



Strathclyde Partnership for Transport
Framework for Supporting Local Bus Services

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Context

- a) The Transport Act 1985 set the framework for the current UK local bus market, which is commercial everywhere except London, and is supplemented by additional subsidy for bus services via Bus Service Operators Grant and funding for the National Concessionary Travel Scheme which provides free bus travel on local bus services for National Entitlement Cardholders in Scotland.
- b) The 1985 Act also made various provisions for powers for transport authorities such as SPT, enabling them to act to improve the bus market in order to meet their policies, including the ability to subsidise local bus services. Despite this legislative power to subsidise services, an authority is under no obligation to do so.
- c) The responsibility for the provision of bus services lies with the commercial bus market. Prior to any request to SPT for supported bus service provision, it is expected that an approach has been made by promoters to commercial bus operator(s).
- d) SPT, by definition, shall be considered as the bus operator of last resort. SPT will only consider filling gaps in the network once satisfied that all options for providing services on a commercial have been fully explored and exhausted.
- e) SPT works within limited budgets to provide supported bus services. In light of these growing financial cost pressures alongside policy objectives, a clear and objective, needs-based criteria with which to assess supported bus service requests is to be used.
- f) SPT officers will review the Framework on a regular basis and update accordingly to reflect current budgets and circumstances.
- g) The Framework shall be updated as required to take account of changes in local [council] or national policy.
- h) The application of the Framework as set out in this document applies only to supported local bus service provision and does **not** apply to other forms of SPT bus provision including Demand Responsive Transport (MyBus) or Community Transport services, which need to be assessed separately.
- i) The application of the Framework, as set out in this document, is effective from **August 2021** and will not impact current contracted services.

Introduction

I. Purpose

This Framework is used by Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) in decision-making steps with regard to requests for supported bus services. The purpose of this Framework is to provide a consistent and transparent template to support any final recommendations made by SPT.

The Framework aligns with SPT's policy objectives as set out in its Regional Transport Strategy (RTS). It also aligns with guideline standards used elsewhere in the UK. The policies of SPT are set by its Partnership Board through the RTS.

In order to meet SPT's policy objectives, the Framework shall apply three simple metrics for assessing the need for supported bus service provision. These are defined as:

- Accessibility – Ability to access essential services.
- Demand – Number of people using the service.
- Subsidy – Cost per passenger threshold.

II. Wider Duties

In determining service requirements, due consideration will be given to the needs of people with protected characteristics and people facing socio-economic disadvantage. Where impacts are considered significant e.g. where significant increased travel cost and/or interchange would be introduced or where the nature of a service change is likely to result in the total or near total loss of services for a particular community, including rural & island communities, then an initial Equality Impact Screening shall be undertaken followed by a full Equality Impact Assessment if required. An Impact Assessment process will take into account the socio-economic impact on a community or individuals.

UK and Scottish Government policies relevant to consideration of this Framework include:

- the UK Equality Act 2010;
- the Fairer Scotland Duty 2018;
- the Islands (Scotland) Act 2019; and
- The Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019.

Consideration will be given to the carbon impacts of decisions about service levels to ensure that any measures introduced to secure access for people and communities minimises environmental impacts.

III. Decision-making Process

This document is to be used to guide SPT in the decision-making stages of supported bus service requests. Recommendations can however be influenced by other factors including budgets, market failure or wider external impacts on the bus network as a whole. It is therefore incumbent upon SPT officers to consider wider aspects surrounding service requests using professional judgment and knowledge of the existing transport network and expertise to inform recommendations.

SPT officers reserve the right to make any final recommendations that are to be taken forward regarding supported bus service requests. However, these final recommendations are subject to approval by SPT's Operations Committee and ratification by SPT's Partnership Board.

Accessibility

1. User Groups - Access to opportunities

Supported bus service provision will only be considered where the withdrawal of, or reduction of a commercial service will adversely impact accessibility to and from the following key essential trip destinations only:

- Essential Services (healthcare, welfare facilities, shopping)
- Further education and major training establishments
- Main areas of employment

2. Access to existing transport services

2.1. Where a commercial bus service is withdrawn or substantially curtailed, this Framework will be applied in an effort to ensure that residents and communities are within an approximate distance of no more than 800m walking distance of an alternative bus service or within approximately 1km walking distance of a rail service.

2.2. It may not be financially or operationally viable to provide a supported service in certain areas that meet distances prescribed above, such as in rural areas, where distances required to access existing commercial bus services are often further than in urban areas.

2.3. Local catchment population (potential for demand) will be considered as part of any request for a supported bus service.

2.4. Any assessment will take account of local circumstances including demographic and topographical circumstances.

3. Socio-economic Factors

3.1. The Framework will take account of local socio-economic circumstances. In this regard, particular consideration will be given to the impact of a service withdrawal or service change(s) in areas of greater social need.

3.2. The assessment of any supported service request will refer to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation - the Scottish Government's official tool, to identify areas of deprivation impacted by a service change or withdrawal. SIMD identifies small area concentrations of deprivation across all of Scotland in a consistent way.

3.3. The Framework will give particular regard to supported service requests concerning areas defined as being a 20% most deprived SIMD datazone.

4. Urban/Rural Classification

The Framework will take account of urban and rural area distinctions. This may influence recommendations including acceptable walk-in catchment, subsidy levels, service demand and frequency.

5. Urban and rural classifications are based on Scottish Government’s 2-Fold Urban Rural Classification (2016).

6. **Interchange**

6.1. SPT will not set out to replace services on a like-for-like basis; therefore, in order to maintain reasonable public transport links, any requests for supported bus services will take account of all available existing services where interchange would be viable.

6.2. Decisions around interchange will take into consideration local socio-economic factors.

Subsidy & Cost

7. **Subsidy Level**

7.1. A maximum subsidy level will be applied in order to achieve best value to the public purse. The maximum subsidy level will be adjusted annually (RPI linked) or adjusted in line with SPT budgets (see **Appendix A** for maximum subsidy levels).

7.2. Where costs exceed the target maximum subsidy, further examination and scrutiny will be undertaken prior to any final recommendation regarding supported service provision.

7.3. Where there is any uncertainty regarding sustainability of services in the longer-term (either through lack of patronage or that the service becomes commercially viable), SPT may consider a short-term solution in order to test the potential market.

7.4. Subsidy levels, along with service usage data and costs, will be reviewed on a regular basis in order to help manage budgets reviewed on an annual basis to ensure value for money is maintained and will be used in the evaluation of tenders in order to calculate the estimated net cost of a new service.

Demand

8. **Service Use**

8.1. Passenger data will be used to assess the performance of services and will inform decisions on whether or not to support a new service or to continue with or withdraw any existing supported service. The following passenger demand levels (per bus journey) will be used:

	6 passengers or fewer per bus journey	7-12 passengers per bus journey	13-20 passengers per bus journey	21 or more passengers per bus journey
Urban	A service will not be provided	Review service arrangements	Continued subsidy	Service provided without subsidy

SIMD	Review service arrangements	Continued subsidy	Continued subsidy	Review service arrangements
Rural	Review service arrangements	Continued subsidy	Continued subsidy	Review service arrangements

8.2. Where there are issues of deprivation, rurality or a lack of commercial urban service, these thresholds will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Service Frequency

9. Maximum Service Frequency

- 9.1. Supported bus service provision will typically be set at a maximum of one bus per hour.
- 9.2. An amended frequency may be considered where it is felt that it would more closely align with actual or predicted passenger use (such as on weekends, evenings or bank/public holidays); would prove to be best achievable in terms operational efficiency; or would achieve maximum subsidy levels. Operation of a service on the days identified above will be subject to consideration by SPT.

Terms and Conditions – General Exclusions

10. Terms and Conditions

- 10.1. As noted in section 1, supported bus service provision will only be considered where the withdrawal of, or reduction of a commercial service will adversely impact accessibility in respect of access to essential services, further education, major training establishments and main areas of employment. However, it is important to note that a supported bus service will not be secured **solely** to meet requirement of people travelling to or from the following:
- Schools (unless commissioned on behalf of respective Councils to support Home to School Transport provision)
 - Places of worship
 - Places of entertainment or recreation
 - Sports events
 - Festivals
 - Ad hoc events or activities
- 10.2. It is to be reasonably expected that the cost of public transport provision requirements specifically to serve new development sites be met by developer contributions (S75) and/or other private & commercial funding streams. This Framework will not consider supported bus service provision in such instances.

- 10.3. A supported bus service will not be secured to serve areas impacted by local road network restrictions such as where temporary road works are in place and commercial bus service has been removed or temporarily re-routed as a result.
- 10.4. SPT will not provide a supported bus service in areas where the road network precludes reasonable access to public service vehicles.
- 10.5. SPT may choose to review current supported bus service arrangements if it is felt that it is affecting the viability of, or extracting passengers from, existing commercial bus services.

Appendix A: Maximum Subsidy Levels

Subsidised local services will aim for a target maximum subsidy per passenger of:

Area Designation	Target Maximum Subsidy Per Passenger
Urban	£2.00
SIMD	£3.50
Rural	£4.50

