



31 January 2023

Edward Mountain MSP
Convener
Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee
Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

Via email: netzero.committee@parliament.scot

Dear Edward,

Petition referred to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

Thank you for your letter on 7 November 2022 and apologies that it has taken so long to reply. I am responding on behalf of COSLA's President as transport policy sits within my portfolio. I am, therefore, grateful for the opportunity to respond to this petition and to the Scottish Government's specific comments on the powers afforded to Local Authorities by the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019.

Firstly, while I am sympathetic to the position of the petitioner, this is an issue that sits best at the national level. The decision on the design of bus fleets needs to be decided at the national level with involvement of the appropriate operators, bus manufacturers, safety professionals and advocacy groups.

The majority of the bus network in Scotland is run by commercial operators, over which Local Authorities have limited power. However, Local Authorities do subsidise and/or operate local bus services throughout Scotland that are not financially viable for private operators. This is because these local bus services are not provided commercially by licensed bus operators, but are socially necessary to maintain connectedness, avoid social isolation and combat climate change across both rural and urban communities.

The Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 does give Local Authorities the flexibility to run their own bus services. However, to date no additional resources have been allocated to allow Local Authorities to explore or deliver this action. Moreover, there is concern that incredibly stretched levels of funding in FY23/24 will prevent Councils from providing the bus services they are currently providing, either directly or by subsidising.

In light of the recent report by your Committee we are obviously very keen to look at ways in which we can speed up progress on a Just Transition to a Net Zero Economy. This includes bus and public transport, which is a priority for COSLA. While, at this time, we have limited direct influence over the issue raised by the petitioner, I would be happy to discuss with you how we make the most of the recent report to make further progress towards the 2030 target and beyond.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Gail Macgregor
COSLA Environment and Economy Spokesperson