

Power Shift

National Insight Briefing - Transport

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Both the Climate Change Committee (CCC)¹ and the National Audit Office (NAO)² have highlighted the fundamental role of local authorities in delivering on the UK Government's ambitions to be Net Zero by 2050. To do so, local authorities need more powers to act. In July 2021 the Department for Transport (DfT) published its Transport Decarbonisation Plan (TDP). In it, the importance of local authorities in delivering Net Zero is also acknowledged:



For transport, local and regional level organisations are often best placed to make the decisions that will deliver the practical changes required, as well as ensuring local communities and businesses are engaged.

The UK100 Power Shift³ report is the most comprehensive examination of the powers local authorities have and need to deliver on climate ever undertaken. It explores the wide range of powers already available to local government, the barriers to local authority action and how these could be removed or overcome, and the additional powers local authorities need. This briefing offers insight from Power Shift on how the TDP and subsequent national developments need to facilitate local authorities' role in delivering Net Zero transport.

Context

In the UK in 2019, transport was the largest emitting sector, comprising 27% of CO₂ emissions (excluding international aviation and shipping) and was only 4.6% lower than nearly 30 years ago.⁴ The TDP is clear. We have to shift all of our vehicles away from fossil fuels as quickly as possible, but even with ambition to do so, it is estimated that only 46% of cars on our roads will be zero emission by 2035, and fewer heavier goods vehicles.⁵ In order to meet Net Zero transport, the DfT now expects a reduction in urban road traffic. It sees the adaptations to commuting, shopping and business travel seen during COVID-19, coupled with an ambitious mode shift away from the car to “offer the opportunity for a reduction or at least a stabilisation, in traffic more widely”.⁶ To achieve this will require a transformative step change in local authority action and this in turn demands a shift in powers, resources and relationships to enable local authorities to get on and deliver in partnership with national government.

1 CCC (2020) Local Authorities and the Sixth Carbon Budget, <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/local-authorities-and-the-sixth-carbon-budget/>

2 NAO (2021) Local Authorities and Net Zero, HC304, <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/local-government-and-net-zero-in-england/>

3 UK100 Power Shift, <https://www.uk100.org/publications/power-shift>

4 DfT (2021) Decarbonising Transport: A Better, Greener Britain, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transport-decarbonisation-plan>

5 DfT (2021) Decarbonising Transport: A Better, Greener Britain, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transport-decarbonisation-plan>

6 DfT (2021) Decarbonising Transport: A Better, Greener Britain, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transport-decarbonisation-plan>

What the TDP means for local and combined authorities

At 220 pages in length the scale and breadth of the actions required to decarbonise transport becomes apparent. There are major new demands on local authorities to help manage the transition away from fossil fuel to electric and hydrogen. These include ensuring equitable access to charging, integration between hydrogen for transport and other uses such as heating. New capacity and skills to build relationships with the energy sector are urgently required. In considering the four elements that the TDP outlines will be covered in the Local Authority Toolkit guidance will offer when it is released later in 2021, it is clear that the onus on local authorities to deliver is huge:

- **Changing travel options** - demand responsive travel, cycling infrastructure, car clubs and education
- **Reducing the need to travel** - space reallocation, using existing planning powers
- **Influencing behaviour through charging** - parking policies, congestion charging, low emission zones
- **Decarbonising the fleet** - Ultra Low and zero emission buses, EV infrastructure and incentives, Freight / e-cargo bikes, decarbonisation of own fleets

The tools required to deliver much of this are known but cannot necessarily be brought together through the patchwork of institutions and funding streams in place today. Whilst some of these shortcomings are recognised in the TDP and recent accompanying reforms to the Bus and Rail sectors, the details remain fuzzy.

Each of these elements relate to different and cross-cutting systems, the guidance that national government provides must incorporate clear actionable steps and ensure that they are appropriately resourced and financed. If by 2050, every place in the UK is to have its own Net Zero transport network, ensuring local capacity to deliver is as important as guidance about what needs to be transformed.

Drawing on the analysis in the Power Shift report there are five key areas that need to be addressed to enable the massive potential for the delivery of Net Zero to be realised at the local level.

1. Reduce the high costs of connecting electric vehicle (EV) charge infrastructure to the grid:

All vehicles will need to be powered by zero emission means. For cars and light vans this means going to battery electric. For heavier vehicles this may be a mix of battery electric and hydrogen. The Government's ambitious decision to phase out the sale of all solely internal combustion engine cars by 2030 and any plug-in hybrids by 2035 coupled with consultation on the phase out dates for light vans has given huge momentum to the shift to electric.

Local authorities have not been seen as important in the planning for electrification. Local energy plans have not given local authorities much say and Distribution Network Operators have been slow to engage. Local authorities are critical because they are responsible for the way in which on-street charging arrangements are delivered to the eight million homes without off-street parking.⁷ They also hold land in car parks, leisure centres and other council service sites which could be used for charge points and they grant planning permissions for developments which might need to be re-sited to enable sufficient grid connections. **Local authorities have a key role to play in the electrification pathway and have to be involved in the planning for their roll out.**

Whilst many areas are well served and can easily add additional charge point connections others are not and the costs of provision for individuals or businesses are prohibitive. Ofgem is currently consulting on ways in which the costs of grid connections might be spread out, for example through electricity bills.⁸

Reducing the high costs of connecting EV charging networks to the grid should be prioritised to enable a seamless vehicle charging network across the UK. Not only should costs of connecting EV charging networks be reduced, every local, city and regional authority should be included in designing and shaping the charging infrastructure across its area for public, freight, and bus networks. This priority is one of six identified by UK100's Net Zero Local Leadership Communique⁹ for immediate action.

⁷ DfT (2021) Decarbonising Transport: A Better, Greener Britain,

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transport-decarbonisation-plan>

⁸ Ofgem (2021) Access and Forward-looking Charges Significant Code Review – Consultation on Minded Positions (online)

<https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/publications/access-and-forward-looking-charges-significant-code-review-consultation-minded-positions>

⁹ <https://www.uk100.org/publications/net-zero-local-leadership-communique-delivering-net-zero-uk>

2. Devolve and pool funding to provide longer term certainty and allow local authorities to deliver:

The TDP identifies £12bn of funding to support the early acceleration of progress to Net Zero. However, within the plan no fewer than 15 different funding streams are listed, each with their own specific conditions, many available to only a handful of authorities on a competition basis. Funding is short term and capital heavy, not allowing authorities to build the necessary capacity to more effectively harness these resources.

The TDP states that it will require local authorities to use the existing statutory Local Transport Plan process to set out quantifiable carbon reductions and the associated funding requirements to deliver. It sets out a commitment:

“ to designing future funding opportunities in a way that minimises local burdens and costs and will engage closely with local areas to plan for this transition.

Currently, local authority transport planners have to justify their investment decisions using centralised appraisal methodologies, even for relatively small scale cycling investments. The approaches are also burdensome, using up valuable staff resources despite efforts to simplify this.

The shift towards channelling funding through Local Transport Plans should bring an end to competition funding for what is now required to be mainstream delivery (e.g. electric bus support). The funds should be awarded on the basis of the Local Transport Plans set out and local authorities trusted to get on and deliver ambitious programmes. The important assessment of value for money should be through what gets done and what the impact is on carbon reduction and not through the micro-management of specific schemes.

3. Integrate the powers required for a seamless public transport service:

For public transport use to grow significantly over the next decade it needs to be more reliable, cheaper, better integrated and simple to use. Such an outcome is not unattainable. It exists in many cities in mainland Europe and it exists in London. Particularly for larger cities, the reforms to deliver such a system and to provide integrated funding to manage the system are urgently required. In other areas some of these reforms will also be beneficial although there are areas where even maintaining current limited bus provision would be a start.

The limitations of the current system have been recognised in recent government reforms. The Williams-Shapps review of rail has promised a complete overhaul of the franchise system, with Government now specifying services and fares to a greater degree. However, it remains unclear exactly what say local leaders will have over the priorities of Great British Railways..

In London, Transport for London has responsibility for key roads, the provision of a fully integrated public transport network as well as taxi and Private Hire Vehicle licencing. This is not the case for areas outside of London but is an option which should be available.

The very strong support from the Government for public transport during COVID was essential for survival of the industry and revealed how important the services are to key workers. The bus and rail reform papers offer important steps forward in providing a greater voice for local authorities in public transport. However, as we transition from COVID recovery to delivering on climate strategies more ambition and direction will be required. Where local areas have the capacity, networks and political drive to move to an integrated London style system for travellers then the DfT and HM Treasury should make this possible.

4. Ensure that revisions to the Planning Bill promotes less car dependent development:

The National Planning Policy Framework sets the context for the allocation of sites for development by local authorities and the processes for development approval. The tools which are provided through the planning system such as Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 agreements are not suitable for designing an integrated sustainable transport system. They can be area specific and time limited and often see the delivery of more sustainable modes after the housing has begun to be delivered and car based habits have formed. Developers can often assume a continuation of previous car-based patterns of living and resist extra investments through the viability test and the National Planning Policy Framework is also cautious about limiting parking in new development. Whilst some places such as Brighton and Edinburgh have delivered car free housing and other more sustainable developments can be found, the majority are still being built as car dependent with inadequate facilities to match the national government's bold goals for Net Zero.¹⁰

The revisions to the planning system following the Planning for the Future White Paper need to ensure that developments are planned in line with the TDP, demonstrating both that they will help deliver a zero growth traffic future and also mandate the provision of smart enabled charge facilities. Funding from developers should be eligible for use as part of an area-wide transport emissions reduction plan.

¹⁰ Transport for New Homes (2018) Project Summary and Recommendations, <https://www.transportfornewhomes.org.uk/the-project/transport-for-new-homes-report-2018/>



5. Introduce a requirement for Highways England to address local air quality management priorities of local areas they affect:

Highways England is responsible for managing the Strategic Road Network and has its remit set by the Secretary of State for Transport. However, many of the roads managed by Highways England are important local routes and pass through communities which are significantly impacted by them. Because of the institutional divide that currently exists Highways England is not obliged to participate in locally-led Clean Air Zone initiatives and can only spend its own clean air funds on its network and not in the areas surrounding the network where the people who are affected live. Air quality interventions and climate policies are closely interlinked, as Clean Air Zones typically encourage a shift to newer and lower carbon vehicles as well as ones which produce fewer toxic exhaust emissions. The division between local authority managed roads and Highways England managed roads is unimportant to residents and immaterial to pollution. It is getting in the way of local authority action.

Local authorities need an enabling power to require Highways England to contribute to emissions reductions schemes outside of the strategic road network. Highways England needs to be able to spend its funds to mitigate the impacts of the use of its network on surrounding communities.

Net Zero Delivery Framework

UK100 is advocating for the development of a Net Zero Delivery Framework which will clarify the relationships between central and local action, explore funding and financing mechanisms, pool skills and expertise and play a key role in evaluation, learning and acceleration. UK100 will shortly release a report detailing the central elements such a framework should incorporate for successful, collaborative implementation of Net Zero.



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