



Transport Select Committee Inquiry into Effective Road and Traffic Management

Consultation Response

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Jonathan Bray

pteg Support Unit
Wellington House
40-50 Wellington Street
Leeds – LS1 2DE
0113 251 7445
info@pteg.net

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. **pteg** represents the six English Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs) which between them serve more than eleven million people in Tyne and Wear ('Nexus'), West Yorkshire ('Metro'), South Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside ('Merseytravel') and the West Midlands ('Centro'). The PTEs plan, procure, provide and promote public transport in some of Britain's largest city regions, with the aim of providing integrated public transport networks accessible to all. The PTEs are responsible to Integrated Transport Authorities (ITAs) made up of locally elected representatives of the areas served. Leicester City Council, Nottingham City Council, Transport for London (TfL) and Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) are associate members of **pteg**, though this response does not represent their views.
- 1.2. **pteg** welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Committee's inquiry into this important topic and would be willing to appear before the Select Committee, should the Committee wish us to expand on any of the points made in this response.

2. The role of public transport in alleviating road congestion

- 2.1. Effective public transport, which is able to move large numbers of people into and out of, and around, urban centres more cheaply and efficiently than private cars, is essential if congestion is not to thwart the economic recovery and future sustainable growth. Moreover, for the 33% of households in metropolitan areas who do not own a car¹, public transport also provides a vital connection to jobs, services and facilities.
- 2.2. Our analysis shows that public transport accounts for more than half of all morning peak trips into the largest city centres in England. If all these trips were to be made by car, traffic levels would double and cities would grind to a halt. Ensuring that public transport remains competitive relative to the private car along key radial corridors is therefore critical if we are to avoid congestion to spiral out of control in the future.

3. The extent of congestion in PTE areas and its impact on public transport

- 3.1. Data collected by the DfT since 2006 for the largest urban areas in England² shows that, with the exception of Tyne and Wear and Bristol, average speed (one measure of congestion) is substantially higher in London than in other large urban areas. In 2008-9, this indicator was 38% lower in Manchester, 27% lower in Merseyside and Leicester, and 17% lower in Nottingham, South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire.
- 3.2. This is not unrelated to the substantially higher levels of transport investment in London compared to other regions. In 2008/9, HMT estimated public spend on transport per head of population to be £641 in London and £287 in the North West. These figures also bust the myth that the most cost-effective transport interventions are all likely to be concentrated in London. Since it is likely to be easier to reduce congestion from a high than a lower level, there are likely to be a number of highly cost effective transport interventions to be made in large urban areas outside London.
- 3.3. But for public transport users congestion is no longer the only problem. Research by Passenger Focus and DfT shows that while punctuality and reliability are the priority for bus

¹ Source: DfT, NTS 2009

² Individual PTE annual monitoring reports

passengers these attributes now top the list of service factors that passengers are most dissatisfied with. As often stated by operators, reliability is also a key cost driver for the industry.

- 3.4. The attractiveness of bus and on-street rail networks is very much at threat from the sustained rise in congestion observed over the past few decades. But public transport also suffers more than general car traffic, in terms of reliability, from increases in congestion and poor traffic management.
- 3.5. This is due to the fact that:
 - bus routes are fixed and hence cannot easily avoid congestion hotspots;
 - traffic control systems are often optimised for average car speeds, and therefore out of sync with bus services which must stop to pick up and drop off passengers;
 - bus lanes are particularly prone to parking infringements and kerb side street works, which can greatly reduce their role in improving punctuality;
 - small schedule deviations can easily blow out of proportion and lead to severe bus bunching due to the accumulation of passengers at bus stops and the prevalence of on-board ticketing;
 - unlike for private car travel, waiting time at bus stops makes up a significant proportion of generalised cost for bus users. Given that waiting time is conventionally weighted at twice in-vehicle time, any increases in waiting time due to greater unreliability have a disproportionate, and typically under-valued, effect on the attractiveness of bus networks;
 - reliability (in the form of average deviation from scheduled times) is estimated to be valued three times more highly than in-vehicle time by bus passengers (Hollander, 2006). As a result, poor reliability severely undermines the attractiveness of bus networks and, in turn, contributes to further congestion.
- 3.6. So for public transport to be efficient, attractive and cost effective it must be fast, reliable, punctual and offer an all-round high quality service. Traffic congestion can badly impact on punctuality and discourage those people who have a choice to use the services. In turn, worsening public transport will lead to growing traffic congestion in what could risk becoming a self-reinforcing vicious circle. We would therefore argue that public transport should be an essential component of any strategy aiming to deliver more effective road and traffic management.

4. The role of PTEs in tackling congestion and improving the attractiveness of public transport

- 4.1. The PTEs play a key role in funding and promoting integrated and high quality local public transport networks in England's largest metropolitan areas. As the statutory body responsible for joint Local Transport Plans (LTPs), PTEs, in collaboration with their local authority partners, lead the way on investment in bus priority systems, such as bus lanes, bus gates and traffic signal control optimisation based on Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) systems.
- 4.2. But better infrastructure is not always the answer and the PTEs have also put significant resources into demand management measures such as school and workplace travel planning. We are also at the forefront in the provision of high quality public transport information. For example, South and West Yorkshire PTEs now run the most successful bus

real time mobile information system (Nextbus) in the UK, which receives tens of thousands of requests on a daily basis.

- 4.3. PTEs also play a major role in improving bus reliability through voluntary Performance Improvement Partnerships (PIPs), a mechanism which sets punctuality targets and involves a commitment on both the part of bus operators and transport authorities to increased reliability.
- 4.4. The PTEs' broad role and strategic overview mean that we are able to identify the most effective combination of measures for tackling a specific local problem. However, many key functions affecting public transport remain outside the responsibility of PTEs. These include the operation of public transport services, enforcement activities and direct responsibility for highway infrastructure. Although we strive to work effectively with our partners and other key stakeholders, governance arrangements have, in some cases, got in the way of effective delivery.
- 4.5. The 2008 Transport Act and 2009 Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act give urban areas the opportunity to review the way in which these transport responsibilities are governed and organised in Met areas in a way which meets local aspirations and circumstances.
- 4.6. By creating Mayors for the twelve largest Districts that don't already have them the new Government's Localism Bill will add a further dimension to debates around where transport and highways powers should lie in the city regions. These Mayors will be able to acquire additional powers via the Secretary of State. In the conurbations journey to work areas, traffic flows, highways and bus and tram routes cross District boundaries and we believe that it will continue to be important that there is a strategic oversight for these networks at a city region level.

5. Evidence on the impact of bus priority measures in tackling congestion

- 5.1. One of the areas where PTEs, in collaboration with their district partners, are particularly active is the provision of bus priority measures directly aimed at reducing congestion and improving reliability. The success and value of this type of measure is often underplayed by many stakeholders due to gaps in the evidence base. For that reason, we feel it is important to highlight the results of a recent and comprehensive review by the International Union of Public Transport (UiTP) (2009)³. This work has shown that signal priority systems, when well optimised for bus services, can achieve as much as a:
 - 9.5 second reduction in delay per bus per junction (Southampton);
 - 24% reduction in overall bus travel time (Toulouse);
 - 49% reduction in bus travel time variability (Sydney);
 - 42% increase in bus patronage (Zurich).
- 5.2. Evidence from five cities (Cardiff, Gothenburg, Portland, Seattle and Los Angeles) has also shown a negligible impact on delays for other traffic although this obviously depends on local circumstances and the degree of bus priority provided.

³ [http://www.tfl.gov.uk/assets/downloads/businessandpartners/interaction-of-buses-and-signals-at-road-crossings\(1\).pdf](http://www.tfl.gov.uk/assets/downloads/businessandpartners/interaction-of-buses-and-signals-at-road-crossings(1).pdf)

- 5.3. Overall, the UiTP work suggests that investment in traffic signal priority can be repaid in 3-16 months, which, assuming an asset life of 10 years, would give a benefit cost ratio between 7.5 and 40, which is extremely high by DfT standards.
- 5.4. This results are consistent with our own evidence. For example, an on-going PTE project costing £1m and aiming to operationalize GPS-activated bus signal priority at 100 junctions will be delivering an estimated £7m worth of benefits, mainly through reliability improvements.

6. The key role of demand management measures and the need for a broader approach to congestion reduction

- 6.1. Although it is often attractive, and may seem common sense, to target public funds at highly visible infrastructure measures these may not always represent the best value for money in tackling road congestion. Demand management measures and, in particular, what has come to be known as 'smarter choices' can prove to be more effective in reducing car use and hence congestion⁴. It is now commonly recognised that behavioural change tools are essential to complement capital improvements in order to achieve change.
- 6.2. For example, a trial of personalised travel planning in Merseyside has shown a 7% reduction in car use by participants. We have also found school and workplace travel plans to be a critical tool in managing peaked traffic flows around specific areas. However, pressures on local government budgets could potentially lead to the loss of funding for many of these revenue-intensive measures.
- 6.3. We welcome this government's initiative to set up the Local Sustainable Transport Fund, which can be used to fund both capital and revenue-based measures. However, this is a very limited and, potentially, short term funding pot. Our position is that in order to deliver the best value for money from all central government funding streams local authorities and PTEs need to have the flexibility to decide on the best mix of measures for their local areas, regardless of whether they are capital or revenue-based.

7. Threats to the funding and effectiveness of PTE initiatives

- 7.1. The contribution of PTEs to PIPs and LTPs typically relies on funding from the Integrated Transport Block (ITB), which has been cut by 50% in the coming year by the current government. Allied to a reduction in major schemes funding, and the withdrawal of the Urban Congestion Fund announced by the previous government, this is likely to severely curtail our ability to shield bus networks from rising congestion. At a time when government priorities seem to be to make the most of available capacity rather than to build new roads, this sort of short term thinking appears misguided and could backfire badly in the medium term. Although we applaud the creation of the Local Sustainable Transport Fund, this is unlikely to be sufficient either in magnitude or scope to make up for much of the loss of funding elsewhere.
- 7.2. Substantial central government funding reductions to police authorities and to local authorities in metropolitan local areas is also likely to have an impact on the effectiveness of existing public transport priority measures, given the role of these bodies in enforcement activity. Poorer enforcement (which may come as the result of revenue and staffing cuts)

⁴ http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/13130/1/CfIT_Value_for_Money_Goodwin_Final2_clean_May_2010.pdf

could negate many of the benefits of measures such as bus lanes, restricted access areas or banned turns.

- 7.3. One significant obstacle for gaining central government funding for larger public transport infrastructure schemes is the bias in the current appraisal framework towards car travel. One example of this is the lower value placed on work time spent on board a bus relative to that spent on a car. As a result, measures aimed at cutting car travel time will be assumed to have higher benefits than those aimed at cutting bus travel time, even if the time saving and number of journeys affected is the same. We would also argue that appraisal fails to adequately take into account that, alongside other measures, significant mode shift will need to take place if overarching climate change goals are to be achieved.
- 7.4. We understand the DfT is currently re-assessing the appraisal framework and would therefore call for the bias against bus schemes to be removed. But given the important role of public transport and demand management measures in reducing congestion we feel the DfT and government need to have a more fundamental look at how funding is allocated at a strategic level. For example, it makes little sense to cut the ITB in half and leave the Highways Agency (HA) budget virtually untouched by comparison. Should demand for car travel in urban areas begin to grow again as it has done in the past, there will be little the HA will be able to do to keep congestion under control

8. Wider operational and governance challenges and opportunities

- 8.1. A number of significant governance challenges remain in relation to the way in which the monitoring and enforcement of bus performance is currently organised and managed.
- 8.2. Although it is clear from some of the evidence quoted above that there are measures which are known to work, substantial challenges remain in understanding what is likely to work best in addressing the causes of bus punctuality and reliability in a given setting.
- 8.3. These include:
 - A lack of resource for the English Traffic Commissioners for monitoring bus performance via VOSA monitoring officers. This problem was highlighted on numerous occasions in previous, and the latest annual, report of the Traffic Commissioners (TCs) . For example Nick Jones is TC for both the West Midlands and for Wales and in the current annual report he states: *'The Welsh Assembly Government has funded additional bus compliance officers and this allows most operators to be monitored more effectively and regularly. This, in turn, has led to remarkable levels of compliance which are far better than those seen in England. The Welsh Assembly Government deserves the credit for this as its funding has enabled effective liaison between the monitors and operators. Within England it is often claimed that it is difficult to run to time in a busy city or in difficult mountainous terrain – results in Wales show that that this is not the case. I often receive reports of compliance in excess of the 95 per target set by traffic commissioners.'*
 - A lack of ready access by all interested parties to the Real Time Information (RTI) data which is the best source of information for identifying the causes of bus punctuality and reliability problems;
 - The DfT's Punctuality Improvement Partnerships (PIPs) initiative, although valuable, has had a patchy impact hitherto (although we understand the current Government plans to refresh and relaunch it);

- There is a disconnect between the informal processes for addressing punctuality problems (including PIPs) and the formal process (via the Traffic Commissioners);
- Although there are some excellent examples of good practice (such as South Yorkshire's Public Transport Board, which brings together key stakeholders to facilitate shared objectives and partnership working) relationships between the key players in improving performance (public transport authorities, highways authorities, Traffic Commissioners, Passenger Focus and operators) are not always well developed and can be subject to mistrust and a blame culture;
- The powers and responsibilities of the different key players on performance monitoring and enforcement are complex and have developed in an incremental way (creating a series of anomalies).

8.4. We believe that better progress could be made if:

- The PIP initiative were to be reviewed, strengthened and re-launched (something we understand the DfT is looking at) and there was a more structured relationship between these non-statutory processes and the TC's statutory process;
- A joint review (led by Passenger Focus) should be undertaken of a sample of routes (with a wide range of characteristics) of the causes of performance issues to allow for a more informed debate on what are the causes and remedies for bus performance issues;
- Traffic Commissioners and Passenger Focus had access to the Real Time Information in order that they can make a more informed assessment of performance issues and to better focus any investigative or enforcement activity.