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Sunday 25 October 2020

Michael Matheson MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure & Connectivity
The Scottish Government
St. Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

CC: Cllr Susan Aitken, Leader of Glasgow City Council
CC: Edward Mountain MSP, Convenor of the REC Committee
CC: Cllr Martin Bartos, Chair of Strathclyde Partnership for Transport

Dear Michael Matheson,

I'm writing on behalf of [Get Glasgow Moving](http://www.getglasgowmoving.org), a volunteer-run campaign founded in 2016 to demand better public transport for everyone in our region. We now have [more than 11,000 supporters](#) across Greater Glasgow.

We met you at the Scottish Parliament on 24 January 2019 when we were lobbying for amendments to the Transport Bill to give all local authorities/regional transport authorities in Scotland the powers to set up their own publicly-owned bus companies to deliver affordable and reliable services like Edinburgh's Lothian Buses.

We [submitted our petition](#) (then signed by 10,184 people) to the REC Committee who were scrutinising the Bill and were very pleased when these amendments passed at Stage 2. It is abundantly clear to passengers throughout Greater Glasgow – who have had their essential bus routes cut or who struggle to pay extortionate fares – that de-regulation has failed (for example: a single on First Glasgow now costs £2.50, whilst a single on Lothian Buses is just £1.80). Research by Transport for Quality of Life [clearly shows](#) that the only way to deliver the world-class, fully-integrated and affordable public transport that we need, is with **public control over the whole network**. This will not only help

provide a much better service, but it will also save money in the long-term. The current system in which Transport Scotland centrally hands out substantial public subsidies to private bus companies – with no local/regional control over routes or fares – has proven to be a completely inefficient use of public money.

While we appreciate the impact of Covid, we are *extremely concerned* about the **significant delay** in enacting the new powers available in the Transport Act 2019, and about the apparent **absence of any financial support or incentive** to enable local authorities/regional transport authorities to fully investigate and utilise all the powers now available to them for re-regulation ('franchising') and publicly-owned buses.

When the Transport Bill was introduced in 2018, [Transport Scotland claimed](#) they wanted to "provide local authorities with a **viable and flexible set of options** to help ensure that bus services in their area meet local users' needs, ensuring that there are sustainable bus networks across Scotland." And when the Bill became the Act in 2019, [you yourself said](#): "Measures to **give local authorities options** to improve bus services and help reverse the decline in passenger numbers... will now go on to become law."

Yet, in reality, it appears these "options" are already being closed down. This is because of the significant delay in issuing guidance on the new powers and the fact that only one of them – Bus Service Improvement Partnerships (BSIPs) – the 'partnership' option most akin to the status quo and therefore the one most favoured by the private bus companies – appears to have any central government funding attached.

This is very bad news and bad timing for Glasgow. As our City Council are currently holding a public consultation on the new Local Transport Strategy, which closes on 30 October 2020. This Strategy will determine the direction of our city's transport system until 2030 – a crucial ten years in which we strive to decarbonise the whole transport system to meet our city's ambitious net-zero carbon target. This will require an unprecedented level of modal shift in a very short space of time, which can only be delivered with a radical overhaul of the whole public transport network. It is therefore essential that our Local Transport Strategy commits to fully investigating and utilising the new powers for re-regulation ('franchising') and publicly-owned buses that will be necessary to deliver this step-change.

In response to Get Glasgow Moving's demands, the [SNP's 2017 Manifesto](#), the new Council administration's [Strategic Plan](#) (priority 57) and the 2019 [Climate Emergency Working Group](#) (recommendations 17 and 19) had each recommended using 'franchising' powers and/or re-municipalising bus services. Yet despite these previous commitments (and their ongoing consultation), Glasgow City Council's new [Climate Emergency Implementation Plan](#) published on 6 October 2020 outright rejects them in favour of "ongoing work on Bus Service Improvement Partnerships, as required by the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 and Transport Scotland funding programmes."

If Glasgow City Council are already being forced by Transport Scotland's funding programmes to develop BSIPs, then not only does it make their entire public consultation a sham (acting counter to the STAG process), but it also completely undermines the aims of the Transport Act to "give local authorities options".

We need you – our Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure & Connectivity – to urgently intervene. You must ensure that local authorities/regional transport authorities are urgently provided with guidance on how new powers for 'franchising' and publicly-owned buses can be utilised, and you must make provision within the Scottish Budget for the additional funding they require to undertake this vital work.

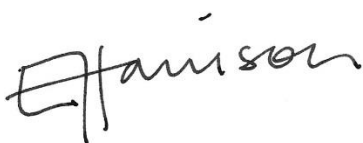
In England, [Manchester](#) and [Liverpool](#) have both been supported to carry out extensive investigations into all the powers available to them under their Bus Services Act 2017. Both cities have concluded that only re-regulating their entire bus networks through region-wide franchising frameworks will deliver the comprehensive, fully-integrated and affordable networks their regions need. South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire also look set to follow suit. Glasgow already lags far behind Manchester and Liverpool on many measures [well-documented](#) by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health's research into 'the Glasgow effect'. If our city is forced against our will into the BSIPs model, then we will fall even further behind. As Transport for Quality of Life [clearly show](#):

"No partnership model – no matter how it is framed – can achieve the transformative change that is needed: it cannot enable a local authority to plan and deliver a comprehensive area-wide bus network; cannot enable creation of a single easy-to-understand fares structure; cannot allow timetables and services to be coordinated; cannot guarantee network stability and easy-to-find comprehensive information; and cannot enable costs of concessionary fares payments to be brought under control."

Unless you act quickly and decisively to address the issues we have raised above, Glasgow will miss this **once in a decade opportunity** to deliver a Local Transport Strategy that will truly "meet local users' needs", "reverse the decline in passenger numbers" and succeed in the vital challenge of decarbonising our transport system by 2030.

We look forward to your timely response.

Yours sincerely,



Ellie Harrison
Chair, Get Glasgow Moving