

TravelWatch NORTHWEST

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Winner of CILT award for best practice in passenger transport (2013)

promoting quality public transport.....

Transport Committee
 House of Commons
 London SW1A 0AA

9th December 2016

Dear Committee Members,

Urban congestion inquiry

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.

2. We are very surprised and disappointed that any inquiry into urban congestion does not take account of rail travel. There is an urgent need to address the congestion problem and conventional rail can play a much bigger role given further investment in infrastructure and rolling stock capacity. It is strange that with the emphasis on urban transport integration and with almost 50% of the population of London using intra/inter urban rail transport, and no doubt dramatically reducing road congestion in the capital, the possibility of rail forming part of the mix is not even mentioned.

3. Road/rail options must be sensibly contrasted in terms of costs and benefits. There has been a widespread tendency to underestimate the footfall where new stations have been introduced e.g. the Borders Railway, or inadequate car parking has been provided e.g. Buckshaw Parkway which opened recently now has parking shortfall despite a substantial car park. Indeed car parking at existing rail stations is often not at all adequate and deters people from using rail. Encouraging people to be able to park at the station instead of drive into town would have considerable potential for the relief of urban congestion. Train Operating Companies/Network Rail/ PTEs & other local authorities should carry out a survey of car parking provision and need at existing and possible suburban and commuting locations.

3. To further encourage people to shift from private to public transport we would draw attention to the numbers of old suburban stations which have been closed on existing rail lines into most cities, and also on lines now reduced to freight only, or with track removed but still available to provide routes for public transport. Re-opening of such lines and stations in city centres. There are similar opportunities for new suburban stations around many conurbations.

3. Bus services are suffering greatly and financially from traffic congestion. Patronage is falling and bus priority measures should be an urgent priority. We commend the bus priority package works being undertaken by TfGM.

4. The Metrolink system in Manchester is very popular and this formula could be repeated elsewhere. Tram-trains are widely used abroad and the ability to have fast rail compatible trams to mix with suburban rail traffic from further afield would give a massive boost to the potential use of this system. We support the development of tram-trains where these can provide significant improvements for passengers. A reservation would be that the benefits of being part of the national rail network should not be lost and also the provision of toilets on longer journeys.

5. The exclusion of lorries from running through City Centres, except for local delivery, should also be pursued, lorries could be sign posted off motorways appropriately to access the commercial areas without driving through the centre. Larger pedestrian areas in city centres should be encouraged with parking (multi storey if necessary) on the outskirts of the traffic free area, or extension of park and ride schemes from motorway junctions

6. The terms of reference make no mention of land use, which has a major influence on the length of journeys in urban areas and the mode of travel chosen. Unlike other countries in Europe, the UK continues to embrace the growth of edge-of-town development alongside decaying inner cities. Although there has been some regeneration in cities such as Leeds and Manchester in recent years, suburban sprawl, along with the growth of out-of-town retail, business and leisure development, is still one of the main drivers of increased car use. Land use and transport policies are not “joined up” and poor infrastructure or transport links have hampered a number of new developments. In this country there is ready acceptance of long commuting distances driven by people’s desire to live in a suburb or village, often without basic facilities. Acceptance of this as the norm has greatly contributed to traffic congestion. On the other hand, citizens of other countries regard city living as highly desirable as it brings access to culture, entertainment and a high-quality built environment.

7. Some post-war experiments have made public and politicians hostile to higher density development. But well designed contemporary housing and the Victorian terraces of a typical city street can deliver just as high a density as many tower blocks. Higher density build leads to other benefits, such as the potential for combined heat and power schemes and of course more viable public transport.

8. New housing and other development needs a supporting infrastructure which includes good transport links. Many developments are poorly served by bus services which often appear to have been added as an afterthought, rather than designed in like drains and lighting, with a cul-de-sac layout making penetration impossible. Developers pay lip-service to the need for buses in order to get planning permission, but, even when funds under

Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 are available, the result is often an indirect and poorly-used bus service which does not meet travel needs. There appear also to be issues with the procedural aspects of Section 106 funding and on our website is a case study involving one of our Directors in Lancashire –

http://www.travelwatch-northwest.org.uk/S106%20agreements_1216.pdf

9. New rail-based transport systems, e.g. the LU Jubilee Line, have greatly increased land values along the line as property becomes more attractive. Some advocate the capturing of this increase by means of a land value tax, which could then fund additional transport investment. It cannot be right that the advantages of transport investment should pass as a windfall gain to some landowners, while others may be adversely affected by disturbance, pollution and traffic noise. At present, compensation for the latter is inadequate or non-existent, while no satisfactory mechanism exists for collecting the gain enjoyed by the former.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond

Yours sincerely,

John A Moorhouse

John Moorhouse, Company Secretary