TravelWatch
NORTHWEST

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Winner of CILT award for best practice in passenger transport (2013)

promoting quality public transport……

Transport Decarbonisation Plan,
Great Minster House,
33 Horseferry Road,
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SW1P 4DR

31st August 2020

Dear Team,

Decarbonisation Transport: Setting the Challenge

1. Introduction

1.1 TravelWatch NorthWest (TWNW) is an independent Community Interest Company representing all public transport users in North West England.

1.2 Surface Public Transport generally has a low carbon footprint compared with cars. We agree with Grant Shapps' comment that "public transport and active travel will be the natural first choice for our daily activities. We will use our cars less and be able to rely on a convenient, cost-effective and coherent public transport network." Much needs to be done to achieve a sea change to public transport especially in and following the current coronavirus hiatus.

1.3 Also importantly, transport cannot be viewed in isolation. It must be considered as part of a wider consideration of land use planning, spatial development, environmental and economic development.

1.4 The huge challenges facing transport in terms of de-carbonisation across the United Kingdom (and Worldwide) are greater because past decisions and investment did not take this holistic view. In simple terms actions in one area will have consequences, favourable or unfavourable, in other areas. A most obvious example with transport is the urban sprawl of communities, including out of town shopping, resulting in excessive dependency on car use. In turn this has contributed to major adverse environmental impacts, the decline of traditional towns, employment losses and uneconomic public transport.

Our detailed comments are as follows -

2. Road – Cars, Buses and coaches

2.1 We strongly support the wider use of low emission and electric cars. In a previous submission on green number plate consultation we raised our strong opposition to these vehicles being permitted to use bus lanes or any other form of bus priority because this would impact on bus journey times and reliability. As the number of electric vehicles increases the impact on bus services would get worse. We said that it is more important from an environmental and road congestion standpoint to maintain and improve bus services to encourage users to change mode to public transport rather than to change vehicles to low emission.

2.2 We are concerned that the paper maintains that "there are no current government targets set for buses."

2.3 To encourage more bus use in line with the Secretary of State's statement, much needs to be done especially at this time. An important consideration is bus priority. The coronavirus pandemic has shown that competition for space on our streets and roads, linked to safe perception of car use and the greater demands for cycling and walking space, will require a considered approach to ensure that bus priority does not lose out. Although cycling could be a factor in reducing traffic congestion thus helping bus services, there will still be a continuing need for increasing bus priority, not diminishing it even further.

2.4 Other measures to make bus travel more accessible are those which we have cited on many occasions in the past. In particular -

- Information and Accessibility - accurate real time information at bus stops and next stop information on buses is often poor and its provision would help prospective passengers' confidence in using buses. Whereas most buses are now fully accessible, many bus stops still do not meet the required standards
- Fares - very high fare levels in some rural areas have tended to price off many passengers who do not have concessionary fares. Additionally, exercises we have conducted throughout our region in the past have shown the difficulty of finding out about bus fares before travelling
- Integration – a lack of integration between bus services and with rail services is another major issue. There is a need to give higher priority to integration and co-operation than to preventing collusion between operators.

Bus Rapid Transit

2.5 Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) can offer a high-quality public transport alternative to tramways on selected corridors. In addition, BRT can be integrated with other bus, tram and rail networks. In Greater Manchester, the Leigh Guided Busway shows the potential success of such systems.

2.6 However, BRT can also be a precursor to light or heavy rail as such routes can be converted when patronage grows to levels which justify such investment. Such is the case in Utrecht, where a heavily used bus corridor serving the university is now being converted to light rail.

2.7 BRT buses should operate for a significant part of their journey within a fully dedicated right of way (as found on the Leigh Guided Busway) to avoid traffic congestion.

3. Light Rail

3.1 Light rapid transit is a proven form of urban transport and can draw power from sustainable sources. Also, in Europe, in addition to light rail, the concept of tram train has been successfully developed. The tram train concept allows tram-like vehicles to share tracks with heavy rail trains, but then leave those rail routes to access city or town centres using light rail tracks.

3.2 In the UK the only system to have tram-train is that in Sheffield. However, it took almost 10 years to develop and implement. Such long timescales are not unique. As yet there are no routes in Greater Manchester despite research having been undertaken into possible conversion to tram-train of a number of existing rail routes since 2001. Whilst it does offer an alternative to heavy rail, it cannot be seen as an easy solution to urban transport problems. However, there should be more focus on the sensible development of tram-train in the UK.

3.3 Cost can be a barrier to development of light rail systems but there is scope for lower cost. For example, a recent development in light rail/tram is the growth of on-board fuel supplied vehicles giving catenary free vehicles powered by hydrogen fuel cells. Foshan, a city of some eight million in southern China, has rolled out the first of what will be many trams powered by hydrogen. When they enter service, each will carry up to 380 passengers, have a range of 100 km, and a top speed of 70 km/h. Refuelling, will take just three minutes. Hydrogen fuel cells generate electricity by creating a chemical reaction using hydrogen and oxygen. That means their exhaust is nothing but water.

3.4 An overriding consideration with both light rail and tram-train is the absolute necessity to integrate with other modes. This is still not ideal with the current Manchester Metrolink system particularly as far as fares are concerned.

4. Rail Passenger Services

Electrification

4.1 We believe that the key contribution to de-carbonising rail transport is electrification. We emphasise the need for a rolling programme of consistent, proactive and extensive electrification - in UK terms Scotland is providing a lead. Alternatives in the form of hydrogen and battery do offer short to medium

terms solutions – and in some (limited) cases the long-term answer on some lesser used lines, but electrification is the real widespread solution.

4.2 In May 2020 we responded to the National Infrastructure Commission's call for evidence on "Rail needs assessment for the Midlands and the North". The following sections of that response relating to electrification are reproduced below.

4.3 "In December 2013 the Government established the North of England Electrification Task Force (ETF) with a central brief to prioritise the North of England's rail lines for electrification on economic grounds. To undertake the detailed assessment work, an Electrification Stakeholder Working Group comprising representatives from northern local authorities, Merseytravel, TfGM, West Yorkshire PTE and the rail industry was established. The thirty-two rail routes of the Northern Rail and TransPennine Express franchise areas were considered.

4.4 On 5 March 2015, the North of England ETF published its report, 'Northern Sparks', stating that:

"Across the world a modern urban or indeed intercity railway is an electric railway because there are a number of significant benefits from electric traction".

4.5 The Electrification Task Force recommended that 12 routes (Tier 1) be progressed immediately through outline design and costing to feed into the initial industry plan / High Level Output Statement for Network Rail's Control Period 6 (CP6) which runs for the 5 years from 2019 to 2024.

4.6 The choice of routes within the Northern Sparks Report was based on assessing their economic contribution. TWNW commended this report, recognising the significant benefits electrification would bring for passengers.

4.7 These benefits include better reliability, faster acceleration and quicker journey times especially for services with frequent stops. In turn there is proof that electrification brings major social, economic and environmental benefits – 'the sparks effect'. With this response, ***we include a copy of the Northern Sparks Report***, as we feel it is worthy of more detailed consideration, and hopefully, the inclusion of some elements in future proposals

4.8 Unfortunately there has been little progress in the 5 year since the report was published, with even two routes considered at that time to be in the baseline – North Transpennine (NTP) and Oxenholme to Windermere - not yet started (the latter now proposed to become part of the bi-mode network).

4.9 The North TransPennine route is now being upgraded (TPE upgrade) in certain sections but the question of electrification is unclear, though wiring Church Fenton to Colton Junction will enable First TPE bi-modes to use more of their electric capability. It is clear to us that this line should be fully

electrified between Manchester and Colton Junction with appropriate capacity enhancements to permit growth in both local and long-distance services.

4.10 Recently, Network Rail Chief Executive Andrew Haines has stated that: "We have to be bolder about demonstrating what electrification can do" and that the Government should "start soon and start progressively". Also, crucially, Andrew Haines believes that Network Rail could deliver electrification costs which are "much more credible and palatable than they were". (Ref: Haines: electrification must start soon and progressively, in Rail Issue 904, May 6 – May 19, 2020, pp 12-13).

4.11 Therefore, progressive electrification should be very much back on the agenda, with more cost-effective methods of implementing schemes. The central role of electrification in decarbonisation appears to have been confirmed, with hydrogen fuel cell and battery traction generally less favoured. In the light of this we would advocate that the priority (Tier 1) schemes in the Northern Sparks paper form the basis of future progress. In addition to Oxenholme – Windermere and North TransPennine these would include – the Calder Valley line, Liverpool to Manchester via Warrington and Southport/Kirkby to Salford Crescent. For a full list of schemes see the report which is attached."

4.12 We understand that electrification costs in some cases have been high due to a requirement to meet new European standards re live wire distancing involving more bridge raising costs etc. As we are no longer a member of the EU perhaps savings could be made by reverting to the old UK standards in this regard which have been running here for over 40 years - as far as we are aware without major incidents.

4.13 In the wake of Covid 19 and with greater awareness of the environmental and decarbonisation issues, the schemes listed in Northern Sparks should be revisited. The report is attached.

Reducing car dependency

4.14 We should view the future of railway stations as potential focal points for communities. This includes improving facilities at our stations to provide better station environments, accessibility, improved access for cycling and active travel and, where possible, retail and catering facilities. This will need substantial investment.

4.15 It is vital to link station developments with land use planning. Stations cannot be separated from a consideration of the immediate area they serve. A fully accessible, safe and secure station with good facilities will not achieve its potential if the catchment area, especially close to the station, is inaccessible. Research shows that the majority of a station's catchment patronage comes from within 800 to 1000 metres of the station. Therefore, cycling and walking are important. This relationship has led to the development of a concept called 'Station Development Zones'.

4.16 The DfT, working in partnership with other Government Departments, local authorities, communities and representative groups (such as TravelWatch NorthWest), can support the creation of Station Development Zones by amongst other things –

- Improving areas outside the immediate operational station, encompassing environmental, access and integration improvements (including walking and cycling)
- Encouraging residential developments close to railway stations

5. Interchange and integration

5.1 Interchanges should make it easier for passengers to transfer between rail, bus, tramway, cycle and walking routes as part of a single integrated public transport network. Interchange facilities should be improved at far more railway stations. These improvements should include the spatial layout of interchanges, shelters, walking and cycling routes, signage and way-marking, safety and security, information provision, park and ride (with electric vehicle charging points) and safe cycle storage.

5.2 Park and ride (or incentive parking) facilities are parking lots with public transport connections, that allow commuters and others travelling to town and city centres to leave their vehicles and transfer to a bus, tram or train. The vehicle is left in the car park during the day and retrieved when the owner returns. Park and rides should not be located too close to city centres, as they can then encourage drivers to drive too far. This means that park and ride developments are best located in the suburbs of metropolitan areas, or the outer edge of large cities.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond

Yours sincerely

John A Moorhouse

John Moorhouse
Company Secretary