Strategy & Programmes Committee

SPT

Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy – Progress Update

Date of meeting   6 September 2024   **Date of report**   28 August 2024

Report by Head of Policy and Planning

1. Object of report

The object of this report is to:

- Update the Committee on progress in the development of the Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy (SRBS);
- Provide an update on the consultation on the Recommended Options for the SRBS;
- Recommend approval of proposed actions following the consultation; and
- Provide an update on the next steps for delivery of the final draft SRBS for public consultation.

2. Background to report

Members will recall previous reports to the Committee in November 2022[1] and June 2023[2] regarding development of the SRBS, the need for which was identified through work undertaken in development of the new Regional Transport Strategy (RTS), including the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 Scoping Option Assessment Study[3].

Members will further recall that the first stage in developing the SRBS was to prepare a Case for Change, the initial findings of which were reported to the Partnership in September 2023[4], with the full report being circulated to Partnership members and published on the SRBS page[5] of the SPT website in late 2023[6]. The SRBS Case for Change consolidated and updated the evidence base for issues facing bus in the region, drawing upon work already carried out in the development of the RTS, as well as updated transport datasets and engagement with local authorities and bus operators carried out during August and September 2023.

Following a progress update to the Partnership in December 2023[7], a report seeking approval to undertake a public consultation relating to the SRBS Options Development and Appraisal stage was approved by the Partnership in March 2024[8]. A report on the initial findings of that consultation was presented to the Partnership in June 2024[9].

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[1] https://www.spt.co.uk/media/zqsayayn/sp251122_agenda8.pdf
[2] https://www.spt.co.uk/media/gr3hd3gj/sp090623_agenda7.pdf
[3] Section 3.3 and Appendix 2, https://www.spt.co.uk/media/vh5prl5y/sp180222_agenda11.pdf
[4] https://www.spt.co.uk/media/4eapnkmz/p290923_agenda8.pdf
[5] https://www.spt.co.uk/about-us/what-we-are-doing/regional-transport-strategy/bus-strategy/
[6] https://www.spt.co.uk/media/2wrkfd2o/srbs-case-for-change.pdf
[7] https://www.spt.co.uk/media/3wdb2fxa/p151223_agenda7.pdf
[8] https://www.spt.co.uk/media/5jcfkngz/p150324_agenda9.pdf
[9] https://spt.production.d8.studio/media/m5thqupj/p280624_agenda9.pdf

Members will recall that the consultation sought views on which of the Recommendations should be taken forward into the development of the final draft SRBS which will also be subject to public consultation. Having considered responses received from individuals and organisations, the following section sets out proposed actions following the consultation.

3. **Outline of proposals**

(i) Report on the consultation

A detailed report on the results of the consultation by SPT's consultant SYSTRA is attached at Appendix 1. The report sets out the consultation methodology, responses, and feedback received on each of the Recommendations, and is an accurate summary of the consultation and responses received.

(ii) Response to consultation and next steps

The table below sets out SPT's response to the consultation feedback and proposed actions following the consultation:

"Recommendation" as presented for the consultation	SPT response to consultation feedback	Proposed actions
"Business As Usual and Voluntary Partnerships should be ruled out as means to deliver a better bus network as more radical intervention is required.	The consultation feedback was generally supportive of this recommendation. Having considered responses received from individuals and organisations, no points were identified that would require a change to the recommendation at this time.	The recommendation will be retained unchanged for development for the final draft SRBS for consultation. However, SPT will continue to support existing voluntary partnership arrangements in the immediate future.
"SPT should commence work on franchising, in line with the requirements of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019."	The consultation feedback was generally supportive of this recommendation. Having considered responses received from individuals and organisations, no points were identified that would require a change to the recommendation at this time.	The recommendation on franchising will be retained unchanged for development for the final draft SRBS for public consultation. The franchise option will be further developed particularly the process route map to take forward the franchise assessment in line with emerging statutory guidance. This will include discussions with partners on funding for the franchise development process.
"SPT will consider developing business case(s) for small-scale municipal bus company(ies) aimed at providing socially	The consultation feedback was generally supportive of this recommendation. Having considered responses received from individuals and	The recommendation will be retained unchanged for development for the final draft SRBS for consultation.

necessary services in parts of the region where private operators are currently very limited."	organisations, no points were identified that would require a change to the recommendation at this time.	
"SPT should progress with Bus Service Improvement Partnership (BSIP) arrangements to provide a firm basis for private and public sector commitments to arrest further passenger decline and improve the bus network over the medium term."	The consultation feedback on this recommendation was mixed in terms of support for and opposition to it. Acknowledging this, and that it may be challenging to deliver BSIP as an interim measure within a wider framework that aims to develop franchising, SPT believes the recommendation should be amended.	The recommendation will be amended to read: *"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 will develop the detail of the "necessary transition arrangements appropriate" as the final draft SRBS for public consultation is developed and finalised. SPT has engagement planned with stakeholders over coming months.

It is important to emphasise that all responses to the consultation have been considered and informed the proposed actions noted in the table above. Responses identified not just whether there was stakeholder support to the options considered but also included positive suggestions for consideration as the strategy is further developed. Further, the responses will also serve to add to, update and inform the evidence base, analysis and development work to be undertaken in preparing the final draft SRBS for public consultation. It is also worth highlighting, as referenced in section 7.4 of the report at Appendix 1, that some respondents commented on the consultation process, and officers will take these points into account in preparing for the public consultation on the final draft SRBS.

This is particularly important given the Judicial Review of the consultation process which Partnership members were recently made aware of, the Judicial Review being a matter of public record. It is important for members to note that litigation, and that consideration has been and will be given to the consultation responses, including the objections of the organisation pursuing the litigation. Members have received a separate briefing on the petition and should have cognisance of this when making decisions.

It is also worth emphasising that Partnership members have as much background and information available to them to make informed decisions about the SRBS and, to that end, a full, appropriately redacted, list of all consultation responses was circulated to

members in advance of this meeting and will be made publicly available on the SRBS page of the SPT website following this meeting.

Within the above context therefore, SPT's position and proposed actions following the consultation are as noted in the table above and, subject to approval by this Committee, the final draft SRBS for public consultation will be developed based on those proposed actions.

It is worth stressing the importance of SPT continuing to press Transport Scotland to re-commence the Bus Partnership Fund, which was 'paused' during 2024-2025. Successful delivery of any future delivery model will also require on-street bus priority measures to support bus as a viable and attractive mode.

(iii) Next steps

SPT has sought to take an inclusive and transparent approach through the early stages of SRBS development, acknowledging the wide range of stakeholders affected by the outcomes from it: councils, operators, business organisations, other sectors and, above all, the people and communities of the west of Scotland. For example, our approach led to the recent consultation on the Recommendations being added to the SRBS programme during the option development stage to accommodate the very large number of stakeholders whom it had become apparent wished to participate in and have their views heard in the SRBS development process and indeed, this was borne out in the resultant scale of response to the consultation. Further, and continuing to align with the inclusive and transparent approach adopted, the public consultation on the final draft SRBS will run for twelve weeks during early 2025.

It is important to emphasise that the public consultation will cover the whole of the SRBS, ensuring respondents have the opportunity to offer their views or suggest alternative approaches on all elements of the final draft SRBS, given its significance and potential impact.

In light of the above, the final SRBS will be presented to the Partnership following the twelve-week public consultation noted above, and any adjustments made to the strategy arising from the consultation. Further details on the dates for the public consultation will be presented to the Committee in November.

4. Committee action

The Committee is recommended to:

(i) Note the content of this report;

(ii) Note the report on the consultation on the Recommendations for the SRBS attached at Appendix 1;

(iii) Approve the proposed actions contained in section 3(ii); and

(iv) Note the next steps in section 3(iii).

5. Consequences

Policy consequences	*Supports delivery of a wide range of policies in the Regional Transport Strategy, including Policy 21 Bus Quality and Integration.*
Legal consequences	*None at present.*

Financial consequences	*None at present.*
Personnel consequences	*None at present.*
Equalities consequences	*An Equality Impact Assessment, Fairer Scotland Duty Impact Assessment, Island Community Impact Assessment, and Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment are being carried for the SRBS.*
Risk consequences	*None at present.*
Climate Change, Adaptation & Carbon consequences	*A Strategic Environmental Assessment is being carried out for the SRBS.*

Name	Bruce Kiloh	**Name**	Valerie Davidson
Title	**Head of Policy & Planning**	**Title**	**Chief Executive**

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STRATHCLYDE REGIONAL BUS STRATEGY CONSULTATION REPORT

SYSTRA

STRATHCLYDE REGIONAL BUS STRATEGY

CONSULTATION REPORT

IDENTIFICATION TABLE	
Client/Project owner	Strathclyde Partnership for Transport
Project	Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy Consultation
Type of document	Consultation Report
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File name	20240809 SRBS Consultation Report v2.0 TC.docx
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APPROVAL				
Version	**Name**		**Position**	**Date**
1	Authors	Lindsey Stack	Associate	15/05/2024
	Checked by	Liz Boast	Associate Director	14/06/2024
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2	Author	Lindsey Stack	Associate	09/08/2024
	Checked by	Liz Boast	Associate Director	09/08/2024
	Approved by	Liz Boast	Associate Director	09/08/2024

Table of contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

In 2023, Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) commenced work on the Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy (SRBS). The SRBS is SPT's process to determine a preferred strategy to improving the bus network and set the direction of bus policy in the region.

As part of this, SPT has appraised several options to understand how well each one could help with the delivery of a better bus network, based on their anticipated benefits, costs and any implementation issues. After reviewing the evidence and appraisal findings, SPT developed a set of recommendations to guide the development and implementation of the bus strategy, as follows:

Rule out business as usual	Rule out voluntary partnerships	Take forward local services franchising	Take forward Bus Service Improvement Partnerships	Further investigate small-scale municipal bus operations

Consultation process

SPT carried out a consultation exercise between **Tuesday 2nd April 2024 and Monday 13th May 2024** to understand levels of support or opposition to these recommendations and reasons why. Feedback from the general public and stakeholders was gathered, with **3,072 responses** received in total across the following channels:

Questionnaire
3,022 respondents
(inc. 2,964 individuals and 58 organisations)

Workshops
28 stakeholders

Document / letter
8 responses

Interviews
14 stakeholders
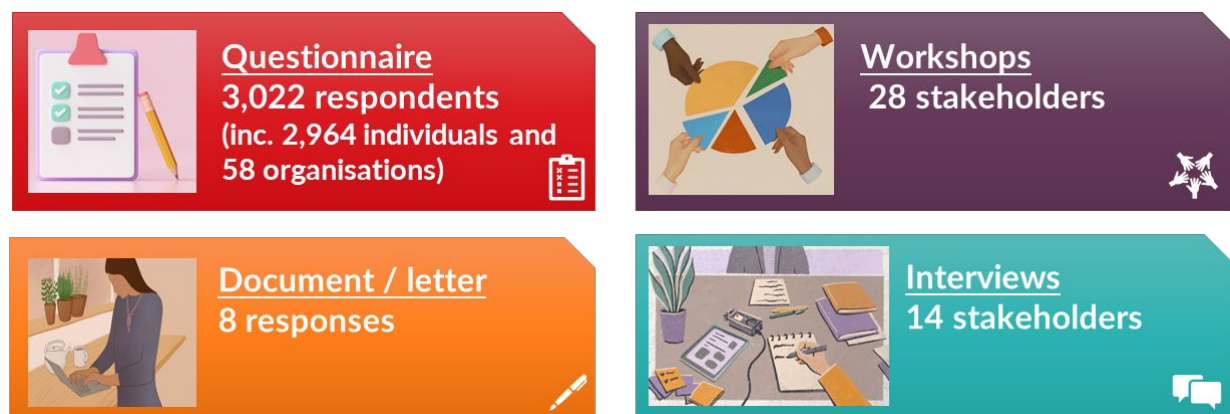
Consultation feedback

The following feedback was received in support/opposition to each of the recommendations:

Rule out business as usual:

Questionnaire findings[1]	Individuals		Organisations	
	80% support	17% oppose	72% support	22% oppose

- Both individuals and stakeholders felt that **change was required** and perceive **business as usual to not be working for users** at present.

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[1] Note, does not include those that responded 'don't know' or 'neither support nor oppose', therefore percentages included within the Executive Summary do not total 100%.

- **Issues with current bus operations** were reported, such as perceived increases in fares and reliability of services.
- However, a smaller proportion had concerns that ruling out business as usual may lead to the **removal of what they perceive to be successful services**.
- Some stakeholders felt the current provision of services is satisfactory and **does not require change**. Others suggested that other factors need to be addressed first, such as road congestion, and that more evidence on the recommendations is required.

Rule out voluntary partnerships:

Questionnaire findings	Individuals		Organisations	
	70% support	**22% oppose**	**60% support**	**30% oppose**

- The main reason for supporting ruling out voluntary partnerships was due to concern around **enforcement**, specifically that voluntary partnerships may have little to no impact in delivering improvements to services without **clear accountability mechanisms**.
- The previous impact of voluntary partnerships was also mentioned by questionnaire respondents and stakeholders during the interviews, who noted instances where these have been introduced but were deemed to have **not succeeded**.
- There were concerns from stakeholders over **potential costs and additional workload** associated with voluntary partnerships.
- However some opposed voluntary partnerships being ruled out as they felt they could work well with **appropriate collaboration and commitment.**

Take forward local services franchising:

Questionnaire findings	Individuals		Organisations	
	76% support	**18% oppose**	**71% support**	**21% oppose**

- The potential improvements that local services franchising could offer in the **quality of service** were mentioned by individuals and stakeholders, particularly relating to improvements in the consistency of service quality and in meeting the needs of local communities.
- Stakeholders referred to **other examples** of local services franchising considered to be successful. Some felt franchising would allow for better **integration** of bus with other modes of transport.
- Reasons for opposition were due to concerns around the **perceived limited impact** franchising may have on current services. Some suggested measures need to be in place to ensure that commitments are binding, and operators are held accountable
- Some stakeholders raised concerns regarding the **timescales** for this option, and potential delays in the implementation of the franchise model. There were also concerns around the **cost** of implementing a franchising model.

Take forward bus service improvement partnerships

Questionnaire findings	Individuals		Organisations	
	43% support	**49% oppose**	**51% support**	**37% oppose**

- Those who were in support of this recommendation felt it could work well as an **interim step** whilst other options are being developed. Some questionnaire respondents commented on the potential benefits this option could have on bus services, and some also mentioned the **perceived success of other bus partnerships** introduced elsewhere.
- The effectiveness of BSIPs was a concern raised consistently by questionnaire respondents and stakeholders, specifically the belief that this option may have **little to no impact** on bus

services. Some had concerns that introduction of BSIPs may delay the introduction of other options.

- There were also concerns around **accountability** and the **flexibility** that this option offers to operators. Stakeholders felt that clear mechanisms for enforcing agreements and holding all parties accountable were required. Stakeholders also raised concerns regarding the potential funding sources for implementing this option, with a similar concern around costs raised in the questionnaire by respondents who perceived this option to be expensive.

Further investigate small-scale municipal bus operations

Questionnaire findings	Individuals		Organisations	
	86% support	8% oppose	74% support	21% oppose

- Support for this option came from all channels with individuals/stakeholders considering this option to provide an opportunity for buses to be run as a **public service** which they consider to potentially bring more benefits than a profit-driven model.
- Some felt that other similar options have been **successful elsewhere**. They noted that they believe this option may improve service coverage, particularly in rural and underserved areas.
- Reasons to oppose this option were due to concerns regarding perceived **potential high costs**, with some stakeholders questioning the cost-effectiveness of this option and investment required. Comments were also made in relation to the **scale and ambition** of this option. While questionnaire respondents felt that this option should be larger scale and more ambitious, stakeholders who participated in the workshop suggested that different scales of operation should be explored to determine feasibility.

The following graph provides a summary of the level of support/opposition received within the questionnaire for each of the different options:
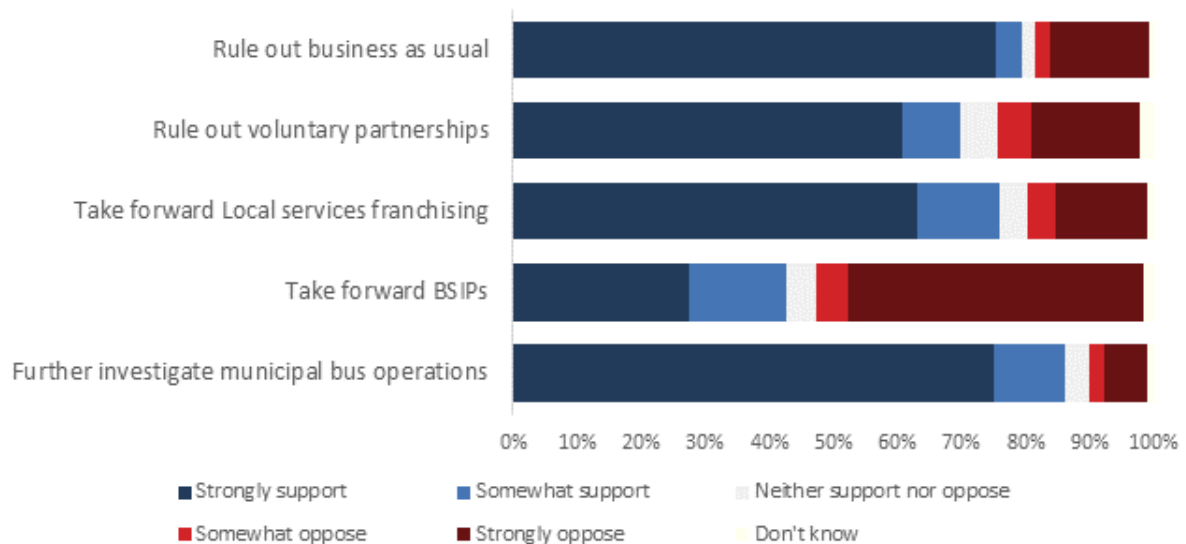
Next steps
SPT will review the findings from the consultation and will be reporting them to the Partnership Board later in 2024. Next year (2025) SPT will complete the development of the bus strategy.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context

1.1.1 In 2023, Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) commenced work on the Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy (SRBS). The SRBS is SPT's process to determine a preferred strategy to improving the bus network and set the direction of bus policy in the region. SPT has now developed a set of recommendations to guide the development and implementation of its bus strategy.

1.1.2 SPT commissioned SYSTRA to consult with stakeholders and the general public to understand the extent of support of or opposition to these recommendations.

1.2 Recommendations

1.2.1 Over the last nine months, SPT has been considering a number of options as to how the future bus network could be delivered. More detail on these options can be found at SPT's SRBS webpage[2]. SPT has appraised each option to understand how well each one could help with the delivery of a better bus network, based on their anticipated benefits, costs and any implementation issues.

1.2.2 After reviewing the evidence and appraisal findings, SPT developed a set of recommendations to guide the development and implementation of the bus strategy. These recommendations are as follows:

⦾ **Rule out business as usual and voluntary partnerships**

> **Business as usual** describes the existing bus network. Operators are free to run any service, set their own fares and choose their own vehicles, subject to meeting safety and operating standards and applicable government policies such as Low Emission Zones. Evidence suggests that with this option, it is highly unlikely that the cycle of decline will be broken. SPT also anticipate that continuing with business as usual is unacceptable to most stakeholders and communities.

> **Voluntary partnerships** are when bus operators and public sector partners come together to improve the bus network through agreeing, on a voluntary basis, to provide or deliver improvements to services and infrastructure or other local policies to support bus services. The option appraisal process found no evidence in the region to suggest that voluntary partnerships are likely to break the cycle of bus decline.

⦾ **Take forward local services franchising and bus service improvement partnerships**

> **Local services franchising** is a system that allows a Local Transport Authority to plan the bus network and to award exclusive rights to an operator to run certain bus services for a set period of time. Under this franchise framework, the Local Transport Authority then enters into franchise agreements with bus operators, generally awarded through competitive processes, to deliver the specified services and standards. SPT believes franchising offers the greatest certainty in delivering an improved bus network for the region in the long term.

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[2] https://www.spt.co.uk/about-us/what-we-are-doing/regional-transport-strategy/bus-strategy/

> **Bus Service Improvement Partnerships (BSIPs)** are a statutory partnership between a Local Transport Authority (or authorities) and one or more bus operators. This model differs from a voluntary partnership in that there is a legal basis for the Plan and Scheme(s) and, therefore, elements of the Plan and Scheme(s) can be enforced. SPT believes BSIPs play an important role in delivering key improvements for the bus network, including bus priority measures to improve reliability, ahead of implementing local services franchising.

- **Further investigate small-scale municipal bus operations**

> A **municipal bus company** is an operator of bus services owned by a Local Transport Authority. A municipal bus company can be formed from the purchase of an existing bus or coach company or the creation of a new company. Municipal bus companies compete for the market in the same way as privately owned bus companies.

1.3 Consultation

1.3.1 SPT carried out a consultation exercise during April-May 2024 to understand levels of support or opposition to these recommendations and why, and to understand if respondents felt any changes should be made. This report brings together the findings from across the consultation process and provides the feedback given against each of the recommendations.

1.4 Structure

1.4.1 The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 2 – Consultation process:** outlines the methodology used and consultation approaches taken, alongside the approach to analysis and reporting.
- **Chapter 3 – Consultation response:** presents the overall response to the consultation, including the number of responses received through different channels.
- **Chapter 4 – Consultation feedback on business as usual and voluntary partnerships:** presents the level of support / opposition for recommendations to rule out business as usual and voluntary partnerships and reasons behind this.
- **Chapter 5 – Consultation feedback on franchise and BSIPs:** presents the level of support / opposition for recommendations to take forward local service franchising and BSIPs and reasons behind this.
- **Chapter 6 – Consultation feedback on small-scale municipal bus operations:** presents the level of support / opposition for recommendations to further investigate small-scale municipal bus operations and reasons behind this.
- **Chapter 7 – Consultation feedback (other feedback):** details the findings relating to other areas in addition to the recommendations, such as feedback on the impact assessments and other comments received.
- **Chapter 8 – Summary and next steps:** summarises the key findings from the consultation and outlines what will happen next.

2. CONSULTATION PROCESS

2.1 Overview

2.1.1 This section sets out the consultation process undertaken to understand the extent of general public and stakeholder support or opposition for SPT's bus reform recommendations.

2.2 Approach

Aim of the process

2.2.1 To gain an understanding of public and stakeholder views on SPT's recommendations, SYSTRA was commissioned to carry out a non-statutory consultation exercise over a six-week period, between **Tuesday 2nd April 2024** and **Monday 13th May 2024**[3]. The purpose of the consultation was to understand views on the recommendations including level of support or opposition for each and why. This feedback would then be used to understand whether SPT should consider amending their approach before moving to the next stage of the bus strategy process.

Communication

2.2.2 SPT aimed to consult as widely as possible on the recommendations and provide those with an interest with sufficient detail to form a view. Prior to and during the consultation, SPT published an information document which covered the background to the consultation, their goals, and details of the recommendations including the rationale for ruling out / continuing with different options. Alongside this, SPT published a series of impact assessments to accompany the bus strategy consultation document.

2.2.3 Ahead of the consultation period, SPT publicised the consultation by:

 ○ Advising council officers of the upcoming consultation at the SPT/Council Liaison meeting in February 2024; and
 ○ Publishing a press release in the lead up to the SPT Partnership meeting that would approve the recommended options for consultation.

2.2.4 During the consultation period, the consultation was publicised through the following channels:

 ○ SPT's website via the homepage and dedicated bus strategy page[4] (SPT);
 ○ Briefing session with MPs/MSPs, following the launch of the consultation (SPT);
 ○ Briefing session with Council leaders and Chief Executives, following the launch of the consultation (SPT);
 ○ Stakeholder interviews (SYSTRA);
 ○ Stakeholder workshops (SYSTRA);
 ○ Emails to c. 700 stakeholders with information on the consultation and how to participate (SPT);
 ○ Local authorities were requested to provide the stakeholder email to all community councils in the region (247 active community councils) (SPT);

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[3] SPT granted a short extension to those that requested it
[4] https://www.spt.co.uk/about-us/what-we-are-doing/regional-transport-strategy/bus-strategy/

- Social media – updates were published via SPT's X account and partners and Partnership Board members were encouraged to 'retweet' (SPT); and
- Press release to launch the consultation (SPT).

Consultation process

2.2.5   Feedback from the general public and stakeholders was obtained through the following channels:

- Online questionnaire;
- Completing a Word version of the questionnaire and submitting via email;
- Attending a workshop (invited stakeholders only);
- Attending an interview (invited stakeholders only); and
- Submitting a stakeholder letter / document.

Online questionnaire

2.2.6   An online questionnaire was produced to allow the general public and stakeholders to provide their views on the recommendations. The survey went live on Tuesday 2nd April and was closed on the morning of Tuesday 14th May 2024. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in **Appendix A**.

2.2.7   The survey asked respondents to provide their level of support or opposition to the recommendations and their reasons why. Respondents were also asked about the accompanying impact assessments, as well as some demographic / travel questions (where appropriate) to understand whether views differed by respondent type. Respondents were also invited to provide additional comments related to the bus strategy recommendations. The survey was accessed via a link on SPT's website and a total of **3,014 responses** were received.

Questionnaire (word version)

2.2.8   A Word version of the questionnaire was also made available to those that requested it, with respondents able to return their responses to SPT by email or post. A total of **eight responses** were received via this method, and these have been added to the responses provided via the online questionnaire. This brings the total survey responses (both online and via Word versions) to **3,022 in total**.

Stakeholder workshops

2.2.9   Primary stakeholders (those with a significant influence on the project direction and substantive interest in the outcomes of the process) were invited to take part in a 75-minute workshop. Five workshops were held in total, and stakeholder types included local authority officers, public transport operators and health boards. A total of **28 stakeholders** took part in the workshop process.

2.2.10   The group workshops involved a discussion to understand stakeholder's level of support or opposition towards the different recommendations and to provide their feedback. Stakeholders were also invited to ask questions which were recorded as part of the write ups for each session. A copy of the slide deck shared during the workshops is provided in **Appendix B**.

Stakeholder interviews

2.2.11   Additionally, a total of 22 stakeholders were invited to take part in a 30-minute in-depth Microsoft Teams interview. The interviews explored support/opposition to the recommendations in greater depth than the online surveys. Topic guides were used for the interviews and a copy is provided in **Appendix C**. Stakeholders were identified by SPT

and were a mix of 'primary stakeholders' i.e. they have a significant influence on the project direction and substantive interest in the outcomes of the process, and 'actively interested stakeholders' i.e. not directly involved with the detailed process, but actively interested in engaging with the outcomes.

2.2.12   A total of **14 stakeholders** responded to say they would like to take part in an interview. Of the remaining stakeholders, one chose to attend a workshop instead, one chose to provide a written response and six stakeholders did not reply. Each stakeholder was sent an initial email, and then (where applicable) a reminder email from SYSTRA, and then a reminder email from SPT. The breakdown of interviews by stakeholder type is provided in Table 1.

Table 1.   Stakeholder profiles

STAKEHOLDER TYPE	FREQUENCY
Third sector and other	8
Bus operators	4
Public sector	2
Total	**14**

Stakeholder letter / document

2.2.13   A small number of stakeholders chose to submit a separate written response. In total, **eight responses** were received from stakeholders who provided greater explanation of their position and the details behind their level of support/opposition for the different recommendations.

2.3   Approach to analysis

Data processing

2.3.1   The online survey was hosted using Snap software, and all online survey response data was downloaded by SYSTRA and analysed internally using SPSS software.

2.3.2   Separate questionnaire responses completed via the Word questionnaire were submitted to SPT and were sent to SYSTRA who then combined with the online responses for analysis.

2.3.3   All data was subject to cleaning e.g. any incomplete or missing rows were removed. For the purpose of ensuring the authenticity of questionnaire responses, the questionnaire asked respondents for basic contact information which included name and email. SYSTRA conducted checks to identify any potential duplicate responses via this information provided. No duplicate responses were identified during the cleaning process.

2.3.4   Data cleaning also involved checks to ensure the correct routing was followed and base sizes were correct for each question.

Data analysis – closed (quantitative survey questions)

2.3.5   All data cleaning and analysis of closed questions was undertaken within SPSS, an industry-standard tool which enables data cleaning, the reporting of descriptive statistics, as well as inferential statistical analysis.

2.3.6   In addition to providing frequencies to outline the results to closed questions at a full sample level, a series of crosstabulations (tables which include two variables, for example (1) support for an option (2) respondent type) were produced to provide deeper understanding of sentiments. Chi-Square tests were also run, to identify whether any differences between key sub-samples were statistically significant.

2.3.7   Statistically significant differences between sub-samples have been noted throughout the report. Where no information is provided regarding sub-sample variations, no statistically significant differences have been identified. In some instances, the low base sizes for some questions, or segmentations, will have inhibited the ability to identify statistically significant differences between sub-samples. Some questions were only asked to individuals in the survey (such as type of area lived in).

2.3.8   The variables used for crosstabulations were:

- Type of respondent (organisation or individual)
- Type of area (e.g. rural, town) (individuals only)
- Location (individuals only)
- Access to a car, van, motorbike or moped, as a driver (individuals only)
- Frequency of bus travel (individuals only).

Data analysis – open-ended coding (qualitative survey questions)

2.3.9   Responses to every open-ended question were read, in full, by a trained coder and each sentiment or idea mentioned in relation to a specific question was allocated to a code or heading. These headings (and their relationships) are known as the 'coding framework'.

2.3.10   Initial outline coding frames were developed by SYSTRA based on the first batch of responses received. These were shared with SPT for feedback (for instance on the level of granularity and the suitability of the structure). New codes were added as new sentiments were found in the responses. This allowed the coding frames to be fully data-led and developed and refined over time, ensuring all views were captured.

2.3.11   The code frame for feedback on the specific options, was structured as follows:

- Level 1: High level theme e.g. which option the comment referred to.
- Level 2: Specific sentiment e.g. positive / negative / neutral.
- Level 3: Sub-theme e.g. nature of the comment.

2.3.12   Two coding frames were developed to capture different sections of the questionnaire. These code frames were as follows:

- Reasons for support / opposition to SPT's recommendations and feedback on the impact assessments; and
- Final comments.

2.3.13   The coding team was closely supervised by a coding manager and a secure Teams page was created, to ensure that any queries were dealt with quickly, that new codes were considered immediately and to ensure responses were coded accurately.

2.3.14   Coding was based solely on what the responses stated. Coders did not interpret or assess whether comments were valid. This ensured that the process of coding was as objective as possible, which in turn maximises inter-coder reliability (which is the extent to which independent coders reach the same conclusions from reviewing similar sentiments).

Data analysis – workshop / interviews

2.3.15   Both interviews and workshops followed a topic guide. For the interviews, findings were recorded within a stakeholder interview analysis proforma which enabled consistency in reporting. For the workshops, an internal write up of each session was produced that captured the key points raised. Participants were asked for their permission for SYSTRA to record the transcript of the interview / workshop. They were informed that this recording was being made for the purposes of accurately writing up the notes of the session afterwards with the file then being deleted.

2.4   Reporting

2.4.1   Alongside the reporting of the closed quantitative survey responses, this report also details the qualitative feedback from the questionnaire, workshops, interviews and separate written responses. These have been presented by theme in decreasing frequency of prevalence. For the interviews and workshops, prevalence terms have been used to provide an indication of the frequency of each sentiment expressed, as follows:

PERCENTAGE RESPONSES	TERM
100% of stakeholders	All
80 – 99%	Vast majority
56 – 79%	Majority
45 – 55%	Around half
25 – 44%	Significant minority
Less than 25%, but more than one person	Small minority
A single response	One

2.4.2   Anonymised verbatim quotes from the general public and stakeholders have been used throughout, where appropriate, to exemplify the findings.

2.4.3   As with all analysis of qualitative data, it should be noted that:

- The views and opinions reported are the views and perceptions of respondents and are not necessarily factually correct (and are not necessarily the views of SYSTRA or SPT);
- Open question survey responses were optional, and are therefore self-selecting data, and therefore does not provide a sample that accurately represents the views

of a larger population. Instead, it allows the views and opinions of different types of people to be heard;

- Whilst we have included terms to illustrate the prevalence of each sentiment e.g. support / oppose, this consultation process cannot be seen as a 'vote' and we do not attempt to draw conclusions about what the 'best' proposed option might be, based on the number of people offering positive or negative comments toward it; and

- It should be noted that the numbers in support / opposition to different options from the workshops and interviews have not been included. This is because in some interviews / workshops, stakeholders did not reveal this information.

2.5   Considerations when interpreting the findings

2.5.1   Whilst this consultation process has proven to be an effective method to gauge current level of support and opposition towards different proposals, there are several factors which should be considered when interpreting the findings presented in this report.

- Questionnaire respondents were self-selecting and consequently, the survey sample is not representative, and the findings are not generalisable to a wider population. However, the consultation was open to all residents and organisations wishing to participate.

- Some responses to the 'Final comments' question repeated set text related to the Better Buses for Strathclyde petition. Whilst this helps demonstrate clear themes in the data, this leads to the same point being made repeatedly. This has been acknowledged in the text of the report.

- Where percentages do not total 100% this is either due to rounding or the multiple response nature of the question.

- Base sizes vary due to some questions being optional.

- The purpose of the research was to provide the general public and stakeholders and opportunity to express their views, and these have been reported as submitted. No assessment/evaluation of the veracity of that feedback has been undertaken and as such, statements may not necessarily be accurate or reliable.

3.   CONSULTATION RESPONSE

3.1   Number of responses

3.1.1   The general public and stakeholders were invited to provide their views on SPT's recommendations for bus reform and state their level of support/opposition to the different options proposed. Table 2 summaries the number of responses received through the various consultation channels.

Table 2.   Responses received

NUMBER OF RESPONSES	QUESTIONNAIRE (ONLINE & WORD VERSIONS)	WORKSHOP	INTERVIEW	STAKEHOLDER LETTER/ DOCUMENT	TOTAL RESPONSES
Individuals	2,964	-	-	-	2,964
Organisations	58	28	14	8	108
					3,072

Note: Some respondents who completed the questionnaire also attended either a workshop or interview.

3.2   Distribution of responses (questionnaire)

3.2.1   The questionnaire asked respondents whether they were completing the survey as an individual or on behalf of an organisation. As displayed in Table 2, a total of **2,964 individuals completed the survey (98%) and 58 organisations (2%).**

3.2.2   Of the 58 organisations that responded to the questionnaire, nine respondents (16%) were bus operators, eight respondents (14%) represented local authorities and 41 respondents (71%) were classed as 'other organisations'. This group included campaign groups, unions and community councils.

3.2.3   Depending on whether they were responding as an organisation or individual, questionnaire respondents were asked in which local authority their organisation primarily operates (organisations) or which town/area they live in (individuals). Figure 1 illustrates the spread of responses. The majority of respondents operate/live in Glasgow City (1,463 respondents, 50%), followed by South Lanarkshire (405 respondents, 14%) and Renfrewshire (251 respondents, 9%).

Figure 1.   Location of responses (questionnaire)
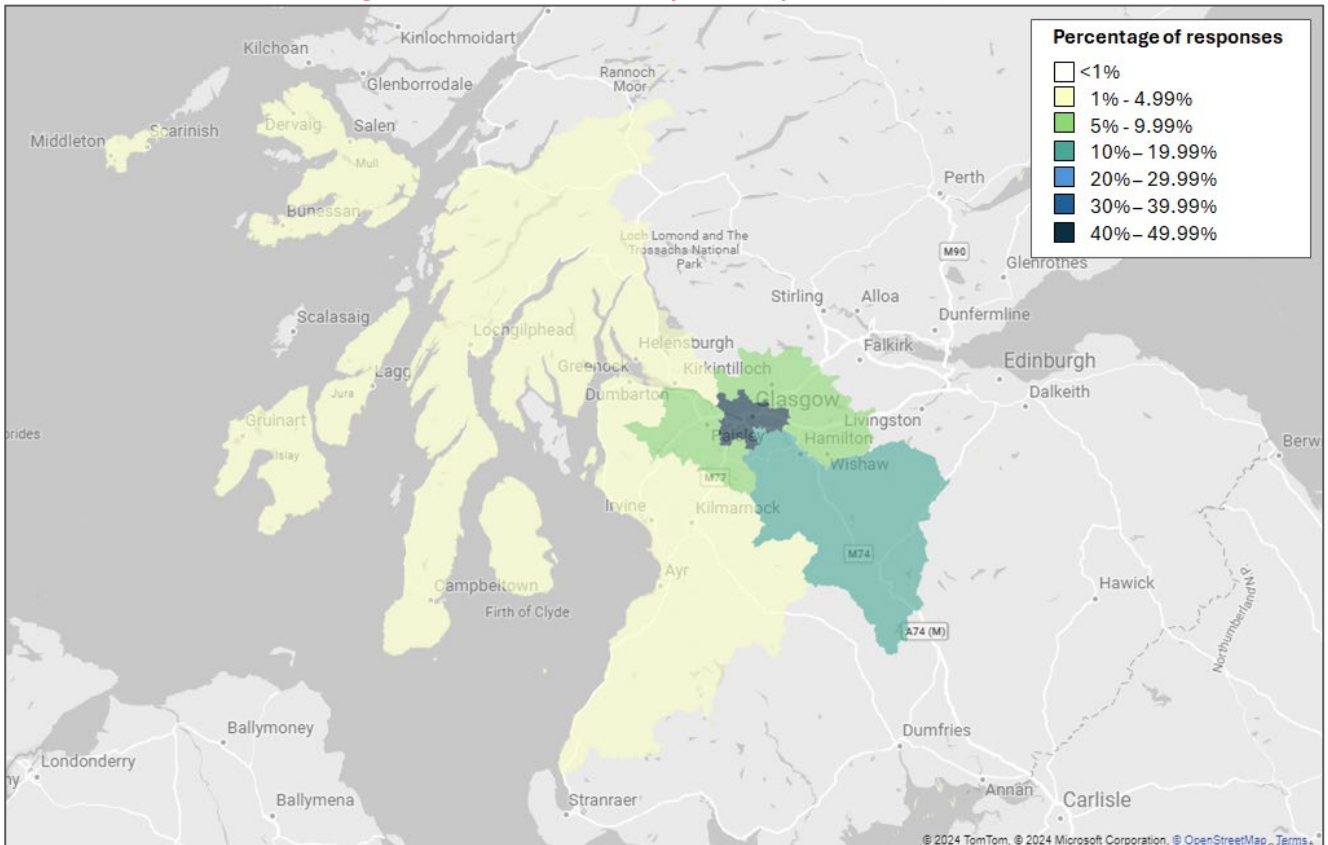
Base: 2,923 responses. Note, organisations were permitted to choose more than one area that their organisation operates within.

3.2.4   Those responding to the questionnaire as an individual were also asked about the type of area that they live in. The results are shown in Figure 2 and illustrate that just over half of respondents (51%) live in a city, whilst a third (33%) live in a town.

Figure 2.   Respondent location: type of area (questionnaire – individuals)
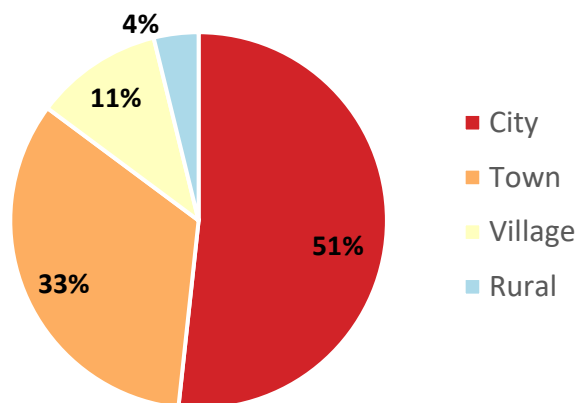
Base: 2,941 responses (responding as an individual).

3.3   Travel characteristics (questionnaire)

3.3.1   Individuals responding to the questionnaire were asked about access to vehicles, as a driver. A total of 1,178 individuals responding to the survey (40%) reported that they do not have access to either a car, van, motorbike or moped, as a driver.

3.3.2   Individuals were also asked how often, on average, they had travelled by bus in the last 12 months. As illustrated in Figure 3, 2,867 respondents (97%) have used the bus within the last 12 months, with nearly two-thirds (63%) reporting that they travel by bus at least once a week or more.

Figure 3.   Frequency of travel by bus (questionnaire – individuals)

Base: 2,948 responses (responding as an individual)

3.4   Evidence of organised campaigns

3.4.1   **Climate Action Strathaven** (CAS) conducted their own online questionnaire to help inform their submission response to the consultation. This was open between the 11th May and 13th May 2024 and advertised using C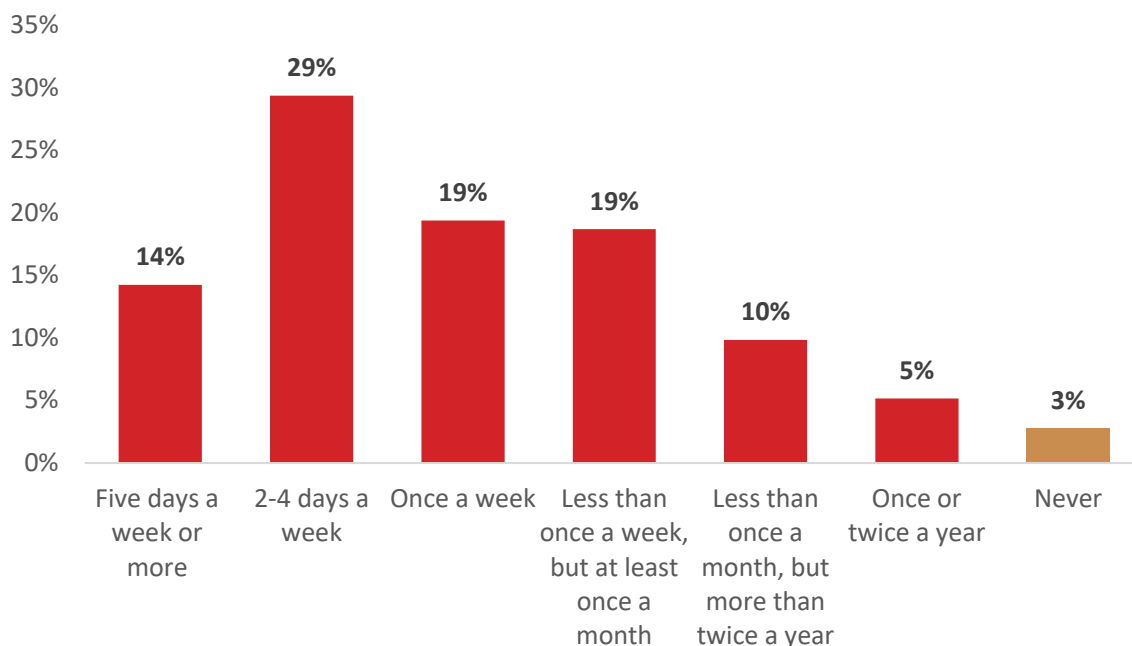AS and Strathaven Facebook page. A total of 1,146 responded to Climate Action's questionnaire and respondents were self-selecting and submitted responses anonymously. Respondents to this survey responded to specific questions about the CAS 3C Strathaven service and the impact it has had. Within the SRBS consultation questionnaire, 98 respondents referred to the 3C service within the 'final comments' section.

3.4.2   **Better Buses for Strathclyde** organised a petition to 'Take Strathclyde's Buses back into Public Control'. This petition states: *"We call on SPT's Board to ensure that this Strategy sets out clear plans to use both these new powers in tandem (for 'franchising' and to set up a new public operator for Strathclyde). It's vital that SPT's Board also rejects the idea of entering into a so-called 'Bus Service Improvement Partnership' with the private operators which would simply maintain the status quo. We call on the leaders on Strathclyde's 12 Councils to support SPT to take our region's buses back into public control. We call on the Transport Minister Fiona Hyslop and her staff at Transport Scotland to provide the funding and support that SPT need to deliver a world-class, fully-integrated, accessible and affordable public transport system fit for the 21st century".* To date, the petition has over 10,870 signatures. Within the SRBS consultation questionnaire, 69 respondents referred to this petition within the 'final comments' section.

4. CONSULTATION FEEDBACK – RECOMMENDATIONS ON BUSINESS AS USUAL AND VOLUNTARY PARTNERSHIPS

4.1 Overview

4.1.1 This section presents consultation feedback on SPT's **recommendations** on **Business as Usual** and **Voluntary Partnerships:**

  ○ **SPT should rule out business as usual as an option to deliver future bus network**
  ○ **SPT should rule out voluntary partnerships as an option to deliver future bus network**

4.1.2 This section presents the feedback on both options from the questionnaire, written responses, workshops and interviews.

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Proposal to rule out business as usual

</div>

4.2 Overall level of support / opposition (questionnaire)

4.2.1 Respondents completing the questionnaire were asked the extent they support or oppose SPT's recommendation to rule out 'business as usual' for further consideration in the bus strategy.

4.2.2 The results are presented in Figure 4, and show that a large proportion of respondents either strongly support or somewhat support SPT's recommendation to rule out business as usual. This recommendation saw the highest proportion of respondents selecting 'strongly support' of all of the recommendations (both individuals and organisations).

Figure 4.   Level of support/opposition to rule out 'business as usual'
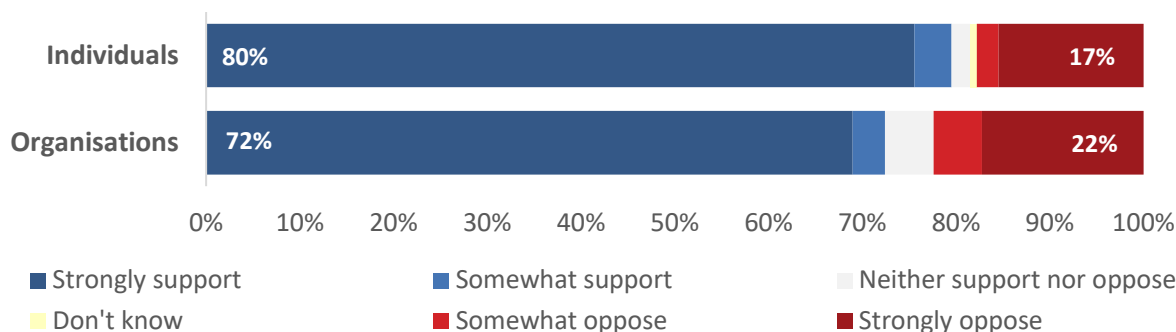
Base: 2,964 responses from individuals, 58 responses from organisations
Percentages presented on the graph above show the combined proportion of those that strongly/somewhat support or oppose

4.2.3 Reported frequency of support for ruling out business as usual varied significantly by:

  ○ **Access to alternative transport**: Respondents who had no access to an alternative mode of transport as a driver such as car, van, motorbike or moped, were significantly more likely to support SPTs recommendation to rule out business as usual, compared to those who had access (85% vs 76%).

4.3 Reasons for support

Summary of findings

The reasons for supporting ruling out business as usual were largely consistent amongst participants responding to the questionnaire and amongst stakeholders who participated in the workshops and interviews.

The majority of participants across the questionnaire, workshops and interviews felt that **change was required**, as they perceived that business as usual is not working for users. In line with this, **issues with current bus operations** were reported across all three research approaches. Specifically, affordability concerns and perceived increases in fares were reported consistently across the questionnaire, workshops and interviews.

Moreover, other issues reported in the questionnaire and stakeholder workshops related to the removal of routes, the limited services to rural areas, and the timing of services, with questionnaire respondents suggesting services should run later and/or start earlier, and stakeholders commenting on the mismatch between bus times and shift patterns. In addition, the need for improved frequency of services and for improved ticketing, particularly integrated tickets, was raised in both the questionnaire and stakeholder interviews.

Other reasons for supporting ruling out business as usual raised amongst questionnaire respondents included suggestions that bus services should be run as a public service, rather than by private operators, as well as suggestions for an integrated network and for operators to be held accountable for any changes to their services.

Questionnaire

4.3.1 In response to the questionnaire, 1,244 respondents left comments to explain why they either did or did not support ruling out business as usual. This section details the key themes amongst respondents in support for ruling out business as usual:

- **Change required:** Around half felt that business as usual could not continue and change was required – *"The current service does not support the needs of the community it is unreliable costly and insufficient"* (Individual).
- **Issues with current bus operations:** Around half provided comments to specify their issues with bus operations at present. This included:

  - would like more affordable services;
  - would like to see improved reliability of services;
  - would like to see improved frequency of services;
  - felt there had been a decline in the bus network and had experienced routes being cut or restricted;
  - commented that they do not have a service in their area;
  - noted they would like to see improved ticketing, such as integrated tickets and / or smart ticketing;
  - would like to see more services to rural areas;
  - would like services to run later and / or start earlier;
  - would like to see quicker journey times / more direct routes; and
  - felt bus services are poor in comparison to other areas e.g. Edinburgh.

- **Ownership:** A significant minority felt that bus services should be run as a public service / not by private operators, and so supported ruling out business as usual to help achieve this – *"Services are declining under this regime. Needs public control"* (Individual).
- **Integrated network:** A small minority of respondents felt that the bus network should be better joined up with other modes of transport and felt that this could not be achieved under business as usual. In addition, some criticised business as usual and feel the mix of different operators and ticketing systems is confusing – *"There are many journeys where I would take a bus, but failure to integrate with other transport modes, separate bus operators over the journey or unreliability mean I either don't make the journey or rely on driving"* (Individual).
- **Accountability:** A small minority of respondents commented that they feel at the 'mercy of operators' and felt that change is required to allow more accountability – *"The current system allows private bus companies to cut routes and raise fares, with no regard for the communities that rely on them"* (Organisation).
- **Reinvestment:** A small minority of respondents explained that they perceive there to be a lack of motivation at present for operators to reinvest back in services leading to a lack of innovation and improvement. They felt that ruling out business as usual would lead to change to help achieve this – *"I believe the current system stifles the reinvestment of funds made from passenger revenue, meaning that passengers receive less value for money"* (Individual).

Workshops

- **Change required:** Similarly to the questionnaire, stakeholders' main reason for supporting ruling out business as usual was due to a perception that it is not currently working for users.
- **Issues with current bus operations** included:
  - **Rural:** A small minority of stakeholders felt there is a lack of coverage in rural areas.
  - **Timing of services:** All stakeholders in one session commented on mismatched bus times with shift patterns.
  - **Costs:** All stakeholders in one workshop session had affordability concerns, noting that they have experienced an increase in fares.
  - **Removal of routes:** A small number of stakeholders across multiple workshops noted that some routes have been removed without warning and they felt consultation should be required before services are removed.

Interviews

4.3.2 Within the interviews, stakeholders raised a number of points in support of ruling out business as usual, which were similar to those provided within the questionnaire. The key themes were as follows:

- **Change required:** The vast majority of stakeholders interviewed felt that business as usual could not continue and change was required. One stakeholder added that whilst business as usual offers stability and familiarity, they feel it does not incentivise innovation or address emerging needs in the transportation sector. Another stakeholder cited reasons such as declining journey speeds and insufficient investment as reasons why business as usual could not continue – *"Maintaining the status quo is unsustainable and fails to address the multifaceted challenges facing the bus network"* (Voluntary groups and other third sector).

- **Issues with current bus operations:** A significant minority of stakeholders specifically referred to particular issues with business as usual. They cited high cost of travel, infrequent services, limited accessibility and a lack of integration. A small minority noted a perceived *"spiral of decline"* in bus services.
- **Innovation required:** One stakeholder emphasised the need for innovative and effective strategies to overhaul the existing system and improve public transport in the Strathclyde region.

Separate written responses

- **Change required:** Several written responses made similar arguments as received through other channels, in that they felt the current bus provision was inadequate and there is a case for changing the current model of bus provision – *"It's transformative change that we urgently need, to address chronic poverty and inequality in our region and meet our pressing climate targets"* (Voluntary groups and other third sector representative).

4.4 Reasons for opposition

Summary of findings

A wide range of reasons for opposing ruling out business as usual were reported in the questionnaire and during the stakeholder workshop, interviews and written responses.

Some questionnaire respondents raised concerns that ruling out business as usual would lead to the **removal of what they perceive to be successful services.** This concern was also raised in the stakeholder workshops, with the current successful approach of **community transport** being emphasised.

Similarly, some questionnaire respondents felt that the current provision of services is satisfactory and **does not require changes** to be made, with some reiterating that services perceived to be successful should be continued. A similar comment on the current provision of services was raised in the workshops, with some stakeholders suggesting that changes could lead to unnecessary costs and disruptions.

In addition, some stakeholders felt that there was **not enough evidence for changes to be made** and that more time needed to be given to assess impacts, particularly in relation to the upcoming election which they felt may influence the outcomes of the decision-making process.

Suggestions were also made regarding other **external factors** that need to be addressed, such as road congestion, bus priority and government funding, which, if improved, could improve the business as usual model. This view was shared amongst questionnaire respondents, stakeholders who participated in the interviews, and separate written responses.

Questionnaire

4.4.1 Reasons for opposing ruling out business as usual are themed as follows:

- **Removal of successful services:** There were concerns from a small minority of respondents that ruling out business as usual would lead to the removal of what they perceive to be successful services. For instance, respondents specifically

referred to the Climate Action Strathaven 3C service and were concerned that ruling out business as usual would mean the removal of this service – *"The CAS 3C bus from Strathaven to Glasgow has been an excellent success for our community and would be a huge loss if it stopped"* (Individual).

- **Change not required:** A small minority of respondents commented that they feel the current provision of bus service is fine and change does not need to happen. A large proportion of these comments appeared to be made in conjunction with the previous point regarding the continuation of services perceived to be successful – *"BAU works effectively and should not be changed"* (Individual).
- **Ownership:** A small minority of respondents (representing organisations) felt that services should be run by private operators / run commercially as they felt that public operations are not as efficient – *"Public bodies rarely deliver services better than private ones"* (Individual).
- **Other factors:** A small minority felt that other factors needed to be addressed and that operators are not to blame for issues with current bus provision – *"Road congestion, not control or ownership, is the biggest barrier to improving bus services in the region"* (Organisation).

Workshops

4.4.2   Stakeholders were vocal in their reasons as to why they opposed ruling out business as usual, as follows:

- **Too early:** A small minority of stakeholders felt more time needed to be given before decisions were made, indicating that the upcoming election might influence the outcome, suggesting that it is too early to draw conclusions.
- **Change not required:** A small minority of stakeholders felt that there are no issues with business as usual, and drastic changes could lead to unnecessary costs and disruptions.
- **Lack of data:** A small minority of stakeholders commented that there is not sufficient evidence to make changes. They highlighted issues with unrealistic run times and express scepticism about the benefits of changing the existing system without sufficient evidence. They felt it requires more understanding from SPT on the current issues being faced.
- **Community transport:** One stakeholder felt the current approach of community transport should be continued, emphasising its success in meeting local needs and promoting public transport usage over cars.

Interviews

- **Other factors:** One stakeholder interviewed noted that there are many factors beyond operators' control, such as government funding and congestion, which influence the effectiveness of services. Additionally, they argue that criticism of business as usual should not solely fall on bus operators, as external factors significantly impact the industry. They suggest that improving funding and addressing congestion could enhance the effectiveness of the business as usual model.

Separate written responses

- **Other factors:** There were a small number of separate responses that referred to necessary investments such as bus priority and fleet upgrades. It was felt that these should be tested through the existing model before franchising or other models are

explored – *"without this we don't know what the current baseline will look like and it is difficult to assess the benefits that different models derive"* (Bus operator). Another stakeholder felt that the main issues affecting the bus industry were linked with traffic congestion and increase in car ownership, and believe these issues would not be fixed by the other options presented.

○ **Continuation of the CAS 3C service:** One stakeholder referred to a survey conducted on the impact of the CAS 3C service, which noted that 1,126 respondents (98.9%) said they support Climate Action Strathaven continuing to directly operate the 3C service on the general public's behalf. As noted previously, some had concerns that this service may be removed should business as usual be ruled out.

4.5 Other questions and comments

○ It should be noted that 96 respondents selected that they opposed ruling out business as usual, however their further comments were supportive of SPT's recommendation to rule it out, suggesting a misunderstanding of the question wording.

○ In the separate written responses, one stakeholder noted that funding is a big consideration as to whether options will be successful. They felt that reform of governance and ownership is unlikely to transform the services available to passengers without a significant injection of public funds, particularly when patronage and revenue are on a downward trajectory.

○ Another stakeholder argued the importance of understanding the baseline of business as usual. Their view was that the variability of service provision across Strathclyde means that the benefits of different models are likely to differ depending upon current provision, and the ability to make interventions that improve business as usual will uplift the benefits from all options.

<div style="background-color:red;color:white;padding:8px">

Proposal to rule out voluntary partnerships

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4.6 Overall level of support / opposition (questionnaire)

4.6.1 Questionnaire respondents were asked the extent they support or oppose SPT's recommendation to rule out voluntary partnerships. It can be seen in Figure 5 that 2,074 individual respondents (70%) strongly/somewhat support ruling out voluntary partnerships, compared to 35 respondents representing organsations (60%).

Figure 5.   Level of support/opposition to rule out voluntary partnerships
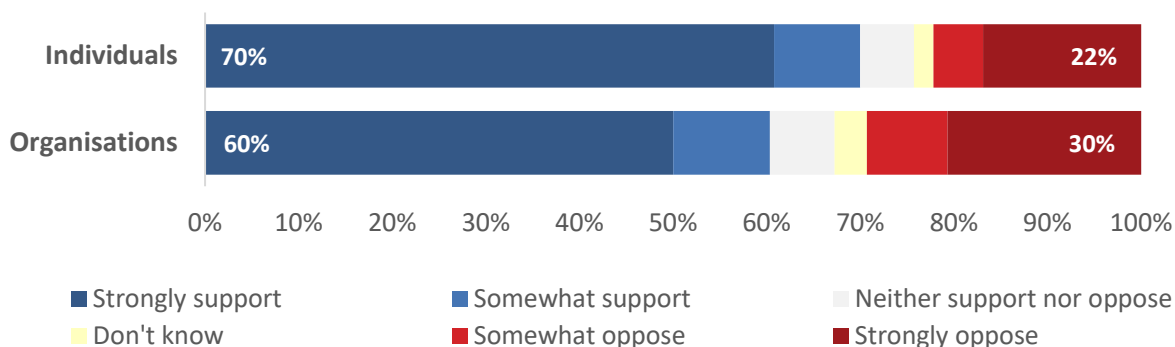
Base: 2,964 responses from individuals, 58 responses from organisations

4.6.2   Support for ruling out voluntary partnerships amongst individual respondents varied significantly by:

○ **Area**: Respondents living in cities and towns were significantly more likely to support ruling out voluntary partnerships compared to those living in villages or rural areas (73% vs 54%).

○ **Access to transport:** Those who reported having no access to a car, van, motorbike or moped as a driver, were significantly more likely to support ruling out voluntary partnerships than those with access (76% vs 66%).

4.7   Reasons for support

Summary of findings

The reasons for supporting ruling out voluntary partnerships were largely consistent amongst questionnaire respondents and amongst stakeholders who participated in the workshops and interviews.

One of the main reasons for supporting this option, reported by questionnaire respondents and stakeholders during the interviews, was the concern around **enforcement**, specifically that voluntary partnerships would have little to no impact in delivering improvements to services without clear accountability mechanisms. Similar to this, there was a shared view amongst questionnaire respondents and stakeholders that voluntary partnerships **may result in little change or improvement.**

The **previous impact** of voluntary partnerships was also mentioned by questionnaire respondents and stakeholders during the interviews, who noted instances where these have been introduced but have not succeeded.

In addition, some questionnaire respondents supported this option as they felt that services should be run as a public service, rather than by private operators, while some stakeholders raised concerns during the workshops about the **potential costs and additional workload** that voluntary partnerships would mean for local authorities.

Questionnaire

4.7.1   Respondents were invited to provide a reason as to why they supported or opposed ruling out voluntary partnerships, of which 860 respondents chose to do so. The key reasons for supporting ruling out voluntary partnerships are themed as follows:

○ **Enforcement:** The most prominent reason for supporting ruling out voluntary partnerships, noted by a significant minority of respondents, was due to the 'voluntary' terminology. Respondents felt that this would mean operators may not make change unless obligated and would be optional, which would lead to voluntary partnerships resulting in no / little impact – *"We support ruling out voluntary partnerships, as there is no legal or enforcement mechanism attached to them"* (Organisation).

○ **Effectiveness:** A small minority of respondents left comments in support of ruling out voluntary partnerships, as they felt that this would result in no change or

improvement – *"I think that this would not represent any improvement to the current system, these partnerships do not work and are vulnerable to cost-cutting at the expense of the general public and the public sector"* (Individual).

○ **Previous impact:** A small minority of respondents felt that voluntary partnerships had been tried elsewhere or in the past, but had not been successful – *"We have had these 'partnerships' in Scotland since the Transport Act 2001, and they have completely failed to deliver positive change"* (Individual).

○ **Ownership:** A small minority of respondents felt that bus services should be run as a public service / not by private operators, and so supported ruling out voluntary partnerships. Others also commented that this option would not provide the change they require – *"Can't see how this would make much difference as commercial operators need to make a profit"* (Individual).

Workshops

4.7.2 The vast majority supported ruling out voluntary partnerships, however some stakeholders did hold reservations. Reasons to rule out voluntary partnerships included:

○ **Cost/Workload:** A significant minority of stakeholders had concerns about the potential costs and extra workload for local authorities that would be associated with voluntary partnerships.

○ **Effectiveness:** A significant minority of stakeholders had concerns around the effectiveness of voluntary partnerships, citing experiences where negotiations with bus operators have yielded little influence over service provision.

Interviews

4.7.3 Stakeholders interviewed discussed their reasons for supporting ruling out voluntary partnerships:

○ **Enforcement:** The majority of stakeholders felt the main reason to rule out voluntary partnerships was due to concerns about their enforceability. Without clear accountability mechanisms, stakeholders had concerns that voluntary partnerships might struggle to deliver substantial improvements in service quality or accessibility. One stakeholder advocated for more formal arrangements with clear outcomes and enforceable agreements.

○ **Previous impact:** A significant minority of stakeholders referred to past examples of where voluntary partnerships have been introduced but have not succeeded. For instance, the Glasgow City Region bus partnership was referenced as an example to illustrate the perceived ineffectiveness of voluntary partnerships in addressing systemic issues.

○ **Effectiveness:** A small minority of stakeholders added that without clear accountability mechanisms, voluntary partnerships might struggle to deliver substantial improvements in service quality or accessibility.

Separate written responses

○ **Effectiveness:** Three stakeholders agreed that there are problems with current bus services and felt that voluntary partnership options were unlikely to address the issues identified.

Strathclyde Partnership for Transport   09/08/2024
Strathclyde Regional Bus Strategy Consultation
Consultation Report   **Page 26/ 61**

4.8   Reasons for opposition

Summary of findings

Fewer comments were made alongside opposition for ruling out voluntary partnerships, with these largely differing between the questionnaire, workshop and interviews.

In contrast with previous suggestions regarding the limited impact of voluntary partnerships, comments were made in the questionnaire and during the stakeholder interviews suggesting that voluntary partnerships could work well with appropriate **collaboration and commitment.** Similarly, in both the workshop and interviews, stakeholders mentioned **previous examples** where partnerships have been effective, with particular mention of the Glasgow City Region Bus partnership.

Some comments made by questionnaire respondents also suggested that voluntary partnerships could be an **interim ste**p that addresses gaps in the current service whilst franchising is developed, while other comments suggested that voluntary partnerships should be investigated further.

In turn, comments made during the stakeholder workshop related to concerns about the potential impact of ruling out voluntary partnerships, particularly on small operators, as these partnerships facilitate competition which contributes to maintaining service quality. Some stakeholders added that there is a lack of evidence to support this option and that more consideration around the practical details and financial implications of this is needed.

Questionnaire

4.8.1   Very few comments were made alongside opposition for ruling out voluntary partnerships. Comments related to the following:

- **Further investigation:** Voluntary partnerships should be investigated further.
- **Interim step:** Voluntary partnerships could fill any holes in the current service and provide a lower cost option whilst franchising is developed – *"Better than nothing"* (Individual).

Workshops

4.8.2   Within the workshops, stakeholders discussed some of the reasons for opposing ruling out voluntary partnerships, and these included:

- **Operator size:** A small minority raised concerns about the potential impact of ruling out voluntary partnerships, particularly on small operators. They argue that voluntary partnerships allow for competition and contribute to service quality. They emphasised the importance of operator involvement in planning and decision-making.
- **Lack of data:** A small minority expressed scepticism about ruling out voluntary partnerships, highlighting the lack of evidence to support such a decision. They stress the importance of competition in maintaining service quality and express concerns about the consequences of limiting partnership opportunities. A further stakeholder suggested that ruling out voluntary partnerships may not be feasible without considering the practical details and financial implications. They

emphasised the need for evidence-based decision-making and express concerns about resistance from operators.

○ **Previous impact**: One stakeholder cited the success of Glasgow City Region Bus partnership whilst a second stakeholder noted experiences with other partnerships (e.g. Northampton) that appeared to have worked well.

Interviews

4.8.3 Most stakeholders focussed on reasons for supporting ruling out voluntary partnerships, but reasons for opposing ruling this option out were as follows:

○ **Previous impact:** One stakeholder felt that voluntary partnerships had been effective previously in certain areas.

○ **Partnerships**: The same stakeholder also noted that voluntary partnerships can be successful with stakeholder collaboration and commitment.

○ **Flexibility**: Another stakeholder also considered the voluntary nature of this option to be important as it provides flexibility.

Separate written responses

○ **Impact**: One stakeholder was of the view that voluntary partnerships would allow improvements to be delivered faster, cheaper and more flexibly.

○ **Toolkit**: One stakeholder felt that voluntary partnerships form part of the toolkit of delivery structures available to transport authorities and operators to deliver improvements in bus services. By ruling out their use, they feel that SPT is closing the door to delivery structures that may allow it to deliver improvements to bus services sooner than franchising.

○ **Appraisal**: One stakeholder had specific concerns around the appraisal process for voluntary partnerships and the assumptions that had been made.

4.9 Other questions and comments

Questionnaire:

○ It should be noted that 67 respondents selected that they opposed ruling out voluntary partnerships, however their comment suggested that they were in support of SPT's recommendation to rule it out.

○ **Accountability:** A small minority of those who did not support or oppose the recommendation felt that for voluntary partnerships to be effective, it needed to be managed correctly with safeguards in place.

4.9.1 In the workshops, a small minority of stakeholders noted uncertainty around voluntary partnerships, more specifically:

○ Two stakeholders had uncertainty about the implications of voluntary partnerships. Whilst a further stakeholder had concerns about disparities in service provision between different areas with voluntary partnerships.

4.9.2 From the interviews conducted, stakeholders also raised the following points:

○ **Enforcement**: Two stakeholders commented that enhancing voluntary partnerships with stricter regulations or incentives could ensure compliance and effectiveness. This could involve establishing clear benchmarks, reporting

requirements, and consequences for non-compliance to enhance accountability and drive meaningful outcomes.

- ○ **Evaluation:** A significant minority of stakeholders were concerned that voluntary partnerships may be ruled out without being thoroughly explored. They felt that their effectiveness and feasibility should be thoroughly evaluated before dismissing them entirely.

4.9.3 From the separate written responses, one stakeholder noted that they were taking a neutral stance until such time as the success or otherwise of BSIPs has been clarified and the timeline for franchising is clearer.

5. CONSULTATION FEEDBACK – RECOMMENDATIONS ON FRANCHISE AND BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PARTNERSHIPS

5.1 Overview

5.1.1 This section presents consultation feedback on SPT's **recommendations for franchise and Bus Service Improvement Partnerships:**

- ○ SPT should commence work on franchising, in line with the requirements of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019.
- ○ SPT should progress with Bus Service Improvement Partnership (BSIP) arrangements to provide a firm basis for private and public sector commitments to arrest further passenger decline and improve the bus network over the medium term.

5.1.2 This section presents the feedback on both options from the questionnaire, written responses, workshops and interviews.

<div style="background-color:#e2000f; color:white; padding:10px; font-weight:bold;">Proposal to take forward local services franchising</div>

5.2 Overall level of support / opposition (questionnaire)

5.2.1 Figure 6 illustrates that 76% of individuals responding to the questionnaire either strongly or somewhat support SPT's recommendation to take forward local services franchising. As shown, 18% of individuals oppose this option to some degree alongside 21% organisations.

Figure 6.   Level of support/opposition to take forward local services franchising
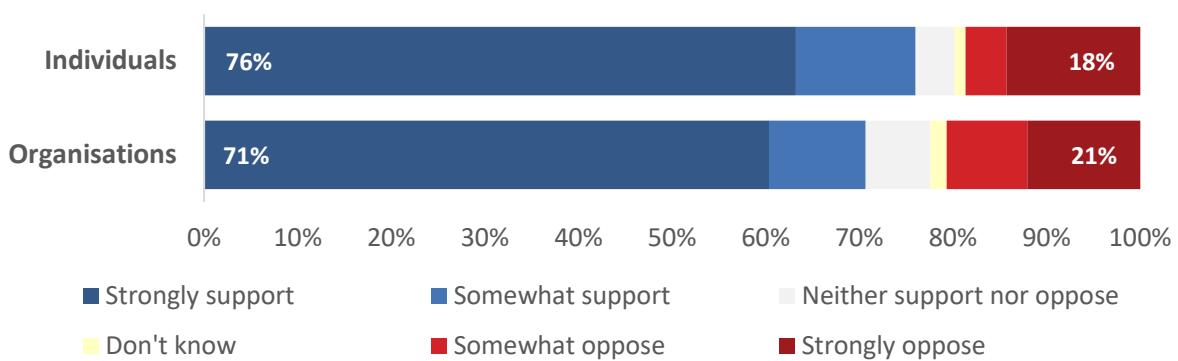
Base: 2,964 responses from individuals, 58 responses from organisations
Percentages presented on the graph above show the combined proportion of those that strongly/somewhat support or oppose

5.2.2 Support for taking forward local services franchising amongst those responding as an individual varied significantly by:

- ○ **Area**: Individual respondents living in cities and towns were significantly more likely to support this recommendation compared to those living in villages or rural areas (78% vs 64%).

○ **Access to transport**: Respondents who reported having no access to a car, van, motorbike or moped as a driver, were significantly more likely to support taking forward local services franchising than those with access to alternative modes of transport (82% vs 72%).

5.3 Reasons for support

> **Summary of findings**
>
> A range of reasons for supporting local services franchising were reported, with some consistency in the comments made amongst questionnaire respondents and amongst stakeholders who participated in the workshops and interviews.
>
> The potential improvements that local services franchising could offer in the quality of service were mentioned by questionnaire respondents and stakeholders during the workshop and interviews, particularly relating to **improvements in the consistency of service quality** and in meeting the needs of **local communities**.
>
> Comments made amongst both questionnaire respondents and stakeholders during the interviews referred to previous successful local services franchising that have been introduced. Similarly, both suggested that franchising would allow for better **integration** of bus with other modes of transport.
>
> Other reasons cited in the questionnaire for supporting this option related to the potential benefits that this may bring to bus users and drivers, and to the ownership of services, with questionnaire respondents suggesting that services should be run as a public service. In turn, during the interviews, stakeholders referred to the positive impacts that this option could have, such as allowing for greater control and accountability over services, promoting fair competition among operators and ensuring equitable access to services, particularly in rural areas and during off-peak hours.

Questionnaire

5.3.1 A total of 841 respondents left comments as to why they support or oppose taking forward local services franchising. The main reasons for supporting local services franchising are grouped as follows:

○ **Previous experience:** A significant minority of respondents noted that local services franchising has been introduced elsewhere and has been perceived to be successful – *"There is incontrovertible evidence that a franchising approach can attract steady growth in public transport use (both bus and rail)"* (Organisation).

○ **Ownership:** A significant minority felt that bus services should be run as a public service / not by private operators, and so were in support of this option – *"This allows for bus services to be planned around the needs of the population, rather than in the interests of private profit"* (Individual).

○ **Potential benefits:** A significant minority of respondents commented to say that they believe this option would have a positive impact and / or provide large benefits – *"I fully support this and I'm passionate about this because it will be a big change and make a difference for passengers and drivers"* (Individual).

○ **Integration:** A small minority of respondents supported this option because they felt it would allow for better integration of bus with other modes of transport – *"[With this option] SPT can deliver a fully-integrated and coherent network across*

bus, subway, rail and ferries; we can reconnect isolated communities, cut and cap fares and deliver one simple affordable ticket across all transport modes" (Individual).

- o **Service quality:** A small minority of respondents felt that this option would raise standard of services and also help to ensure a consistent quality of service – *"Facility to supervise and demand guaranteed levels of service"* (Individual).
- o **Timescales:** A small minority left comments to note that they feel this option will bring benefits quickly, however a small minority also commented to say that they want to see this option being fast-tracked – *"SPT should focus all its resources on fast-tracking franchising"* (Individual).
- o **Rural routes:** A small minority of respondents felt this option protects 'loss making routes' and could help to protect rural services and help rural communities – *"Local service franchising would ensure service levels on routes private companies deem unprofitable"* (Individual).
- o **Environmental impact:** A small minority felt this option was considered to bring environmental benefits – *"It is the only way to deliver the transformational change to our public transport system needed to address poverty and inequality and meet pressing climate targets"* (Individual).

Workshops

5.3.2   Reasons for supporting taking forward local services franchising included:

- o **Power for operators:** A significant minority of stakeholders supported this option due to its potential to provide exclusive rights to operators and dictate service levels.
- o **Service quality:** Stakeholders saw local services franchising as a long-term solution that could potentially offer significant improvements in the quality of service.

Interviews

5.3.3   Stakeholders discussed the benefits of taking forward local services franchising, which were themed as follows:

- o **Service quality:** Around half of stakeholders felt that this option would allow local authorities to set specific service standards and requirements to meet the needs of the community.
- o **Greater control and accountability:** A significant minority of stakeholders felt that franchising would allow better control over routes, reliability, and environmental standards. One stakeholder added that franchising can provide a framework for setting clear service standards and performance metrics, which are essential for ensuring transparency and accountability in the provision of local bus services. Another stakeholder commented that at the moment they feel there is a lack of accountability and lack of transparency, whereas they feel a franchise system would simplify the accountability process.
- o **Competition:** A small minority of stakeholders felt that franchising could promote fair competition among operators while ensuring a consistent level of service quality.
- o **Service areas:** A small minority of stakeholders felt that franchising offers the best model for communities, particularly in rural areas and during off-peak hours, ensuring equitable access to services.
- o **Affordability:** A small minority of stakeholders argued that franchising is the only way to regulate fares effectively and provide affordable pricing across the region.

- **Ticketing**: A small minority of stakeholders also felt that this option would offer the potential for integrated ticketing and fare systems, simplifying the passenger experience.
- **Integration:** A small minority felt that this option has potential to enhance integration with other modes of public transportation, promoting seamless travel experiences for passengers**.**
- **Collaboration between operators:** One stakeholder saw a benefit of local service franchising as leading to greater efficiency and coordination among bus operators, resulting in better service reliability and coverage.
- **Previous experience:** One stakeholder highlighted the perceived success of franchising elsewhere, such as Greater Manchester.

Separate written responses

- Within the written responses, the Better Buses for Strathclyde petition was referred to, which supports taking forward local services franchising.
- Highland Council's current pilot project was also referred to as a successful example.
- The 'Miles Better' report by Coombes, Rodrigues (2023) was also noted, which recommends improvements to the public transport system in three phases – 1. Franchising, 2. Introducing revenue-raising tools, 3. Bring commuter heavy rail lines into SPT's control alongside the future Clyde Metro.

5.4   Reasons for opposition

Summary of findings

A wide range of reasons for opposing local services franchising were reported, with these largely differing between the questionnaire, workshop and interviews.

Comments made in the questionnaire related mostly to concerns around the **limited impact** franchising would have on current services, with some suggesting that measures need to be in place to ensure that **commitments are binding**, and operators are held **accountable**. The **timescale** of this option was also a concern, as questionnaire respondents felt franchising would take too long for benefits to be realised.

While stakeholders also raised concerns during the workshop regarding the timescale for this option, these related to the potential delays in the implementation of the franchise model. In turn, concerns around the **cost** of implementing a franchising model were raised by stakeholders in both the workshop and interviews. Some stakeholders also questioned the **feasibility of funding** a franchise model, due to the existing financial challenges.

Other concerns raised during the stakeholder interviews related to the potential limitations of monopolistic practices which may arise as a result of franchising, as well as the complexity and administrative burden that operators would face under a franchising model.

In addition, other concerns were raised by stakeholders during the workshop, such as the impacts that franchising would have on smaller operators who provide vital services and the potential legal risks associated with franchising.

Questionnaire

5.4.1   The emerging themes from the questionnaire, for why local services franchising was opposed, were as follows:

○   **No impact:** A small minority respondents left comments noting their belief that this option would have no / little impact on current services – *"I do not think this will be any improvement on the current 'business as usual' strategy"* (Individual).

○   **Previous experience:** A small minority respondents considered local services franchising to not have been successful elsewhere.

○   **Accountability:** A small minority respondents noted that they felt that measures must be in place to ensure that commitments are binding and operators are held to account – *"Not much better without being enforceable"* (Individual).

○   **Timescales:** A small minority of respondents had concerns that this option will take too long for benefits to be realised.

Workshops

5.4.2   Some stakeholders had concerns due to the following reasons:

○   **Timescales:** A small minority expressed concerns about the time-consuming nature of setting up a new competitive process for the franchise model, which may delay its implementation.

○   **Impact on smaller operators:** A small minority also raised questions about how smaller operators, who provide vital services, would be affected by the franchise model. There were concerns about potential consolidation among larger operators and its impact on service provision.

○   **Funding**: One stakeholder had concerns about defining the scope of the local transport authority and the high cost associated with implementation. However, concerns also exist regarding the high costs and lengthy implementation period associated with franchising.

○   **Risks**: One stakeholder highlighted potential legal risks associated with franchising, particularly regarding the role of the Traffic Commissioner, and emphasised the need for clarity on funding sources from the Scottish Government.

○   **Rural/island considerations:** One stakeholder highlighted challenges in rural and island communities and questioned the effectiveness of franchising in addressing these issues.

○   **Skills:** One stakeholder raised concerns about the potential loss of skilled personnel from the private sector if franchising were to proceed without clear plans for workforce transition. They highlighted the need for more information and time for evaluation.

○   **Lack of detail:** One stakeholder raised concerns about the lack of detail in the proposal, highlighting uncertainties about the model's specifics, such as purchasing buses and route franchising. They advocate for more transparency and clarity – *"There's absolutely no details about what franchise model is being proposed... There's nothing in there about what would happen to our business if they lost out in the area they currently operate"* (Bus operator).

Interviews

5.4.3   Some concerns were raised by stakeholders, in relation to franchising, including:

- ○ **Funding:** A small minority of stakeholders had concerns about its funding and uncertainty about where the necessary resources would come from for this option. They highlighted the financial challenges faced by the Scottish Government and the cuts in budgets for regional transport partnerships, which raise doubts about the feasibility of funding a franchise model. Additionally, stakeholders question the effectiveness of franchising without significant financial support, suggesting that prioritising other measures to improve bus services might be more practical in the current financial climate.
- ○ **Monopolistic practices:** One stakeholder had concerns regarding the potential for monopolistic practices or limitations in fostering innovation and service quality improvements.
- ○ **Evaluation criteria:** Another stakeholder felt that there was a need for transparent evaluation criteria and processes to ensure fairness and effectiveness if franchising is pursued.
- ○ **Complexity / admin burden:** One stakeholder raised concerns regarding the complexity and administrative burden for operators under a franchising model. More specifically this included asset ownership, investment incentives, and equitable distribution of responsibilities.

Separate written responses

- ○ **Funding:** One stakeholder had concerns over the funding sources required for this option. Another stakeholder had concerns that funds may be spent on the costs of administering the contractual framework associated with franchising.
- ○ **Incentives:** One stakeholder questioned what thought had been given to maintain incentives for bus companies to invest in service improvements during the process of reviewing and potentially introducing bus franchising.
- ○ **Impact:** One stakeholder felt that there was a risk of overestimating the benefits of this option. Whilst another felt this option would not be successful – *"Implementing a franchising scheme will not address this root cause and could potentially be less effective in tackling congestion than a statutory partnership"* (Bus operator).
- ○ **Geography:** Two stakeholders referred to the varying nature of rural and urban parts of Strathclyde, and were concerned that a regional scheme would not be appropriate and would inevitably focus on the needs and conditions in Glasgow at the expense of more outlying areas. Another stakeholder felt that this was an issue in the appraisal process itself, noting *"The appraisal currently proposes single option solutions for the whole of Strathclyde, but Strathclyde is not a homogenous area in terms of bus operation"* (Bus operator). They added that they felt the appraisal does not fully consider the use of different regulatory structures for provision of bus services in different parts of Strathclyde. However, they could see no legislative reason why this could not be the case and given the differing natures of the bus market across Strathclyde they felt it would be logical to consider this.
- ○ **Other impacts:** One stakeholder felt that other impacts should be considered first, such as the impact of bus priority or new fleet upgrades on business as usual before franchising is progressed.
- ○ **Financial assessment for franchising:** One stakeholder had specific issues with the appraisal (affordability) in that they considered it to not be fairly comparing different models. Given the limited budget available, they felt the wrong approach to modelling had been taken and a fair comparison cannot be made. The stakeholder also had concerns about: the appraisal process, including the treatment of NCTS; changing the balance of risk and reward; the lack of clarity on

whether transition costs and risks were taken into account in assessing implementation of franchising; the deliverability; and, the risk assessment.

- **Risks (market transition):** One stakeholder perceived the current appraisal to lack details as to how a franchising framework would work in key respects. They felt that more detail was required around funding and the practical ability to transition from the current situation or BSIP to franchising, and also how the whole market will be transitioned in a way that does not create significant issues for drivers and other employees.
- **Impact on large operators:** One stakeholder felt there could be a disproportionate impact of franchising on the largest of the operators. They felt that due to the size / geography of the operator, that if it were unsuccessful in a bid to deliver franchising, they would be less able to mitigate the impact of loss of business compared to other smaller operators. They also added that the operator has invested heavily in new vehicles with the aim of enhancing passenger experience but which has come at significant cost.

5.5 Other questions and comments

Questionnaire

5.5.1 A total of 37 respondents provided other comments, falling into the following themes:

- **Ticketing:** A small minority desire to see integrated ticketing across modes
- **Regulation:** Supportive, but only on the provision that legal clauses could be enforced.

Interviews

5.5.2 During the interviews, one stakeholder raised the following point:

- They felt there is a need for franchising to be implemented in conjunction with setting up a public operator to ensure fair competition and prevent excessive bidding by private operators.

Separate written responses

5.5.3 Several points were raised via the separate written responses, as follows:

- **Financial:** One stakeholder felt they needed greater clarity as to where funding for this option would come from. They added that their support for this option is predicated on there being a clear and fully funded delivery model that does not put additional pressure on existing Council or SPT priorities – *"Pressures are expected to remain across National and Local Government over the immediate future and the period where franchise model is being developed; this is a fundamental concern to the success or otherwise of this recommendation"* (local authority).
- **Risks and engagement:** One stakeholder identified that there are several risks with this option including funding, feasibility, timescales, process for establishment, competition, risk-sharing, and uncertainty. They felt it is essential that SPT continues to engage with stakeholders and these matters are worked through timeously.
- **Roles:** One stakeholder felt it will be important to recognise existing Council statutory responsibilities, functions, and duties. They felt that local democracy must remain with councils to ensure full consideration of geographical differences

(e.g. rural areas), local priorities and to ensure a balanced approach to the needs of all sectors of our businesses and communities. It was their view that infrastructure development and initiatives can be equally successful using existing statutory powers and duties, strong professional partner relationships and political support across councils and SPT.

- ○ **Blight:** One stakeholder mentioned franchising blight and believed the strategy does not give sufficient weight to this risk.
- ○ **Appraisal:** One stakeholder had concerns over the appraisal of this option. Detail which they feel has not been included was as follows: how franchising will be rolled out; whether it is appropriate for the whole of Strathclyde; whether all local services be made subject to franchising or if there will be exceptions; how SPT will deal with cross boundary services; how SPT will transition from current commercial ticketing to single, simplified ticketing arrangements; how SPT will ensure there is not greater complexity and cost for passengers during the transition.
- ○ **Types of contract under a franchising delivery model:** One stakeholder questioned whether this has been explored in the Appraisal, and if not, they feel the appraisal is misleading as the mitigation listed is then not achievable. If it is intended to be explored further, the stakeholder noted they would be keen to engage with SPT on this and the benefit of an approach which enabled medium term direct awards to transition the market on a lower risk basis for both SPT and existing operators.

Proposal to take forward BSIPs

5.6 Overall level of support / opposition (questionnaire)

5.6.1 Of all the recommendations, SPT's proposal to take forward BSIPs received the lowest support, and saw the highest proportion of responses that strongly opposed this recommendation. As can be seen in Figure 7, a total of 1,253 responding as an individual (43%) strongly/somewhat support these proposals, compared to 28 respondents representing organisations (49%). It can also be seen that opposition varied significantly by type of survey respondent, with over half of individual respondents (51%) somewhat/strongly opposing this recommendation in comparison to 37% of organisations.

Figure 7.   Level of support/opposition to take forward BSIPs
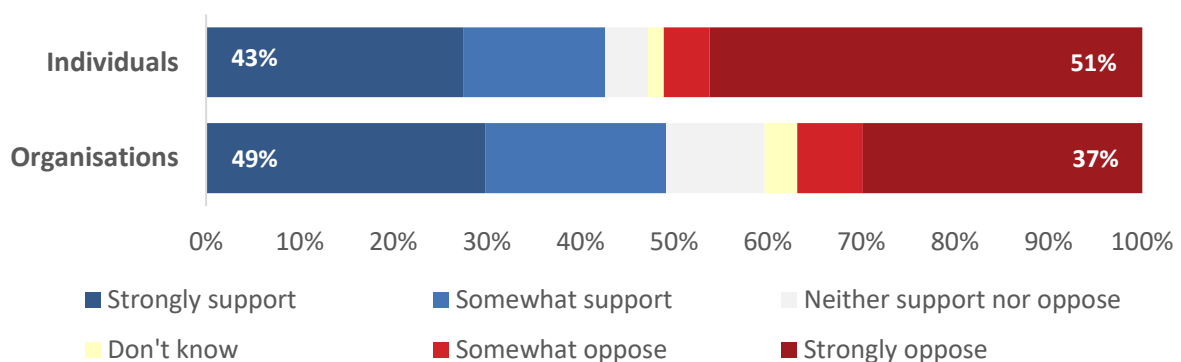
Base: 2,940 responses from individuals, 57 responses from organisations
Percentages presented on the graph above show the combined proportion of those that strongly/somewhat support or oppose

5.6.2　Support for taking forward local services franchising amongst those responding as an individual also varied significantly by:

- ○ **Area**: Respondents who lived in villages and rural areas were significantly more likely to support taking forward BSIPs compared to those living in cities or towns (78% vs 64%).
- ○ **Frequency of bus-use**: Respondents who were infrequent bus users or non-bus users were significantly more likely to support the recommendation to take forward BSIPS compared to those who were frequent bus users (46% vs 41%).
- ○ **Access to transport**: Respondents who reported having access to a car, van, motorbike or moped as a driver, were significantly more likely to support taking forward BSIPs than those with no access (44% vs 40%).

5.7　Reasons for support

Summary of findings

A range of reasons for supporting proposals to take forward BSIPs were reported, with some consistency in the comments made amongst questionnaire respondents and amongst stakeholders who participated in the workshops and interviews.

Both questionnaire respondents and stakeholders felt that this option could be an **interim** option whilst other options, such as franchising, are being developed.

In relation to this, questionnaire respondents commented on the potential benefits this option could have on bus services, and some also mentioned the success of other BSIPs introduced elsewhere.

In turn, during the workshop, some stakeholders mentioned the need for the development of a long-term plan in addition to this option, with their support for taking forward BSIPs depending on this. During the interviews, stakeholders raised further comments in support of this option, such as the potential for a collaborative framework for improving bus services, with BSIPs facilitating cooperation between local authorities, bus operators and other stakeholders.

Questionnaire

5.7.1　In total, 809 respondents left feedback as to why they support or oppose proposals to take forward BSIPs. The key reasons for supporting these proposals are as follows:

- ○ **Potential benefits:** A small minority of respondents commented to say that they believe this option would have a positive impact and / or provide large benefits – *"This would allow for the ability to provide a reliable and consistent bus service across the city that benefits the people of Glasgow"* (Individual).
- ○ **Interim:** A small minority supported this option as an interim option whilst other options are developed e.g. franchising – *"This appears to be an interim measures and should not distract from focusing on bringing in a bus franchising model"* (Organisation).
- ○ **Previous experience:** A small minority noted that formal partnership schemes have been introduced elsewhere and have been perceived to be successful.

Workshops

5.7.2   Key reasons stakeholders had for supporting taking forward BSIPs were as follows:

- **Interim:** Around half of stakeholders viewed BSIPs as a short-term option that could deliver some benefits while franchising is being developed.
- **Long term plan:** Some added that their support for this option is dependent on the development of a long-term plan in addition.

Interviews

5.7.3   Within the stakeholder interviews, a number of points were raised to support taking forward BSIPs:

- **Collaboration:** Around half of stakeholders felt that BSIPs offer a collaborative framework for improving bus services. They felt that they can facilitate cooperation between local authorities, bus operators, and other stakeholders.
- **Interim:** A small minority of stakeholders commented that they see BSIPs as a useful transition toward franchising, particularly due to the expected lengthy timeframe for full franchising implementation.
- **Potential benefits:** One stakeholder highlighted the perceived benefits of BSIPs in delivering better services and addressing local challenges.
- **Cost effectiveness:** The same stakeholder also felt that BSIPs could be more cost-effective and flexible compared to other options like franchising, making them a favourable choice for improving bus services.

Separate written responses

- **Potential benefits:** One stakeholder felt that the introduction of this option could be successful – *"putting commitments by operators and authorities on a statutory basis whilst retaining the flexibility to adjust to changing market conditions as the market continues to recover and develop post-pandemic"* (Bus operator).
- **Interim**: One stakeholder felt this option provides a firm basis for private and public sector commitments to address further passenger decline and improve the bus network over the medium term, with a view to making a franchising scheme in due course.
- **Previous experience:** One stakeholder referenced work from the Steering Group of Cornwall's Enhanced Partnership, which had delivered what they saw as being "*an excellent new scheme on passenger information provision*." They felt that this demonstrates what could be achieved with strong working relationships between the authority and the principal bus operators, however acknowledged that no two areas share the same circumstances.

5.8   Reasons for opposition

Summary of findings

The reasons for opposing BSIPs were largely consistent amongst questionnaire respondents and amongst stakeholders who participated in the workshops and interviews.

The **effectiveness** of BSIPs was a concern raised consistently by questionnaire respondents and stakeholders, specifically the belief that this option would have little to no impact on bus services. In addition, comments were made regarding the introduction of similar partnership schemes elsewhere that were not deemed to be

successful, which were also consistent amongst questionnaire respondents and stakeholders.

Similar to this, suggestions were made in the questionnaire and stakeholder interviews that BSIPs would **delay** the introduction of other potentially more successful options, such as franchising.

There were also concerns around **accountability and the flexibility** that this option offers to operators. While this concern was shared between questionnaire respondents and stakeholders participating in the interviews, stakeholders also felt that clear mechanisms for enforcing agreements and holding all parties accountable were required.

In turn, stakeholders in both the workshop and interviews raised concerns regarding the potential **funding sources** for implementing this option, with a similar concern around costs raised in the questionnaire by respondents who perceived this option to be expensive.

Other concerns raised by stakeholders during the workshop included the need to consider the effectiveness of franchising in rural and island communities, and in small local areas with limited providers, as well as the need to consider the legal and financial implications of implementing such a model.

Questionnaire

5.8.1 The key reasons for opposing BSIPs from the questionnaire responses are as follows:

- **Effectiveness:** The main reason for opposing taking forward BSIPs (a significant minority) was due to a belief it would have no / little impact on bus services – *"All available evidence suggests BSIPs cannot deliver the scale of change that is needed and would end up costing the city more and lead to further delays"* (Individual).
- **Delay:** Linked with the previous theme, a small minority of respondents left comments opposing taking forward BSIPs because they felt it was a 'distraction' and would delay the introduction of other options which may be more successful – *"A BSIP would just delay the necessary changes required to create an integrated safe reliable low cost transport system"* (Individual).
- **Previous experience:** A small minority also left comments noting that formal partnership schemes had been introduced elsewhere but were not deemed to have been successful.
- **Accountability:** A small minority had concerns that operators would not make change unless obligated and that this option allowed too much flexibility and operators would not be accountable.
- **Trust:** A small minority of respondents were concerned that SPT may not manage this option effectively and expressed a lack of trust.
- **Cost:** A small minority opposed this option because they perceived the delivery costs to be high / considered this an expensive option.
- **Timescales:** A small minority of respondents had concerns that the introduction of BSIPs would take too long for benefits to be realised.

Workshops

5.8.2 Several potential drawbacks to taking forward BSIPs were discussed within the workshops, and the key themes are as follows:

- **Effectiveness:** A small minority had concerns about the limitations of BSIP agreements in delivering major benefits.
- **Funding:** A small minority expressed concern about funding and want more clarity on where the money will be derived for implementing this option.
- **Legal / financial:** A small minority had concerns about the legal and financial implications of implementing such a model.
- **Ongoing consultation:** A small minority emphasised the importance of understanding the practical challenges and barriers faced by operators. They highlighted the need for detailed evidence and express scepticism about the potential benefits outlined in the proposal.
- **Area:** One stakeholder had concern about the effectiveness of BSIPs in small local areas with limited provider options and emphasised the need to consider the tipping point for sustainable service provision.
- **Previous experience:** One stakeholder had a lack of trust in BSIPs due to previous failures and perceived lack of support from local authorities. They questioned the willingness of operators to invest in a model with uncertain returns.

Interviews

5.8.3   During the interviews, stakeholders raised the following concerns in relation to taking forward BSIPs:

- **Accountability:** The most frequently raised issue around BSIPs by stakeholders (a significant minority) was regarding concerns about their effectiveness in delivering significant improvements, especially if the partnership lacks sufficient incentives or mechanisms for accountability. Within this, one stakeholder commented that they would like to see clear mechanisms for enforcing agreements and holding all parties accountable, suggesting that statutory partnerships offer a simpler path to achieving these objectives. One stakeholder suggested that the Traffic Commissioner should have authority to penalise any party, including public sector partners, for failing to act in partnership agreement. Another stakeholder felt that BSIPs may not incentivise significant improvements and this could lead to complacency among bus operators.
- **Effectiveness:** A significant minority expressed doubt over the ability for BSIPs to create the radical changes they believe is necessary – *"any partnership like that with private companies is not going to deliver the transformative change that's needed at all."*
- **Delay:** A small minority of stakeholders emphasised the importance of not letting BSIPs delay the implementation of franchising – *"we think the BSIP process would be a massive distraction from accelerating franchising"*. Within this, one stakeholder specifically felt that the BSIP process is complicated and complex and would take time to introduce, which could cause delay to implementing franchising.
- **Previous experience:** One stakeholder highlighted potential failures of BSIPs in the past due to inaction from various parties involved. One stakeholder referred to Greater Manchester as an example, and said they had reviewed their options and did not take forward partnerships as they felt this approach would not work.
- **Funding:** One stakeholder had concerns about how this option would be funded. They called for clear funding mechanisms and accountability measures within BSIPs.

Separate written responses

- **Funding:** One stakeholder had concerns about how this option would be funded.

- **Delay:** As with the interviews, another concern, from one stakeholder, was that BSIPs may delay the progression of franchising.
- **Appraisal:** One stakeholder had concerns that the appraisal does not consider what BSIP would deliver with equivalent funding to franchising. They feel that the appraisal therefore draws a false equivalence between franchising and the BSIP that is assessed, and does not provide consultees with a fair comparison between different options.
- **Impact:** One stakeholder made reference to several evidence sources (including that within Centre for Cities' recent 'Miles better' report) that state that no partnership model, no matter how it is framed, can deliver the transformational change that is required to address issues with the public transport system.
- **Costly:** One stakeholder group reported that BSIPs are a *"costly waste of time"* and may potentially *"sabotage taking the bus network back into public control"* through franchising. They refer to the SYSTRA Scoping Study which they note states that the process of creating a BSIP could cost £1.5million to establish and £50-£250k annually to run. They comment that this money would be better invested in accelerating the franchising process. They also note that this Scoping Report referred to BSIPs as 'unsuitable for delivering cheaper and fully integrated fares'.

5.9   Other questions and comments

5.9.1   In the questionnaire, a small minority of respondents made comments in relation to **accountability** of this option. They noted that for them to support this option, they felt BSIPs needed to be managed correctly with safeguards in place.

5.9.2   Similarly in the stakeholder interviews, a small minority also commented that this option could be enhanced by establishing mechanisms for information sharing, collaboration, and evaluation to ensure that the strategy complements the others effectively. Another stakeholder advocated for clear guidelines and mechanisms to ensure equitable participation and benefit-sharing in BSIPs.

5.9.3   Several issues and questions were raised about this option via separate written responses received, as follows:

- **Interim:** It was questioned whether a BSIP may use up resources at the expense of progressing the franchising model. The stakeholder questioned whether as an interim measure, would a BSIP potentially entangle SPT and Council in legal agreements or challenge that may frustrate attempts to take forward the preferred option of bus franchising.
- **Funding:** Another stakeholder asked how this option would be funded.
- One stakeholder suggested that SPT look at the net cost contracts model of franchising (such as is operating in Jersey), which shares the risk between public and private sector. They felt this may help with the high political risks and uncertainty over funding.
- The same stakeholder also commented on their awareness of an authority developing a potential franchising proposal which has developed three funding scenarios (high, medium and low) as a basis for assessing its delivery options. This stakeholder believes that SPT should also give this consideration, whilst recognising that there is a trade-off between the risks that are taken and the control that can be achieved and thus the benefits that can be realised.
- **Evaluation:** One stakeholder noted that the use of a BSIP must be properly evaluated. They felt this needed to include the impact to passengers between now and implementation, and the risk for a BSIP compared to franchising.

- **Appraisal - Interpretation of legislation:** One stakeholder felt that the appraisal has underestimated what can be delivered by BSIP, assuming that there are statutory blocks which are not there in practice. They felt the key issue was whether the public sector can provide and bind itself to its commitments, as a BSIP requires commitment from both sides to deliver. This stakeholder's experience with the Bus Partnership Fund was that this may be a greater risk than operator buy-in, with Scottish government's decision to suspend the fund meaning that local authority partners were unable to deliver the priority previously promised. Their view is that a BSIP would solve this issue by placing those bodies under an obligation to deliver and with the statutory objection rights meaning that such schemes cannot be varied if operators object in sufficient numbers.

- **Appraisal - lowering fares:** One stakeholder points out that the appraisal sets out concerns regarding lowering fares in the current operating environment. This stakeholder notes that they disagree with these. They feel that before SPT discount the ability to lower fares under a BSIP they need to properly assess the options for implementation, otherwise they feel it will be deliberately undervaluing what can be achieved through a BSIP and associated plans.

- **Appraisal - Service delivery with public sector financial support:** The same stakeholder notes that the appraisal reports higher funding levels may make provision of higher levels of service on existing commercial bus routes difficult to do in compliance with the relevant legislation. They feel that this point is not explained clearly, making it difficult to understand what appears to be a relatively major argument against BSIP. Without a clear explanation of why they believe this is the case, the stakeholder has concerns that it is difficult to respond to this point in the consultation, however they note that similar challenges in England have been overcome to allow spending of National Bus Strategy funding to support services.

6. CONSULTATION FEEDBACK – RECOMMENDATION ON MUNICIPAL BUS COMPANY

6.1 Overview

6.1.1 This section presents consultation feedback on **SPT's recommendation on Municipal Bus Company:**

○ **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.**

6.1.2 This section presents the feedback on this option from the questionnaire, written responses, workshops and interviews.

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Proposal to consider developing business cases for municipal bus

</div>

6.2 Overall level of support / opposition (questionnaire)

6.2.1 Of all the recommendations, SPT's proposal to further investigate the opportunities offered by small-scale municpal bus operations appeared to receive the highest level of support from the questionnaire responses. A total of 86% individuals responding to the questionnaire strongly/somewhat support this proposal, alongside 74% of organisations. A significantly larger proportion of organisations were in opposition to this recommendation comapred to individuals (21% compared to 8%).

Figure 8.   Level of support/opposition to further investigate small-scale municipal bus operations
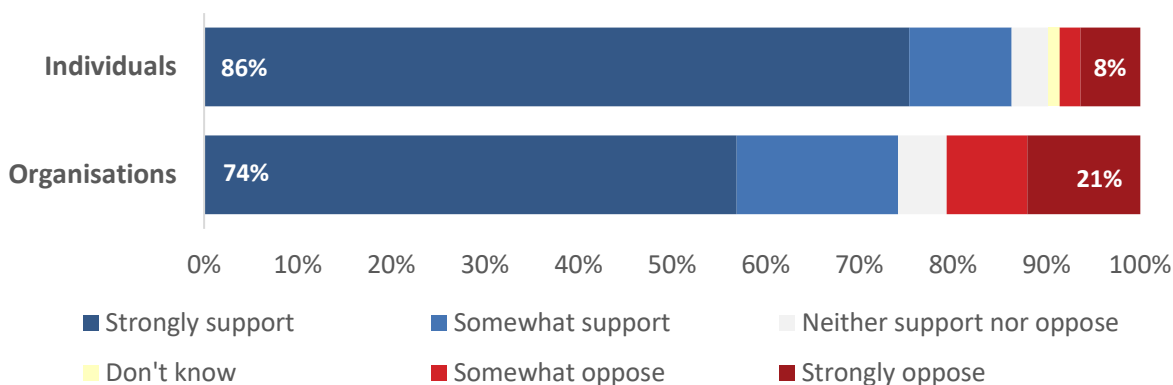
Base: 2,964 responses from individuals, 58 responses from organisations
Percentages presented on the graph above show the combined proportion of those that strongly/somewhat support or oppose

6.2.2 In addition, reported frequencies of support for investigation of municipal bus operations varied significantly by:

○ **Area**: Respondents who lived in cities or towns were significantly more likely to support investigation of municipal bus operations compared to those living in villages or rural areas (89% vs 74%).

○ **Access to transport**: Respondents who reported having no access to a car, van, motorbike or moped as a driver, were significantly more likely to support this recommendation than those with access to the alternative modes of transport (91% vs 83%).

6.3 Reasons for support

Summary of findings

Participants reported a wide range of reasons for supporting SPT's recommendation to further investigate municipal bus operations, with some similarities in the reasons reported in the questionnaire and during the stakeholder workshop and interviews.

Comments relating to the ownership of services were made by questionnaire respondents and stakeholders who participated in the workshop, with the suggestion that this option provides an opportunity for buses to be run as a **public service** which may provide more benefits than a profit-driven model.

Moreover, in the questionnaire and stakeholder interviews, comments were made regarding other areas where they perceive similar options to have been successful, such as Edinburgh (Lothian Buses) and the Highland region. There was also a shared view between questionnaire respondents and stakeholders who participated in the interviews that this option would improve service coverage, particularly in rural and underserved areas, which would promote equality and ensure people's needs are met.

Questionnaire respondents who supported this option suggested that this was most likely to succeed, and reported that this was their preferred option, while stakeholders in both the workshop and interviews supported this option as they felt it would promote competition and enhance service quality.

Questionnaire

6.3.1 As part of the questionnaire, 966 respondents made further comments to explain their reasons for supporting or opposing SPT's recommendation to further investigate municipal bus operations. This section presents the key themes as reasons for supporting this option:

○ **Ownership:** Around a third of respondents commented that they were in support of this option because they felt that buses should be run as a public service and that this option provides this opportunity – *"Buses are a public service. They should be run and owned by the public, not for private profit"* (Individual).

○ **Previous experience:** A significant minority left comments referring to other areas where similar options have been introduced. Edinburgh (Lothian Buses) was referred to frequently as an example where respondents felt this option had been successful – *"Other transport authorities have achieved this with great success, obviously Lothian Buses is the best example. Their services are far superior to those in Strathclyde"* (Individual).

○ **Potential success:** A significant minority of respondents felt this option was most likely to succeed and was their preferred option.

○ **Integration:** A small minority of respondents supported this option because they felt it would allow for better integration of bus with other modes of transport – *"A*

municipal bus company would make it easier to provide a coherent and integrated bus network" (Individual).

- ○ **Service coverage:** A small minority left comments noting that they felt this option would protect services in rural areas from being removed – *"This would allow essential bus services to be provided for communities where no local bus operators make acceptable bids for local franchises, either in urban or rural areas"* (Organisation).
- ○ **Single operator:** A small minority of respondents commented that they would like to one single operator rather than multiple operators – *"I think this would only work if it were just one publicly owned bus company for Strathclyde"* (Individual).
- ○ **Reinvestment:** Linked to ownership / operating for profit, a small number of respondents commented that this option may allow for profits to be reinvested to improve services and infrastructure – *"This should be the preferred future model with profits being reinvested in services"* (Organisation).
- ○ **Environmental impact:** This option was considered to bring environmental benefits for a small minority of respondents.

Workshops

6.3.2 The following themes were discussed in the workshops as reasons to support municipal bus operations:

- ○ **Enhance competition:** One stakeholder supported the idea of a small-scale municipal bus operation, citing problems with existing operators pulling out of contracts and concerns about increased competition and duplication of services with a larger operation.
- ○ **Ownership:** Another stakeholder felt there was benefit of moving away from a profit-driven model to provide services where needed.

Interviews

6.3.3 Stakeholders considered the benefits of further investigating municipal bus operations to be:

- ○ **Service coverage:** Half of stakeholders felt that this option could particularly benefit underserved areas. They see it as a potential solution to address areas where there is a lack of commercial services, ensuring that people's needs are covered and promoting equality.
- ○ **Enhance competition:** One stakeholder saw this option as potential avenue for promoting competition and enhancing service quality.
- ○ **Innovation:** One stakeholder felt this option could inject fresh perspectives and approaches into the market, leading to greater efficiency and customer satisfaction. One stakeholder mentioned the potential for improved ticketing options – *"We will have things like joined up ticketing arrangements which have been talked about in Scotland for so long but have never ever materialised"*.
- ○ **Previous experience:** One stakeholder mentioned successful examples of municipal bus operations in other regions, such as the Highland region, which suggests that this approach could work effectively.

Separate written responses

- **Popularity:** One stakeholder commented that this option was likely to be popular, and noted that local authority-owned bus companies have generally performed well in passenger satisfaction surveys and delivered high levels of patronage.
- **Competition:** One stakeholder noted that they welcome an injection of further competition into the local bus market.
- **Single operator:** One stakeholder commented that they would be keen to see one new public operator for the region branded 'Strathclyde Buses'. They referred back to the 'Better Buses for Strathclyde' briefing note and Centre for Cities report in support of this option.

6.4   Reasons for opposition

Summary of findings

Participants reported a wide range of reasons for opposing SPT's recommendation to further investigate municipal bus operations, with some similarities in the reasons reported in the questionnaire and during the stakeholder workshop and interviews.

Both questionnaire respondents and stakeholders raised concerns regarding the high **costs** of this option, with stakeholders also questioning the **cost-effectiveness** of this option and the **investment** required.

In addition, comments were made in relation to the **scale and ambition** of this option. While questionnaire respondents felt that this option should be larger scale and more ambitious, stakeholders who participated in the workshop suggested that different scales of operation should be explored to determine feasibility.

In turn, other reasons for opposing this option included the perception that it would have limited to no impact on bus services, which was reported by questionnaire respondents. There were also concerns around the potential variation and responsiveness depending on ownership of the municipal bus company and around the lack of data and information required to inform the decision-making process, that were raised by stakeholders during the workshop.

Questionnaire

6.4.1   The main reasons given for opposing SPT's recommendation to further investigate municipal bus operations were as follows:

- **Scale/ambition:** A small minority commented on the term 'small-scale' and felt that this option should be larger scale and be more ambitious – *"We support the decision to develop a business case but that put forward lacks ambition. The powers available allow the creation of a fully integrated service, encouraging people to use public transport and reducing the use of cars"* (Organisation).
- **Impact:** A small minority opposed taking forward municipal bus operations was due to a belief it would have no / little impact on bus services, particularly to a lack of clarity over how this option would be funded – *"Public funding is poor therefore I am not convinced that this will improve services"* (Individual).
- **Cost:** A small minority had concerns that the costs for this option would be high and it may be the most expensive option. Others had concerns over how this option would be funded – *"This is an extravagant, excessive and completely unnecessary strategy that would come at a high cost to the public purse with significant risk*

involved. We believe that the scope of the financial cost and risk has been significantly undervalued and underestimated" (Organisation).

Workshops

6.4.2   Key reasons as to why some stakeholders oppose further investigation of municipal bus operations included:

- ○ **Roles:** A small minority were concerned about potential variation and responsiveness depending on whether the municipal bus company is owned by SPT or local authorities. Another stakeholder wanted clarity on expected roles and responsibilities and raises concerns about the funding, expertise, and resources required.
- ○ **Cost:** One stakeholder felt expectations need to be managed due to the high cost involved with this option. Another stakeholder had concerns over the cost-effectiveness of a small-scale municipal bus operation, citing the difficulty in achieving profitability – *"I just don't see how it can be funded... I can see it working in theory, but given the state of the local authorities, the state of Scottish Government, I just don't see how it can be funded"* (Local authority).
- ○ **Scale:** A significant minority felt different scales of operation could be explored to determine feasibility.
- ○ **Data:** A significant minority of stakeholders felt more data is required to inform decision making – *"There's probably 10,000 questions that need answering... there's a huge amount of questions that need answering"* (Local authority). A small minority felt there has been a lack of information provided and emphasised the need for more detailed information and questions the feasibility of obtaining answers
- ○ **Routes:** Suggestions were made for mechanisms to ensure that profitable routes subsidise non-profitable ones.

Interviews

6.4.3   Reasons for potentially opposing this option have been grouped under the following themes:

- ○ **Cost:** A significant minority of stakeholders had concerns about the cost required to deliver this option. Another stakeholder highlighted the significant costs associated with municipalisation, and suggested that costs to deliver this option had been underestimated. There were also concerns about the significant investment required, where this would come from, and the buyout of existing providers.
- ○ **Expertise:** A small minority of stakeholders also had concerns that SPT do not have the expertise to successfully deliver this option, and argued that those best placed to operate buses lies within the commercial bus sector.
- ○ **Conflict:** One stakeholder had concerns around the potential conflicts with existing private sector bus operators which may lead to challenges in future collaboration

Separate written responses

- ○ **Funding:** As before, one stakeholder questioned where funding would be derived to deliver this option.
- ○ **Operator of last resort:** One stakeholder felt that this would entail significant resource to establish and staff up, compared to using existing operators (potentially

from outside of the area) to provide services if current operators withdraw. They commented that establishing an operator of last resort would require the investment of significant sums to create a standing resource that may not be required for some time, if at all, without the benefit of economies of scale and learning.

○ **Establishment:** One stakeholder felt there could be challenges in establishing a successful municipal bus company in a competitive local market rather than maintaining an existing one (e.g. Lothian Buses in Edinburgh). Another stakeholder also described how a new municipal bus company in Strathclyde would either need to start 'from scratch' or be based around the acquisition of an existing operator. They were concerned that both situations would require potentially significant initial capital investment in the form of start-up or acquisition costs. They questioned again where such investment and funding would come from.

6.5 Other questions and comments

6.5.1 Stakeholders interviewed raised several additional points for further investigating municipal bus operations which they were keen to be considered:

○ **Evaluation:** A significant minority of stakeholders acknowledged the importance of carefully assessing the feasibility and potential impact of such an initiative before implementation. They emphasise the need for thorough research and analysis to understand the costs, benefits, and implications of establishing a municipal bus operation. One stakeholder suggested implementing a pilot program similar to Highland Council's approach to test the feasibility and effectiveness of the municipal bus operation model in the Strathclyde region.

○ **Roles:** A small minority of stakeholders emphasised the need for clear separation of roles and responsibilities, with clear guidelines and accountability mechanisms. One stakeholder cautioned against larger scale operations without clear delineation of responsibilities.

○ **Timescales:** One stakeholder emphasised the need for more urgency in the implementation process, advocating for immediate action rather than prolonged investigation.

○ **Scale:** One stakeholder also referred to the scale of this option, and felt that these could be larger – *"SPT should be setting up a municipal operator immediately, actually I think this recommendation is very timid and woolly"*

○ **Integration with franchising:** One stakeholder stressed the importance of integrating the municipal bus operation with the franchising system, viewing them as complementary measures rather than standalone solutions.

○ **Collaboration:** One stakeholder noted that they would be keen to see SPT collaborate with community transport organisations.

6.5.2 Through written responses, the following concerns or questions were raised:

○ **Funding / skills:** One stakeholder had concerns over where funding for this option will be made available from and also how SPT will obtain the necessary skills or assets to run such a bus company.

○ **Concerns**: One stakeholder raised the following concerns with the model proposed:
  ● They feel that the assumptions about municipal bus operators in the BAU/voluntary partnership/BSIP market are not correct
  ● They consider the assumptions about municipal bus operators in a franchise environment to not be correct.
  ● They questioned the impact if franchise agreements are not awarded

- They felt that the option is not comparable
- They feel that the conclusions are overly positive due to not taking into account risks identified.

7. CONSULTATION FEEDBACK – OTHER FEEDBACK

7.1 Overview

7.1.1 This sections details the findings from the consultation in relation to other areas, such as feedback on the impact assessments and other comments received.

7.2 Impact assessments

7.2.1 A number of impact assessments accompany the bus strategy consultation document, and SPT wanted to understand whether questionnaire respondents had viewed these documents. A slightly higher proportion of organisations had viewed the documents compared to those responding as an individual (63% organisations vs 54% individuals).

Figure 9. Have you read any of the impact assessments that accompany the bus strategy consultation document?
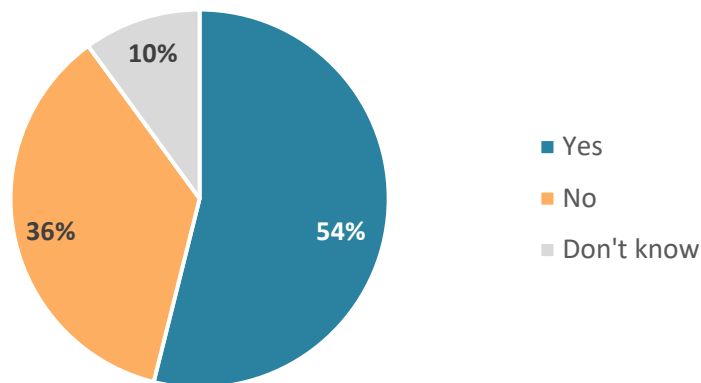
Base: 3,020 responses to the questionnaire

7.2.2 Questionnaire respondents were asked if they would like to leave any comments related to the impact assessments, of which 189 chose to do so. However, half of comments received were in relation to support / opposition for the different options. Half of the comments related to the impact assessments, and these covered the following themes:

- Broad support / agreement with the impact assessments
- The importance of ensuring that passengers are the main focus
- The documents were difficult to understand
- There was a lot / too much to read
- Difficulty finding/accessing the documents
- Concerns that the assessments had been made by those who either don't use or understand commuter needs

7.3 Comments received

7.3.1 At the end of the survey, respondents were invited to leave any further comments related to the consultation on the bus strategy recommendations. A total of 1,155 respondents chose to leave further comments, and these align to the following key themes:

Feedback on the current bus network:

- **Change required:** A significant minority of respondents reiterated previous comments that they wanted to see changes made to the current bus network – *"Please make the bus service better"* (Individual).
- **Specific issues with the bus network:** A significant minority of respondents provided more detailed comments regarding why they wanted to see change to the current provision of buses. This included:

  - wanting more **affordable** services
  - wanting **improved reliability** of services
  - noting a **lack of bus services** within the area that they live
  - a call for more **integrated bus services** with other modes of transport – *"We need more regular, reliable and cheaper bus services to enable people not to have to drive their cars everywhere."* (Individual)

Feedback on recommendations – general:

- **Public ownership:** A significant minority of respondents reiterated previous points noting that they wanted to see buses in public ownership and not run for profit – *"I wish to see a return to publicly owned bus services, or at least a situation where the transport authority has significant control over bus services"* (Individual).
- **Public transport comparisons:** A significant minority of respondents referred to perceived successful bus operations in other locations such as Edinburgh, London and Manchester – *"Buses in Edinburgh are great - Scotland's biggest city should have a similar opportunity - regular reliable cheap buses - to support the economy and improve people's lives significantly"* (Individual).
- **Action required:** A significant minority of respondents commented that they would like to see action quickly – *"It's time for action"* (Individual).
- **Accountability / regulation:** A small minority of respondents commented that they would like to see options that result in greater accountability / regulation of services – *"It would be great to have accountability for routing by a public body"* (Individual).

Feedback on recommendations – specific:

- **Ruling out BAU – opposition (CAS 3C service):** A significant minority of respondents reiterated previous comments regarding the CAS 3C Strathaven service and concern this may be removed if business as usual is ruled out. They argue that local services that are perceived to be successful should be allowed to continue – *"I live in Strathaven where the 3C bus service provided by the local Climate Action Group has been life changing for many of us. I would be devastated to lose it"* (Individual).
- **Local services franchising – support:** A significant minority of respondents left comments reiterating their support for local services franchising to be progressed – *"I want to see SPT both use the powers for franchising and set up a publicly-owned operator for Strathclyde, as soon as is practically possible"* (Individual).
- **BSIPs – opposition:** A small minority of respondents commented that they oppose BSIPs being taken forward – *"Buses should be run by the council, and there should not be any stop-gap measures such as BSIPs because they are a waste of time and money"* (Individual).
- **BSIPs – opposition (petition):** A small minority of respondents noted that they are "one of 10,000 people" who have signed a petition to 'Take Strathclyde's Buses Back into Public Control' which was presented to SPT in February 2024. This petition (described in more detail in section 3.4), rejects the idea of entering into a BSIP as they believe this would maintain the status quo.

- ○ **Municipal bus operations – support:** A small minority of respondents made further comments in support of municipal bus operations – *"I support the move to a municipally owned bus and transport network"* (Individual).

Wider impacts

- ○ **Impact on the environment / car usage:** A significant minority of respondents commented that if improvements to the bus network were made then they would travel by bus more / use their car less – *"I would take the bus every day if it were as reliable, and affordable as Edinburgh's. As it stands, I actively avoid taking the bus in Glasgow, and use it only as a last resort"* (Individual).
- ○ **Impact on older people / disabled people:** A small minority of respondents left comments regarding the impact a lack of bus services can have on older / disabled people. Many commented on their own experiences and the importance that bus travel has on their lives – *"As someone who cannot drive due to disability the unpredictable nature and poorly run status of your buses directly impacts my livelihood in a negative way"* (Individual).

7.3.2   From the workshops, the following additional comments were made:

- ○ **Funding:** One stakeholder reiterated concerns over where funding will come from, felt more clarity was required, and felt this should be reflected in the appraisal process
- ○ **Services:** One stakeholder added that they want to see a service coverage for all areas where people live, and stressed the need to prioritise buses over cars from a climate perspective.

7.3.3   From the stakeholder interviews, a number of additional comments were made:

- ○ **Other factors:** A small minority reiterated previous comments that other factors affecting the bus network need to be addressed. These factors are considered to be congestion and service reliability.
- ○ **Ticketing:** A small minority also called for improvements to ticketing to make fares more accessible. They also wanted to see affordable fare levels being maintained to encourage ridership.

7.3.4   Other comments received via written response include:

- ○ **Bus priority:** A small minority of stakeholders wrote about bus priority measures. One stakeholder felt that investment in bus priority compared to the current position of bus needs greater focus. Another stakeholder commented that bus priority   would be critical to the successful delivery of both BSIPs in the medium term and franchising in the longer term. However, they refer to the Scottish Government pausing the BPF in 2024/25, and the Scottish Government reducing SPT's capital programme to zero in 2024/25, thereby removing two potential sources of funding for investment in bus. They note that while the consultation does not specifically ask for comment on this, they wish to note that while having faster and more reliable journey times is essential, they feel care must be taken to ensure a balanced approach for all sectors of businesses and communities. This included the consideration of geographical differences (e.g. rural areas) and local priorities.

This stakeholder was of the view that through the adoption of on-board bus and on-road technology across the network, a faster and more reliable journey time for all users could also be achieved.

Another stakeholder noted that they encourage further exploration of the existing model where the public sector delivers on bus priority measures and the private sector invests in fleet upgrades. They felt that upgrades, such as investment in electric buses, should be tested through the existing model or voluntary partnership proposal before franchising or other models are explored.

- **Wider benefits and priorities:** Another stakeholder felt that a new model of bus provision could create wider benefits to society – *"a new model of bus provision will enable bus services and public transport across Strathclyde to contribute more towards a healthier environment, inclusive economic growth, and an improved quality of life for the people and communities of Strathclyde"* (Local authority). Another stakeholder noted the importance of considering user-needs from a tourism angle, noting that visitors, especially in the case of international visitors, have distinct and differing needs to those of Scotland residents.
- **Outcome perceived to be pre-determined:** One stakeholder was of the view that SPT has a pre-determined outcome for the Consultation and for devising the SPT bus strategy and potential outcomes from any assessment of a franchising framework in the future. They are of the opinion that this fundamentally undermines the Consultation process. They specifically refer to an article by SPT staff, noting an article in *Holyrood Magazine* in support of franchising, and an article in *Passenger Transport* about the benefits of franchising.
- **Statutory guidance and regulation for the franchising process**: One stakeholder notes that these have not been issued, and if SPT ultimately seeks to introduce franchising, they will be required to comply with the mandatory statutory process for approval of its proposed franchising framework.

7.4   Consultation feedback

Questionnaire:

- **Support for SPT's proposals:** A small minority positively referred to SPT conducting this work and noted that they fully support the potential for change – *"This is a great opportunity to provide a real boost to public transport across Strathclyde. Get Strathclyde Going!"* (Individual).
- **More publicity required:** A small minority of respondents felt that the consultation could have been promoted more widely. Some of which requested for updates and regular meetings as the proposals develop further.

Workshops:

- **Consultation:** One stakeholder noted they would like to see more face to face local consultation in addition to online.

Interviews:

- **Consultation:** One stakeholder specifically commented that they are pleased to see this consultation taking place and welcomed the opportunity to provide feedback – *"Although we've got a bit disagreement about emphasis in terms of the bus strategy and the proposals that we very, very much support the direction of travel and that we have a degree of faith and hope that they are going to start the process"*.

Written responses:

One stakeholder had specific concerns about the consultation process, including:

- ○ **Timescales not long enough:** One stakeholder felt that the timescale for the consultation was inadequate and does not meet the minimum legal standards and government guidance for a consultation. They feel the timescale is not proportionate to the issues under consideration. They refer to the appraisal document which they perceive to be substantive, and felt it was not possible for respondents to review and obtain expert advice within the timeframe. They refer to other guidance which advises a consultation period of 12 weeks and feel this should have been what was allowed in this consultation.
- ○ **Verification of individual respondents:** The same stakeholder was of the opinion that nothing has been done to prevent duplicate responses or to verify submissions. They comment that respondent email verification should have been required.
- ○ **Pre-engagement**: The same stakeholder was also of the view that no substantive engagement with operators was conducted prior or during consultation and are critical that they were informed of the consultation one day before launch. The stakeholder was also critical of the workshop process due to not being provided answers to their specific questions about the appraisal process and options. They also criticised the lack of pre-warning of proposals to change the current model of delivery, noting that they have invested in new vehicles and would be disproportionately impacted if they were to be unsuccessful in tendering for current routes under a franchising agreement.

8. SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

8.1 Overview

8.1.1 SPT carried out a consultation exercise between **Tuesday 2nd April 2024 and Monday 13th May 2024** to understand levels of support or opposition to a set of recommendations to guide the development and implementation of the bus strategy. Feedback from the general public and stakeholders was gathered, with **3,072 responses** received in total across the following channels:

- Online questionnaire
- Workshops
- Interviews
- Stakeholder letters/ documents

8.2 Summary of consultation findings

Rule out business as usual

- Both individuals and stakeholders felt that **change was required** and perceive **business as usual to not be working for users** at present.
- **Issues with current bus operations** were reported, such as perceived increases in fares and reliability of services.
- However, a smaller proportion had concerns that ruling out business as usual may lead to the **removal of what they perceive to be successful services**.
- Some stakeholders felt the current provision of services is satisfactory and **does not require chang**e. Others suggested that other factors need to be addressed first, such as road congestion, and that more evidence on the recommendations is required.

Rule out voluntary partnerships

- The main reason for supporting ruling out voluntary partnerships was due to concern around **enforcement**, specifically that voluntary partnerships would have little to no impact in delivering improvements to services without **clear accountability mechanisms**.
- The previous impact of voluntary partnerships was also mentioned by questionnaire respondents and stakeholders during the interviews, who noted instances where these have been introduced but have **not succeeded**.
- There were concerns from stakeholders over **potential costs and additional workload** of voluntary partnerships.
- However some opposed voluntary partnerships being ruled out as they felt they could work well with **appropriate collaboration and commitment.**

Take forward local services franchising

- The potential improvements that local services franchising could offer in the **quality of service** were mentioned by individuals and stakeholders, particularly relating to improvements in the consistency of service quality and in meeting the needs of local communities.
- Stakeholders referred to **other examples** of local services franchising considered to be successful. Some felt franchising would allow for better **integration** of bus with other modes of transport.

- Reasons for opposition were due to concerns around the **perceived limited impact** franchising may have on current services. Some suggested measures need to be in place to ensure that commitments are binding, and operators are held accountable.
- Some stakeholders raised concerns regarding the **timescale**s for this option, and potential delays in the implementation of the franchise model. There were also concerns around the **cost** of implementing a franchising model.

Take forward Bus Service Improvement Partnerships

- This was the least supported of all of the options, but those who were in support felt that this option could be an **interim step** whilst other options are being developed. Some questionnaire respondents commented on the potential benefits this option could have on bus services, and some also mentioned the **perceived success of other bus partnerships** introduced elsewhere.
- The effectiveness of BSIPs was a concern raised consistently by questionnaire respondents and stakeholders, specifically the belief that this option would have **little to no impact** on bus services. Some had concerns that introduction of BSIPs may delay the introduction of other options.
- There were also concerns around **accountability** and the **flexibility** that this option offers to operators. Stakeholders felt that clear mechanisms for enforcing agreements and holding all parties accountable were required. Stakeholders also raised concerns regarding the potential funding sources for implementing this option, with a similar concern around costs raised in the questionnaire by respondents who perceived this option to be expensive.

Further investigate small-scale municipal bus operations

- Support for this option came from all channels with individuals/stakeholders considering this option to provide an opportunity for buses to be run as a **public service** which they consider to potentially bring more benefits than a profit-driven model.
- Some felt that other similar options have been **successful elsewhere**. They noted that they believe this option may improve service coverage, particularly in rural and underserved areas.
- Reasons to oppose this option were due to concerns regarding the **potential high costs**, with some stakeholders questioning the cost-effectiveness of this option and investment required. Comments were also made in relation to the scale and **ambition** of this option. While questionnaire respondents felt that this option should be larger scale and more ambitious, stakeholders who participated in the workshop suggested that different scales of operation should be explored to determine feasibility.

8.3 Next steps

8.3.1 SPT will review the findings from the consultation and will be reporting them to the Partnership Board later in 2024. Next year (2025) SPT will complete the development of the bus strategy.

Appendix A – Consultation questionnaire

Link to Appendix will be available on website

Appendix B – Workshop slides

Link to Appendix will be available on website

Appendix C – Interview topic guide

Link to Appendix will be available on website

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