

TravelWatch NORTHWEST

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promoting quality public transport.....

Transport for the North
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27th August 2021

Dear Team,

TfN Draft Decarbonisation Strategy

1. TravelWatch NorthWest is an independent Community Interest Company representing all public transport users in North West England. We are pleased to give our views to this inquiry. In general we feel this paper has a dearth of specific physical recommendations which are necessary to instigate effective action.

Public Transport

2. Public transport must adapt to be a more attractive alternative to the private car - an overriding basic significant contribution to decarbonisation is the need to persuade people to increase their use of public transport, which needs to be far more attractive so that it can compete effectively with the car. During Covid, discouragement to use public transport has not boded well for people to be attracted back to it in the medium term.

3. The Covid 19 crisis has provided some insight into what a better and more environmentally friendly future for our centres of population could be like. These conurbations must be dependent upon walking, cycling and sustainable public transport. Limitless car use cannot be an option for future mobility in cities and elsewhere. Some 22% of UK *carbon emissions arise from cars and so the UK cannot return to an excessive reliance on car travel, but must develop innovative and sustainable public transport as an alternative.*

4. Electric cars are not the total answer. They will take up space and contribute to congestion in the same way as conventional cars. Cars of any power source take up space which could be used for houses, green areas, parks and other outdoor spaces. Walking, cycling and of course sustainable public transport has to be the priority for future planning. The car must not be allowed to become the dominant mode of transport for local or longer journeys.

5. The need to reduce or eliminate carbon emissions is urgent. For example, recent deliveries of new rail rolling stock, wholly or partly diesel powered, even where running on electrified routes, has militated against carbon reduction. New light rail schemes should be strongly supported. The trend to introduce battery powered buses is to be welcomed but the rate of conversion is very slow in most cities and we understand that large orders for diesel buses are still being made.

6. A decade of reducing the fuel duty levy in real terms and a proposed cut in the Air Travel Duty for Domestic Flights makes a nonsense of carbon reduction targets. Allied to sensible fuel duty there should be road charging and a tax on workplace parking.

Rail

7. We welcome the commitment in the strategy to “support the Government and Network Rail, utilising the NPR project, in identifying appropriate routes for electrification and associated implementation”. We believe that the key contribution to de-carbonising rail transport is electrification. We emphasise the need for a rolling programme of consistent, proactive and extensive electrification - in UK terms Scotland is providing a lead. Alternatives in the form of hydrogen and battery do offer short to medium terms solutions – and in some (limited) cases the long-term answer on some lesser used lines, but electrification is the real widespread solution.

8. Quick wins could be made by the electrification of short branches such as Oxenholme – Windermere and Morecambe South Junction to Morecambe. The former would give more flexibility compared with battery or hydrogen powered trains and the latter would enable the proposed Eden Project, which is within a few hundred yards of the station, to be served environmentally by rail without a change to diesel transport at Lancaster.

9. The Northern Sparks report (attached) published in 2015 recommended that 12 rail routes in the North be progressed for electrification immediately. We completely supported the report’s findings but unfortunately, there has been little progress in the 6 years since the report was published. With more cost-effective methods of implementing schemes the priorities listed in this report should be revisited.

10. Rail needs to be more attractive and better promoted. One vital element is the need to simplify fares and make it easier for regular travellers to travel for commuting on a flexible number of days in the week, rather than the conventional season ticket which is priced on a 5-day week basis. There has been some progress with this but further work appears to be necessary to take account of changes to commuting.

Buses

11. There is little about bus travel in the strategy. The role of the bus should be seen in the broad concept of land use planning. Employment, education and shopping activities have been moving away from the town centres which form the focus of bus networks. At the same time, centralisation of NHS facilities, banks, post offices and libraries has meant that rural dwellers have to travel further to reach their nearest one, further disadvantaging those without cars. All this means that land use and transport planning must be considered together and not in isolation.

12. The coronavirus pandemic has shown that competition for space on our streets and roads, linked to safe perception of car use and the greater demands for cycling and walking space, will require a considered approach to ensure that bus priority does not lose out. There should be greater bus priority measures across cities through bus lanes, bus gates and bus priority at junctions, to protect bus services from congestion. We also support the introduction of a congestion or workplace parking charge to reduce traffic levels and fund local transport investment, including subsidy for bus services.

13. I think the strategy makes some reference to the above issues but we could not find a specific reference to them in the section on “TfN’s Priority Decarbonisation Actions”.

14. Other measures to make bus travel more accessible are those which we have cited on many occasions in the past. In particular -

- Information and Accessibility - accurate real time information at bus stops and next stop information on buses is often poor and its provision would help prospective passengers’ confidence in using buses. Whereas most buses are now fully accessible, many bus stops still do not meet the required standards
- Fares - very high fare levels in some rural areas have tended to price off many passengers who do not have concessionary fares. Additionally, exercises we have conducted throughout our region in the past have shown the difficulty of finding out about bus fares before travelling, though this is slowly improving.
- Integration – a lack of integration between bus services and with rail services is another major issue. There is a need to give higher priority to integration and co-operation than to preventing collusion between operators.

15. The UK has benefited from cleaner, greener bus journeys as a result of the Green Bus Fund. The next step in the process should be totally electric buses. A possible mode is the trolleybus. These can be powered by batteries, in areas where overhead line equipment cannot be constructed.

Integration

16. There has always been a need to achieve better integration between modes to heighten the attractiveness of public transport. Much more needs to be done, including for example a re-look at previously largely negative policies on the carrying of bicycles on trains and indeed on light rail. The importance of the whole journey experience and the need for more convenient transport interchanges and hubs cannot be over stressed.

17. As well as bus/ train integration there is also the need for light rail to integrate with other modes. This is still not ideal with the current Manchester Metrolink system particularly as far as fares are concerned.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond

Yours sincerely,

John A Moorhouse

John Moorhouse, Company Secretary