

UK100 Resilient Recovery Taskforce

Local path to Net Zero
policy briefings: Transport



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Introduction

Following the launch of the Resilient Recovery Taskforce in September 2020¹, UK100 convened a series of workshops with local authority members and experts from the clean energy sector to share insights on local on-the-ground delivery and to identify priorities for action.

Decarbonising transport will be critical to getting to Net Zero, with the sector accounting for nearly one quarter of emissions in 2019². **This briefing paper sets out key policy priorities that will enable the UK to meet the challenge set by the Department for Transport in March 2020 for the UK to be an ‘internationally recognised leader in environmentally sustainable, low carbon technology and innovation in transport’³.**

The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted the fragility of our economic structures, their vulnerability to external shocks and the need to support people in our poorest communities. The action now needed to revive our economy must involve tackling climate change in ways that create benefits for people in the short term and build support for a rapid and fair transition away from dirty fossil fuels. Such an approach will enable us to reskill our workforce, create jobs, establish cleaner, healthier, safer places to work and live, and restore the nature upon which we all rely.

The UK Government needs the involvement of local leaders to meet its legally binding Net Zero commitment. They understand the local context, respond effectively to local crises, are engaged with communities and stakeholders, and have the democratic legitimacy to enable their communities to bounce back. A group of twenty-four mayors and local leaders, representing twenty-five million people across the country, have established the Resilient Recovery Taskforce and have called on the Chancellor to commit to a ‘New Deal for Green Skills and Growth’. Furthermore, UK 100 research in July 2020 recommended that the investment required to meet Net Zero would be delivered most effectively through a new Net Zero Development Bank, working in partnership with UK local authorities to mobilise private investment⁴.

Participants in the workshop identified three key areas that need to be addressed in order to decarbonise transport: **Electric vehicle charging infrastructure, support to switch to electric vehicles, and supporting a shift for local journeys to walking, cycling and public transport.**

Electric vehicle charging infrastructure

The Government must provide policy certainty around the development of electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure to enable the development of a business case. Currently, the EV charging market is unregulated and as such, that lack of standards has resulted in a poor level of interoperability between different infrastructure providers. The rapid change in the market and in technology makes it challenging to plan and creates wariness with regard to investment and concern around stranded assets.

“The need for multiple apps or RFID cards [for different charging infrastructure] is frustrating, even for early adopters.” Cornwall Council

The Government should look to centralise the EV charging rollout strategy and funding at national and city levels as the complexity, scale and novelty of the challenge makes it hard to deliver with a purely local model. However, the fact that local authorities possess expert local knowledge means they should have an enabling and orchestrating role in delivering EV charging in their area.

“We believe no individual actor - public or private - can solve the transition to electric vehicles alone or drive a green recovery alone. We want to, and have to, work with governments, businesses and other partners to make it more affordable for drivers to go green.” Uber

“We are running projects with a range of partners because they are the experts in relation to developing EV charging infrastructure.” Leicester City Council

“Focusing charging infrastructure on the high mileage drivers in the immediate term will result in a flywheel effect that sparks private investment to enable others to follow suit.” Uber

Grid capacity - particularly in residential areas - is currently the major limiting factor for scaling up EV infrastructure. The grid has significant capacity to allow for a substantial increase in the number of EV charge points and there is the financial capacity to overcome local constraints where they occur. However, the current financial model for DNOs does not incentivise investment in storage at scale or the development of a smarter grid.

Consequently, the financial model needs to be refashioned to incentivise investment in the grid to enable the scaling up of EV infrastructure. The impracticality of having a charge point outside every house, however, means that other approaches will have to be considered - such as charging hubs.

Support to switch to electric vehicles

The cost of purchasing EVs is still too high for most people. In order to kickstart the transition, market incentives and subsidies for vehicle purchases need to be increased. Perverse incentives such as tax breaks for PHEVs which make them more attractive than EVs to high mileage drivers need to be removed.

Access to EV charging needs to be equitable. Those with access to home charging will potentially be able to refuel more cheaply. The introduction of a ‘Right to Charge’ policy similar to these currently practiced in Amsterdam would make it easier, fairer, faster, and cheaper for people living in shared properties and those without access to off-street parking to install chargers in existing buildings/gain access to reliably available local charging points.

Supporting a shift for local journeys to walking, cycling and public transport

The Government needs to provide a clear policy framework for walking, cycling and public transport that will remain in place over time, along with resourcing to enable delivery. A first step would be to revise the National Planning Policy Framework to enable - rather than limit - ambition for low carbon neighbourhoods.

Alongside a clear policy framework, the Government needs to provide leadership and wider support for local authorities to deliver solutions that prioritise walking, cycling and public transport. Experimental and innovative supply-led solutions often face vocal local opposition, but once in place, communities experience the benefits of these projects that promote walking, and cycling and public transport, leading to long-term behaviour change.

“Newcastle closed a number of bridges to traffic. It had a minor impact [on car journeys] but motorists complained a lot. But the initiative also transformed the reality for schools, as parents started walking. People are coming around to the benefits. People need to see what it can be like - hence testing these initiatives to allow people to experience the benefits.”
Newcastle-upon-Tyne City Council

Local authorities who use deliberative decision-making processes to enable a diverse range of voices would benefit from more Governmental support. These outreach tools (such as citizens’ assemblies) help to demonstrate the ways in which apparently controversial ideas can be widely accepted by communities.

Local authorities understand the transport needs of their areas. A greater devolution of transport power - including greater responsibility for public transport - is therefore required. Solutions must be appropriate to local circumstances and there should be greater requirements for other key stakeholders, such as Highways England, to engage more fully with local authorities.

Workshop participants

Amber Infrastructure
Bath and North East Somerset Council
Belfast City Council
Birmingham City Council
Birmingham University
Cambridge City Council
Cambridgeshire County Council
Cenex
Climate KIC
Cornwall Council
Department for Transport
Energy Hub North West
Green Finance Institute
Imperial College London

Leeds City Council
Leicester City Council
Liverpool City Council
Midlands Energy Hub
Newcastle-upon-Tyne City Council
Public Power Solutions
Sheffield City Council
Siemens
Southampton City Council
SSE Enterprise
Uber
University of West of England
Urban Transport Group
West of England Combined Authority

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3. Decarbonising Transport: Setting the Challenge, Department for Transport, March 2020, assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/878642/decarbonising-transport-setting-the-challenge.pdf
4. Accelerating the Rate of Investment in Local Energy Projects, UK100, July 2020, www.uk100.org/publications/accelerating-rate-investment-local-energy-projects