

Rising to the Challenge:
What will it take to decarbonise transport?
webinar series brought to you by



During the first of three webinars in the series 'Rising to the Challenge: What will it take to decarbonise transport?', delegates heard from:

- **Professor Peter Jones OBE, Professor of Transport and Sustainable Development, UCL**
- **Claire Haigh, Chief Executive, Greener Transport Solutions**
- **The Rt Hon Lord Deben, Chair, Committee for Climate Change**
- **Professor Alan McKinnon, Professor of Logistics, Kuehne Logistics University, Hamburg**
- **Professor John Whitelegg, Fellow in Transport and Climate Change, FIT**
- **David Brown, Group Chief Executive, Go-Ahead**
- **Jonny Mood, Director of VFM, National Audit Office (NAO)**
- **Lauren Pamma, Programme Director, Green Finance Institute**
- **Paul Hirst, Head of the Transport Sector Group, Addleshaw Goddard**
- **Professor Glenn Lyons, Mott MacDonald Professor of Future Mobility, UWE**
- **Professor Greg Marsden, Professor of Transport Governance, University of Leeds ITS**
- **Paul Campion, Chief Executive, TRL**
- **Victoria Hills, Chief Executive, Royal Town Planning Institute**

The topic of this session was 'Not the journey but the destination: how our whole economy needs to change'.

The event was sponsored by Greener Transport Solutions, Addleshaw Goddard, Transport Times, the Foundation for Integrated Transport and The Transport Knowledge Hub.

It was organised by Connect Public Affairs and chaired by **Professor Peter Jones OBE, Professor of Transport and Sustainable Development, UCL.**

Introduction from Claire Haigh, Chief Executive, Greener Transport Solutions

In her introductory remarks, Ms Haigh said there would be a series of three webinars that feed into the publication of 'A Manifesto for Decarbonising Transport' later in the autumn.

She warned that the planet was in the "last chance saloon" on climate change following the publication of the recent UN report. The UK should be using its leadership of COP26 to set out a coherent policy response to climate change, especially in tackling emissions from transport.

Ms Haigh said that transport emissions had only fallen by 3% since 1990 and had risen since 2013. She noted that the commitment to phase out new petrol and diesel vehicles had not come along with a policy framework to match the growth of cleaner technology.

The Government was perpetuating a “myth” that our lives would be able to continue uninterrupted because of new technology and this meant that problems were being stored up for the future, Ms Haigh said.

She urged the Government to do more to improve access to public transport and reduce the cost of using it. The UK economy needed to shift to reduce the need for travel as much as possible.

Local leaders were integral to driving an integrated long-term plan to accommodating the decarbonisation of transport within their area, Ms Haigh said. She advocated a joined-up approach between central, regional, and local government to empower the latter two with the necessary powers and resources.

Ms Haigh referred to key issues including using the Planning Bill to shift developments away from car dependency and aligning shifts in energy with the whole systems approach to transport decarbonisation.

Keynote speech from Lord Deben

In his remarks, Lord Deben said the UK Government had taken on statutorily enforceable measures for reducing climate change that could be enforced by the courts system.

He believed that the Government was lacking a clear framework for reaching its goal of achieving net zero by 2050. The passage of the Sixth Carbon Budget by Parliament had helped pave the way forward, but more needed to be done.

Lord Deben said policymakers should look to create a proper discussion with the public and preparation was a crucial part of that, which meant overcoming departmental silos.

The upcoming Planning Bill should be used to create an assumption that any planning decision should further the goal of reaching net zero, he explained.

Lord Deben said there was no central planning advice from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to the Planning Inspectorate on achieving the move to net zero through planning decisions.

Moving to electrification on transport meant looking at the energy system, which had not been designed to cope with electricity being generated from a multiplicity of different sources, Lord Deben said.

He called for a systemisation of the electricity generation system with cars being electrified and able to store electricity.

Lord Deben said the decarbonisation of transport could only be achieved by putting in effect measures like the Future Homes Programme and noted that one million homes would need to be retrofitted to meet the necessary emissions reduction standards. These issues needed to be tackled before the decarbonisation of transport could begin.

Many politicians and policymakers spoke in favour of active travel but had not practised it, Lord Deben said. He wanted to see people using active travel more and cars less.

Lord Deben said the behavioural change in lockdown had not been capitalised on, for example replacing in-person meetings with digital ones in the long-term. He did not believe people should be encouraged to return to their offices five days a week and more flexible working practices should be adopted.

Summing up, he criticised the Education Secretary for failing to grasp the issue of using a programme of skills training to reach net zero. He also advocated empowering local partners and making the best use of the 1% of GDP needed to ensure the just transition.

“Justice has got to be part of what we do [in decarbonising transport]”, Lord Deben said, dismissing any suggestion that moving to net zero was an attack on motorists.

Questioned by the Chair, he called for measures to curb the culture of using delivery vans to rapidly provide goods and services to people. Lord Deben said he wanted to see an overhaul of the logistics sector and urged the Government to have honest conversations with people about the changes that needed to be made in their lives.

Panel discussion

In his remarks, Mr Brown explained how Go-Ahead was making progress on rolling out electric buses, creating a virtual power station at Northumberland Park in Northeast London and running a fleet of hydrogen buses.

He added there was no shortage of ambition, targets, and consultations from policymakers, but there was the lack of a plan on how to achieve these. There was a gap of £522m annually for the next funding needed for the bus industry to reach the Government’s decarbonisation target.

Mr Brown called for action to help persuade people switch from cars to buses. He wanted to see more action to help make buses more attractive as an alternative.

Road pricing could become a realistic solution as the Government needed to replace lost revenue from Fuel Duty, Mr Brown said. He added that simply creating the market for low-emissions vehicles would not bring the prices down.

Mr Brown said the National Bus Strategy should be used to lead the way for the bus industry.

Following this, Professor McKinnon said there was a lack of data underpinning the Government’s Transport Decarbonisation Plan and called for action to break down the silos between freight and passenger transport.

He wanted to see further reductions in freight transport on top of the 4% reduction that had already taken place.

Prof McKinnon said the railways had lost their freight coal traffic and the rail freight industry should be looking for options to replace these.

Action should also be taken to improve the efficiency of road freight and the utilisation of freight capacity. Digitalisation could be used to help fill the vehicles better and many haulage firms had expressed an interest in this.

Prof McKinnon said de-fossilisation of the freight industry sector was important, including plugging the gaps in the electrified rail freight network and making greater use of hydrogen-powered lorries.

He added that the Government was pinning too much hope on short-term measures on reducing emissions and was not taking the necessary steps to decarbonise the freight industry.

After this, Prof Whitelegg said improving active travel was contingent on adopting the Swedish-pioneered approach of Vision Zero to remove all structural elements of the transport system contributing to road deaths.

He wondered if the UK should adopt pulse timetabling for buses and ensuring buses were integrated with other modes of transport. Adopting regional transport authorities would also be beneficial.

The UK had not adopted the World Health Organisation's recommendations on improving active travel, Prof Whitelegg noted. He advocated cancelling the road building programme and using the money to invest in other forms of travel, especially walking, cycling and buses.

After Prof Whitelegg, Mr Mood said the National Audit Office had published several reports on the decarbonisation of transport that had unveiled several themes.

Government needed to ensure sufficient and sustainable resources were available to drive decarbonisation in transport in the upcoming Spending Review, Mr Mood said.

He felt the Government should also be aware of managing the links between decarbonisation across different areas, for example the push for electric cars and improving the wider energy distribution network.

Mr Mood singled out the disconnect between transport planning and local housing infrastructure as another example of where joined-up thinking was needed.

Bodies like Network Rail and Highways England would be essential in decarbonising their respective networks, alongside empowering local authorities, he told the meeting.

Mr Mood advocated the Government having clear metric of the move towards net zero and communication of priorities and phases to improve understanding in the wider public.

The final speaker in the panel discussion was Lauren Pamma, who began by saying that reducing congestion and improving air quality depended on considering mobility with a system-wide approach.

The Green Finance Institute had sought to bring together key stakeholders to unlock the potential of electric vehicles by offering new financial solutions to encourage their rollout.

Ms Pamma said both public and private finance had a role to play with a complex range of different investment opportunities available and private capital needed to play a role.

Finance had a role to play in supporting the rollout of charging infrastructure from rural charging points to rapid charging hubs in urban areas, she said.

Ms Pamma said that the UK had 25,000 electric vehicle charging points but there were unevenly distributed.

She called for grant funding to focused on areas where private capital was not readily available.

Reflections and debate

The Chair then opened the meeting to remarks from members of the Greener Transport Council and other attendees.

Paul Hirst, Head of the Transport Sector Group, Addleshaw Goddard said it was important to manage the demand for car use, but the country was in the middle of a “car-led recovery” of the wider economy.

He wanted to see an integrated transport system that was green and helped generate jobs in places that needed them. Creating an integrated transport system could only be achieved by local authorities and infrastructure schemes should be given clearer, locally led funding streams.

Mr Hirst said more should be done to encourage the interest of third-party financiers in areas like buses. He called for more joint working between the public and private finance to achieve decarbonisation of transport.

Professor Glenn Lyons, Mott MacDonald Professor of Future Mobility, UWE said multiple regime changes were needed to achieve transport decarbonisation. He added that the Government was stuck in a mode of consulting, but not acting on transport decarbonisation.

World Bank data had shown that was a clear link between improvements in digital connectivity and reducing the need for travel, he said.

Prof Lyons said providing digital connectivity was an essential component to creating alternatives to motorised transport.

Speaking after Prof Lyons, Professor Greg Marsden, Professor of Transport Governance, University of Leeds ITS said the Government’s electrification agenda was at the back of policymakers’ minds when it came to discussions around changing transport habits.

He described the decarbonisation plan published by Leeds City Council as being ambitious but missing many solutions. Solutions needed to be developed by the public sector as well as the private sector.

Prof Marsden said there was no mention of the words ‘fairness’ or ‘justice’ in the Government’s Transport Decarbonisation Plan. He added that government changed slowly, and more action was needed from the centre to drive change, specifically at a Cabinet Office level to bring different Whitehall departments together.

Paul Campion, Chief Executive, TRL said decarbonising transport was a “non-negotiable challenge” for everyone but was not being tackled with any sense of purpose by policy makers.

“We do not need new ideas. What we need is new stories,” Mr Campion said, adding this was how to address the climate crisis.

He explained that the Transport Decarbonisation Plan had been written by policymakers conscious that the public needed to be led gently into any change, citing examples of the Fuel Duty riots, the introduction of seat belt legislation and drink drive limits.

Rounding off the reflections of the Greener Transport Council members, Victoria Hills, Chief Executive, Royal Town Planning Institute said the pandemic had put people in a situation where they were being asked not to travel.

She hoped that the hybrid model would mean that the conventional mode of working would not reassert itself.

Ms Hills praised the introduction of the National Design Code for Placemaking as a positive step forward but wanted to see silos broken down in policymaking to bring the necessary people around the table.

In the absence of a return to regional planning, she wanted to see all parties brought together, specifically anyone with an investment plan in the next 30 years with infrastructure planners as part of green planning boards to put net zero first in planning.

Ms Hills said the world was watching in the run-up to COP26 to see how the UK would lead the world in moving towards net zero. She also highlighted the opportunities resting with the private and tech sectors, with people under the age of 25 driving change.

The Chair then opened the session to a wider discussion.

In the discussion, Prof Lyons said it was important to craft a compelling narrative for the Government to get behind and commit resources to.

Mr Champion agreed and said that the Government would only go as far as it believed it could carry public opinion.

Later in the session, Prof Whitelegg said encouraging people to switch from cars to other modes of transport was not in any way “anti-motorist”.

Prof Lyons warned against the debate becoming solely focused on investing in public transport or other solutions viewed in isolation.

Ms Hills predicted that travel patterns would remain as they had during the pandemic, noting that there had been changes to people preferring to work at home with a greater need for hyper mobility.

The panel also discussed the differing travel needs of rural areas, including in areas like public transport and freight. All agreed that the needs of rural areas should not be overlooked.

Ms Hills said there were technological solutions that could reduce car usage in rural areas.

Closing the session off, the Chair said decarbonising transport was an important part of reconstructing society, including changing the habits of the wider public and consumers.