



# URBAN TRANSPORT GROUP

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Consultation response

## Urban Congestion

Transport Select Committee

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Urban Transport Group (UTG) represents the seven largest city region strategic transport bodies in England, which, between them, serve over twenty million people in Greater Manchester (Transport for Greater Manchester), London (Transport for London), the Liverpool City Region (Merseytravel), the North East (North East Combined Authority), the Sheffield City Region (South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive), the West Midlands (Transport for West Midlands) and West Yorkshire (West Yorkshire Combined Authority).

## 2. Response

### Decisions on local traffic congestion are best taken locally

- 2.1. It is our contention that decisions on how best to respond to urban traffic congestion are best taken locally and that there is no one-size fits all template that should be applied nationally.
- 2.2. This is because:
  - The nature and extent of congestion varies both between and within urban areas (both spatially and temporally). Indeed in some areas congestion is limited because of relatively low levels of economic activity and it is stimulating that economic activity which is more of a priority for the local authority concerned.
  - Local transport authorities are best placed to understand the full range of factors that are contributing to congestion and the interplay between traffic congestion and economic and development plans; air quality plans; and the views of stakeholders.
  - Local democracy (in particular the Government's preferred format of city region mayors) means that voters' views on local transport and traffic issues are likely to be a factor in the election of Mayoral candidates and their subsequent policies.
- 2.3. Having said this, across the city regions the momentum is towards more focused, city-region wide and integrated approaches to transport planning through the creation of the Mayor in London, Combined Authorities elsewhere, and Mayoral Combined Authorities now being introduced in a number of areas. Where decision-making lies within each area varies, however one of the core purposes of moves towards more strategic and focused governance formats was to bring about a more effective and holistic approach to transport planning and policy and to forge clearer links between transport planning and economic and land use planning. The advantages of more cohesive governance for a city region can be seen in the Mayor of London's recent announcement of a package of measures to combat congestion.
- 2.4. Above the city region level of governance we have also seen the establishment of new pan-regional bodies, in particular Transport for the North and Midlands Connect, which have a remit of bringing a more coordinated approach to the planning of links between the city regions.
- 2.5. We believe there is also a need for the key national transport agencies (chiefly Network Rail and Highways England) to map onto a devolving England to ensure that their plans reflect city region priorities at both an operational and a strategic level. So for example, most traffic on the Highways England network has an origin and destination on the sub-national highways network. Clearly therefore, the consequences of decisions on the national highway



network have profound implications for the exacerbation or alleviation of congestion on the sub-national highway network. We believe there is more that can be done to ensure that Highways England strategic decisions on road capacity and operational measures (such as driver information systems) are taken in consort with sub-national bodies rather than in isolation from them.

- 2.6. Similarly, we made a strong case for a Northern Route for Network Rail so that this would map onto the priorities of the city regions, as well as Transport for the North, in a way that Network Rail has hitherto failed to do in a consistent or efficient way. The extensive delays to the introduction of tram-train in South Yorkshire is one example of the way in which key priorities for urban transport strategies are not given the same priority by Network Rail.

### **Funding for local transport authorities to tackle congestion**

- 2.7. Availability of capital funding for local transport authorities to tackle congestion problems fluctuates and there is a strong case to put capital spending on local transport on a more stable long term footing. Long term funding certainty allows a considered approach to ranking and delivering priorities; it means that business and investors in city regions can plan ahead with more confidence; it allows expertise and capability in the planning and delivery of schemes to be built up and retained; and it reduces the inefficiencies inherent in oscillating between 'feast or famine' for contractors and suppliers.
- 2.8. The greater certainty that has been brought to national rail and road spending through five year funding periods and investment programmes is welcome, as is the creation of the National Infrastructure Commission. However, funding for local transport capital spending has proved less stable and more subject to year-on-year fluctuation as well as block grants increasingly being replaced by competition funding.
- 2.9. At the same time revenue spending on local transport has seen deep cuts with the prospect of more to come. Revenue spending is needed in particular for bus services (which are less capital dependent than rail). The bus is the main form of public transport, and as set out below, can be an effective tool in reducing congestion for all road users. Revenue support is also important for local rail services which can also help relieve congestion on the roads. In addition, revenue funding also pays for the planners and staff that develop and implement the capital programmes which can help tackle congestion.
- 2.10. Finally, the proliferation of competition funding creates additional pressures on declining resource funding in terms of uncertainty around when such funding competitions will emerge, what they will cover, and whether or not a local authority's bid will be successful. Bidding for grant funding has a non-negligible cost (which we estimate could amount to up to 1.8% of total costs for a £5 million scheme), and creates unpredictable peaks and troughs in workloads which are difficult to plan for efficiently.

### **The nature and effect of congestion in large urban areas**

- 2.11. A study by the Centre for Economics and Business Research (Cebr)<sup>1</sup>, recently quoted by the Treasury, found that, in 2013, congestion cost the UK economy £20.5 billion, or the equivalent of 0.7% of GDP. Around 60% of this cost falls on households through increased

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.cebr.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/INRIX\\_costs-of-congestion\\_Cebr-report\\_v5\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.cebr.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/INRIX_costs-of-congestion_Cebr-report_v5_FINAL.pdf)



fuel consumption and wasted time with the remainder falling on businesses, leading to higher prices.

- 2.12. Congestion is most severe on local roads. Statistics from the Department for Transport show that average traffic delay is eight times greater on English Local Authority 'A' roads in urban areas than on the Strategic Road Network (SRN) operated by Highways England (see table one). The data also show that average delay on Local Authority urban roads increased by 4% over the previous year (information is not available for the SRN).

**Table one: Average delay, year ending June 2016<sup>2</sup>**

Road type	Average delay (seconds per vehicle mile)
Local Authority urban A roads	75.0
Local Authority rural A roads	20.0
Strategic Road Network	9.0

- 2.13. Congestion also tends to be worse in urban areas as shown in table two. But the figures also show that this phenomenon does not follow a simple rule. Slough, on the western fringe of London, has some of the lowest vehicle speeds in the country. In contrast, Thurrock, with a similar population and just the other side of London, has some of the highest traffic speeds in the country. Traffic speeds do not necessarily always equate to levels of congestion as other factors are at play, however it is still an indicator that levels of congestion depend on a complex range of local factors.
- 2.14. This reinforces our earlier overarching point that urban congestion, and transport problems more generally, can be best tackled by empowering transport authorities to target available funding in the most effective way.

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<sup>2</sup> DfT tables CGN0502 and CGN0402



**Table two: Average vehicle speeds (flow-weighted) during the weekday morning peak on locally managed 'A' roads: ten least and most congested local authority areas in England, 2013/14<sup>3</sup>**

10 lowest average traffic speeds			10 highest average traffic speeds	
Area	Average speed (miles per hour)		Area	Average speed (miles per hour)
1 Inner London	12.3	1	Rutland	40.7
2 Reading	13.6	2	Telford & Wrekin	38.7
3 Bristol	14.5	3	<b>Thurrock</b>	<b>36.6</b>
4 <b>Slough</b>	<b>15.3</b>	4	Northumberland	36.6
5 Manchester	15.4	5	Peterborough	36.2
6 Nottingham	15.6	6	Redcar & Cleveland	35.8
7 Southampton	15.9	7	North Lincolnshire	35.7
8 Leicester	16.1	8	Shropshire	35.6
9 Tameside (G Manchester)	16.3	9	Lincolnshire	35.5
10 Brighton & Hove	16.4	10	Dorset	35.0

- 2.15. Congestion imposes costs on businesses, can contribute to higher levels of air pollution and also makes urban areas less attractive places to be. At the same time, one of the biggest drivers of transport policy for city centres is now place-making. In order to make cities more attractive, cleaner and liveable places there are moves to reduce the volume of road space - either through full or partial pedestrianisation – or through other schemes to improve the urban realm. This trend is part of a wider recognition that transport not only links places but also helps determine the nature of those places which in turn has a bearing on whether or not a place is somewhere where people want to live, visit, work or invest.
- 2.16. This is reflected in recent moves by TfL to establish a typology of the road network<sup>4</sup>. This typology rates roads in terms of both their importance for movement and their importance as a place (in recognition of the key role that roads play in the civic and commercial life of the city). Three tiers are used to understand the relative balance of movement and place at a location: with movement highlighting routes which carry people and goods; whilst place identifies on-street locations which actively attract people. The typology is not used to determine the form or quality of the road but illustrates consensus on current function, a critical step in understanding the amount of change needed when planning for the future.
- 2.17. As there are moves towards reducing the available space for vehicles, the competing demands for volume and priority on that declining road space become more intense and the trade-offs potentially more acute. The different sectors that are competing for road space include active travel, cars, freight and logistics, buses, taxis and tram systems.

<sup>3</sup> DfT table CGN0201a

<sup>4</sup> Roads Task Force, 2013, <http://content.tfl.gov.uk/rtf-report-executive-summary.pdf>



### Some of the issues around competing demands for road space

#### *Buses*

- 2.18. The bus can be a very effective means of making effective use of available road space as it can move large volumes of people in a single vehicle. In doing so it can also attract users from the private car thus also alleviating congestion. Schemes which give the bus priority can also be highly effective through speeding up bus journey times and, by making them more reliable, bus services become cheaper to provide and attract higher ridership.
- 2.19. In a 2014 report for Greener Journeys, KPMG estimated that bus priority schemes can typically generate £3.32 of benefits for every £1 invested by Government<sup>5</sup>. This represents excellent value for money, compares well with other forms of urban transport investment, and scores more highly than many much larger transport infrastructure projects. Bus priority schemes are also cheaper to build and maintain, and quicker to implement, than many traditional transport infrastructure schemes.
- 2.20. It is important to note too that although bus priority is usually thought of as bus lanes there are other measures that sit alongside bus lanes or in isolation that can also be effective. This includes bus gates and traffic signal priority. For example in Hazel Grove, Manchester, a traffic signal priority scheme has reduced bus journey times by three minutes and journey time variability by 50%, while cutting congestion levels for all traffic by 75%<sup>6</sup>. Bus priority schemes can also be designed as part of much wider street works designed to improve the urban realm, provide for better parking, drop-off and delivery as well as safer and more attractive conditions for pedestrians and cyclists.

#### *Street running modern trams*

- 2.21. Modern tram schemes have a sense of permanence and give a 'buzz' to the places they serve, creating a climate for regeneration, confidence and business growth. They are attractive and popular, enticing people to leave their cars at home - typically at least one in five peak hour travellers on trams in the UK formerly commuted by car. Street running tram systems also provide an opportunity to renew the urban realm on the streets they serve as well as for wider reorganisation of the road space. Initial findings from an evaluation of the Manchester Metrolink Phase 3 expansion indicates that a quarter of all trips on the new extensions would have been made by car if the option of travelling by tram had not been available.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Active travel (walking and cycling)*

- 2.22. In England, only 1% of trips shorter than 2.5 km are currently made by bike, which compares to 37% in the Netherlands, 27% in Denmark and 14% in Germany. However in England, 30% of trips made in cities are shorter than 2.5km, showing the potential scope for an increase in the level of cycling<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Greener Journeys, 2014, <http://www.greenerjourneys.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Bus-infrastructure-report-June-2014.pdf><http://www.greenerjourneys.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Bus-2020.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.buspartnership.com/index.php?fuseaction=statutory.a6-hazel-grove-to-manchester-corridor>

<sup>7</sup> TfGM, 2016, [https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/1004/22\\_metrolink\\_evaluation\\_report](https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/1004/22_metrolink_evaluation_report)

<sup>8</sup> Pucher and Buehler, 2008, City Cycling



- 2.23. This reflects the fact that walking and cycling offer an efficient means of transport in their own right. Measures that promote active travel can move large numbers of people in a small amount of space; rely on cheap infrastructure; and, in the right conditions, offer very competitive journey times.
- 2.24. Active modes can therefore play a key accessibility role in dense urban areas, by linking workers and households to a wider range of jobs and other opportunities; by allowing firms to cluster more densely together; and by cutting the time and money cost of moving people and goods around. By enabling urban areas to grow in a more sustainable way, higher levels of walking and cycling can also help make them more attractive and pleasant places to live in, in turn generating further growth. Enhanced city centre environments have been associated with as much as a 40% uplift in retail takings<sup>9</sup>.

### *Freight and logistics*

- 2.25. The freight and logistics sector contributes £100bn to the UK economy and employs 1 in 12 of the country's working people, delivering everything from the food in our supermarkets to the medicines in our hospitals, with cities frequently the ultimate destination for consignments<sup>10</sup>. At the same time, road freight can contribute to poor air quality, congestion, road danger and unattractive urban streets and spaces.
- 2.26. We have made the case in our 2015 'Delivering the Future' position statement for shifting long haul freight to rail and water where possible and ensuring last mile deliveries are made by low impact modes (such as low or zero emission vans and cycle logistics). There is also the potential for greater consolidation and efficiencies in logistics. Although modern logistics may be commercially extremely efficient it is not necessarily efficient in use of road space as vehicles are not fully utilised or are larger than they need to be for the actual loads being carried. The rapid increase in internet shopping and offers to consumers of ever quicker delivery times are exacerbating these trends.
- 2.27. Since 2000, vehicle miles by light vans has increased by 45%<sup>11</sup>. This compares to an increase of 6% for cars over the same time period. Policy responses to these challenges include encouraging retiming of freight deliveries; using planning, building, contracting and development policy to build in requirements on effective, safe, clean and efficient freight and delivery policies; and the potential for urban consolidation centres (where freight is long hauled into a single distribution centre for onward delivery into an urban core through appropriate vehicles which are efficiently utilised).

### **Potential of transformative technological change**

- 2.28. Transformative technological change offers the opportunity to make transport users far more informed about the available options (including alternatives to the car); to improve operational management of the highway network; and to plan future schemes more effectively and efficiently. For example, it can provide car drivers with information about congestion and alternative options as well as providing people more generally with a full range of information about all the travel options for a potential journey with costs / ticketing

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<sup>9</sup> Living Streets, 2014, [https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/media/1391/pedestrianpound\\_fullreport\\_web.pdf](https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/media/1391/pedestrianpound_fullreport_web.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> pteg, 2015, <http://www.urbantransportgroup.org/system/files/general-docs/Delivering%20the%20future%20FINAL%202015.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> DfT statistics table TRA0101.



options via what is now known as Mobility as a Service. By showing other alternatives to the use of congested highway capacity by single occupancy private vehicles it can also serve to attract people to make journeys in other ways or re-time those journeys in a way which assists in alleviating congestion.

- 2.29. Connected and autonomous vehicles offer the potential for a graduated move towards vehicles that can make more efficient use of available road space. The argument being that connected and autonomous vehicles will be more efficient travelling through junctions as vehicles communicate with each other instantly about which vehicle should turn next. They will be able to drive much closer to other vehicles on the road. They will also be able to accelerate and decelerate more quickly and safely. In addition if connected and autonomous vehicles are part of a wider move from ownership to shared use it is argued that more efficient use will be made of every vehicle and the need for space for vehicle parking could be dramatically reduced.
- 2.30. At the same time there are circumstances whereby transformative technological change can have negative impacts on congestion. For example the rapid rise of Uber in some cities can lead to greater congestion as the low cost for users attracts patronage from bus services or through drivers cruising in areas where potential demand may be high (for example in the environs of airports). Similar issues could arise if autonomous vehicles become widespread if these vehicles spend time cruising empty awaiting their next use by their owners or on a shared basis. It should also be borne in mind that, whether autonomous or not, urban place makers are seeking to reduce space for vehicles of any sort in order to create more attractive and liveable urban centres.

### **Fiscal measures**

- 2.31. As well as physical measures in relation to the extent and allocation of road space there are a range of fiscal measures that could be taken at either a national or local level which could influence the extent and nature of traffic congestion. These include:
- Parking policies (availability and pricing);
  - Road user charging;
  - Taxation of purchase and use of private vehicles;
  - Cost, quality and availability of public transport;
  - Tax incentives (such as those that affect the cost of using a particular mode).
- 2.32. We would argue that:
- The Government's fiscal policies on transport should relate to wider policies on reducing congestion, supporting local economies, improving air quality and delivering on their aims for growth in active travel;
  - That local transport authorities are best placed to determine which of the tools available to them would be appropriate given local circumstances and priorities and the outcomes of the local democratic process.



### Other issues

#### *Full implementation of the Traffic Management Act*

- 2.33. Some traffic offences are decriminalised to allow for civil enforcement by local authorities. These powers are generally provided under the Traffic Management Act 2004 (TMA). Part 6 of the act covers a number of these, including moving traffic offences. Under Part 6 local authorities can apply for powers to take on further enforcement themselves, rather than relying on the police. However, unlike other offences covered under Part 6, like parking and bus lane contraventions, the provisions relating to moving traffic offences have not been activated as the necessary secondary legislation has never been passed. These would grant local authorities powers to enforce – and issue penalty charges for – offences such as disregarding one-way systems, failing to give priority to ongoing traffic, or disregarding box junction markings. These powers are in place in London under separate legislation and the Welsh Government has passed the secondary legislation covering its jurisdiction<sup>12</sup>.
- 2.34. Elsewhere, moving traffic offences are enforced by the police, however, the Local Government Association claims that in practice the police have ‘largely ceased to enforce moving traffic offences’<sup>13</sup>.
- 2.35. As well as the safety benefits of effective enforcement, evidence suggests that activating these provisions would reduce congestion, thereby improving traffic flow and air quality. When the provisions were initially piloted in London, ‘traffic flow was increased in a six month period by 73% at those junctions enforced.’<sup>14</sup>
- 2.36. The House of Commons Transport Select Committee concluded in its 2016 report that *‘Granting local authorities the power to enforce against moving traffic offences makes sense, it allows enforcement to take place even where roads police numbers are in decline and it provides valuable local accountability. We see little evidence to support the Department’s position that there is little support for this... We repeat the previous Transport Committee’s recommendation that Part 6 of the Traffic Management Act 2004 be commenced’*<sup>15</sup>.

#### *Street management issues*

- 2.37. Poorly managed street works have considerable potential to cause or exacerbate congestion problems. To this end we support the LGA’s call for all local authorities to have access to the full range of powers to manage street works. There are many examples of successful permitting schemes and pilots of lane rental schemes which have shown that this can be a powerful tool in managing the impact of roadworks at key locations on the road network. For example, Kent County Council’s lane rental scheme saw the average occupation time for urgent and emergency works that cause congestion on their major network at traffic sensitive times has drop from 4 days to 3 days in the first year of the scheme.

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<sup>12</sup> Written evidence from the Local Government Association (RTL0029) to the Transport Committee Road traffic law enforcement inquiry

<sup>13</sup> Written evidence from the Local Government Association (RTL0029) to the Transport Committee Road traffic law enforcement inquiry

<sup>14</sup> Written evidence from the Local Government Association (RTL0029) to the Transport Committee Road traffic law enforcement inquiry.

<sup>15</sup> Transport Committee (2016) 2<sup>nd</sup> Report – Road traffic law enforcement, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmselect/cmtrans/518/518.pdf>



2.38. We would therefore support the LGA's call for all local authorities to take decisions about what the appropriate regime is for street works in their area and give them automatic access to powers that have worked well in pilot areas.

### *Funding for road maintenance*

- 2.39. The condition of the road network can also have an impact on congestion in terms of traffic speeds, the impacts of remedial or emergency maintenance work and the knock on effects for congestion of damage to vehicles as well as road accidents.
- 2.40. 98% of the road network is managed by local highways authorities which carry two thirds of all motorised traffic however the 2% of the road network managed by Highways England received 2.7 times as much maintenance spend per km as local authority-managed A roads and motorways; and 15.9 times as much as local authority unclassified roads<sup>16</sup>.
- 2.41. Our 2015 report, 'A Bumpy Ride – the funding and economics of Highways Maintenance on local roads in the city regions'<sup>17</sup>, also found that:
- funding for Highways England is set to more than double over the next five years whilst maintenance spending on local roads has already fallen by 25% since 2010 (in real terms)
  - In the six English metropolitan areas alone (with a combined population of 11 million), there were 5,500 kms of local roads in urgent need of repair in 2014, compared to just 220 kms across the entire Highways England network
- 2.42. The report goes on to show that stop-start road maintenance funding is inefficient as it leads to expensive, short-term patching and mending of crumbling roads rather than planned and pro-active maintenance which fixes problems before the structural integrity of a stretch of road is damaged.
- 2.43. The report also shows how the poor condition of local roads is a drag on productivity by making it more expensive to move people and goods around, and reducing the amount of useful interaction between people and places further apart. Indeed, research in the West Midlands suggests that an accelerated maintenance programme would generate economic returns of £6.50 for every £1 of public funding invested<sup>18</sup>.

The report calls on government to:

- Create longer term certainty and stability over highways maintenance funding;
- Support an accelerated maintenance programme, which would see a significant increase in maintenance spending over the next five years so as to bring road surfaces back up to a sustainable condition;
- Give local authorities greater flexibility over how overall maintenance funding is spent. This means relaxing some of the artificial distinctions between capital and revenue maintenance, as well as allowing local authorities to determine the maintenance spending profile over time, in accordance with a long term asset management plan;

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<sup>16</sup> pteg, 2015, <http://www.urbantransportgroup.org/resources/types/reports/bumpy-ride-local-highways-maintenance>

<sup>17</sup> pteg, 2015, <http://www.urbantransportgroup.org/resources/types/reports/bumpy-ride-local-highways-maintenance>

<sup>18</sup> CH2m Hill, 2015, Highways Maintenance Challenge Fund - West Midlands Road Condition Maintenance Improvements



- Review the formulae used to allocate available funding so as to better reflect the economic opportunity offered by local roads. This would mean allocating funding in proportion to the volume of cars, buses, lorries, pedestrians and cyclists travelling on local roads rather than just in relation to road length.