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Convener

Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

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Dear Convener

During my attendance at the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee on Tuesday 19 September 2023 I undertook to provide further information on the funding to investigate the Transport Act powers in the form of the Community Bus Fund, the status of the £500 million long term commitment for bus priority infrastructure, as well as alcohol and antisocial behaviour on trains. This information is set out below which I hope the committee finds helpful.

Community Bus Fund

In 2023-24, the Community Bus Fund was allocated £5 million capital and £0.75 million resource funding, with the method for distributing these funds being jointly agreed with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA). The resource funding will be used for pathfinder projects to support those local authorities who are interested and ready to prepare for exploring the powers in the Transport Act 2019, including local authority run services, franchising and formal partnerships, by conducting the relevant reviews and assessments.

The £5 million capital will support improvements to local bus services including connectivity, integration between modes, and using innovative transport solutions. This capital funding will be distributed to all local authorities. Recognising the unique challenges rural areas face, particularly for people on low incomes who rely more heavily on bus, rural local authorities will receive greater levels of capital funding.

£500 million bus priority infrastructure funding

The Scottish Government committed to providing a long-term investment of £500 million to deliver targeted bus priority measures which encompasses both the Bus Partnership Fund and work to reallocate road space on parts of the motorway network around Glasgow to high

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occupancy vehicles such as buses. The second Strategic Transport Projects Review also recommends that bus priority options are implemented within Scotland's cities and towns where congestion is highest.

To date we have awarded £26.6 million for bus priority through the Bus Partnership Fund. This funding has been awarded to eleven partnerships covering 28 local authorities across Scotland. This initial funding has been awarded to local authorities, working in partnership with operators, to identify, develop and deliver bus priority measures. See Annex A for the breakdown by Partnership.

The Fund has already delivered bus lane cameras and traffic light equipment to help buses get through them more quickly in Glasgow, Ayrshire and Inverness, bus priority in Aberdeen City Centre, as well as making a number of temporary measures permanent in Fife and Edinburgh. I was also pleased to see the recently opened bus gates in Aberdeen City Centre part funded by the Bus Partnership Fund. This will mean over half a million passengers every month benefit from quicker and more reliable bus journeys making bus more attractive. It is also expected that a further bus gate at Raigmore Hospital in Inverness will open shortly, making it quicker for passengers to access the hospital by bus.

At the start of the Bus Partnership Fund there were not many projects that could be built straight away. To identify further measures, Partnerships were funded to undertake studies. As well as smaller scale projects which we are funding as soon as sufficient evidence is available, Partnerships have also identified larger transformative projects, such as bus lanes on key corridors into some of Scotland's cities. These are estimated to cost substantially more and, as such, they need to be supported by robust business cases and Government must properly scrutinise the evidence within them. We have also been clear that Partnerships must ensure those affected, both positively and negatively, have the opportunity to have their say in the development and implementation of projects. Transport Scotland continues to work with Partnerships and stakeholders to understand how collectively they can identify and overcome barriers to increase the pace of delivery.

In the case of the motorway network, Transport Scotland would build on the current work progressing plans for the M8, M77 and M80, which includes looking at actively managed hard shoulders for buses like those already operating on the M90/M9 Queensferry Corridor and on the M8 eastbound approach to Hermiston Gait.

A draft Strategic Business Case (SBC) for Glasgow Managed Motorways was produced in November 2021 to identify options for improving the operational performance of key sections of the Glasgow motorway network including consideration of bus priority on the M8, M80, M77 and M74. However, the traffic data and modelling that informed the appraisal process in the draft SBC was based on pre COVID-19 data and there has been an interim period of changing travel patterns and traffic flows on the motorway network, as people have adjusted their travel behaviour to reflect increased and more routine working from home and changes to public transport services.

As such, Transport Scotland is ensuring these important changes are fully captured in the business case process. While this will result in the programme for this work taking longer than previously anticipated, it is essential to ensure that the business case remains robust.

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All the bus priority measures above are aimed at making travelling by bus a more attractive option by reducing the negative impacts of congestion on bus services, making bus journey times shorter and services more reliable for passengers, and addressing the decline in bus patronage. This will encourage people to make more sustainable transport choices and help us achieve our net zero targets.

With regard to future funding, the Scottish Government is committed to delivering vital public services and supporting households. However, funding decisions must be made in the context of the Scottish Budget and annual budget setting process.

Alcohol on ScotRail Trains

The existing ban on alcohol on ScotRail services remains in place. Transport Scotland is considering a wide range of views and will provide Ministers with further advice on options that will best meet the needs of Scotrail staff and passengers. Once this process has completed, I would be happy to update the committee.

Antisocial behaviour

We know from our own research that antisocial behaviour is a concern among public transport users. Over half of respondents (56%) to a Transport Scotland Survey undertaken in November 2022 said that they had witnessed antisocial behaviour when using public transport. This was predominantly on the train, subway, tram or bus, but also at the bus stop and train station. In addition, Transport Scotland is conducting an evaluation of the Young Person's Free Bus Travel Scheme which includes research on the issues of personal safety and anti-social behaviour and considers the views of stakeholders and bus users, along with the experiences of young people accessing and using public transport.

Anti-social behaviour is unacceptable on Scotland's public transport network and in wider society. The police, local authorities and other local agencies, empowered by the Scottish Government, are responsible for tackling anti-social behaviour locally. The Scottish Government supports a suite of enforcement activities including Formal Warnings, Fixed Penalty Notices and Antisocial Behaviour Orders, alongside positive diversionary and early intervention activities.

On Scotland's Railways, we work closely with the British Transport Police (BTP), who recognise the significant impact that assaults have on Scotland's rail staff and passengers. Reducing these types of incidents is a key strategic objective for the Force.

BTP engage closely with the rail industry on this issue – a positive example of BTP's partnership working with ScotRail includes its collaboration with ScotRail's Travel Safe Team to reduce the number of incidents involving assaults on rail staff. Together, BTP and ScotRail conduct joint patrols when areas of concern for anti-social behaviour and violent offences are identified.

Although it is a wider issue than just on public transport, the Scottish Government is exploring potential routes for banning people who commit anti-social behaviour on our networks. This includes the use of measures available under current antisocial behaviour legislation, and the extent to which any additional powers or offences might be desirable.

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The Scottish Government is aware that there have been incidents of anti-social behaviour over recent months that have been linked to the introduction of the Scotland-Wide Free Bus Travel Scheme for Young People. Although reported incidents of antisocial behaviour are of concern, they should not detract from the success of policies such as the Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme. By the end of June over 73 million journeys have been made since the scheme went live in January last year. It is making a real difference to the lives of young people and their families by helping to cut costs for essential, every day and leisure travel, and encouraging use of more sustainable transport modes.

In addition, following a Parliamentary debate on the specific issue of women and girls' safety on public transport earlier this year, which followed the publication of Scottish Government research on this topic, I have tasked officials to organise an event which will bring together relevant stakeholders to discuss how to take forward the research recommendations. Improving the safety of women and girls who both use and work on the transport network is a key issue which will impact on overall safety across the network.

I trust this provides the information the Committee was seeking.

Yours sincerely



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Annex A – Bus Partnership Fund Awards made by Partnership (as of 25 August 2023)

Partnership	Grant Award (£)
Argyll and Bute	282,000
Ayrshire	385,000
Edinburgh	3,127,826
Fife	1,799,968
Forth Valley	567,000
Glasgow	3,655,000
Highland (Inverness and Fort William)	3,403,568
Midlothian	302,000
North East	12,205,596
Tayside	640,160
West Lothian	225,750
Total	26,593,868