UK:100

A call for Ideas: Integrated National Transport Strategy
Department for Transport

UK100 Submission

Introduction

This submission is from UK100 which is a network of 117 local authorities and their leaders who have pledged to lead a rapid transition to Net Zero in their communities ahead of the Government's legal target.

Our submission focuses on the following key concerns that we consider crucial for achieving the objectives:

- **Devolve powers for local transport integration:** Local authorities should be granted the power to coordinate transport networks across different modes, similar to London's model and those being developed by other combined authorities. This includes integrating buses, trains, cycling infrastructure, and active travel, with the ability to oversee timetables, cross-ticketing, and emissions reduction on major roads. We also believe that these powers shouldn't be just reserved for combined authorities and that all tiers of local government have a crucial role to play.
- **Reform funding for sustainable transport:** Shift from competitive, fragmented funding to long-term, devolved budgets allocated based on local transport plans. The current funding model prioritises vehicle flow over active travel and public health benefits—this must be reformed to align with Net Zero, clean air and broader societal goals.
- **Strengthen rural and semi-rural transport strategies:** Rural areas require tailored solutions beyond urban-focused transport investments. Devolved funding should support flexible, demand-responsive transport (e.g., on-demand buses), improved rail connectivity, and active travel infrastructure suited to dispersed populations and their economies.
- **Enhance data and technology:** Local authorities need access to transport data to improve planning and coordination. Integrated ticketing, real-time journey planning, and investment in EV charging infrastructure should be prioritised. Local authorities should have the flexibility to pilot new technologies that align with local needs.

Q1. What is the name of your organisation?

UK100 is a network of 117 local authorities and their leaders who have pledged to lead a rapid transition to Net Zero in their communities ahead of the Government's legal target.

Q2. We would like to have further contact with you on this subject beyond this call for ideas. This communication will principally be by email.

You are:

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not content to continue contact

content to continue contact via email (specify email)

Q3. What is the approximate total number of employees in your organisation?

- 1
- 2 to 9
- **10 to 49**
- 50 to 249
- 250 to 499
- 500 to 1,000
- Above 1000 (specify)

Q4. What best describes your organisation?

- Charity
- **Non-government organisation**
- Transport operator
- Other transport organisation
- Housing organisation
- Technology organisation
- Data organisation
- Government department
- Government arm's length body
- Local government
- Public affairs
- Consultancy
- Academia
- Research
- Another type of organisation (specify)

Q5. In your opinion, how could the transport network be better 'joined-up'?

As per the latest data, domestic transport is the UK's largest emitting sector, responsible for 29% of total carbon emissions in 2023. With the UK aiming to be Net Zero by 2050, it is critical that any transport strategy at a local, regional or national level prioritises emissions

reduction at its core. Local authorities are key to this transition as more than 80% of emissions are within their scope[1] and they are responsible for maintaining and managing the majority of the UK road network.

A truly integrated transport network requires local authorities to have the power to coordinate across different modes of transport. Each mode—whether it's buses, trains, cycling infrastructure, or active transport—serves a distinct purpose and appeals to different user needs. Local authorities, with their local knowledge, are well-positioned to create connections between these modes, ensuring users can seamlessly switch between them.

Challenges:
- **Lack of control and oversight of the whole transport system:** Many transport systems, such as buses, trains, and bike-sharing services, often operate in silos, leading to inefficiencies and inconvenience for users. Local authorities are one player in the transport matrix. Only London is currently fully able to implement an areawide strategy as it has control over the funding for the whole system. UK100 has been calling for devolving powers for local leaders to develop a London-style integrated, reliable, more affordable, and simpler to use regional public transport network[2]. Where these have been devolved, it is starting to deliver, for instance in Greater Manchester, their <u>Bee Network</u> is doing well to deliver an integrated public transport and active travel system for residents and businesses and <u>Cambridge and Peterborough</u> is the first largely semi-rural transport authority to commit to bus franchising.
- **Lack of consolidated funding for local authorities:** Competitive funding continues to widen the gap between those authorities that have the capacity to develop successful bids, often based on demonstrating previous ability to deliver funded programmes, and those that do not have the resources to do so. The new government has committed to reforming this system, especially around bus funding which we support, but it needs to go further and faster. The funding models used to assess investments (DfT's WebTAG, based on the Treasury Green Book) put a high value on free-flowing vehicle traffic and almost no value on active travel. This is a massive inhibitor of low carbon transport schemes wherever funding decisions are not devolved or specifically ring fenced for active travel.
- **Lack of a strategy for rural and semi-rural areas:** Large urban areas have the population density and infrastructures that enable zero carbon transport options to be more readily installed and suit the travel demands of the population. The solutions for smaller towns and rural areas are more difficult to achieve and more difficult to fund using the government's funding mechanisms and the current pace of devolution will not see all parts of England covered by new authorities until later this decade.
- **Fragmented governance**: Fragmented transport responsibilities across different levels of government. Lack of coordination between local authorities, transport

providers, and national policies and agencies such as Active Travel England and Highways England.

- **System planning and land:** At the local level there are complex webs of land ownership around rail stations should local authorities want to create more integrated or connecting transport nodes. Land may be owned and separately managed by any combination of Network Rail, the franchised rail operator for the station, the local authority or private bodies and agreements have to be made with each owner or operator.

Recommendations:

- **Greater powers for local authorities:** Devolve the powers for local leaders to develop a London-style integrated, reliable, more affordable, and simpler to use regional public transport service. This includes incorporation of the oversight of buses into the local transport authority role (we hope to see this partially resolved in the new Bus Services Bill), giving local authorities the power to require bus and rail operators to collaborate on timetabling and cross-ticketing and requiring National Highways to cooperate with local authorities on emissions reduction and clean air schemes on major highways within the local area.

- **Reform the funding mechanism:** Devolve and pool local authority transport funding to provide longer term certainty, with funds allocated in a non-competitive way on the basis of local transport plans. Local authorities should have the power to access transport funding using alternative justifications to WebTAG, and WebTAG should be revised to increase the value assigned to traffic reduction, active travel and health impacts.

- **Create a unified strategy:** Government, local authorities and transport agencies should collaborate to create a single, overarching transport strategy that integrates different modes and regions, ensuring alignment in policies and investment.

- **Integrated systems:** Integrate payment systems across different transport modes to simplify access for users, ideally through mobile apps that centralise data and make switching between transport options effortless. Ensure that different modes, like buses and cycling lanes, are scheduled and designed in a way that complements each other, particularly at peak travel times, so that residents can rely on a comprehensive system of transport choices. It is important to think of the end user and how the overall system can be made simpler and more efficient for them to navigate. For instance, some authorities including Bristol, Bath & North East Somerset, Southwark and Lewisham also offer a "try before you buy" scheme where people can rent a bike for up to a month to see how they get on with cycling, before buying their own[3].

- **Prioritise clean air and Net Zero:** Net Zero, clean air and sustainability must be embedded in all transport decisions and plans. A well-integrated, low-carbon transport network for both people and goods will not only cut emissions, but also improve accessibility, affordability, air quality and quality of life for all communities. Some local authorities have introduced freight consolidation centres to transfer goods from larger, more polluting lorries to smaller vehicles before entering city

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[3] https://www.uk100.org/sites/default/files/publications/Powers%20in%20Place_Nov%2723.pdf

centres, improving efficiency and enabling reverse logistics. However, their success depends on business support, and a national framework is still lacking.

Q6. Data in the context of the next question can mean having better information about journeys, such as but not limited to departure times, journey planning, traffic information and accessibility information.

How could data be used to improve the transport network?

Data plays a pivotal role in optimising the operation of different transport modes. For example, traffic flow data can inform bus routes and timings, while data from bike-sharing programs can help local authorities plan for more bike lanes or docking stations. Local authorities, however, need more access to granular data at the community level, as they are best placed to understand the specific mobility challenges in their area, whether that's congestion, accessibility for people with disabilities, or the integration of different transport options.

Key challenges:

- The models used to determine the economic benefit of each pound spent are based on a calculation of the economic benefit of moving more cars, vans and lorries more efficiently. These models are not sophisticated enough to include the costs or savings to public health. This narrow focus has led to under-investment in active travel in particular, and in designing the public realm to be a pleasant place to walk and cycle.
- Investment in active travel infrastructure is hampered by the evaluation process which calculates a Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) for each project. Benefits are generally calculated in economic terms using WebTAG, the DfT 'Green Book'. This tends to favour outcomes such as reduced journey times by calculating economic benefit using traditional transport modelling. Whilst active travel projects will usually meet the strategic case, the assessment of the economic argument is based on models that assign monetary value to speeding up vehicular traffic movements to calculate their BCR. This directly conflicts with the need to reduce carbon.
- In addition, economic models work from baselines on the basis of percentage uplifts – which means that they are unable to model (or assign value to) paradigm shifts. The economic appraisal is unable to capture a new piece of infrastructure that creates an entirely different travel pattern (for instance a completely new segregated cycle lane encouraging parents and children to cycle to school) and this means it entrenches existing schemes and can only be used to improve existing infrastructure. Putting a figure on carbon reduction is not given much weight
- Siloed and inadequate data that prevents the comprehensive planning needed for an integrated transport system. Many journeys extend across local authority boundaries, highlighting the need for data standardisation to effectively track and manage complete travel routes.
- Many travelers still lack access to real-time updates regarding traffic conditions, delays, or route changes.

Recommendations:

- The government should reform assessment methodologies, including WebTAG, to better reflect the benefits of active travel, public health, and carbon reduction. Current models prioritise vehicle journey time savings, undervaluing the long-term economic, social, and environmental benefits of walking and cycling. The appraisal process should be updated to give greater weight to carbon reduction, public health improvements, and local economic benefits, while also capturing transformational shifts in travel behavior rather than just incremental changes to existing infrastructure. A more holistic approach would ensure active travel and sustainable transport are not disadvantaged in funding decisions, aligning investment with Net Zero and wider societal goals.

- Foster collaboration between local authorities, tech companies, and public transport providers to ensure that data is shared across different platforms, enabling better-informed decisions about scheduling, traffic and parking management, and service expansion.

- Create a centralised platform that aggregates data from various sources, including traffic sensors, transport providers, and public feedback. Use data analytics to identify gaps in the transport network, for example, areas that are underserved by public transport or routes that lack safe cycling infrastructure.

- Understand consumer preferences and needs and design systems that work best for the end users. This should include and support active travel measures as well. Gloucester City Council's relatively new Green Travel Plan aims to provide a route map for reducing surface transport emissions and improving air quality. It does this through 15 recommendations, including to explore segregated cycling infrastructure and to embed the council's agile working policy[4].

- In order to hear from residents Southampton City Council ran its first ever citizens' assembly focussed on climate change and transport. The assembly produced three outputs aimed at informing the next iteration of the council's Local Transport Plan - the vision statement, recommendations on priority actions and ideas on funding[5].

- Rapid progress in AI and technology presents new opportunities to enhance strategic planning, intelligence, and real-time transport management, but there is a lack of funding to fully exploit its potential. The sector naturally generates vast journey data that can be key to improving modelling and service delivery in real time.

- Transport planning often should be based on data to ensure decisions are guided by facts, reducing conflict and supporting well-founded business cases. This includes parking management, where DVLA data can be unreliable and a barrier to innovation around climate, active travel and clean air friendly policies, such as vehicle size based charging.

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[4]https://www.uk100.org/projects/knowledgehub/gloucesters-plan-cut-commuting-emissions#field_our_problem

[5] https://www.uk100.org/projects/knowledgehub/southamptons-citizens-climate-assembly#field_systems

Q7. Technology in the context of the next question means new and innovative ways to complete journeys, for example but not limited to the use of autonomous vehicles, electric scooters and e-hailing rides.

How could technology be used to improve the transport network?

Technology offers a range of innovations that can enhance the functionality of different transport modes. However, local authorities must have the power to experiment with, regulate, and expand these technologies within their jurisdictions, ensuring that they align with local needs and complement other modes of transport.

Key challenges:

- EVs are a key component of the UK's transport decarbonisation strategy. Whilst other measures can reduce demand for cars and freight vehicles, there will be a considerable residual demand for private mobility, especially outside the more densely-populated urban areas. But not all areas are equipped with the necessary infrastructure to support technologies like electric vehicles (EVs) or autonomous vehicles. In addition, local authorities lack the control and resources needed to deploy innovative technologies effectively.

- Regulatory barriers and slow adoption of emerging transport solutions hinder technological advancements. UK cities have been shown to be some of the worst performing in Europe when assessing the uptake of shared e-scooter and e-bikes[6]. There is also a lack of national clarity about the role that car clubs can play in reducing the need for private car ownership and kerb side use. The ongoing local trails around such schemes need to lead to changes in national regulation and ensure that the right suite of powers are devolved to local authorities to regulate and manage the potential of these new modes.

- Implementing advanced technologies on a wide scale can be expensive and may not provide an immediate return on investment, this needs to be reflected in funding.

- Rural and urban areas have different issues with respect to transport and hence need different low carbon solutions.

- Limited funding to deploy innovative solutions or plan for the long-term.

Recommendations:

- Continue to grant local authorities the authority to pilot new transport technologies (e.g., autonomous vehicles, e-scooters, or on-demand buses) in their communities, allowing for tailored solutions that meet local needs, and speed up the process for mainstreaming successful trials. For instance, demand responsive transport (DRT) and other innovations or technologies can have potential in rural areas by providing flexible, on-demand services that can be tailored to specific travel needs. This can address the challenges of low ridership and inflexible timetables associated with traditional bus services. It can improve accessibility for residents in remote areas,

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[6] https://cleancitiescampaign.org/thank-you-for-sharing/

increase flexibility and convenience for passengers and has a potential for cost-effectiveness compared to traditional bus services in low-demand areas.

- Wiltshire council has launched an on-demand bus service linking rural communities in North Wiltshire. Passengers can use a smartphone app to book a low-emission bus for door-to-door transportation within a defined service area.

- Ensure seamless transfers through well-timed bus schedules that connect with train stations, or other major transit hubs allow for efficient travel across the city.

- Create a zero emission freight policy framework that supports local authorities to promote and accelerate the uptake of low carbon freight solutions, such as e-cargo bikes and electric vans.

- Implement integrated ticketing systems that allow passengers to use multiple modes of transport with a single ticket or card simplify travel and encourage multi-modal journeys. Network One is Tyne & Wear's combined public transport ticketing system. It offers a ticket covering local buses, local rail, metro and the Shields Ferry with options to buy for weekly, monthly or annual travel. Similarly, Merseytravel offers weekly, monthly and annual combined tickets for bus, rail and Mersey ferry services[7].

- Continue to invest in charging infrastructure for electric vehicles (EVs) and electric bikes, ensuring these options are integrated into the broader transport network and accessible to users.

  - Reduce the high costs of connecting EV charging networks to the grid and include every local, city and regional authority in designing and shaping the charging infrastructure across its area for public, freight, and bus networks.

  - In order to ensure the council can cater to the rising numbers of electric vehicles (EV), Oxfordshire and Oxford City Council has simplified procurement of EV infrastructure with a platform available free of charge to the UK public sector. Since 2021, its dynamic purchasing system (DPS) has helped secure over £23 million, delivering around 4,000 charge points toward the 2030 target of 300,000[8].

  - Explore aligning the VAT regime between domestic off street charging and on street and public charge points.

- Encourage local authorities to embrace smart technologies for real-time journey planning, such as apps that allow users to compare and choose between modes of transport (buses, trains, ride-sharing) based on real-time data.

Q8. How, if at all, would you improve the way decisions are made about the transport network?

Decisions about transport infrastructure and services should not only come from national or regional bodies, but should also be informed by local authorities who understand the

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[7] https://www.merseytravel.gov.uk/tickets-and-pricing/ticket-types/trio-ticket/
[8] https://www.uk100.org/projects/knowledgehub/oxfords-unique-ev-infrastructure-procurement-platform

specific transportation needs of their communities. The decision-making process needs to be decentralised to allow local authorities the power to influence the development and funding of transport solutions, particularly for the different modes that serve their communities. Whether it's improving bus services in areas with limited connectivity or expanding cycling lanes in congested city centers, local authorities must have the ability to prioritise and implement projects that address their unique transport challenges.

Key challenges:

- Centralised decision-making structures that fail to consider the local nuances of transport needs. Government departments shouldn't be routinely having to sign off local transport decisions.
- Insufficient powers and funding for local authorities to make decisions about the integration of different modes of transport at the community level.
- The voices of local communities and users are sometimes underrepresented in transport planning, leading to solutions that do not fully meet the needs of all users.
- Lack of urgency or coordination to address the increasing number of vans and especially in dense urban areas, and the impact on emissions, road use and air pollution.
- An underlying assumption that private car use will be the main mode of travel and a source of economic growth.
- Lack of detailed sustainable travel design input throughout the planning process, we need to avoid the government's mission to see the development of 1.5 million new homes leading to 1.5 million new private cars and associated trips and infrastructure Stroud Council recent;y highlighted to us the challenge of delivering a new local plan with a commitment to high environmental standards and being forced to expand the local and national road network to accommodate expected traffic, without the ability to use planning and transport strategy to reduce the reliance on the private car in the way for instance the London Plan and many London boroughs do through car free development.

Recommendations:

- The English Devolution White Paper suggests that Strategic Authorities may gain greater autonomy over rail and road networks. This shift towards local decision-making, in collaboration with relevant agencies, would be a positive step towards greater regional control over transportation infrastructure. However, smaller authorities should not be left behind in the journey, especially given the uneven pace of devolution.
- Provide local authorities with more autonomy and funding to experiment with local transport solutions, particularly for integrated multimodal transport projects that serve the specific needs of their populations.
- Create frameworks for local authorities to have more say in transport policy, particularly in relation to how funds are allocated across different transport modes.
- Encourage a more participatory approach to transport planning, where local residents and councils can influence decisions about where to improve services and

infrastructure, whether that's expanding cycling infrastructure or adding more buses on certain routes.

- Improve public engagement and consultation to ensure that local communities, business owners, and commuters are actively involved in the decision-making process, using surveys, town halls, and participatory platforms to gather feedback. Ensure local authorities have the necessary tools and funding to action this at the local level.
- Develop decision-making models that prioritise evidence-based approaches, and models that don't just rely on economic benefits but account for low carbon transport measures.
- A truly integrated transport network requires considering passenger transport, freight, and infrastructure together, ensuring policies address their interdependencies. For example, most freight in the UK relies on roads, creating environmental challenges in urban areas. The UK van fleet now emits more harmful NO_x emissions than it did ten years ago owing to an increasing number of diesel vans on the roads. Some local authorities have introduced freight consolidation centres to transfer deliveries from larger lorries to smaller, cleaner vehicles before entering city centres. While these centres improve efficiency and reduce emissions, they require seed funding and ongoing support to remain viable, as well as a national policy framework for zero emission freight areas, such as in place in the Netherlands.

Q9. Any other comments?

Staff Resources and Capacity

All local authorities have been affected by a decade of reduced resource and funding and have reduced staffing. This means that staff time is reduced and they have few resources to challenge the status quo. This is particularly marked in smaller, less urban authorities where it is harder to raise revenue (e.g. from developers) but which still have a full remit in terms of planning, transport, social and environmental services. It has become increasingly difficult for council officers to find time to work together across departments: such working is crucial for decarbonisation, for instance in ensuring that a local development has an environmentally sustainable transport plan or to increase active travel to schools.

Political will and organised opposition

There is a vocal and growing lobby that views any attempt to get people out of their cars as restricting freedom. The heightened sense of controversy. Some local leaders may be hesitant to act decisively in the face of vociferous opposition, despite Government guidance urging them to roll out traffic management schemes to address national Net Zero and air quality targets. However, it also speaks to the need to fully involve and properly engage with communities on net zero proposals, enabling fears and myths to be addressed, and to put in alternatives for people and businesses before charging or restrictive schemes are implemented.

Clean Air Zones (CAZ)

Whilst air quality is not directly the same as decarbonisation, cutting the numbers of internal combustion engine vehicles has a decarbonising effect. Conversely, the previous focus on CO2 emissions lead to an increase in diesel vehicles with negative impacts for air quality. A holistic approach considering cobenefits and assessing for unintended negative impacts needs to be taken in all transport decisions. Birmingham CAZ started in June 2021, with older cars, taxis and HGVs all subject to a daily charge within the boundary of the A4540, other schemes have rolled out recently in Bradford and Sheffield with impressive results. Revenues from the Birmingham scheme are reinvested in active travel, public transport and air quality initiatives[9]. It has also led to the reduction in the levels of nitrogen dioxide gas (NO2) – an air pollutant which adversely affects people's health[10].

Planning contributions

Planning contributions are not suitable for designing an integrated sustainable transport system as they are typically specific to each development, not the area as a whole, or do not provide sufficient contribution for a radically new travel system. Some planning conditions are time-limited and do not enable long term provision e.g. support for a bus service for a limited number of years, then it is not a viable service for a private operator to take on.

We would be grateful if, in addition to considering UK100's response to the call for ideas, you would also explore opportunities for further engagement. Please get in touch if you would like to know more or explore our response in more detail. We would also be happy to give evidence, convene a discussion with our member local authorities, especially those working to deliver innovative solutions in rural areas, to discuss the themes within this inquiry and our response further.

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[9] https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20076/pollution/1763/a_clean_air_zone_for_birmingham

[10] https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/news/2023/clean-air-zone-reduces-air-pollution-levels-in-birmingham-study