



TYNE AND WEAR

Public Transport Users Group

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Response to Transport Select Committee re: Bus Services Bill

Dear Select Committee Members,

We are a public transport users group representing sixteen other community groups across Tyne & Wear, with the objectives of improving all forms of public transport through greater integration between the services provided. Our management committee has asked me to respond to your request for our views on the current 'Bus Services Bill' as it passes through Parliament. May I express my committee's thanks for giving us this opportunity to share our views with your members.

We have supported/campaigned with the councils' or more precisely, the transport authorities in Tyne and Wear, (previously the ITA and now North East Combined Authority. NECA), in their decision to seek a more integrated public transport network for the region; not just for buses, but rail, and the Tyne and Wear Metro as well.

We come from a unique position in Tyne Wear having been part of the only Quality Contract Scheme process and in this respect, we were very disappointed with the decision of the Traffic Commissioners who in effect, decided that the interests i.e. profits of the private bus operators outweighed the advantages the travelling public would have gained from the introduction of a Quality Contract Scheme. Namely, more control through regulation of routes, timetables and fares and not least, in the 8-20% plus increased revenue to local councils' that is currently lost in the form of profits to shareholder of these corporations. We recount this because we believe this is still relevant when we consider current legislation with regard to local bus services.

OVERVIEW

We do welcome the opportunity the Bill might give to local authorities, to introduce franchising contracts with the private bus operators, as this could improve the bus services in our region by giving NECA's representative organisation, NEXUS, the right to decide routes, fares and timetables.

However, our main objections are that the Bill in its current form, effectively leaves the situation much as it is; where private operators will still maintain high profit levels for their shareholders and that means high fares and a poorer service for the passengers who both use and rely upon bus services.

On behalf of the Tyne and Wear Public Transport Users Group, and in line with our Management Committee, I want to express some of the reservations we have with regards to the content of this Bill, in particular Clause 21, which will prevent any local authority from establishing their own bus Company. We want to see a fully integrated public transport service in Tyne and Wear. We see the municipalisation ie public ownership of buses, as a vital option so that in future any Transport Authority in England and Wales, may have that right, not just to franchise, but to own and control its own bus service.

You have asked for specific responses to the following points.

1 the need for the Bill

2 whether the Bill addresses the correct issues

OUR RESPONSE TO THESE TWO QUESTIONS

There is certainly a need for new legislation with regard to all public transport and in particular, bus services; given that the greater majority of UK public transport users rely upon these. However, the current bill does not address the need for integration that we see across most of Europe.

3 how Advanced Quality Partnerships and Enhanced Partnerships are likely to contribute to the Government's aims of improving services for passengers and enabling a successful commercial sector

4 the appropriateness of limiting the automatic right to introduce franchising to combined authorities with elected mayors

5 the likely effect of franchising on small and medium operators.

OUR RESPONSE TO THESE THREE QUESTIONS

The AQP's and EP's are in effect, window dressing as they do not change the voluntary nature of the present contractual arrangements; where private operators can cancel and withdraw if their profits are threatened. We do not believe you can run a quality public service on that basis. Franchising is a step in the right direction but here again, the current bill allows for central government and their representatives to limit the agreements. Recent changes may also effect the introduction of 'devolution' and elected mayors.

6 the effectiveness of the measures relating to open data and how these could improve the accessibility of bus transport.

OUR RESPONSE

We also welcome measures to open up private companies' data i.e. their profits as this will, we hope, lead to more honest working agreements. We do not want to see bus companies go out of business, nor are we opposed to them making a reasonable profit; one which is not in the 18 to 20% range.

7 *the basis for a prohibition on new municipal bus companies
delivering bus services, particularly in non-franchised areas*

OUR RESPONSE Prohibiting new municipal bus companies is both undemocratic and a backward step in our view and, thankfully, there is already a campaign to have clause 21 removed from the current bill.

8 *measures in the Bill relating to ticketing schemes and new
technologies.*

OUR RESPONSE : We welcome measures that will link new technologies with ticketing as this should increase ridership.

Paul Baker

Secretary Tyne & Wear Public Transport Users Group END