

Debate on transport for towns

House of Commons
19 February 2019



KEY MESSAGES

- The Government has made the future of transport and mobility a ‘grand challenge’ in its Industrial Strategy. Councils have an important role to play in this, as they can promote new transport technologies and enhance transport connectivity in our towns.
- Councils strongly support active means of travel in our towns and cities. It is a key way of tackling many transport and health public policy problems. Increasing the use of active travel will improve congestion, air quality and obesity rates, which in turn have substantial societal benefits.
- Bus usage is declining across the country. The reduction in the levels of subsidy from central government to councils has exacerbated this decline. Our latest analysis shows that nearly half of all bus routes are under threat due to the underfunding of concessionary fares by over £650 million.ⁱ
- There is currently a £9.3 billion roads repair backlog, meaning Government investment in local roads maintenance is critical.ⁱⁱ We were pleased to see £420 million announced in the Budget for council road maintenance in 2018/19.ⁱⁱⁱ However, councils are still fixing a pothole every 21 seconds on average.
- Local authorities are determined to improve air quality in their areas, including through the promotion of cleaner forms of transport. However, a lack of long-term government funding is a clear barrier to significant measures to tackle air pollution.
- Many councils are embracing autonomous, connected, electrified and shared transport options in their areas. There are many good examples of where the work councils are doing to improve and modernise their transport networks across the country.^{iv}

Briefing

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FURTHER INFORMATION

Active travel

Councils support active travel, and the positive impacts it can have on health and wellbeing, as well as local economies. In recent years councils have been effective at identifying the means to get more people walking and cycling.

The Government's overall support for active travel is welcome and has seen some results over the past couple of decades. The most powerful way the Government could improve local active travel infrastructure is to allow councils to get on with delivering it. Too often funding is provided in the form of short-term capital grants linked to bidding processes with strict criteria. This stop-start funding, developed for specific policy interventions, does not allow councils to develop long-term sustained plans.

The investment we have seen over the last twenty years has given us a good idea of what works and in which context it works. We now need to allow councils the long-term funding certainty to implement locally tailored solutions and sustain them. In addition, all elements of government policy should support the ambition of getting more travel by active means. This means that there must be closer coordination between separate departmental policies which impact local health and wellbeing, and the funding targeted at councils to facilitate active travel.

We recently surveyed our members on the drivers for their investment in sustainable transport. We found that the main barriers to councils doing more to invest in sustainable travel were:

- lack of revenue funding (33 out of 38 for cycling/walking and 31 out of 38 for public transport);
- uncertainty over continued levels of funding (28 out of 38 for cycling/walking and 30 out of 38 for public transport); and
- a lack of capital funding (26 out of 38 for cycling/walking and 26 out of 38 for public transport).

Bus travel

Bus travel is the only major mode of transport without its own specific strategy. If the Government is going to reverse the decline of the bus industry it must take decisive action to reform bus subsidies and extend its current pilot schemes.

Bus journeys accounted for 70 per cent of journeys using public transport in non-metropolitan areas last year. It is the most common form of public travel outside of major cities and plays a major role in ensuring residents in otherwise isolated communities have access to jobs and services. However, a lack of funding has meant councils have been forced to reduce subsidies to local routes. This has contributed to a six per cent decrease in bus use over the last ten years.

The Industrial Strategy lacks a vision of the bus as part of a connected and autonomous transport future. New technology such as Mobility as a Service offers an important opportunity for increasing the amount of information consumers have about bus options. However, there is a risk that the adoption of technology will exacerbate existing divides in provision. In areas with advanced bus networks

there will be a greater roll out of technology, whereas areas that currently suffer from a lack of connectivity could be the last to benefit.

The National Concessionary Travel Scheme is a statutory duty administered by councils, which provides free off-peak bus travel for older and disabled people. Funding for the scheme has been gradually reduced over a number of years, and has grown to an estimated £652 million. A failure to address this widening gap in the Spending Review could lead to vulnerable residents being left isolated and unsupported.^v

Councils are increasingly having to fill the gap between the cost of the concessionary fares scheme, and central government funding provided. To try and do this, councils have been forced to reduce spending on discretionary concessionary fares across England, from £115 million in 2014/15 to £85 million in 2017/18 – a fall of 26 per cent. This means less money being spent on providing supported rural bus services, discretionary subsidised bus services, such as free peak time, post-16 school transport, or assistance for young person's travel. Nearly half of all bus routes in England currently receive partial or complete subsidies from councils and are under threat.

Roads investment

Councils spend substantially more on local roads than what they receive from central government. However, that spending is reducing and local authorities are becoming more reliant on Government support. Whilst councils will always seek to improve local roads maintenance, they are having to do so against significant overall funding pressures. Recent LGA analysis estimates councils in England face a funding gap of £8 billion by 2025.

There is currently a £9.3 billion roads repair backlog, meaning Government investment in local roads maintenance is critical. Councils are fixing a pothole every 21 seconds, which is dangerous for local road users. We were pleased to see the Government announce £420 million to be provided in the Budget for local authorities in 2018/19. This money will be used to tackle potholes, repair damaged roads, and invest in keeping bridges open and safe.

The additional funding for some of our cities will help to modernise local transport in those areas. However, it is vitally important that councils have long-term certainty over funding from central government. This view has been endorsed by the National Infrastructure Assessment, which states that 'local leaders have to bid to many different government competitions, which provide an unpredictable and short term funding stream and place a significant strain on the limited revenue funding available for transport planning.'^{vi}

We look forward to working with the Government to ensure the forthcoming Spending Review delivers future-proof funding for the vital maintenance of local roads and investment in local transport infrastructure.

Air quality

Local authorities are determined to do more in planning for new places in ways that improve air quality and promote more sustainable forms of travel but a lack of long-term funding is a clear barrier to such investment. It is vital the Government seeks to address this in the forthcoming Spending Review.

We would welcome consistent national public health messaging about the dangers of air pollution to road users and what practical steps people can take to

improve it. Whilst there is a growing awareness of the damage poor air quality can cause there are not widespread simple to understand messages about the positive steps people can take. A national campaign creating better understanding would dovetail with local council messages on days with high pollution.

The Government recently announced £6 million in funding for 17 UK councils to provide charging points for ultra-low emission taxis. This is good news to help councils continue to improve air quality for their communities and reduce air pollution which is a major public health concern. Councils have already introduced several measures to tackle air pollution, such as encouraging the use of electric vehicles with recharging points, promoting cycling, investing in cleaner buses, and pioneering the concept of low-emission zones.^{vii}

Easing congestion through better enforcement would help to reduce air pollution from vehicles in many local areas. We would like Part 6 of the six of the Traffic Management Act 2004 to be implemented as soon as possible. This would help councils to keep traffic flowing by enabling them to enforce moving traffic offences through Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs). Currently these powers still rest with the police for all of England outside London.

The Workplace Parking Levy

The Workplace Parking Levy (WPL), which was introduced in the Transport Act 2000, allows councils to help tackle congestion in towns and cities through a charge on businesses for every employee who parks in the area. We supported the WPL, and generally welcome additional powers that give councils the tools to manage congestion.

To date, only Nottingham City Council has introduced the WPL. We have actively promoted the positive experiences that Nottingham City Council have had with the WPL, and provided the scheme with a platform in our publications and at our national events. Over recent years this brought about renewed interest in the WPL, such as within the Greater Cambridge Partnership.

Despite some success, councils have to take many factors into consideration when deciding whether to adopt a WPL scheme. Such factors include the likely impact on businesses and residents. A significant amount of time, money and officer capacity is therefore needed in making a business case. Councils estimate that introducing a WPL scheme could take between 3 to 5 years.

Tomorrow's transport technology: local case studies

To find out about what councils are doing to embrace new technologies and provide cleaner, more efficient transport, please read our latest report: [Clean, Connected and in Control](#). This publication includes the following case studies:

- *Swindon Borough Council: EV charging and solar carports – Public Power Solutions Ltd*
- *Transport for the West Midlands: Mobility as a service (MaaS)*
- *Bristol City Council: Tantalum Big Data*
- *Milton Keynes: Automated vehicle testing*

ⁱ <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/nearly-half-all-bus-routes-risk-funding-gap-free-bus-pass-reaches-ps650-million>

ⁱⁱ APSE, Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) survey 2018, April 2018

(<http://apse.org.uk/apse/index.cfm/members-area/briefings/2018/18-16-alarm-survey-2018-and-5-year-comparison-of-survey-results/>)

ⁱⁱⁱ HM Treasury, Budget 2018, October 2018

(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/752202/Budget_2018_red_web.pdf)

^{iv} [https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/WEB%205.30 - Clean connected and in-control 04-1.pdf](https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/WEB%205.30%20-%20Clean%20connected%20and%20in-control%2004-1.pdf)

^v <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/nearly-half-all-bus-routes-risk-funding-gap-free-bus-pass-reaches-ps650-million>

^{vi} <https://www.nic.org.uk/publications/national-infrastructure-assessment-2018/>

^{vii} <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/lga-responds-government-funding-green-taxi-charging-points>