

## **RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE**

### **PRE-BUDGET/FINANCIAL SCRUTINY ON ROADS MAINTENANCE IN SCOTLAND**

#### **SUBMISSION FROM STAGECOACH UK BUS**

Stagecoach is one of the principal providers of bus and coach services in Scotland, with operations throughout Scotland. Our services utilise local and major roads in the majority of Local Authority areas, along with the trunk and motorway networks.

Through our Joint Venture with Comfort DelGro, we operate long distance services throughout Scotland through Scottish Citylink, which includes the megabus.com network.

We carry significant numbers of passengers each year.

Our principal concern is the impact of road maintenance on our bus and coach services and, primarily the impact on passengers.

The Traffic Commissioner expects operators to operate at least 95% of journeys on registered bus and coach services no more than one minute early and no more than five minutes late, the "6 minute window". This is a tighter standard than is applied to other modes of transport. Operators may face regulatory action if they fail to achieve this target without reasonable excuse, which could involve financial sanctions, warnings or even revocation of their Operators Licence. Service punctuality is monitored by Bus Users Scotland.

Bus and coach passengers rightly expect services to operate punctually, and this consistently comes through research carried out by Transport Focus.

Scottish Government is intent on reversing the decline in bus patronage that has taken place over many years, but that can only be achieved if the correct operating conditions are provided to allow the punctual operation of services.

We recognise that road maintenance is essential and, indeed, that there is a significant backlog of work in many areas.

When work is being scheduled, it is critical that the impact on bus and coach passengers is taken into account. If disruption is likely, bus and coach services must receive priority to minimise or mitigate delays. This could involve dedicated alternative routings or being allowed to maintain access to the area the works are taking place whilst other traffic is diverted away.

Where closures, lane restrictions or diversions are required, and no other mitigations are possible, the works should be restricted to take place overnight, when bus and coach patronage is lowest.

If delays are unavoidable, additional resources will be required to minimise the disruption to services, and these should be funded by the roads authority, utility provider or contractor.

We strongly believe that, to avoid inconvenience to bus and coach passengers, the roads authority, utility provider or contractor must consult with all bus and coach operators operating services on the affected roads or close to the affected roads, and be required to have agreed measures in place in advance of any works starting. The Road Works Commissioner should be required to assess and agree these measures in advance, and be able to impose penalties when the measures are not implemented or effective.

Many services operate over long distances, resulting in passengers being unaware of works taking place in parts of the route they are not using. Good communication of any disruption is critical, and the roads authority, utility provider or contractor must play a role in disseminating this information, or funding the costs incurred by operators in doing so.

Where works are due to be carried out on a section of the network, any other work likely to be required in that section must be coordinated with it to avoid repeated works.

Similarly, all works must be completed to a high standard to avoid further remedial action being required.

Those carrying out works must stick to the dates they have indicated, particularly the dates for work starting. This is particularly important where bus and coach services are liable to delays or diversions due to the works. Works should avoid clashing with key events, such as major sporting events or the Edinburgh Festival.

With the current condition of many roads in Scotland, we are facing greater wear and tear on vehicles, resulting in increased maintenance costs. This includes parts wearing prematurely due to the wear and tear from the level of potholes in many areas. This can make marginal services uneconomic, resulting in higher fares for passengers or the withdrawal of part or full services. It results in higher prices in tenders submitted to Local Authorities for supported bus services and school contracts.

Other, less highlighted, areas of concern relate to the maintenance of trees adjoining roads, which can cause significant damage to vehicles, particularly in times of wet weather, and the lack of maintenance of road drainage, resulting in increased water being retained on roads resulting in flooding. Water ingress can cause significant electrical problems over time for buses and coaches.

Some recent examples of the impact of road maintenance and road works on bus and coach services and, most importantly, passengers are contained in the appendix to this submission.

In response to the specific questions in the Call for Views:

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

As indicated above, roads maintenance has a major impact on our operation and, more importantly, on our passengers. The value of bus passengers to local economies is generally not considered, but is highlighted in extensive work by Greener Journeys.

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

We believe that current problems and impacts would be exacerbated.

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

We believe that mode shift to those forms of travel highlighted in the roads hierarchy could mitigate some of the negative effects, but this would require investment in those modes, along with car restraint measures, to enable motorists to have a choice ("carrot and stick").

**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?**

In theory this should work, but the variability of maintenance standards achieved by local authorities is great, indicating that some measure and regulation of road condition is required.

I hope the above comments will be helpful to the REC Committee. Please contact me if you require clarification of any point.

Robert Andrew  
Regional Director – Scotland and Wales

**Appendix:**

Recent examples of the impact of road maintenance and road works on bus and coach services and, most importantly, passengers:

Perth: Barrack Street at the junction with Atholl Street. Road works and closures commenced one week after school summer holidays, to last for a period of ten weeks causing a significant diversion on one of the main arterial routes out of Perth City Centre. This is impacting on city services which offer frequencies of up to every 12 minutes (of which we have already had to add additional running time into to account for 'everyday' congestion) but of greater impact is the delay caused to services linking Perth to rural communities along the A9 corridor north of Perth such as Stanley, Bankfoot and Aberfeldy, which are already subject to disruption on the trunk road network due to the dualing process north of Inveralmond Roundabout. This follows on from a programme of closures around the Atholl Street area of the city centre over the past year which have frequently seen bus services not only diverted but also unable to serve the main terminal point within the city centre (Mill Street) and on occasions leave the only suitable point for inbound passengers to the city centre some 500m away from the normal terminal. Each occasion has caused significant disruption to bus passengers and to service provision. The longer term impact of disruption and increased journey times is notable in the ongoing decline in bus patronage in this area and this in the longer term calls into question the viability of some services in their current format. The local authority in this instance does not include bus operators in road work planning meetings and as a result it is not uncommon for more than one set of major works to be live on a route at any given time.

Fife: A915 Largo Road in Leven. A 220 metre section of this road was closed for three consecutive weekends in early 2019. This is the main arterial road into the East Neuk of Fife and sees three separate hourly bus routes serve the road and then differing areas of the East Neuk and onwards to St Andrews. The diversion was 11.3km and resulted in delays of over 40 minutes to bus services in the East Neuk villages. One service had to be diverted completely away from the East Neuk to ensure delays to customers on the Leven to Edinburgh section of route were kept to an absolute minimum but this left some parts of the East Neuk without a service on these weekends. Consideration was given to home owners along the closed section of route but not to bus service provision or to the passengers impacted by this closure.

Dundee: Trades Lane. In mid 2018 a one way closure was scheduled to be introduced on Trades Lane at its junction with Seagate (20 metres in length). This section of road is the access point to Dundee bus station for services arriving from the east and north. Without warning the road was fully closed and remains closed today over twelve months later. This immediately meant that our services could not easily access the bus station. The diversion is 750 metres around already busy city centre roads. This has

introduced numerous delays to the bus services that were diverted but has also increased the number of vehicle movements along Seagate, an area that already has poor air quality. The delays created in this unannounced closure created reliability issues in particular to service 39 which links Arbroath with Dundee, Ninewells Hospital, villages in the Carse of Gowrie, Perth and Perth Royal Infirmary. This disruption was exacerbated by road works taking place along the line of route within Arbroath (Angus) and at times within Perth city centre. The impact of numerous uncoordinated road works has left service users, particularly in the Carse where other services are not available, with a poorer level of service that we would seek to provide.

Ayrshire: Recently on the service 11 corridor (Kilmarnock – Irvine – Ardrossan) there were six sets of temporary traffic lights at the same time. There were sets at the South Beach roundabout, at Auchenharvie, at the Wreckgates roundabout in Stevenston, at Kilwinning, at Springside and in Crosshouse. These road works combined to cause regular delays of up to 25 minutes on the 11 service. At the same time as the above there were road works in Fairlie, West Kilbride & Grangemuir Road in Prestwick meaning Service 585 (Ayr – Irvine – Largs – Greenock) was also subject to substantial delays of up to 40 minutes in some cases. Road closures on the A736 in recent weeks have resulted in delays to service X44 (Ardrossan – Irvine – Glasgow). There were two closures on at the same time, both with a lengthy detour (Torranyard and Lugton to Uplawmoor).