



ADVANCING
PUBLIC
TRANSPORT



▶ EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TRANSPORT AUTHORITIES FOR METROPOLITAN AREAS

THE BENEFITS AND OPTIONS IN TIMES OF CHANGE



WHY A METROPOLITAN TRANSPORT AUTHORITY?

Metropolitan areas are the drivers of national economies and the places where the battle to limit damaging climate change will need to be fought and won. If they are to play that role in a way which is also equitable then they will need public transport systems (given resources will always be finite) where the right choices and trade-offs have been made on where services are run and on how those services are developed.

A metropolitan area transport authority is well placed to do this because it can map the services it provides onto functional journey to work patterns as well as wider social, economic and cultural geographies. It can establish the transport planning capacity to put in place a long-term plan for the development of public transport which gives greater certainty and allows for more cost-effective planning and delivery of individual policies and projects. It can also develop the capacity, expertise and reputation in ways that enable it to bring together different funding streams to fund those plans in a sustainable way.

KEY CORE ROLES FOR A METROPOLITAN TRANSPORT AUTHORITY

They can plan and fund public transport by ensuring:

- ▶ There is the market research and transport planning capacity to enable informed and rational decisions about how best to target available revenue and capital funding across its territory and across the modes in the short, medium and longer term
- ▶ There is a framework for the way in which new mobility formats, or existing informal mobility formats, operate
- ▶ They blend together a variety of different funding streams which may be generated in different ways across the areas they serve.

They can integrate public transport networks by ensuring:

- ▶ Integrated ticketing across public transport networks (by operator or mode or both) in a way which makes public transport use simple and easy and therefore more attractive

- ▶ That public transport services coordinate, rather than duplicate each other, and that each mode plays to its strengths
- ▶ Consistency in the quality of public transport networks via setting high standards either through contracts, regulation or direct operation
- ▶ Common branding and signage to make the network as a whole easier to understand and use
- ▶ Passengers are kept informed about how services are running
- ▶ A coordinated response to service disruption



WIDER ROLES AND BENEFITS

Transport authorities can play a role that goes beyond the provision of public transport and can extend into other types of transport (such as active travel, freight and taxis) allowing for more integrated approaches and outcomes including on allocation of road space, information provision and relative costs and charges for use of different modes. All of which in turn can be used to promote modal shift and, in some cases, generate income for public transport.

They can help make better places by playing their part in ensuring that land use and economic development is coordinated with transport planning. They can contribute to the wider cultural life of the city and reflect and enhance the identity of the place they serve. They can drive innovation and act entrepreneurially. At their best, they enter a virtuous cycle where success breeds success; they attract and retain talent, and the respect they have earned for their competence and capabilities in turn attracts further investment. This also puts them in a good position to seize the moment when the opportunity opens up for step changes in ambitions for public transport (for example, a Mayor with a strong mandate for public transport transformation or there is a window for a radical reorientation of policy on road space).

GREENER, FAIRER AND HEALTHIER PLACES

The core business of a transport authority is to promote and encourage greater use of public transport – which in itself is vital to the wider goal of decarbonising metropolitan areas. At the same time, they can also make public transport greener and cleaner through investing in low and zero emission public transport fleets and the supporting green energy infrastructure, as well as looking for opportunities to improve the climate resilience of the places they serve.

Transport authorities have a wider role in serving the public interest and supporting broader social goals. They can do this through seeking to provide good jobs and reflecting the diversity of the areas they serve in their workforce and by providing services which meet the needs of all communities in their territories in a way that is fair and appropriate.

They can make a key contribution to wider public health goals by reducing death and injuries on the roads, by tackling poor air quality through investing in their fleets and promoting modal shift, and by providing access to healthcare facilities.



THEIR SCOPE AND SCALE

The three key aspects of a metropolitan transport authority are:

- the area it will cover (and how any overlap or boundary issues with neighbouring areas will be managed)
- its legal status, powers, responsibilities, governance structures and accountability
- how it will be funded and what responsibilities it will have for its own funding.

In its 2013 report (Institutional Labyrinth: Designing a way out for improving urban transport services)¹, the World Bank made the case for a maximalist approach to

the powers that a transport authority should have, arguing that:

“It is important to provide a financial structure through which a lead institution can carry its own weight vis-à-vis other ministries and agencies. It should be able to pay for what it needs, and it should be the only channel for funds needed for urban transport. Its sources of funding must be clearly identified and secured.”

And that: “Lead institutions tend to succeed when they have strong external support, are provided the required manpower and internal financial capacity to live up to their mandate, and prove themselves able to deliver public value.”

TRANSITIONING

When contemplating a transition to a more fully empowered metropolitan area transport authority, issues to consider include:

- without the highest level of political commitment, a rapid transition is unlikely
- where such high-level political commitment is not in place, achieving consent for such a transition across a metropolitan area can take time and might require a patient stepping stone approach over a period of time. This can include taking responsibility for roles which no existing institution was responsible for or roles which other institutions in practice are willing to shed
- playing a wider and key role in establishing interlinked long term strategic plans for transport, land use, carbon reduction and economic development can also be a sound foundation
- existing institutions can be resistant to giving up their own powers, positions and roles so thought needs to be given to how different cultures, pay scales and practices are harmonized and transitioned
- at the same time, to succeed, a transport authority will need to attract and retain the talent that can get things done on the ground in a way that creates confidence in the new institution.



¹ [UrbanTransportInstitutionalLabyrinth.pdf \(worldbank.org\)](https://www.worldbank.org/UrbanTransportInstitutionalLabyrinth.pdf)

CONCLUSION

Round the world transport authorities in all their different guises have kept metropolitan areas moving day-in and day-out whilst at the same time always looking to the future as to how they can improve the service they provide and how they can manage the constant churn of social, economic and environmental change. In doing this they seek to serve the wider public interest whilst making difficult choices as to what priorities to pursue and how they are to be funded. They have been there for the places they serve in the most difficult of circumstances (from pandemics to natural disasters), they have kept public transport going when mass private vehicle use has been politically favoured, and when the tide has turned they have been ready to grow and expand public transport.

Transport authorities have been able to skilfully respond to these challenges through policy innovation, attracting and retaining talent and skills and developing corporate capacity and memory. Through this they have been able to earn trust, blend funding sources and be in a position to move quickly when wider politics or circumstances open up to expand sustainable transport provision at pace and scale. At their best they have also become a respected symbol for the places they serve, enhancing the metropolitan area's allure and providing wider civic and commercial leadership.

But Metropolitan areas are constantly in flux and we now live in an era where the wider challenges that they face are becoming increasingly complex and cross-sectoral in nature. Challenges like:

- making timely decisions on how best to reduce carbon emissions whilst improving climate resilience
- realising the consumer benefits of new technologies, new mobility formats and business models whilst at the same time protecting the wider public interest
- balancing the need to improve the quality of places whilst still providing transport to those places
- ensuring that governance reflects the full diversity of the places it serves in the way it works and the decisions it takes

Based on their achievements already and the complex challenges that twenty-first century metropolitan areas face, the case for transport authorities for metropolitan areas is stronger than ever.

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