

# **Scotland's Transport**

## **STUC response to Scottish Executive Proposals for a New Approach to Transport in Scotland: A Consultation**

### **Introduction**

1. The STUC is Scotland's Trade Union Centre. Its purpose is to co-ordinate, develop and articulate the views and policies of the Trade Union Movement in Scotland and, through the creation of real social partnership, to promote trade unionism, equality and social justice; the creation and maintenance of high quality jobs and the public sector delivery of services.

2. The STUC represents around 630,000 working people and their families throughout Scotland. It speaks for trade union members in and out of work, in the community and in the workplace. Our affiliated organisations have interests in all sectors of the economy. Our representative structures are constructed to take account of the specific views of women members, young members, black/minority ethnic members, LGBT members, and members with a disability, as well as retired and unemployed workers.

### **Key themes**

3. The STUC:

- Is pleased that the Scottish Executive has come forward with proposals that seek to co-ordinate transport initiatives in Scotland. However, we are not convinced that the proposals properly address current barriers to delivery of an efficient transport system.
- Is concerned at the lack of reference to trade unions, transport workers and transport users. The new agency will be less effective if it chooses to ignore the views of those who work in the industry.
- Is concerned that centralisation could inhibit rather than improve delivery of an efficient transport system.

- Believes that Ministers must argue for further revisions to the Scotland Act to allow rail infrastructure to be funded and controlled by the Executive thereby providing the new agency with sufficient powers to make a real difference to transport delivery in Scotland.
- Believes any new regional partnerships must be accountable and retain sufficient flexibility to effectively meet local needs.
- Recognises the significant contribution that SPT has made to delivery of transport services and infrastructure in the west of Scotland and does not believe a case has been made for a dilution of its powers let alone its abolition.

## **Transport in Scotland**

4. The arguments in favour of creating an environmentally sustainable, high quality, accessible and fully integrated transport system are well rehearsed. An efficient transport system:

- Supports economic development and job creation.
- Has an important part to play in combating social exclusion. In 2002 35% of Scottish households did not have access to a car and according to a contribution made during a debate on transport in the Scottish Parliament on 5 November 2003 this figure rises to 56% in Glasgow.

5. The STUC shares the Minister for Transport's commitment to 'improving our transport infrastructure, putting in place an integrated transport system that connects communities, gets goods to market quickly and efficiently and gets people to work safely and on time'.

## **A new agency**

6. The STUC is pleased that the Scottish Executive has come forward with proposals that seek to co-ordinate transport initiatives, both public and private, through the creation of a national transport authority. However, we believe a more effective process would have involved:

- a) The Executive and key stakeholders working together to conduct a rigorous analysis of our transport system to identify where and why it is currently failing.

- b) Wide consultation on a long-term strategy for the delivery of an effective transport system in Scotland
- c) Consideration of the structures necessary for effective implementation of this strategy

7. Although the STUC has no in principle objections to a national transport agency, it is our view that the consultation document fails to make a compelling case for one at this moment in time. It is disappointing that stakeholders have been presented with the new agency as a fait accompli and then consulted on, for instance, the powers it should possess. This approach restricts the ability of stakeholders to make a significant contribution to development of the Executive's transport policy.

8. The consultation document argues that a new agency would improve planning and coordination while providing no clarity on the powers it will possess. Bodies who are current involved in transport delivery must be concerned at this apparent lack of rigour in a process that could result in a dilution of their powers.

9. It is right that a '*central goal for a new body should be to engage widely across Scotland*' (para.15). The STUC agrees that wide-ranging discussion and genuine consultation are necessary for delivery of a successful transport strategy for Scotland. However, we are very concerned that there is no mention of trade unions or transport users in this process. Those who work in the industry have a special insight into its problems and are well placed to identify possible solutions. It would be sensible and appropriate for the new agency to place great emphasis on listening to, learning from and involving those who work in the industry.

10. The STUC is concerned by the tone of the proposals (para. 21) around involving the private sector. Decisions on delivery of services should be based on quality considerations and should not rest on a preconceived assumption that the private sector is best placed to provide the transport services Scotland needs. The new agency must strive to achieve close working relationships with all stakeholders within the industry.

11. Current problems with the governance of transport in Scotland largely stem from:

- the devolution settlement leaving important strategic rail issues outwith the scope of the parliament;
- a failure of co-ordination between the 32 councils acting as roads authorities; private bus companies in competition with one another; various ad hoc transport partnerships

12. The STUC hopes that the Executive's proposals arise from a recognition that this fragmentation within Scotland's transport is inefficient and a barrier to delivery. However, if as the consultation appears to suggest, the Executive believes the remedy lies in a greater centralisation of powers within the new agency, reform could make the situation worse.

13. The STUC believes it is crucial that the new agency pursues control of powers currently held by the Strategic Rail Authority and Network Rail. Ministers must argue for further revisions to the Scotland Act to allow rail infrastructure to be funded and controlled by the Executive through the new agency. Assuming these powers would ensure that the agency is able to make a real difference to the travelling public in Scotland.

14. The new agency must also seek to build effective working relationships with other departments of the Scottish Executive in order to facilitate joined up thinking on transport matters.

### **Regional Partnerships**

15. The discussion on Regional Partnerships also suffers from a lack of clarity on role, powers and responsibilities. Despite not wishing to endorse a particular option at this stage, the STUC strongly believes that any new structures must be accountable and possess the flexibility to tackle local needs.

16. The differing needs of urban and rural transport users are unlikely to be met through a centralisation of powers and responsibilities. It is crucial that an effective balance is struck between the ability to deliver local solutions to local problems and regional and national structures that are able to deliver effective integration.

17. STUC recognises the significant contribution that SPT has made to delivery of transport services and infrastructure in the west of Scotland. SPT has consistently delivered investment and high quality integrated transport planning and services with the involvement of local communities. The STUC considers SPT a model that could potentially be extended to other areas.

18. Whilst recognising that integration between SPT and local roads authorities could be improved we do not believe that this problem is insurmountable. We certainly don't see this problem as justifying a dilution of the powers of SPT or its ultimate abolition.

### **Policy Development**

19. There are in our view lessons to be learned from other countries in terms of the benefits of long-term transport planning and the greater involvement of all tiers of government, within overall sustainability targets and objectives.

20. Lessons do not appear to have been learned from the Executive's recent research paper "Transferability of best Practice in transport policy delivery" which sought to identify the key factors which underlie transport policy delivery. This doesn't help build trust among stakeholders that the much-vaunted evidence-based policy making approach is being followed in practice.

### **Quality contracts**

21. One more encouraging aspect of the consultation is the proposal to equip the new agency with powers to effectively deliver on the Executive's commitments in terms of quality bus contracts.

22. The STUC believes that this area of the proposals should include the regulation of fares, frequency of service, safety standards and workers conditions within this sector. We also feel that there is an urgent need to address the health and safety of transport workers, as an integral part of Quality Partnerships and Contracts.

## **Conclusion**

23. The STUC welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the ongoing debate on the future of transport in Scotland. We clearly share much common ground with Ministers on the type of transport system we envisage for Scotland.

24. The STUC remains to be convinced that the Executive's proposals for a new agency are an appropriate response to the challenges currently facing the industry. However, we look forward to working with the Executive over the coming period to ensure that any new national, regional and local structures are as effective as possible and draw sufficiently on the expertise of transport workers and their representatives.

STUC  
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