

Bus fares in my area are too high. Can Transport Scotland make the bus company lower them?

Bus fares are a matter for individual operators who use their own commercial judgement as to the fare structure to be applied, taking into account the level of patronage, in order to provide a viable service. Transport Scotland provides an annual subsidy of £66.5 million to the bus industry, the aim of which is to keep fares at affordable levels and enable bus operators to run services that might not otherwise be commercially viable. This substantial subsidy, Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG), recognises the public service aspect of buses.

What is Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG)?

The aim of BSOG is principally to benefit passengers. It does this by helping operators to keep their fares down and enabling operators to run services that might not otherwise be commercially viable thus contributing to the maintenance of the overall bus network. It also contributes to the operation of Community Transport organisations allowing people who cannot make use of conventional bus services to access local services.

There is no bus services where/when I want to go. Can Transport Scotland ensure that this service is provided?

The majority of services in Scotland are operated on a commercial basis by private bus companies. Provided that an operator registers a service with the Office of the Traffic Commissioner they can operate any route they wish to any timetable. Local authorities can provide subsidy for services that are not provided on a commercial basis but this is entirely a matter for the local authority.

My local transport authority won't subsidise the bus service I want to use. Can Transport Scotland provide the subsidy?

No. Transport Scotland does not have the power to directly subsidise bus services. We do, though, provide funding to local authorities for this purpose. It is the responsibility of each local authority to allocate the total financial resources available to it on the basis of local needs and priorities. However, the decision to subsidise services is solely a matter for local authorities and the Transport Scotland has no power to intervene.

The bus service is not running on time, who can I report this to?

It is unacceptable for bus services to not run to their registered timetables.

The Traffic Commissioner for the Scottish Traffic Area, Ms Joan Aitken, is the licensing authority for the bus and coach industry in Scotland and applies the regulatory regime. Operators are legally required to register their local services with the Commissioner and to run these services to the registered timetable. The Commissioner has powers to impose a range of sanctions on failing operators. Service concerns can be referred to Ms Aitken at: Office of the Traffic Commissioner, The Stamp Office, 10 Waterloo Place, Edinburgh, EH1 3EG (tel 0131 200 4964).

The bus keeps breaking down, who can I report this to?

The Traffic Commissioner for the Scottish Traffic Area, Ms Joan Aitken, is the licensing authority for the bus and coach industry in Scotland and applies the regulatory regime. Bus operators are legally obliged to keep their vehicles in a roadworthy condition. Operators who fail to maintain their vehicles to an acceptable standard may have their operator's licence curtailed or revoked by the Traffic Commissioner. Complaints about buses which are perceived to be in an unfit condition in any respect should be referred to Ms Aitken at: Office of the Traffic Commissioner, The Stamp Office, 10 Waterloo Place, Edinburgh, EH1 3EG (tel 0131 200 4964).

Do all buses have to be wheelchair accessible?

Disability legislation is reserved to the UK Parliament.

The timetable by which buses must be fully accessible is set out in the Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations (PSVAR) 2000. All new buses have had to be fully accessible since 31 December 2000. All other single decker buses must be fully accessible by 1 January 2016 at the latest, all double decker buses by 1 January 2017 at the latest and all coaches by 1 January 2020. Until then, fleet renewal and deployment is a discretionary operational matter for individual bus operators. The Scottish Government is committed to encouraging bus operators to meet these regulations within the timetable.

The timetable has been agreed with the transport industry and the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (the Department for Transport's statutory advisers on the transport needs of disabled people). The timescales set by the Regulations are a compromise between the need to make vehicles accessible and the economics of replacing current fleets.

Phased implementation recognises that many existing vehicles cannot be modified to meet the requirements nor is it cost effective to do so. The timetable allows such vehicles to continue in service for a period representing the end of their economic life.

Enquiries in relation to these regulations should be directed to the Department for Transport, the responsible UK department, who can be contacted at Department for Transport, Great Minster House, 76 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DR (tel 0300 330 3000, e-mail FAX9643@dft.gsi.gov.uk).

Do other passengers have to make way for wheelchair users?

New duties for bus drivers with regard to wheelchair users were introduced on 1 October 2002 as part of the Public Service Vehicles (Conduct of Drivers, Inspectors, Conductors and Passengers) (Amendment) Regulations 2002. In their guidance to bus and coach staff on these regulations the Department for Transport state that:

"Where other passengers are occupying the wheelchair space you should ask them to move to allow a wheelchair user to board. You do not have to let the wheelchair user on if the carrying capacity - seated or standing - would then be exceeded. Other passengers on the bus aren't obliged to move and you're not expected to make them."

Will Transport Scotland re-regulate the bus industry?

At present there are no plans to re-regulate the bus industry in Scotland. The Transport (Scotland) Act 2001 provides a framework which allows local transport authorities to enhance the provision of local bus services. The Act provides a toolkit of options including Quality Partnerships, Quality Contracts, provision of information about local bus services and joint ticketing schemes. The Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 provides local authorities in the Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) area with concurrent powers to introduce Quality Partnerships and Quality Contracts.

We have no plans at present to make changes to the regulatory regime for local bus services which we believe to be adequate for its intended purpose.

What is a statutory Quality Partnership?

A statutory Quality Partnership (sQP) is a quality measure whereby local transport authorities can put in place schemes to improve the quality and reliability of bus services, encourage patronage growth and improve the environment by reducing levels of congestion and pollution. Through an sQP authorities can specify the quality of buses (eg age, Euro class, low floor, etc) and minimum frequencies (including in the evenings, early mornings and Sundays). As part of the partnership, authorities will improve the infrastructure (including bus stops and bus priority measures such as "greenways" and priority junctions).

What is a Quality Contract?

A Quality Contract (QC) is a franchise type arrangement and gives a transport authority more control than can be achieved through a statutory Quality Partnership (sQP). Under a QC authorities are able to determine what local services should be provided and specify routes, the standard and quality of services and fares. Local transport authorities can introduce a QC for a particular area if they can demonstrate that such a contract is necessary in order to implement their local transport policies.

Why don't bus stops have timetable information for all the services that stop at them?

Section 33 of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001 places a duty on local authorities to determine what local bus information should be available in their area. They should use a format that they consider to be the most economic, efficient and effective. Authorities can then seek to ensure that the required information is provided by bus operators on a voluntary basis. If this is not possible, local transport authorities can act to make the information available and recover the costs of doing so from the operators concerned. In September 2008 the Scottish Government produced best

practice guidance to local authorities on a range of issues including the provision of information on bus services.

Will Transport Scotland provide new bus stations?

The provision of passenger facilities is a matter for individual local transport authorities. It is the responsibility of each local authority to allocate the total financial resources available to it on the basis of local needs and priorities.

Local authorities are encouraged to consider the appropriate facilities which best meet the needs of bus users in their area. Improvements to the quality of the waiting environment for passengers would show a firm commitment to improving public transport in an area. New, modern facilities such as the provision of enhanced information systems; comfortable, secure surroundings; and easy access for all sectors of the community offer significant benefits to existing bus users and may serve to encourage and attract new users. However, it is ultimately a matter for local authorities to establish their own budget priorities.

I have made a complaint to a bus company but I have not received a response to my satisfaction. What can I do now?

Bus Users Scotland (BUS) only consider complaints that have been raised with the bus company in the first instance. If after raising your concerns with the operators, you do not receive a response to your satisfaction then you can raise your concerns with BUS.

The contact details for bus complaints in Scotland are:

Address: Bus Users Scotland, Hopetoun Gate, 8b McDonald Road, Edinburgh, EH7 4LZ

Telephone: 0300 111 0001

E-mail: enquiries@bususers.org

Bus Users Scotland's remit includes:

- Incorrect fare charged
- Attitude or behaviour of staff
- Personal security
- Accessibility
- Clarity of destination and route inform
- Reliability and punctuality