



Transport Committee

Oral evidence: [Strategic road investment](#), HC 904

Wednesday 1 March 2023

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 1 March 2023.

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Members present: Iain Stewart (Chair); Mr Ben Bradshaw; Jack Brereton; Ruth Cadbury; Paul Howell; Karl McCartney; Gavin Newlands; Greg Smith.

Questions 162–189

Witnesses

II: Lisa Hopkinson, Associate, Transport for Quality of Life; Professor Glenn Lyons, Professor of Future Mobility, University of the West of England; and Ralph Smyth, Adviser, Transport Action Network.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Transport for Quality of Life](#)
- [Transport for Quality of Life](#)
- [University of the West of England](#)



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Lisa Hopkinson, Professor Lyons and Ralph Smyth.

Q162 **Chair:** Before we start this panel, I remind witnesses that as this is a formal proceeding of the House of Commons we have certain rules about referring to court cases. In most instances, those rules do not apply to talking about the kind of planning decisions that affect the strategic road network. However, can I ask you not to make specific reference to the details or merits of cases that are at the stage of application for judicial review? Talking about judicial reviews themselves is fine, but not cases at the prior stage when the court has been asked to rule on whether to allow a judicial review or not. I ask you all to bear that in mind. Thank you. Will the witnesses state their name and organisation, please?

Professor Lyons: Glenn Lyons, Mott MacDonald professor of future mobility at the University of the West of England, Bristol.

Lisa Hopkinson: Lisa Hopkinson, associate of Transport for Quality of Life.

Ralph Smyth: Ralph Smyth, adviser to Transport Action Network.

Chair: Thank you very much. Ben, I think you are starting off our session.

Q163 **Mr Bradshaw:** Thank you, Chair. What should be the purpose of public money being spent on the strategic road network? Perhaps we could start with you, Professor Lyons.

Professor Lyons: It should be informed by a national strategy that would not just be a strategy on the strategic road network, or indeed necessarily just the transport network, but, in the same way as we are looking at decarbonisation, at economy level. That, of course, determines the allocation of funds potentially that then start to be ringfenced specifically for the strategic road network.

Lisa Hopkinson: I concur. We need an integrated transport network, and we need to look at RIS and other road schemes in the context of that and in the context of wider Government objectives on carbon, health, levelling up, air pollution and all the other things. It should not just be looked at in isolation.

Ralph Smyth: I would like to draw a distinction between the day-to-day and the longer-term, more strategic matters. There needs to be some sort of performance specification, as there is now, looking at safety and quality of surfaces, and a fit with wider Government priorities like levelling up, productivity and decarbonisation. That is where perhaps there is a need for a more multimodal approach rather than putting money in certain baskets and that dictating solutions.

Q164 **Mr Bradshaw:** From what all three of you say, you do not think that the



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current programme reflects the aims that you think it should reflect. Could you give me any examples specifically, without getting into trouble with the Chair?

Lisa Hopkinson: I could tell you about the examples of decarbonisation. The work we have done has shown that the RIS2 programme will add about 20 million tonnes of carbon cumulatively up to the end of the fifth carbon budget. That is at odds with the decarbonisation strategy. The transport sector is already struggling to meet its carbon targets, and this will only add more difficulties.

Ralph Smyth: Can I come in on congestion and productivity? What really struck me from the previous speakers is that none of them mentioned the Government forecasts of congestion surging. We heard how congestion impacts on the freight sector, but none of them said, "The Government have just published figures showing a doubling of congestion in the next couple of decades."

That is the real problem. No matter how many road schemes we build, and there is less money and they are becoming more expensive, we are not going to sort that. We are not even going to make a dent in that increase in congestion. Maybe it is time to try some different solutions. Many of the smart motorway programmes not only increased carbon emissions but they were not solving congestion in the longer term. They are a sticking plaster.

Q165 **Mr Bradshaw:** Lisa, you touched on that in your evidence to us. I quoted you in the earlier session, forgive me. You said that you do not think there is really any evidence that building roads improves productivity. Could you dig down into that a little bit?

Lisa Hopkinson: I didn't say there was no evidence; I said that there is a lack of robust evaluation evidence, and this comes from DfT's own comprehensive reviews to inform the road investment strategy. It also comes from a very comprehensive analysis of 2,000 studies on road schemes, and from some work that we did looking at the National Highways evaluation reports that it does after each road scheme is built. We looked at something like 90 road schemes, and of those that had an objective to have some benefit for the economy we found that for the vast majority the evidence was weak, limited or just anecdotal. Even when there was some moderate evidence, it had to be qualified because it could have happened anyway or it might just have been firms moving from town centres to motorway junctions, retail parks and things like that.

Q166 **Mr Bradshaw:** Is that a view that is shared commonly across the panel?

Professor Lyons: It is a situation of how clearly we can understand cause and effect, frankly. We heard in the last session about the significant degree of uncertainty and the dynamics that we saw amplified during the pandemic. Therefore, when one comes to evaluation it is very difficult to do trace through cause and effect. If we look at smart



motorways, we should rightly focus on safety, but I am concerned that almost nothing is said about the conflict they create between demand management and traffic management. They are focused on managing traffic—localised, immediate congestion—but they have consequences for the shaping of the transport system.

Let's be clear that when we change the transport system we are not just serving society; we are shaping patterns of land use and we are shaping, as we heard earlier, efficiency, reliability, cost and convenience being factors that determine behaviours. Those are influenced by how we invest in the road network.

Q167 **Mr Bradshaw:** Ralph, your organisation was very critical in its evidence about the way the Government add up the costs and benefits. Could you say a little bit more about that?

Ralph Smyth: For sure, but can I follow up the previous question? On productivity, where the road network is mature—as Edmund King said, he thinks it is now—there isn't evidence that adding more lanes works. I would go further than that. The Eddington study by the former boss of BA, which the DfT commissioned to look at transport in the round in 2006, found that road pricing would have 50 times the productivity benefits that adding extra capacity would. I know your Committee is still waiting for a Government response to its report on that. Perhaps that is another reason to chase.

In terms of the benefit-cost ratios, there are wider questions about whether they are a good way of valuing schemes. In fact, the most recent Treasury guidance says it is better to look at strategic fit with Government priorities. But just for the moment, if we are saying, "Let's go with BCRs," the numbers given have changed, for example, because of values of carbon changing, but National Highways has not been forwarding them on.

If we then put in the latest traffic figures, or at least figures that will be compliant with carbon budgets, there would need to be lower traffic and far lower benefit-cost ratios. If you looked at the current roads programme and tried to meet carbon targets by 2030, you would basically be sweeping them all off the table because they simply will not add up.

Q168 **Mr Bradshaw:** Just remind us briefly how the Eddington review came to that conclusion about productivity gain from road pricing? Is it because of management and investment in other modes?

Ralph Smyth: Maybe I could write and get the Excel out.

Mr Bradshaw: That would be helpful.

Ralph Smyth: Simply, it is because if you can only have a few road schemes here and there, they will move the congestion along rather than tackling it, but a system of demand management will actually address



that congestion network-wide. One of my concerns with the evidence from the previous panel was that they said, "Look at the system strategically," but if we are finding cost overruns for a few small schemes, is it realistic to think we will ever have the money to be able to build everywhere?

Q169 **Mr Bradshaw:** Do you think we should be doing the same in England as they are doing in Wales and have a complete review of all the road building network?

Ralph Smyth: Yes, but Lisa and Glenn may be better placed to answer.

Lisa Hopkinson: Yes, I think that would be a good idea. If we have a problem, whether it is congestion, safety or regeneration, there are multiple solutions. If DfT guidance on appraisal was followed properly, we should be looking at all the solutions. We should be looking at demand management, pricing, new roads, or whatever it is, and then making a decision on that. Glenn was actually on the review.

Professor Lyons: I am bound to say that I think there is significant merit in what Wales has done and what it has learnt from doing that. It has a rather different policy context from England, or the UK, at the moment. Very responsibly, it stood back and said, "Given that we changed the policy context significantly, and we acknowledge the climate and nature emergencies alongside the need to develop our economy, how do we invest in roads and how do we ensure that the case made for road investment is sound?"

If I might come back to your point on benefit-cost ratios, the DfT published in December its latest road traffic projections, indicating a range of between 8% and 54% growth in traffic on the road network by 2060. That underlines, as the report itself did, the significant uncertainty we have. It is a fallacy to believe there is a known do-nothing future against which you then judge how much return on investment you get.

Mr Bradshaw: Thank you.

Q170 **Chair:** The Government have identified the strategic road network as playing a "vital" role in the levelling-up agenda. Would you support that claim?

Lisa Hopkinson: I would not support that. The promise in the levelling up White Paper to improve public transport connectivity throughout the country similar to London levels is very welcome, but I don't think that improving connectivity is done necessarily through the strategic road network. There is a much greater case for investment in public transport to improve connectivity and to help with levelling up.

Q171 **Chair:** Professor Lyons and Mr Smyth?

Professor Lyons: I agree that levelling up is about levelling up access to opportunities, but unpacking that does not simply mean, as Lisa pointed



out, connectivity through capacity enhancement. Access comes through there being available opportunity, for example in relation to employment, first of all, and then looking at the different means by which access can be fulfilled by individuals to take advantage of that opportunity, which may be through proximity and investment in spatial planning, through digital connectivity, or indeed through different forms of access using the road network, not necessarily private vehicles.

Ralph Smyth: I agree with the previous two panellists, but stress that the levelling up Bill has some very specific missions and even more specific metrics to check against progress with those. I did not see any awareness of that apart from one or two of the pieces of written evidence. Besides the public transport improvements, which will need a big shift from road spending to public transport if they are ever going to be seen, there is also a need for the world-class cycling and walking network that is being promised, which, again, will require a big shift in funding. Even for some of the missions that are not transport focused, such as mission 9, which is about satisfaction with town centres and pride in place, we know—this was the research Lisa did in 2017—that road-based schemes tend to encourage out-of-town developments; they do not help town centres.

What really needs to happen is a checking of the roads programme with the levelling-up missions and metrics, and for RIS3 to have something written into its performance specification on how well National Highways worked with local authorities, because the evidence you have received has been pretty damning of that, and also how National Highways might, for example, unlock a cycle route across a dual carriageway that cuts off a town from the countryside or perhaps enables a new bus service to interlink with a coach service. Those are the sorts of things that RIS3 could do, but at the moment all the signs are that the money will be spent on big projects that will not do that.

Q172 **Chair:** Let me press a little further on how strategic road investment can contribute to levelling up. To use an example that was referenced in the last panel, some people would argue that dualling the A1 north of Newcastle to Scotland is a vital project for connectivity across the United Kingdom. Would you disagree with those sorts of projects?

Lisa Hopkinson: I cannot comment on that specific road scheme because I have not looked at it. As I mentioned, when we looked at 87 or so strategic road schemes that had been completed, many of them over-claimed. They stated things like, “This is vital for connectivity. This is vital for regeneration of this area,” but when we actually looked, after the road had been built, to see whether those claims were substantiated, we found very little evidence, and in some cases there were even disbenefits.

I can give you numerous cases where motorways were expanded to help out-of-town shopping centres, which then disadvantaged town centres. There are cases where roads were built to open up development spots, and five years after there was no development in those areas, but there



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was development nearby that was not accessed through the new road. There has to be better evaluation of the claims made for new roads. They do not always live up to their promises.

Ralph Smyth: If I could come in on the A1, there really is no connection between that scheme and the levelling-up missions and metrics. Where there might be a connection is with the Union connectivity objectives, but what we need there is a multimodal budget to improve connectivity between Newcastle, the rural area in between and Edinburgh, and then to see what are the best solutions that will help connectivity and decarbonisation. That will probably be a mixture of rail upgrades and smaller-scale safety improvements along the existing road.

Professor Lyons: To return to the Wales roads review and the acceptance, largely, by the Welsh Government of the recommendations, your example would not pass the tests, from a Welsh perspective, for a capacity-enhancing scheme that would encourage greater use of the car. Neither would it ignore the legitimacy of there being a problem or an opportunity identified for that part of the country, and therefore would beg the question: what are the alternative options available that can be considered for investment that would provide the levelling-up benefits without reverting to what can often feel like a default capacity enhancement solution to economic prosperity and distribution spatially of that opportunity?

Chair: Thank you. I turn to our colleague from the north-east, Paul.

Q173 **Paul Howell:** Thanks. My apologies for not being here for the start. I had a conflict of interest so I have just been between two places. I apologise if I am covering something that has already been touched on to a degree.

When you start to look at local impacts, one of the problems we have always seen in Government is the Green Book approach, which has seen bigger value coming from the areas where there are more people and bigger numbers going on in the economy. When you are looking at levels of investment—we will use the north-east as the obvious example—how do you think that should be determined?

My personal view, to give you a start point, is that the proportional impact on the population needs to be factored in, as opposed to the overall wealth that comes out for the country as a whole. Perhaps, Professor, I could start with you. How do you think these sorts of investments should be assessed in terms of which part of the country the investment should be applied to?

Professor Lyons: For me, you are rightly touching on questions of equality and fairness in part, before one gets to the possibilities that that is economically beneficial to redistribute opportunity, employment and so on. In a broad sense, I would simply concur with you that that should be a lens through which we consider investment, in whatever form that investment takes.



Lisa Hopkinson: The current benefit-cost ratio and appraisal process does not take into account very well things like regeneration and the social benefits of new schemes, which is why public transport schemes often struggle to make a business case, whereas with road schemes the time savings are generally the majority of the benefits.

Yes, you are right. We need to look at transport schemes in terms of a whole range of different objectives, whether it is fairness, equity, regeneration, carbon or health, and then say, "Which is the best transport scheme for this area? What is it going to take to deliver that?" That may not necessarily be a new road scheme. It might be a new tram extension in the north-east or it might be bus priority lanes or new cycle routes. There are many different ways of realising those transport objectives.

Ralph Smyth: There will be a tension between nationally set objectives such as those in the RIS and those set by some of the subnational transport bodies. That certainly came through in the evidence. That is another reason why we would like to see a shift of funding from National Highways, which is overrun with cash, to some of the more regional bodies.

There are two lenses to look through for the north-east. One is about the leisure sector—tourism. There is a massive tourism deficit. Most people who visit the UK stop in London. VisitBritain research says that because we drive on the left many people who come do not really want to get in a car, so if there isn't good public transport, they will not visit those places. That is an opportunity for the north-east region.

The other is on safety. Because the focus of National Highways has been very much on the big schemes, the smart motorways, there are many rural trunk roads with poor safety records. I do not have any examples to hand from the north-east, but I am sure there are some; they are not hotspots, but the whole corridor would benefit from a separate path for cycling and agricultural vehicles, things like that to make the routes safer. At the moment, there is not the funding for that, and unless there is a shift of funding to smaller safety schemes it is impossible to see how the Vision Zero target—zero deaths on the strategic road network by 2040—will be met.

Q174 **Paul Howell:** There are also changing demographics. My understanding of bus routes is that a lot of them were predicated initially on people getting to town centres—hubs and spokes around town centres—but with more online shopping is there a different predication that should come about for centres of work? Maybe the centre should be the local industrial estate or something. I have a particular problem in Newton Aycliffe with getting to the next nearest town, which is Spennymoor. We cannot get between the two easily on a bus to suit work times. Maybe there should be a more holistic view of transport as a whole and what should be public service as opposed to the roads themselves and what should happen with



local railway investments.

I have another one where there is a small railway station that we would like to reopen. The impact at a levelling-up scale of things and the engendering of economic benefit in the area all need to be in the pot somewhere to assess what is the right thing to do, that or the local motorway or the local bypass, and then you have the comparators to the rest of the country. It is about getting that right for the local population.

I do not know whether you have any suggestions as to how we do that in terms of getting cognisance of overall co-ordination and consideration when trying to make these decisions. It feels so important to me.

Professor Lyons: For me, what you are pointing to is consideration of alternatives, and then capability and diversity within the profession and the authorities concerned with the issues, so that we open our minds to a broader set of alternatives. You have rightly highlighted how patterns of behaviour are changing, and therefore the types of solutions that might unlock opportunity for different parts of the country, and for the north-east.

At the moment, we are seeing through too narrow a lens, where we very quickly filter down to traditional solutions, and particularly are preoccupied by seeing a transport problem and assuming it needs a transport solution. Actually, often the transport problem is a derived one, and it is derived from other things that relate to spatial planning and location of employment opportunity, retail and so on.

Lisa Hopkinson: One thing that would also help is changing the governance of transport. At the moment, it is split between the railway, local authorities, bus companies and National Highways. What you need is a guiding mind that can integrate all of these things—road, bus, rail, ferries, active travel—so that trains connect with buses. You need to optimise your transport system as much as possible.

Ralph Smyth: From the policy side, the forthcoming—at some point—national policy statement on road and rail will be key in setting out what the national need is; for example, more rail accessibility or whatever else. From the funding side, nothing will happen until we change the funding settlement, and for us that means taking out the many billions from enhancements that are ringfenced for National Highways and giving it to regions to decide, working with Network Rail, National Highways and so on, what the best solutions are.

Q175 **Paul Howell:** Do you think that guiding mind is a national thing, or is it a guiding mind nationally complemented by the guiding minds at devolved authority level such as the Tees Valley combined authority or an LA7—whatever the different big lumps are for different parts of the country?

Ralph Smyth: It has to be a mixture. Whitehall simply will not have that detail. Maybe central Government needs to be saying, “We’ve got these



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decarbonisation targets nationwide. How are you going to solve that in your region?" It is that conversation.

Q176 **Paul Howell:** But the specifics, whether it be road, rail or whatever, are probably more appropriate sitting at devolved authority level.

Ralph Smyth: One counter-argument might be that there are some national roads, so we need to think nationally. Actually, many of the problems, the congestion issues, are around rush hour, and it is the congestion caused by local journeys on those national roads. It is a good example of why we need a national/local/regional conversation, and that does not seem to be happening, from the evidence of the combined authorities and the subnational transport bodies at the moment.

Paul Howell: We could go round a few loops, Chair, but I think we've pretty much covered that.

Chair: Thank you.

Q177 **Ruth Cadbury:** Moving on to decarbonisation and the environment, the DfT has said that "roads will continue to be the predominant form of transport in a net zero world." How credible do you think that is as a pathway to net zero transport by 2050, Professor Lyons?

Professor Lyons: I cannot disagree with the statement. We have 190,000 miles of roads in this country. We have a very mature road network. If I put to one side for a moment capacity enhancement schemes and the generation of the carbon emissions they relate to in terms of both construction and use, the significant challenge we have with tailpipe emissions, looking at the vast majority of the existing network, is how those emissions are drawn down not only completely by 2050 but quickly enough through the interim carbon budget periods.

As things stand, there is significant doubt. In fact, I would refer to a distinction between our decision makers now being gamblers or stewards when it comes to the decarbonisation of transport. We had some work published earlier this week from the RAC Foundation, which the Committee may wish to be aware of; it ran 9,900 modelling scenarios to examine the different conditions for being able or not to get to the level of decarbonisation by 2030 that is required in line with the balanced approach that the Committee on Climate Change has set out to meet our national obligations.

What is very clear from that work is that, yes, you can bet on some possible combinations of factors that would allow us to continue to rely on using the road network much as we have, but there are many, many combinations of uncertain factors where we would be gambling and losing.

Q178 **Ruth Cadbury:** Thank you. I'll come back to you, Ms Hopkinson. Do you have anything to add, Mr Smyth?

Ralph Smyth: The difficulty for TAN is that we have seen promises made by the Department for Transport about roads and being decarbonised



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since 2011, when we were told there would be a transport decarbonisation plan. It took 10 years to produce. In 2013, we were promised aggressive measures to decarbonise. I could go on, but it is in our evidence.

It is simply not happening. Yes, roads will be used but, hopefully, more by bikes, people walking and buses. It is not compatible to pump in more money for more traffic in a decarbonised world, and that is where the statement about roads in a net zero world seems to smooth over the cracks.

Q179 **Ruth Cadbury:** Ms Hopkinson, you have argued that RIS2 is not consistent with UK carbon targets. What would RIS3 look like if it were to be consistent with those targets?

Lisa Hopkinson: There would be no increase in carbon and, therefore, no increase in traffic, so it would be very difficult for an enhancement programme to achieve that without closing road capacity or doing something else in the transport system to decarbonise. There is growing tension between DfT's decarbonisation strategy and a push for more road capacity and more carbon.

Q180 **Ruth Cadbury:** Do you think investing in "enhancements" to the strategic road network will alleviate congestion or increase it further, and by how much?

Lisa Hopkinson: They certainly increase congestion. New roads generate traffic. That is a well-known fact, which has been known for 100 years, and I am sure you have heard the evidence on that. In our work for CPRE, in the report I quoted earlier, we looked at the long-range impacts caused by new roads. Over the long term, eight to 20 years, new roads increased traffic by 50% over and above background levels.

Ralph Smyth: Can I come in on that? The final page of our evidence has some examples of what we would like to see in RIS3. First of all, I want to go to an unexpected area, which is freight. We have heard a lot about freight, but there needs to be decarbonisation of freight from 2025, not 2030. Currently, the National Highways plan is only to start looking at different charging and fuelling from 2030 onwards. That is simply too late for the Climate Change Committee targets, and it is too late for many of our big name companies that want to be net zero by 2035 or 2040. Beyond that, Scotland and Northern Ireland have great examples of what are not smart motorways, but that in peak hours let buses and coaches use their hard shoulder. We do not have that in England because of political constraints.

There could be programmes to influence travel behaviour, maybe getting some of the out-of-town work sites to buddy up and have bus and coach services put on specially. That can really cut traffic. With bike lanes, there is great potential for e-bikes, but unfortunately many of the junctions on the edges of towns are pretty hideous, or even where there are facilities



you have to go through seven different traffic lights. Things like that could be done quickly and make a big difference by 2030.

Q181 **Ruth Cadbury:** Professor Lyons?

Professor Lyons: To your earlier question about RIS3, for me it is the importance of framing RIS3 and I would like to see a projection of the future levels of internal combustion engine-powered vehicle miles travelled that it would be necessary or prudent to have to ensure that the transport sector makes its contribution to the legal obligation the Government have to decarbonise in line with the interim carbon budgets moving to 2050. We do not have that currently but, as we heard in the earlier session, what we do have is significant uncertainty. It is far from clear that electrification of the vehicle fleet is moving quickly enough to provide any sort of guarantees, even if we put to one side the carbon emissions associated with vehicle manufacture, maintenance and disposal. Having that in place would give much greater clarity, which would then provide a framework for appraisal and decision making.

Q182 **Ruth Cadbury:** Government policy on transport has for long aimed to cater for predicted traffic growth, and road investment has generally followed that. Should the Government shift and aim towards constraining traffic growth, and how can they do that without a lot of pushback, Mr Smyth?

Ralph Smyth: The funny thing is that some new planning guidance for the strategic road network published by DfT talks about a shift to a vision and validate approach, but other parts of the DfT are still stuck in, essentially, predict and provide.

Your Committee did a great report about road pricing. What is important is that we need to start thinking about how we can widen choice on the strategic road network as soon as possible, before what will be the pretty inevitable introduction of some form of pricing, at the very least to tackle congestion and the fiscal black hole. It has to be a mixture of carrots and sticks. How can we encourage more lift-sharing and more coaches, and things like that, so that people have a choice, rather than paying a lot for a train?

Q183 **Ruth Cadbury:** Those are obviously great ideas, and ones that I support, but has anybody done the numbers on them? Do we know what impact they will have? What level of policy intervention would deliver what level of modal shift? That is what people want to see.

Ralph Smyth: The challenge we have, whether it is for the electrification of freight or modal shift of people, is that we need to be doing stuff now, rather than doing a five-year study and then seeing what happens. The world keeps on changing unpredictably, so we need to adopt a test and learn approach, a more agile approach, and that is very different from the long cycles that National Highways has, of taking ages to do a scheme and then, when it is built, suddenly finding that it is not what the local authority wants.



Lisa Hopkinson: Scotland has done a lot of work in that respect. They have a 20% traffic reduction target that was set to meet their carbon budgets, and they have done a lot to try to work out what they need to do to achieve that. They have consulted on a draft route map, and that is the sort of thing we need to be doing in England as well.

Q184 **Ruth Cadbury:** Professor Lyons?

Professor Lyons: To add to Lisa's point, within the British Isles England is the only part, with the exception of Northern Ireland, that does not have a target for reducing road traffic levels—car miles travelled—by 2030. That is the critical period ahead, running into the sixth carbon budget period. Of course, using the word restraint is provocative politically, but I refer us to data from the national travel survey before the pandemic, which included a reduction of about a fifth in the commuting trip rate per person per year, and an even greater reduction in business trip rates. If we look at young people's licence holding, from 1997 to 2017, it went from 48% of 17 to 20-year-olds having a licence to 29%—from nearly a half to less than a third.

There are some very powerful behavioural dynamics happening anyway, largely, I believe, due to the collision of the digital age with the motor age. We have had a pandemic that created a massive shock to the system, as we all know. It has also highlighted how resilient and adaptive we can be as humans when we change the context for how we go about our economic and social lives. It is eminently possible to see changing behaviours looking forwards that do not necessarily constrain our economic prospects or our social wellbeing, but redistribute the way we exercise how we gain access to those things.

Lisa Hopkinson: Rather than viewing traffic reduction as a negative thing, we should be viewing it as a positive thing. It benefits freight drivers if there is less traffic on the roads. Most people do not want more traffic on the roads, and the benefits of improving public transport and active travel and all the other public goods, such as relieving congestion, public health and air quality, are all very positive. Public transport investment can deliver significant economic growth as well.

Q185 **Ruth Cadbury:** Representatives from the logistics industry in the first panel made that point about the importance of traffic reduction for economic reasons.

Do SRN enhancements have to impact on other transport, like walking and cycling or historic rights of way? Is that inevitable or can SRN enhancements benefit all road users? That might be a yes or no question.

Ralph Smyth: Can I give you two examples? One challenge has been that National Highways works in its silo and there isn't join-up with local walking and cycling networks of the routes it plans. Examples are the A14 in Cambridgeshire or the A556 near Manchester which were flagship schemes where there simply was not that integration. It is not just about



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routes for people but for wildlife. If they are not joined up with local conservationists, they won't work for otters or whatever else.

Yes, the problem is one of expense. If you put in bridges for every single right of way, it will increase the scheme cost, but an often hidden issue is that the traffic generated by the new roads, or the enhancements, will mean more traffic on the local road network, and that might degrade conditions for walking and cycling on those roads, too.

Q186 Ruth Cadbury: Does anyone have anything to add?

Professor Lyons: I am not sure whether I might be moving slightly away from your initial question, but to build on what Ralph said, I think we have not heard mention at all in the sessions today of biodiversity. We are focusing very heavily, rightly, on decarbonisation in a way we would not have seen five years ago if we were discussing preparations for RIS2, yet we are facing a nature emergency.

We had COP15 in Canada only a matter of weeks ago when we ratcheted up the importance of biodiversity protection and enhancement. In RIS2 at the moment, the commitment is to leave the highways estate in terms of biodiversity no worse than we found it, with an aspiration, one might say, by 2040 to start moving to biodiversity enhancement. That is too late and is not good enough for the obligations that we as a nation have been setting globally, and it seems to me an under-recognised aspect of the forward investment considerations in RIS3.

Q187 Ruth Cadbury: My last question is on air quality. Reducing air pollution on the SRN is based mainly on a switch to zero emission vehicles. What else should the Government and National Highways be doing to reduce emissions on major roads?

Ralph Smyth: To be fair, they have recently tried some speed limit reduction, which has helped. Modal shift is a key need, particularly because these are urban areas and the Government have committed to making half of all journeys in urban areas walking and cycling by 2030. That has potential, even if it means someone, say, walking to the train station and getting a train, rather than walking 7 miles, which is unrealistic.

There is a lot of scope for more shifts to public transport but, as I think the Oxfordshire evidence said, National Highways does not see that as its role. That is unfortunate and it needs to change.

Q188 Ruth Cadbury: Thank you. Ms Hopkinson?

Lisa Hopkinson: I agree with Ralph. We need to get people out of cars and on to more sustainable modes of transport.

More than half of people using the SRN break the speed limit, so enforcement of the speed limit, as well as bringing down speeds, would certainly help on carbon and air pollution.



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Professor Lyons: I am in violent agreement about air quality improvement through speed reduction. The powerful aspect of speed reduction when it is enforced, and therefore delivering changes in speed, is that there are significant co-benefits across safety and performance of the network, as well as on emissions.

Ruth Cadbury: Those are all my questions, Chair. Thank you.

Chair: Before we conclude, do you still have a supplementary, Paul, or has it been covered?

Q189 **Paul Howell:** Broadly covered, but I have a brief question. There was a comment earlier that roads drive traffic. It seems a natural follow-on, therefore, that the provision of public transport drives the usage of public transport. Whether it is rural transport or trying to get people out of their cars, everything we hear post pandemic is still that there is declining usage of this mode of transport.

Do you think it is time that the Government did some messaging that pushed us, and said that public transport is fine. There was a lot of anti-public transport messaging, for all the right reasons, in terms of congestion and keeping people away from confined spaces, but do you think it is time for that to move on and for the use of data on things like where transport routes should go? We touched on that earlier. Whether it is a town centre or an industrial estate, the times of shifts and the times of transport need more focused provision, rather than a general provision, to try to hit what people need, with the use of data to drive that. Do you have any thoughts on that, using data that already exists? I don't want to do as you said earlier and go for another five years of trying to work out what we are going to do. There is loads of data we should be directing people towards for these changes.

Professor Lyons: The paradigm we have been in with reference to predict and provide is what I would call demand-led supply; in other words, we have attempted to forecast or even predict what the future demand will be and assume that our job is simply to respond to that by providing the capacity. The reality, as we heard in the earlier session, is that people's behaviours are shaped by the conditions they face—cost and convenience. If you turn it around and see it through the lens of supply-led demand, to me it is very evident that if you change the conditions that someone is presented with for their choice-set, behaviours, notwithstanding other constraints in their lives, are likely to respond and change accordingly. For example, in London the cycle superhighways were a supply-led demand approach that recognised that once the capacity was in place, it would attract behaviour change, which indeed it did.

You are absolutely right—not that it is straightforward—that we should focus emphasis on investment in a supply-led demand approach.

Lisa Hopkinson: There is definitely a vicious cycle. With declining public transport services, fewer people use them; the services are cut and then



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they become worse than useless. We need to reverse that. We need to reduce traffic and invest in public transport, and I think we can use technology to provide things like better route planning. For carbon and other reasons, we definitely need to invest more in public transport.

Ralph Smyth: Actually, public transport is being used well at weekends. I am sure you have seen overflowing trains and buses. The problem is that often the Sunday service was the worst of the week when it should perhaps be the best. How we can improve that and get messaging out may be a challenge for the future. As to whether it is best to spend on national messaging versus local, the Highways Agency, the predecessor to National Highways, ran schemes up to 2011 and found massive success in promoting public transport through what it called influencing travel behaviour schemes around Birmingham. There were benefit-cost ratios of 13:1 that tower above anything in the roads programme now. That is something that should be looked at again for RIS3.

Chair: Thank you all for your time and evidence this morning. That concludes the session.