

Participants

- Professor Greg Marsden, Professor of Transport Governance, Institute for Transport Studies, University of Leeds (Chair)
- Claire Haigh, Chief Executive, Greener Transport Solutions
- Hilary Chipping, Chief Executive, Southeast Midlands LEP
- Kamal Panchal, Local Government Association
- Stephen Joseph, Transport Consultant
- Cllr Clyde Loakes Waltham Forest Council
- Cllr Don Alexander, Cabinet Member for Transport, Bristol City Council
- Cllr Peter Carlill, Lead Member for Active Travel & Sustainable Transport, Leeds City Council
- Cllr Bridget Smith, Leader of South Cambridgeshire District Council
- Christina Calderato, Director of Transport Strategy & Policy, TfL
- Patrick Warner, Lead Officer - Bus Decarbonisation, Liverpool City Region CA
- James Golding-Graham, Decarbonisation Manager, England's Economic Heartland
- Leo Murray, Director of Innovation, Possible
- Janna Walker, representing ADEPT and Head of Service for Highways Commissioning, Leicestershire County Council
- Jason Torrance, Assistant CEO, UK100
- Rosie Pearson, Local Partnerships
- Dr Ashok Sinha, London Cycling Campaign
- Richard Bradley, Head of Strategy, Midlands Connect
- Chris Todd, Transport Action Network
- Brian Love, Connected Cities
- Steven Bishop, Director Sustainable Transport, Steer
- Silviya Barrett, Campaign for Better Transport
- Stephen Glaister, Emeritus Professor of Transport and Infrastructure at the Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering, Imperial College London
- Chris Todd, Founder and Director, Transport Action Network

The meeting was held under Chatham House rules, meaning all remarks made in this summary note are non-attributable.

Summary of meeting discussion

Opening remarks

At the commencement of the session, participants heard introductory remarks about how the efficiency gains of a technology-led approach to decarbonising transport had been eroded by people driving more and in larger vehicles. Central government must turn its focus to behaviour change and traffic reduction to push forward on decarbonisation.

Perspectives from local government

The session then opened to remarks from attendees.

One person speaking from a local authority perspective explained how their area had set out to reduce car use across the borough, alongside tackling negative perceptions around cyclists and encouraging active travel. This had included putting in place low traffic neighbourhoods to cut through traffic on residential streets.

They insisted that the traffic mitigation measures in the borough had put in place to deprioritise motorists needs, which they claimed had benefited active travel, air quality and hopefully public health in the long-term.

Another attendee explained how local authorities surrounding their own took different approaches to demand management in transport, such as offering free car parking. Central government needed to take a lead on this area by ensuring carbon neutrality was built-in to planning decision for transport infrastructure.

Their area needed a better public bus system, but a suite of measures was needed to reach net zero. The aim of the local authority was to create carbon neutral corridors to allow travel from the outskirts of the area into the city centre.

Following this, a speaker set out the challenges of managing a large metropolitan area with a significant difference in the life expectancies of ten years between those living in the inner city and those living in the outer areas. They credited a large contributing factor to this as being the differences in air quality and carbon emissions between these areas.

The speaker called for the local council to be given more control over the local bus network and local rail networks. They also criticised the uncertainty around major national infrastructure improvements that may or may not benefit their part of the country.

A final speaker from a local authority discussed the political complexities in their area and how they were developing a joint local plan with a neighbouring authority. The ambition was to use planning to create the greenest local plan in the country, whilst also providing unfamiliar places to life, improving public transport infrastructure and reducing car usage.

Powers of local government and mandates for change

One attendee raised a question about how local authorities could best use their existing pricing powers to tackle transport usage.

Another person wondered how local authorities could act on allocation of road space.

Local authorities could run citizens assemblies to bring in a voters' perspective to tackle political opposition around potentially difficult issues like congestion assemblies. This point was echoed by another speaker who had also tried climate juries in their area, which had helped confirm that the views of the local council were in line with their voters, including on establishing local authority control of buses.

Local MPs had been afforded opportunities to denounce policies that councils had been forced to implement by national government, they said.

Councils could overcome opposition to measure like the workplace parking levy by securing a large majority at upcoming elections.

Later in the session, a speaker claimed that the free market did not work for public transport. Operators would cut unprofitable routes, which had left 8,000 people without access to the city centre.

Another local authority representative said they did not support climate assemblies because they diluted the decision-making authority that local councils were elected on. Councils should look to charge for residents parking permits, impose 20mph speed limits and introduce measures to prevent engines idling in traffic.

Local government encouraging cycling, active travel and sustainable transport

An attendee praised the “political bravery” of local councils and officials on supporting cycling and active travel in their areas. They wondered what civil society could do to support local authorities.

Central government was scared to push the behavioural change agenda on transport, so councils should come together to do it for them.

There was strong consistent support across every part of the country to reduce traffic based on road safety, air quality and other areas. However, public support for any measures fell away only to rapidly recover when these steps had been put in place.

Popular support for implementing a radical change was not a good guide when the long-term benefits of a policy would be. Proposals for change did not motivate support.

This speaker insisted that there was majority support for road space allocation, encouraging local authorities to move past the often “toxic,” vocal minority, often men over 55 years old, who would express opposition.

They supported representative polling of local populations and climate assemblies, as opposed to pre-consultation models. Crucially, this work should be done at the start of an election cycle.

Acceleration of digital and road use charging

Another attendee spoke about how they were seeking to embed digital into all solutions to deliver better connected and shared transport services by creating a public infrastructure layer.

They wanted to hear about the challenges of delivering digital solutions and if there was a case study library available to draw on for local authorities.

Following this, a fellow speaker highlighted examples of road use charging from their area. This had been delivered through strong political leadership and how ensuring a buy-in to the challenge was important.

Nonetheless, it was still difficult to push forward amendments. Measures looking at challenges for tackling air quality had received more support from the public.

Local authorities were looking at how road use charging could be used to deliver the committed reduction in traffic meaning there were challenges for moving on with road pricing across large metropolitan areas.

Later in the session, an attendee advocated that LAs should be empowered with the powers and budgets necessary to push forward the decarbonisation of transport.

A participant drew attention to the missions set out in the Levelling Up White Paper on bringing public transport across the UK closer to London’s level by 2030 and improving public health

outcomes. Local councils should work together to hold central government to account on these areas.

What can local authorities achieve?

Local authorities would find it difficult to deliver on carbon reduction targets because of the lack of powers and budgets, a speaker said.

Another speaker said actions could be possible at a city region level but agreed it would only be delivered with more money. The private sector also had a part to play, and more creative solutions were needed.

Many rural bus networks were on their knees and faced with route cuts. It was politically difficult to reduce underused bus routes given local opposition or to put in place bus lanes in older built environments, particularly those with historic road layouts such as older market towns.

Regions like the Midlands had to balance transport decarbonisation against the economic concerns of having a large road haulage and logistics sector that were integral to those areas.

As the session ended, a speaker emphasised the importance of sharing benefits across all local areas and giving local government leaders all the means, they needed to deliver net zero in their areas.

Remarks raised by participants in the chat during the event

All remarks are unattributable in-line with Chatham House rules.

- *We have a City Deal here and are culminating a City Access Study which is highly likely to recommend Congestion charging. The push back is political rather than from residents.*
- *Bus Back Better funding was designed to grow bus services and patronage and started off with £3billion support; but it is now only £1.2 billion and not national strategy as Gov only intend to use the funding to transform a few places.*
- *Key issue we are trying to undo some 50 years of car centric design and the symbol of the car as an aspiration. Imagine if Fuel Duty had increased year on year and that funding ring fenced for active travel infrastructure and investment. If Central Government is not going to read the writing on the wall, then councils need to show the 'leadership'. We need to remove parking and increase and introduce permit parking schemes. We are getting lost in 'plans'... we have the evidence and examples of what works, some can be done cheaply.*
- *I have been caught out on two occasions from clever use of bus lanes (bus gates) in Cambridge city centre - learnt my lesson!*
- *Bus gates are a big issue in Brighton with Conservative Cllrs calling on motorists to be refunded for the fines they have incurred*
- *I would like us to scrap City centre car parks, but many councils are completely reliant on the income they produce.*
- *Climate Assemblies can be good but our one on transport was done without any consideration of the actual impact on climate change from suggested interventions - no proper consideration of need for traffic reduction. They can come forward with less consistent outcomes, even if most suggestions were heading in the right direction*
- *We also need far greater certainty about large scale strategic infrastructure. East West Rail has been on the cards for years, but all is silent now. Certainty over this is vital for local planning as well as travel planning*

- *As a city who had planned for ten years on how to make the best out of HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail, following the IRP we now feel the rug has been pulled out from under us and we are back to square one.*
- *Other countries are acting in response: Germany is providing 9 Euro monthly travel cards for three months; New Zealand has cut bus fares (and other public transport fares) in half for three months also; Ireland reduced fares by 20 per cent, and 50 per cent for young adults under 24, and Northern Ireland, where buses are publicly run, has frozen public transport fares.*
- *Fuel duty cut is likely to be a similar quantum in 2022/23 as the cost of operating all UK bus services a year pre-Covid*
- *Mayoral combined authorities are getting there; and DfT officials get it, but challenge is the Treasury*
- *There are many 'unions' of local authorities always pushing at Government but.....*
- *The point is that it should be less competitive, and project based but more allocation-based tied to achieving certain objectives*
- *WF has benefitted hugely from 'supporters' not on the political/ council spectrum. From my experience civic 'campaigns' are normally mobilised against something or an initiative. What we saw in WF was when that 'against' irrational campaign emerged, we saw a pro-more organised and message disciplined group emerge, who could take the 'values and ideas' based on evidence rather than anecdote, fight to the places that I or the Council could not.*
- *Won't road pricing (which is coming) effectively be Demand management under the table...?*
- *If it is used as a demand management tool and not just revenue raising tool.*
- *Road pricing may not manage demand if it is not set high enough - and there will be strong pushback for higher rates - some will see it as an opportunity to reduce the tax burden on motorists*
- *to higher rates*
- *But look at the borough of Ealing: mass demos against LTNs, resulting in the council leader being deposed and the LTNs pulled out. It is hard to play the long game until the ground has been better prepared in advance.*
- *The effect of road pricing - if done right - will be to make the cost of driving more visible and people may think twice about making short journeys or switching if the alternatives are convenient or affordable enough.*
- *Agree about limitations with pre-polling. My understanding was that DfT helpfully changed guidance so that new cycling schemes must stay in place for 12 months.*
- *It is easy to play the long game where you have a vast majority as a party.*
- *There is something about quick wins, helping councils and councillors do things quickly that are visible and make people feel that something is happening*
- *In fairness to Transport to London, they understand Leo's point and are looking to support boroughs with a more "co-production" (for want of a better term) than traditional scheme consultation approach.*
- *In places where the balance of power varies with each set of elections - we have had minority administrations (Green - Labour and Conservative) over past ~20 years - it is difficult to plan longer term unless you can guarantee political buy in from at least two parties*
- *Local Labour Party factionalism was a huge factor, with a previously marginal faction spotting a populist opportunity to unseat the incumbent. The new leader wrote the 2018 manifesto which promised all the LTNs he now disavows! But it is also the case that Ealing is an object lesson in the mistakes made in emergency active travel implementation in the pandemic*

- *Build it and they will come!*
- *I fear most case is in fact special. My experience is that local factors are always key, which is another reason (informal) partnership with local civil society feels critical.*
- *Splits within parties occur across the country. Labour in Brighton are split on active travel which is why we saw a successful temporary cycle lane (that they put in) taken out when they sided with the Conservatives (having swallowed the Conservatives' narrative)*
- *Only central government leadership on race to ZC, as well as funding, will reduce the political inertia that is inevitable whether you have a large or small majority.*
- *The unedifying dramas over the Manchester CAZ are a particularly egregious example of failure of political leadership*
- *We need to see central government stress we are in an emergency - that message / urgency seems to have been lost*
- *The difference between the legal powers in London and the rest of the country is massive. Some of us can only dream....*
- *<https://enjoywalthamforest.co.uk/>*
- *I have an anti-growth conservative MP who sides with the NIMBYs at every opportunity. Exceedingly difficult to deal with as he is seen as the voice of Government*
- *Got my fingers crossed that councils outside London will finally this year be getting powers to enforce against moving traffic offences. Only been trying for 10 years...!*
- *Our estimate is that there's 18 months of paperwork to do.*
- *Agreed. Cannot get away from the vital importance of the devolution of power and control and the ability to raise/retain funds.*
- *We have been doing monthly cycle counts in WF for some years now, which I tend to publish. We then use the data for our 'WF Annual Walking and Cycling Account'*
- *Yeah, I thought so, thank you!*
- *The disconnect between government departments is very unhelpful. Transport, environment and health must be working together on this and then we might see some change*
- *Love the beauty pageant analogy, Jason!*
- *I frequently see anti-LTN folks saying the WF data is a lie, there is no decrease in car use or increase in cycling.*
- *Government is not the only source of funding. In places like Manchester where rain is common, just enabling people to walk in the dry is a major attraction. Canopies over pavements can be self-funding if they use transparent PV which produce electricity, especially for street lighting. See <https://blog.spiritenergy.co.uk/solar-pv/west-bromwich-market-22-kwp> for an example*
- *01The link I just posted includes everything we have ever done in WF since Mini Holland incl. all engagement and consultations and cabinet and portfolio holder decision reports etc.*
- *We have just under 20 minutes so I do not think I can fit in more than we have hands up - 3 mins max please*
- *We need to make it the easiest choice and the cheapest choice*
- *That requires funding...*
- *For info: UK100 research into powers that Local Authorities need to take forward ambitious long-term action on climate: <https://www.uk100.org/publications/power-shift>*
- *I will be really interested to see the outcome from the workshop on Smart & Fair Road User Charging, cannot decarbonise without it. Need to de-toxify it politically. How?*
- *Agree completely with Stephen*
- *We have not mentioned planning in the discussion today, yet many local authorities are approving new developments that are making things worse - not always their fault due to*

weaknesses in NPPF, but equally local Cllrs often want more parking and do not understand strategic impact of substantial number of small decisions

- *Re: funding. Perhaps not spending money on a National Roads Programme and subsidising Fuel Duty - would help?*
- *A little too much politics for my liking, there are strong views at both ends of the spectrum but a large majority in the middle who just want an alternative to mass car use to work for them. Fast, frequent and reliable bus services that provide an attractive alternative to the many downsides of driving that generate passenger growth and relieve pressure on the cost of providing the service with interchange points on busy corridors saving rural people from having to drive all the way are what is needed. Politicians in the room, if you genuinely believe this, please be bold and brave and help deliver it in partnership with those that can help make it work*
- *The Greater Cambridge City Deal has until last May had a board made up of three political groups (it is now 2) - this was helpful in breaking down political barriers*
- *There has been no discussion on it since and most local authorities are not doing as you are*
- *I do not know what the situation is outside London but worth noting here that London boroughs with residents-controlled parking zones ALL subsidise these; seven and a half million or so per annum in the inner London borough where I live, H&F, where only 38% of households even have access to a car. they are cross subsidised from short stay parking and fines*
- *The least polluting form of public transport is rail, and the good news is that the rail network is in place but is not always working at capacity. Fortunately, with the coming of Great British Rail the rail goals have been changed. The Secretary of State for Transport has announced the core goals that will define GBR:*
 - *Changing the culture of the railways, not simply creating a bigger version of Network Rail*
 - *Thinking like customers, both passengers and freight, and putting them first*
 - *Growing the network and getting more people travelling*
 - *Making the railways easier to use*
 - *Simplifying the sector to do things quicker, driving down costs and being accountable*
 - *Having a can-do, not a cannot do culture*
 - *Harnessing the best of the private sector*
 - *Playing a critical role in the national shift to net zero*
- *People always says- 'We shouldn't make perfect the enemy of good' when it comes to cycle infrastructure.... I always remind him though that 'adequate' and 'poor' has no place!*
- *I also think we have not talked about shared mobility much: e-scooters, e-cycles, e-cargo-bikes, and e-cars. Car ownership is hideously expensive, and we are in a cost-of-living crisis. We could do much more to support sharing.*
- *Weird how Active Travel England has not been mentioned yet!!!!*
- *Micromobility is coming up FAST in the rear-view mirror and will change the whole game*
- *Good point - there is a big gap in terms of the skill set in LAs*
- *I am afraid I am still not convinced by 'micro mobility'.....it is still in its fad mode.*
- *There is much we can and are doing as local govt on mobility, but we cannot solve the bigger issues without central govt leadership*
- *Wholly agree. Always up for supporting LAs in putting pressure on HMG.*
- *We also need to stop the artificial divide between rural and urban. Yes, they may require different approaches, but they also have a big interaction which is often overlooked*

- *If people are used to travelling by micromobility and local frequent public transport they are unlikely to own cars, and therefore consider long distance public transport first So changing the short-term travel habits effects the high carbon long distance journeys*
- *We need more voices being honest about the local challenge to increase pressure on Government about the allocation of resources which is currently skewed in the wrong direction*
- *There is a consultation that came out yesterday to designate National Highways as a relevant public authority (and therefore required to collaborate with LAs on improving air quality <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/designation-of-national-highways-as-a-relevant-public-authority>)*
- *In fact, Government just consulting on forcing National Highways to work with local authorities on air quality - <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/designation-of-national-highways-as-a-relevant-public-authority>*
- *London needs to invest £75 billion between now and 2030 to hit NZ. Only possible if private money (pensions etc.) mobilised through de-risking by the NIB.*
- *If power is devolved to regions with long term financial settlements, then we can better leverage private sector money.*