



Fair Transition Unit

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

TRANSPORT PRIORITIES FOR THE
NEXT UK GOVERNMENT

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IPPR's Fair Transition Unit (FTU) was established in June 2022 as a new landmark initiative to carry forward the work of IPPR's cross-party Environmental Justice Commission and award-winning work on environmental breakdown.

The FTU's mission is "to accelerate progress in reducing emissions and restoring nature and secure a fairer, more just and thriving society". To realise this mission, the FTU delivers projects, programmes and support to others focused on securing a fair transition to net zero and the restoration of nature.

The Environmental Justice Commission drew on views and recommendations from citizens from across the country in a way that has genuinely shaped policy thinking and had tangible policy and media impact. Building on this legacy, the FTU puts the public at the heart of its work through extensive public deliberation.

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We have helped shape national conversations and progressive policy change for more than 30 years. From making the early case for the minimum wage and tackling regional inequality, to proposing a windfall tax on energy companies, IPPR's research and policy work has put forward practical solutions for the crises facing society.

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ABOUT THIS PAPER

This short briefing provides a concise summary of the IPPR Fair Transition Unit's view on the priorities for transport that the next UK government must address.

The themes presented in this briefing are not exhaustive but represent some of the key challenges and opportunities for change that communities across Great Britain have described to us.

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TRANSPORT PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT UK GOVERNMENT

SUMMARY

IPPR argues that we need a transport strategy that reflects the importance of changing how we travel to keep the UK on track to meet its climate commitments and seizes the opportunity to deliver a transport system that works better for people today and allows future generations to thrive.

Our six priorities for a new government are:

1. set out a new vision and approach to transport decision-making
2. lead a renaissance for local public transport
3. create attractive spaces for walking, wheeling, and cycling
4. make clean air and a healthier environment a right for all communities
5. accelerate access to electric vehicles and ensure a fair deal for those who need to drive
6. ensure aviation is delivering its share of emissions reductions.

Transport is a national asset connecting people to the things they need, care about and enjoy. As we leave our front doors and walk our children to school, cycle to work, make our way to the bus stop or turn the key in the ignition for the drive to the supermarket, we rarely think of what we're doing as being part of a transport system. A consequence of this is debates about the future of how we travel are rarely at the top of the news agenda nor seen by the public as one of the most important issues facing the country.¹

Yet transport has a crucial role to play in tackling the issues that are top of people's minds – the rising cost of living, public health and an overstretched healthcare system, sluggish and unequal economic growth, lack of affordable housing in healthy places to live, as well as the climate and nature crises. The design of our roads and public realm is also intrinsically linked to the freedom children have to travel independently, the pride communities have in their local area and how connected or isolated people feel in their neighbourhoods and villages (Massey-Chase et al 2022, Webb et al 2022, Frost et al 2021, Billingham et al 2023 and Singer Hobbs et al 2023).

In recent years IPPR has engaged communities across the UK in deliberative workshops linked to the future of transport. We found that whether it's Glasgow, Liverpool and

¹ 3 per cent of adults say transport is one of the three most important issues facing the country, compared to 53 per cent who say 'the economy' (YouGov 2024).

Anglesey, Thurrock and the South Wales Valleys, Stoke on Trent, Hastings and Redcar or those living on low incomes from across England's cities – all of Britain's communities have a story to tell about how the transport system is failing them, and the environment.

The Labour Party has launched reviews covering major infrastructure projects, rail and urban transport and has set up a British Infrastructure Council. There is a clear desire to deliver quickly. The UK government's recently published 'Network North' plan, described as "not fully costed and beset by uncertainty" by the chair of the National Infrastructure Commission (Williams 2023), highlighted the risk of attempting to write transport strategies in the absence of a clear vision and without engaging those who will deliver it and the communities it will impact.

The Transport Select Committee has an active inquiry on the extent to which government take a "long-term, national and multi-modal approach" to addressing the country's transport needs. The answer is it rarely does. Where strategies exist, they are based around specific modes with plans for walking, wheeling, and cycling, buses and drivers all sitting in isolation from each other. The UK's Transport Decarbonisation Plan and Net Zero Strategy won't deliver net zero in line with the Paris Agreement (Marsden 2023) and don't set out an overarching vision for the transport system.

It is in this context, and particularly with the voice of the communities we have worked with in mind, that we propose the following priorities for the next UK government.

A NEW VISION AND APPROACH TO TRANSPORT DECISION-MAKING

Priority 1: Deliver a new transport strategy for England that sets out a shared vision of what we want the future of travel to look like and what goals the transport system should be working to. This must be multi-modal and include a plan for changing how we travel that keeps the UK on track to meet its climate commitments and seizes the opportunity to deliver a transport system that is fairer and healthier.

This strategy should guide transport decision making across all tiers of government and ensure that investment is aligned with reducing inequality, delivering inclusive economic growth, improving health, tackling transport poverty and social isolation, as well as addressing environmental crises (including climate adaptation). This plan for how we move cannot be seen in isolation from the places we live – this strategy should also address the quality of the public realm and how this is used.

A key feature of this strategy should be a future generations test that ensures all transport investment is contributing to allowing our children to live happy, healthy and fulfilling lives in an environment that will support this. As part of this, and as recommended by the Climate Change Committee (Climate Change Committee 2023), there should be an urgent independent roads review to consider which schemes are compatible with net zero and meet this test.

The UK's approach to allowing autonomous vehicles on our roads has to be seen in the context of this desired vision for the future of transport. There is only a slim chance of the rollout of this technology being aligned with reducing emissions (Connected Places Catapult 2020). The UK government must ensure that new technologies are used in-line with public expectations, deliver safer streets for all road users and support a more

resource-efficient transport system. As the Transport Committee (2023) has said, if the UK gets this wrong then congestion will get worse, existing inequalities in transport access will be exacerbated and therefore the government must take a “cautious, gradual approach” to its rollout.

Priority 2: Transport decision making must shift from being something done from above to being done with and by people.² **The next UK government must put in place a high quality, well-resourced public engagement strategy for sustainable travel** that includes activities to educate and inform as well as meaningful opportunities for people to shape decision making. This will ensure that transport policy is fair, effective and transparent – crucial elements of maintaining public support on the path to net zero (Mitev et al 2023).

Priority 3: Power over transport must be shared more widely alongside a fairer allocation of resources.³ To unlock the ability of local leaders to deliver net zero, protect nature and shape a transport network that meets local needs **the UK government must end competitive short-term funding for transport and move to strategic, long-term, single pot funding.** This should sit alongside a goal for more authorities to have the highest level of devolved powers over transport by 2030.

Priority 4: Align the planning system with delivering on transport goals, including ensuring that new homes are built in higher densities near public transport hubs (Singer Hobbs et al 2023). A national land use framework to help manage strategic land use priorities across England is urgently needed and this should ensure transport infrastructure plans are aligned with protecting at least 30 per cent of land for nature.

LEAD A RENAISSANCE FOR LOCAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT

As with so many of the UK’s public services, most people think that public transport is in a bad state.⁴ England’s bus network has seen urban bus services (outside London) reduced by 48 per cent and rural by 52 per cent since 2008 (Friends of the Earth 2023). As a result, almost two thirds (63 per cent as of 29th January, YouGov 2024) do not think transport is being handled well by the current government.

Priority 5: The government has set a mission to ensure that by 2030 local public transport connectivity across the country will be significantly closer to the standards of London but has not committed the resources to achieve it. Parties looking to form the next government should **be clear on what they believe a world-leading 21st century local public transport system looks like and how significant progress towards it will be achieved in England over the next 10 years.** This should include the following.

- **Increasing the levels of public transport service in all metropolitan areas to closer to those seen in London** through investment in mass transit⁵ and provision of more

² This is identified as one of the key shifts required in climate policymaking within the final report of the IPPR Environmental Justice Commission 2021.

³ See Billingham et al 2023 for more on the role this sharing of power and resources must play in reducing regional inequality.

⁴ 70 per cent say trains are in a ‘very bad’ or ‘bad’ state, with 49 per cent saying the same about buses (Smith 2023).

⁵ See National Infrastructure Commission 2023 for more on the need for investment in urban mass transit.

frequent, faster and reliable bus services – giving these priority through designated lanes and car-free areas.

- **Far greater bus patronage and mode share**, including having brought the number of per person trips by buses in all major metropolitan areas much closer to London levels.
- **Maintaining an affordable bus fare cap⁶** in England and ensuring bus ticketing is well integrated with other forms of local public transport, community transport and shared mobility schemes (including e-bike sharing and car clubs).
- **100 per cent electric buses in urban areas by 2030** and on-track for a fully zero emission bus fleet by 2035. This should be backed by £2 billion of new green investment between 2025–30.
- **Connectivity with high quality walking, wheeling and cycling infrastructure.**

Priority 6: Many rural communities have been left isolated due to poor quality public transport. The next UK government must **put in place the long-awaited definition of ‘socially and economically necessary’ bus services** – setting a statutory duty to provide access to public transport⁷ with appropriate funding for transport authorities and operators to deliver it.

Priority 7: Lift the ban on municipal bus fleets, make franchising of buses easier and ensure the rail network is run by a national guiding mind in partnership with local leaders. The public should be engaged in shaping the future of local transport services and empowered to be part of making them relevant and accessible to all communities. Root-and-branch reform of fares and ticketing must lead to lower-cost domestic rail travel.

CREATE ATTRACTIVE SPACES FOR WALKING, WHEELING AND CYCLING

Priority 8: Commit to an equivalent of 10 per cent of the transport budget being spent on active travel in England by 2029, with funding reaching the level of £50 per head across the country (Singer Hobbs and Frost 2024). This should include a commitment for ringfenced funding of the National Cycle Network of at least £2.4 billion over the next decade.

Priority 9: Existing government targets to increase the number of children walking to school are off track (National Audit Office 2023). The next UK government must now go further and faster in making the school run something fewer people use a car for. They should support this by **making the rollout of schools streets, where roads outside of schools are temporarily closed to traffic, a national priority** with every school where they are feasible (estimated to be 50 per cent of those in English cities, Hopkinson et al 2021) signed up within two years of a new government being formed.

⁶ See Frost et al 2022 for further thinking on the opportunity to make bus travel more affordable.

⁷ Incorporating thinking about community transport and demand responsive transport within better integrated local public transport networks.

Priority 10: Financial support for accessing cycles and e-bikes is centred on those in work and this has to be extended to ensure those who face the highest barriers to purchasing a cycle, including adapted ones, can do so. The next UK government should **put in place a cycle and e-bike subsidy modelled on the one implemented in France.**⁸ The role of e-scooters on our roads must urgently be clarified with high safety standards put in place.

MAKE CLEAN AIR AND A HEALTHIER ENVIRONMENT A RIGHT FOR ALL COMMUNITIES

Priority 11: Use a new Clean Air Act and Environmental Rights Bill⁹ to establish targets aligned with WHO guidelines for reducing air pollution and set out the pathway to achieving them by 2030. Significant funding should be allocated for scrappage schemes that provide support to those who need it to make the shift from polluting vehicles to cleaner transport modes.

Priority 12: Nature-based solutions can play a key role in addressing air pollution alongside creating more climate resilient and pleasant streets. **The UK government should work with local governments to set tree canopy cover targets for urban areas,** and establish more spaces in cities and towns where through traffic is limited and more room is provided to people and nature.

ACCELERATING ACCESS TO ELECTRIC VEHICLES AND ENSURING A FAIR DEAL FOR THOSE WHO NEED TO DRIVE

People cannot be defined by their mode of transport, be that ‘drivers’ or cyclists. Our transport system should offer freedom over how people travel. Those who have to drive are facing rising costs due to soaring insurance premiums and, as with other road users, want action to address dangerously poorly maintained roads. Those on low incomes currently have little prospect of being able to afford to make the shift to electric vehicles (EVs).

Priority 13: Central to getting EVs into the hands of more people is ensuring that those with the resources, including higher earners and organisations, are all buying new electric vehicles by the end of 2020s. To support this the next government must **reinstate the 2030 ban on the purchase of new internal combustion engine vehicles and realign the Zero Emission Vehicle mandate behind this.**

Priority 14: More can be done by government to get EVs into the hands of those driving the most and least able to afford to buy a new car.¹⁰ In the first instance, **those living on low incomes in rural areas with poor public transport provision should be supported to access EVs through an affordable social leasing scheme.**

Priority 15: Car insurance costs have never been so high (Confused 2023) and the government must act to curb these – addressing autorenivals, hidden fees and poor

⁸ Which provides access to a wide range of bikes, adapted cycles, e-bikes and cargo bikes with the level of support graded by income.

⁹ In 2021 the United Nations Human Rights Council passed a resolution in favour of the “human right to clean, healthy and sustainable environment”. The UK voted in favour of this resolution but has not yet acted on this right in a meaningful way.

¹⁰ See New Automotive 2024 for discussion of the importance of reducing the emissions associated with the most frequent drivers.

value of insurance products. The government can also help drivers by making roads safer and providing alternatives to driving that allow people to reduce their mileage. Car ownership in the UK is fuelled by debt (Haines-Doran 2023), in the form of Personal Contract Purchase (PCP), and the next UK government must **launch an urgent taskforce to address the risk PCPs create to financial stability and make recommendations on how to align car financing with social and environmental goals.**

Priority 16: The fuel duty freeze has gone on long enough. Between 2010/11–2023/24 the cumulative costs to the UK government has been £80 billion (OBR 2023) and led to higher emissions (Carbon Brief 2023). The freeze helps those on higher income more than those on the lowest incomes and puts just £13 a month back into the pockets of the median UK household (Salutin 2023). Public transport investment gives far better returns for people and is aligned with meeting wider social and environmental goals. The next UK government should **unfreeze fuel duty and establish a cross-party, independent commission on the future of motoring taxation backed by a citizens' jury to ensure it reflects the concerns of the British public.** This review should include identifying how car regulations and taxation should change to address the trend of ever-increasing car sizes.

ENSURE AVIATION IS DELIVERING ITS SHARE OF EMISSIONS REDUCTIONS

All parts of the transport sector should be playing their role in delivering near term emission savings. Due to the current UK government's unwillingness to engage the public in a conversation about the benefits and trade-offs of climate action, the aviation sector has been given a free pass on emissions savings in the 2020s and into the 2030s. Decisions on airport expansions are operating in a vacuum caused by a lack of national leadership.

Priority 17: In-line with the recommendations of the Environmental Audit Committee, the next UK government must **bring forward legislation to make good the commitment for aviation emissions to be considered within the scope of the sixth carbon budget** (Environmental Audit Committee 2023). A review of the Jet Zero strategy should be brought forward from 2027 to 2025 with policy proposals on demand reduction developed to support this. As per the Climate Change Committee's advice, no airport expansions should proceed until a UK-wide capacity management framework is in place (Climate Change Committee 2023).

Priority 18: The UK is responsible for more emissions from private jets than any other European country (Murphy and Simon 2021) yet those making these flights may be taxed less than a car driver making the same journey (Green Alliance 2023). The public back green taxes (Peake 2021) and higher taxes on private jet use would send a clear signal that those with fame, power and wealth are being made to pay their fair share and pushed to change their lifestyles. **The next UK government should introduce new private jet taxes, including both increased air passenger duty and a kerosene tax.**

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