

Call for Evidence: Public Transport in Towns and Cities – ADEPT Response

March 2022

Introduction

The House of Lords Built Environment Committee has launched an inquiry into public transport in towns and cities in England. The inquiry will assess public transport travel trends in towns and cities, as the ways in which people choose to travel for work, school and leisure have changed over recent years, driven by trends including digitalisation. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought further dramatic changes in travel patterns, with more people working flexibly, although it is not clear how enduring these changes will be.

The Committee seeks evidence in response to the following questions. It is not necessary to answer all the questions.

1. What are the current and anticipated levels of public transport demand and capacity in towns and cities in England? What influences public transport travel patterns? How does the choice of public transport vary across different demographic groups?
2. How might public transport travel patterns shift in the next 10 years? What impact could digitalisation and the COVID-19 pandemic have on travel patterns in the long term?
3. What can be done to improve connectivity across public transport modes? How could better integration be delivered in urban areas outside London?
4. What are the likely areas of innovation in urban public transport over the next 10 years? How should public policy be shaped considering both incremental and transformational innovations? How could data help transport services meet consumer demand?
5. Are local authorities well equipped with appropriate funding and powers to deliver high-quality public transport services? Would further devolution of transport policy contribute to better outcomes?
6. Could better policy coordination across government departments, and between central and local government, improve public transport outcomes? If so, how can this be achieved?
7. What are the barriers to improving urban public transport, in terms of delivering the necessary infrastructure, increasing connectivity and improving the consumer experience?
8. Are there other important changes, not covered elsewhere in these questions, which would improve matters?

Who are ADEPT?

ADEPT represents place directors from county, unitary and combined authorities, along with Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), sub-national transport boards and corporate partners drawn from key service sectors throughout England.

ADEPT is a membership based, voluntary organisation with:

- 90+ county, unitary and combined authority members,
- 3 sub-national transport bodies,

- 14 local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) and
- 21 Corporate Partner members across England.

The key to unlocking economic recovery and renewal lies with local leadership. Place directors create the strategies, run the services and lead the projects that shape local places for their communities. The whole country benefits from investment in local place. Tackling inequality and climate change, while promoting health and wellbeing, supporting business and maintaining critical infrastructure is most successful when national investment is locally led.

ADEPT represents members' interests by proactively engaging central government on emerging policy and issues, responding to consultations and enquiries, creating national guidance, and promoting initiatives aimed at influencing government policy. ADEPT also represent public sector interests across all our key areas in national sectoral organisations.

Contact Details

Name: Mark Kemp – Chair, ADEPT Transport and Connectivity Board

Email: Mark.Kemp@hertfordshire.gov.uk

Response:

1. What are the current and anticipated levels of public transport demand and capacity in towns and cities in England? What influences public transport travel patterns? How does the choice of public transport vary across different demographic groups?

Demand for Public Transport

The Local Government Association (LGA) commissioned SYSTRA Ltd to undertake research on the future of public transport in England, outside of London. ¹

This research report^{Error! Bookmark not defined.} (January 2021) found:

- There has been a steady and continuous decline in public transport usage over recent decades, for at least 70 years.
- The pandemic has exacerbated this decline as passengers were required or opted to work from home, travel less frequently, or travel by car, walking or cycling to maintain social distancing. This has led to significant financial difficulties for transport organisations. This is particularly evident in London with Transport for London (TfL) requiring government bail outs. ²
- According to LGA report, the “*industry became unviable overnight and has survived through councils and central government continuing to pay for services that are no longer being used through emergency support and subsidies*” - however, this funding cannot continue forever.
- The bus industry is in long term decline. The number of local bus passenger journeys in England fell by 5.5% in the year ending March 2020, with bus companies reporting declines in journeys during the weeks preceding the COVID-19 lockdowns. Bus mileage in England in 2019/20 decreased by 3.1% when compared with 2018/19. ³ To properly address this issue, local authorities and central government will need to communicate better the message of what makes travelling by public transport so

¹ <https://www.local.gov.uk/systra-lga-bus-report>

² <https://tfl.gov.uk/info-for/investors/announcements>

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/929992/annual-bus-statistics-year-ending-march-2020.pdf

attractive (e.g. reduces carbon emissions and congestion whilst improving air quality, provides quality time for other activities such as reading or working or relaxing whilst travelling, avoids costs of car tax, insurance, parking etc.). However, unless more work is done to make the switch from private car to public transport use more affordable and accessible and address the imbalance between urban and rural public transport provision, the behaviour shift required to make public transport services commercially viable will be difficult to achieve.

Factors Influencing Public Transport Use

Despite the environmental benefits of travelling by public transport, a recent study highlighted that travel time and distance are the most influential factors driving public transport use, whilst the car is still seen as the most desirable mode of transport due to its flexibility and convenience.⁴ As such areas with better provision of public transport infrastructure are likely to experience higher public transport use.

How Public Transport Use Varies Across Demographics

According to data collated as part of the National Travel Survey (UK)⁵, based on miles travelled by mode, and by ethnicity, on average in the 5 years from 2015 to 2019:

- 17% of all miles travelled were by public transport (excluding London buses and underground services).
- Car or van journeys made up 79% of the distance travelled by white people, the highest percentage out of all ethnic groups – the lowest percentage was for black people (54%).
- Overground rail made up 16% of the distance travelled by black people, the highest percentage out of all ethnic groups – the lowest percentage was for white people (9%).

When looking at demographics by age:

- 17–20-year olds' made the largest number of trips per person per year using public transport as a mode of travel (excluding London buses and underground services), with an average of 68 trips per person per year.
- The 70+ age group made the smaller number of trips per person per year with an average of 17 trips per person per year.

A paper on transport access and inequality (prepared by NatCen for the DfT in July 2019) noted that there are three key underlying factors that influence the relationship between transport and inequality:⁶

- 1) The way people are distributed geographically, and across social classes.
- 2) The way opportunities are distributed, including jobs and education.
- 3) How accessible the transport system is, in terms of cost, geographic accessibility and the time and reliability of different transport options.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/703080/understanding-the-drivers-road_travel.pdf

⁵ <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/culture-and-community/transport/travel-by-distance-trips-type-of-transport-and-purpose/latest#number-of-trips-by-ethnicity-and-mode-of-transport>

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/953951/Transport_and_inequality_report_document.pdf

The main finding of the paper suggests that if transport is (or is perceived to be) too expensive, then people are not able to make the journeys they need to get into work or move into education/training. The way transport and inequality are experienced varies by group and location. Different socio-economic groups have differing levels of access to transport options. People who depend more on the bus network for work tend to be lower paid, live in more deprived areas, and are more likely to turn down jobs due to transport issues, than those on higher incomes, who tend to use cars and trains more often.

Some groups can be at higher risk of poverty and transport poverty. The impacts of transport poverty are worst for poorer people in rural areas. Services are further away, incomes are often lower, and transport costs higher, partly reflecting low population density which makes it harder to run public transport.

2. How might public transport travel patterns shift in the next 10 years? What impact could digitalisation and the COVID-19 pandemic have on travel patterns in the long term?

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on people's working patterns. It has led to greater flexibility in how, where and when people work. This has been supported by advances in technology, digitisation, and improvements to home-working tools. This has meant that a significant proportion of workers can now undertake their job at home, something that would not have been possible five or ten years ago. It is likely that this will become 'the new normal' with a return to 9-5 work patterns and travelling into a fixed office every day being a thing of the past.

Many of the benefits of travelling by public transport (e.g. reduced car dependency and congestion, lower carbon emissions, improved air quality and health, tackling social inequalities) are 'trumped' by personal benefit of working from home or choosing not to travel. This is likely to mean that amongst hybrid workers any mode shift to public transport is likely to be limited.

New technologies could be used as an advantage to monitor the impact of the pandemic on changing travel patterns – particularly for public transport users. For example, Local Highway Authorities (LHAs) and the government could use new monitoring tools to quickly understand the groups of people that are being affected by the withdrawal of commercial bus services. This data can then be used to develop effective strategies for tackling these impacts.

3. What can be done to improve connectivity across public transport modes? How could better integration be delivered in urban areas outside London?

Key factors that would help to improve connectivity across public transport modes include:

- Making public transport services more attractive (particularly the cost element plus reliability, frequency, comfort).
- Publicise the benefits of an effective public transport network, including: saving money; the benefits of connecting to key areas of employment, leisure and education; reducing car dependency; reducing congestion; lowering carbon emissions; tackling climate change; improving air quality and health, and addressing social inequalities.
- Provide more frequent bus services / offer demand responsive transport.
- Introduce bus priority measures to improve journey times and reliability.
- Creation of mobility hubs to allow for seamless transfer between modes (e.g. park and rides).

- Integration of ticketing and payment between operators and modes (Mobility as a Service).
- Improve the branding and marketing of public transport services
- Provide easy access to public transport information.

4. What are the likely areas of innovation in urban public transport over the next 10 years? How should public policy be shaped considering both incremental and transformational innovations? How could data help transport services meet consumer demand?

There are several key avenues that are being explored by local authorities throughout the UK to drive innovation in existing public transport networks^{Error! Bookmark not defined.}. These include:

- Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) – this can provide opportunities to make services more attractive, in the right context. For instance, DRT can help connect isolated rural communities, create flexibility around school transport, and be used as a model for community led transport schemes. Hertfordshire recently introduced the statutory Intalink Enhanced Partnership⁷. Under the Partnership, the County Council has a commitment to provide or improve public transport facilities and measures, including bus priority measures (bus lanes, traffic signal prioritisation); real time infrastructure and information; and ticketing schemes. In return, bus operators have committed to provide newer, cleaner vehicles; higher frequencies; evening and weekend services; an extended network; lower ticket prices; access to data on a monthly basis; and Intalink branding on buses.
- Total Transport and Mobility as a Service (MaaS)⁸ approaches: These concepts are seen to have value in the integration of modes, payment and ticketing, attracting car users to public transport, and in integrating sectoral transport (for example across health, education, tourism etc.). MaaS is effectively a journey planner and payment app all-in-one, across a multitude of operating providers and modes. It would be designed to track journeys and spending by users to allow users to clearly realise their travel habits and journey costs, whilst suggesting alternatives to private-car travel. For example: “you have spent £X on petrol and parking for your journey to work this week. Have you considered taking the XX bus to work for £X a week instead?”. The MaaS platform will specifically encourage the use of new modes currently seen as on the periphery, such as car clubs, electric vehicles and bike hire.
- Exploring new ways to plan public transport networks through interchanges. Typically, these involve concentrating network resources around a set of core high-quality routes (fast and frequent) which are then integrated with local feeder services (in some instances, DRT) through high quality interchange facilities. This model aims to simplify routing and avoid convoluted routes that aren’t attractive to the majority of users, while still providing connectivity to as many users as possible.
- There is also recognition that bus service planners and operators must be able to understand changes in patterns of travel which are being, to observed try and capture some of the opportunities related to this – for example, flattened demand in peak periods could mean that operators can reduce their peak vehicle requirement (PVR), reducing the cost of additional vehicles and staff which were

⁷ <https://www.transportextra.com/publications/evolution/news/64653/herts-becomes-first-council-to-agree-enhanced-partnership>

⁸ <https://maas-alliance.eu/homepage/what-is-maas/>

previously only required to serve the short, sharp peaks in commuter travel prior to COVID-19^{Error! Bookmark not defined.}.

A good example of this in practice is the innovative mobility hubs currently being explored by University of Nottingham using MaaS. The university is investing in the creation of 'Campuses for the Future'⁹ specifically relating to the trial of autonomous shuttle vehicles, as campuses provide an ideal location for connected autonomous vehicles due to the fact that they are contained environments suitable for experimental technology. The university has been chosen as a primary location for the pilot of an E-mobility Campus Hub, which seeks to solve the first and last mile travel of students and staff on campus and introduce new modes such as autonomous shuttle buses, e-bikes and e-scooters. Bike parking and community track pumps, e-bike charging, e-cargo bike hire, smart bus stops, and Electric Vehicle Charging (EVC) points will also be included as features for 'Campuses for the Future'.

- MaaS is a good example of how personalised data analysis and tools can be used to help authorities to understand key information which is important to delivering transport, such as travel pattern data, user demand profiles, congestion and efficiency indicators, and capacity analysis etc. Effective data analysis and tools/transport modelling can help identify and assess the scale of problems and opportunities and be used to test or justify interventions proposed for improving the situation.

5. Are local authorities well equipped with appropriate funding and powers to deliver high-quality public transport services? Would further devolution of transport policy contribute to better outcomes?

As well as being one of the key enablers for the delivery of local public transport ambitions, funding is the biggest barrier faced by LHAs in delivering high quality public transport services.

Reductions in funding have meant that LHAs spending on local transport has declined by 40% over the last decade.^{Error! Bookmark not defined.} Further pressure has been placed on local transport spending due to a long-term decline in patronage and the corresponding loss of commercial services which need to be supported, as well as concessionary travel spending. The LGA commissioned SYSTRA Ltd to undertake research into this issue. Their report suggested that the main issue currently being faced by local authorities related to the need to secure sufficient resources.

Additional funding is needed to attract and maintain sufficient staff resources (people, skills and systems) to fulfil everyday needs as well as future-proof the public transport industry and commission studies which explore and deliver innovative changes in transport.

Future funding should focus on:

- Providing longer term stability in terms of staff and resources.
- Ensuring that funding is provided in a way that not only tackles capital funding elements but also ensures that the schemes delivered can continue to operate into the future.
- Recognising the significant pressures on viability caused by COVID-19 and moving from an emergency funding approach to a longer-term, strategic recovery plan.

⁹ <https://airqualitynews.com/2020/03/23/nottingham-council-to-create-three-electric-mobility-hubs/>

- Ensuring that funding opportunities can be accessed by all authorities, not just those with the capacity and expertise to respond to bidding calls.

Substantial investment in infrastructure is also required to enable improvements to local public transport systems. When the LGA study asked about the amount of spending needed for a transformational change in local public transport, some authorities indicated that the spend would need to be doubled. Some of the authorities consulted in the LGA study are pursuing other local funding mechanisms to increase their ability to deliver on their ambitions. Local fundraising included:

- Workplace Parking Levies (WPL), as a way to raise ringfenced money, contest car dominance, help tackle congestion, and improve bus competitiveness. For example, Nottingham raises £8.5m net annually for transport improvements via their WPL¹⁰. They have used this for match funding to access further national funding such as the Ultra Low Emission Bus (ULEB) Scheme; and
- Road user charging and parking measures, as a means of using surplus revenue while tackling car dominance. However, it is counter-productive to rely on parking revenue to fund transport measures when one of the overarching objectives for transport in most areas is to reduce car use. Therefore, funding avenues which do not need continued car use to sustain them need to be explored.

The LGA study has highlighted that the challenges facing English local government in fulfilling its local transport responsibilities and wider ambitions need to be more clearly articulated – including the mismatch between available funds and local authority ambitions.

In terms of decentralising powers to local authorities, the LGA study found that some authorities were keen to establish additional control over how services operate. This could be furthered through statutory enhanced partnerships and franchising.

The same report also suggested sharing experiences between authorities on how to broker suitable partnerships with operators, neighbouring authorities and other public sector agencies. This would be particularly relevant in relation to effectively managing and using data sources and tool, as well as making use of new bus powers available to authorities, such as statutory enhanced partnerships, examples below:

- Hertfordshire, for example, recently introduced the statutory Intalink Enhanced Partnership⁷. Under the Partnership, the County Council has a commitment to provide or improve public transport facilities and measures, including bus priority measures (bus lanes, traffic signal prioritisation); real time infrastructure and information; and ticketing schemes. In return, bus operators have committed to provide newer, cleaner vehicles; higher frequencies; evening and weekend services; an extended network; lower ticket prices; access to data on a monthly basis; and Intalink branding on buses.
- Franchising, which is available to some authorities, provides the ability for authorities to specify service requirements. The Greater Manchester area is looking to reform the bus network and is carrying out works to move to a franchise model¹¹.

¹⁰ <https://www.transportxtra.com/publications/parking-review/news/68005/the-workplace-parking-levy-nottingham-pioneers-the-way-ahead/>

¹¹ <https://tfgm.com/our-buses>

A franchising model would allow bus services to be specified across the area, as is currently done in London.

6. Could better policy coordination across government departments, and between central and local government, improve public transport outcomes? If so, how can this be achieved?

To ensure that local authorities are well equipped with appropriate powers to deliver high-quality public transport services, the LGA report suggested that partnership working is crucial for the use of new transport powers by local authorities. This could include fostering partnerships between:

- Different tiers of government – to effectively deliver on regional policy.
- Neighbouring authorities – to tackle shared problems and to deliver cross-boundary travel initiatives such as payment and ticketing.
- Transport officers and politicians – to ensure that long-term strategies for transport are supported politically.
- Local authorities, public transport operators, and other bodies providing transport – to work together to face common challenges and share resources
- Different sectors, such as health, education, employers, social care, and tourism – to consider where there is the potential for integrated delivery and improved efficiency.

Partnership working and strong communication is particularly important for the delivery of any innovative transport projects, such as MaaS.

Partnership working is also crucial for the use of new transport powers by local authorities. Statutory enhanced partnerships, formalise partnership working between the council and operators. Therefore, strong relationships must be developed between all parties in order to ensure that each fully understands and commits to the conditions of the partnership.

7. What are the barriers to improving urban public transport, in terms of delivering the necessary infrastructure, increasing connectivity and improving the consumer experience?
Funding Streams and Resources

The main barriers are funding and lack of staff and resources. Research suggests that money sought is often spent on big budget infrastructure and roads projects and isn't always available for what is needed to deliver daily public transport operations or for spending in other areas which support car-free lifestyles, such as active travel.¹²

This has occurred because traditionally far greater amounts have been made available through roads capital funding streams (e.g. Local Growth Fund, Large Local Majors, Major

¹² This research is based on in-depth interviews with transport officers and councillors from six representative case study local authority areas: Bath and North East Somerset (B&NES) and the wider West of England Combined Authority (WECA); Hertfordshire; Lancashire; Lincolnshire; Milton Keynes; and Stockport as part of the LGA's "The future of public transport and the role of Local Government" Report – accessed via <https://www.local.gov.uk/systra-lga-bus-report>

Road Funding Network). A lack of sufficient revenue funding to support bus services, behavioural change programmes and active travel remains a significant barrier.

To address this LHA's require both capital and revenue funding streams. Although the investment being delivered by the government through the National Bus Strategy should begin to help to address this by making more revenue funding available to LHAs.

Concessionary Travel

Earlier this year, a National Audit Office report highlighted that an increasing proportion of local transport spend is being used on concessionary travel reimbursement to operators when compared to spending on supporting bus services.¹³ Research by the LGA has concluded that the level of underfunding is around £700m a year. By having less money to spend on supporting or delivering services, local authorities have less influence over where, when, and how bus services are delivered in their area.

Public Support

There is often a lack of public support for bus schemes / infrastructure improvements (e.g. bus lanes or bus shelters). These schemes can be extremely controversial and therefore difficult to deliver. To address this better public engagement along with campaigns to increase public and Member understanding of the wider benefits of bus schemes / infrastructure is needed. However, this will place additional funding and resource pressures on LHAs.

¹³ <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Improving-local-bus-services-in-England-outside-London.pdf>