

RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE**PRE-BUDGET/FINANCIAL SCRUTINY ON ROADS MAINTENANCE IN SCOTLAND****SUBMISSION FROM CONFEDERATION OF PASSENGER TRANSPORT UK – SCOTLAND**

The Confederation of Passenger Transport UK (CPT) is the trade association for the bus and coach industries. We represent the operators of local bus services that account for over 90% of the registered bus mileage in Scotland. CPT is the recognised voice of the industry in negotiations with the Scottish Government on relevant policy matters and provides operational guidance to our members to help ensure compliance with current legislation and to keep members informed of relevant future legislative changes.

How have recent spending decisions on roads maintenance affected the quality of Scotland's roads, road users, businesses, public services, and the economy?

There has been an insufficient level of spending to maintain Scotland's roads to a satisfactory standard over recent years. This sustained lack of funding has resulted in generally poor-quality roads with a considerable backlog of repairs across the country.

Road surfaces have been allowed to deteriorate to dangerous levels in some areas. The general condition of Scotland's roads is causing significant damage to the buses and coaches operating along the length and breadth of the country, with vehicles frequently meeting potholes, road erosion, and loose surfaces. In some parts of Scotland, bridge and secondary road maintenance has been delayed or halted entirely; occasionally resulting in the need for vehicles to seek alternative routes.

Where road repairs are undertaken, they are carried out at low-cost, or ineffectively, resulting in the need for further repairs to be carried out at later date.

These short notice patch repairs are often inappropriately communicated to bus and coach operators (if at all). This is in part due to the flexibility afforded to local authorities and utility companies with regards to updating the roadworks register and the flexibility also granted around start and end dates for such work. The lack of sufficient time to plan diversions and advise passengers of changes can often cause delays, increased congestion, and discourages bus use as passengers become frustrated with incorrect travel information and reduced journey reliability. Disappointingly, where road maintenance works are known and planned for, there is often poor communication with bus and coach operators. In some cases, operators do not know that works are starting until the first vehicle meets the disruption. In these instances, operators have no time to communicate diversions to passengers

and are often committed to operating along a significantly congested and delayed route.

Additionally, operators face severe penalties from the Traffic Commissioner for Scotland should they fail to operate at least 95% of all journeys on registered services no more than one minute early or five minutes late. Failure to do so may result in regulatory action such as financial sanctions or even revocation of an Operator Licence.

During periods of adverse weather, flooding due to a lack of drainage clearing, landslides and debris from wind-blown foliage significantly increase accident and vehicle damage risk.

Bus and coach operators are experiencing rises in maintenance cost as a direct result of poor road maintenance and adverse weather planning, with these costs having to be recovered from the fare box. This can often result in increased fares for passengers or a reduction/curtailment of service.

Where bus users cannot consistently rely upon reliable journey times, they will seek alternative options and switch to different modes if they can. Once the travel disruption is completed a reduced number of passengers return to the mode, further increasing the strain on the viability of routes.

If spending on roads maintenance continues at current levels, what could be the likely effects on the above groups?

Should action not be taken, Scotland's roads will almost certainly continue to fall further into disrepair. Increasingly, safety will be compromised, and a growing number of accidents and instances of vehicle damage will surely be seen.

Operators would have little choice but to make cuts to services due to rising costs of vehicle maintenance, vehicle availability and reduction in journey time reliability as a result of poorly planned and delivered roadworks.

Local communities would likely come under strain as they see reductions to services and service frequency. Where routes do operate, increased journey times should be expected due to increased congestion and delays.

How could any negative effects of reduced road spending best be addressed?

It is our view that there should be an increased and sustained investment in Scotland's roads and infrastructure. In the absence of increased funding, a new approach to road user charging could be considered, with revenues ring-fenced for reinvestment on road maintenance and road infrastructure. In addition to increased investment, a more holistic approach should be taken to address the various factors contributing to a reduction in road condition quality and journey time reliability.

Buses and coaches are adversely affected by roadworks due to service requirements, the ability to inform passengers ahead of time, and journey time expectations. Bus and coach operators should therefore be consulted at the earliest stage possible so that plans can be made, and passengers informed. Operators should be informed directly as smaller operators are often not in a position to attend consultation meetings due to the availability of staff.

The Scottish Roadworks Commissioner should monitor the suitability of the planning, consultation and coordination of any roadworks, imposing any additional measures as and where they are required.

Where closures, restrictions or diversions are unavoidable, works should be restricted to take place overnight, when the likelihood of disruption is at its lowest.

Where roadworks are carried out, they should be coordinated in such a way as to reduce the need for repeat works at a later date. Temporary methods of repair, whilst understandable, should be used sparingly with higher and more permanent standards of work favoured.

The Scottish Roadworks Commissioner should be given powers to impose financial penalties on contractors and utility companies who fail to give appropriate notice of works being undertaken and in instances of delayed start dates, late completion of roadworks or inappropriately long road closures.

Buses and coaches are in a unique position to ease congestion and delays during periods of road maintenance. During periods of sustained roadworks, car owners should be encouraged to leave their vehicles at home in favour of other modes.

Traffic Management initiatives such as priority measures for bus and coach can further help reduce congestion whilst encouraging modal shift. Where possible, bus and coach access through areas of roadworks closed to other modes would reduce the need for confusing diversions and improve journey reliability.

Roadworks should avoid clashing with major events, such as sporting events, music events or the Edinburgh Festival in order to avoid further increasing congestion, delays and travel disruption.

Is the current model of funding and delivering roads maintenance, which is split between Transport Scotland and local authorities, the most economic and efficient option?

Largely, the current delivery method for road maintenance split between Transport Scotland and local authorities is the most efficient option if appropriately funded. There are instances where trunk routes can form part of a local network and here there can be a disconnect; however, these are a small number of instances and overall, there is a logical divide between trunk and local roads.

Operators can sometimes find it difficult to understand who the best organisation is to contact where changes are required or difficulties are being experienced along a route, often resulting in increased delay. Here it is important that any issues raised are addressed quickly and efficiently by the responsible authority.

Wherever possible, Transport Scotland and Local Authorities should work more closely together, pooling resources where possible, as this would ultimately provide savings.

There is a variation of standards across the Local Authorities with some performing much better than others. The ability for Transport Scotland to both measure and standardise the condition of roads would be welcomed by the industry.

Given this, there may be merit in exploring if a national body could provide an overarching approach to the management of Scotland's roads and road infrastructure. Such a body would be able to ensure that allocated funds do not come under the same pressures that are faced by local authorities to fund other key areas (such as health or education).

We hope that the above comments will be helpful to the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee. Please do contact us should you have any questions about our comments or would like further information on any aspect of our response.