and evaluate progress on delivery of RTS policies.

Transport Scotland is working with COSLA and RTPs to consider its response to the report's findings. SPT is fully engaged in these discussions and officers will provide an update on this work to the next Strategy & Programmes Committee.

3.2 Regional

3.2.1 Clyde Metro

Work on delivering the Clyde Metro Case for Investment (CFI) continues at pace. For CFI Stage 1 workstreams; Stage 1a: Case for Change and Initial Option Development has concluded, whilst Stage 1b: Client Advisory Services is progressing. Current focus is on delivering a period of formal engagement with a wide range of stakeholders on the Vision, Objectives, and emerging options from CFI Stage 1a. Stakeholders include, key strategic and technical stakeholders, other wider stakeholders, community planning groups as well as political representatives. The formal stakeholder engagement period will be complete mid-February 2025, with feedback used to inform CFI Stage 2.

Preparations for CFI Stage 2 Programme Business Case is also nearing completion, enabling consultancy support to be commissioned across multiple work packages via the Clyde Metro Professional and Technical Services Framework. Several commissions have recently been tendered, with the remainder to be issued imminently. Subject to relevant Committee approvals, contracts for delivery of CFI Stage 2 are programmed to commence from March 2025.

In line with best practice for delivering programmes of this scale, a further assessment of readiness is being carried out by project partners prior to

⁴ https://audit.scot/uploads/2025-01/nr_250130_sustainable_transport.pdf

⁵ https://spt.production.d8.studio/media/scnmei5l/p200924_agenda6.pdf

commencement of CFI Stage 2 to fully ensure that appropriate levels of resource, expertise and structures are in place across partner teams to successfully deliver the CFI within the programme timeline. CFI Stage 2 is planned to complete in early 2027 resulting in a final optimal network and a supporting programme Business Case being identified.

A detailed update on Clyde Metro will be provided to the Partnership meeting on 14 March 2025.

3.2.2 Regional Transport Strategy Transport Governance Workstream

Further to earlier reports, officers continue to progress this workstream working in close partnership with our constituent councils through the Transport Governance Steering Group and supporting Subgroup. A key element the work of the group is to understand in detail the current framework for transport delivery in Scotland including the key legislation and delivery mechanisms to provide an agreed baseline for work going forward.

To support this work, SPT, in agreement with our local authority partners, has appointed consultants Arup to develop a baseline report. An initial working session has taken place with consultants, SPT and local authority colleagues and work to develop the baseline report is at an advanced stage. Officers will provide a further update to this Committee as this workstream progresses.

3.2.3 SPT Climate Change Strategy & Net-Zero Action Plan

The Net-Zero Delivery Group is currently working to build reporting requirements to improve visibility of workstreams across the Net-Zero Action Plan. Officers are working closely with key departments and relevant data owners to establish a structured approach to data collection, which also integrates the Public Bodies Climate Change Duties Reporting. This will ensure that there is alignment between statutory emission reporting and SPT's Net-Zero Action Plan. Reporting requirements have also been updated to a quarterly schedule to provide a consolidated view of progress.

The Groups key actions focus on tackling the emissions hotspots identified during the carbon assessment conducted as part of SPT's Climate Change strategy development. Investigating the feasibility of heat decarbonisation across our estate remains the first priority area for delivery within the Net-Zero Action Plan. Investigations into viable options are ongoing, with departments actively reviewing the allocation of resources and budgets to support this critical workstream.

Other key action areas include: embedding sustainability into procurement to promote circular economy principles and enhance resource efficiency, improving energy efficiency measures across our estate, and developing a Climate Resilience and Adaptation Plan for SPT to futureproof our assets, estate and infrastructure from current and future climate impacts.

3.2.4 SPT Climate Resilience and Adaptation Plan

As reported previously⁶, SPT has been developing a Climate Resilience and Adaptation Plan to enhance resilience to climate change impacts, focusing exclusively on SPT's corporate estate and associated responsibilities. Work to date has included undertaking a Climate Change Risk and Opportunity assessment, stakeholder engagement workshop sessions with key staff, and development of climate risk and opportunity Register.

⁶ https://spt.production.d8.studio/media/1fdizwm/sp291124_agenda7.pdf

Consultants have developed a Climate Risk Assessment Framework (CRA) to provide an initial evaluation of climate risks faced by SPT across assets, highlighting the vulnerabilities and potential impacts of climate related hazards. The assessment reveals that various assets, including buildings and infrastructure, are all subjected to significant risks primarily associated with floods and storms, as well as precipitation and sea level rise.

Next steps are to consolidate feedback from internal and external stakeholders and further develop the actions as part of the Risk and Opportunities action register. Actions will be prioritised based on factors such as feasibility, cost, key performance indicators (KPIs), and other relevant criteria.

4. Committee action

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

5. Consequences

Policy consequences	<i>All workstreams noted in this report are in line with the policies of the new Regional Transport Strategy.</i>
Legal consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Financial consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Personnel consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Equalities consequences	<i>The impact of the issues identified could be significant for equalities groups. Due process in terms of statutory impact assessments will need to be undertaken by responsible parties to ensure appropriate mitigation of any matters identified.</i>
Risk consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Climate Change, Adaptation & Carbon consequences	<i>The impact of the issues identified could be significant and due process in terms of statutory impacts assessments will need to be undertaken by responsible parties to ensure appropriate mitigation of any matters identified.</i>

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Appendix

Draft: Subject to consideration at Strategy & Programmes Committee 21 February 2025

PE2116/H: Accelerate the implementation of bus franchising powers

SPT written submission¹, 10 January 2025

Background

SPT is the Regional Transport Partnership (RTP) and Public Transport Authority for the west of Scotland, with an area comprising twelve local authorities and a population of 2.14m people. SPT plays a key role in coordinating the public transport network across our area and we work closely with our constituent councils, operators and others to seek to ensure that people across Strathclyde have access to facilities and activities including healthcare, employment, education, leisure, shopping, and visiting family and friends. SPT also acts to encourage more sustainable travel through our programme of investment in a range of initiatives across all modes of transport, and, on a revenue basis, supports socially necessary bus services across the west of Scotland, including the MyBus demand responsive transport service. Further information on SPT and the services we provide is available at www.spt.co.uk.

SPT is currently preparing the Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy (SRBS) and as part of this process has been reviewing the Bus Powers contained in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019. The development of a Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy has its foundations in SPT's A Call To Action: The Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) for the west of Scotland (2023 – 2038). The RTS recognises and promotes the importance of bus in our region and to that end, the need for the development of the SRBS was identified in light of the issues facing bus, and the potential opportunities available through the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019.

In 2024, [we undertook a public consultation seeking views on which recommended options should be considered further as part of the SRBS](#). Following an analysis of the SRBS consultation responses, SPT's Partnership Board approved the following recommendations to be reflected in the draft SRBS:

- Business As Usual and Voluntary Partnerships should be ruled out as a means to deliver a better bus network as more radical intervention is required.
- SPT should commence work on franchising, in line with the requirements of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019.

¹ Please note this response is to be considered at SPT's Strategy and Programmes Committee on 21 February 2025 and should be treated as draft until then.

Appendix

Draft: Subject to consideration at Strategy & Programmes Committee 21 February 2025

- SPT will consider developing business case(s) for small-scale municipal bus company(ies) aimed at providing socially necessary services in parts of the region where private operators are currently very limited.
- SPT, and our partners, should progress with the necessary transition arrangements appropriate (e.g. time-limited, voluntary partnerships or other agreements aimed at improving the bus network) to provide a structured basis for private and public sector collaboration in attempting to arrest further passenger decline and stabilise the bus network in the pre-franchising period.

SPT is currently finalising the draft SRBS, which will be presented to SPT's Strategy and Programmes Committee in February 2025, at which approval to undertake a 12-week public consultation over March-May 2025 will be sought. The final SRBS will be presented to the SPT Partnership Board for approval in September 2025.

SPT comments on the Petition:

- Point raised in petition: "Introducing, without delay, the regulations and statutory guidance required to give bus franchising powers full effect"

SPT comments: SPT is keen to see the Regulations and Guidance associated with the Act complete and published in full particularly given that we are currently undertaking the work noted above to develop the SRBS which may result in utilisation of the Act's Bus Powers. Transport Scotland (TS) has advised that it intends to publish guidance on both franchising and bus service improvement partnerships in Spring 2025. TS has also advised that it is working on a final set of Regulations for franchising, covering the process from transitioning into and out of a franchise, which includes extending the registration period for changes to bus services. This would complete the necessary Regulations and Guidance associated with the Bus Powers in the Transport (Scotland) 2019 Act.

SPT has engaged with Transport Scotland and Association of Transport Coordinating Officers (ATCO) through a Working Group to support the preparation of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 Regulations and Guidance and we welcome the opportunity Transport Scotland has provided to gather and reflect feedback by key partners as the process has developed. We would note that our responses to the points raised in the Public Petition do not commit SPT to a particular course of action in relation to the Bus Powers in the Act.

During this period however, SPT would welcome consideration of any improvements which may be identified following the issue of the Better Buses Bill applicable in England and Wales which is seeking to address learnings from early adopters of Bus Reform work.

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- Point raised in petition: “Amending the 2019 Act to remove the requirement for proposed franchising frameworks to be approved by a panel appointed by the traffic commissioner, instead empowering Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) to have the final say on approving proposals”

SPT comments: [SPT expressed concerns about the panel in its response to the consultation undertaken by Transport Scotland on the Act's Bus Powers in 2021](#). As a matter of public record, these concerns remain.

However, at this advanced stage in the development of the Act's Regulations and approaching publication of the finalised Guidance, we acknowledge this process is now firmly enshrined in law.

Notwithstanding the concerns previously raised by SPT, the change as proposed by the Petitioner would, by necessity, require development by the Scottish Government of an alternative proposal, consultation and, more fundamentally, further amendment of the Act. While Scotland remains an exception in the UK by retaining such a panel process, it is also evident that any change may result in further significant delay and introduce additional or new risks to any local transport authority such as SPT considering taking forward a franchising framework at this time.

Given the above, should the Scottish Parliament move to amend these provisions, SPT would seek assurances from the Scottish Government that any change can be made timeously and without delay. SPT would be concerned by any amendments that further delay the issue of regulations and guidance given the length of time to date. Specifically, we would seek assurance that any change would not materially impact on the timeline required to undertake a Franchise Assessment nor introduce additional risks to any authority considering Franchising as a means of improving bus networks for the travelling public in Scotland.

- Point raised in petition: Providing additional funding to help support RTPs in preparing franchising frameworks and assisting them with initial set-up costs once frameworks are approved.

SPT comment: SPT firmly believes that the appropriate funding is made available by the Scottish Government / Transport Scotland to ensure that Local Transport Authorities intending to review and potentially take forward the Bus Powers contained in the Transport (Scotland) Act can do so effectively. Planning, developing and implementing significant reform plans, including ensuring compliance with Scottish Government due processes, require a substantial commitment of resources and expertise to ensure that any proposals emerging are robust in meeting the complex requirements of the legislation, including in terms of appropriate communication, engagement, consultation and business case development and to support any set up costs associated with a preferred approach. To date no additional or specific resources have been made available to SPT at this time, and this has been identified as a key risk to the successful delivery of the bus reform agenda.