The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

Jim Fairlie MSP
Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity
Scottish Government

12 June 2025

Dear Jim,

Public Service Vehicles (Registration of Local Services) (Local Services Franchises Transitional Provisions) (Scotland) Regulations 2025

The Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee considered the Public Service Vehicles (Registration of Local Services) (Local Services Franchises Transitional Provisions) (Scotland) Regulations 2025 at its meeting on 27 May 2025. While the Committee didn't make a formal recommendation in relation to the instrument itself, we did agree to write to you with some wider questions about how the bus franchising model would be implemented. These questions are set out below.

Publication of Statutory Guidance

When you and your officials gave evidence on the Local Services Franchises (Traffic Commissioner Notices and Panels) (Scotland) Regulations 2024 on 29 October of that year, we discussed at length the guidance which is being developed to support local transport authorities. One of your officials stated that "we have been engaging with local transport authorities on the draft of that and we will be looking to publish that in the new year." You also provided assurances that you would come back to the Committee with the guidance as it develops and that the Committee would have the opportunity to scrutinise the guidance before it is incorporated into the traffic commissioner's remit. In a subsequent letter to the Committee on 28 January 2025, you stated that "work is continuing on the statutory guidance" and "it is my intention to share a complete draft of the guidance with the Committee at an appropriate juncture when closer to finalisation, which is likely to be in the spring."

1. Can you confirm when the Scottish Government intends to publish the statutory guidance on bus franchising, and when a draft version will be made available to the Committee ahead of formal publication?

Timescale for Implementation

At the meeting on 27 May, the Committee noted the overall pace of progress in Scotland compared to developments in English mayoral regions, where legal

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changes have already facilitated franchising. With Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) potentially making a decision on franchising in September, the committee is seeking assurance that the franchising framework will be operational in a timely manner and that steps are being taken to avoid any slippage.

2. What is the Scottish Government's anticipated timescale for full implementation of the bus franchising framework?

3. What further actions can the Scottish Government take to help SPT or any partnership pursuing a franchising model to move forward to the delivery stage without unnecessary delays? What guidance or other support will the Scottish Government provide?
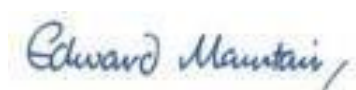
Support for Local Transport Authorities

The Committee discussed the potentially significant financial and administrative burden placed on local transport authorities under the franchising regulations, with SPT estimating the cost of developing a franchising proposal at £15 million. The Committee also discussed whether the current process could be simplified to encourage broader uptake and more rapid progress.

4. What assessment has the Scottish Government made of the financial and administrative burden placed on transport authorities by the franchising regulations, and what support does it intend to provide to those considering this model, particularly in light of SPT's estimated cost for this work of up to £15 million?

5. Has the Government considered simplifying the franchising process to reduce complexity and enable faster implementation?

The Committee would appreciate a response by the end of June.

Yours sincerely,

Edward Mountain MSP

Convener

Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee