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Decarbonising Transport - A Better, Greener Britain: One Year On

Transport Planning Society response

About the Transport Planning Society

The Transport Planning Society (TPS) is the only professional body focusing entirely on transport planning in the UK. The aim of the Society is to raise the profile of transport planning and chart a course for the profession.

Introduction

The Transport Planning Society (TPS) commends the government for publishing its 'One Year On' report on its Transport Decarbonisation Plan, 'Decarbonising Transport - A Better, Greener Britain' (henceforth, TDP). The TPS has produced this response, bringing together expertise from board members and the wider TPS membership.

We have presented our response in sections we think are most important in relation to decarbonising transport and the TDP update. We then address specific sections of the TDP update where we have comments to make. We have also included analysis from our membership survey, demonstrating importance of decarbonisation to our members.

Our response to the original TDP can be found on our website.

We have also recently published an initial response to the government's recent 'Growth Plan 2022'. We raise this here because the accelerated plans for road building set out in the Growth Plan do not necessarily support the aspirations of growth (see response for full details) and are completely at odds with the aspiration to decarbonise the transport network. They will undermine the TDP and all efforts to mitigate climate change.

We welcome the fact that the government remains committed to the decarbonisation agenda and that, as detailed in the update, progress has been made at least in the area of technology and the switch to electric vehicles. Yet while there has been technological progress, there is still a very long way to go and the one-year on update reports little real progress on many of the most crucial issues:

- Planning and transport integration
- Behaviour change
- Changes to funding
- Emissions accounting
- Adaptation

- Building professional capacity

Technological measures such as a transfer to different fuels and electrification are all important, but on their own they will not achieve the scale, speed or nature of change required. Technology needs to be part of a wider strategy as set out in the initial TDP. The government's update unfortunately focuses on progress on the technology side of the strategy. It is essential that spatial and behavioural factors are progressed so that society as a whole embraces the actions that must be taken.

Speed and building resilience are also of the absolute essence – even in the recent months of 2022 we have seen dramatic and largely unpredictable changes in the national and global climate situation, with extreme heatwaves in the UK and severe flooding in Pakistan to name just a couple of examples. Taking the progress set out in the TDP update and the evidence for the intensification of climate change impacts, we are not reassured that the government is doing sufficiently to facilitate a fast enough transition.

This response sets out the TPS's views on areas where the government's strategy and action needs to be strengthened to enable and deliver the rapid changes we need to see to minimise the impacts of climate change.

TPS membership survey answers on policy topics

We will begin by looking at the views of our membership. The TPS surveyed its members this year asking several policy-focused questions. Climate change and decarbonising transport are important to respondents.

When asked:

- How they thought the government and industry was doing on decarbonisation, only 46% rated it well or very well. It is important for the government that professionals have confidence in what it's doing and feel that their own efforts to address climate change are supported by the national context.
- On the greatest threats (multiple could be selected) to the transport network, 62% ticked 'Climate change and adverse weather' - the most votes of any option. See our section in this response on the importance of adaptability and resilience, 'Adaptation should be more recognised in decarbonisation efforts'.
- When selecting their top five transport policy drivers, 'Decarbonising the transport sector' was decisively the top answer with 72% of respondents selecting it.
    - The next four most popular answers were: 2. Using spatial planning policy to reduce the need to travel, 3. ensuring the transport network contributes to healthier lifestyles, 4. improving bus and rail journey time reliability, and 5. optimising the use of the existing transport system. All of these align with decarbonising transport and progress in these areas should feature in the government's next update report.
- 'At national level: Assuming transport will have to generate new income streams, and setting aside legal and administrative issues, which of the following do you think should be prioritised in the next five years?'. The top 3 responses were (in order):
    - Introduce national road user pricing for all vehicles
    - Increase the scope and raise the level of tax on aviation
    - Introduce a national parking space levy.

  These responses show the desire for income generation to dovetail with deterring the most polluting forms of transport, which would make the system more equitable. Cars are hungry

resource consumers, not only in fuel but also for road space and for parking whether on highway or in public and private car parks, whilst aviation is of course a huge carbon producer.

These responses show how important transport decarbonisation is to our members – transport planning professionals - as well as illustrating specific measures and policies that they support to achieve that. We invite the government to engage with us and our members to work together to achieve the TDP's goals.

Key issues for the TPS

Decarbonising transport through places: A place-based approach to decarbonising transport must be central

The effective integration of spatial and transport planning is fundamental to the swift and equitable decarbonisation of transport and must be given more resourcing and focus than the update suggests. The proposed review of the National Planning Policy Framework provides a unique opportunity to address this, and we hope the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) uses it effectively.

Communities and businesses generate demand for transport, the response of the providers of transport infrastructure and services determine in part the competitiveness and sustainability of those communities, as well as how low-carbon and active they are. The interaction between spatial and transport planning can create virtuous development in which transport shapes and further improves the economic and social success of those communities. It is important that transport and spatial planning provide low and zero carbon options that are the most attractive and easy options, and we would like to see this recognised and delivered in future updates.

Local transport plans

The Local Transport Plans (LTPs) guidance is being prepared to ensure a coherent transport framework. LTPs will be a vital tool to realise the government's decarbonisation plans, as well as other place making and health objectives. To achieve this, the government should ensure the LTP guidance facilitates, if not requires, clear current and future networks for walking, cycling and public transport, that can then be linked to development locations both current and proposed for the future.

The government should also consider integrating the proposed local authority electric vehicle charging infrastructure strategy into the LTPs. Additionally, a parking strategy is a critical part of the LTP for every local authority to decarbonise. Finally, the opportunity should also be taken to formally link the LTP to the Local Plan. We hope these suggestions can be incorporated in the forthcoming guidance on LTPs.

Public transport and place

Places need transport and transport frequently shapes places. Liveable places with good local access to facilities and services and a healthy environment require a reduction in car use and increased use of active travel and shared transport modes.

However, public transport is in crisis, financially and in respect of declining confidence of the users. Customers must feel confident that services adequate for their needs will continue to be available and that public transport is safe in relation to COVID-19, as well as declining user volumes. As a result, we are seeing the network decline in some places, rather than growing, which is what is needed to achieve net-zero.

A concerted effort from central government, local government and public and shared transport providers will be required for public transport networks to grow in size and patronage. User confidence in public transport must be rebuilt, and the appetite for other shared mobility solutions including car-sharing, car clubs and Demand Responsive Transport needs to be fostered.

With good planning involving all relevant stakeholders, a virtuous cycle could be created. Greater use of buses and active travel will reduce car ownership and use, which will allow the land allocated for parking to be released and places improved. Recent analysis has estimated that on average private cars spend 96% of their time not being used. This is not only economically inefficient, but also wasteful of land used for car parking in commercial or industrial areas, whether privately or publicly owned, and of kerb-space where priority should be for servicing and maintenance vehicles wherever feasible.

The design, availability and accessibility of the whole transport network should be an integral part of the planning and design of places from the beginning, influencing the choices people make and the way they live.

Behaviour change

Behaviour change is recognised in the TDP update as part of the walking and cycling programme going forward but it needs to have a much wider role across the whole transport agenda. The need for delivering decarbonisation of transport is not wholly understood by many people. Changing attitudes leading to actual behaviour change will be critical.

Some of this can occur through effective integrated spatial and transport planning that properly engages the community. In this country, there are few exemplars and without positive examples, decision-makers are reluctant to take what they believe is a risk while the public is sceptical. Carrying out a pilot approach working closely with a community as to how to change attitudes and behaviours would be a strong way to deliver decarbonisation through places. It could also demonstrate the benefits of spatial and transport planning-based behaviour change interventions. Pilots could also incorporate an element of working with the local people to produce their own decarbonisation strategy. Working hand in glove with the local community improves both understanding and the drive to action changes. Such a project may be even more informative if carried out in both a unitary authority and a two-tier authority separately, to explore the different needs of each and to test which approaches work best in the different governance contexts.

The TPS was involved in an excellent, informative project with the Royal College of Art; Our Future Towns, which sought to test this type of approach and we advise the government to review and consider this further. These pilots on supporting community behaviour change could be part of the next phase linked to the Local Authority Decarbonisation Toolkit Revisions. The absence of mention of progress on these toolkit revisions with DLUHC, as proposed in the original strategy, does lead us to assume there has been little, which is disappointing.

The government should explore establishing an equivalent body to Active Travel England (ATE) to push this wider behaviour change programme.

Changes to transport funding are necessary

While we welcome the update's mention of new funding for various schemes, it feels depressingly insufficient given policies that essentially subsidise polluting modes of transport, chiefly through the continued existence of the fuel duty freeze and aviation sector subsidies (sources 1, 2 & 3). A wealth of funding could be unlocked for active travel and other decarbonisation schemes through changing these policies that undermine the entire TDP.

We would like to see changes to funding in TDP updates, giving truly additional and substantial funding and subsidy to active and sustainable transport across the UK and removing it from polluting modes such as Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) vehicles and airplanes.

It is pertinent to return to the TPS' members survey question that asked, 'assuming transport will have to generate new income streams, and setting aside legal and administrative issues, which of the following do you think should be prioritised in the next five years?', and to which the top 3 responses were (in order): introduce national road user pricing for all vehicles, increase the scope and raise the level of tax on aviation, introduce a national parking space levy. Again, these responses show that, among professionals, there is a desire to change the sources of income from transport to target the most polluting and harmful modes and redress the inequity in current subsidy and financial penalisation structures.

Transport for London (TfL) funding

It is also frustrating that the aforementioned subsidies for road and aviation exist alongside a funding crisis for TfL. Of course, we absolutely want high-quality transport to be funded across the whole country, yet it is a shame that TfL, as a beacon of good practice, has seen its funding so drastically cut that it has thrown the future of many active and sustainable transport schemes and business-as-usual into uncertainty.

Although the government and TfL have now reached a funding agreement, the regional transport body will still likely see an increase in fares and service cuts, potentially creating a vicious circle of decline. In addition, the lack of funding will likely cause delays in the delivery of decarbonisation schemes that, due to the scale of London's transport network, could have a big impact on the UK's decarbonisation.

The transport authority had been delivering an efficient and effective service until the loss of revenue grant from central government following several years of budget restraints, severely impacting its operations. TfL earns a far higher proportion (over 70%) of its revenue from fares than any other world leading transport authority (where the range is 20% to 50% with a median of around a third). TfL had developed into an efficiently run organisation. During the pandemic it merited sufficient funding from the government to tide it over the financial difficulties of substantial loss of fares revenue whilst managing a transition to a sustainable funding model.

It is short-sighted of the government not to maintain sufficient funding to allow TfL to properly and strategically adapt its services to the evolving levels of post-pandemic demand. Doing this and encouraging TfL to maintain the exemplary service planning methods it has built up, would allow it to respond to the dual climate and cost-of-living crises, rather than letting services deteriorate and enter a spiral of decline.

Adaptation should be more recognised in decarbonisation efforts

As we have seen this year with the severe heatwaves in the UK and extreme weather around the globe, the impacts of climate change are being felt ever more strongly, and worse and sooner than previously predicted. Government needs to take adaptation, resilience and scenario planning seriously – adaptation in terms of the impacts of climate change on our ability to deliver decarbonised transport *and* the resiliency of our decarbonised transport network. The National Adaptation Plan (NAP) is briefly mentioned in the TDP, but adaptation is not mentioned at all in the update.

While we recognise decarbonisation is different from adaptation, the two are strongly linked. For example, all the new infrastructure being built in efforts to decarbonise should be resilient to the worst predicted impacts of climate change that will occur during their lifespan - we are going to experience worsening weather effects regardless of how successful the UK's transport decarbonisation efforts are because efforts to reach net-zero by 2050 are to keep global warming within 2°C, which is still an increase in temperature compared to now. It would be welcome for the

update to include acknowledgement and reassurance that the work to advance decarbonisation will itself be resilient and long-lasting. As it is, the NAP seems somewhat out of sight, out of mind.

Emissions accounting needs to be improved

While it is of course positive to see, as the update notes, that transport sector emissions have dropped, this doesn't mean they decreased across the board. Some preliminary research found that, despite the change in travel habits during the pandemic leading to a decrease in emissions, it has been accompanied by a larger increase in residential energy consumption as many worked from home. It is important that the TDP facilitates genuine emissions decreases across the board while continuing to move people around alongside ensuring the shift to increased telecommunications is also low carbon, by not being siloed from the buildings sector.

The TDP sets out many excellent programmes, projects and innovations that will all contribute towards reducing carbon emissions. However, we do not know if the sum total of these schemes will bring us to net-zero because there is little information about the predicted carbon savings of each in the TDP, nor the savings realised thus far in the update. The update contains only one mention of saved tonnes of CO2 (presumably annual) resulting from an Arup / Liftshare scheme in Solihull.

We recognise that forecasting and measuring transport emissions, especially related to active travel, are incredibly complex and hard to do, and in many cases, estimates will be the best we can achieve. However, the TDP updates should be doing more to demonstrate actual tonnes of CO2(e) savings, while strengthening the forecasting of TDP schemes' CO2 impact, in order to identify what else is needed to truly get us to net-zero by 2050, if not sooner.

Professional capacity must be built and maintained

The government must ensure that the training and education pipeline of planning and transport professionals is sufficient so there will be future capacity to deliver net-zero carbon. Without skilled people in the profession, we cannot expect to deliver good quality transport schemes that will achieve net-zero carbon and other co-benefits.

The TPS has provided comprehensive discussion and recommendations about this topic in its response to the DfT's Labour market and skills consultation. We would like to see this mentioned in future updates.

TDP update section 1: Decarbonising all forms of transport

Overarching comments

A broader definition and discussion of active travel

Buses and trains facilitate active travel for passengers. Almost every single bus or train journey involves at least one walk trip. We would like to see this recognised in TDP updates. Together, public transport, cycling and walking should be recognised as a broader category of active travel that might be termed "healthier journeys", or "sustainable and healthy travel".

The majority of active travel trips, including bus/coach trips, necessarily make use of the highway network. Infrastructure provision (including cycle and bus lanes), maintenance and roadspace allocation therefore have significant impacts on quality and rate of adoption of all of these modes. Even if a road project is primarily aimed at improving conditions for cars, there are supporting measures that can be taken to improve the viability of public transport and active modes. These considerations should apply to the program of accelerated road schemes in The Growth Plan 2022 if they go ahead.

Pricing public transport

There are examples of public transport support schemes that are successful and transferrable, such as Vienna's long running model, which includes a one euro per day travel card (as an annual pass available to residents). Austria also launched a similar flat-rate public transport fares scheme for the whole country in 2021.

The UK government should explore financial assistance to public transport passengers and providers in the UK. This will initially support citizens through the cost-of-living crisis, and in the long-term will encourage mode shift, reduce carbon emissions and increase passenger revenues to achieve financial sustainability. As we can see from the Austrian example, strategic design and delivery of such schemes is vital to their success.

Walking and cycling

We are pleased to see that Active Travel England (ATE) has been launched and already begun work announcing funding for schemes across England. We look forward to hearing about more progress as the new body becomes fully established and finds its feet.

Buses, coaches and other shared transport modes

Coaches that are on scheduled services provide an inter-urban network that is more affordable for people with low household incomes but also reaches the parts that railways currently do not reach and probably never will in the less populated parts of the UK. As such, as well as being important for travel equity, they are another key part of decarbonising transport through providing a lower carbon alternative to individual car or air travel; and that can itself be further decarbonised (i.e. through electrification). We welcome the government new call for evidence to better understand how to decarbonise coaches and minibuses and would like to see more news about developments in this space, including support for this mode in future updates.

We welcome the update that the government will be offering funding to boost sales of plug-in wheelchair accessible vehicles. We would like to see more updates on low-carbon shared transport modes, which contribute massively to providing publicly available mobility and access for disabled people who are unable to use mainstream buses and trains. Shared transport includes various forms of Demand Responsive Transport ranging from charitable community transport groups to prospectively commercial services using advanced digital technology.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are many positive updates we are pleased to see in the One Year on Report. However, we feel it shows that, so far, the most substantive progress is being made in the realm of technology, which is important, but is only one piece of a comprehensive puzzle.

This puzzle must have behaviour change woven throughout it and utilise the relationship between spatial and transport planning as a core, foundational approach in healthy, equitable decarbonisation, more so than the TDP update suggests is happening. This approach should be underpinned by greater understanding of current emissions and of the forecast carbon impact of projects, which is currently lacking in the TDP, as is the sufficient incorporation of adaptation, which must be recognised now.

Yet, all of the efforts of the TDP are undermined as long as financial subsidies and levies continue to favour the most polluting modes of private cars and planes while public transport faces various fare and funding challenges that threaten its ability to play the role it must in decarbonising transport. This situation must change if the UK is to meet its net-zero targets, both in terms of cutting the emissions of those most polluting modes and in securing funding to deliver the massive changes needed in promoting and using healthy and sustainable modes.

Lead author: Rose Yorke Barber. Key contributors: Lynda Addison, John Carr, Tom van Vuren, Alex Bennet. The Transport Planning Society (TPS) is the professional association for Transport Planners in the UK and Republic of Ireland. We represent 1,600 individual members and 38 businesses in the profession.