



PATHWAYS TO NET ZERO:

Report on a Roundtable Discussion Series

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The summary and reflections set out in this report offer my personal thoughts on the discussions and how we can move forward on the net zero agenda. All errors remain mine alone!

Greener Transport Solutions

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CONTENTS

What is to be done?	I
Summary & Reflections	III
Introduction	III
A credible framework	IV
Political deliverability	IX
Social impacts	XV
Conclusion	XX
ANNEX: Roundtable Discussion Series Write-ups	XXI
1. Pricing.....	1
2. Wider economy.....	10
3. Planning.....	21
4. Politics and local delivery.....	31
5. Behaviour Change.....	43
Roundtable Discussion Series Attendees.....	55



What is to be done?

We must start by facing the truth. Government policy will not deliver net zero. Nor will everything in our current arsenal of policies and measures.

Achieving net zero carbon is a major national and global challenge, and one that cannot be met by any sector acting alone. Global greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced by 45% by 2030 if we are to avoid climate catastrophe¹. Major changes are needed in how we live our lives. There are no futures which meet our climate obligations which do not also require reducing the amount we travel by car.

The current sharp rise in the world hydrocarbon price is doing exactly what we would want in carbon emissions terms. It sends precisely the right price signal, but at great social cost. We also need to think about what to do when the world price eventually falls back. We cannot allow the reduction in fuel duty to become permanent.

The pandemic has demonstrated that when faced with an emergency we can act. Governments can be decisive, and people will respond. The climate emergency, joined up with energy security and the cost-of-living crisis is such an emergency. These crises are intrinsically related, and we need a joined-up response that gets to the root cause, which is fundamentally our dependency on fossil fuels.

There is a solution

If we are to wean ourselves off fossil fuels, we must price for carbon properly. The fear has always been that if we do that, we could end up harming the poorest in society. However, carbon pricing generates substantial revenues which can be used to mitigate any negative social impacts.

We face the most severe cost-of-living crisis in a generation. On 26th May the Chancellor announced a £21 billion package to help households with their energy bills. However, further emergency measures are likely to be needed by the autumn when inflation is expected to reach 10%. For poorer households, it will rise to 14%².

The Chancellor should consider introducing a universal carbon allowance for every individual in the UK funded by putting a carbon price on everything we consume. Work is needed to understand the full distributional impacts, but as a percentage of people's income this would be a very progressive measure. Individuals on higher incomes would pay more in carbon tax through all the goods and services they buy but receive the same fixed allowance as those on lower incomes. Higher income households consume three times more carbon than lower income households³.

¹ <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/net-zero-coalition>

² <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/15905>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/net-zero-review-final-report>



Getting the pricing of carbon right across the whole economy would ensure that the correct decisions from a net zero perspective are the most cost effective and politically acceptable. It would give power to the elbow of local leaders trying to deliver change. Our local transport networks would be transformed. Our towns and cities would become more livable places free of congestion and air pollution, with more connected communities and better opportunities for all.

Time for a new approach

The Pathways to Net Zero series is the culmination of a project that began more than two years ago investigating how to decarbonise transport⁴.

The key conclusion is that we are getting nowhere near the scale of change needed to achieve our net zero targets for transport. Lack of joined-up thinking undermines net zero ambitions. Spending is skewed towards road building and unsustainable transport policies. We are still building car dependent housing developments.

Lack of leadership from central government is a major problem for our local leaders trying to deliver on their net zero targets. The cut in fuel duty was unhelpful to local areas trying to implement car restraint measures because it sends the wrong message to the public. There is felt to be a strong need to develop a mandate for tough decisions for the long term.

There is much work that the transport sector can do to decarbonise its vehicle fleet and encourage the switch to more sustainable modes. But the transport sector on its own cannot achieve net zero. We need a solution for the whole economy.

If we continue with 'policy as usual' we won't get close to bringing emissions down in time. But record high fuel and energy prices are a game-changer. The cost-of-living crisis presents the opportunity for a completely new approach.

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⁴ <https://greenertransportsolutions.com/events/03-march-2020-decarbonising-transport-a-transport-knowledge-hub-national-workshop/>



Summary & Reflections

It's "now or never" if world is to avoid climate disaster. The IPCC have been clear on what the world must do avert catastrophe, but without immediate drastic action that chance will slip away. And all of this we must deliver in an ever-darkening context.

The twin shocks of the coronavirus pandemic and the war in Ukraine mean that oil and gas prices have risen sharply, whilst food prices have hit record highs. Inflation in the UK hit 9% in April and is predicted to reach 10% by the autumn. The UK is suffering its worst bout of 'stagflation', weak growth alongside high inflation, since second oil shock of 1970s.

The current crises illustrate with devastating clarity that we must break our dependency on fossil fuels. The IPCC calculate that reducing energy demand across all sectors could deliver a 40-70 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050⁵. Energy demand reduction supports the key goals of energy policy: security, affordability and sustainability.⁶

The UK Government has failed so far to grasp the nettle on demand reduction. A technology led approach has delivered little progress since 1990. The key message of our Manifesto was that we need a national focus on behaviour change urgent attention must be given to traffic reduction. We must reduce car kms travelled on our roads by a quarter by 2030.⁷

Introduction

This report draws out some key conclusions of the recent Pathways to Net Zero Roundtable Discussion Series on how to deliver the required traffic reduction. It was felt that there is a huge gap between the level of ambition and level of funding and ability to deliver at pace and scale. As a sector we need to make sure we are not complicit in allowing central government to vacate its responsibility. As one contributor put it:

"Is the industry being honest enough with politicians about scale of challenge? We know it's not just about demand management, planning system, sustainable transport, digital etc. It's about all those things and doing them now! Are we holding up the mirror so that leaders can make those urgent and necessary decisions?"

The Roundtable Discussion Series March-April 2022 is the culmination of a project that began in March 2020 with a Transport Knowledge Hub Decarbonising Transport event⁸ which set out to answer the following question:

"What would be a credible and politically deliverable framework for the decarbonisation of transport that will deliver the necessary emissions reductions in the shortest time possible whilst mitigating any negative social impacts?"

⁵ <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg3/>

⁶ <https://www.iea.org/topics/energy-efficiency>

⁷ <https://greenertransportsolutions.com/publication/pathways-to-net-zero/>

⁸ <https://greenertransportsolutions.com/events/03-march-2020-decarbonising-transport-a-transport-knowledge-hub-national-workshop/>



A credible framework

1. Transport sector on its own cannot achieve net zero
2. We must price properly for carbon
3. Reduce embedded carbon and “sweat the assets”
4. Better integration of transport and planning
5. Implement proper devolution
6. Net zero requires a step change in funding
7. A net zero test for public policy

1. Transport sector on its own cannot achieve net zero

We need a whole systems approach to transport decarbonisation that reflects the shift to digital connectivity and the integration of transport with land-use planning, energy, green finance and the trip-generating sectors. A missing part of the jigsaw has been to develop strategies to avoid or reduce travel, both through reducing trip numbers and trip lengths.

Most of travel is a derived demand, so collaboration with the major trip-generating sectors is essential. Some examples were cited of where this is starting to be achieved. Transport for Greater Manchester has worked with the health and social care sectors. Wigan took a fresh look at social care workers and nurses going to people’s homes and found that they were travelling all over the borough so reorganised staff visits so that many can now walk or cycle.

The pandemic has accelerated the shift to digital connectivity, but one contributor asked whether we are really seeing a reduction in mileage and carbon emissions from switch to online shopping. Setting the marginal next day delivery cost at zero has perverse outcome for carbon emissions. Could pricing make it more efficient? More profound aspects also need to be considered as these are driven by consumer life-style choices. As another contributor commented:

“You might say I will no longer drive to Sainsburys and have my groceries delivered. But if your green beans still come from Kenya and your apples still come from South Africa and your tablet computer comes from China, you’re still living in a globalised not a localised world, you just changed some of the peripherals around the local delivery mechanisms”

We need to plan for people and freight more holistically. One contributor suggested that we should adopt the 80/20 principle. E-scooters and cargo bikes get a huge amount of focus but what is actually moving most people and goods? ***“The answer is buses and HGVs!”***

Logistics operators will continue to deliver whatever their customer asks them to deliver but they face extremely tight margins and appalling conditions for drivers. ***“If Deliveroo didn’t make profit in the pandemic, when could it ever be expected to?”***

We need informed consumer change by individuals and businesses. Who has sufficient time to stand back, understand the complexity of their supply chain and then set about decarbonising it? And do they have the technical knowledge to implement any solutions?



2. We must price properly for carbon

Carbon is not priced properly. This failure runs through every sector of our economy and continues to support unsustainable levels of consumption. As one contributor commented

“You can’t get all the decisions coordinated across the economy the right way unless you price properly for carbon. If you price properly for carbon, you will generate a lot of revenues which can help mitigate social impacts.”

Every mode of transport should be priced according to its environmental impact, but crucially this must be achieved whilst ensuring a fair and just transition to net zero. If price incentives are perverse, it makes it very difficult to achieve this objective.

If we want to reduce carbon emissions from transport, we must approach the problem directly. It was noted that BEIS have recently reissued official prices for carbon to be used in appraisal, on what real cost to society is of burning carbon⁹.

To achieve carbon targets car use needs to be reduced and some form of pay-as-you-go road pricing needs to be actively thought about. Road pricing is a very old subject, but there have been important changes recently: 1. There is a stronger interest in carbon reduction; 2. There is a reduction in revenues from Fuel Duty from the switch to electric vehicles (EVs); 3. There has been a rapid increase in the world price for hydrocarbons.

One contributor noted that on the current trajectory of EV roll out, fuel duty revenues by end of this decade likely to have fallen by approximately £5 billion. To the question of when the Treasury would have to do something to plug the gap (if anything), their conclusion was that Government is facing a problem that would affect its successor.

3. Reduce embedded carbon and “sweat the assets”

One contributor expressed concern that the Transport Decarbonisation Plan focuses purely on the decarbonisation of the operation of transport. There is a big gap around addressing the embedded carbon in transport infrastructure.

“Focusing on the zero-carbon mile leaves us tending to “build” a huge unnecessarily redundant “system” that delivers zero emissions miles. Unless we start focusing on the GHG impact of that infrastructure we risk ignoring the biggest GHG impact in next decade.”

There is a tension between the desire for universally convenient travel available when where and how one wants it, and necessary and efficient net zero travel. For example, how many EV charge points do we really need? At one extreme some will argue that we need millions of charge points because everyone should be able to charge everywhere. ***“But that is a huge cost, and a huge, embedded carbon.”***

Several contributors spoke about the need “sweat the assets”. We should minimise what we build and increase car and charge point sharing. We need to move to a more circular

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/valuing-greenhouse-gas-emissions-in-policy-appraisal/valuation-of-greenhouse-gas-emissions-for-policy-appraisal-and-evaluation>



economy, making better use of all the resources we have. This includes consideration of the impacts of hybrid working. Do we need to consider moving to seven day working week?

The point was made that whilst we need to sweat the assets and reduce overall movement, to do this we need to reduce demand. It can't be to fail to provide the capacity by relying on congestion (which just produces more carbon).

NOTE: A recent briefing by Decarbon8 & UKRI Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council highlights that the carbon implications of infrastructure have not been adequately considered in strategic cases advanced to date. All new transport infrastructure generates carbon emissions in its construction, maintenance and operation¹⁰.

4. Better integration of transport & planning

Since the 1950s a car-based consumer culture has ensured that our transport system has been built on the assumption that the car is the predominant mode of transport. This assumption continues to be reflected in transport budgets and planning decisions. However, decarbonisation will require a decisive shift away from a car-based culture. Despite this, we are moving towards more car dependent developments.

Integration of transport and land use planning is critical. Density is key to supporting public transport, and shorter distances are needed to make walking and cycling feasible. To deliver behaviour change we need ensure that the provision of sustainable transport is factored in at the very start of the process. However, as one contributor commented: ***“Transport comes in too late in the process and tries to mop up disasters.”***

The mindset needs to change. Several contributors expressed concern about the lack of integration transport and planning, which very often leads to car dependent developments with no pavements, no urban realm. One contributor noted that ***“A massive education job is needed to get the right developments in the right places with the right amenities and sustainable transport.”***

Another noted that we've known for 60 years about need to integrate planning and transport, so why hasn't it happened?

Part of the problem, it was suggested, is that transport and local government are in separate government departments. Another issue is that the role of planning and transport is fraught with who makes what decision. For example, a local district council planning decision to add houses onto the edge of a village is made without any regard to transport. We are also heavily constrained by the built environment. As one contributor commented:

“The built environment has grown up very slowly over the last 200 years based on ability to travel through it using fossil fuels. Nearly all trips have their origin and destination within existing built environment. Fossil fuel mobility has allowed large choices of destinations. If you shrink down to revert to village living what you lose are the choices people value. We are habituated to high levels of choice and it is hard to pull away from that.”

¹⁰ <https://decarbon8.org.uk/embodiedemissions-policy/>



The importance of place making was raised. As one contributor commented **“we always seem to be dealing with individual projects not talking to each other”**. There is a need for a Chief Place Maker, with clear outcomes and metrics aligned in the NPPF.

It was noted that we are disproportionately focused on time savings. In WebTAG, speed is the key criteria, but people don't “save time” they just travel further. The amount of time people travel has remained constant for the last 50 years.

Transport planning is often based on old data which over time could lead to significant over-scaling. One contributor questioned whether we need to be building 300,000 new homes every year, it may be more like 200,000. ONS fertility rate is 1.6 which is below replacement rate of 2.1. Immigration has plateaued in UK, and projected population growth flattening out.

Housing Infrastructure Fund schemes often lead to a rush to speed up road construction before developments are approved. **“The speed of decisions is a disaster for the net zero agenda.”** We are so focused on building new houses we are not sufficiently focused on making our existing towns and cities fit for purpose. We need to retrofit existing communities. Transport for New Homes analysis¹¹ has shown that some small bits of retrofitting could make a big difference (such as extending walkways).

Planning Reform will form part of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill. It was felt that we should take the opportunity to deliver some important changes: i) Enshrine in the NPPF a legal obligation for net zero; ii) retrofit existing communities; iii) get more people walking and cycling – capitalise on public health as a change factor and (obesity/Covid); iv) improve decision making – Unitaries are more able to join the dots between planning, transport and climate change; v) ensure more devolved responsibilities and devolved budgets.

5. Implement proper devolution

Delivering policies to achieve net zero on the ground is very hard. Proper devolution, with secure long term funding settlements, is the only way to bring it all together. Local leaders need funding certainty and devolved powers and accountability. There are currently too many individual pots of funding. Bidding is inefficient, labour intensive and militates against the joined-up decision making needed. It was hoped that “County Deals” will deliver the devolved long term budgets and arrangements similar to the Mayoral Combined Authorities.

More work is needed to bring local authorities properly up to speed on the net zero agenda. There is a serious lack of resource, skills, and knowledge base at local level, including not enough transport planners. Bus Back Better and LTNs are difficult to deliver. Much more funding and support is needed. As one contributor put it **“Our buses are on their knees”**.

One contributor summarized that there are three key areas to address. Firstly, funding and finance: **“we must end the ridiculous ongoing cycle of beauty pageants which disables long term planning”**. We need consistency from central government, which on the one hand urges local authorities to put in CAZs [Clean Air Zones] and then says ‘CAZs are totally nonsense’. And planning and transport must be better integrated.

¹¹ <https://www.transportfornewhomes.org.uk/the-project/building-car-dependency/>



6. Net zero requires a step change in funding

Lack of funding was identified as a major obstacle to progress. One contributor asked what local authorities can really achieve under current arrangements? Not only is there a need to move away from piecemeal pots of funding, but a step change in the scale is needed.

“Current levels of funding are hardly likely to move the dial”.

One City Council has set a target of net zero by 2030 (more ambitious than its Combined Authority which has a target of 38%). To achieve this, it has set a target to double rail usage and more than double bus usage by 2030 (compared with pre-pandemic levels); to quadruple cycling; to increase walking by a third; and to cut car mileage by 30%. **“But all of that won’t deliver net zero, it only manages 43%”.**

There is more the City Council can do: such as introduce a Workplace Parking Levy or congestion charging. However, 40% of transport emissions come from motorways over which they have no control. The contributor concluded, **“Everything we know we need to do won’t get us there... we feel on the back foot already”.** They have been awarded £170 million over 5 years, which is more funding than they’ve ever had, but it’s nowhere near enough. At least £200 million a year would be needed.

It is essential to provide better alternatives to car travel. One contributor suggested that we should hold government to account on Mission 3 in the *Levelling up White Paper*: “By 2030, local public transport connectivity across the country will be significantly closer to the standards of London, with improved services, simpler fares and integrated ticketing.”¹²

7. A net zero test for public policy

There are some major fundamental problems with “policy as usual”. Lack of joined-up policy making has often undermined cross-government ambitions. GDP is not necessarily a good measure of what matters. The transport metrics we use of time savings skew policy towards road building and unsustainable transport policies.

Too often we focus on the wrong targets. It was agreed that if there was a mandatory responsibility to deliver carbon reduction rather than numbers of housing for example – i.e. a legal requirement to deliver net zero in the NPPF – that would be a game changer.

NOTE: The Institute for Government has recently published a report which sets out how government needs to tackle incoherent policy making if it is to meet its net zero target¹³. ‘A net zero test for public policy’ would help ensure alignment, that government sticks to the least-cost path towards net zero and receives public support for this, and that net zero is considered early enough in the policy making process before final commitments are made.

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom>

¹³ <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/net-zero-test>



Political deliverability

1. The need for consistent messaging
2. How to build a political mandate for change
3. A positive vision needed to overcome “NIMBYism”
4. We need a balanced discussion about the car
5. How to implement radical road measures
6. What can we learn from the Covid behavioural shift?
7. Engaging with the public

1. The need for consistent messaging

The electoral cycle presents inbuilt challenges. There is a need to develop the mandate for change and tough decisions for long term. This requires consistent messaging from central government. Currently there are too many mixed messages, which is a huge problem for local leaders. The cut to fuel duty was very unhelpful for example. As one contributor noted:

“I think we have to accept that potentially, politically you could end up being sacrificed by the electorate if they don't like what you are doing. But doing the right thing has to be at the forefront of what we do and that's why we have stuck to our guns with regard to our Low Traffic Neighbourhoods and our interventions to deprioritise motorists' needs in favour of active travellers' needs.... It's difficult. It's always challenging but it's worth the fight because you see the benefits.”

Much greater leadership is needed from government which publicly appears to be pro-car, but by the back door expects local leaders to deliver modal switch. As another contributor noted ***“We are being painted as the anti-car party”***. There is evidence to suggest a silent majority is in favour of sustainable transport. The Climate Jury they held gave the City Council a clear mandate, recommending public ownership so that transport can be used as a tool to deliver on net zero. But central government has not provided political support.

“Our real struggle politically is that there is a real reticence on us to put on anti-car measures without decent alternatives, but most of the potential alternatives are outside our control.”

2. How to build a political mandate for change

One contributor commented that politically there is ***“a need to win a thumping big majority to do anything challenging”***.

The case for sustainable transport needs to be presented as a common cause. Even where there is broad support for environmental policies there can be strong divergences in opinion, both at the level of local politics and civil society, about which solutions are needed. Local sustainable transport groups can be too focused on their specific transport mode.

In one City Council there is conflict between what the contributor described as the “village green” greens who want to prioritize active travel and the scientific environmental planning



type greens who see mass transit as essential. However, ***“We absolutely have to get a better bus system or something else. We are not going to get to carbon neutrality just by turning cars into electric cars.”***

There is an important role for deliberative democracy in educating the public and building a mandate for change. It was noted that people invariably propose more radical solutions than politicians are prepared to do, especially when confronted with evidence of the effects of climate change and the urgent need to act.

It was noted that in one English Shire County the Citizens’ Assembly provided support for outcomes and means to achieve those outcomes, e.g. support for congestion charging and revenue to support bus networks to help them get out of their cars for green outcomes.

Citizens Assemblies provide a political and public mandate (“people like me”). However, they are not a silver bullet and need to sit within a wider ecology of measures.

System change is needed and too much emphasis on individual changes could backfire politically and meet resistance. One contributor emphasised that energy transitions take decades. ***“We are locked into a system politically and economically that is hard to change”*** (fossil fuels). ***“If people think net zero will look like first lockdown we will be further away from where we need to be”***

3. A positive vision needed to overcome “NIMBYism”

NIMBYism was highlighted by one contributor as the biggest barrier when trying to drive modal switch. The Shire County referred to aspires to have greenest local plan in UK. They want car ownership not only to be optional but also undesirable. They aspire to create places where “car is no longer king”, however:

“Our experience is that everybody wants a new railway or an off-road bus route until it runs close to their homes. And everyone wants more buses but very few people will leave the comfort of their cars to use them. Everyone wants congestion to be reduced and air quality to be improved until they find out that road closures and congestion charging are the only ways to achieve that. And everyone wants more cycling and walking but they won’t give up their road space and their car parks...”

“So, in a nutshell, our experience is that NIMBYism is actually the biggest barrier that we face when trying to drive modal shift to sustainable transport and zero carbon living.”

A positive vision is vital to overcome NIMBYism and build a mandate for change. We need to paint a vision of the world we want which includes more than economic indicators. It was noted that economics frames the main policy arguments but what about life satisfaction and quality of life? We need appraisal values for quality of life.

The language of sacrifice won’t win public support. We must change the story from “travel less” to “lead a better life without needing to move around so much”. What would a sustainable *aspirational* lifestyle look like? How can we sell this to the public?



We need to engage with the public in an informed way and communicate that: rocketing fuel prices are hitting our pockets; we don't want car more dependent developments; and that we are living unsustainable lifestyles.

One contributor commented that the messenger matters. Sometimes people don't want to hear from their local authority, could local charities and civil society provide support in delivering those messages?

4. We need a balanced discussion about the car

Even if you triple numbers using public transport, it will make very little difference because car use is so dominant. We need to address car use directly or we won't meet the target. One contributor made a powerful case for selling being "car free" as a positive choice:

"No one is selling benefits of not owning a car. How do we create a vision and movement for this against the tide of our car dominated culture? How do we give a voice to the quarter of households without a car? How do we build a vision of greener less polluted communities?"

There is a need to provide an integrated, comprehensive public transport system. However, we need both carrots and sticks need to restrict car use. Unless we also make it more expensive and/or difficult to drive we will not succeed in getting people out of their cars. The Swiss and Dutch have excellent public transport, but they also have highest per capita transport emissions because they are wealthier and drive more.

However, we must avoid extremes or polarization. We need to be clear that the problem is not the car but too much car use. We need to understand why people like the car. The car gives access to better choices and opportunities. ***"We have become habituated to high levels of choice and access which it would be difficult to claw back from"*** (on the other hand access and choice are subject to saturation).

Another contributor observed: ***"This whole discussion has been admirably balanced, but we can only gain the political momentum here if we come out as street fighters. And we've got to recognise that there will be a whole set of reasons, well-funded people on the 'other side' who, for lots of partial short-term reasons of gain, will be willing to argue in much less responsible ways than we are."***

"I just want us to recognise that the politics is going to be dirty and messy on this."

5. How to implement radical road measures

One contributor noted that the traditional model of pre-consultation for a road scheme doesn't work:

"There is very strong alignment on the need to reduce traffic congestion but as you approach what needs to happen public support craters. But after you've "done the thing" public support climbs again and no-one wants it removed."



Examples were cited of successful schemes that were linked to improving local transport. Ken Livingston tied congestion charging to improving buses in London. Nottingham City Transport tied the Workplace Parking Levy to improving the tram.

“Test the stuff – consult after you’ve done it!”

There was discussion about how to sell road pricing. Importantly, it was emphasized that we are not looking for everyone to stop using their cars. What we are looking for is a corporate reduction in car use. There will be some pain to be had but this should be presented as how best to use available carbon in terms of tackling climate change.

It is difficult to sell road pricing to public as a way of raising revenue (even if the money is hypothecated to public transport). That is not helpful framing with public. A better approach is to focus on public health, air quality, climate.

One contributor noted that if we look at issue of replacing fuel duty with a standalone charge the public says: “no thanks”. It is only potentially acceptable if it is part of a broader policy mix. People will not want to discuss tax (road pricing) but a debate around what a more attractive future could look like is more likely to achieve cut through and gain support. However, the biggest problem with the subject for officials and politicians is that it became completely toxic by 2009:

“It has remained toxic but rather like a barrel of nuclear waste, buried, until very recently. And the idea that the politicians and the officials could lead any kind of public debate on this, it’s probably not going to happen... So it actually then falls to the rest of us to be ... exploring the art of the possible, and laying out options.”

6. What can we learn from the Covid behavioural shift?

Discussion focused on how we might replicate the behavioural change experienced during Covid. One contributor outlined some of the key learnings from CREDS research¹⁴:

It was the wealthiest in society who were most able to switch their activities online. It was commuter and business travel, the so-called high value trips in the economy, that ended up being the most flexible and able to switch to online. By contrast over half the population could not work from home, such as those working in abattoirs, packing warehouses etc. It transpired that so-called discretionary travel such as caring for family and friends was much less flexible and less able to switch.

It was suggested that the Scottish Government’s target to reduce car kms by 20% by 2030 should not be applied evenly across the population. It should mean a greater reduction for some and no reduction at all for others (or even more travel for some).

We should capitalise on the ongoing churn of job and home changes, and consideration should be given to what kind of incentives would enhance more home-working. Being bold on behaviour change is possible but it needs clear reason and strong leadership from central government, i.e. not cutting fuel duty.

¹⁴ <https://www.creds.ac.uk/publications/less-is-more-changing-travel-in-a-post-pandemic-society/>



One contributor observed that Covid has enhanced the importance of the “local”, reinforcing more local travel and the uptake of walking and cycling, switching of activities to online. With fuel prices now escalating, the question is what do we need to put in place to provide viable alternatives? What can be done at short notice?

The pandemic demonstrated that Governments can be decisive, and people will respond when presented with a clear emergency. However, there is currently a failure by the general public to acknowledge that the climate emergency requires urgent action. People need to understand that change is happening anyway. We are not facing a static future. If we do not reduce carbon emissions, disruption will follow anyway.

How can we use forecasts rather than just observed past metrics to catalyse the right policy decisions? Comparison was made to the visual representation of data used by Chris Whitty during the pandemic. Could scenarios and trajectories be represented visually to show where we could be heading?

7. Engaging with the public

The 25% traffic reduction required by 2030 will require a massive cultural change, and it is therefore vital that we start engaging in a very different way with the public. We will continue to fail to change anything other than at the margins unless we fundamentally alter our whole mindset around what it means to design behaviour change interventions.

Covid lockdowns, the ban on smoking in public places, drink driving, and same-sex marriage were all cited as examples of fundamental shifts in public behaviour. They all involved legislation in the first instance before attitudes changed. It was suggested that some form of constraint would be needed to change behaviour and that the best way to do this is pricing.

“Is there any example out there of massive behaviour change that hasn't revolved around constraint and getting people to not do things? I struggle to think of one.”

The role of psychology and pricing will be vital in terms of influencing behaviour change. The technology is already available to do road pricing the problem is electoral and psychological. Our whole approach to strategic planning and communications also needs to change.

One contributor observed, ***“at the moment the metrics that are used for investment in transport are whack.”*** They assume that time spent in transit is a disutility. The result of this is that they are disproportionately preoccupied with speed and time saving as a metric, not the quality of the journey. We might apply this to freight, but it's misaligned with what people actually care about when they make a journey.

“We don't have SI units for human emotions, do we? We have SI units for time and speed and we can derive units for punctuality, but we don't have SI units for anxiety.”

“I find it really, really interesting the extent to which in an engineering culture psychological solutions are treated as if they are cheating. If you are an engineer, you can only solve problems through engineering because to do it any other way is basically seen as not playing the game. I think this happens when we get an increasingly siloed business culture.”



The book *'Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed'* by James C. Scott was cited. The central argument is that the state defines things to optimise legibility and comprehension at the centre, which means it tends to treat people as uniform, fungible and interchangeable units in its plan.

"I don't think anybody in the environmental movement has managed to crack this yet..."

"What we need to do is translate the collective aggregate effects we want to see into individual behaviour which is context-sensitive and sensitive to what people are currently doing, and what they could easily be doing, versus things they find impossible to do"

Public transport ***"tends to be a bit too utilitarian and too egalitarian"***. It fails to take account of the different priorities of the individuals who make up different sections of society. It was also noted that not all environmental behaviour needs to involve sacrifice. So much of our transport is ***"performative"***, such as business meetings that we need to be seen to attend but which would be much better online. The greener choice is often the better choice.

There was discussion about how behaviour change too often centred on cars being 'good' or 'bad': ***"This polarisation is actually killing the debate."*** How do you encourage people to change their behaviour when they don't have other choices available to them?

Another noted that ***"The really bad thing about the car is not the car itself, it's the fact that that once you own a car you become preternaturally reluctant to use any other form of transport."*** Choice architecture often makes it too easy just to drive rather than travel by public transport i.e. car parked outside one's house instead of in a less convenient location ***"the way we start a journey by car has a disproportionately path dependent effect on rest of journey"***

We need a better understanding of biases in decision making and how to improve choice architecture to encourage behaviour change. How to present information is critical. One of the reasons that the Central Line is used more than the Victoria line is simply that it appears as a more direct line on the tube map!

One contributor presented examples of different communications and advertising campaigns which could broadly be simplified into two 'H's – herding and heuristics.

Herding reassures those reached by the campaign with the message "don't worry everyone else is doing it". A campaign to combat HIV trumpeted how many people were getting HIV tests every year in London. A decade-long campaign for Quorn meanwhile focused on heuristics, such as that vegetarianism meant that you would be low on energy. Long-distance runner Mo Farah became the figurehead of the campaign to dispel this myth.

Reflecting on experience with communications campaigns: ***"We nearly always listed out the heuristics. What are the lazy assumptions and habits and mental associations? ... We went after them. We really attacked them and called them out for what they were, because behind a lot of those lazy associations there's a degree of nonsense you can unpick. You can't work out if you don't eat meat is a nonsense!"***



Social impacts

1. Unfairness of our current transport system
2. The switch to EVs
3. Free public transport
4. The role of accessibility planning in social inclusion
5. Mobility credits and carbon allowances
6. Mitigating negative social impacts
7. A moral imperative

1. Unfairness of our current transport system

The relative costs of motoring costs and use of public transport were highlighted as creating an unfair transport system. Over past 20 years the cost of motoring has fallen in real terms by 15% whilst the cost of rail fares has risen by 20% and of bus and coach fares by 40%.¹⁵ A quarter of households and half of workless households have no access to a car. A 10% reduction in access to public transport is linked to a 3.6% increase in social deprivation¹⁶.

It was noted that some countries responded to the increase in fuel prices by giving out mobility credits directly to lower-income people. ***“They are not messing around with Fuel Duty. They are trying to compensate those that are most affected by the price rises in other ways. There are some creative solutions we can think about.”***

However, it was also noted: ***“We have to accept the fact that the planning system has put many people in a position where they have no choice but to drive.”***

Research into transport-related social exclusion found that many people are driving without licences, they are driving old bangers, they often have no MOT, they can't afford to repair cars. ***“I wonder if there's a fiscal solution whereby employers ... need to take account of external impacts of how their workforce are actually getting to work”***

2. The switch to EVs

There was discussion about whether the predominant focus on EV roll out in government's decarbonisation strategy was a socially just approach or whether there should be greater focus instead on improving sustainable transport networks. One contributor summarized: Firstly, there is the carbon cost of manufacturing EVs. Secondly, EVs are likely to be bought by people on higher incomes, those on lower incomes are less likely to have an on-site parking space. Finally, the shift to EVs requires an extra 50% of generating capacity, requiring a complete rebuild of our distribution network.

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transport-decarbonisation-plan>

¹⁶ <https://greenertransportsolutions.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/The-Value-of-the-Bus-to-Society-FINAL.pdf>



“The big move to electric vehicles has many, many problems, not least problems associated with social justice...”

“How about we focus on building radically more infrastructure for walking, cycling, micro mobility, and local sustainable transport? This would be a better way to decarbonise transport and deliver on social justice issues at the same time.”

It was observed that increasing fuel duty to prevent a hole in the public finances resulting from the roll out of EVs would entail a more significant cost to lower-income households than higher-income households.

NOTE: A recent report by the Social Market Foundation SMF models the impact of fuel duty increases on poorer households. Under a hypothetical scenario in which richer households are much more likely to drive EVs in the short-to-medium term, if the government preserves motoring revenues through fuel duty hikes (and leaves EVs untaxed), the share of fuel duty costs borne by the poorest 40% of households would rise from 20% at present to 41%.¹⁷

3. Free public transport

Public transport has the potential to deliver improvements in social justice, equity, work and life opportunities for all sectors of society. As one contributor noted ***“The potential is enormous.”*** Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden were all cited as places where the public transport system delivers social justice very effectively. Some places are even offering free public transport.

The UK should switch from ***“subsidising rich people buying expensive electric vehicles with expensive charging points”*** and instead put funding into totally free public transport. ***“The buses would be zero carbon, and there would be dense networks of public transport services. People wouldn't need to use a car. It would reduce congestion and reduce air pollution.”***

However, another contributor offered a warning that reductions in bus fares have been shown to attract people away from walking or cycling but not from cars. ***“I have very grave doubts about whether the Government's policy in cities of improving bus services without doing anything about road charges will really have the effect they desire.”***

4. The role of accessibility planning in social inclusion

Accessibility planning can achieve real success. One contributor argued that it is only when we recognise that transport must be planned as part of the wider economy and society that we get the public consent to do the difficult things we need to achieve (e.g. car restraint).

Social inclusion must be central to what we do if we want to change social norms towards decarbonisation. Accessibility is the glue that allows this collaborative planning and delivery

¹⁷ <https://www.smf.co.uk/publications/miles-ahead-road-pricing/>



to take place. The track record of decarbonisation by planning access for people and places has been highly successful but widely under-reported.

We need to develop a circular economy for sustainable transport¹⁸. Businesses focused on profit maximisation for shareholders will not be well placed to tackle many challenges in social spaces like transport, compared with mission driven businesses.

“A transport industry more interested in mobility than accessibility may find a few new allies in the net-zero agenda, but ultimately collaborative planning needs to use the language of accessibility so that the changes we plan can resonate with people’s lifestyles and activities.”

5. Mobility credits and carbon allowances

The central dilemma for climate policy is how to ensure that the poorest in society are not penalized. One of the concerns about using pricing as a tool is that it can be regressive. Contributors considered how we can get towards net zero, working across sectors, in ways that would be fair and socially just.

Should we give everyone a mobility budget for them to choose how to travel, with all modes of transport priced according to their carbon impact? One contributor noted that a “two-part tariff” with a negative standing charge, could be presented as a subsidy for travel. The machinery needed to implement road user charging by definition includes a personal travel account. If we can add other modes to it, we have a way to give negative standing charges (i.e. subsidies) ***“Now that is a message we can sell!”***

And why stop at transport? The merits of carbon allowances were also discussed: ***“You can give everybody a right to burn carbon but allow them to trade that right. It’s free until you hit the limit. Simple innovative ideas to sweeten the pill to the general public and spread the load equitably across them.”***

Greener Transport Solutions has proposed a ‘Climate Change Allowance’¹⁹. This would be a fixed allowance paid to every individual in the UK funded by putting a carbon price on everything we consume. This could be a highly progressive measure. Low-income households, who overall consume less carbon than higher income households, would be better off.

6. Mitigating negative social impacts

Carbon pricing and taxes are a powerful way to raise the significant investment needed to support the transition to net zero and protect our energy security, but the fear is that the burden would fall disproportionately on low-income households. This would be especially concerning at a time of escalating fuel and energy prices and cost of living crisis.

¹⁸ <https://stsg.org/a-new-look-at-making-sustainable-transport-work-for-everyone>

¹⁹ <https://greenertransportsolutions.com/publication/pathways-to-net-zero/>



However, some studies suggest that the overall impact of a carbon tax can be progressive depending on the nature of revenue-recycling and the treatment of transfer income²⁰. Whilst a carbon tax would lead to higher prices of goods and services such as fuel and electricity, the tax's revenue can be returned to households in ways that promote progressivity.

Carbon taxation can be closer to proportional in countries with low levels of inequality which explains why we first saw the introduction of carbon taxes in the Nordic countries. Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway all implemented carbon taxes between 1990-1992, and income inequality was relatively, and historically, low. Countries such as the UK where inequality is relatively high may find it politically more difficult to implement carbon pricing without measures to offset regressive effects²¹.

At an aggregate level, higher income UK households consume three times more carbon than lower income households, but lower income households spend a higher share of their income on high carbon goods²². The Treasury's final *Net Zero Review* highlights that there is significant variation within income groups, depending on how much energy they use, the type of house they live in, and whether they drive a car and that these factors will have significant influence over a household's overall exposure to the transition.

Work is needed to understand more fully the distributional impacts of carbon pricing and how to mitigate these via revenue recycling, direct transfers and/or carbon allowances.

7. A moral imperative

As we struggle to recover from the pandemic with spiraling fuel and energy prices and rising inflation we face the most severe cost-of-living crisis in a generation. 40% of households will be at risk of fuel poverty when the energy price cap increases to £2,800 a year in October. The poorest tenth of households typically spend almost three times as much of their budgets on gas and electricity as the richest tenth²³.

Dame Sharon White, CEO of John Lewis has said that a Covid-19 style intervention in the economy will be necessary²⁴. CEO of Ofgem Jonathan Brearley described high energy prices "a matter of life and death" and a "once in a generation event not seen since the oil crisis in the 1970s"²⁵. CEO of CBI Tony Danker has said that providing aid for households was now "a moral imperative"²⁶.

²⁰ [Impacts of a carbon tax across US household income groups: What are the equity-efficiency trade-offs? L.H. Goulder et al, May 2019](#)

²¹ <https://www.hhs.se/en/about-us/news/site-publications/publications/2021/carbon-tax-regressivity-and-income-inequality/>

²² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/net-zero-review-final-report>

²³ <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/15905>

²⁴ https://www.theguardian.com/media/2022/may/12/john-lewis-boss-says-cost-of-living-help-must-match-covid-package?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

²⁵ <https://www.energylivenews.com/2022/05/12/ofgem-inability-to-afford-rising-bills-a-matter-of-life-and-death/>

²⁶ https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/may/16/cost-of-living-crisis-immediate-support-from-sunak-a-moral-imperative-cbi?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other



On 26th May, the Chancellor of the Exchequer duly announced a £21 billion package to help households with the cost-of-living crisis. This included a £15 billion package of giveaways funded by a “temporary, targeted Energy Profits Levy” expected to raise £5 billion and an additional £10 billion of borrowing. The Energy Profits Levy, which will see oil and gas companies pay an additional 25% windfall tax on excess profits during the current crisis, will take their headline tax rate to 65%.

The Chancellor is reportedly also considering extending the Energy Profits Levy (windfall tax) to electricity generators, including those generating electricity from wind power and other renewables. This would raise £3-4 billion, but Labour have argued that the Chancellor is damaging the investment environment for new energy projects by threatening to extend the levy.²⁷

Whilst the package announced was considered generous, it is argued that it doesn’t go far enough to help those most in need²⁸ and that it could increase inflationary pressures. Support should be as targeted as possible. Putting tens of billions into the economy at a time of high inflation could stoke additional demand and make inflation more permanent.²⁹

Importantly, these measures were meant to be a one-off, but all the evidence points to a protracted cost-of-living crisis. Further emergency measures are likely to be required by the autumn. What options are available? How does the Chancellor ensure the right level of targeted support for those who most need it whilst avoiding inflationary pressures in the economy?

²⁷ *Financial Times* Windfall tax on UK electricity generators would curb investment Labour warns, 5.6.22

²⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/27/first-edition-rishi-sunak-cost-of-living>

²⁹ *The Times* described the £400 grant for every energy customer in the country as “an unwarranted bung that comes with a £6 billion price tag” 27.5.22



Conclusion

Government policy will not deliver net zero. Nor will everything in our current arsenal of policies and measures. The changes needed are more fundamental. 'Policy as usual' won't get us anywhere close. As a sector we have the responsibility to hold up a mirror. If we do not, we are complicit in a form of group denial with potentially devastating consequences.

The pandemic has shown that when faced with an emergency we can act. Governments can be decisive, and people will respond. The climate emergency, joined up with energy security and the cost-of-living crisis is such an emergency. These crises are intrinsically related, and we need a joined-up response that will get to the heart of the problem, its root causes, which is fundamentally our dependency on fossil fuels.

The current sharp rise in the world hydrocarbon price is doing exactly what we would want in carbon emissions terms. It sends precisely the right price signal, but at great social cost. The key thing we must also think about now is what to do when the world price eventually falls back. We cannot allow the reduction in fuel duty to become permanent.

If we are to wean ourselves off fossil fuels, we need to price for carbon properly. The fear is that if we do that, we could end up harming the poorest in society who would suffer the most at a time of unprecedented pressures. However, the advantage of carbon pricing is that it generates substantial revenues which can mitigate any negative social impacts.

We are facing a protracted cost-of-living crisis. By the autumn the Chancellor will be under pressure to introduce further emergency measures. He could introduce a universal carbon allowance for every individual in the UK funded by putting a carbon price on everything we consume. More work is needed to understand the full distributional impacts, but as a percentage of people's income this would be a very progressive measure. Individuals on higher incomes would pay more in carbon tax through all the goods and services they buy but receive the same fixed allowance as those on lower incomes. Higher income households consume three times more carbon than lower income households.

Getting the pricing of carbon right across the whole economy would influence spending decisions and would mean that the correct decisions from a net zero perspective are the most cost effective and politically acceptable. It would give power to the elbow of our local leaders at the cutting edge of trying to deliver change. Our local transport networks would be transformed. Our towns and cities would become more livable places free of congestion and air pollution, with more connected communities and better opportunities for all.

As a sector we must paint a positive picture of what a zero-carbon future looks like. There is no shortage of dire warnings. What we need is a clear articulation of the future we want. We know that there are so many benefits to life beyond fossil fuels. The greener choice is most often the better choice.

We need a collective vision to inspire us all. A vision that would make the work of the brave leaders we've spoken to not only possible, not only politically acceptable, but a vote winner. A vision that would supercharge their work.



ANNEX: Roundtable Discussion Series Write-ups

Pathways to Net Zero is supported by the **Foundation for Integrated Transport**. The focus of the programme is to develop proposals for how to deliver the traffic reduction required if we are to achieve our net zero targets for transport.

The programme began with a roundtable discussions series (March-April 2022) which aimed to drill deeper into the key areas necessary for delivering traffic reduction. The roundtables were sponsored by **Trueform** and chaired by the leading academics on the Greener Transport Council:

- Stephen Glaister CBE, Emeritus Professor of Transport and Infrastructure at Imperial College London, Associate of the London School of Economics
- Professor Peter Jones OBE, Professor of Transport and Sustainable Development in the UCL Centre for Transport Studies
- Professor Glenn Lyons, Mott MacDonald Professor of Future Mobility, University of the West of England
- Professor Greg Marsden, Professor of Transport Governance, Institute for Transport Studies, University of Leeds
- Professor Jillian Anable, Chair in Transport and Energy, Institute for Transport Studies, University of Leeds

The **Rees Jeffreys Road Fund** provided a grant to fund the roundtable discussion series write-ups. They were written by transport journalist **Rob Jack**.

The roundtables were held under Chatham House rules, meaning that all remarks made are non-attributable.

1. Pricing.....	1
2. Wider economy.....	10
3. Planning.....	21
4. Politics and local delivery.....	31
5. Behaviour Change.....	43
Roundtable Discussion Series Attendees.....	55

Roundtable 1 – Pricing

Chair: Stephen Glaister, Imperial College London

Chair’s introduction:

Charges and taxation are controversial, so discussion is too often avoided. However, they do make an important difference to behaviours, as the following discussion confirmed.

As a means to implement policy some charges and rates of taxation have the immense advantage that they can be changed quickly whereas other measures may take decades to take their full effect—and rapid change is what is needed. Whilst “correct” charges and taxes may be an unattainable ideal, if they actually create perverse incentives they will render other measures less effective.

There is a general recognition of the principle that “the polluter should pay” but at the moment the polluter often does not. Further, carefully designed charges and taxes can produce significant new revenues which can be used to mitigate undesirable effects on fairness. In any case decarbonisation policies are reducing Exchequer revenues to an extent that will force any government to take a view on how to respond.

This discussion explored the role that road user charging and other pricing and taxation measures might play in achieving a sustained reduction in carbon emissions at the scale and pace required to meet the Government’s targets.

A technology-led approach to decarbonising transport has seen little progress since 1990. Vehicle efficiency gains have been eroded by the trend towards larger vehicles, people driving more etc.

It was argued that one of the main problems is that carbon is not priced properly and this failure runs through every sector of our economy and continues to support unsustainable levels of consumption. Every mode of transport should be priced according to its environmental impact, but crucially this must be achieved whilst ensuring a fair and just transition to net zero. Could road pricing help to address this problem in the transport sector?

A key plank in the Government’s Transport Decarbonisation Plan is electrification. However, if we electrify the fleet without replacing Fuel Duty, road traffic will increase as the cost of running a car falls dramatically. The Transport Select Committee has highlighted the fiscal black hole that the Treasury will face if it doesn’t act now.

Discussion of road pricing is framed very much in the context of decarbonisation, but other policy objectives that should not be forgotten including air quality, congestion, safety and various dimensions of social policy.

The current price incentives are wrong

One contributor argued that, despite a great deal of talk about the need to reduce carbon emissions, very little, if anything, is happening on the ground.

“If we are going to take the carbon reduction targets seriously, we need a very large change in behaviour from a large number of people and very quickly. Pricing can help a great deal with this, particularly with getting people to change behaviour in large numbers and quickly.

“If the price incentives to behaviour are perverse in relation to the policy you are trying to achieve it makes life very difficult indeed.”

Road pricing is a very old subject, but it was argued there have been important changes recently:

1. There is a stronger interest in carbon reduction than there used to be.
2. There is a reduction in revenues from Fuel Duty that the Government has begun to notice.
3. More recently, there has been a rapid increase in the world price for hydrocarbons.

At the same time there is a reduction in the general standard of living following from the Covid crisis, which means a massive increase in national debt, the prospect of inflation and the general halt in the increase in living standards which we have come to expect.

The public may be unaware that they already pay a substantial amount to use roads. If you are driving a vehicle which does 40 miles to the gallon, you are paying about eight pence a mile in Fuel Duty.

The public may also be unaware that only a quarter of this money is spent on roads, with the rest going to other things. That's why the Treasury is worried about the reduction in Fuel Duty revenues.

Fuel Duty has substantial advantages as a form of raising general taxation. Among them are that it's very cheap to collect and it's almost impossible to evade.

However, the rate of Fuel Duty has fallen very substantially in real terms since the year 2000, when it reached its peak. This is the result of successive governments not increasing Fuel Duty. [This meeting took place the week before the Chancellor cut fuel duty by 5p a litre in his Spring Statement.]

How fast is Fuel Duty evaporating?

The meeting heard that research has been carried out on what is likely to happen to Fuel Duty revenues as electric cars replace petrol and diesel ones. Different parameters were identified that could move around between now and 2035, and a range of possible outcomes were identified. £5bn was used as the loss of Fuel Duty revenue that might trigger alarm bells at the Treasury.

The research specifically looked at cars. Fuel Duty from cars in 2019 accounted for about 60% of total Fuel Duty Revenue at about £16.5bn. It was established that £5bn of that will have evaporated by somewhere between 2028 and 2032 - and once the Fuel Duty evaporates there's a little bit of extra evaporation because the Treasury levies VAT on Fuel Duty. The researchers couldn't see any likely measures that could potentially delay this date, only ones that might bring it closer.

By working out when a significant sum of money would have gone, the aim was to establish the date by which the Treasury would need to decide what it was going to do (or not do) to plug the gap.

The Chancellor could take the view that losing this income is part of the price he is paying for saving the planet. However, there is a Treasury orthodoxy that once you have started paying a tax for something they'd really like to carry on levying it.

The research concluded that the government is not currently facing Fuel Duty falling off a cliff, but it will probably be a problem for the next government – and therefore political parties need to address this issue for their manifestos for the next general election, which is due to be held in 2024.

“One of the reasons that we have the London Congestion Charge is that it was a manifesto commitment of the first of the latest generation of London mayors, Ken Livingstone. It was very clear and upfront as one of his headline policies.

“Successive airings of the issue of road user charging in the public domain have revealed that by and large if you ask people how they feel about it, ‘no thanks’. Only if it's part of a broader policy mix does it start to find its way through.

“That means, I think, we should be considering whether, if there is to be a replacement for Fuel Duty, it's something that would go into the manifestos for the next election, if it's 2024.

“That gives the Treasury two years to come up with something that they consider is practicable and effective and for politicians to get themselves comfortable. Two years is not very long.”

To provide an idea of the scale of the funds that could be lost, one contributor pointed out that £5bn a year is roundly the level of subsidy that the railway received pre-Covid. It's also roundly the annual expenditure on High Speed 2.

And the £5bn that is likely to be lost between 2028 and 2032 is the “canary in a coal mine”. After that there will be an acceleration in the loss of Fuel Duty revenue. Around £35bn is set to go eventually unless something is done.

A toxic issue

One contributor said: “I think perhaps the biggest problem with the subject for officials and politicians is that [road pricing] had become completely toxic by 2009. It has remained toxic but rather like a barrel of nuclear waste, buried, until very recently. And the idea that the politicians and the officials could lead any kind of public debate on this, it's probably not going to happen. I just can't see how they could do it. If they come out with the subject at all they will find that the critics are immediately jumping on them.

“So it actually then falls to the rest of us to be ventilating the issue, having a discussion, exploring the art of the possible, and laying out options and seeing which ones get the applause and which ones draw fire.”

Fairness is a key consideration

Back in the late-1960s and early-1970s, road spending and road taxation were broadly in balance. Over the years, as traffic grew, the revenues crept up and the road spending went down. For every £4 that is raised from road taxes today, only £1 is re-invested in the road network.

Commenting on this, one contributor said: “The system we have now is not necessarily a very fair one. People don't discuss it, it's just there.”

However, another contributor remarked that we should also take into account some of the unaccounted costs of motoring, like air pollution, the impacts of obesity and the sedentary lifestyle that car use encourages. This places huge costs on the NHS, the accident and emergency services, and wider environmental pollution.

“I think we need to be quite careful when we are talking about how much money we receive in and what is spent on roads. That's the headline that you see in some of the press but it's not a very accurate reflection of the true cost on the Treasury.”

Many of those who drive have access to alternatives, but many others don't. And we've seen with protests like the ‘yellow vests’ and others around the world how the public will respond and react to a measure that they don't feel is fair.

One contributor said: “We have to accept the fact that the planning system has put many people in a position where they have no choice but to drive.”

Research into transport-related social exclusion found that many people driving without licences, they are driving old bangers, they often have no MOT, they can't afford to repair cars. “I wonder if there's a fiscal solution whereby employers ... need to take account of external impacts of how their workforce are actually getting to work.

“A bit like when you sell a house you've got to give your energy rating. They should give their energy rating on their whole carbon spend, including that of their employees. I think that would encourage things like Demand Responsive Transport, shared use and so on. And that would actually tackle some of these equity issues which have often held up debates about charging for transport.

Meanwhile, Fuel Duty “falls very unfairly on people in rural areas, where congestion and pollution are much lower than in urban areas and people have no choice other than to drive a car”.

“Even if they go into a town most of their journey might be in a rural area. It would be quite a selling point, particularly perhaps for the Conservatives, if the advantages of a differentiated road user charge to rural areas were brought out a bit more.”

Another contributor highlighted the imbalance between the rate at which motoring costs have increased compared with public transport and suggested this was part of the debate on fairness. Some countries responded to the increase in fuel prices by giving out mobility credits directly to lower-income people. “They are not messing around with Fuel Duty. They are trying to compensate those that are most affected by the price rises in other ways. There are some creative solutions we can think about.”

However, another contributor offered a warning about the impact of lower bus fares: “Reductions in bus fares have been shown to attract people away from walking or cycling, but not from cars. So I think we need to be careful not to be led astray by what might seem a good idea but probably isn't.

“I have very grave doubts about whether the Government's policy in cities of improving bus services without doing anything about road charges will really have the effect they desire.”

One of the contributors pointed out that if they are not avoided the impacts of climate change will not be distributed in a fair way.

“This whole discussion has been admirably balanced, but we can only gain the political momentum here if we come out as street fighters. And we’ve got to recognise that there will be a whole set of reasons, well-funded people on ‘the other side’ who, for lots of partial short term reasons of gain, will be willing to argue in much less responsible ways than we are.

“I just want us to recognise that the politics is going to be dirty and messy on this. We need to have these discussions but then we need to come out of them with a clear story that we can mobilise people on. Because otherwise we will be having this conversation repetitively.”

In order to achieve a fair transition to net zero, it was suggested that you could give everybody a carbon allowance but then tax them for using the carbon. “You can give everybody a right to burn carbon but allow them to trade that right. It’s free until you hit the limit. Simple innovative ideas to sweeten the pill to the general public and spread the load equitably across them.”

Mechanisms for introducing road pricing

One contributor noted that the debate about road user pricing always seems to be instead of Fuel Duty and Vehicle Excise Duty, but another approach might be to offer people the opportunity to instead opt-in to road pricing.

“You would be refunded for your [Fuel] Duty and you would not pay Vehicle Excise Duty. So therefore the vast majority of people who would be advantaged would be the people in rural areas, where the congestion is lower and where the contribution to pollution is lower.

“The advantage of that is twofold. One is that a large number of people sign up. So as a democracy you’ve then got a much bigger group of people in the road user charging camp.

“The second thing is that since the Chancellor is now in charge of Fuel Duty, vehicle excise duty AND road pricing, you can tinker with the prices for all of those elements so that your transition to decarbonisation of road transport is under some sort of control and lands in a soft way whilst remaining democratically achievable.

“A voluntary system avoids the binary argument of one thing or another.”

Another contributor said: “Government should set a date from which it would become mandatory, but in the interim there could be incentives and possibilities of opting in and that would be particularly attractive to people in rural areas.”

Another warned that any scheme like that will lose money in the short-term, by definition, because the people who benefit will opt in. “There are lots of precedents for it. I believe water metering was introduced that way in some parts of the country.”

Another contributor argued that there should be a charge on electric vehicles when they are used because they are not contributing to the cost of road maintenance through Fuel Duty. But that can't be done in the near term because you need lower operating costs for electric vehicles to offset the higher present capital costs.

Over time it is expected that the capital costs will come down and the total operating cost - capital and fuel put together - will be similar to a petrol or diesel car. “At that point it would be reasonable to start charging electric vehicles’ contribution. That’s a fairness argument and I think it’s one that would have some general support.”

Rather than starting from scratch, it was suggested that the Government could build on the road user charging system that has already existed in London for 20 years. “It works technically. It's publicly acceptable. No privacy issues. It generates useful sums of money to subsidise public transport.”

The technology could be migrated to a smartphone app because the smartphone knows where it is in time and space. It knows if it is in a charging zone, it can know what vehicle it is in and it routinely has a payment mechanism. The incentive to get that migration would be to offer a discount off the daily charge.

“Once you've got a good number of users charging to a smartphone app you can then flex the charge. Charging by duration in the zone, by time of day, by congestion or what have you. Once you've developed that, you've got an urban charging system that other cities could take up. And then you also have a system for a national charge for electric vehicles when the time comes to implement that.”

Another contributor suggested that perceived costs matter as much as actual costs. “You could imagine a road pricing scheme where people paid annually. When they had their MOT, they just pay the mileage charge based on that. That would be very untransparent in terms of the journeys people make. Something that made each journey more visible would have more of an impact on behaviour. So I think how you do this matters.”

A distance-based system might be more acceptable to people because it will be charged by the amount of mileage rather than lump sum for one day, but how would a national scheme interact with local schemes?

One contributor asked: “If we have a national scheme being considered ... will it cover just the strategic road network or will it cover all roads? Will it be a flat charge across all the roads and then complemented by city schemes? Or will it try to subsume any city schemes that take place by then?”

“A flat national scheme complemented by city schemes would be the preferred option, so that the revenue split is then clear between national and cities. But it would need to be mandated that cities need to transition to this at some point so that local politics does not get in the way.”

It's an “enormous can of worms”, another remarked, but one that needs to be considered at the start. “Londoners will not want to be charged twice.”

Another contributor also addressed the issue of compatibility. “Technology developed for London circumstances shouldn't be incompatible with the wider introduction of road pricing elsewhere, so the people have to have different technology and their vehicles according to which part of the country they are in. I hope the Transport for London will talk to the Local Government Association and others.”

Road pricing can increase public transport use

To decarbonise transport, we need to find a way of shifting people out of cars and into active travel or public transport through carrots and sticks. Recent research looked at scenarios between 2024 and 2030. It looked at what could be done to shift people from cars to buses by increasing bus speeds by 1%.

“We know that's important because people value quicker journeys, more reliable journeys. That also decreases operating costs that you could feed back into the system.”

The research then modelled what would happen if you increased the cost of car travel by CPI+5%, and this resulted in a much more dramatic shift in people from car to bus.

The conclusion: "It is really important that we do all this stuff to make public transport attractive. But if we are really going to drag people out of their cars it looks like there really is something we need to do there around the cost of car travel."

The primary aim should not be to raise money

The emerging view is that if we are going to get close to meeting carbon reduction targets we have to reduce car use by the order of 25-30%.

The top 10% of earners are currently responsible for about a quarter of the mileage. With a pay-as-you-go tax like Fuel Duty, they are paying for the mileage that they do. But one contributor pointed out that, with respect to the net zero agenda, it is those "excess travellers" that we need to influence.

"We really need to understand how we can get these high-end consumers. Because almost any kind of fiscal instruments that we put into place, they can afford to buy their way out of them. That's going to make our net zero target very difficult."

Another contributor drew a comparison with Clean Air Zones. They have proven to be a powerful tool, enabling local authorities to get to grips with a problem they have been trying to tackle for decades. They are seeing it having real impact in a relatively short time.

The aim of Clean Air Zones is to have fewer vehicles on the road, and cleaner vehicles. They are not designed to raise money. The framing of road pricing as a replacement for Fuel Duty makes that difficult.

"If we want road pricing to replace decreasing revenue then how effective is it going to be in terms of achieving fewer vehicles on the road, and cleaner vehicles on the road?"

There are currently difficult conversations between Transport for London and central Government about how to plug the hole that Covid has left in TfL's budget. There is a strong sense of national government not wanting to spend money in London. They instead want to push the mayor into using the resources that he already controls and they want to give him new powers.

One contributor said: "Road user charging is up there as something at the mayor can and is likely to do ... If you say that the drive is Transport for London's financial hole you cannot just have emissions-based charging because one of the lessons out of ULEZ [Ultra Low Emission Zone] is if you have a nudge-based system that's great in nudging behaviour, but actually your revenues fall away quite quickly."

Another added: "The government gave London the powers to introduce congestion charging. Ken Livingstone was always very clear that was not about raising money, it was about reducing traffic and air pollution. The big change is that it is now being considered as a way of filling a financial deficit. For the public it is a difficult thing to swallow."

"The general public were originally very sceptical about Ken Livingstone's scheme in 2003 but their attitudes changed completely once it was in place. It's a fairly common experience around the world. The public saw the benefit in traffic terms of the congestion charging scheme."

Whether they will be so unresistant if it is presented as a way of raising revenues is perhaps a different issue.”

Reflecting on Ken Livingstone’s introduction of the Congestion Charging, another commented: “The man was able to say look I have made some traffic go away and now the roads are flowing better. To have such dramatic effect on traffic with any national road user charge is incredibly difficult.”

How can we engage the public?

How should we engage the public in the debate about road pricing? “I think the challenge really is to make it an interesting subject. It is an interesting subject.”

Previous work has found that “once people understand a simple amount of what the problems are, nothing is ruled out”.

“Everyone is interested in transport, as we all know. Talk to people about carbon reduction and they are not going to put that at the top of their priorities. But finding ways that are less painful but actually at the same time reduce carbon is really the key to it. People feel good about it.”

Carbon reduction may not be considered sufficiently important in its own right, but it’s “often a tipping point”.

Meanwhile, public engagement is getting cheaper. “We really need concentrate on doing that ... Politicians will want to do it to give them a stiff upper lip which they will need to introduce some of these things.”

Another contributor asked: “How do you get the mass of the population to understand that and recognise that there is a degree of pain involved here?”

The response to the pandemic was cited as a recent precedent for this: “We have experienced over the past two years a massive, massive behaviour change, almost instantly with the advent of Covid, and that had impacts on travel behaviour. What happened there was that people very quickly got to understand that there was a real problem and they had to change their behaviour, and they did.”

Another added: “My great hope on behaviour change is the young people ... the stridency of the argument from young people, I think, has the best chance of influencing the behaviours of the others. Children are putting pressure on their parents and their parents’ behaviour. We can pin our hopes on the greater environmental sensitivity of young people to help carry the argument. I think we should be equipping them with lots of the right information to help them do so.”

However, another cautioned: “Some young people don't want to drive. In other places you will find a queue of young people waiting to pass their driving test. It's by no means universal it's quite a metro trend.

“If we continue to try to get the population to engage in a debate about what amounts to a debate on tax, we are on a hiding to nothing. I never met anybody who wanted to engage on a debate on tax. The best taxes are ones that are extremely boring and you might begrudge them a bit. but you don't talk about it. I can't think of a situation when I have never discussed income tax in my own private life. It's just not the sort of thing you want to talk about down the pub.”

An alternative approach was suggested: “What is interesting is presenting what a more attractive future could look like. I think one of the things that we rather let slip through our

fingers as a Covid consequence was the ability to reach places, walking and finding that it was pleasant. Places could be a lot more pleasant if it was not for all the car drivers who persist driving up my road. Something that's about a more attractive future, which includes making the place you live a more attractive place to live, might just have something in it."

Another pointed that while the public may be resistant to change, "the future is going to change anyway".

"Motoring costs are going to get more expensive, particularly if we continue to be reliant on big oil and the volatility that brings. There is no better time than right now to be bringing that into debate.

"If we are not successful in reducing emissions then motoring will be impacted by disruptions and all the economic costs that mitigating climate change and adapting will bring. We are not facing a static future.

"So when we are talking about increasing costs or reducing car travel, that's the baseline that we are talking about. We want to try and bring that into the discussion."

"The thing about Covid is that the restrictions applied to everybody, rich or poor. They also had a scientific backing that was front and centre when the politicians were delivering hard messages. They could blame it on the science. Where are the scientists? How can we get into that and help the politicians to deliver these messages in some way?"

ENDS

Roundtable 2 - Wider Economy

Chair: Peter Jones, University College London

Chair's introduction:

Achieving net zero carbon in the transport sector is a major national and global challenge, and one that cannot be met by that sector acting alone.

Transport does have some powerful policy levers at its disposal, such as emission regulation and road pricing, to help 'shift' travel away from carbon emitting vehicles, but these are not sufficient, on their own, to achieve nationally agreed carbon reduction targets.

The most obvious need for wider sector collaboration is with the energy-generating sector, without whose active support we would not be able to 'improve' vehicle carbon efficiency, by electrifying the fleet and operating it using renewable energy.

But, the missing part of the jigsaw, up to now, has been to develop strategies to 'avoid' travel, both through reducing trip numbers and trip lengths – thereby making active travel an option for more trips. Here collaboration with the major trip-generating sectors is essential – and is starting to be achieved.

These various elements were explored and debated during this workshop, as summarised below.

This discussion focussed on the role of transport within the wider economy. We need a whole systems approach to transport decarbonisation that reflects the shift to digital connectivity and the integration of transport with land-use planning, travel-generating sectors, energy and green finance. A key challenge of delivering this will be overcoming the silos of government, both locally and nationally, and in improving cross-sectoral working.

Since the 1950s a car-based consumer culture has ensured that our transport system has been built on the assumption that the car is the predominant mode of transport and this assumption continues to be reflected in transport budgets and planning decisions. However, the decarbonisation of transport will require a decisive shift away from a car-based culture. We need a massive shift to clean technologies but we must also reduce traffic levels, and that will require us to reduce the need for travel.

This discussion looked at how decisions taken in other sectors impact on transport, and the extent to which they can be encouraged to take those into account when making those decisions.

The transport sector cannot achieve transport net zero alone

Most of travel is a derived demand (i.e. moving between locations to carry out activities), so is strongly influenced by conditions under which activities take place.

Most of these activities are provided by public or private sector operators, whose service delivery models often take little account of the transport consequences of their operations. They are seen as externalities they don't really have to worry about.

It was therefore argued that we need cross-sector collaboration to address transport challenges in the context of the wider economy

Looking at the National Travel Survey 2019, and assuming that all trips are influenced by specific service providers except visits to friends and family and holidays/day trips, 82% of daily trips are influenced by service providers (education, health, retail, leisure etc) and 66% of annual mileage.

“That means the majority of the travel that occurs in some way is influenced by the organisations that provide the services that people take part in.”

In dealing with the transport carbon crisis, we are very much looking at accessibility rather than mobility. The important thing is that people can access the goods and services they need, but there are different ways in which that can be done, often without extensive physical travel.

Take health, for example. Historically, going back 50 years or more, we recognised that vehicles on the road network contribute substantially to air and noise pollution, and more recently carbon, and that they also contribute to traffic accidents, collisions and affect personal safety.

Recently there has been a strong interest in working with the health sector to promote healthy travel, both for its benefits to the transport system, in terms of reducing pressure on road networks, and the health benefits too. But what impact are decisions made in those sectors, such as the health sector, having on the transport network? For example, the construction of new hospitals on greenfield sites has been done with very little consideration about the impact it might have on the transport system and travel behaviour.

An ‘Avoid/Shift/Improve’ approach can be applied to deliver low/no carbon transport strategies. Avoiding the need to travel can be done by substituting digital for physical meetings, providing equipment in-home and localising facility provision, thereby requiring shorter trips. Shifting the need to travel can be done by encouraging people to switch to sustainable modes of transport, and the consolidation of freight. Improving vehicle travel can be achieved by decarbonisation of vehicle fleet and increasing energy efficiency.

There are significant barriers to cross-sector working, but there is now a common goal around achieving net zero carbon. As a result of that, both public and private sector organisations are starting to use the same accounting framework for greenhouse emissions. They have recognised that a core component of the carbon that they generate, either embedded through investment or daily activities, involves transport.

The CBI last year (April 2021) produced a report called 'Greener Miles: delivering a net-zero vision for commuting' where they accept that companies have some responsibility for the carbon that their employees generate in travelling to work.

This is very different from what the situation was historically, because there is an agreed overall objective across the economy, of reaching net zero by 2050, and in many cases earlier. We are using common metrics and timelines

“These other sectors are accepting responsibility for addressing sector generated to transport emissions, in a way that they have not previously. I think the view is that one sector cannot start externalising its carbon and dumping it on another sector.”

Resetting the price signals

One contributor suggested that pricing is the key to delivering change.

“You are not going to get all these decisions co-ordinated across the whole economy in the right way, unless and until you price the carbon properly. Unless you do that, you are on a hiding to nothing in terms of achieving our objectives [to decarbonise transport].

“If you do price carbon properly, which is code for ‘impose a substantial tax on the use of carbon across the piece’, never forget you will generate a lot of revenue and that revenue gives you the means to deal with the problems that people always mention - to do with the people who are disadvantaged by the policy.

“If you do price the carbon properly, then you will have a measure of the true costs of the carbon zero policy, and you will reduce the costs quite a lot because people will respond in an efficient way to the need to reduce carbon emissions.”

Another contributor pointed out that this discussion is not new. 20 years ago, Professor Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker in Germany advocated that prices must tell the ecological truth and he invented ecological taxation. Meanwhile, there were European Commission research projects that said the transport is under-priced and that we must internalise external costs.

There is an example of this in Germany, where owners of heavy transporters used for cargo shipping pay the LKW-MAUT road tax. This tax is levied for every kilometre travelled on certain routes. This has shifted considerable amounts of freight from the road system onto trains. Importantly, it has also led to a reduction in the distances over which inputs are sourced.

“We shouldn't accept that existing levels of demand are somehow correct, like gravity. They are a function of the wrong price signals and we need to reset the price signals.”

Another contributor pointed out the freight operators are ready to react to what the market wants.

“Each of us as individuals [need to react]; when was the last time we made a purchasing decision and changed the delivery vehicle to a zero-emission vehicle? It's down to those business decisions, because freight operators will do whatever their customers want ... Somehow we have to start to think about what those social, economic and environmental impacts are, when we as individuals and we as businesses make those decisions.”

Another contributor also considered the shift to home deliveries.

“Are we reducing vehicle miles and carbon emissions through the transition of people having things delivered to them at home? Could price signals make that more efficient?”

“Supermarkets have been subsidising the cost of home delivery and are now trying to recoup that. Can they now use those pricing mechanisms to more strongly incentivise people to choose time slots which reduce the total vehicle mileage for deliveries?”

Another contributor asked about who pays for the trade-offs.

“We are seeing ready acceptance of the need to view these things holistically, but it's about who pays for the externalities, the trade-offs that need to be made.”

“I just wonder whether [we should be] looking to other sectors who seem to be doing a better job than transport currently; for instance, the packaging industry or the food waste industry where there's a recognition by the key actors that there is a problem and that the full cost of those externalities are not being covered - the difference being is that they are very much being focused back to those who have the best ability to pay. With food waste and packaging it's very clear that retailers and producers are the two key actors who, frankly, have to pay.”

“The problem we have at the moment with transport is that we spend so much time analysing whether or not someone is actually covering the full cost of home delivery, for instance, of food products, or indeed any products, that we perhaps concentrate solely on the handle of the barn door and miss the barn door.”

“I just think this is going to be an absolutely critical issue. Otherwise I think that we will just end up with a melee of people disagreeing about who is responsible for the trade-offs, before we can actually move to solutions.”

Another contributor suggested that the debate is too often framed purely in economic terms.

“Economics is a very powerful set of tools for thinking about how the world works, but it is not the only tool we use. People report that a reduction in their commute to work below a certain level is the equivalent of a pay rise of 10 or 20%. This stuff is very poorly captured in purely economic terms.”

“The majority of our travel is not commuting, it's leisure and all these other things. We are very bad at understanding how those choices relate to life satisfaction, I think it's really important that we remember to paint a vision of the world that we want, that includes more than just the economic levers. We have to take notice of the economic levers. I wish it were as simple as just 'let's tax carbon'. The truth is it's much more complicated than that.”

Another contributor warned that that fossil fuel-based mobility has increased the choices available to people and it will be very hard to reverse that trend.

“I think it will be very hard to get behavioural change on the scale that would have a big impact on carbon emissions, so I think we really going to have to focus on technology, because an electric vehicle will give you the access and choice you are used to from carbon-based mobility without the tailpipe emissions. I accept that goes against the theme of this set of discussions, but it's really based on the fixity of the built environment that we've created.”

Another person pointed out that some of the world's fastest growing companies, like Google, are giving a lot of attention to accessibility planning, but the main driver for this is their people. “The strongest motivation for cross sector working is to focus on people.”

Learned helplessness

Research into the behaviour of how businesses conduct their operations and why they won't change has found that “there is a significant element of learned helplessness within the behaviours of the senior leaders”, one contributor said.

“[They] simply cannot figure out how they can make a change because all sorts of other people need to make changes in order to allow them to make a change ... I think part of the problem is that we don't bring all of the various actors together enough. We have too many people talking in groups of people that agree with each other, rather than people that have a disagreement about how to do things.

“I am both hopeful and worried that decarbonisation in the transport sector will be driven more by the market than it will be by policy-makers or customers. It will be driven by the market as they figure out how to make money out of decarbonisation. We may end up with all sorts of fabulous and interesting solutions to decarbonisation, all acting together in a completely unpredictable way, and then end up with completely the wrong answer.

“Businesses are not solely economically driven, not solely price driven. A really good example at the moment is the way in which social value is being driven as major objective for major businesses. It's being driven through employment because young people won't join companies unless we've got a demonstrable record to show the impact that we have both in terms of carbon and in terms of social value.”

“So, there are other ways that we can begin to influence the way in which the market behaves. I think we need to learn to use some of those other levers on behaviour, because ultimately we are going to need to find a way of the market getting over its learned helplessness.”

Sometimes it takes an individual or an organisation to lead the way. One contributor explained that when the new CEO took over at a major motor manufacturer a couple of years ago there was a discussion about the company taking a lead on trying to get to carbon zero.

“At that time, they said it's very difficult to change the industry and so on. And they publicly committed, very nervously, to decarbonising by 2039. This was just two years ago.”

“What happened then was all their main suppliers ... came along and said ‘if you've taken the lead we will match that’. And they've now got to the point where all new models within the next two years will be electric.”

“In the public sector it needed brave politicians like Ken Livingstone to introduce congestion charging in London, and to remove guard railing in Kensington and Chelsea.”

“It needs brave people in the public and private sector often to do that one step ahead. I think that will help everyone to move forward.”

We can't just decarbonise operations

One contributor said it was problematic that the Government's Transport Decarbonisation Plan focuses almost singularly on the decarbonisation of the operation of transport.

“The big gap in policy is around the embedded carbon and the resources required to deliver that [zero carbon]. An interesting stat that the RAC Foundation came out with is that the highest mileage of new cars by manufacturer is Tesla. So Teslas do more miles on average than Mercedes, these sort of traditional diesel high mileage cars, and that's because we are making those miles cheap. They can be zero carbon, but we're not thinking about the embedded carbon and the battery.”

“We need to think about the infrastructure, what we are building, as we move to a decarbonised energy system. We will have zero carbon from the miles and it will all be embedded in the built infrastructure, the built vehicles. That's where we need to start to focus some of our net zero ambitions. We are working towards an operational zero, but certainly not a net zero. I think that is probably the biggest discussion that we need to start now to develop as we go on. Should we build an environment that allows us to have that fully decarbonised mileage?”

“We are having a tension about how many charge points need to be in the ground to support electric vehicles. At one end we need millions of charge points because everyone should be able to charge everywhere, so that they can run their electric vehicles. That is a huge cost. A huge embedded carbon. We have got to design the system we want and then build it.”

The NHS as an example of a trip generator

About 15 months ago the NHS produced its own net zero carbon document, recognising their own impact on emissions. They estimate that 14% of all their emissions actually come from transport, passenger and freight, and they are taking responsibility for tackling that.

One contributor remarked: “The NHS is a significant trip generator, traffic generator, there's no argument about that. But actually, doing something about that is really very difficult, because many hospitals are building football field after football field of parking and raising millions of pounds for multi-storey parking, and public transport services are appalling.”

“So, I think what we have to try and do is accept the NHS has a clear approach. It does want to reduce carbon. It does want to be best practice. But on the ground the reality of hospital-generated trip-making is largely car dependent and that has a lot to do with the poor quality of the alternatives.”

Efforts to reduce travel generated by the NHS are aggravated by its clear and consistent policy of centralising facilities, which requires longer journeys to be made.

“There is a need to talk nicely to the NHS ... and talk to them about different ways of organising the location and the concentration of what is offered.”

Decision-makers in the NHS must be implored to take account for demands they put on people to travel.

“Hospitals look at the travel difficulties of their staff, their patients, their outpatients, and decide to build another car park. I would like to know how we stop that particular oil tanker accelerating in the direction it is now going.”

Another contributor explained how an EU project with Transport for Greater Manchester tried to implement a cross-sector approach to transport, with some success. It worked very closely with health sector and social care sector.

Wigan took a fresh look at social care workers going to peoples' homes and found that the workers were going to clients all over the borough. They reorganised it so they could deal with people in a smaller locality. The result has been that many of those workers no longer needed a car, they can cycle and walk or use other modes instead.

“These are small steps but I think the oil tanker is slowly changing.”

Another contributor who has worked with the NHS emphasised with success of accessibility planning approaches.

“It's not just a design of the building. In transport we are often focused purely on the location and the big planning decisions ... We shouldn't underplay the positive impact of accessibility planning approaches. The net impact of that is far greater than the things that transport planners get excited about - light rail schemes or bus schemes. We do that work as well, but it doesn't have anything like the impact on transport or decarbonisation that we do through accessibility planning. We have a track record and we know what works.”

“We have a tendency to underplay the successes of our achievements when we work with the NHS. We don't own the solutions that are highly successful. We don't talk about these things enough in transport circles. I think if we did, we would build the trust we need from the NHS to trust and believe in the travel plans we do. They would then learn how successful it is when we do it.”

Buses are the biggest obstacle

One contributor said the lack of participation by the bus industry was the biggest obstacle by far.

“The bus industry is the cheapest sector to subsidise, far cheaper than rail to get people out of cars. And yet ... despite the National Bus Strategy and the Bus Service Improvement Plans that stem from that, we still have no sight of how the long-term funding of the bus industry is going to come from.”

“The local authorities don't have the money. Central government is refusing to provide any long-term commitment to it. And that is the only way that we can build the combination of bus services required.”

“We need express bus services that can offer a time-competitive alternative to driving. And we also need the coverage of services to get people the first/last mile connections to express bus services and to rail services and connect up with walking and cycling. That bit of the puzzle is completely missing.”

“All of our planning has to make assumptions that the only bus services that we can design around are the existing ones. We cannot design for a future where there are additional bus services, and different types of bus services serving different purposes. That completely hobbles all of our sustainable development planning.”

A National Evidence Centre?

One contributor remarked: “I wonder whether a really effective intervention that we are not quite seeing here is some sort of national evidence centre that could gather together some of the best practise that has been talked about, in parallel to measuring and ranking different areas in terms of their effectiveness?”

“So, you name and shame and you do that in conjunction with a kitbag of demonstrated interventions, which means that you can much more effectively as a society target the interventions you know work at the places that need it most.”

“That feels to me like a relatively cheap and potentially quite effective way for the Department for Transport, and society more generally, to start thinking about making progress here.”

Another contributor called for international examples of best practice to be studied, especially where they demonstrate that decarbonisation does not hold back economic prosperity.

“If you go to Freiburg in Southern Germany or Lund in Southern Sweden, and several other places in the Netherlands and Germany, there are towns and cities and regions with much higher GDP than anywhere in England, including London; and their modal split data clearly shows that cars are responsible for less than 25% of all trips every day. Walking cycling and public transport is much higher.”

“I think there is a cultural problem or a paradigmatic stubbornness problem of some kind [in the UK]. Mentally, certainly within local authorities I have dealings with, we still associate economic growth with road building and encouraging road travel.”

In contrast, Lund is one of the best examples of totally integrated, planning, transport, public health and Climate Change policy.

“There's no problem, there's no argument, there's no discussion. You can have your cake and eat it. So please can we look around a bit at best practice”

Socially just solutions

One of the standard reactions to using the price signals is that it's the poorest people that are hardest hit. Contributors considered how we can get towards net zero, working across sectors, in ways that would be seen as fair and socially just.

One contributor said: “Transport policy, transport planning, transport spending, public sector investment, vocational policies, planning policies, can all deliver a massive improvement in social justice equity and progressive work and life opportunities for all sectors of society. The potential is enormous.”

Germany, Denmark the Netherlands and Sweden were all cited as places where the public transport system delivers social justice very effectively. Some places are even offering free public transport.

It was proposed that the UK should switch funding away from “subsidising rich people buying expensive electric vehicles with expensive charging points” and instead put it into totally free public transport.

“The buses would be zero carbon, and there would be dense networks of public transport services. People wouldn't need to use a car. It would reduce congestion and reduce air pollution. So, therefore, it doesn't figure very largely in thinking in the United Kingdom.”

Another contributor agreed that investing in electric cars is not the most socially just way to decarbonise transport. Firstly, there is the carbon cost of manufacturing them to consider. Secondly, there is the fact that they are likely to be bought by those of higher incomes, and those on lower are less likely to have an on-site parking space in their house or be able string a cable from their own personal electricity supply to their electric vehicle. Finally, the shift to electric vehicles requires an extra 50% of generating capacity, requiring a complete rebuild of our distribution network.

“The big move to electric vehicles has many, many, many problems, not least problems associated with social justice.”

Meanwhile, another argued that allowing concerns about fairness to prevent essential changes would ultimately result in less fair outcomes.

“We are either serious about meeting these carbon targets or we are not. And if we are going to get close to meeting them, especially on the kind of timescales we are talking about, there is going to be a degree of rough justice. We cannot allow ourselves to reject potentially successful policies on the grounds that there will be social injustice involved. We have to face up to that.”

“The reason for facing up to it is that to do nothing, or to fail to meet the targets, is not in itself socially just. Failing to meet the targets will mean we will get a situation which will probably

affect disadvantaged groups even more. We can't allow people to say 'you can't do that' just because one particular group is disadvantaged. We have to take a more balanced attitude on that."

Sweating the assets

"I think one of the key things we have got to think about is sweating the assets that we've got," said one contributor.

"The issue about charge points is that if you put them in the ground and don't use them they are a white elephant, and in fact there is modelling that ... says that local charging hubs that are highly utilised will actually bring the price down to domestic levels of energy cost."

"One of the biggest activities will be working out how we make best use of the assets and minimise what we make and build in the future. And, rather than having 40 million cars, should we have 20 million cars that are used almost twice as much?"

"That will actually give you a bigger reduction in greenhouse gas probably in the 2040 timeframe, because of this shift of greenhouse gas being fundamentally generated by the build and embedded in things, because we are going to decarbonise the operations."

"We have really got to think about the transport system we want and the efficiency of that transport system in terms of the assets that we utilise ... I would agree with commentary about 'let's not build £27bn worth of new roads', let's make much better use of the ones we've got."

"It's all about sweating the assets, because it's the assets that are going to be demanding the resource and the carbon, not the actual use, in the long term."

Another contributor asked how car sharing could be encouraged in order to make more use of existing assets. The point was made that we will see the utilisation of cars fall even further if we do start encouraging people to work at home more and travel less. This means they become even more inefficient compared to the embedded carbon.

"We do need to get that use of car sharing up and I think that's going to involve working not only with the finance sector and the manufacturers and software providers, but also with insurance companies, to make sure that the ability to share cars is easier. Because I think insurance is one of the big hurdles there at the moment."

Another argued that we need a much greater focus on the circular economy, which involves sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing and recycling existing materials and products as long as possible.

"There are countries like Finland that have really moved heavily down the circular economy concept, and that's appealing because it's not a sort of anti-growth or anti-capitalist, millenarian lifestyle change thing. It's actually just making much better use of all the resources that we already have. Endlessly reusing and repurposing."

Meanwhile, in order to utilise transport assets most efficiently, we need to spread the working week across seven days, rather than five days on and two days off, with everyone travelling to and from work at peak times.

"That involves actually rethinking whole working patterns ... I think we have to do a lot more of that if we're actually going to not require new infrastructure to cope with people's mobility needs."

Picking up on this point, another contributor warned that hybrid working, whereby people work partly from an office and partly at home, could have the opposite effect.

“If we can spread that over five days then essentially we make better use of the infrastructure and we don't have to provide some of that very expensive peak capacity. On the other hand, if it's all concentrated on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday then we are much worse off than we were before. We need the same capacity but we are using it for an even smaller percentage of the time.”

Another argued that demand management was also part of sweating the assets.

“I agree we need to sweat the assets but the way to do that has to be to reduce the demand. It can't be to fail to provide the capacity and hope to do it by congestion. That's just potty. You will not meet your objectives. Congestion just creates more carbon, not less. The idea that you let traffic grow or stay the same, but you fail to provide the capacity for that movement and hope to meet your targets by congestion is not the way to go.”

Focus on what matters most

“We get distracted very easily by the new and exciting,” lamented one contributor. So, if you take the DfT at the moment, we have got a ‘Bus Back Better’ [National Bus Strategy for England] document and it's struggling, but there is a load of focus on e-scooter trials and everything else. What's moving the most people around is not e-scooters.”

“It's the same currently in freight. People are obsessed with cargo bikes. Unfortunately, a lot of these are almost handmade. They don't have any annual tests for roadworthiness, or for safety. The drivers aren't managed effectively and they don't have insurance.”

“Big is beautiful. Tesco is out trialling 37-tonne electric vehicles. An HGV is basically a bus. We need to make sure we get the right vehicles in at the right time to the right places. If you want cargo bikes for the last mile, great. But let's make sure we've got the space for it, the land for it, and we can actually get the majority of the stuff in as easily as possible. Cargo bikes have become a solution without knowing what it's for.”

Commenting on e-scooters, another said: “They have a role but when you look at mileage and so on in relation to carbon, a lot of those effects can be quite small.”

Share modelling methodologies

It has been suggested that the UK needs to reduce car use by 25-30% by 2030 in order to achieve its carbon reduction targets. However, one contributor argued that there is little consensus on this issue, because the modelling methodologies are not open for scrutiny.

“I'm not sure there is a consensus that we need to have a major reduction in travel. That's not the Department for Transport view in their decarbonisation plan. They aim to decarbonise mainly through technology and they have done modelling using the National Transport Model and other transport models to that effect, but they have not published the detail.”

“So, we've got a conflict between models, between the kind of model used by the Climate Change Committee and the energy modellers, which is looking at energy and carbon emissions and then looking at energy as a sub-sector; and then the department's modelling approach, based specifically on transport models.”

“What I think we need to do is to move towards a consensus here with modellers sharing their methodologies, and maybe by using their models on common scenarios so we can see how these models differ.”

“I think it's important, because it seems to me quite hard for governments to say ‘you must make huge changes to travel behaviour because we have these models that say to do that is necessary in order to achieve net zero by 2050’. The models aren't validated. You can't validate models out to that timescale. There's a lot of uncertainty about the parameters that are chosen and the relationships.”

“So, I think models of different complexions should need to work together, as happens for energy modelling generally within the UK, where the academics and government use the same modelling framework, as happens internationally on modelling climate change itself, which is a very collaborative exercise.²

“People in the transport sector who model the requirements that generate the need to make big behavioural changes really ought to talk more together, to see if we can get a coherent consensus view.”

ENDS

Roundtable 3 - Planning

Chair: Professor Glenn Lyons - UWE Bristol

Chair's introduction

We need to reduce global emissions by 45% by 2030. It hardly seems that spatial planning is the place to look for that. Planning is a slow process. Changing the built environment is a slow process. We don't have time!

But planning of the past has been complicit in shaping the present in which we now confront the stark reality of dependence on a transport system, the considerable direct and indirect emissions of which are no longer tolerable. Planning of today and tomorrow will in turn have long-lasting ramifications for society. How we now plan is therefore no less important in the fight against climate change for the decades ahead, for future generations.

And requirements for a different sort of planning could send powerful signals to developers, local authorities, businesses and households about the need for change – signals that could influence their strategic decisions. Retrofitting *existing* development might make more immediate contributions, alongside a changed approach to planning *future* development. Better planning could at least help prevent things getting worse than they already are.

The discussion outlined below highlights opportunities that exist for better planning to help tackle decarbonisation. It is also a painful reminder that they are difficult to seize without appropriate skills, greater imagination, appropriate incentives and, most of all, strong leadership.

A Sisyphean task

Decarbonisation of transport will require a decisive shift away from our car-based consumer culture. Despite this, we are moving towards more car dependant developments. How do we change direction and how do we stop building towards a carbon intensive, car dependant future?

It was argued that planning in relation to transport “is enormously fraught on a whole number of levels”.

To begin with, there is the issue of who makes what decisions. For example, a local district planning decision to add some houses on the end of a village is taken without any regards to transport. Difficulties of access, including access to public transport (if any exists), are not taken into account.

For larger-scale developments it is accounted for - but often superficially - “usually about where the roundabout is going to be”.

Another contributor argued that we need to challenge planners and developers to give more attention to matters of access, beyond how people travel to work, with wider consideration due to how to access shops, places of education, leisure opportunities and so on.

The introduction, 20 years ago, to WebTAG [which contains the Department for Transport's guidance on appraisal of transport schemes], focused attention on how 'to produce the most efficient transport system knowing the trips that people want to make'.

So planners took a view of the trips and then worked out what kind of transport system would most quickly solve the problem of how to fulfil the making of those trips. There was no regard to influencing the number of trips, and no regard to influencing mode choice or to questioning whether slow(er) modes had legitimacy or even appeal.

"It was all about speed because the whole thing was predicated on the value of time, which everybody was going to be able to save and use for other purposes if they went faster from A to B.

"If there's one thing that we've learnt it's that people don't save time, they go further, they go farther, they use a different mode, but they're not saving time. The amount of time that people are prepared to spend travelling has been pretty much constant for the last 50 years.

"We have to continue to attack the way transport decisions are made."

Effective transport planning was likened to a Sisyphean task. One contributor observed: "We have known since the 1960s that transport and land-use are closely linked and that land use policy affects travel patterns. Yet 60 years on we are still seeing housing developments in the wrong places, and designed in a way that embeds car use. Despite all these planning reforms over the last 60 years we have not actually managed to tackle that."

Another contributor pointed out that each country has its own DNA and its own way of doing things, and each country thinks that the way it does it is the right way.

"The UK has always been a country that makes sure it does things properly, it has committees and research etc. This is why you are going to have a high-speed rail line half a century after the French managed to do it. I'm not saying that's wrong. I'm just saying it happens in different ways."

"In the UK we get stuff back from the authorities saying we love what you're doing, and we really believe in it and this is the way forward. But just in case let's build the road anyway and we will do your stuff too. There comes a point in the planning process when we really need to be stronger and say 'no'.

Another contributor remarked: "What planning must do is stop things getting worse even if it can't turn it's attention to making things better as rapidly as we might like."

A broken system

Offering a local authority perspective, one contributor remarked: "I've been really really shocked by the lack of connection between planning and transport. Transport is brought in through the lens of people who just need to get planning applications through.

"It's interesting to try and change the order that conversations happen. There are joined up conversations within authorities but at the moment planning is at odds with where I am trying to come from with a transport and highways perspective. A travel plan

doesn't make an unsustainable development sustainable and it never will. We are trying to get them to consider the long-term carbon impact that they are going to have with the planning applications that are coming in in."

Developers want high levels of viability in line with their own objectives, and to get applications through, and they push resource-deficient local authorities to agree to things. They take sites and they break them up and they sell them on, and this fragmentation means that you don't get the overarching picture you want for developments.

"I've seen some cases that will make your hair stand on end. Completely car dependent development with no urban realm, no connectivity, no pavements, no pathways - there's no chance of people making any journeys by anything other than car. They haven't got connections, they haven't got services - middle low-density, car-based development that you need to drive to get anywhere to."

There is work to be done to educate planners on the need for new approaches: "There's an absolute tonne of work to be undertaken in this discipline to actually get people from a local authority on the same page, to help them to understand they've been in this role for 20 years but things have changed. Aspirations are different, ambitions are different, and that 25% change [reduction in car kilometres] by 2030 doesn't figure in anybody's mind unless they are in a conversation like this." That said, sometimes the car can appear the only credible option in locations where public transport is all but non-existent.

A local authority perspective suggested that officers had not been given the right questions to ask in terms of looking at schemes, and assessing their appropriateness. Meanwhile, the environment they are working in is very pressurised and very political. "At the end of the day if we are coming to building stuff and if we haven't got the right conditions, if we haven't got the right requirements, then all of the top-level strategy goes to dust. We need to make sure that the system is fit for purpose. It's broken at the moment.

"We need to do a lot of work putting that back together at all the different levels. We have the policy and strategy but we do not have it at the implementation level, but it can be done."

Another contributor who has worked in local authorities also called for a mindset change: "We think of transport as something that comes along at a late stage and tries to mop up disasters ... It seems to me that we do all these things back to front and then wonder why it doesn't work. We haven't resolved that over many decades.

"Planning authorities have really got to go away and read their own policies because everyone says the right stuff. There are some lovely things in local plans and local transport plans that you can't disagree with, it's just that they do the opposite in practice. So if we were policy-led we would be in an entirely different place."

Meanwhile, in relation to passenger transport, it was observed that having one bus per hour does not mean that a development is sustainable: "The crisis that is now hitting passenger transport, in terms of not only changing demands but ever escalating costs, means that you cannot necessarily plan for these things in the way that we used to."

Another contributor also argued that the system was broken. "The most polluting aspect of transport is the one that the government makes around £25bn annual profit out of. And we have a planning system that gets in the way of people who want to do the right thing from a decarbonisation standpoint rather than help them. We are not even enabling the people who are really keen on doing the right thing.

“People on the edge of cities like Bristol, Oxford and Cambridge have been trying to put in things that are very car light and they are engaged in battles of one kind or another with planning authorities around the driveway - the provision of overly generous ratios of car parking spaces to dwellings in very convenient places – and the roundabout or the junction. I'm not blaming the people involved in those planning authorities, it's the system.”

Meanwhile, another pointed out that shops and mobility hubs need to be built first, “not in Phase 6 of the development by which time everybody drives”.

Planning reform

Are we going to see planning reform with teeth anytime soon? It was suggested that if we do it's most likely to be in the Government's Levelling Up Bill, which is expected in Summer 2022. It provides an opportunity to crystallise two or three big things that some would like to see.

For example, the self-imposed legal obligation on the Government to achieve net zero by 2050 is not currently reflected in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in the way that it ought to be.

“You're only going to affect change in new development significantly if you've got that legal obligation. There are some councils that are going over and above in their local plans, but most of them don't have to [so they don't].”

The structure of local government was another area where planning reforms could be implemented. As a result of research and conversations with chief planning officers, larger unitary authorities were cited as being successful places that are capable of joining the dots and delivering at scale. They have chief planning officers who are in control of planning, the climate change brief, building control and highways and transportation. They are therefore able to move away from silos towards a more integrated systems approach.

There was a plea to consider developers when implementing planning reforms. “We've got to be very careful not to create system that is going to be incredibly difficult and complicated and expensive to use as we put more controls into it because that is the way that you then get developers pushing back against it, or indeed having to spend so much time making the plan they actually haven't got any money left for the public realm or design improvements. They default to business as usual, because even doing that is hard. We need to think about it from the user point of view as well what is great policy.”

Another contributor also called for consideration of the developer. “They have an enormously important role to play in this. At the moment what we get in from developers is very, very far away from what we've asked them to put forward. Then it's such a long and protracted negotiation and politicians get involved. Then we just acquiesce and go for the path of least resistance. So I think the developer and the part they play in this is absolutely huge.”

Wales was highlighted as a positive example of where everything is being considered through the lens of protecting future generations. In policy terms this means that planning now comes under the environment brief.

The correct hierarchy of decision-making should be about carbon first and trip generation later. “We've got so many examples where decisions for really good mixed use, sustainable applications have been thrown out because there weren't enough parking spaces.” Another contributor pointed out that Active Travel England is coming into play and will get powers to intervene and make a difference.

Cross boundary issues were identified as an area where reforms were needed. “You can't think about Somerset without thinking about North Somerset and Wiltshire and Bath and North East Somerset, because they are all approving developments that are loading onto the same roads.”

“You need to move from moving vehicles as a success measure of roads to measuring people. As long as you just measure throughput of vehicles you are not going to give priority to car sharing or coaches or buses, because they are just one vehicle.

“We need sub-national plans covering, say, the whole of Lancashire rather than trying to pick things out.

“We need to highlight that other countries do this differently and better.”

Phygital mobility

“How many elephants do you need in the room? God comes along and he says I think everybody should work closer to home so I'm going to give you the internet. So he gives you the internet and people keep commuting long distances and using the internet at the other end. So he thinks 'I've had enough of that', so he gives us a pandemic. Everybody has to work at home, some people can't. It goes on for long enough that we know no how it works and when it works. Now he's saying that our energy in the future may not be very resilient, and it will be a lot more expensive, and your pocket is going to be more empty. Everything is pointing towards the need to localise facilities.

“We need to plan for *phygital* mobility - physical and digital, you can't separate the two in 2022. You've got to have the two together.”

Taking up this point, another added: “We have to see that there is a silver lining in the set of crises that we are facing right now. The silver lining may disappear if we are not careful. There are opportunities that are unprecedented within that for the taking, and digital clearly is one of them.”

Devolution

One of the things that the National Infrastructure Commission has pushed really consistently is the need for devolution, said one contributor, “because it's only when you get into some proper devolution that you can bring some of those decisions together”.

“While it's all being dealt with in those silos, slowly feeding down, you can't pull the thing back together.”

Other contributors also cited the importance of devolution. “It's that combination of devolved power and some funding settlements. Small changes spreading are actually going to be more effective and more acceptable than trying to have some big top-down ‘everybody must do this’ solution”.

Density

A piece of work by the Centre for Cities was cited. It drew comparisons with continental cities, where city centre density is much higher and where people will tend to live in low-rise apartments with decent public space. Such developments are rare in the UK.

The Barbican in the City of London was cited as an example of such a development. This was a highly successful development but it never really caught on as a way to manage more dense developments. More dense developments like this are required if we are going to support a public transport system and offer shorter distances necessary to make cycling or walking attractive. There is therefore a question about what sort of templates of development we should be talking about.

Meanwhile, “minor densification”, spread out over a lot of places, was suggested as a way to make a big difference. This could involve adding a storey to a house or adding a storey right along a High Street. “That is the kind of way in which we might make urban and intra-urban transport more sustainable and attractive, because to get behaviour change you have to make something more attractive.”

Carrots as well as sticks are needed to influence behaviour. “If we prescribe behaviour change that makes people feel worse off it's not going to get very far, so I think we have a challenge on making density more attractive.”

However, templates are needed for dense developments that are also attractive places for people to live and raise families. Manchester was cited as an example of a place that has built new high-rise blocks, but is this really the kind of development that people want to live in, especially when they have a family? How do you manage active travel safely for children in such environments, for example? How do you stop the school car trip?

Trip chains

Trip chains, journeys which link up several locations, such as the school-run, a shopping trip and a commute to and from work, were cited as being among the core questions that we should really focus on.

Those chain trips are done with things like pushchairs and small kids, and they are many times more effectively done in a private vehicle than other modes.

That encapsulates the challenge, and behaviour change must therefore be supported by effective infrastructure.

That means going back and challenging the design of new developments, particularly in relation to making them more walker-friendly, because they are often lacking. “I was absolutely shocked when we first went and looked at some of the new developments in Milton Keynes and you realise that you really wouldn't want to walk around them. They weren't friendly to that. Even if you could walk into them you wouldn't walk out of them into anything else.”

Funding

There was a plea for the Government to give long-term funding settlements to local authorities so that they can make long-term plans.

Another contributor observed some progress on equipping local authorities with the resources they need: “There is something going on at government. We are starting to get support to provide capacity and capability to local authorities in the build up to what is potentially a rapid development of Local Transport Plans.”

The Housing Infrastructure Fund was identified as helping to promote car-dependent developments. This money is generally for road construction and is on “a ridiculously short” timescale because it's designed to speed up housing delivery.

“This means you have to take all the decisions with speed otherwise you lose the funding. Councillors are not going to turn down the funding from government so they approve the big roads immediately, before the development is even designed.

“There’s no commitment to sustainable travel or anything else. The game is lost. That is the culture that we need to change.”

Another said: “We have to get away from this business of writing business cases to get housing infrastructure funding when the principal was already established that this was where we needed to put housing and infrastructure ... Other countries across Europe just don't do it like that. They just get on with stuff.”

Another highlighted that funding was in short supply. “We don't have enough money on planning. We don't have enough planners. We don't have enough transport planners. We need people to be able to deliver the cycling schemes that we need. We need people to be able to deliver the buses network that we need. And we need people to deliver the future charging infrastructure that is needed.”

There are revenue streams appearing, but they are all individual. “There is nothing about joining it all together or giving local flexibility. An authority might decide that they don't need charging points, they need to invest in buses or cycling. It's not done like that which is deeply frustrating. I think there is more flexibility in the Mayoral Combined Authority areas. They say there is going to be more flexibility coming with the new County Deals. We will see.”

Outdated data

The Government has been working on the presumption that we need 300,000 homes a year, but some are now questioning this.

In January, the Office of National Statistics republished its projections for population growth, but it didn't say anything that we did not already know. We already knew that the natural reproduction rate in the UK is mimicking the rest of Europe. It is around 1.6, which is below the replacement level of 2.1. It has been below that level for some time.

Immigration has plateaued in the UK the policies for immigration becoming stricter. The projected population growth is therefore flattening out. There is still some growth projected for about 10-15 years and then a plateau, but it could be that the plateau has already begun.

The data that is still being used to assess housing needs was produced years ago, and it was argued that we don't now need 300,000 new homes a year. We need considerably fewer.

At the same time, transport planning still uses TRICS [a database of trip rates for developments, used in the United Kingdom for transport planning purposes, specifically to quantify the trip generation of new developments], which is also based on older population data¹.

“We are over scaling,” it was argued. “Maybe it's not radical but it's significant enough that over time we are designing the wrong places.”

¹ It should be noted that the way in which the 30+ year time span of the TRICS database is used to inform development planning has recently been reviewed and a new TRICS ‘Guidance Note on the Practical Implementation of Decide and Provide’ published - <http://www.trics.org/decideandprovideguidance.html>

Retrofitting

It was argued that planning professionals are focussed very much on the delivery of new housing and major developments. However, “we forget the key and crucial thing now is to restructure the city we have and make the cities we have fit for the next century”.

A contributor agreed that there is a huge opportunity to retrofit existing communities. “People say ‘there's nothing more sustainable than an old car’, well actually let's stick with the developments we've already got. They may not be that well connected but they are a lot better than starting off with a greenfield site somewhere in the middle of nowhere.”

The Transport for New Homes² campaign has gone out and examined what is being built on the ground across England. On a positive note, one contributor noted: “Some of the site visits ... suggested that some really quite small bits of retrofitting would make a huge difference. Basically all the people involved in managing and planning those places don't actually believe that anybody would ever walk there and they've never tried it themselves. There are bits of walkway that finish off in muddy puddles. Some quite small-scale retrofitting would make a huge difference.”

Another contributor argued that retrofitting is not going to be easy but it is fundamental. “Building within your existing towns is a challenge but it's well worth the effort, and the uplift in land values that you get from it can go some way towards paying it.

“Retrofitting new settlements into the existing transport infrastructure is a more effective way of moving forward and tends to upset fewer people. But you have to guarantee from the outset that the locations you use are those which are already well served by public transport.”

Politics

Short electoral timeframes don't allow for a long payback and that was identified as an in-built challenge.

The roll-out of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods demonstrated the importance of having a mandate. This is attained by working with local people and local communities. A constant narrative enables politicians and planners to take people with them.

At a national level, consistency from government is required. “At the moment we still get too many inconsistent messages.”

The National Bus Strategy for England, *Bus Back Better*, was cited as an example of this inconsistency. At first there was £3bn of funding available, but now there is £1.2bn. At the same time, fuel duty has been reduced by 5p.

There are mixed messages on cycling too. Councils were instructed to get on with implementing pro-cycling measures and then found themselves being criticised by Grant Shapps, the Secretary of State for Transport, for the way they were doing it.

“We hear messages that ‘Motorists are King’ and yet we want to do all this stuff on decarbonisation.”

Another pointed out that public opinion of the importance of addressing climate change is also inconsistent. Opinion polling ahead of last autumn's COP26 climate change summit in Glasgow

² <https://www.transportfornewhomes.org.uk/the-project/building-car-dependency/>

showed that concern for the environment was at the highest it has ever been since the beginning of the survey back in the 1980s. However, a couple of months after COP26 it dropped 26 points. “The public is seemingly so volatile in the midst of so many things to be exercised about.”

Another contributor observed: “It’s easiest to be a strong leader when you’ve got everybody behind you pushing you forward.”

The problem is that people too often suggest simple solutions for what appear to be simple problems – for example, “oh congestion, we need more roads” – and it doesn’t work.

Who is the person who can come forward and explain all of this clearly to people? *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams was cited as a wonderful way of ridiculing the unthinking construction of a by-pass. Greta Thunberg has meanwhile come along helped to elevate consciousness of climate change to new levels: “There has been fabulous amounts of work by really clever people for years and years but one person suddenly elevates it.”

High profile champions are perhaps crucial, with another contributor identifying cycling campaigner Chris Boardman as another figurehead who can “cut through and reach the public in a way that professional ranks can’t”.

Focusing on outcomes

“It’s always a road project, a housing project, a retrofit project,” said one contributor. “They are not really talking to each other and they are not really aligned.”

It was suggested that local authorities should instead be focussed on pre-agreed outcomes defined by very clear metrics.

“Endless vision documents say the right things but they never follow through. That’s because nobody is establishing any metrics.

“With highways in particular it is quite clear what their metrics are and what their incentives are, which is often safety to move vehicles without getting congestion on the roads. But they don’t really have any other metrics for well-being, sustainability, happiness. Until we do that there will always be the person in the room trying to argue for the wider road or against changing a piece of infrastructure.”

Reform of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) offers an opportunity to include “some really strict metrics”. “It might be that you need to have a line in the NPPF that talks about modal share. It is very easy for people to nod to sustainable transport and say they have given it consideration, but until you say ‘your development must achieve a modal share which is set out in the Transport Decarbonisation Plan’, whether it’s 50% active and sustainable, that could answer the question about why we keep building in places that we really shouldn’t be putting homes at the moment.

“So then if you throw 2,000 homes on an airfield you are going to be measured against that 50%. You are going to have to put in a Bus Rapid Transit and that will then come out of the land price itself. Then you will quickly see people not building in these areas.”

Another contributor added: “We need a much more objective-led approach to metrics. Personally I have been inspired by Professor Chris Whitty, the way he stands next to the Prime Minister with his trajectories. Instead of looking a year back and saying ‘it’s getting worse’, we are trying to adjust the trajectory to whatever the milestone is.”

But metrics require data that is not always freely available. “Just landing a single dataset on electric vehicle ownership takes time. We shouldn't underestimate the amount of effort it is to actually do things like data engineering to get things into dashboards to deliver to decision-makers on what the future looks like, rather than what last year looked like. We need more forecast metrics than just observed metrics.”

On the subject of forecast metrics, another added: “There are no metrics for the future because we haven't got there yet. So what are the possible ranges of outcomes, and are they the ones we actually want? That gives us a way of actually visualising them and enabling people to think about whether this is good place to end up. The future is going to be different from the past whether we like it or not.”

Bringing people together

It was observed that there was a lot of violent agreement in the meeting, but “how can we bring like-minded people together to help each other on communications, advocate and assist each other?”

The Sustainable Transport Alliance was cited as an example of a structure that brings together existing green NGOs in a loose wrapper. They try to help each other out and meet every fortnight.

Another contributor added: “We really do need a learning by doing and sharing culture around this if we have to move forward. Yes, we need change at pace and at scale across the country, but if we can find those beacon developments and authorities and make sure they are very visible to others then perhaps there really is a formula for responsible innovation ahead of us.”

ENDS

Roundtable 4 - Politics and Local Delivery

Chair: Professor Greg Marsden, Institute of Transport Studies

Chair's introduction:

The scale of the climate challenge provides an impetus to more radical approaches to improving local transport. There are no futures which meet our climate obligations which do not also require reducing the amount we travel by car. However, the scale and pace of change is such that this cannot simply be 'done' to citizens by nudging choices.

The participants in our workshop on politics and local delivery suggested that we need to bring citizens into the decision-making process. For the kinds of changes we need to see happen there needs to be more politics, not less. This is being made much more difficult by the lack of clarity from Ministers in England that cutting car travel is part of the necessary pathway. Whilst this makes the doorstep discussions more difficult, there are many reasons why people support changing our towns and city environments such as safety, air pollution and noise and many areas are pressing on.

There are, however, limits to what can be done locally. The levels of funding on offer coupled with the short-term competitions for accessing the funding are totally inadequate to deal with the emergency. Whilst pooling resources is on the cards for the next round of Local Transport Plans the quantum of funding is a big issue. Strategies that are unfunded and potentially unfundable will undermine the credibility of local politicians seeking to provide the kinds of step change that make the prospect of giving up some use of the car palatable.

It is important to recognise that there is not a mandate for action on the climate everywhere. However, time and again our participants told us of the quiet majority who backed change. The need to reach out and ensure that a truly diverse set of voices define what is possible cannot be underestimated. That might usefully apply to decision-makers too.

This discussion explored the question from the perspective of delivery at the local level, and crucially the politics involved in making those tough decisions. How can we make change happen? How can local politicians take that electorates with them? What more support is needed, political or otherwise, from central government?

Political perspective: London Borough

The discussion heard a presentation from a councillor for a London borough who delivered a series of politically challenging interventions since 2013 to radically change the way the people move around the borough.

The borough was successful in bidding for money from the then Mayor of London (and now Prime Minister) to get more people cycling, but it soon became apparent that it was actually

about active travel in a broader sense. “Cyclists and pedestrians have far more in common than perhaps some people believe.”

The council started to “rectify the narrative that suggested that cyclists were evil and the pedestrians were being mown down by cyclists at a rate of thousands of people a day”.

“Actually it was motorists that were killing people, directly or indirectly, because of the way it was stifling delivering active travel into people's daily lives. And if you put active travel into your daily life you are going to live longer, you are going to be more healthy, a whole range of benefits.” This speaks more broadly to the need to avoid false culture wars.

Low traffic neighbourhoods were introduced. “We are big champions of those because unless you are taking out the through traffic, which has boomed through residential neighbourhoods because of technology our phones and sat-navs, you are never going to encourage more people out of their cars to do those short journeys. I think that is just a simple fact now.

“As long as you leave your residential roads open to through traffic you are not going to get more people walking and cycling or micro-scooting to and from school everyday, to the local shops, to the town centre etc.”

“So we are big champions of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods as a way of rectifying something that should never have happened in the first place.”

The council also included long sections of segregated cycle track and made them as direct as possible. A huge amount of cycle infrastructure was introduced, including 600 cycle hangers on residential streets. Cycle training and cycle hire was provided, including a large fleet of cargo bikes of all shapes and sizes for all families and businesses.

“It has been difficult, but I didn't come into politics to maintain the status quo. I came into local politics to actually make a difference, because I believe you can at a council level.

“I think we have to accept that potentially, politically you could end up being sacrificed by the electorate if they don't like what you are doing. But doing the right thing has to be at the forefront of what we do and that's why we have stuck to our guns with regard to our Low Traffic Neighbourhoods and our interventions deprioritise motorists' needs in favour of active travellers' need.

“It's difficult. It's always challenging but it's worth the fight because you see the benefits.”

These benefits include seeing small children cycling to school, improvements in air quality, community cohesion, thriving local town centres, and a real uplift in cleanliness and the general standard of the street scene.

While the council stuck to its guns in the face of big demonstrations, there is inconsistency in the wider policy message from central government.

“Cuts to Fuel Duty that hasn't even been raised in 12 years sends out really, really poor messages around this agenda. I would have thought cuts to bus fares would have been a lot better, cuts to rail fares would have been a lot better. Bigger investment into active travel would have been better.”

Political perspective: City Council A

A councillor at a city council in England, which lies within a Combined Authority, spoke of the challenges of tackling car dependency. The surrounding unitaries, for example, are the polar opposites politically and have very different approaches. One of them provides a lot of free car parking and has very wide roads, which results in challenges at a regional level.

“In terms of demand management we need the Government to lead on this. The Government is kind of doing that by the back door by the Department for Transport. But publicly what it is doing is the opposite of what the Department for Transport is doing, which is the usual trick really in the relationship with the local and central government – if it's not politically popular let the councils do it while ‘we’ look popular in Westminster.”

The big challenge the city faces is retrofitting carbon neutrality onto historic and sometimes poorly designed settings. The city has a green ethos, but Green Party voters in the centre want active travel while Labour voters on the edge of the city want fast and reliable public transport links. The latter is very difficult because of the challenge of retrofitting infrastructure within the narrow streets of the historic centre.

The city needs to establish strategic corridors to ensure swift access but this is often is not popular with Green voters because they have “more of a village mentality than a science-based environmental approach”.

Yet new public transport infrastructure is essential if the city is to have a carbon-neutral transport system.

“We absolutely have to get a better bus system or something else. We are not going to get to carbon neutrality just by turning cars into electric cars.

“So there is a strange conflict between the sort of village green people and your scientific planning type mentality, which is what we feel we need to adopt in order to get those corridors in.”

Political perspective: City Council B

A second city council perspective was offered. A councillor explained that the city is finely balanced, with the ruling party maintaining a thin majority of members.

The council declared a climate emergency in 2019 with the aspiration for the entire city to be net zero by 2030. That’s a long way ahead of central government (2050) and the wider region’s Combined Authority (2038).

“Achieving that will need a lot of work by the city council, a lot of work by the residents of the city, but also an incredible amount of work by other partners, such as the transport authority, the government and various others. I think that is where we gauge ourselves mostly. We are requesting for as many people as possible to help with the mandate the people ... gave us on that.”

The council recently set out its transport strategy, and it’s a huge shift from where the city was seen as being 30 years ago.

“The headline fact of that is that we want to be the city where you don't need a car. We've always had an aspiration where walking and cycling were the first choice for short journeys, but I think this is us being very clear that that means you don't need a car at this point. It's not that

you decide to leave your car at home, it's that we actively want you to not have one in the first place.”

Another important part of the plan is that everyone should have an affordable carbon zero choice in how they travel, regardless of where they live in the city.

Across the city 30% of households have no access to a car and in many areas it's 50% or higher.

As well as the transition to net zero, there is a social justice argument for this policy. When you look at the health inequalities in the city there is a 10-year life expectancy gap between the wealthier and the inner city and the more affluent outlying areas. The cars that are coming from the city's suburbs and rural areas, which are the areas with the highest carbon emissions, are driving through those inner city areas and affecting what happens there.

A major issue is that there is reticence about introducing restrictive measures without the alternatives being in place, but many of the alternatives are outside of the council's control – especially within the short timeframe between now and 2030.

“It's those opportunities for alternatives that I think are our real struggle at the moment. We are seen as being a restrictive council that are reducing car use. But for the person on the street, they can't understand why we are not increasing buses, increasing trains, increasing the other things that we here well know we don't have control of.

Another issue that is outside of the council's control are the policies pursued by neighbouring authorities. “We have many people who start their journeys in another authority and many of those authorities may be on different trajectories to us.”

A final thing piece of the transport jigsaw is outside of the council's control is the motorways that slice through the city.

Despite the lack of controls, the city's transport strategy sets ambitious targets. It aims to double rail usage and more than double bus patronage (on pre-pandemic levels), and it aims to quadruple the level of cycling and increase walking by one third. And there's a target to decrease car mileage by 30%.

However, it's still not enough. “When you add up all of that we are very clear in the transport strategy, it doesn't meet net zero in terms of transport ... it gets a 43% reduction in carbon emissions.”

The council is therefore consulting on congestion charging and a workplace parking levy as a way of bridging the gap between what the strategy can deliver and its own 2030 net zero target.

Political perspective: Shire County

A final political perspective came from the leader of an English shire council. It's a politically diverse council that covers a very rural area and wraps around a city like a doughnut. It has over 100 villages and is in the process of building three new towns.

Carbon emissions in the country are 25% higher than the national average, and that's because of transport. There was a desire among citizens for change, but it is not always matched by willingness to change their own behaviours.

“Our experience is that everybody wants a new railway or an off-road bus route until it runs close to their homes. And everyone wants more buses but very few people will leave the

comfort of their cars to use them. Everyone wants congestion to be reduced and air quality to be improved until they find out that road closures and congestion charging are the only ways to achieve that. And everyone wants more cycling and walking but they won't give up their road space and their car parks.

“So, in a nutshell, our experience is that NIMBYism is actually the biggest barrier that we face when trying to drive mobile shift to sustainable transport and zero carbon living.”

The council's most powerful tool is its local plan. It is doing a joint local plan with the city it surrounds and the aspiration is for this to be “the greenest local plan in the country”. Climate and Environment are the overarching principle and overarching priority.

The current administration inherited a local plan with 39,000 houses in it and has had to add a further 11,600 to that. However, only 4% of these additional homes are in rural locations, and that's only in the villages with main line rail stations. The rest are either in or around the city or the new towns, because they will have the best in sustainable transport.

One of these developments has potential to be a car-free community. “I think we won't achieve that, but I think what we can achieve is somewhere where car ownership is not only optional but actually is undesirable.”

“If we can actually make car ownership undesirable, because we are not going to build homes with garages and multiple car parking spaces, we even put the car parking outside, but there's lots of opportunities for a Zipcars, there will be a railway and so on.

“So I think local planning is the biggest tool we have because we are providing the carrots as well as the sticks. We are providing really exciting living for people. A lot of this is going to be edgy, urban living, which we haven't really seen in a place like this before.”

With a cost of living crisis looming, there is a further opportunity to promote this kind of development.

“We have been talking for some time about the health and well-being benefits of sustainable travel, but we now have to start talking about the cost of living benefits as well.

“So by having the local plan where are all the housing is close to where are people work, where they are educated, where they get their leisure, where they get their healthcare, that then starts having a direct impact on their budgets.

“By building houses that are built to the highest energy efficiency standards they are not giving all their money to the utility companies either.

“It starts actually improving people's cost of living because suddenly they don't need to own cars, they are in houses that are energy efficient to run, and it's a whole sort of package.

“I think more and more we are going to have to be talking about the finance of living.

In conclusion: “We have to think about ways that we can improve people's cost of living as well as improving the environment as well as improving their health and well-being. They are all inexplicably linked. My ambition is that we create places through our local plan where the car is not king.”

The power of positive visions

Responding to the political perspectives, one contributor said: "It's great to see creations of positive visions. I think this is something that has to be part of our discussion. When we are just talking about things like demand management or taking things away without creating that alternative positive vision I think it just generates a very negative reaction."

Another asked: "How can we get better sharing of our experiences? We've heard some great stuff today but is there a case study library that we can access so that we can take that back out to local authorities?"

The importance of a mandate

One contributor said: "I think this agenda is going to get even more difficult because we are being asked to do even more reallocation of road space, not just a cycling and walking, but to buses. We have to make space for e-scooters and EV charging too. It's going to get even more challenging. How important is it to have that mandate?"

Another said: "How can we get the voices of people who actually think it would be a good idea to have less car use heard? When you have been trying to do things where there voices who were in favour of reducing traffic, and how can those be given more weight? Are there other ways in which we can help organise those who support lower carbon transport?"

Responding to these points, the Shire County leader said that it takes one and a half hours to drive from her area into the city for 9am. The solution for this is likely to be the introduction of some form of congestion charging.

"Interestingly, we ran a citizen's assembly. That was a carefully selected group of people, wide backgrounds. That gave us the evidence of support for the outcomes, and actually the means to get to those outcomes.

"The problem is that we all risk committing political suicide by being ambitious and doing things like this, but we have to do what's right, not what's easy.

"But if you run a citizen's assembly it provides the evidence for you to say, 'the political opposition might think that congestion charging is something from Satan but actually the people are quite happy with it, they are prepared to do it because they understand that congestion charging provides the revenue stream to provide the buses, which will allow them to get out of their cars and free up some of their income'."

City Council B meanwhile achieved a "very clear mandate" through a climate jury.

"A number of people were selected from all backgrounds ... and from all trains of thought on climate. They came up with some really good suggestions and we are really happy they did.

"So, for instance, when they were looking at transport from all the evidence they saw they recommended public ownership of transport ... The solution wasn't just make the buses more reliable or increase routes. It was that it needs to be under public control so that it can be used as a tool in this battle against the climate emergency.

"When the emergency active travel fund came out we did a Commonplace consultation as a quick way of gathering views across the city, and 69% of contributors to that said they supported measures to reduce traffic on residential streets permanently. Therefore, that is my mandate. That's fine. I'm happy with that."

It's meanwhile important to make sure that consultations reach those people who don't normally make their voices heard.

"We did a consultation on one scheme, an online consultation and then knocking on doors. The online consultation came up with 42% positive or neutral. This was for an Active Travel Neighbourhood scheme, same as a Low Traffic Neighbourhood. The doorstep came out as 80% positive or neutral on that scheme.

"You go to a local ward member and they are very happy to deliver an 80% positive or neutral scheme in their area. Doing the same consultation on an online format came up with 42% and that's when you are having difficult conversations with ward members."

A consultation on another Active Travel Neighbourhood mainly attracted negative responses prior to its implementation. "It was predominantly men as with most highway and transport consultations we end up with."

However, at the end of the 12-month trial the response was 63% positive. "I think that's the only consultation I have seen in transport where we had more women than men ... I am certain that changed the outcome.

"So it's around getting the right respondents as well as just getting right responses, and I think we have been a bit lazy in transport consultations before. We talk about groups like seldom heard. They are only seldom heard if we are not listening. That's the difficulty, making sure you have got a wide range."

What value should a council ever place on a consultation with a huge gender imbalance? "Some are 70% men, 30% women, and the views are quite often very different because the journeys that typically men and women take in this country are very different."

The other city councillor said: "If you want to do politically challenging things, the best thing you can do is win a thumping majority at the election. Things like the workplace parking levy, Nottingham has done that. Leicester is now looking at that. Somewhere like [our city] will find that almost anything controversial like that takes more than one electoral cycle - with all the legal work and consultation, the other party is going to play games with it."

The London Borough councillor offered a different view on assemblies: "I'm not a massive fan of climate assemblies. In some respects I think that is attempting to dilute the leadership role that we are elected to take forward.

"We have to make some difficult decisions, and if some councils are still not charging for residents parking permits, still not introducing 20mph zones, if councils still don't have the powers to enforce speeding in some parts of the country ... If some of those basic things aren't in place then we are never actually going to move forward on this."

Test first, consult later

One contributor argued: "The traditional model of pre-consultation before a road space reallocation doesn't work. It is very broken."

To illustrate this point, a poem by Bertolt Brecht was cited:

*When it's a notion
When it's still vague*

*It is praised.
When it looms big
When plans are in motion
Objections are raised*

“We have got extremely strong alignment over the need to reduce traffic. Everybody wants to reduce traffic ... There is incredibly strong alignment, consistently. It's well over 80% of populations at every level of geography say there is too much traffic, traffic should be reduced. That's to do with road danger, it's to do with air quality, it's to do with the pleasantness of the place that you live. Incredibly, incredibly strong alignment.

“And then as you approach what needs to actually happen about it suddenly public support for what you are proposing to do craters. But a lot of that is a perception and this is the really critical part. After you've done the thing public support climbs back up again, and nobody ever wants this stuff reversed.”

“We knocked on hundreds of doors of households that live on streets with historic modal filters, modal filters that have been there for many years, and well over 80% of people said, 'God no, I would not want this modal filter removed'. You've got low single-digit percentage of people saying, 'Yes, take it away'. Nobody ever wants this stuff to go back.”

London's Congestion Charge and Nottingham's Workplace Parking Levy were each cited as examples of controversial schemes that are now accepted by the local populations. But measures like this are unlikely to attract majority support at the outset.

“You can be confident that these things are popular in the long run because the truth is that testing public attitudes towards a proposal for radical change is a very, very poor guide to public preferences ... And so how do you best represent your constituents' interests in that scenario where they are very bad at knowing what they actually want collectively, or certainly knowing and expressing it? That pre-consultation model just doesn't work.

Work by the Local Government Association looking at the mistakes made around the introduction of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods was cited.

“There is in fact majority support for road space reallocation. Almost every time, that's what you'll find. It's just that the support is soft, and proposals for change don't mobilise people. They don't want it enough. They will not show up to your consultation. The people who show up are angry over 55-year-old men who don't want the change. They are the only people you will hear from and they will then dominate the discourse.

“They will dominate the discourse on social media if you log on. Those are the only voices that you hear, but partly because if it comes self-fulfilling. Nobody wants to wade into that toxic conversation. People back out.

“People who were in two minds start to think that it is unworkable, because it seems like it is wildly unpopular. All of that is just incredibly misleading.”

Instead of consultations, local authorities were advised to do representative polling of their populations and deliberative stuff like climate assemblies and climate juries.

In conclusion: “Test the stuff then consult people a year later, and do it at the start of the electoral cycle.”

Funding

A number of contributors spoke of the importance of funding. The National Bus Strategy for England was cited as an example where the available funding failed to match the scale of ambition from local authorities.

“Funding is fundamentally undermining the ability of people to deliver on the carrots.”

An example from one city was offered of a strategic cycling and walking corridor that could have probably been completed in one year. Funding constraints mean that it will have to be delivered over three years, delaying the benefits.

“So setting aside all the other problems, without adequate funding, without sort of long term commitments from government that people can start going down a route and know they will be able to deliver the project across the conurbation, it's going to be incredibly hard to deliver those carrots to persuade people that we want to change and we've got to restrict the car on other levels. To me that is a fundamental element of this.

“And as we have seen with the way that central government has taken money from improving the buses, for example, and used it for Covid short-term support, we are in quite a difficult position with the Treasury not wanting to spend more money. How do we get around that?”

Another contributor said: “If central government is obviously so scared of talking about behaviour change and wants to give way to local authorities on this, surely local authorities can together go back to central government and say, 'okay we will take the hit for you, but fund us properly’.

“Not competitive funding pots like the Bus Service Improvement Plan, not piecemeal funding. Reallocate some funding from road building towards bus services, towards active travel and fund us properly to deliver on this. And that way we can afford to reduce parking spaces, replacing our parking income and so on.”

Another agreed: “I think we are in a ridiculous situation where we have an ongoing cycle of beauty pageants where local authorities are forced to apply for small amounts of money.

“Some local authorities are equipped to bid, some aren't. And it's all judged often by DfT officials on a short-term basis, whereas other things, like a national road building programme, that have a long-term settlement.”

Commenting on funding competitions, a local authority officer spoke of the “half sad, half happy” feeling when new bid competition comes out. “It's all hands to the pump, you rush from one thing to another, you tend to be taking risks.”

Their council currently has three major schemes over £50m. “That is frightening our finance partners anyway. So then to rush and put together a new bid and make sure you have got the costs right, that you are not taking on more risk, is really difficult. It puts a lot of pressure on authorities to take that risk on themselves and be ready, and not necessarily do best work under those circumstances.

“To give politicians the most confidence, the most time for consultation about that, longer-term settlements over a longer plan, and the ability to manage that, would really make a big difference to us.”

A reality check is meanwhile required between some of the policy messages that are coming out of central government and the baseline that authorities are starting from.

"If you take *Bus Back Better* [the National Bus Strategy for England] or the LTN 1/20 notes [on cycle infrastructure design], it's actually very difficult to implement those ... Particularly our rural bus network. It's on its knees. This isn't about 'when am I going to get fancy EV vehicles, when am I going to have Wi-Fi on every bus?'. This is about, 'is there a bus?'"

Another suggested that the focus on funding competitions were skewing priorities: "Everyone is so desperate for funding that if you win the challenge fund bid then you are delighted. But climate strategy in a number of places that we are researching at the moment is essentially what projects can you get funded, not what needs to be done. That's a real challenge."

"The point we are coming up to in Local Transport Plan 4 where everyone is going to be bidding for the next five years' worth of funding is going to be a key pinch-point with the government. Is it going to put the resources in, or are we going to end up where we are with [a scenario like] Bus Service Improvement Plans where there is seven times the amount of demand for stuff to be done than there is money available?"

Another echoed the concerns about inadequate funding: "We've heard a lot about all sorts of initiatives from local authorities all of which are helpful, but I suggest at the current levels of funding, or anything like the current levels of funding, are hardly going to move the dial in relation to the [UK Government's carbon reduction] targets on the timescale that is required ... So, I think sadly a lot of what has been said about local authority initiatives it's just unrealistic in relation to carbon targets, whatever the merits of the actions."

Mixed messages from central government

Whatever local mandates have been achieved it don't make everything easy, especially when there are mixed messages from government.

One city councillor: "In many times being me has been a very lonely place to be. I am going to community forums in areas of the city where they are not sure why we're making these measures and how we are making them.

"I then receive a letter from the Transport Minister telling me to be bold and brave. Unfortunately, they haven't heard that message from the Minister for Transport, telling them that they need to be bold and brave, or from the Prime Minister, shall we say. That's the real struggle.

"Quite often I have been delivering schemes on behalf of the government, many of whose aims I do not necessarily agree with being in a different party and looking after a different area. But the message that that is where it has come from has not been clear.

"There has been a lot of 'get out of jail free' cards given to Members of Parliament around the country who could then denounce measures that their own Ministers were asking for."

The London Borough councillor agreed. "In theory we have a Transport Secretary of State that is very keen on active travel, but actually we don't. We have Andrew Gilligan, the Prime Minister's transport advisor, who is very, very keen in this space. And we have a Treasury that would rather cut Fuel Duty that has not been raised in 12 years.

"I can't get over the hypocrisy of this. They would rather do that than actually invest and fund active travel solutions, particularly through our towns and cities across the country, that could be easily making a difference very, very quickly. Because we know what now works, we don't have to go out looking for examples. We know what works."

Another cited the example of Great Manchester's plans for a Clean Air Zone as an example of a lack of a consistent approach from central government: "We see central government ... saying to authorities across the country, including Greater Manchester, you have got to put in a Clean Air Zone. And then Boris Johnson saying the Clean Air Zone is a total nonsense, it needs to be stopped. So how can local authorities plan going forward?"

Another said: "People are saying that demand management, that message has to be led by Government. Unfortunately they heard abundant evidence on this and I can tell you the civil servants, it's not in dispute, the civil servants at the DfT understand very well demand management is required, but we have discovered where the edge of Conservative political ideology will take us to when it comes to this stuff and demand management is absolutely verboten ... So don't hold your breath. We are not going to get leadership from government on that issue."

Another spoke of the need to hold the government to account on the delivery of its pledges: "If you look at the Levelling Up White Paper there are 12 missions that the Government has set out. One of those is mission 3: 'By 2030, local public transport connectivity across the country will be significantly closer to the standards of London, with improved services, simpler fares and integrated ticketing.' There are a couple of others about healthy life expectancy.

"So why don't we collectively hold government to account on those missions because that would be a really good case to make for consistency of policy and continuity of funding in the future."

Civil society can support politicians

One campaigner spoke about the role that civil society can play in supporting brave politicians.

When Boris Johnson stood for re-election as Mayor of London in 2012 he had been "absolutely resolute was all you had to do was put down blue paint on the road and that would be enough to create safe space for cycling". The alternative of segregated cycle lanes and Low Traffic Neighbourhoods weren't needed.

But campaigners successfully exploited the intense political competition between Johnson and his main opponent, former mayor Ken Livingstone, and secured a number of promises from him to switch over to a Dutch-style approach.

"I hope what we have done since then as the Civil Society is try to support really brave councillors and brave politicians and brave officials - because political bravery seems to be the key ingredient here, but it's more easily talked about than achieved.

"We are here to help and we are here to try and create that political space for you. Perhaps we could do more to work in dialogue and conversation with politicians to open up that little space for you."

Another contributor remarked: "When it comes to difficult messages then surely the messenger matters as well. My observation is that sometimes people are not willing to accept new messages from local government telling them what to do and what not to do, but perhaps if it came from a charity ... talking about the importance of changes locally, healthy streets and so on, perhaps that can help to open up the conversations."

Stop the in-fighting between sustainable modes

Contributors said there were conflicts between supporters of different sustainable transport modes.

A councillor said that their city has a group called the Green Partnership. "You have got cyclists in there who argue with bus people who argue with tram people. I keep saying to them you are here to address the carbon problem. Please get together as modes and present your case as a joint body not as individual modes arguing with each other."

Another contributor argued: "We have had a lot of calls to stop the in fighting between different sustainable modes and speak with one voice, building on that sometimes quite protracted debate about urban, interurban and strategic when it comes to public transport. I think we need to stop that fighting. We need to think about seamless door-to-door journeys and different journey purposes, not just what's more important."

"I think we see that sometimes from DfT and National Infrastructure Commission that they don't necessarily think about the whole journey ... 80% of emissions come from trips over 20 kilometres."

Are we being honest with political leaders?

One contributor asked: "Do we think the industry is being honest enough with our elected leaders and members? We know that it's not just about the planning system and it's not just about sustainable transport, and it's not just about demand management and it's not just about digital. It's about ALL of those things and it's about doing them ALL now, and really to their fullest extent."

"So it's great to hear some of the local examples but nowhere is delivering on all of these components to the extent, with the urgency that's required. And I'm wondering are we holding the mirror up as the industry to inform our leaders so that they can make decisions with the best information possible?"

Picking up on this point, another said: "We have to achieve two-thirds reductions in the next decade essentially. Is anywhere even remotely close to that? Are we building strategies that we don't think we have any chance of delivering on?"

"If we do that do we then avoid the difficult thing of turning it back to central government and saying 'with what we have got now we are not going to be able to support all of what you need to do' ... We are promising local electorates that we will deliver zero carbon by 2030, 2028 in Nottingham, But actually, can we? And if we can't, what are we going to do and say about that?"

ENDS

Roundtable 5 - Behaviour Change

Chair: Professor Jillian Anable, Institute for Transport Studies

Chair's introduction:

It is almost impossible to hear any discussion about pathways to a net zero transport system that does not concede to a role for behaviour change alongside technological transformation. However, that is about where any consensus ends. Wildly different meanings, ambitions and approaches to behaviour centre around a fundamental divide in perspectives about where agency lies, how change comes about and how (im)possible it is to achieve. On the one side, shifting how cars are owned and used is regarded as the product of millions of individual decisions and the key is to tailor and target elements of the transport system to guide choices in desirable directions. On the other hand, the scale and speed of change required is deemed to involve a foundational change in our thinking about how we bring about societal-level shifts that go way beyond placing responsibility on one individual at a time.

The discussion in this webinar sat firmly on the latter 'paradigm shifting' side of the divide, whilst casting lifelines across to important perspectives about how individuals can be brought along for the ride. The conversation offers fresh perspectives about the need to champion and promote positive visions of less car dependent lifestyles whilst being careful not to fall into the trap of 'car is bad'. Strong views are expressed about how purposeful behaviour change has historically only come about as a result of strong legislation that creates level playing fields for change whilst the corollary - placing responsibility at the individual level - is counterproductive, leading to backlash and denial. There are additional insights about how success is likely to require a reversal to our thinking about what is discretionary versus non-discretionary travel and that we need to reduce total demand whilst allowing some people to do more, not less.

This is a vital, fresh and frank discussion about how we will continue to fail to change anything other than at the margins unless we fundamentally alter our whole mindset around what it means to design behaviour change interventions. Given the unequivocal evidence that, even post Covid, we need to achieve at least a 20% reduction in car kilometres travelled in less than 10 years in order to prevent the transport sector from irrevocably blowing its carbon, this could not be a more important topic. Every other policy area depends on us transport professionals adopting this radical mindset shift before any meaningful behaviour changes have any hope of being achieved.

The challenge of this discussion was outlined as being to bring forward some different perspectives around the topic of travel behaviour change.

This discussion considered how we can engage with the public to get the kind of change that we need at the rapid pace that is required. The 25% traffic reduction needed over the next decade

in order to deliver on the UK's net zero reduction targets will require a massive cultural change, and it is therefore vital that we start engaging in a very different way with the public.

Look beyond single interventions

It was suggested that travel behaviour change is almost a "toxic" phrase. It can provoke frustration and outrage as to why people do not do the right thing, and how we can get them to do the right thing.

And it's often talked about with respect to very narrow ideas about specific types of intervention, the balance between 'carrots' and 'sticks', and is all about trying to encourage use of alternatives to the car, often without even daring to mention reducing car use. This is an issue as the former does not necessarily lead to the latter.

"I think one of the first things we need to do if we can is to stop allowing the language and the approach to behaviour change to be confined by single interventions, and it being single interventions that define success or not.

"We are not going to get to net zero by picking off at the edge, these edge cases of car use here and there. We've got to talk about how to get whole scale shifts in mindsets, in social norms, expectations, meanings, visions and of course lifestyles. This is way beyond the transport sector."

Most of the behaviour change that has happened has not come about as the result of transport interventions. "We've got to face up to things that are really blocking these mindset changes."

Creating a positive vision

It was suggested that we should think about why so little effort is put into nurturing and elevating the less vocal (but often majority) support in favour of certain types of change and intervention.

At the same time, we have to recognise that the debate is often dishonest because we benchmark change against our cosy lifestyles today without being honest about the changes that will happen if we don't succeed.

Without painting a doom and gloom picture, ways must be found to explain how much better it will be if we change how we live.

"We really have to also think about why we don't collect the evidence about the benefits and the positive visions and lifestyles that we are trying to get people to see. We just don't seem to be able to paint those pictures and we need to think about that."

One contributor spoke about growing up in a car dependent household but then living an urban, car-free lifestyle for the past 14 years. "I have managed to live without a car and the benefits of this to me have been insane."

This lifestyle has saved a lot of money, it's reduced their impact on the city but it hasn't inhibited other aspects of their lifestyle. "I've been able to go everywhere I wanted to go."

How can this be sold as a positive vision?

“I feel like being car-free for me is something that we need to switch the conversation to allow people to be more proud of it, to allow people to shout about it more and to allow people to fight for it more.

“I think at the minute the overarching feeling is that people fight for their privileges to drive a car. But I often find that if I don't have those privileges I am less likely to fight hard for something I don't have versus the people who have it, and I'm probably the one who's losing out because I'm not fighting as hard.”

Moving away from individual car ownership can help us to get to net zero, as well as achieving a range of other individual and societal benefits, but who is promoting this lifestyle?

“The car industry is just so good at selling the empty roads, the car solves everything, the car makes you sexy, the car makes you free. It's freedom, that's what people are selling really. But who's actually selling being free from the car? Who's selling car freedom?”

Should there be a 'car-free society' or some kind of movement? At the moment, cycling groups promote cycling, rail promotes rail, buses promote buses – but no-one is selling the broader concept of car-free living.

Could car-free living become a movement that you could gain 'membership' of. “I can picture people with stickers on their cycle helmets on their bikes, on their backpacks ... Can we offer people discounts? Can we give them discounts off the e-scooter network, off the buses? I picture a car-free railcard. Wouldn't that be amazing, you get a car-free railcard?”

Another contributor spoke about the need to empower people and create a greater sense of positivity and pride towards the alternatives to private car use.

“We have a lot of people already who are living car-free lifestyles. Let's think about empowering them and giving those people a voice, but I think also the idea about car-free as a lifestyle. I don't think it needs to be absolute. This is not necessarily about persuading lots of people to suddenly ditch the car entirely.

“It's a mechanism we can use, it's a message we can use to encourage people to think about whether they can take small steps. And I think it's also a way for mobilising communities at a local level.”

'Car-free days' have been very successful in numerous locations around the world, but it was suggested that they have been under-utilised in the UK. They can help to get communities thinking about how we can make change in an empowering way and in a way that works for local people, while creating a positive vision of greener, less polluted communities that are less dominated by the private car.

Missing metrics

It was argued that transport decisions are often made without consideration of the right metrics.

“We can ask all we like about human behaviour but at the moment the metrics that are used for investment in transport are whack.”

For example, they assume that time spent in transit is a disutility. The result of this is that they are disproportionately preoccupied with speed and time saving as a metric, not the quality of the journey.

This is the kind of metric that we might apply to freight, but it's misaligned with what people actually care about when they make a journey.

"I have perfectly serious colleagues in their fifties who go to the business pod parking at Heathrow Terminal 5. When they arrive they are told that unfortunately the car park is full and they have been upgraded for free to the short stay car park. They admit to me that they are actually gutted because the highlight of their day was going to be riding on the little electronic pod from the car park to the airport.

"Now you can't really justify those electric autonomous private pods if you use conventional transport metrics. It's only when you factor in the fact that people with luggage hate getting onto and off buses [and] that we do quite enjoy a little bit of private space from time to time. It's only on those emotional and psychological factors that we can really justify quite a lot of innovative forms of very, very sustainable transport which just aren't all that fast.

On this basis the contributor suggested that High Speed 2 does not need to be as fast as it is designed to be. "I would argue that for all but a tiny number of people, those people who travel between Manchester and London once a week, we are spending £80bn pounds on High Speed 2 to give a very large number of people a mild convenience [in terms of journey time saving]."

Supporters of the High Speed 2 project emphasise that it's about providing additional capacity rather than journey time savings. But the suggestion was made that you could instead "deliver about 30% of the benefits of High Speed 2, maybe 40%, in six months at a cost of £1m" by simply using technology to help fill empty trains.

An app that offers passengers the chance to board the first train available to their destination (even if their ticket is for a later train) would reduce the end-to-end journey time, ease crowding at stations and enable passengers to proceed to the more pleasurable and productive part of their journey, the on-board travel experience. This new flexibility would make rail travel more attractive and therefore encourage behaviour change.

"I find it really, really interesting the extent to which in an engineering culture psychological solutions are treated as if they are cheating. If you are an engineer you can only solve problems through engineering because to do it any other way is basically seen as not playing the game. I think this happens when we get an increasingly siloed business culture."

The role of psychology and pricing is vital in terms of influencing behaviour change. The technology is already available to do road pricing, for example, but the real problem is electoral and psychological. How do we get people to accept it?

Continuing with this theme: "We don't have SI units for human emotions, do we? We have SI units for time and speed and we can derive units for punctuality, but we don't have SI units for anxiety."

An example of this is the map on the Uber app, which shows users the location of the vehicle they have booked to come and collect them. This was described as a "psychological game changer" because it offered a degree of reassurance that was not previously available to taxi users while they waited. "It didn't change the duration of the time but it changed the quality of the time."

Tailor actions to individuals

One respondent cited the book 'Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed' by James C. Scott. Its argument is that the state defines things to optimise legibility and comprehension at the centre, which means it tends to treat people as uniform, fungible and interchangeable units in its plan.

"I don't think anybody in the environmental movement has managed to crack this yet. What we need to do is translate the aggregate changes in behaviour needs into individual behaviours."

An example of how the choice architecture of this could be approached would be to make a list of 10 big things that people can do, 10 medium sized things that people can do, and 10 small things that people can do. Everyone would be asked to pledge to do any three from each list for the next year. At the end of that year if they be offered the opportunity to change their mind and do something else, or build on their pledges.

"I'd make it manageable because what we are currently ... asking everybody to do everything all at once. And, like a deer blinded by the headlights, people respond to bad choice architecture by effectively doing nothing at all."

It was also argued that not everybody needs to change their transport behaviour.

"I would say if you are an elderly person and you live in the countryside and you have a petrol engine car which is quite old, and you use it very infrequently to go to the shops and about twice a year you embark on a long distance journey, I don't think that person is under any obligation to change their behaviour. They are already contributing through their transport, through their movement, very, very little to the problem."

It wouldn't make sense for a person like this to purchase an electric car, because of the resources consumed and the carbon emitted during the manufacture of that vehicle.

"What we need to do is translate the collective aggregate effects we want to see into individual behaviour which is context-sensitive and sensitive to what people are currently doing, and what they could easily be doing, versus things they find impossible to do.

"We are always looking at this problem at the aggregate and we assume that the individual behaviour is just the aggregate divided by 65 million. And that's a very, very crude, ergodic way of looking at the problem. In fact, there are a lot of people who can do a lot more. There are some people who don't need to do any more. And, depending on individual contexts and circumstances, what people can do will vary."

It was also suggested that public transport "tends to be a bit too utilitarian and too egalitarian". It fails to take account of the different priorities of the individuals who make up different sections of society.

For example, wealthy New Yorkers who would never think about travelling on a bus happily use a jitney (a luxury coach with two-plus-one seating and an on-board host), to get to Long Island. "I wonder if trams are a bit too socialist. The reason I said it is because you'll all hate it, but the rest of the economy works that way."

Another argued that "one-size-fits-all messaging is really difficult", citing the Scottish Government's target to reduce car kilometres by 20% by 2030 as an example. "We don't mean 20% for everyone ... We actually mean an awful lot more for some parts of the population and possibly nothing at all for other parts of the population. Or indeed allowing for some growth in mobility in some parts of the population."

Video-conferencing should be part of the plan

The rapid adoption of video conferencing and home working during the coronavirus pandemic was cited as an example that not all pro-environmental behaviour change needs to involve sacrifice.

“A huge amount of travel, particularly business travel, is effectively performative. You have to do it to show willing, to show commitment. In 2017, if I had a two-hour meeting with a client in Frankfurt, not to fly to Frankfurt for the day, even though it might have been preferable to both of us, would have seemed rude.

“One of the most important things we have done here is that we have created a world where performative travel, travel as a form of costly signalling, as proof of commitment, has been slightly reduced.”

Why wasn't Department for Transport encouraging video conferencing as an effective way of reducing the need for travel before the pandemic gave us all a crash-course in the technology?

What would the impact on travel have been if the Government had gone to Zoom and purchased nationwide membership for the United Kingdom? How would that have changed travel behaviour? How would that investment compare in value terms, and carbon terms, with spending on transport infrastructure?

However, another contributor suggested that the media might have leapt on the government if it had pursued such a policy, and the retail outlets that depend on hordes of office workers would have lobbied against it.

The car is not a 'bad' thing, and choice is not always available

One contributor said: “The really bad thing about the car is not the car itself, it's the fact that that once you own a car you become preternaturally reluctant to use any other form of transport. It's a behavioural problem it's not actually a problem with the device itself.

“It's the effect that owning a car has on your subsequent behaviour that needs to be addressed, not the fact that the car is evil in and of itself. A lot of economic activity could not actually take place on affordable land if people weren't able to drive there.”

Another argued that discussion about behaviour change too often centred on cars being 'good' or 'bad': “This polarisation is actually killing the debate.”

How do you encourage people to change their behaviour when they don't have other choices available to them?

One contributor argued: “We shouldn't place too much emphasis on choice. We need to acknowledge the transport mode the majority of time is not subject to a free, conscious, unfettered choice. And actually by putting too much emphasis on individuals making different choices, better choices, it can be counterproductive, it can be disempowering, it can suggest that we don't really get the practicalities of the everyday.”

Another said that public engagement research had found that the discourse around net zero puts a lot of emphasis on individuals, and this can be counter productive.

“Although in this conversation we have accepted that there are infrastructural limitations, I think there's still a tendency to talk about this as an issue of habit or an issue of behaviours.

“That filters down and you can quite easily see how that can filter into a sort of anti-net zero narrative. People are already trying to push that at the moment, unsuccessfully. You could see how the constant sense that people get that it is being placed on the individual could potentially backfire.”

Another pointed out that access to a car expands choice and it's difficult to pull back from that: “I think we do need to recognise why the car is so popular. [It's] because it gives people access to people and places, opportunities and choices, they wouldn't otherwise have.

“We become habituated to quite high levels of access and choice which will be quite hard to claw back from ... You can manage without a car in a city centre where the population density is high enough to justify a wide range of goods and services within a short distances, so you can walk or cycle or use public transport. But once you get out the under dense city centres into the suburbs beyond the car it seems to me will always remain attractive.”

Meanwhile, another contributor pointed out that leisure travel, which came back strongly as Covid restrictions were lifted, is often talked about as ‘discretionary’. However, it should be understood that leisure travel is incredibly important to people and includes a wide array of things, such as caring responsibilities as well as weddings and meeting friends.

“These are the things that actually people perhaps value in society and we have been calling it discretionary and maybe imagining that that's where the savings are going to come from.

“So I think we need to think about mode shift for these kinds of journeys. We've got to start being more targeted about how we are going to try and deliver this behaviour change.”

Trip generators should get involved

One contributor said: “I wonder whether you think there is an opportunity for those that generate travel ... to influence those choices by people.”

The Transport Decarbonisation Plan published by the Government in the summer of 2021 announced 'Commute Zero' - a package of measures designed to help businesses reduce emissions from their employees' travel. This might see employers encourage car sharing or install showers for cyclists.

Could this kind of initiative help nudge people in the direction of changing how they travel for particular journeys?

Herding and heuristics

The discussion included a contribution about different communications and advertising campaigns which could broadly be simplified into to ‘H’s – herding and heuristics.

Herding reassures those reached by the campaign with the message “don't worry everyone else is doing it”. For example, a campaign to combat HIV trumpeted how many people were getting HIV tests every year in London to get the message across that this behaviour was normal.

“Human beings do what other human beings do, and we kept coming back to convincing them that they were doing the same that everybody else is doing.”

A decade-long campaign for Quorn meanwhile focused on heuristics, ie. lazy, quick mental associations. The first was that vegetarianism meant that you would be low on energy, so long distance runner Mo Farah became the figurehead of the campaign to help dispel this myth.

"What we did is we went right after that heuristic, 'if I am veggie I will collapse with fatigue and hunger'. You had to go right at the problem."

The second heuristic was the idea that children would not eat Quorn, so the advertisements switched to having "bundles of kids eating either their faux chicken nuggets or the little cocktail sausage".

The most recent set of advertisements for Quorn went after the heuristic that you couldn't possibly build a decent body with a vegetarian diet. "We had a huge bodybuilder grunting away with giant weights."

Reflecting on experience with communications campaigns: "We nearly always listed out the heuristics. What are the lazy assumptions and habits and mental associations? ... We went after them. We really attacked them and called them out for what they were, because behind a lot of those lazy associations there's a degree of nonsense you can unpick. You can't work out if you don't eat meat is a nonsense."

Another contributor said: "I think we could have another workshop to identify these heuristics across the board."

Meanwhile, in terms of herding, people may be unaware how normal being car-free actually is. "If you simply to a lay person, 'did you know that a quarter of households live without a car?', people are flabbergasted."

Commenting on herding, another contributor pointed out that veganism has a high profile despite there being only 600,000 vegans in the UK. In contrast there are 31.3 million car-free people already in the UK (although that includes children and people may be unable to drive or afford a car). "There's a lot of people out there that we should be representing and we should be drumming up support for."

Examples of significant behaviour change

Covid lockdowns, the ban on smoking in public places, drink driving and same-sex marriage were all cited as examples of fundamental shifts in public behaviour.

The introduction of the congestion charge in central London in February 2003 was cited as a precedent for changing travel behaviour. It reduced traffic by 13 to 15% overnight, and was accompanied by a scaling up of bus service provision in the capital.

They all involved legislation in the first instance before attitudes changed – and it was suggested that the same approach may have to be taken to change transport behaviour.

"I am wondering if we can even get close to the carbon reduction targets without direct legislation to change attitudes in the first place."

This sentiment was echoed by another contributor: "I don't think that's a good thing to do but we are not going to achieve the targets without constraint and I struggle to see a better way of doing that than pricing, fundamentally. You price it and you price road travel. And you've finally got a cause now that the Treasury is losing £28bn a year currently [because the roll-out of electric vehicles is eroding fuel duty revenues]."

“Is there any example out there of massive behaviour change that hasn't revolved around constraint and getting people to not do things? I struggle to think of one.”

Another view was that we always approach discussions about behaviour change by saying how difficult it is.

“Actually it's really easy. We know exactly what to do to change behaviour. Behaviour change policy is regulation policy and pricing policy largely ... I know there is an oversimplification but essentially we know what to do, we just don't know how to get it done.”

Another contributor agreed that pricing was the key, arguing that comparisons with the smoking ban and other behavioural changes were limited.

“The system we are trying to move away from is infrastructure built around a particular energy environment, built around accessible, cheap fossil fuels for a long period of time. So I don't think ... behaviour change examples like smoking can really illuminate an awful lot.

“There was actually a good paper written looking at how long do energy transitions take. You are looking at centuries. If you want to do it quicker, moving to a different fuel you can get it to decades. But it's normally through some kind of energy price shock, normally an external thing.”

Despite the huge scale of meeting the Government's carbon reduction targets, talking about radical interventions like rationing, as happened during the Suez Crisis, risks provoking a backlash.

“It's no use just saying that because if a politician comes on stage and says ‘we have to be serious, this is what we doing’, you end up with the ‘gilets jaunes’. I agree ... that we need to be serious about these targets, but just saying we need to be serious about these targets over and over again isn't going to get you where we need to be.

“I think if you tell people ‘net zero is going to look like first lockdown did’ you are going to be further away from where you need to get to than where you started. This is not just a one-off blip like the Suez Crisis. It's something that is structurally about what our society is going to look like.”

What did the pandemic teach us?

The pandemic has seen a radical behaviour change in relation to transport. During lockdowns the number of trips plummeted as the population followed instructions to stay at home. And, as restrictions have eased, it's clear that many of them are continuing to spend more time at home and in their local neighbourhoods. The pandemic demonstrated that it's possible for many of us to work and shop at home.

Research into how Covid has changed travel behaviour found that the wealthiest and the most hyper-mobile are the ones that have been most able to reduce their commute and business travel. These are the journeys that were reified before and we had to plan our transport network to enable them. These are the high value trips in the economy, but they are also the most flexible. But the Government was accused of failing to capitalise on the opportunity provided by this.

“The absence of any great national policy response to jump on this and say ‘this is a key part of our travel reduction’ is deeply problematic.”

It's not just business and commuting that people did differently. People shopped less often, but they didn't buy less stuff. People were shopping far less often for things like food.

“There are things we can do without any great pain which are about organising differently.”

The increase in home working has resulted in more walking and a very small reduction in car ownership as people don't need so many vehicles, and could therefore be seen as a route to delivering a positive behaviour change.

“But where are the incentives? It's an absolutely awful set of incentives for home working other than the saving you make on the commute. And yet we still continue to have tax breaks on company car ownership and so on in ways that we don't provide for home working.”

The Government was also accused of failing to capitalise on the opportunity that Covid provided to promote active travel.

“We haven't been able to tool-up very quickly to take advantage of the massive increase in cycling, and I think a lot of that was down to the massive reduction in traffic levels that was there at the time. But we haven't been able to provide vast amounts of cycle lanes. We don't have the engineering capacity. We don't have a consultative capacity to deliver that rapidly. We've got to keep going but it will take a decade or so.”

Leadership is lacking

Contributors argued that the Government was guilty of sending mixed messages to the public. On the one hand it wants to encourage greater use of active travel and public transport, but on the other it doesn't want to do anything that could be perceived as anti-car. For example, the Chancellor responded to rising fuel prices by cutting fuel duty by 5% in the Spring Statement while New Zealand decided to make public transport cheaper for its citizens. “It tells you everything about what the signals are from government.”

Promoting public transport

It was argued that if we are going to get people to go car-free then we need legislation to deliver a radical reorganisation of public transport.

“We need an integrated system like they enjoy in Switzerland, where all transport operators co-operate to give an integrated, comprehensive system which is the realistic alternative to the car.”

“In Britain, outside London ... public transport is fragmented, largely because of bus deregulation, and that fragmentation we must get rid of and that requires legislation.”

Another contributor pointed out that the Swiss have the highest per capita carbon emissions in Europe, including from transport. And so do the Dutch, despite their comprehensive and integrated public transport system.

The reason is that “they do everything more”. They may cycle and use public transport, but they also own large cars and they drive them long distances.

“We can provide people with lots and lots of choice for their local journeys, which these countries do, but it is the longest distance journeys and it is the cumulative journeys by the wealthier of the population in any country that we really are talking about to address the challenge that net zero provides to us.”

Another contributor argued that buses are the only mode of transport that can be scaled up quickly enough to make a difference to carbon reduction by 2030, but the regulatory structure is not the thing that is holding this back.

“It isn't about changing ownership it's about getting a great deal more money spent on it. The bus industry can respond in the timescale but it requires an enormous increase in the amount of money being spent on it. Changing ownership of the companies may or may not help but it isn't the basic problem. The basic problem is lack of resource going into buses.

Another responded: “It needs that massive investment, but we can't just invest in the alternatives. We have to at the same time as providing those alternatives take more space and so on away from the car.

“That's the other example of Switzerland and the Netherlands. They've done great things to provide alternatives but they've done nothing actually to restrict the car or increase the cost of motoring at the same time.”

One contributor asked whether the Government could support one or two demonstration areas where the bus offer could be dramatically improved to provide a viable alternative to cars. “What sort of networks could be put on at short notice to actually show that there are cheaper ways of getting around as part of a transition to not relying so much on cars?”

Another pointed out that some places, like Luxembourg, have made public transport free in order to incentivise behaviour change.

But another contributor countered: “I am certainly not in favour of that. It requires too much public money and will damage capital investment. What we do desperately need in this country outside London is much better public transport and fares systems, which are much, much simpler, controlled by regional authorities, and much cheaper than what we are paying outside London.”

Forums for discussing behaviour change

Climate assemblies, citizens assemblies and juries have been formed to debate issues of concern. They are meant to be representative of the broader public, and provide people with a chance to learn about an issue and form opinions, culminating in some kind of formal output.

Climate Assembly UK brought together over 100 people from all walks of life and of all shades of opinion to discuss how the UK should meet its 2050 net zero target. Meanwhile, many local authorities have run them alongside their local climate emergency declarations.

Experience has shown that while most people would like less traffic and air pollution in their neighbourhoods, they're quite hesitant about giving up cars - and they are quite hesitant about telling people they should give up cars. They tend to instead favour things that make the alternatives more feasible.

Importantly these forums can provide politicians with a mandate for action. It gives them a reassuring barometer of public opinion that goes beyond those who make the most noise. A citizens jury in Kendal, for example, supported the introduction of a 20mph limit in the town. The town council doesn't have the powers to implement this, but it has given councillors a mandate to take to the county council and there are now signs that it will happen.

“Providing that mandate is one of the ways they can help politicians make some of these difficult decisions that might go against the grain.”

At the same time it offers a mandate to individual members of the public, “a people like me effect”.

“If people can see that there has been this level of consultation, people have been listened to and brought into the decision-making, they are more likely to reassess their own views or go along with the findings.”

The Citizens Assembly in Ireland on abortion was cited as an example of this. Research shows that people did shift their views as a result of following the process externally and abortion was legalised in the referendum that followed.

In some cases it might be appropriate for these forums to continue to come together and follow through the various stages of a policy process. In Copeland, for example, a Citizen’s Panel was formed to discuss the controversial issue of a new coal mine. They are now looking at setting up some sort of standing citizens panel to oversee the work of the council and provide local scrutiny.

ENDS

Roundtable Discussion Series Attendees

Professor Jillian Dr Jacob	Anable Ainscough	Institute of Transport Studies Senior Researcher, Environmental Governance and Ecological Economics, Lancaster University
Cllr Don	Alexander	Cabinet Member for Transport, Bristol City Council
Dr Iraklis	Argyriou	Research Fellow in Sociotechnical Transitions of Bus Transportation, Queen's University Belfast
Dawn Silviya	Badminton-Capps Barrett CBE	Director for England, Bus Users UK Head of Policy, Research and Projects, Campaign for Better Transport
Lynn	Basford	Founder, BasfordPowers (and lead author of recent planning guidance)
Helena Kris	Bennett Beuret	Senior Policy Adviser, Green Alliance Commissioner, Independent Transport Commission
Steven Richard Xavier	Bishop Bradley Brice	Director, Sustainable Transport, Steer Head of Strategy, Midlands Connect Chief Executive, Sustrans
Christina Paul Cllr Peter	Calderato Campion Carlill	Director of Transport Strategy & Policy, TfL CEO of TRL Lead Member for Active Travel & Sustainable Transport, Leeds City Council
Hilary James Heather	Chipping Coates Cowan	Chief Executive, South East Midlands LEP Chair, CLT Roads and Traffic Policy Group Climate Change and Just Transition, Transport Scotland
Stephen	Cragg	Head of Appraisal and Model Development, Transport Scotland
Matt Leon	Croucher Daniels	Economics Manager, SMMT Transport Planning Expert & Chair, Highways Sector Council
Gavin Richard Pete	Devine Dilks Dyson	Founder and Director, Park Street Partners CEO, CoMoUK Principal Behavioural Scientist, Department for Transport
Andy Alison Edward	Eastlake Edwards Forrester	Chief Executive, Zemo Partnership Head of Policy, CPT Principal Transport and Infrastructure Future Mobility, Mott Macdonald
Mark Roberta	Frost Fusco	Chair, Transport Planning Society Interim Director of Policy and Communications, Living Streets
Roger Justin	Geffen Gibbons	Campaign and Policy Director, Cycling UK Partner, Work Research

Professor Stephen James	Glaister	Emeritus Professor of Transport and Infrastructure, Imperial College London
	Golding-Graham	Decarbonisation Manager, England's Economic Heartland
Steve	Gooding	Director, RAC Foundation
Professor Phil	Goodwin	Senior Fellow, Foundation for Integrated Transport
Claire	Haigh	CEO, Greener Transport Solutions
Derek	Halden	Director, DHC Loop Connections
Victoria	Hills	Chief Executive, Royal Town Planning Institute
Paul	Hirst	Head of the Transport Sector Group, Addleshaw Goddard
Professor Peter	Jones	Professor of Transport and Sustainable Development, UCL
Stephen	Joseph	Trustee, Foundation for Integrated Transport
Martina	Juvara	Director, Urban Silence
Andrea	Lee	Campaigns and Policy Manager, Client Earth
Edward	Leigh	Senior Transport Officer, North Herts Council
Cllr Clyde	Loakes	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment, Waltham Forest Council
Brian	Love	Director, Connected Places
Professor Glenn	Lyons	Mott Macdonald Professor of Future Mobility, University of the West of England
Professor Greg	Marsden	Professor of Transport Governance, Institute for Transport Studies, University of Leeds
Rose	McArthur	Director, Transport & Highways, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Phil	McCluskey	Head of Sustainable Transport Demand, Climate Change Unit, Transport Scotland
Professor David	Metz	Honorary Professor, Centre for Transport Studies, UCL
Dave	Milner	Deputy Director, Create Streets
Keith	Mitchell	Director, Transport and Place, Stantec
Jonathan	Morley	CEO, Trueform
Leo	Murray	Director of Innovation, Possible
Flora	Ogilvie	Consultant in Public Health, Transport Climate Change Policy, Behaviour Change and Impacts, Transport Scotland
Lauren	Pamma	Programme Director, Green Finance Institute
Kamal	Panchal	Senior Advisor, Local Government Association
Rosie	Pearson	Corporate Director, Local Partnerships
Graham	Pendlebury	Former Director, Local Transport, Department for Transport

Professor Laurie Alex	Pickup Reid	International Director Vectos Business Development Manager, Zero Emission Mobility, ETP, University of Aberdeen
Nick Bridget	Richardson Rosewell	Technical Principle, Mott MacDonald Commissioner, National Infrastructure Commission
Anna	Rothnie	Principal Transport Planner, Mott MacDonald
Philip Dr Roger Dr Ashok Cllr Bridget	Sellwood CBE Sexton Sinha Smith	Chair, Zemo Partnership Transport Analyst Chief Executive, London Cycling Campaign Leader, South Cambridgeshire District Council
Rory Chris Jason Jools David Ian Janna	Sutherland Todd Torrance Townsend Tucker Wainright Walker	Vice Chairman, Ogilvy & Mather Founder & Director, Transport Action Network Assistant CEO, UK100 Chief Executive, Community Rail Network Chair, FSB Transport Policy Unit Director, Future City Logistics Head of Service for Highways Commissioning, Leicestershire County Council
David Molly	Walmsley Walton	Transport Analyst Energy and Transport Manager, We Mean Business
Julian Patrick	Ware Warner	Head of Corporate Finance, TfL Lead Officer Bus Decarbonisation, Liverpool City Region CA
Professor Peter Professor John	White Whitelegg	Emeritus Professor, University of Westminster Senior Fellow, Foundation for Integrated Transport
Professor Tom Ian	Worsley Wright	Visiting Fellow, University of Leeds Head of Innovation and Partnerships, Transport Focus