

PE2116/F: Accelerate the implementation of bus franchising powers

Tactran written submission, 9 January 2025

Thank you for inviting Tactran to provide our view in respect of petition PE2116 in relation to bus franchising powers.

Tactran is the Regional Transport Partnership (RTP) for Tayside and Central Scotland covering the Angus, Dundee, Perth & Kinross, and Stirling council areas. Tactran was established under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005. Tactran is a model 1 RTP and is the statutory body responsible for developing, maintaining and overseeing the delivery of the Regional Transport Strategy (RTS). Tactran's most recent RTS was approved by Cabinet Secretary for Transport in April 2024 and adopted by the Tactran Partnership in June 2024.

The petition supports actions to accelerate implementation of bus franchising powers contained within the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 at section 38, themselves one of a series of 'new powers' contained from section 36 of the 2019 Act. In making this response we feel it appropriate to support the intention(s) of the new powers, as we understand them, on a global basis; namely, to create conditions for greater levels of bus use, as may include, but not be limited to: bus service improvement, greater reliability, improved availability, integration, and coordination. While both intent and effect might be accomplished by changes in the ownership and management structures of the bus companies themselves, including franchising, the extent to which any one approach is appropriate will be largely dictated by the circumstances and local contexts of delivery.

Tactran have undertaken a series of analyses of the bus market within our area. The work stems from the RTS commitment to explore new models of bus supply and includes reviews of the implications of the 2019 Act, public satisfaction and behaviour analysis, the development of a pathfinder study, and of a bus plan focused on options for delivery. In each case it was recognised that practical delivery options differed between city, rural, and regional services. In short no one model would fully satisfy the needs nor result in comprehensive behaviour change where treated in isolation. Moreover, the coordination and development of partnerships was felt more likely to benefit urban areas than a franchise option, while Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) and more flexible transport options were highlighted as appropriate to local bus service provision in rural communities. While neither instance precludes greater authority involvement, with a number of options benefiting from the coordination and network effects of such involvement, these were felt possible in partnership models.

Separately the RTP supports the operation of two bus alliances, the Tayside Bus Alliance, and the Forth Valley Bus Alliance, the latter being managed by our neighbouring RTP SEStran. In each instance the intent to deliver service improvements is highlighted. The Tayside Bus alliance also focusing on integration of active and public transport options, including the identification of sustainable transport corridors in both Perth and Dundee. The alliances also supported the concept of improvement partnership(s), as a structural framework contained within the new powers, while application of these would need to be focused on the local

authorities within the Tactran region, as it is the Local Authorities; Angus, Dundee City, Perth and Kinross and Stirling Councils, that are the transport authorities in each instance.

It is also appropriate to highlight the issues of funding, supporting infrastructure, and associated instruments, including ticketing. Experience in other areas of the UK, notably in the development of Bus Service Improvement plans in England, metropolitan area franchises, notably in England, and government direct control, as illustrated in Northern Ireland, reflect distinctly different contexts, and may thus not be fully comparable with the circumstances either in Scotland, in general, or Tactran specifically. Improvement plans in England appear to have been accompanied by significant additional specific support funding, which is not the case in Scotland. Similarly recent moves to franchise in metropolitan areas of England are also reflective of a distinct and supported metropolitan (regional) council, which is not the case in the Tactran area, and only partially visible in other areas. The role of sufficient and targeted funding cannot be underplayed, as success in regulatory reform follows primarily from an affordable improvement in services, in short, a regulatory change is constrained by the positive level of investment that supports it. It is further notable that integration appears constrained as may be affected by further aspects of the 2019 act specific to ticketing opportunity, and the nature of the regulatory model itself.

We therefore highlight that any development in terms of a regulatory structure, regardless as to which model is adopted, requires both contextual and circumstantial compatibility. This is not limited to the model alone, but necessarily requires funding appropriate to need, policy integration, including across modes, and structural alignment.

I trust this response is helpful to the Committee. Should you have any further questions please contact me.