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**Local Bus Services in Scotland**

**Improving the Framework for Delivery**

**Friends of the Earth Scotland Response**

**December 2017**

Friends of the Earth Scotland welcomes the opportunity to feed into this consultation.  Our air pollution campaign aims to tackle Scotland’s unsafe levels of air pollution which persist in 38 Pollution Zones across the country and are responsible for over 2500 early deaths each year.

Traffic is the dominant cause of air pollution, so our air pollution campaign is pushing for cleaner and fairer transport systems in Scotland. We’re working to urgently shift the balance of transport policy and spending towards clean public transport, cycling and walking. Not only will this mean cleaner air, but it will also mean less climate emissions from the transport sector, and a better transport system for all.

Buses are at the heart of successful public transport networks, are a lifeline for hundreds of thousands of people in Scotland, and are an essential part of the solution to air pollution. We want to see the sector thrive, with expanded networks and increased patronage. We agree with therefore and strongly support the consultation document’s analysis of the need for the bus in Scotland. We agree with and strongly support the proposals to allow for franchising, as long as local transport authorities are given the powers to specify the terms of the franchising agreement. We also agree with and strongly support proposals to allow local transport authorities to run their own bus operations.

We recognise that car congestion has played a role in the decline in buses, and we are also campaigning for the introduction of transport policies which will discourage unnecessary car usage (including premises parking levies for example). However the dominance of the car and the overall decline of the bus sector are an interactive process and are in a feedback loop.  Deregulation has made it harder for bus routes to be well-designed networks and therefore have not always served the public interest. It has made coordination of fares, timetables, services, and information difficult. Bus companies often compete for and cherry pick profitable routes, neglecting socially necessary but less profitable areas. Deregulation has also resulted in profits made by bus companies not always being reinvested back into expanding the network. These factors have made it harder for buses to thrive.

As a result of the increases in bus fares and reduction in routes,  the bus is just not a viable option for many people, but its replacement - the car - is no match. For many in Scotland, cars are simply unaffordable; for others, maintaining the cost of a car keeps them trapped in a cycle of poverty. Crucially, unfettered car use across Scotland is causing air pollution and climate emissions that are working against the pressing need to tackle climate change and illegal air pollution.

This consultation presents an opportunity to break the vicious cycle of bus decline, car congestion and social isolation. It presents an opportunity for passengers, by proposing the right conditions to be created for bus services to be better planned and expanded, and operated in public interest.

We support the proposals which shift the balance of power in favour of local authorities being able to run their own bus services or failing that, to operate highly regulated franchises. Through a reformed franchise system, Local Transport Authorities should be empowered to specify the terms of the agreement, including: bus routes, frequency of service, simple and affordable fares, smart ticketing, emission standards, livery, pay and conditions, concessionary fares and data sharing.

Franchising and publicly run bus options would enable profits to reinvested in expanding the local public transport network, improving reliability and reducing fares, and would also assist the transition to Low Emission Zones in Scotland. However for these changes to work and become a reality, the Scottish Government must also commit to financially supporting LTAs who wish to embark on either of these processes.

We accept that local authority owned bus services are not a bulletproof guarantee of a reverse in the decline of buses. But highly regulated franchises and publicly run models are much better frameworks and create an opportunity for profits to be reinvested into cleaner fleets and an expanded network, and so we welcome the proposed changes.

Finally, we urge that the National Transport Strategy Review includes a Strategic Review of Scotland’s entire Public Transport network which involves passengers’, would-be passengers and industry employees’ views and needs, in order to ensure a world class public transport network for Scotland.