



Councillor Lawrence Fitzpatrick
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Our Reference: 202400404717

12 April 2024

Dear Councillor Lawrence Fitzpatrick,

Thank you for your letter of 12 March 2024 to Fiona Hyslop MSP, now Cabinet Secretary for Transport, regarding the pausing of Bus Partnership Fund (BPF) in 2024-25. As bus now falls within Jim Fairlie MSP's portfolio as Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity, I have been asked to reply on his behalf.

I understand your disappointment regarding the budgetary position. Following the UK Autumn Statement delivering the worst-case scenario for Scotland and a nearly 10% real-terms cut in our capital budget from the UK Government, the Scottish Government had to take difficult decisions to deliver balanced and sustainable spending plans for the 2024-25 financial year. As such, regrettably, the Bus Partnership Fund has been paused for 2024-25.

We have provided £26.9 million of funding for bus priority through the BPF to date, including £3.08 million to the Edinburgh City Region Partnership (which includes the City of Edinburgh, East Lothian, West Lothian, Midlothian, Scottish Borders, Fife and Falkirk Councils), £1.8 million to Fife Bus Partnership, £480,000 to the Midlothian Bus Alliance and £226,000 to the West Lothian Alliance. This is in addition to the £20 million of Scottish Government funding for public transport improvements in West Edinburgh through the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal.

In Edinburgh, this funded a study to identify and develop bus priority measures on eight cross city corridors and making a number of temporary measures put in during the pandemic through the Bus Priority Rapid Deployment Fund permanent. A number of these have been completed with other measures going through the statutory processes. This also funded the implementation of bus priority at traffic signals to help buses get through signals more quickly, partial funding for design and implementation of a new A90 Queue Management System and a bus lane enforcement camera on the A70 Gillespie crossroads.

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Following the announcement of the pause, Fund spend proceeded as planned for the remainder of 2023-24, to complete the delivery of the bus infrastructure underway for the benefit of passengers and operators and to conclude business case work planned that could inform future investment. We are grateful to your officers for their on-going work in that regard.

Regarding your request for assurance on the Fund's return in 2025-26 and recognising the challenges with single year award funding, whilst the Bus Partnership Fund will be paused for 2024-25, future funding opportunities and approaches require to be considered as part of annual budget setting processes and prioritisation exercises.

In terms of Transport Scotland resources in the processing of any potential applications in future, this will be considered in line with the above budget setting processes. The Transport Scotland Bus Partnership Team will necessarily be redeployed to deliver the priorities of Scottish Government, however as an Agency, Transport Scotland has previously offered advice on appraisals and other work where this has been requested by Councils and others, and will continue to do so where it is in line with Ministerial priorities.

Indeed, Transport Scotland continue to offer advice and support in relation to the West Edinburgh Transport Infrastructure Improvement Programme (WETIP) Outline Business Case. Transport Scotland are in the process of reviewing the draft version and currently await a technical addendum which was requested to provide more detail on the performance of some packages of measures. The £20 million investment to support public transport improvements in the A8/A89 corridor, that the Scottish Government has made through the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal, continues to be an opportunity for the City of Edinburgh Council to work collaboratively with West Lothian Council and other partners to showcase the benefits of bus priority and make progress on delivery.

As indicated at the Committee meeting on 01 March 2024, this pausing of BPF presents an opportunity to recast bus priority work within a longer term integrated public transport vision. Furthermore, our firm commitment to the bus sector continues with almost £430 million in funding for concessionary travel and bus services planned for 2024-25 across Scotland. This will see funding of almost £50 million to help ensure our bus operators can continue to provide access to affordable transport, and £6 million to continue our support for the Community Bus Fund. Our funding supports bus operators to run an estimated 256 million bus kilometres annually throughout Scotland.

Thank you for your dedication to advancing sustainable transportation solutions, and I look forward to our continued collaboration in driving positive change for the Edinburgh and South East Scotland region.

Yours sincerely

Safiat Macfoy
TS : TS BAAT, Bus Regulatory and Funding Policy Unit

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