



Built Environment Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Public transport in towns and cities

Tuesday 29 March 2022

10 am

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Members present: Baroness Neville-Rolfe (The Chair); Lord Berkeley; Lord Carrington of Fulham; Baroness Cohen of Pimlico; Lord Grocott; Lord Haselhurst; The Earl of Lytton; Lord Moylan; Lord Stunell; Baroness Thornhill.

Evidence Session No. 7

Heard in Public

Questions 80 - 89

Witness

I: Chris Lane, Head of Transport Innovation, Transport for West Midlands.

Examination of witness

Chris Lane.

Q80 **The Chair:** Good morning. Welcome to the House of Lords Built Environment Committee's public evidence session in our inquiry into public transport in towns and cities. The inquiry is considering the impact of technological and digital developments on travel behaviours, future trends in public transport, especially innovation, and how public policy may be shaped in the light of those trends. We are also very interested in connectivity between modes and better integration through data and innovation. We will make recommendations to the Government later in the year.

This is our second session focusing on innovation. We are very glad that today we have as a witness Chris Lane, head of transport innovation at Transport for West Midlands.

Our session is being broadcast on parliamentlive.tv. A full transcript is being taken and will be made available to you shortly after the session so that you can make any corrections.

I am afraid that some Members may need to leave the meeting early, as the Building Safety Bill is being taken in the Chamber at 11 am. Three of our colleagues have joined us online. I suggest that Members and witnesses keep their questions and responses succinct, as we have a lot of questions to cover and we would like to get through them.

Mr Lane, can you look ahead and share your crystal ball? Which public transport services do you think will grow over the next 10 years? Will some shrink? Is this linked to customer needs and wishes, which this committee has taken a big interest in, or is it to do with funding or lack of funding?

Chris Lane: Let us think about the impact of the pandemic to start with. It has been a real opportunity to see a change in travel behaviour. What we have seen post pandemic, as you can imagine, is that cars on the motorways and the roads are back to the levels that they were before the pandemic in the West Midlands, but we are not seeing that comeback with light rail, bus and train. In fact, train is the worst of those at the moment in the West Midlands. Metro is leading the way.

That is the past. Dealing with car transport is going to be a challenge for us. Unless we do something, car transport will continue to increase. That is probably because we told everybody not to use public transport during the pandemic and to isolate themselves. We have to reverse that message now.

We did a piece of work in the West Midlands called "Keeping the West Midlands Moving". It showed that, no matter what you did to encourage them to drive early or to change their route, a number of drivers would still have that behaviour. There is a real emotional attachment to the way in which people decide the mode that they use to travel.

Through our future transport zones work, which is future thinking, we have started to think a lot more about this behaviour, the emotion, what will make people change and what the future transport modes can be. Through the showcases there, we have tried some new modes. We have tried car clubs extensively in the West Midlands, which some people may say are not that new but they are fairly new. We have tried electric scooters. Love them or hate them, we have them in the West Midlands. We have put in bike hire schemes. We have also put in a demand-responsive transport service where you can call the bus on your phone and it works in a geographical area rather than point to point.

As we look forward, we think that DRT-type services—more on-demand, more personalised services—will be more of the services of the future. We will still want mass transit and quick links into centres, but we think that a number of people will want services to be demand responsive.

The other thing we have looked at in the West Midlands is autonomous vehicles. We have a trial today at Birmingham Airport of an autonomous shuttle being driven, but it is very early days. We think that at some point the technology will be there and we will start to see these autonomous vehicles, but it will probably be for more smaller-distance services. We can see some demand-responsive services moving to autonomous vehicles in the future. We do not want to get to everyone having their own autonomous vehicle. Although they will probably be clean, as they will probably be electric, nobody will be going anywhere because congestion will still be there.

That is what we are learning at this stage. The key thing is that it is not necessarily about the technology; it is about bringing people with you. There is a very strong motivation to stay with the car at the moment.

The Chair: I am sure that that is true. What are the main modes at the moment in the relevant areas? How do you expect them to change, in percentages?

Chris Lane: We can look at one of the projects that we have done, which was called mobility credit. We gave people £3,000 to scrap their old vehicle and then understood what they did. We gave them access to any other transport. Sustainable transport was the preference. They could use car hire, taxis or scooters. We found that a number of people moved to taxis and car hire, but we started to see some people move over to buses. Eighteen per cent of the group of people that we looked at started to use the bus, really for the first time, moving away from the private vehicle.

We think that micromobility—the bike and the scooter—is going to be really important for people once they have reached their destination, to make that final journey to the office, home, leisure centre or wherever else they are going. We see things such as scooters and bike hire—electric bike hire is particularly popular—as being a key transport mode of the future, but it will not replace the big mass transit modes. We are developing a bus rapid transit system and are still developing the tram

system. We still expect those to be extensively used within the West Midlands.

The Chair: So it will be cars first, then buses, then Metro and then these new kinds of micromobility.

Chris Lane: That is right. However, when it comes to the public transport offer, buses still carry by far the most people. Even with the decline post pandemic, that is still the largest mode of moving people in the West Midlands at the moment, other than the car.

The Chair: Is the micromobility replacing buses or cars, or is it actually replacing walking, which is one of the things that I see in London?

Chris Lane: We have started to see signs of its moving people away from cars, but they are only small and it is very early days yet. We think that it has the potential to move people away from cars.

Another thing that we are doing in the West Midlands is creating something called mobility as a service, which allows you to link these modes together in a seamless way, using an app. If you are a train user, when you get off the train you do not want to have to think about how to hire a scooter or a bike. You want that to be frictionless. You want to be able to move from your train journey on to your scooter or bike or into a taxi. We are building on our current Swift smart card scheme to allow you access to those modes of travel and to build that into an app, to make it really easy for you to use.

The Chair: The elderly and people with small children or luggage are still on the bus, in the car or autonomous vehicle. Is that correct?

Chris Lane: Yes. We are encouraging people who have to have a car to think about car clubs and are really trying to introduce those. Imagine that you live on a particular housing estate, there is a car club on that estate and you can use that car when and if you need to. We are thinking about what we call 15-minute neighbourhoods. We talk about travelling, but what if you do not have to travel? What if the facilities that you need are close to you? What if you can walk or cycle to them? However, when you need to travel and take the family out, there is a car club that you can use. That car will be new. It will be environmentally friendly, because it will be the latest electric vehicle. It also means that there is not a vehicle on everybody's drive, just sitting there during the day doing nothing, and that the utilisation of vehicles is much higher. We still have a lot of work to do to get there, but we see the use of car clubs as being much more important as we go forward.

The Chair: That is interesting.

Q81 **The Earl of Lytton:** Good morning. That is very interesting. I would like to drill down a bit more into where you think that the detail of the shifts in travel patterns has occurred. You refer to increasing private car use. Is that associated with travel to work or with other things? The reason why I say that is that I am a car driver but my mileage has fallen

astronomically; it is a tiny fraction of what it used to be before Covid. Have wholesale changes to travel patterns as regards the hours of a day and things of that sort happened?

Take the question of peak-time travel on public transport, for instance. In many transport areas, that has a premium price. If it is travel to work, somebody is paying out net of tax money to finance that. This whole modal shift may be not only about people deciding not to travel in on Mondays and Fridays, but about people deciding to travel in after 10 o'clock and to stay until after 7 o'clock so that they get the benefit of off-peak travel and that sort of thing.

How much of a shift is this? How much do you think is permanent? You may not want to answer that, but my own suspicion is that some of it will be permanent because cultural and economic things have caused that shift. What does that mean for planning high-ticket-cost items such as tram systems, which are necessarily hypothecated on a regular and identifiable income stream? I am sorry; it is rather complicated, but I want to try to get behind the detail here.

Chris Lane: It is fair to say that it is too early to know whether the changes that we have seen through the pandemic are permanent. I talked about cars. We know that there are more cars on the road now than there were pre-pandemic. At the moment, we have not drilled down into where those cars are going.

The Earl of Lytton: You do not necessarily know at what time of day they are travelling.

Chris Lane: Generally all the time.

The Earl of Lytton: It is all over.

Chris Lane: Yes.

The Earl of Lytton: It is not just at peak time.

Chris Lane: It is not just at peak times. We are seeing more traffic.

At the same time, we are also seeing the public transport modes starting to build back. We are starting to see them come back. The evidence is not there to prove it yet, but our general feeling is that a number of people will work in this hybrid way, if they can. They will probably spend a couple of days in the office or a couple of days at meetings and then spend some time at home.

Working with the companies we work with, we are starting to see that become a discipline. The other day I spoke to a West Midlands-based company, a large auto manufacturer. It is research based, rather than a company that builds vehicles. Its view was, "Yes, we will ask our staff to be in a couple of days a week. We have that joint working, but we like flexible working at the same time". I think that we are seeing that. That is why, within our own strategies, we are thinking of digital as being one

of the important transport modes. Digital connectivity becomes even more important as we go forward.

On large infrastructure, we are thinking about this concept of 15-minute neighbourhoods and 45-minute centres. To do that, we are looking at a series of mobility hubs, the hub being the place where you can go locally to make broader connections, whether it be a local trip to another mobility hub or local centre or a trip to the main centre itself. But we will still see people travelling to the centres for work and business.

Q82 Lord Grocott: I should declare an interest as someone who lived in Birmingham for many years and is a frequent visitor.

I have two unrelated questions about how things will develop in the future. One is about the competition for road space, as you envisage it. You talked about scooters and cycling as being part of the future, but you also said that buses, in particular, are a crucially important part of commuting as far as Birmingham is concerned. However, they are all after the same bit of road space, or competing for road space, are they not? Specifically, we had evidence from a witness last week about the problems that it presents to buses when cycle lanes are introduced and the impact of cyclists on the work of bus drivers, the timekeeping of buses and the rest. Can you comment on how you see that competition developing in the future?

The other specific question is about Midland Metro. Whatever may or may not happen in the future, when it comes to investment in the West Midlands there is a £1.3 billion commitment to expansion of the Metro. Personally, I favour that, but that is just a personal opinion. Clearly, that must be a statement of the success in West Midlands terms of the Metro that exists at the moment. At least, I guess that that is the case. It must also be some sort of estimate of the extent to which Metro and its like can help to address congestion in cities and move people away from cars. I would like to have your thoughts on those two unrelated issues.

Chris Lane: You asked about competition for road space. I think that the biggest competition is with the car, so perhaps we should talk about bus against cycle or bus against scooter, but the biggest competition is the car. In the West Midlands, certainly, we have found that probably our biggest barrier to get over is people's keenness and desire to use the car and giving them a genuine alternative that will appeal to them and that they will use. We are trying to do that. We are trying to think about that behaviour change.

The right sort of investment and road space use, properly segregating cycles and making proper space for buses on the roads, can make that work. We are all dealing with very scarce resource, as you say, and trying to make the most of that, but we are also fighting against the car. We need to think about whether there are opportunities to take the car out completely and to dedicate road space to active travel and public transport, as we have done along Broad Street, where the tram runs now, but it has to be the right sort of location.

Lord Grocott: I do not know why a tram is called active travel.

Chris Lane: No. It is for active travel and for the trams.

The second question related to Metro. We see our West Midlands network as having three tiers that we are developing. The longer-distance services, rail and Metro, are absolutely key to that, to move people between the larger centres. We see a more local network, which involves looking at our Sprint bus network and the demand-responsive buses. Then there is the local bus service that sits underneath that.

You can look at a number of European cities. If you have ever been on holiday to one of the Swiss or German cities, you will see that their network map looks quite structured. It makes a lot of sense. They have fast services underneath. Those high-capacity, mass-transit services are layered on with slightly lower-capacity services. Then there are the very local services, which get you to exactly where you want to be.

Metro still has a really big part to play within the West Midlands, but we are also exploring cheaper forms of light rail. Working with Coventry council, we are looking at the very light rail system as one of the options. We are also looking at autonomous vehicles. I know that they are a quite a way off yet, but can they also have a part to play in these demand-responsive services, to provide some of that mass transit or some of the bespoke transit we are looking at?

Lord Grocott: Do you expect a return on the investment?

Chris Lane: Yes. Metro is coming back better than all the other modes after the pandemic. As you are probably aware from the press, we have had some issues with the vehicles themselves, which we are dealing with at the moment. Setting those aside, the patronage is building back. It is not quite where it was pre-pandemic, but it is doing better than all the other modes in terms of people coming back to use the tram. They do want to use it. It is very popular.

The Chair: What are the finances like? Can the Metro be a cost-effective solution? Do you have to put in a lot of subsidy relative to buses?

Chris Lane: The reality during the pandemic is that there has been subsidy across the board. We have appreciated that and the investment that the Government have made in keeping public transport moving. For a few years to come, while we build back to better levels than we are at, at the moment, there will probably need to be support to make public transport really viable, but there is no reason why the tram, for example, cannot be viable in the long term.

The Chair: Can I ask a question for clarification? You talked about 15-minute neighbourhoods. I was interested to know how those match the land-use patterns in the West Midlands. Indeed, is it a 15-minute drive time or a 15-minute walk time? I used to work for supermarkets, so I understand—

Chris Lane: We are thinking about 15-minute connectivity: to be able to get somewhere in 15 minutes. We would rather you used a public transport mode from those neighbourhoods to do those 15 minutes. A car is likely to be a bit quicker, if you go door to door.

We are working with the local authorities as regards their thinking on land use planning, because they have similar challenges. How can we work hand in glove with the local authority planning teams and the public transport teams to put these hubs in the right place and to create the right environment? It is about more than just transport. If you have a 15-minute neighbourhood but there is nothing in that neighbourhood—no shops or medical facilities—that does not work for you.

The Chair: Are these 15-minute connectivity areas natural in the West Midlands? Is that a sensible choice, or is it a top-down thing that you are imposing from a planning point of view?

Chris Lane: We have done it both ways. We have done some analysis across the West Midlands, so we have an idea of where these 15-minute neighbourhoods are. We have done it from a data perspective. However, from a policy point of view, thinking about what it is reasonable to ask of people in terms of time and distance, we think that 15 minutes is a reasonable distance to go for.

The Chair: I am very interested in having some more evidence on where these are. It is obviously a very interesting idea.

Chris Lane: We have taken a map and done some GIS analysis of that data. We have understood where those neighbourhoods are and where they could work. We have also recognised that there are different mobility hubs, if you like. There will be some that are in suburban areas, but there will be others that will be closer to public transport interchanges. You also need to think about the city centre as being a mobility hub in a different way. Each of them has different facilities and capabilities. We are currently defining that scope.

The Chair: If you were able to share some of the circles, we would be very interested.

Chris Lane: Yes. We can share that.

Q83 **Lord Berkeley:** I want to carry on the discussion about 15-minute neighbourhoods, which is very interesting. It is also coming up in London and some other places. Am I right in thinking that 15 minutes refers to the time that it will take you, and how you spend it depends on how far you have to go? It could be walking, cycling, in a car or anything else. It is a concept of having as many facilities as possible, be they medical, schools or anything else, within the area. As the Chair said, if you have anything on that, it would be very helpful.

Chris Lane: We can share some of our analysis. It does not exist now. It is our policy goal that, as we develop things, we need to think in that sort

of way and to work with local authorities to create mixed-use land that has the transit links that it needs to the right places.

Lord Berkeley: Can I move on from there? You have them, you have the interchanges you talked about, which are also very interesting, and you have the issue of how to integrate the modes, from walking upwards, and of the connectivity between them, the 15-minute centres and everything else. At the beginning of your introduction you mentioned that people would like to see autonomous vehicles, so that they know where they are going and have total control over their journey. How do you link all those together?

The key, of course, is to have ease of interchange. This week and last week I was in Brussels, where I did some scooter riding. The key there was that there was always a scooter outside where I wanted to start from and I knew that I could dump it anywhere, leaving aside blocking the pavements, which some of my colleagues were not very happy about. The key was that I had certainty. That is very important for people if you have to change modes, from a scooter to the Metro and from the Metro to something else. How is one going to achieve that?

Chris Lane: There are two aspects for us to achieve that. One is the mobility hubs that we are talking about. People need to start to understand what is available at a mobility hub and what they can get there. If you find your way to a mobility hub, you should know that you can get your scooter or your bike and that you can access public transport. It should have good information. That is part of it. We would like to see scooters and bikes extending much further. We are working on doing that, but scooters are still subject to a final decision on where we go with them.

Over the top of that, what we want to give to the individual, if they have a mobile phone, is this mobility as a service solution that tells them what to do, where to go and where to get things. It tells them when their bus will be available and whether their scooter is available. They do not need to worry about booking it. If they have their phone, they will just be able to use it. It is about creating a seamless experience for the individual travelling.

Lord Berkeley: What about those over a certain age who do not have mobile phones?

Chris Lane: We have thought about that as well. We currently have a very successful smart card scheme that can be used on all public transport. That is card-based. We would be able to use that for people who did not have or did not want to use a phone. We know that there are a number of people who would choose not to, which is absolutely fine. We have that now with the card.

Q84 **Lord Haselhurst:** First, can I clarify one small point in my mind? What is the relationship between Midlands Connect and the authority that you represent?

Chris Lane: Midlands Connect is the sub-regional body that looks across the Midlands as a whole. Transport for West Midlands is part of West Midlands Combined Authority, so we have the direct powers, through the mayor, for transport within the West Midlands. Midlands Connect helps us to shape policy. It helps us to think about things from a Midlands point of view, making sure that we are doing right by the whole of the Midlands, but transport policy in the West Midlands is enacted through the mayor and the West Midlands Combined Authority.

Lord Haselhurst: So it is a sort of research department for you.

Chris Lane: Effectively, yes. It convenes all the local authorities and transport bodies in the area to make sure that we are working in the same direction. It is very good at lobbying government to make sure that the Midlands perspective is taken into account when we do things. It will also lead on issues. The smart card that I mentioned is a good example. We have one and Nottingham has one, but we should be doing things together. Midlands Connect is very good at making sure that, cross-region, we join up and start to work together.

Lord Haselhurst: Which of the projects that you have implemented or chosen to implement do you feel happiest about? Which is the most comfortable fit for the West Midlands?

Chris Lane: The most interesting one is through the city region sustainable transport fund that has just been announced. We are going to do some work with demand-responsive transport. People have seen a decline in overall bus usage for a number of years now. That means that areas of low patronage are not profitable. Everything is run privately, outside London.

Demand-responsive transport offers a couple of things. First, it offers the opportunity to provide services where you might not have been able to previously. Secondly, it gives people services of a bespoke nature. It is not just one bus going from A to B. The bus can go from a number of locations to a number of other locations. It has multiple routes, and you have more certainty with the journey itself.

We are really looking forward to investing in that. We have done some research into these services in Coventry to understand how they work. People like them and are starting to use them. It is a really nice fit for where a standard bus service would not work.

Lord Haselhurst: The other day the Roads Minister announced £200 million more for zero-carbon buses. How many of the buses that she thinks will be achieved by that amount of money do you hope to get?

Chris Lane: We do very well in the West Midlands. We receive funding for electric vehicles for Coventry so that it can become an electric bus city. It is in the process of electrifying the bus fleet across the operators in Coventry. Just this week we had the announcement on hydrogen buses, so we will be thinking about having hydrogen-based buses on our

bus rapid transit routes. Again, we look at those sustainable modes of transport as being key to underpinning the transport network in the West Midlands.

That being said, at the end of the day the investment in a bus is a private company decision. While we can influence it, without this incentive and funding, it will be the likes of companies such as National Express and Stagecoach that decide whether to buy these vehicles.

The Chair: Can I go back to demand-responsive services? I think that you have something called MaaS. That is the acronym.

Chris Lane: Yes. It stands for mobility as a service.

The Chair: Is it difficult to get the different platforms on board? How viable is it? We had heard that Whim was struggling and were wondering how you were going to make this work going forward.

Chris Lane: We can explain that. We set up Whim to be a purely commercial offering. We said to the private sector, "Can you come in and produce a mobility as a service solution?" It produced one, and people liked it, but it did not have the reach and customers to make the difference that we wanted to see for public transport policy. It was something that people liked, but it was not successful commercially.

What we are doing now with mobility as a service is building on top of our successful smart card ticketing scheme, which has multiple hundreds of thousands of customers already. We are working in collaboration with the bus companies. We have a collaboration agreed with National Express Group to develop this together, so it is not just a public transport initiative or a public initiative: it is a public-private service that is providing the backbone to actual transport ticketing, not just mobility as a service. We believe that, with Swift, the operators' co-operation and some investment through future transport zones, we will become the honest broker that sits in the middle and manages the scheme. That will allow all the other bus operators, the scooters, the bike hires and the car hires to plug into it and make it work.

Q85 **Baroness Cohen of Pimlico:** I was particularly interested in some things you have tried that might or might not have worked. In the experiment of giving people £3,000 to row in their car and see what they could do, I picked up the figure that only 18% of people that you know about moved on to the bus. What did the rest of them do?

I have two questions. How many people actually rowed in their car for a lump sum of £3,000, and what did the 18% who did not move on to buses do?

Chris Lane: As of February, 75% of those people were using taxi or ride-hailing instead of their private car; 18% were using bus and tram. Approximately 9% were using the car clubs that I talked about, where you can pick up a shared car. At the moment just over 100 people are using that scheme. A budget of £3,000 does not go a long way. We had

significantly larger interest from people wanting to take up that scheme than the 100 that we are able to work with. The scheme runs over two years, so we will take the time to fully understand after 18 months whether they get bored, go back and buy an old car, and start driving again.

Baroness Cohen of Pimlico: That is what I want to know.

Chris Lane: It is genuinely looking at future transport on the basis that, yes, we hope it will work, but if it does not work we need to know that and why. What will make them go back to the car from those options? Interestingly, a small percentage is walking and cycling. You can see on YouTube that there is one chap who sold his car, and he seems to have become an avid cyclist and walker now. He is telling everybody all about it. These people were driving their car previously, so we would expect them potentially to move to taxis and car hire before they move on to public transport. The good news is that we are starting to see some people trying public transport.

We have just extended the active travel scheme so you can now buy your bike with the £3,000. If you feel you are going to be riding a lot and you do not want to be continually hiring a bike, you can buy a bike through that scheme.

It is also worth saying that the scheme allows you to travel not just in the West Midlands. If you wanted to come down to London, or if you are going further afield in your car, it gives you the opportunity to do that.

Baroness Cohen of Pimlico: Of course 100 is a very small sample.

Chris Lane: It is a small sample, but we are working very closely with those people to understand in detail why they are doing what they are doing.

Baroness Cohen of Pimlico: It is an interesting experiment because, at the worst, those 100 people are out of cars for however long it is—18 months or for ever if you are very lucky. You have a chance at least of getting them out of cars. Do you plan to extend the experiment?

Chris Lane: We would like to extend it, but we are waiting for the final results. Again, we want to make sure about it. Whenever you introduce something new, people try it. We join a gym in the new year, do we not, we use it for a couple of months and then we stop? Do people stick with it? The most important thing is not them getting the money. It is the behaviour change and what causes the behaviour. That underlies all the work we do: why did they make that change, and what would cause them to go back to their old habits, because that is the thing we need to fix?

Lord Grocott: Briefly, based on what you just said, do you have any information at all about the proportion of the public who can avail themselves of travelling by bike or by scooter? There are obviously many who cannot—children, the elderly, people with various disabilities. Is there a notion of what your maximum potential is of people who can say,

“Blow the car, I’m going to cycle or scoot”?

Chris Lane: I do not think we have done those numbers yet, for a couple of reasons. First, as far as scooters are concerned, because we are still in trial mode, we do not know where we will end up with that. We do not know whether everybody will be allowed to have their own private scooter and do what they want, or whether it will be managed schemes as we have at the moment. We will probably say we would prefer managed schemes as we have at the moment so that we can keep an eye on that. We have not done those numbers yet, but where we can we are looking to make walking, cycling and scooting a positive experience for people, and make that as friendly as possible.

The Chair: I am a bit of a scooter sceptic. Do you have any information about accidents, particularly on pavements—because they tend to go on pavements that is one of the problems—and, indeed, crime? Are you looking at the downside as well as the upside?

Chris Lane: We are definitely looking at the downside and the upside. It is really hard to understand what is an accident from a local authority managed scheme and what is an accident from a private scooter. A lot of the time we find it is the private scooters—the illegal scooters—but not always. I will be absolutely honest: I have seen some of our scooter scheme scooters used inappropriately, but when we know that, because people have registered and we know who they are, we can do something about it; if it is a private scooter that is behaving badly, unless you are there and someone can enforce that immediately, you cannot do anything.

Lord Berkeley: That is a very interesting discussion that we need. PACTS—the Parliamentary Advisory Committee for Transport Safety—produced a report last week, but it does not compare the accident statistics—as you have said, there are two different types—with the equivalent ones on bikes. I do not really care whether they are owned bikes or hired bikes, but it would be nice to know whether there is a significant difference. I am not suggesting you can tell us now, but if you have that information it would be really good.

Chris Lane: To help us understand the behaviour of scooter riders, as part of our future transport zones work, we have set up showcases. One of our showcase sites is around Warwick University. It is a big site with students and a lot of industry; Jaguar Land Rover does research there. It is a very active university. We have also put in some road sensors so that we can identify scooters, people walking and people cycling, which tracks their behaviour, so you can see where people are on the pavement or where people are crossing where it is unhelpful or dangerous to cross. We are only starting to collect that data now, but that will also be important in understanding what people do and why they are doing it, and in the built environment whether you can design things to prevent some of that unintended behaviour. We are trying to bring everything to bear in this research.

The Chair: Please keep us in touch because we are very interested in this mode and in international experience. I first came across these at UCLA in Los Angeles. It must have data because it has had it for five or six years.

Chris Lane: We have found that they have been very popular in the West Midlands. The take-up has been much larger than the local authorities thought it would be. Birmingham extended the geography of its scheme twice. At the same time a number of people, quite rightly, are quite nervous about what the impact of scooters is going to be. It is definitely a topic worth continuing to talk about.

Q86 **Lord Moylan:** I have lots of questions. As background, I should say that I grew up in Birmingham and I used to be deputy chairman of Transport for London. I would like to put in context this desire for areas outside London to have a transport system like London. London's population density is 5,700 persons per square kilometre, and in the West Midlands, which is the second most dense part of the country, it is 3,235, which is only 56% of London's population density. That, of course, is more dense than anywhere else other than London in the country.

In that regard, my first question is: nationally, the figure for the number of trips taken by car is approximately 85% of all trips. Do you have a starting figure, so to speak, for the West Midlands, and what would you aim to reduce it to when all your measures have been deployed? Obviously, I would not expect it to be 85%.

Chris Lane: The figure I know that I could quote off the top of my head is that commuter trips pre-pandemic into Birmingham were roughly 63% by car, so there were still quite a number of trips by car into the West Midlands.

Lord Moylan: What is your goal?

Chris Lane: I would have to come back to you on an actual percentage. We have realised that to achieve our carbon net-zero targets there has to be a significant shift, not just to electric vehicles but in the way we travel, to make a difference to that.

Lord Moylan: When you have all those measures in place, would you expect that number to be 60% or 50%? Do you have any rough idea?

Chris Lane: The number is probably not what we are aiming for. What we are really looking at is what is the social, economic and environmental impact of that mode.

Lord Moylan: What is it? It has to translate into a number for your measures to be effective, otherwise there would be no point in doing them.

Chris Lane: We would not necessarily measure congestion levels. We would measure single occupancy vehicles, the impact on the

environment, and the social and environmental impact. I can come back to you with the figures, because we have some.

Lord Moylan: It would be helpful. Birmingham is blessed with some wonderful radial dual carriageways, especially the northern half of Birmingham, perhaps a little less so in the south. How much road space are you deliberately removing from car users as part of your pushback against the car?

Chris Lane: It is not in our gift to remove road space as the combined authority. It is the local authority's decision to remove or not remove road space. It is up to Birmingham City Council what it chooses to do.

Lord Moylan: Obviously, you work closely with Birmingham City Council. My understanding is that it has deliberately removed a lot of road space. People do not want to travel on the trains because they want to use their cars. You must be conscious of what they are doing because you are working with them. Are you able to say what Birmingham has done about that?

Chris Lane: I cannot give you a number of what it is reducing, but I know it is passionate about wanting to reduce its pollution levels in Birmingham and is working very hard to remove the combustion engine from the city where it can.

Lord Moylan: Do you know Birmingham city centre?

Chris Lane: Yes, I do.

Lord Moylan: I do not know where you are based in the West Midlands. It has lost John Lewis now and its retail attractions have largely gone, in my opinion. There are people living on the periphery of Birmingham, in the suburbs of Birmingham, who will not go in any more because it is just too awkward and complicated. Do you think these policies are having any effect on the retail vibrancy of the city centre?

Chris Lane: I think it would be hard to untangle the effect of the pandemic on these policies at the moment. We would want to research with those individuals who do not travel why they do not travel and at the moment what is causing them to do that.

Lord Moylan: Structurally, your big problem as an organisation in the West Midlands is that you have no purchase, as I understand it, on national rail commuter services, because they are run by the rail companies and not by you. You have the buses and other modes that you have described, but not the rail services. Of course, in London that is less true because Transport for London has taken over the operation of some rail services and has its own very extensive rail service in the shape of the Underground, which is both underground and overground and competes with rail services to some extent.

How much do you feel in your organisation and similar bodies, although you do not want to comment on others perhaps, that the set-up, so to

speaking, is somehow breathing on one lung and what you need is to get control of the urban rail services as well?

Chris Lane: We have never hidden from the fact that we think that is the case. West Midlands Rail Executive was set up on the basis of it being able, at the time, to co-manage the franchise with the Department for Transport. We think we need a big say in local rail. We have a good collaborative relationship with West Midlands Railway at the moment, and the rail operators, but, yes, we would want to see more—

Lord Moylan: Chiltern, for example, operates the railway from Dorridge and Solihull into Moor Street and Snow Hill and so on, and there must be other rail companies that—

Chris Lane: There are, yes.

Lord Moylan: It is not just one operator that you absorbed.

Chris Lane: No, and I think at the time we said that it was for West Midlands Rail Executive to jointly or singly manage the rail franchise or the rail contracts and be able to specify the rail services. The key thing is to specify the right level of rail and the right integration. What is the point of your train arriving if your bus has gone?

Lord Moylan: Right, and you are saying that that never happened.

Chris Lane: That was very difficult to happen because you have two separate private entities doing things differently.

Lord Moylan: What is the West Midlands Rail Executive doing now?

Chris Lane: West Midlands Rail Executive is working towards helping to specify the West Midlands rail services and get the best services we can.

Lord Moylan: The DfT remains the franchiser.

Chris Lane: We work hand in glove with the DfT.

Lord Moylan: And Great British Railways will take that on.

Chris Lane: Our rail executive will work to understand how that relationship will work going forward.

Lord Moylan: At the moment you have not had any clarity on how that relationship will work.

Chris Lane: As far as I am aware, no.

Q87 **Lord Stunell:** It has been a fascinating discussion and there are plenty of further questions that could be asked. Perhaps we could go to a more strategic look. We have had a national bus strategy and the Williams-Shapps rail plan. Indeed, Lord Moylan has just referred to that, and we have the levelling-up White Paper. What will be the impact of that on the West Midlands and the services that consumers receive? Is it all just hot

air, in your opinion? What is the substance and what will be the impact of that?

Chris Lane: We really welcome the announcement on the city region sustainable transport fund. That has given us some funding and, unusually, it has given us funding for an extended period. It is a five-year settlement. Again, you worry that you will get something for one, two or three years and then things will move round. That has been good.

I have to say it is not enough. For what we were asking to do and the extent we wanted to do, we had asked for more and needed more, but we genuinely think that funding will make a difference to transport in the West Midlands. It will start to see changes to the Metro. It will see improvements to the demand-responsive transport that I talked about. It will help towards electric vehicle charging, in thinking about those people who are doing last-mile deliveries and who are always out there on the roads and need to charge their vehicles on the go. It is helping in a number of ways but probably just scratching the surface of what we could do as a region.

Lord Stunell: Alongside that, you have talked about the need for a continuing central government subsidy while you recover from Covid—you said perhaps for several years. What do you see as being the balance of revenue support and infrastructure and capital support in terms of not just staying where you are but having the kind of developments, the 15-minute neighbourhoods and the other stuff that you have talked about?

Chris Lane: Any public body would say they want to see revenue support rather than capital support; you do need it. But, again, to keep those services running, to keep them operating, there needs to be some funding, even to establish the new services. Even the demand-responsive services will take time to establish, so that revenue funding is vitally important to help us get those started.

Lord Stunell: What do you see as being the balance between the fight to retain the system you have now and investment to develop the system as you want it to be?

Chris Lane: We are working hand in glove and we are trying to make that balance work. At the end of the day, the bus network is operated by private companies. Those private companies make a profit and loss, and put their investment in or take it out, depending on what they want to do. We need to make sure that those private companies are able to continue to run those businesses. It is not like London where we are letting a contract. We have private bus services.

Lord Stunell: In 10 years' time, you think the core of the business that you have now will be essentially the same, hopefully with the same passengers returning. In your conception of the outcome, what fraction will the new innovative services and the new neighbourhoods be?

Chris Lane: I do not have that number at the moment. We are working through that at this stage. We are just finishing the business case work

on demand-responsive transport to understand what it will replace, what it will support and what it can do. You have to understand what is declining, what you are replacing, and what could become demand responsive.

Lord Stunell: Just to round that off, you could have something that produced a completely new cake recipe, or you could have something that just had sugar sprinkled on the existing cake, and I am trying to understand which.

Chris Lane: To answer your question directly, buses will still be a significant part of the future, on some core routes and core corridors, supported by other modes. Those could be scooters, bikes, demand responsive, at the edges of that. This is back to the three-tiered network I talked about in terms of the inter-regional long-distance network, the centres-based network, and then thinking about the last mile and how you get people to their final destination.

Q88 Baroness Thornhill: The last two questioners, Lord Stunell and Lord Moylan, were absolutely fascinating. I just want to nail a little more the whole issue of governance and accountability, and the impact of that on delivery, with particular reference to the barriers that you see. Lord Moylan in his forensic way nailed a couple, talking about removal of road space and not having control of the rail.

Could you talk to us in more general terms about the governance and who is accountable for what? In particular, what things could improve to make that smoother and less problematic, or is it not problematic in the West Midlands?

Chris Lane: We definitely have our challenges. To start off on a positive note, through the setting up of the mayoral combined authority we have new powers. Those have helped us with land remediation and to think about land development alongside transport. The mayoral powers have helped us to do some of the things that we want to do.

Through the levelling-up White Paper we have been offered the chance to become one of the trailblazers for the next devolution deal, and we are currently shaping what policies and what powers the mayor could have that we think would unlock those sorts of things. If you think about building a tram, you have the Transport and Works Act, traffic orders and vehicle licensing for taxis. There is a whole host of things spread across local authorities, government and other agencies. By centralising that and bringing that together, it allows you to think across the region.

Baroness Thornhill: Thinking about the fact that you are obviously dealing with lots of different local authorities, and the pressure that is apparently on you that things need to become commercially successful quickly, I am aware of local authorities that have abandoned schemes of the kind you are talking about because they are not working. Do you have any information about timeframes for things to work?

For example, my own authority has demand-led transport, and I know

the mayor is having pressure put on him to abandon it. It is not working. It was launched during the pandemic, which begs a question. Do you have any information about how long it should take or how far we should go before things are deemed not to be successful? Is there any kind of blueprint around funding? Funding is often withdrawn very quickly, from my experience, if there are not instant results. Is there anything we can learn from you on that?

Chris Lane: We have been very fortunate. We were the first future transport zone-funded region in the country that has allowed us to look at future transport. That was DfT funded. That has allowed us to have a period where there is funding to explore the impact of those services. We are looking at a three-year period to put those services in, to give them time to run, and to understand what they really cost and what their real impact is, and then understand whether you have a future business case.

With regard to the mobility credits I mentioned earlier, I imagine no local authority would just put its hand in its core revenue budget and give people £3,000 to scrap their car. This funding has allowed us to try that and we are starting to see some results. Then we can make a business case for how we would do more of that because of the impacts we have seen. Future transport zone funding has been very helpful in allowing us to explore some of these new modes of transport.

Baroness Thornhill: Has there been much evidence of what I would call the real political and people interface causing you challenges—politicians being pressurised not to give up road space or not to allocate land use? What is the reality of your experience of that interface?

Chris Lane: I would say the reality has been educational, but that sounds patronising and I do not mean it that way: re-educating people to the art of the possible with some of these transport systems. I remember putting a scooter in front of a councillor for the first time and I probably cannot repeat what he said. It was new, but the guy loves it now and enjoys riding it.

We also found as an organisation when we first started talking about demand-responsive transport, when you have been in the bus industry for a long time and you are used to standard tendered bus services, that it is a new concept. Part of what my team has done is to try to build that education as well, and allow people to look at things and try things, and understand them. We are also prepared to say that it is okay to say that something has not worked, exactly like you are saying. If mobility credits do what we think they will do, fantastic, we can have more. If they do not, we not only know that they did not work but we will know why they did not work and the areas that we might need to explore next as to what we can do. We see ourselves as very privileged to have this opportunity and we accept that not everybody has the opportunity we have here.

Baroness Thornhill: It all sounds massively exciting and we wish you well, Chris.

Chris Lane: It is really good.

Q89 **Lord Carrington of Fulham:** I want to look forward a bit with you. To support your plans for transport in the West Midlands, what sort of infrastructure will be necessary going forward, and how will it be funded? I am particularly thinking of not just the rail, tram and road infrastructure, but I am fascinated by the 15-minute travel areas you are talking about and how they differ from the old Victorian concept of high streets. Are we talking about going back to a town planning structure that is closer to the old village structure that the West Midlands grew out of at one time? How will that be done and how will it all fit together over the next 10 years?

Chris Lane: If I start back with the high streets, there is some of that in what we are thinking. We see the mobility hubs that help us have these 15-minute neighbourhoods as being a place that has social value as well as transport value. It cannot be just a bus stop and an electric vehicle charger. It has to be more than that and has to mean something to the community, which I think is what you are saying. It is where people will be prepared to go, not just for transport but it becomes a centre for that suburban area or that local area. That is the case.

The reality of funding for the mobility hubs, for example, is that we have funding to do two or three of those. Again, that will help to prove the business case. We then have to go and find the funding for others. Part of the developing of those hubs is understanding how they sustain themselves—what the commercial model is behind it. My team is working on not just how to afford to build these but how we keep them up to date and active and working. We think we have some ways to do that.

Lord Carrington of Fulham: Does that tie in with the housing strategy of Birmingham City Council?

Chris Lane: We are working really closely with the local authorities that we have to, rightly, plan housing. If you are doing a housing development, you need to think about the mobility features that can be built into that development to make it successful. Local authorities are doing this now; we are seeing that. In fact, we had some good conversations with one of our local authorities that wanted to build in an area where air pollution was on the fringes. Again, it started to talk about what new mobility modes can help it to do that so that we do not have car parking for people who live there, but we have other ways to move people around. What we can do is enable housing in places where you cannot enable parking or driving.

Lord Carrington of Fulham: Once upon a time I knew the Black Country quite well. It used to be very densely populated, with a mixture of housing and industrial usage. The industrial usage has declined dramatically, and the constancy and the density of the usage of the land has declined dramatically, which means that people feel they are living further apart than they used to. Is this a problem for you? Does that mean you will have to put in more infrastructure than you would do in a

more highly dense area in the rest of Birmingham?

Chris Lane: That is still to be decided. At the moment we are working out where the best places to put these are. We are working it out from the raw data upwards. We are saying that the Black Country is as it is at the moment. Where are the best places to put these facilities? As you build new things, as you build hospitals and other things, the logic is to think about transport and housing and the mixed use. It just makes common sense.

Lord Carrington of Fulham: Looking forward again on road usage, we have tackled you a bit about mixed usage of a scarce resource. Does the West Midlands need more roads?

Chris Lane: I do not know whether we need more roads. We probably need a higher quality of roads and those roads maintained, and we need more public transport. We need more Sprint bus routes, more Metro and some of those MaaS transit routes to move people, to give people that genuine choice. As Lord Moylan said, London is dense, but Birmingham has a dense public transport network as well. We need to give people the opportunity to turn up and be able to go, and you can do that. I can walk out of here and there is a tube every few seconds. There are places in Birmingham and in the West Midlands that are busy but you do not have that sort of facility available to you.

Lord Carrington of Fulham: But you do not have the density of population to justify it either.

Chris Lane: No, but what we found with the Metro is that it is turn up and go, and people really like that. Where we can provide those services and make them turn up and go, people turn up, which is good.

The Chair: The turn up and go is an interesting comment that we have met elsewhere. I do not know if anybody else has any final questions, but I have one.

You have not talked much about enterprise. You have said there are problems with the bus companies being private and so on. If you can get enterprise and something works, you get change very quickly, in my experience. I am an ex-businesswoman, as you probably know. Is that in your thinking? Clearly, you are very driven by planning and the need to meet customers' needs. You have mentioned air pollution several times. Do you think about how the private sector can help with some of these aspirations?

Chris Lane: Absolutely. We know that we cannot solve this on our own and we absolutely need the private sector, in all sorts of ways. For mobility as a service, there are a number of private modes that you would want to include there such as car hire and car clubs. You have car-hire companies such as Enterprise, Bolt and others that operate in the West Midlands. Again, they could bring investment to this as well that is non-traditional bus, so, yes, we think it is important.

The Chair: Thank you for that. I think we have probably exhausted our questions. You have answered very succinctly and well. We are really grateful to you for coming. Thank you for your time and for the offer of some further evidence, which we would really appreciate. Perhaps you can talk to the clerk about what you are able to provide for us. It is obviously a very important trailblazing area. Thank you very much, Mr Chris Lane, for your time, and for the excellent evidence. The public session has now ended and we will continue in private.