

Submission to the Margaret Hodge Review of Arts Council England

From: *The Local Theatre Touring Alliance (LTTA)*

Date: 16 June 2025

1. Who We Are

The **Local Theatre Touring Alliance (LTTA)** is a new, sector-led initiative formed in response to the increasing fragility of **professional touring theatre in towns and smaller cities** across the UK. It brings together venue managers, producers, touring companies, policymakers, academics, funders, and service organisations to find **practical, collaborative solutions** to the escalating pressures facing this vital part of the theatre ecology.

Since launching in Spring 2025, LTTA has engaged over **120 professionally managed venues and touring organisations**, primarily working at **mid-scale** (300–800 seat venues), with an emphasis on **inclusive, accessible, and high-quality work**.

We are not a lobbying group or membership body. We are a **collaborative alliance focused on action**, working to stabilise and re-energise professional touring as a vital part of local cultural life, particularly in places where the **risk of cultural deprivation is growing fastest**.

2. Why This Matters to the Review

The work of LTTA sits directly within the concerns of this Review. We speak for venues and producers who are:

- **Fundamentally committed to excellence and access**, but feel increasingly unable to deliver either without targeted structural support.
- Located in places that have seen **significant real-terms reductions in public investment**, often outside the main metropolitan areas.
- Trying to deliver **local impact with national relevance**, but struggling with reduced touring circuits, falling earned income, rising costs, and a loss of talent and infrastructure.

While Arts Council England has recently made major strides in supporting the ecology of large-scale touring through the Incentivised Touring Scheme, we are concerned at the lack of focus and investment in the mid-scale touring sector and the venues that rely on it.

This is not a fringe issue. If mid-scale professional touring becomes unviable:

- Audiences in towns and smaller cities will lose access to high-quality work.
- Producers and companies will collapse or stop touring altogether.
- The infrastructure that supports young people's pathways into the creative industries, early career and skills development, creative innovation and audience diversity will erode.
- Young people's access to high quality performing arts and safe spaces promoting creative health and wellbeing in the places where they live will be put at risk.

We believe Arts Council England is uniquely positioned to lead the **strategic renewal of mid-scale touring** across the UK. While the current system lacks the coordination and planning needed to make touring work sustainably, (particularly for towns and smaller cities), this is

precisely where ACE can and should step in. The future of mid-scale touring will depend on cross-regional networks, shared infrastructure, and long-term planning that no single combined authority could lead and deliver alone. Rather than devolving responsibility in ways that risk fragmentation and inequality, we see an opportunity for ACE to play a stronger national role: bringing partners together, investing strategically, and ensuring that high-quality touring remains a vital part of cultural life in every part of the country. Only ACE has the reach, authority and perspective to make this change happen.

3. What Needs to Change

We are at the beginning of our journey but are already identifying **concrete interventions** ACE could consider, including:

- **Rebalancing risk and reward** across the touring ecology, including targeted funding for venues taking creative risks, or for producers sharing touring infrastructure.
 - Supporting **pilot models** for collaborative touring, block booking, and regional programming partnerships, especially outside major cities.
 - Prioritising **audience development and engagement capacity** in mid-scale presenting venues.
 - Recognising the urgent need for **shared capital investment** in venues that are mission-driven but crumbling, particularly those dependent on earned income.
 - Ensuring ACE's **funding criteria and frameworks** support rather than inhibit flexible, ambitious touring models.
 - Addressing the **skills gaps across the sector**, particularly in technical and production roles.
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4. What We Hope to Achieve

By Autumn 2025, LTТА aims to have:

- A set of **tested pilot touring models**, co-designed by venues and producers.
- A collective voice advocating for **realistic funding structures** for professional touring.
- Stronger local-national connections between venues, communities and producers.
- A revived sense of confidence, ambition, and mutual support in the sector.

We are doing this with no core funding, no bureaucracy, and full commitment to **cross-sector collaboration**. But we need structural change to match this momentum, underpinned by a secure and confident Arts Council England, and we hope this Review can help unlock that possibility.

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