

PE2116/D: Accelerate the implementation of bus franchising powers

Paul Sweeney MSP written submission, 14 November 2024

I was pleased to raise the importance of this petition in a meeting of the Parliament on Thursday October 31 in which I highlighted the warning from Jonathan Bray, one of the leading experts on bus franchising, who suggests that giving the Traffic Commissioner for Scotland the unilateral power to veto Strathclyde Partnership for Transport's plans to introduce a bus franchise would be a grave mistake.

At present, the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 requires the proposed framework for bus franchising to be approved by a panel that is appointed by the Traffic Commissioner.

However, I believe that this should be removed from the process so that Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) has the confidence and ability to implement, democratically, the scheme which they have spent so much time devising.

Bus privatisation has been a total and complete failure, and we can now rectify it so that, once again, public control of bus networks is in place, via operating regulations and control of the fare box. The approval panel outlined in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 only serves those that would prefer the deregulated status quo remains.

The Scottish Government should instead be providing greater support for regional transport partnerships to prepare their franchising frameworks instead of giving the panel the ability to unilaterally and undemocratically veto any bus franchising plan.

I would encourage the Committee to keep this petition open and call interested parties in to give evidence. This should include representatives from SPT and representatives from regional transport authorities from other parts of the UK with established experience of introducing bus franchising, such as West Yorkshire and Greater Manchester.