

Fiona Hyslop MSP
Minister for Transport
The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

*CC Mairi McAllan MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition; and
Edward Mountain MSP, Convener, Scottish Parliament Net Zero, Energy and Transport
Committee*

12th January 2024

Dear Minister,

Bus Partnership Fund

Following the publication of the Scottish Budget on 19 December 2023 we are writing to you on behalf of our membership, and as representatives on the Bus Partnership Fund Steering Group to seek assurances on the future of the Bus Partnership Fund in 2024/25 and the Scottish Government's long-term commitment to investing in bus priority infrastructure.

The Fund was first announced as a landmark, long term investment in the 2019 Programme for Government, and launched in 2020 with a commitment to providing an investment of over £500m to deliver targeted bus priority measures on local and trunk roads, intended to reduce the negative impacts of congestion on bus services and address the decline in bus patronage.

The Second Strategic Transport Project Review (STPR2) published in December 2022 recommended that bus priority options be implemented within Scotland's cities and towns where congestion is highest and that bus priority measures continue to be identified and implemented on the trunk road and motorway network; and following the most recent Programme for Government the First Minister's letter to the Cabinet Secretary refers to delivering on 'the development of measures to give priority to buses in appropriate areas, making bus travel more attractive'.

To date however only around £26.9 million of the announced £500m has been awarded to Partnerships.

As you were able to see in your recent visit to Aberdeen the bus priority routes introduced in August 2023, and funded through the North East Bus Alliance's bid to the Fund, are already delivering measurable benefits for passengers, with improved

punctuality. As a result, major operators have reinvested the savings they have made as a result and are, for example, offering free weekend travel across the region in January. There is the potential for this investment to be replicated across the country.

It was also the intention that the Fund complement the powers in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, with 2024 seeing the final regulations and guidance giving powers around partnerships and franchising full effect. To suspend key funding at the same time as legally enacting powers to encourage partnership seems counterintuitive.

In her letter to the Scottish Parliament Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee on 19 December 2023 the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition said:

“At present, there are no plans to provide direct funding for the Bus Partnership Fund in 2024-25. Through our active travel programmes, we are looking at how we can deliver more synergy between bus priority space and more space for walking, wheeling and cycling”.

The Bus Partnership Fund is later referred to in the same letter as being part of a long-term package of support, in relation to questions on rural services, and on support for passengers.

We are keen to understand what these statements mean in practice for the Partnerships and Alliances and work already in progress. Our members fear that even a temporary 'pause' in this work could prove disastrous for the future of bus priority and is likely to majorly impact on the Government's stated aim to reduce car kms.

We would be keen to meet with you and officials to discuss this further, ideally ahead of the next Bus Partnership Fund Steering Group in March.

Kind regards,

Paul White
Director, CPT Scotland