



UK Transport Governance - an introduction

Briefing

How does transport work in the metropolitan areas?

The six largest conurbations outside London are known as the metropolitan areas (Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, South Yorkshire, Tyne and Wear, the West Midlands and West Yorkshire). Their combined population is over eleven million people. Five of the six metropolitan areas have a Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA). Tyne and Wear has a Mayoral Combined Authority for north of the Tyne and a Combined Authority for south of the Tyne. Outside of the metropolitan areas, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Tees Valley and West of England are also Mayoral combined authorities.

The responsibilities of MCAs in relation to transport and other key policy areas will vary depending on how the post was established in statute. The role of the directly elected Mayor in a MCA is not the same as the well-known London Mayoral model in that London has a directly elected assembly whereas outside London the Mayor works with District Councils under a Combined Authority. Combined Authority Mayors are also different from directly elected Mayors of District Councils like those in Liverpool, Bristol and Leicester.

On transport, District Councils remain the Highways Authorities (although in some areas more responsibilities are moving up to the MCA level) and prior to MCAs being established all the metropolitan areas had a Passenger Transport Executive (PTE) which, as the local transport authorities, were responsible for key aspects of public transport planning and delivery including:

- Contributing to the planning of local rail services (in partnership with the DfT and/or regional entities like Transport for the North);
- Planning and funding socially necessary bus routes;
- Working in partnership with private operators to improve bus services - for example through bus priority schemes;
- Running concessionary travel schemes for older, disabled and young people;
- Developing, investing and promoting new public transport schemes—like new stations, light rail and guided bus networks;
- Providing impartial and comprehensive public transport information services through a range of media; and
- Managing and maintaining bus interchanges, bus stops and shelters.

In three of the six areas, the PTE has been abolished (West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire and West Midlands) and absorbed within the MCA. In Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region the PTE is responsible to the MCA. In Tyne and Wear the PTE is responsible to the North East Joint Transport Committee.

All PTEs, and former PTEs, have a brand name – Transport for West Midlands (West Midlands), Merseytravel (Liverpool City Region), Metro (West Yorkshire), Transport for Greater Manchester (Greater Manchester), Nexus (Tyne and Wear), Travel South Yorkshire (South Yorkshire)



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Could more MCAs or PTEs be created?

Yes. Existing legislation allows any group of local authorities to apply to the Secretary of State to create new MCAs or PTEs. Existing MCAs and PTEs can also expand to take in neighbouring Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) if all the LTAs concerned so wish and if the Secretary of State approves.

What do Shires, Counties and Districts do on transport?

In England (outside the metropolitan areas and London), the Local Transport Authority (LTA) is either the Unitary Authority or the County Council for that area. More urban areas tend to have a single ('unitary') authority whilst more rural areas are often two-tier authorities with both a County Council and a District Council. In these two-tier areas, the County Council is responsible for transport.

In either case, as an LTA, the Council is responsible for transport planning, passenger transport and highways.

What about LEPs?

A Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) is a voluntary partnership between local authorities and businesses. These were set up after the 2010 election to help determine local economic priorities and lead economic growth and job creation within local areas.

What are Transport for the North and Midlands Connect?

Sub-national transport bodies (STBs) aim to transform strategic transport links across their respective areas, providing the infrastructure needed to drive economic growth and are partnerships of elected and business leaders which work with central government and national transport bodies.

On 1st April 2018, Transport for the North became England's first STB and is the only statutory STB.

The following STBs are now in place: England's Economic Heartland, Midlands Connect, Transport East, Transport for the South East, Western Gateway, Peninsular Transport.

Who is in charge of bus services outside London?

Outside London, buses are a free market meaning that anyone (subject to minimum safety and operating standards) can start up a bus service. In this environment, bus operators are free to run whatever services they like as well as decide the fares they will charge and the vehicles they will use. Although in theory, it is a competitive market, in reality, most bus services are provided by five large companies who rarely compete against each other (Arriva, First, Go-Ahead, National Express and Stagecoach). LTAs are only allowed to support bus services where no commercial service has been provided. They do this through tendering those services, with the private sector competing to provide them. About 20% of bus services outside London are provided in this way.



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In a limited number of areas (all outside the metropolitan areas) local transport authorities still own bus companies (known as ‘municipals’). This includes Reading, Warrington and Nottingham. However, these municipal companies still operate in the same deregulated free market as elsewhere outside London.

Outside of provision of bus services, LTAs support bus services in other ways including:

- Information on, and promotion of, services;
- Concessionary fares and multi-modal ticketing;
- Developing and maintaining bus stops, shelters and interchanges.

The extent to which LTAs undertake all these activities varies – with PTEs at one end of the spectrum and smaller rural counties at the other end.

Who is in charge of rail services outside London?

Rail infrastructure

Rail infrastructure is the responsibility of Network Rail (Network Rail is a public company, answerable to Government via the Department for Transport). Network Rail owns, operates, maintains and develops tracks, signals, tunnels, level crossings and viaducts on the network. They also own the stations and operate 20 of the most significant rail interchanges. Network Rail’s funding is provided by the Department for Transport and is determined by a complex process based on five year funding and investment cycles. Network Rail is overseen by the Office of Rail and Road, the independent economic and safety regulator for the railways.

Passenger train services

Passenger train services are managed and operated by Train Operating Companies (TOCs), usually under regional franchises awarded by DfT. The franchises specify which passenger services are to be run, the quality and other conditions such as station facilities, the cleanliness of trains and reliability. Over time more devolution has been introduced to this system with:

- Merseyrail Electrics now franchised by Merseytravel;
- A network of urban services (‘London Overground’) in London franchised by Transport for London;
- Scottish rail services franchised by Transport Scotland which is responsible to the Scottish Government;
- Northern and Trans-Pennine services franchised by Transport for the North (on behalf of a consortia of local authorities in the North of England) and DfT;
- West Midlands Trains franchised by the West Midlands Rail Executive (a consortia of local authorities in the West Midlands) and DfT
- Wales and Borders rail services franchised by Transport for Wales which is responsible to the Welsh Government.

In addition to the arrangements above, TOCs are able to bid for ‘slots’ – specific parts of the National Rail timetable – to operate their own services on a commercial basis outside the franchising system. These are known as ‘open access operators’. The scale of the services provided by open access operators is very limited.



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Rail freight

Rail freight is a free market – with the largest operators being EWS (owned by DB, the German state railway) and Freightliner. All are open access operators which means that each can bid to run services on any part of the network.

Who is in charge of the roads in England?

Highways England (a Government Corporation) is the authority for trunk roads and motorways. Local Highway Authorities are responsible for all other roads. In the metropolitan areas the Highway Authorities are the responsibility of district councils although in some areas more responsibilities are now moving up to the Combined Authority level. Outside of the metropolitan areas the Highway Authority is either the unitary authority or the county council (where there is no unitary authority).

How do things work in London?

In London, Transport for London plans, provides and procures the majority of public transport services (the main exception being most of the heavy rail services that come into London). It is also responsible for the majority of the main highway network as well as the overarching transport strategy for London and the delivery of major schemes. District Councils are responsible for local roads. Transport for London is responsible to the Mayor of London and accountable to the Greater London Assembly.

How do things work in Scotland?

Transport Scotland (an agency of the Scottish Government) is responsible for overall Scottish Transport policy as well as major roads, the rail network and ferries. Regional transport partnerships (RTPs) were established on 1 December 2005 to strengthen the planning and delivery of regional transport so that it better serves the needs of people and businesses. One of these is the former Strathclyde PTE. Bus services are deregulated as in England and local highways are the responsibility of local councils.

How do things work in Northern Ireland?

The highways network is the responsibility of Transport NI which is a business unit within the Department for Regional Development. All rail and bus services are provided by Translink (which is a Government owned corporation).

How do things work in Wales?

The Welsh Government is the franchising authority for the Wales and Borders franchise and responsible for Motorway and Trunk Roads. Local highways are the responsibility of local councils. Bus services are deregulated.

Q. How can I find out more?

Keep up to date with UK Transport Governance arrangements at our online resources centre (www.urbantransportgroup.org/resources/governance)

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