Title	Transport Committee call for evidence: Reforming public transport after the pandemic
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Introduction

1.1 We sit in the middle of a global pandemic, on the verge of an unprecedented recession and with a global climate emergency looming over us.

1.2 Yes, the coronavirus pandemic has had a huge effect on how people use public transport, with patronage declining as a result of government guidance, fear, and temporary changes in travel behaviour. But our current situation masks much wider, deeper systemic issues. Bus use has been in decline for 70 years, with passenger journeys on local bus services reducing by 11.9% in the last decade alone[1].

1.3 An effective public transport system is vital for a prosperous, fair and healthy society. It has a major part to play in contributing to economic growth, the health and well-being of the population, social inclusion and in tackling the climate emergency. Deregulation, changes in national strategy and policy, and targeted funding have failed to stem the downward trend. Even before COVID-19, we were in a time of both 'crisis and opportunity'[2].

1.4 The speed and scale of change to people's needs and travel habits, and so many unknowns ahead, means that future needs will bear little resemblance to what we have known in the past. We cannot continue as we have before, nor should we try to go back to how things were: now is the time to be accountable and to act.

1.5 ITP is a forward thinking, independent sustainable transport planning and research consultancy dedicated to improving the way the world moves. We firmly believe that public transport is an essential public service, and bold steps should be taken to reform public transport and how it is delivered. Below is our response to the Transport Committee's call for evidence, which focuses on the implications of the coronavirus pandemic on the public transport sector.

[1] Annual bus statistics: England 2018/19 – Department for Transport
[2] WHAT'S DRIVING BUS PATRONAGE CHANGE? – Urban Transport Group 2019

The long-term implications of the pandemic for the use of public transport and the way that people choose to travel, both locally and for longer domestic journeys.

1.6 There has been significant change in the need for, and frequency of, travel over the last six months for all modes. The ripple effect of the coronavirus pandemic will change the way people travel in the short, medium and long-term, and will negatively impact on local bus services.

1.7 During April bus use outside of London dropped to 11% of pre-COVID levels; even in August, as lockdown eased but with social distancing in place, bus use was less than 50% of pre-COVID levels.[3]

1.8 The picture is not the same everywhere. York has seen a drop in passengers higher than many areas, due to a user base that can either walk or cycle or have the ability to work from home. This may be a trend we see in the 'highest achieving' public transport towns and cities, such as Brighton & Hove and Reading, and has serious ramifications for the sustainability of commercially operated networks. In a recent survey by Hubble, 70% of respondents indicated that they had had a positive experience of working from home; 86% of employees suggested that they would like to continue working remotely at least once a week in the future. It is very clear that many commuters will travel less frequently in the future.

1.9 For many that commute, the situation has proved that a conventional 0900-1700 working day is not necessary. Although the peak times for travel have started to spread over recent years, this may spread and flatten even further as people choose to live and work in a different way – this will impact bus operations, timetabling, and Peak Vehicle Requirement.

1.10 The way we access services has changed as well. Again, living in lockdown, conditions have proved we can survive without the need to travel. From on-line shopping, to remote medical consultations, to remote learning. According to the Office for National Statistics (2020) online retail sales were over 50% higher in July 2020 than February's pre-pandemic levels. Although many will choose to travel for these journey purposes in the future, it is likely that the overall number of journeys for services, particularly by public transport, will reduce.

1.11 Some sustainable modes will benefit. With government interventions to increase walking and cycling, and people preferring not to mix with other people, journeys are likely to be abstracted from public transport.

[3] Transport use by mode: Great Britain, since 1 March 2020 – DfT

1.12 In the short term, it is only those who need to travel and have no alternative that are using public transport. Those with access to private cars are using them and, with quieter roads and ample parking, are coming conditioned to using them – meaning a more difficult job drawing people back to public transport. Equally, messaging about only using public transport for essential journeys and the need to wear face coverings to avoid the spread of the virus on public transport, will have deterred use.

1.13 As patronage decreases, operators will not secure enough revenue to operate services commercially. This will result in bus service reductions and complete service withdrawals. With local authorities' budgets already under serious financial pressure, there is a significant risk that many areas of the country will have little or no bus service. And it will be those in the lowest income groups that will lose out; 42% of lower income groups do not own a car compared to 8% for the highest income group[4]. Lack of service provision will result in poorer opportunities and life chances for those of society who are already the poorest and most disadvantaged. This is turn will increase inequalities.

1.14 Steps can be taken, and should be taken, to increase patronage – marketing, fares subsidy, integration opportunities, amongst other interventions set out in this report - but these are just sticking plasters for a terminal patient. We need to reassess the role of public transport, give it the priority it justifies, back this up with firm commitment and support from central government, and reform the way bus services are delivered. We are at a critical point in the survival and sustainability of our public transport networks, and firm action is required now in order to reverse the trends.

The long-term implications of the pandemic for central and local governmental transport priorities and finances and funding for transport.

1.15 With reducing patronage and increasing costs, less services will be commercially viable, resulting in fewer commercial bus services and fewer bus operators. As bus services are an important public service, local authorities will need to secure funding to support them. Local authority budgets for supporting local bus services has decreased over time as other statutory services take precedence.

1.16 At present there is a funding disconnect between the role of public transport and funding that is being allocated to it; and government budgets continue to prioritise measures that benefit car users, including the continued freeze on fuel duty. In addition to this, the cost of using buses (and rail) has grown disproportionately

[4] Delivering change: Making transport work for cities, Centre for Cities 2014

compared to the cost of using the car - while individual spending on motoring has increased by 9% over the past decade, individual spending on public transport has increased by 74%[5].

1.17 Investment in public transport outside of London has not been sufficient enough to develop an attractive, integrated network and needs to be addressed. Public transport should be seen as an essential service, supported by adequate funding from central government in tandem with increased opportunities for authorities to generate additional income locally.

1.18 This is the time to revitalise both the bus, and public transport, through development of a new persuasive, visionary national strategy that gives clear structure and priority for a way forward where the public transport is at the heart of our transport network. It needs to be built around flexibility, allowing local authorities to develop their networks in accordance with local needs and aspirations. It needs to empower local government with a boldness to make tough decisions recognising the long-term benefits. And it needs to be supported with adequate funding, incorporating both capital and revenue streams to support public transport as a viable and attractive alternative to the private car.

1.19 Public transport networks need to be comprehensive and coherent, allowing each type of service to complement the whole. Demand responsive transport, for instance, needs to be fully integrated into the public transport network, connecting into conventional services and incorporating the same fares and ticketing systems.

1.20 Transport networks do not work in isolation. Travel is a means to an end, and so a network's success is influenced by wider policy. Of most significance is the relationship of land-use policy and transport policy; taking a holistic view and ensuring sustainable transport is at the heart of development planning, building the right type of development in the right place, is key to developing a sustainable public transport network and decrease car use.

1.21 Traffic plays a significant role in the attractiveness, and sustainability of the bus network, therefore it is important to prioritise the bus (and active travel modes) on existing or dedicated road space; reliability and punctuality are regularly cited as the most important factors to encourage bus use. Without prioritising the bus, increased congestion will decrease journey times, require additional vehicles to meet timetables, and increase direct operational costs; these have historically been recouped through fare increases, further deterring passengers from using the bus and impacting the most disadvantaged in society. Equally, policy relationship between transport, planning and parking is key to reduce the attractiveness of private vehicles.

[5] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42182497

1.22 For car owners, there is a perception that public transport is more expensive than the car, as fares are an immediate and noticeable expense, and is compared only with parking costs and not vehicle depreciation and running costs. This is exacerbated when parking charges are relatively low compared to fares. Pricing strategies are significant motivators for driving behaviour change, especially when there is a direct cost penalty to using the car, but it still often requires a cultural shift and availability of a quality alternative to inspire people to make the sustainable choice. Pricing strategies have the duel benefit of encouraging public transport use, and raising money to support services, and need to be recognised as one of the key measures in local authorities' arsenal to support public transport going forward. Increasing mode shift away from the car will reduce congestion (and carbon emissions), increase bus journey times, and reduce operational costs (as fewer vehicles are required).

1.23 A longer term view on the image of the bus also needs to be considered; the next generation needs to understand the wider benefits of using the bus, but also how to use the bus, for instance, by including this within the National Curriculum. As they grow older, younger people should be viewing public transport as the obvious choice for travel where active travel modes are not possible.

The long-term implications of the pandemic for the devolution of transport policy-making responsibilities and powers

1.24 We believe there is not a blanket approach to achieving the required transport revolution. Flexibility will be key, with local need and aspirations dictating what bus delivery models are best suited; but with the responsibility for the strategic direction for public transport lying with central government.

1.25 As well as presenting local authorities with new powers to improve partnership working, The Bus Services Act 2017 provides Mayoral Combined Authorities with the powers to implement franchising schemes. However, instigating franchising schemes is currently a long, arduous and expensive process, and implementing them requires significant funding and a high number of skilled people which are in short supply within local authorities. As well as investigating alternative models, such as a partnership/franchise hybrid, all bus delivery models should be made available to all local authorities, and the process streamlined and representative of the size of a scheme.

Case study: Seoul

Transport within the Seoul metropolitan area had become a major issue with rising population and congestion levels. Reform was desperately needed. With political support for both institutional and technical change, 2004 became a milestone in Seoul's transport polices, as the Seoul Bus system underwent a complete overhaul. The Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG) increased control over bus routes, schedules, fares and system design, altering the system from private to quasi-public management. These changes have led to Seoul becoming an internationally renowned exemplary case study of public transport reform.

Between 2003 and 2008, the average number of daily passengers on the bus system increased by 15.2% (Embarq, 2009). Furthermore, bus usage has increased as a supplementary mode of transport due to the introduction of an integrated fare system, resulting in real fares per travel gradually decreasing when compared with pre-reform levels (Kim et al, 2011). The fare reform, particularly the free-transfer benefits, has also led to a reduction in household transport expenses (Kim and Kim, 2012).

1.26 We believe at the core of any future delivery model is a partnership approach between local authorities, operators, technological innovators and planners. The private sector is where the skill base is located, and is often the driver of innovation, but it's the local authority that can take the holistic view of needs and the network. At the heart of a new strategy, should be the impetus to strengthen true partnership, and to resource and fund it adequately.

Case Study: Brighton and Hove

Despite the general decline in bus use outside of London in the UK, bus patronage in Brighton and Hove has been increasing year on year since the early 90's, to the extent that patronage has doubled since 1993.

The growth is down to strong partnership working between operators and local authority, consistent investment in new vehicles, improved infrastructure & priority and an imaginative mix of hard and soft marketing that means Brighton and Hove has the highest bus use per head of any English city outside of London and car ownership per household is decreasing - it is now the eighth highest local authority with households not owning a car.

1.27 Continuous political commitment to sustainable transport should not be underestimated in its influence on the success of developing efficient transport networks. High achieving UK cities, such as Brighton and Hove, Nottingham and Reading have strong political support that has led to high and sustained prominence and investment into the public transport network. What sets these apart from other cities goes beyond just political support to a policy and leadership boldness; taking decisions that may be unpopular in the short term, by recognising and carefully promoting the long-term benefits. Examples include the London Congestion Charge, and Nottingham's Workplace Parking Levy. Local government should be empowered to make such decisions, whether they be to suppress the demand for private car use, implementing radical improvements to public transport provision, or both.

Case Study – Nottingham's Workplace Parking Levy

In April 2012 Nottingham became the first UK City to implement a Workplace Parking Levy, with the revenue generated earmarked for the development of the tram network, interchange upgrades, and bus service enhancements. It led to:

- Reduction of car parking space by one third.
- An 8.6% switch in mode away from the car.
- Suppressed demand for travel by car partly offsetting benefits of the WPL.
- Net revenue generation of around £40m in the first 5 years, ring fenced to improve the sustainable transport network.
- Congestion relief, resulting in an inferred improvement in air quality.

The long-term implications of the pandemic for the resilience of the transport system for future crises

1.28 We have learnt a great deal in the wake of the pandemic, such as the demographics of bus users, and where and when people need to travel. This insight will prove useful in planning networks in the future, but should also highlight the importance of using data to understand, in a much greater depth, the role of the bus network and how it works in each area, as well as understand what measures could be adopted to increase bus use. Having ongoing, detailed data analytics, will better prepare operators to respond to future crises and adapt more quickly to changes.

1.29 The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of communication, ensuring users are informed about changes, enabling them to make their essential journeys and avoid them seeking alternative, less sustainable modes. The role of technology is key in this respect and information relating to service times, frequency, journey time, capacity, fares, integration, cleanliness, and other information bus users require, should be easily available.

The long-term implications of the pandemic for the decarbonisation of transport and the capability to meet net zero carbon emissions targets by 2050

1.30 The decarbonisation of transport is an absolutely critical driver in any national strategy going forward. We are acutely aware of the numbers of deaths caused by the coronavirus and these numbers have called us in to unprecedented action and funding. Between 2030 and 2050, climate change is expected to cause approximately 250 000 additional deaths per year, from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhoea and heat stress.[6] These figures are startling, but have failed to drive us to act as the consequences of our previous choices and actions are yet to be truly felt.

1.31 Whilst operators and local authorities have made firm commitments and progress towards decarbonising their networks, the global pandemic has rightly taken priority over the last six months. Early progress towards these aims and goals is likely to be delayed; operators may be hesitant to invest in new and alternative-fuelled vehicles until patronage increases, the network is stabilised, and future need becomes clearer.

1.32 The strong message of "avoid public transport where possible" has driven people back to their cars which is a huge step backwards for the decarbonisation agenda. A national campaign to reverse this trend is therefore required.

[6] https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health

1.33 Progressing the industry towards zero emissions will require significant strategic direction and financial support from central government. The DfT's all electric bus town scheme should be expanded to help in this regard, but with more opportunity for areas without self-contained networks to seek funding.

The long-term implications of the pandemic for innovation and technological reform within transport

1.34 Innovation and developing technologies are vitally important for us to meet our carbon emissions goals. But they cannot be the focus of endeavours at the expense of what could be done in the short and medium term. Building on the partnerships fostered during the pandemic, and further developing the technology and apps introduced relating to information, ticketing and payment, will help increase patronage and lower operational costs.

1.35 The technology to manage effective on-demand public transport has come to the fore in recent years, enabling various new types of services to be implemented. However, in most cases these have been introduced quite separately from the conventional bus network, normally to target new markets, such as workers at out-of-town business parks or younger people. However, the danger is that such services are seen as being another alternative, rather than something that is part of the wider public transport network.

1.36 Equally, new on-demand services ignore the existence of other established specialist transport services, such as community transport, dial-a-ride, home to school transport and non-emergency patient transport. The DfT's Total Transport pilots highlighted the importance of co-ordinating these passenger flows and integrating the planning of services, but little progress has been made, with each of these services separately commissioned and operated by different players. Therefore, alongside technological developments, there needs to be institutional and organisational changes to facilitate effective joint planning and delivery of transport services.

Summary

1.37 The pandemic has had an immediate and longer-term impact on public transport and it is important to take steps to safeguard this essential public service in order to provide access for all, reduce congestion, meet decarbonisation targets and drive economic growth. However, public transport was in decline before the pandemic. Now is the time to make the bold changes required to safeguard public transport into the future.

1.38 Below are our top 10 suggestions for change:

1. Introduce a new persuasive, visionary national strategy that gives clear structure and priority for a way forward where public transport is at the heart of our transport network.
2. Provide increased capital and revenue funding to sustain bus services through the period of reduced patronage and beyond.
3. Empower local authorities to make bold decisions on local transport networks, in partnership with bus operators, and provide them with more powers in bus service delivery - but make the process easier.
4. Support an integrated approach, using each sustainable mode in its most appropriate place, avoiding duplication, and providing seamless transfer between modes through infrastructure, information, and payment. Institutionalised integration should be adopted to enable the Total Transport principle.
5. Ensure public transport is intrinsic to development planning, taking a holistic approach to ensuring future development is built around sustainable travel options.
6. Prioritise buses on existing or dedicated road space, making the bus journey quicker than that of the car.
7. Discourage the use of the car through parking policy and car-related charges – the funding being ring-fenced for public transport.
8. Tackle the image of public transport through educating children and national marketing campaigns.
9. Provide the resource and tools to better analyse data to understand and plan public transport and be adaptive to changing circumstances.
10. Develop technology to provide the necessary tools to enable public transport to be the obvious choice of travel.