

Bus, Accessibility & Active Travel

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CÒMHDHAIL ALBA

Mr Alan Reid

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Dear Mr Reid

Thank you for your email of 5 December to Michael Matheson MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity in respect of funding for rural bus services. I have been asked to respond.

We know that bus services are vital in keeping Scotland moving during the COVID-19 pandemic, be it helping people get to work, access health services and essential shopping, or meeting family and friends

Since receiving your email we have announced that we are providing up to £29 million in further funding to support bus operators with maintaining bus services up to 31 March 2021. This is in addition to the £162.3 million in funding that the Scottish Government has already provided to support bus services to date. This funding is to help operators to cover the expected loss of fare-paying passenger revenue that they continue to experience due to physical distancing requirements and reduced demand. We are also maintaining concessionary travel reimbursement and Bus Service Operator Grant payments at pre COVID-19 levels where we would normally spend over £260 million. We will continue to work with the bus industry and local authorities to provide a safe, flexible bus network for those who need it.

However, even with Scottish Government financial support and bus service levels at 95% of pre-Covid levels on average, bus operators in consultation with local transport authorities are having to make difficult decisions about where best to deploy the capacity they have, to meet current demand and reduce the risk of overcrowding on busier routes. Local authorities also have a duty to identify whether there is a social need for particular services and can subsidise these at their discretion. Local authorities and regional transport partnerships already have powers to secure additional bus services to meet local transport needs and funding for this is included in the local authority general revenue grant. In 2018-19, £57 million was provided in this way. The decision to subsidise services is solely a matter for local authorities and the Scottish Government has no power to intervene.

I am sorry I cannot be more helpful.

Yours sincerely

Trish McCotter
Bus Funding Policy

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