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

promoting quality public transport.....

Transport Committee
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

21st January 2022

Dear Committee Members,

Inquiry launch: Fuelling the future: motive power and connectivity

1. TravelWatch NorthWest is an independent Community Interest Company representing all public transport users in North West England. We are pleased to give our views to this inquiry.

The effect of Government fuel policy on future road, rail, air and maritime connectivity

2. The transport industry will need to use oil and gas for a considerable period into the future. Given the slow paced of rail electrification and the experimental nature of alternatives such as hydrogen, diesel trains will be around for some time yet. The bus industry is making some progress with electric based vehicles but many vehicles and of course cars will still be oil based for some time to come. Both the air and marine industries are far away from becoming less dependent on oil.

3. Although we are an oil and gas rich country there is a danger that we will end up being dependent on resources abroad for these fuels. This does not help the environment, as they are still being produced elsewhere. We would urge measures are taken to retain self-sufficiency as much as possible for the period before oil and gas are phased out.

4. It is our overriding view that fuel policy must incentivise public transport, which has suffered and is suffering substantially from the Covid pandemic. The big hurdle is to attract private car users to public transport. This may entail unpopular measure to restrain car use by taxation. However, the October 2021 budget actually froze fuel duty, giving the completely contradictory message to **encourage** car use. Some 22% of UK *carbon emissions arise from cars and so the UK must develop innovative and sustainable public transport as an alternative.*

5. In addition, not all public transport is environmentally friendly and in the case of air it is regrettable that the same budget included measures to make it cheaper to take internal flights. This policy effectively pushes passengers to switch from rail to flying, by cutting the price of internal flights at a time when rail fares are rising. We understand that in some other European countries domestic air travel is becoming increasingly more restricted where rail alternatives are available.

Whether and how the Government is ‘technology neutral’ in its regulation and assessment of alternative fuels, and how its policies on alternative fuels influence investment, research, development and production

6. The government seems unconvinced about the benefits of electrification. We have previously laid great emphasis on rail electrification asserting that it is the key contribution to de-carbonising rail transport as well as contributing to less use of fossil fuels. We have always emphasised the need for a rolling programme of consistent, proactive and extensive electrification such as that set out in the 2015 report of the North of England Electrification Task Force – “Northern Sparks”. Unfortunately, there has been little progress with the well-considered schemes in the report.

7. One important factor with electrification schemes has been the high initial capital cost. There are signs that this is now being addressed so 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 and fuel policy terms should be confirmed, with hydrogen fuel cell and battery traction relegated to lesser routes.

8. On the last point, an issue with battery train operation is reduction in flexibility. For example, a proposal has been made (last year) for a future such method of operating train services on the Oxenholme – Windermere (Lakes) Line. This could constrain service patterns which would be determined, not necessarily by the market, but by the needs of battery electric trains to spend a considerable proportion of their time running under the overhead wires between Oxenholme and Manchester in order to recharge batteries.

The infrastructure required to develop, produce, store and dispense alternative fuels

9. No comment

Steps that the Government could take to maximise the utility of the UK’s existing transport stock while meeting climate change commitments

10. A shift in emphasis to greener public transport is needed. For example, to encourage the greater use of buses, the introduction of a congestion or workplace parking charge would reduce traffic levels and fund local transport investment, including subsidy for bus services. There should also be greater bus priority measures across cities through bus lanes, bus gates and bus

priority at junctions, to protect bus services from congestion. Cities should not get extra funding for bus services while also making them worse by forcing buses into traffic jams.

11. The whole issue of public transport support and development – rail, road and integration - needs a thorough overhaul with lessons learned from many continental European countries. This would go much of the way towards reducing fossil fuel dependence and meeting climate change commitments.

The contribution that alternative fuels could make to sustainability, transport decarbonisation and connectivity.

12. We do not profess any great expertise in the environmental benefits of alternative fuels but we do affirm that the government needs to concentrate on further decarbonising buses and trains with more electrification of both modes. We welcome the commitment to zero emission buses and trends towards introducing battery powered buses.

13. More use of rail can, on its own, be a major factor in reducing carbon emissions. In addition, new electrified Light Rail systems should be supported. Manchester Metrolink has been very successful in providing a worthwhile, energy efficient passenger operation to compete with higher energy consuming modes. Other conurbations should follow its example.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond.

Yours sincerely,

John A Moorhouse

John Moorhouse, Company Secretary