



Scottish Executive's Consultation on a Public Transport Users' Committee for Scotland

NESTRANS' Response

Introduction

NESTRANS is the regional transport partnership for Aberdeen City and Shire. As a voluntary partnership, it comprises Aberdeenshire Council, Aberdeen City Council, Scottish Enterprise Grampian and Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce. Its work will be taken forward by the new statutory North East of Scotland Transport Partnership from 1 April 2006.

NESTRANS was formed in 2001 to bring together public and private sectors in the region to develop and implement a regional transport strategy. The resulting strategy - the Modern Transport System - takes an integrated approach to improving accessibility to and within the region and tackling congestion in Aberdeen.

This consultation response has been prepared on behalf of both Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils and was discussed and approved by the NESTRANS Board on 20 March 2006.

Answers to specific questions:

1. Which option do you believe would best deliver an effective PTUC?

NESTRANS concurs with the view of the Scottish Executive that Option 1 would be the most effective option. This would appear to be most efficient organisational structure and would avoid the duplication that may arise under option 2. A common secretariat offers the potential for efficiencies and should assist in encouraging greater integration between different transport modes and policies.

However the inheritance it will have from the different bodies that exist currently suggests that a flexible but fair approach to the work of the sub-committees will be required. Clearly some will have more functions and responsibilities than others and it is important that particular modes do not become too dominant in the PTUC.

Similarly, it is also important to ensure that particular geographical interests do not come to dominate the PTUC or its sub-committees. Clearly the Scottish Ferry Committee, if established as a sub-committee of the PTUC, would have a focus on those parts of Scotland served by ferry links, but as a general principle the PTUC should ensure that it considers the needs of passengers in all parts of Scotland.

2. Do you have any other alternative suggestions of how the PTUC could be structured?

NESTRANS is content with the structure outlined in Option 1, however it would have been useful to see a diagram showing the proposed sub-committees, their responsibilities and relationship to the PTUC and other bodies.

It is also not clear what the remit of the PTUC would be with regard to rail services. Clearly the new RPC has been set up on a GB-level with a Scottish representative, but it would seem appropriate if modal sub-committees are to be established, that a rail sub-committee should exist also to consider matters relating to rail services in Scotland. With the Scottish Ministers now having assumed responsibility for the specification and management of the Scottish Passenger Rail Franchise, there is potential for the PTUC, possibly aided by a sub-committee, to act as a useful forum for ideas, comments and suggestions regarding the operation of the franchise and ways in which it may be enhanced. It is also essential that good relations are maintained with the RPC and that there is clarity on their respective roles and remits.

It is also not clear whether the sub-committees will be comprised solely of PTUC members or whether they would also include other co-opted members. Clarity on this point would be useful.

3. What do you believe should be the remit of the PTUC?

NESTRANS agrees that the PTUC needs to have a clear remit and that the particular functions that may be inherited from existing bodies such as the Bus Users' Complaints Tribunal (BUCT) and the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland (MACS) are made clear.

The intention that the PTUC should not deal with individual complaints is supported. However, with regard to BUCT, there are concerns about the current lack of engagement with Councils when dealing with user complaints. If a sub-committee is established to deal with current BUCT responsibilities, including user complaints, it is important that this recognises that many bus services in Scotland are provided on behalf of Councils and that complaints about operators or services must be brought to the attention of the relevant contracting Councils, for the purposes of effective contract management and enforcement.

With regard to MACS, if this was incorporated into the PTUC as a sub-committee, then the remit of the PTUC would need to reflect the remit of the current MACS. In particular, it should be recognised that the role of MACS goes beyond public transport, to cover other matters such as the 'blue badge' parking scheme and wider accessibility issues. It should also be recognised that MACS has a useful promotional role, involving the commissioning of research and issuing guidance, the benefits of which should be maintained.

In addition to the activities listed in paragraph 44, the remit of the PTUC should ensure that it considers the needs of different types of public transport user – people travelling for business, leisure, commuter and tourism purposes.

4. In what way do you envisage the PTUC interacting with users or your organisation?

NESTRANS envisages consulting with the PTUC on the development of its Regional Transport Strategy and other relevant matters. It may also be appropriate for a member of the PTUC to be invited along to meetings of the North East Transport Consultative Forum (the stakeholder consultative forum established by NESTRANS). The PTUC should also have regard to the regional transport strategies developed by the RTPs in advising Ministers on public transport policy and interventions. In the longer term, as RTPs develop their transport delivery strategies, it may be appropriate for RTPs to be more closely involved in the PTUC's deliberations, particularly on strategic public transport policy direction.

In the north east there is a well-established local public transport user consultation network, in the form of Area Bus Forums and a Community Transport Forum in Aberdeenshire, which meet regularly to enable public transport users and providers to discuss transport issues, problems and proposals. It is envisaged that these arrangements, providing a local focus for identifying and addressing public transport needs and issues, will continue to have a role. It is important that the role and purpose of the PTUC is clearly defined and communicated, to avoid potential conflict and/or confusion between the roles and responsibilities of PTUC and any such local groups.

For the PTUC to have credibility with the travelling public, it needs to be an open and accessible body. Its role and remit need to be clearly communicated and procedures would need to be put in place to efficiently and appropriately handle enquiries from the public. This would inevitably involve the re-direction of enquiries and complaints to public transport operators and, as discussed under Question 3, to relevant contracting Councils, if they do not fall within the remit of the PTUC.

A well-designed and accessible website is clearly essential.

5. Should PTUC membership seek to include passenger representatives covering rail, bus, ferry and air or should the focus be on an individual's ability to contribute at a strategic level?

People generally use a mix of transport modes and NESTRANS do not consider there to be a need to recruit passenger representatives for particular modes, although it would be useful to ensure that its membership includes representatives with experience of island ferry and air services and also community transport.

The essential requirements should be broad experience of using public transport, coupled with the ability to take a strategic view, recognising the inter-relationship between different modes of transport, including the car. It is not clear whether it would be appropriate for RTP Board members to apply for membership and guidance on this point would be welcomed.

The document refers to transport providers and operators as key stakeholders but does not indicate whether representation from operator bodies, such as CPT, is envisaged. As indicated in response to Question 3, it must also be recognised that Councils and Regional Transport Partnerships are important funders and providers of public transport services and facilities, in some cases being involved in direct public transport service delivery. Consideration should be given to including the public sector, in its role as a transport service provider, possibly through CoSLA or the main professional bodies, SCOTS and ATCO.

6. What essential skills and knowledge should a member of the PTUC have?

In considering what should be required of members of the PTUC, the criteria drawn up by the Scottish Executive for the appointment of non-Councillor members of Regional Transport Partnerships provides a useful model.

NESTRANS considers that members of the PTUC should have broad experience of a range of public transport modes, should be able to take a strategic view, should not represent a particular local or sectoral interest but should be able to contribute experience of the impact of public transport on particular areas, such as access to healthcare, employment or tourism. It is also important to guard against the PTUC becoming a body that is divided along particular sectoral, geographical or factional lines and is able to act with common purpose.

NESTRANS agrees that the membership of the PTUC should provide broad geographical representation and would welcome more information on the criteria and process for selection in due course.

Conclusion

NESTRANS welcomes the creation of a Public Transport Users' Committee for Scotland and appreciates the opportunity to contribute to issues regarding its creation.

If you wish any further information, please contact:

Ben Kerfoot
Policy Officer
NESTRANS
27-29 King Street
Aberdeen
AB24 5AA

Tel: 01224 625 524

Email: bkerfoot@nestrans.org.uk

NESTRANS
21 March 2006