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By email

rriwtberreview@cma.gov.uk

Competition and Markets Authority

10 April 2024

Dear Sir/Madam

Rail, Road and Inland Waterway Transport Block Exemption Regulation consultation (RRIWTBER)

I am responding on behalf of Transport Focus to the above consultation.

Transport Focus is the independent consumer watchdog representing the interests of rail users throughout Great Britain; bus, coach and tram users across England, outside London; and users of the Strategic Road Network in England. Working with transport providers and Governments across England, Scotland and Wales – and in partnership with our colleagues at London TravelWatch – we ensure that the users voice is heard.

In answer to your specific question in Para 5 re awareness of the RRIWTBER. We were not aware of this prior to this Call for Inputs, though we were familiar with the public transport ticketing schemes block exemption.

Our focus in this brief submission is on consumers rather than operators/suppliers. Competition can clearly be beneficial for consumers but with public transport there are occasions when collaboration and co-ordination can be equally valuable.

There are several current examples that would fit under the criteria set out in Article 2 of the RRIWTBER on technical agreements. On rail, for example, timetables are co-ordinated, there are a raft of common operational and design standards, and there is a general requirement/expectation that operators work together during periods of disruption. The existing Public Transport Ticketing Schemes Block Exemption also enables passengers to purchase tickets or travel cards that are valid on the services of all participating operators rather than having to buy

separate tickets from each operator used. This degree of cooperation has clear benefits to the consumer.

Bus has traditionally been a more competitive market but the introduction of bus partnerships (via the Bus Services Act 2017) is leading to a more collaborative approach. This in turn can secure improvements to local services, the quality of vehicles or facilities, as well as tackling traffic congestion, noise or air pollution. These consumer benefits are recognised in the CMA's guidance, 'Bus Enhanced Partnerships: Advice for Local Transport Authorities, May 2023'

If we are to retain the benefits of collaboration in future then it is important that the RRIWTBER exemption remains in place in one form or another. We do not have a view on what format it should take – the important thing is to retain the environment in which operators/modes can work together in certain circumstances.

Moreover, a greater profile to the exemption could potentially give existing rail and bus operators greater confidence to engage with each other. This could be especially beneficial in planning and delivering multi-modal services. Making it easier to plan journeys, better connections, and quicker journeys could all make public transport more attractive.

Yours sincerely



Mike Hewitson
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