

Consultation on changes to bus registration in Scotland



RESPONDENT INFORMATION FORM

Please Note this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately

1. Name/Organisation

Organisation Name

Aberdeenshire Council

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3. Permissions - I am responding as...

Individual / Group/Organisation

Please tick as appropriate

(a) Do you agree to your response being made available to the public (in Scottish Government library and/or on the Transport Scotland web site)?

Please tick as appropriate Yes No

(b) Where confidentiality is not requested, we will make your responses available to the public on the following basis

Please tick **ONE** of the following boxes

Yes, make my response, name and address all available

or

Yes, make my response available, but not my name and address

or

Yes, make my response and name available, but not my address

(c) The name and address of your organisation **will be** made available to the public (in the Scottish Government library and/or on the Transport Scotland web site).

Are you content for your **response** to be made available?

Please tick as appropriate Yes No

(d) We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Transport Scotland to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

Please tick as appropriate

Yes

No

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Question 1: do you agree with the proposal to extend the pre-registration notice period from 14 days to 28 days ?

Yes No

The current 14 days notification period can be very tight when a high number/volume of service registration documents is received as part of an extensive review of an operator's network. In recent years such major corridor/network revisions have become more frequent and commonplace. Given the tight 14 day timescale it is not unusual for problems to be identified by the operator or Transport Authority after the 14 day period and the registration has been lodged with the Scottish Traffic Commissioner, necessitating a request for a short notice registration change.

An extension of the notification period to 28 days would allow more rigorous consideration of registration documents when these are received 'in bulk' to the benefit of transport authorities, operators and most importantly the travelling public.

Such a benefit would not however be fully realised if the overall registration period remains at 70 days.

Question 2: Do you agree with the proposal to replace the duty to inform the relevant authorities before making an application for registration with a duty to consult with the relevant authorities?

Yes No

Aberdeenshire Council have excellent partnership arrangements with Stagecoach Bluebird and other local operators who currently consult with the authority over new and revised services.

Engagement with bus users and local communities is undertaken through our Area Bus Forums which meet on a six-monthly basis in each of the authorities six administrative Areas. These Area Bus Forums, that are convened by the Council are fully supported by local operators and provide an avenue for consultation on all local bus matters including supported and commercial bus service provision. Frequent operational meetings are also held with Stagecoach Bluebird, the principal commercial operator in Aberdeenshire, and the authority is given pre-warning of any up and coming commercial service revisions along with the opportunity to feedback comments to the operator.

It is considered that mandatory consultation, involving an expectation of engagement with user representatives, within a short 14 or 28 day time limited period would be less effective than the existing avenues involving comprehensive voluntary consultation prior to the commencement of the registration process. Also any duty to consult rather than simply notify could result in a significant added burden to both operators and the transport authority when there is little time to make substantive amendment to registration proposals and therefore engender little added benefit over our current consultative mechanisms.

Question 3: Do you agree that relevant authorities should be encouraged through guidance to draw potential concerns about new registrations to the attention of the traffic Commissioner for Scotland and/or Transport Scotland?

Yes No

There is already the opportunity for Transport Authorities to raise concerns with the Scottish Traffic Commissioner if it is considered that a registration is in breach of the legislation/regulations. To provide other comments on registrations to the Scottish Traffic Commissioner and/or Transport Scotland, such as concerns over levels of service provision or timing of services, would be of little benefit if neither recipient have the legislative power to address the concerns raised. Such actions could also prove counterproductive and undermine partnership working arrangements.

Question 4a: Do you agree with the proposal to reduce the period of registration from 56 days to 42 days? What difficulties (if any) do you consider such a change might present and how might these be addressed?

Yes No

As discussed above when large numbers of registration documents are received the existing 14 + 56 day statutory period can prove challenging to Transport Authorities in: determining whether or not responsive action in the form of additional supported journeys/services is required; procuring these journeys/services; and, amending bus service databases which feed both the authority's passenger information systems (e.g. associated with the production of bus stop publicity displays and dissemination of real time passenger information systems) and the Traveline Scotland national timetable database.

Given that timetables and/or routes can be significantly amended during the

'notification period' in response to dialogue between operators and the transport authority over the proposed service provision, coupled with the identification of errors in registration documents during this period, it is not prudent to update bus service databases until the registration has been lodged with the Scottish Traffic Commissioner. It is also desirable to commence timetable production and export service data to Traveline Scotland at least 21 days in advance of the service change. A reduction in the period of the registration from 56 to 42 days would therefore reduce the time available for processing the relevant data from 35 to 21 days, 40% less time.

Aberdeenshire Council in partnership with First Aberdeen, Stagecoach Bluebird, Aberdeen City Council and the Moray Council, produces bus stop timetable displays for 2944 bus stop displays across north-east Scotland. Any significant reduction in the time available to do so, such as that proposed, would significantly erode/undermine our ability to produce local timetable information as well as export the relevant service information to Traveline Scotland.

As the majority of the service registrations received by Aberdeenshire Council are already in EBSR format, these difficulties could only be addressed by incurring additional staffing costs at a time of public sector funding constraints

Question 4b: An alternative option would be to reduce the registration period from 56 days to 42 days only where Electronic Bus Service Registration (EBSR) is used. Do you agree with this?

Yes No

Whilst Electronic Bus Service Registrations are beneficial in terms of the input of information into bus service databases, the proposal presupposes that EBSR registrations are of high data quality. Local experience suggests that this is not necessarily the case.

This is particularly prevalent when services are 'split' across multiple registrations to avoid being subject to EU driving regulations which are more onerous than Domestic driving regulations. EBSR files submitted in this manner require as much, if not more, resource to process as traditional paper registrations.

Question 5: Do you agree that we should require operators to detail within registered hourly frequency bands any services that are registered as frequent services?

Yes No

There are currently no services within Aberdeenshire that are registered as frequent services.

As recommended by the Competition Commission, legislation should be amended to preclude the opportunity for operators to increase frequencies immediately and with no recourse to the Scottish Traffic Commissioner, in response to a new competitive service.

Question 6: Do you agree that if the proposed changes set out above are adopted, they will improve the bus registration process in Scotland ?

Yes No

To reduce the period between lodging a registration with the Scottish Traffic Commissioner and the date of implementation from 56 to 42 days, as was formerly the case, would be a retrograde step with potentially significant detrimental effect on transport authorities ability to respond to service changes, procure replacement journeys/services in order to maintain an effective local bus network and inform the public either directly or through Traveline Scotland.

The proposal to replace the 14 day notification period with a statutory consultation period would also place a greater burden upon Transport Authorities (and operators) in terms of staffing resources at a time when Authorities are under severe financial constraints but is unlikely to provide more effective public engagement over bus service provision than that afforded by the consultation opportunities which are already available to Authorities.

Question 7: It is possible that much of what is proposed above could be achieved through Guidance and/or a Code of Conduct to facilitate engagement between operators and relevant authorities rather than changes to the legislation. Do you have any views on this?

Yes No

If the Scottish Government wishes to proceed with the proposals set out in the consultation document, where possible it would be preferable for these to be progressed through non-mandatory guidance rather than regulation/legislation. This approach would provide transport authorities and operators with more flexibility to adapt registration processes and

procedures to the benefit of local situations. Notwithstanding this point, if alternative registration timescales are to be made available, it must be clear and unequivocal to which timescale/period any operator must adhere.