

The role of localism in ensuring a fair and just transition to net zero and driving decarbonisation

Webinar 3

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Rising to the Challenge: What will it take to decarbonise transport?

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During the third webinar of the series entitled 'Rising to the Challenge: What will it take to decarbonise transport?', members of the Greener Transport Council heard from:

- Hilary Chipping, Chief Executive, South East Midlands LEP
- Claire Haigh, Chief Executive, Greener Transport Solutions
- Jamie Driscoll, Mayor of North of Tyne
- Victoria Hills, Chief Executive, Royal Town Planning Institute
- Martin Tugwell, Chief Executive, Transport for the North (TfN)
- Henri Murison, Director, Northern Powerhouse Partnership
- Luke Murphy, Head of the Environmental Justice Commission and Associate Director for the Energy, Climate, Housing and Infrastructure Team, IPPR
- Gareth Powell, Managing Director, Surface Transport, Transport for London (TfL)
- Jason Torrance, Assistant Chief Executive, UK100
- Anna Heaton, Joint Head of Transport Sector Team and Real Estate Partner, Addleshaw Goddard
- Maria Machancoses, Chief Executive, Midlands Connect
- Kamal Panchal, Senior Adviser, Local Government Association (LGA)
- Paul Campion, Chief Executive, TRL

The topic of the webinar was: 'The role of localism in ensuring a fair and just transition to net zero and driving decarbonisation'.

It was chaired by Hilary Chipping, Chief Executive, South East Midlands LEP, and sponsored by Greener Transport Solutions, Addleshaw Goddard, Transport Times, the Foundation for Integrated Transport and The Transport Knowledge Hub.

Introductory remarks from Claire Haigh, Chief Executive, Greener Transport Solutions

In her opening remarks, Ms Haigh said the webinar series had been intended to outline the challenges needed to decarbonise transport and the wider societal changes that were needed.

She warned that vehicle efficiency gains in reducing transport emissions had been eroded by trends such as a move to large vehicles and increasing numbers of people travelling.

Ms Haigh said the move to electric vehicles alone would not help drive the heavy lifting in emissions reduction that had to take place over the next decade to meet 2050 targets.

Car dependency that had been baked into policymaking for the last 30 years could not be undone by the drive to electrification alone, she added, saying that policymakers needed to prioritise reducing car use.

She declared that people should be at the heart of making policy to tackle climate change, including putting carbon pricing into the policy agenda, whilst using mitigation measures to prevent such measures from becoming regressive.

Local leaders needed to be at the heart of the drive towards net zero, but they had to be given the powers and resources needed to play their part, Ms Haigh said.

She also said it was important to move beyond narrow frameworks of cost-benefit analysis. Climate change must be framed in terms of the management of immense risks.

Keynote speech from Jamie Driscoll, Mayor of North of Tyne Combined Authority

During his keynote speech, Mr Driscoll said the current aspirations of the public needed to shift from moving vehicles to moving people, advocating the need for modal shift in transport.

He referred to the recently published Transport Decarbonisation Plan, including the aim to put 10% of ethanol in fuel, claiming it did not make sense to use prime arable land to grow this as global wheat prices soared.

Mr Driscoll also criticised the Plan's intention to use blue hydrogen because of the level of methane produced during the process. The electricity grid needed to be fully decarbonised to push forward decarbonisation in transport.

"Walking does not require any technological innovations. We need to crack on with that," he said.

Mr Driscoll called for proper investment in local authorities on buses and believed that the Integrated Rail Plan would not help further the decarbonisation in transport. He wanted to see more homegrown produce consumed as opposed to flying in consumable goods from abroad.

The Government could also consider an air miles scheme, whereby those who had flown more than certain threshold would pay a greater level of tax, Mr Driscoll said.

He also advocated greater partnership working and franchising for buses at a local level.

Mr Driscoll also discussed the need to reduce the need for motor transport, alongside better neighbourhood planning with all services within walking distance and encouraging improvements in digital infrastructure and sustainable public transport.

He sought to refute the suggestion that many transport improvements were unaffordable but insisted that measured could be afforded.

Panel discussion

Victoria Hills

Ms Hills said that the Government was consulting on its Planning White Paper, with a response perhaps due that week, with a Bill expected later in the year. The planning reforms would have major implications for transport, including the increased role for Local Plans.

She noted that RTPI had published a report on net zero earlier in the year that had advocated planning in a carbon positive world to see capacity returned to the grid and active travel enabled.

Ms Hills said there were many younger professionals who did not own a car, did not need to travel as well and were already living healthier lives. She wanted to see the younger age cohorts pulled into transport planning and local government careers.

Routes for involving people in transport and planning decisions also needed to be broadened, Ms Hills said.

Martin Tugwell

Many visitors to the North of England faced challenges on a lack of transport infrastructure, Mr Tugwell said, adding there was a huge scope for people to change what was happening.

He believed there was an opportunity to repurpose transport and urban centres.

Freight decarbonisation was the sector of the transport sector where action needed to be considered by terms of supply chains, Mr Tugwell said.

He explained how TfN had developed future transport solutions to facilitate ways of moving to net zero, whilst also reducing the rate at which the UK was burning through its carbon budget.

Mr Tugwell said price was a key determiner in transport behaviour and noted TfN was focused on delivering outcomes at a local level, along with what transport could do to drive the solutions.

TfN would be publishing its decarbonisation plan later that year and along with other sub-national transport bodies, it would have a clear role to play.

Henri Murison

Speaking on behalf of The Northern Powerhouse Partnership, Mr Murison said the centralisation of transport funding and decision making drove certain outcomes. He criticised the centralisation of Fuel Duty and Vehicle Excise Duty, noting it could be hypothecated.

Mr Murison said new infrastructure would be needed in the North of England to help shift freight off the roads and encouraging people to make fewer journeys around cars.

There was more to be done to drive public transport across the region, he declared.

Mr Murison said decarbonisation of transport was not a separate question to economic growth, urging the Government to move away from “unlimited investment in the road network” in the North.

He wanted to see greater flexibility on the funding between Highways England and Network Rail to break down the silos, allowing for greater flexibility in between the overall budget.

Mr Murison said the North of England could only decarbonise with rail investment like HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail.

Luke Murphy

Mr Murphy said fairness had to be at the heart of the shift to net zero in transport and all areas of decarbonisation.

He discussed how IPPR's Social Contract had proposed a people's dividend for transitioning to a low-carbon economy, with those in the most need benefitting most from it.

Mr Murphy said transport should also improve access to jobs and ensure a fairness lock on all policies to ensure they were fairly costed. Some on the think-tank's citizens' juries had argued that the needed support should be put into effect ahead of change.

"Every government policy must be a climate and environment policy", he added, noting that nature should be given the same weighting in the debate.

IPPR was also proposing a "people-first approach" to give people a stake in the development of climate and nature plans, Mr Murphy said.

He warned that policies must be tailored to local levels through devolving powers over transport, the economy and planning to local authorities.

Gareth Powell

Mr Powell from TfL said there should be clear, definable targets on a local level with the London Transport Strategy including one on a target for 80% of all trips in London to be sustainable by 2041.

He added that 89 kilometres of cycle lanes had been introduced over the last 18 months, 86 kms of bus lanes had been upgraded and several thousand sets of traffic lights reviewed.

Mr Powell noted that the Ultra-low Emission Zone (ULEZ) would be expanded by 18 times in size to cover up to the North and South Circular roads with the funding available for the decarbonisation of transport.

Supply chains needed to be influenced to introduce that ambition, including through the 500 zero emission bus vehicles over of 9,000 vehicles. Investment from the private sector had been incentivised through clear structures and plans.

Mr Powell said the Spending Review should be used to deliver long-term funding and certainty for the transport sector to guide investment and help guide the move to net zero.

Jason Torrance

Rounding off the panel discussion, Mr Torrance said there was no framework for net zero that encouraged coherent investment by local government in transport, planning or other areas.

He added there were knock-on effects for local government finances and criticised the confusion created by the National Roads Programmes.

Mr Torrance said NRS had created a "shadow" over the transport debate and called for more to be done to set the course of sustainable travel.

He believed the need to find an alternative to Fuel Duty and the UK Infrastructure Bank created opportunities to push forward on net zero.

Mr Torrance said there were significant problems but many solutions available to overcome them.

Reflections and debate

Opening the reflections section, Anna Heaton, Joint Head of Transport Sector Team and Real Estate Partner, Addleshaw Goddard called for celebrations of what had been achieved on policy and whole economy point.

She said more transport businesses were seeing sustainability as a long-term opportunity. However, this opportunity could only be delivered by having certainty over long-term proposals.

Ms Heaton said Network Rail's sustainability plan had been substantiated by stakeholder engagement in the regions and believed local leaders should be given the freedoms to deliver for their local areas.

Following on from this, Maria Machancoses, Chief Executive, Midlands Connect said there were many opportunities to consider including improving infrastructure and providing certainty on the direction of travel.

She added that transport investment needed to be driven both nationally and locally, alongside involving the public more in transport decisions.

Personal carbon budgets were being considered in the Midlands to give people a greater stake in the debate, she said.

Ms Machancoses added that the people of the UK needed to look to change their transport habits away from long distance, single person car journeys at pace.

Kamal Panchal, Senior Adviser, Local Government Association said clear messaging was needed from central government to support councils in reallocating road space, often politically very challenging to deliver.

More support from government was needed to help councils deliver modal switch. The risk was that EVs would make driving too cheap. Investment was needed in cycling and walking infrastructure.

He wanted to see the needs of the whole national transport network considered, as well the resources given to councils to help push forward the decarbonisation agenda. Long term funding certainty for councils was needed

The Chair agreed that the issue of the overall availability of capital funding was an important one.

Closing off the reflections section, Paul Campion, Chief Executive, TRL said transport decarbonisation would only succeed by encouraging people to embrace new ways of living. Any messaging based on the premise of a loss of freedoms would be doomed to fail.

"We have to do something now", he added, wondering if imperatives were the correct language to use because it shut out those preoccupied with the daily concerns of life.

Mr Campion did not want to compromise the scope of debate in a democratic society on these issues for the sake of speed and vice-versa. There were ways to rapidly make changes and make an impact on the environment.

Local authorities should look to articulate a support from central government with a case that they were confident that the wider public would follow, he concluded.

Later in the Q&A session, Mr Campion said messaging on cycling needed to be shifted away from fitness towards it being a cheaper alternative to commuting, He also wanted to see new ways provided for delivering new solutions,

Mr Driscoll responded to the speakers' and Council Members' remarks by saying that the public responded best where greater certainty was available when it came to transport decisions.

He added that fiscal innovations were required by local authorities with mechanisms developed to help councils accrue the benefits.

Mr Panchal said that long term funding certainty for councils would be essential for them to be able to plan and leverage third party investment.

Mr Torrance said all funding and investment efforts should be directed towards tackling the climate emergency.

Ms Heaton said that with more certainty of public funding there would be more involvement from the private sector who see this as a huge opportunity.