

Transport Committee

Oral evidence: [Our future transport](#), HC 1061

Tuesday 9 May 2023

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

Questions 1–80

Witnesses

[I](#): Maggie Simpson, Director General, Rail Freight Group.

[II](#): Peter Gordon.

[III](#): Malcolm Brown, Chief Executive Officer, Angel Trains.

[IV](#): Fran Collins, Chair, Maritime and Transport Action Group.

[V](#): Councillor Jim O'Boyle, Cabinet Member, Coventry City Council.

[VI](#): Chris Paul, University of Manchester.



Examination of witness

Witness: Maggie Simpson.

Q1 Chair: Welcome to today's session of the Transport Select Committee. It is a slightly different type of session today and tomorrow morning. Over the two days, we are hearing from the 12 shortlisted proposers for our future transport inquiry. The format is that each proposer will have five minutes to make a presentation to us, followed by 15 minutes of questions on their pitch.

Without any further ado, could I invite our first proposer, Maggie Simpson, to the podium, please? For the purposes of our records, could you state your name and organisation, please?

Maggie Simpson: Thank you very much. I am Maggie Simpson, and I am Director General of the Rail Freight Group.

Chair: Thank you, your time starts now.

Maggie Simpson: Committee, thank you very much for allowing me to pitch to you today. The Rail Freight Group, which I lead, is a member-led trade association representing over 100 companies active in rail freight, including freight train operators, customers, ports, quarries, retailers, warehouse developers, rolling stock companies, and supply chain and support services.

All our members want to see rail freight grow. They want more resilient and diverse supply chains, and they want to invest in the UK, increase employment and become more efficient and productive. A modal shift from roads to rail helps them to achieve this. Above all, though, they want to use more rail freight because it is the easiest way to remove carbon emissions from their supply chains right now.

These businesses are serious about this. They are investing in new terminal and equipment, looking to consign new flows of traffic to rail, innovating and collaborating. That is being matched by the freight train operators, who are also working hard to grow their businesses, investing in new locomotives, wagons and facilities, and introducing new innovations, using data and technology to modernise their operations.

A growing rail freight sector has a vital role to play in transforming the UK economy. Our members are already helping to build new infrastructure, such as Hinkley Point and HS2. Rail freight supports housebuilding and the creation of new communities across the country. We also deliver retail goods to warehouses and supermarkets to keep those communities fed and supplied. We are a vital part of new freeports, with almost every freeport location including major rail links and terminals. Rail freight can help to decarbonise other parts of the economy, with huge potential for moving liquid hydrogen, synthetic fuels, liquid carbon and recyclable materials by train.



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However, this opportunity, as significant as it is, is not a reason for this Committee to do an inquiry into rail freight. Nor, for that matter, is the fact that, as far as I am aware, the Committee has never done an inquiry specifically on rail freight. The reason we believe that there should be an inquiry is that the rail freight sector cannot do this by itself. Operating on a publicly owned network alongside publicly specified and funded passenger trains, rail freight must have a supportive Government policy if it is to achieve its true potential.

The problem right now is that, while the Government is saying the right things, they are not delivering. Sometimes I feel like Eliza Doolittle in "My Fair Lady"—"If you're in love, show me." We were promised a freight growth target in the Williams-Shapps plan for rail, in the transport decarbonisation plan and in Mark Harper's George Bradshaw address. The Scottish Government have published one, but we still do not have one for England and Wales. We were promised a statutory duty on freight in the new legislation for rail reform. However, it was not in the draft that was consulted on last summer and we do not know if we have a Bill at all now. We are told the duty might be in the draft licence, but we have not seen that either.

HS2 was to release capacity for rail freight, but the recent pauses to the programme mean that we do not know when or if that will happen— little comfort to those building new rail link warehouses on the west coast main line. Critical schemes, such as Ely junction, Haughley junction or the upgrade at Ripple Lane yard, are delayed and delayed and delayed. While rail freight operators are investing in new bimodal locomotives and using sustainable low-carbon fuels to decarbonise their operations even further, Government is silent on plans for infill electrification of short sections of the freight network or on power upgrades to allow freight to operate under the wires where they do exist.

Within the Department for Transport there are some excellent people, including former Transport Committee Chair, and now Rail Minister, Huw Merriman. I know that they want to get it right for rail freight, but somehow we cannot seem to move forward to give my members the comfort that they need to carry on making those important investments.

This Committee acts as a critical friend of Government, holding their feet to the fire and encouraging progress. An inquiry into rail freight is essential to help Government deliver on its promise and, in turn, help rail freight deliver on its potential to decarbonise transport and support economic growth across the UK. Thank you.

Q2 Chair: Thank you very much, Maggie, that was a very good overview of the need for some work in this area. Could you tell me a little more about why you think it is time-sensitive for us to do this inquiry now?

Maggie Simpson: For two reasons. First, tactically, we are going through a period of rail reform right now. That legislation may or may not come forward this summer. If rail freight is to prosper, that legislation



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has to be right; it is no good just having any old legislation that will deliver GBR. We need it to provide those critical safeguards for rail freight. Tactically, we need to be making progress on things like that statutory duty and that freight growth target now.

Strategically, the reason I think it is now is that carbon emission reduction is not going away as a critical priority across the globe, and every tonne of carbon we save today helps with that. While reaching net zero 2050 is of course critically important, so is taking carbon out of the atmosphere today. My members are doing that, and every time a new business consigns its goods by rail, we are taking carbon out of the atmosphere—significant amounts of carbon. Therefore, strategically, that cannot wait either. We need to be getting this right now.

Q3 Chair: If we were to do an inquiry into this subject, who should we be speaking to to get under the bonnet of the issues?

Maggie Simpson: There are some businesses out there that are hugely ambitious about moving more freight by rail. I know that we have colleagues speaking later from the maritime sector. Almost every port that I speak to wishes to have more rail freight operating from it. The shipping lines that come across the quay want to use more rail freight.

Increasingly, retailers also want to use more. Tesco is a member of mine, but other companies like that are looking at what they can do to get more goods on rail. Businesses that are what I call a 3PL or a third-party logistics company—Eddie Stobart will be the one you know and love—are also starting to use more rail and wanting more rail in their supply chains, because they need to decarbonise and the companies that they work for want to decarbonise. From a business point of view, there are a lot of businesses that I am sure would be pleased to tell you why they want more rail freight.

Also, of course, the rail freight operators themselves, who are looking to put on the services to grow, are obviously working with Network Rail and the GBR transition team to try to drive that forward. From a Government point of view, trying to understand how we could make progress, and what we could unlock quickly with some pressure, would be welcome.

Chair: Thank you. I will have a couple of other questions later, but we will turn now to Jack.

Q4 Jack Breerton: You mentioned the desire to get more freight, and particularly a wider range of freight, on to the rail network. At the moment, obviously, a lot of the smaller freight does not go on it so much. It is the more bulky, heavy freight that is going on the rail network. What are the barriers that are preventing some of the more parcel-type freight from going on the rail network?

Maggie Simpson: Parcel freight is coming on to the rail network. We have members who consign parcels on passenger trains and who have some very ambitious plans to do more with bagged freight. We have



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recently seen the trial from Varamis running between Birmingham and Scotland with a converted passenger train.

There is a piece about scale—in the parcels market, but also in the supermarket trade—where people do not necessarily have a full trainload and need to collaborate to do that. These companies are starting to look for solutions for that collaboration. What they want is the confidence that if they take that step, there will be a place for them on the rail network and that that Government commitment stands behind them in putting that effort into their supply chains.

Q5 Jack Brereton: You talked about some of the enhancements, whether it is the major projects like HS2 or some of the smaller enhancements to the network. Do you think that the freight industry is properly engaged, consulted and involved in these plans at the moment?

Maggie Simpson: There is consultation, and the freight teams at Network Rail and GBRTT are very good at that—I would not criticise them. Of course, we understand the fiscal situation we are in and that some of these bigger schemes are difficult. Where I think there are opportunities that sometimes do not get exploited is with some of the smaller schemes—things that sit in the boundary territory between renewal and enhancement.

Ripple Lane, for example, which I mentioned, has a funding gap of £10 million. It is absolutely critical to unlocking that corridor, where there is huge demand for more passenger trains, because of the housebuilding that is going on, but also huge demand for more freight from the big ports at London Gateway and Tilbury that are part of the Thames freeport.

Some of these schemes are not billions and billions of pounds. They are small amounts of money that could start to unlock benefits. Those smaller schemes sometimes do not float to the top of the debate, because we spend a lot of time, quite rightly, talking about HS2 and some of the bigger projects.

Q6 Jack Brereton: Do you think that there could be more prioritisation given? As you say, some of these are much more affordable schemes in the grand scheme of things. Is there a way of potentially attracting more private investment, for example, to fund some of these schemes?

Maggie Simpson: Getting private investment into the main line network is difficult. The private investment that my members are making is in the ports, the terminals and the equipment. A typical rail freight interchange will be £100 million to £200 million of private sector inward investment coming into the UK. A facility somewhere like Daventry will employ 5,000, 6,000 or 7,000 people. That is private sector money.

What they need to know is that those trains can get out on to the network, that they will be fairly treated when they are on the network and that they will be able to operate efficiently and productively on the



network. That is why we need that Government strategy, particularly as we move towards GBRTT, who will also run the passenger trains. We need to be absolutely certain that rail freight is looked after.

Q7 Jack Brereton: Looking at international examples, you have stated that other countries are seeing more freight than we are on their networks. What countries are doing this best?

Maggie Simpson: You would want to pick some examples from lots of different places. Certainly, in mainland Europe, where the network is much more similar to the UK, people have looked to subvent track access charges to help rail freight grow and to make it much cheaper. They have invested in those networks, particularly, for example, in Switzerland on the transalpine tunnels. They have put that freight-facing investment in. In other parts of the world—America and Australia—these are freight railways, so the dynamics are very different, but they are still putting that technology and investment in to help freight prosper.

Q8 Mr Bradshaw: If there were a couple of countries in Europe that we wanted to look at more closely to see best practice, would you have a suggestion? If not now, would you be able to come back with one?

Maggie Simpson: If you look at the German railway, they have a much higher market share on rail than we do. That is partly because they have a more industrial economy and because of their location, but they certainly have a much higher percentage of electrically hauled rail freight than the UK is able to do. That makes that selling point for customers even better. While we in the UK say we would produce 76% less carbon, that would be 90% to 95% in Germany because of that electrification.

Q9 Mr Bradshaw: Is rail freight a matter of academic study? Is there a leading expert in Britain we could get to do some number-crunching and/or some objective international comparison analysis?

Maggie Simpson: The University of Westminster has done a lot of work in that field in the past. Dr Allan Woodburn is probably where I would start.

Q10 Gavin Newlands: In terms of modal shift, I had an answer back today from the Minister confirming that the modal shift revenue support scheme will be getting reviewed soon. That is Government speak, but obviously the current scheme ends in 2025 so it does have to be reviewed. I know a logistics company that would like to move a huge number of vehicles off the road and on to track, but the distance is relatively small compared to the current allowance under the EU rules. How important is it that that review is carried out quickly and soon, and how do you think that this Committee looking at freight might inform that review?

Maggie Simpson: That is an excellent point. The current scheme puts about £20 million into rail and water freight each year. That goes particularly to deep-sea traffic from port to inland terminals where those distances are too short for rail to be economic. It has worked well. It



delivers a hugely good value-for-money return, but there are some areas where it works less well. Shorter distance flows that are—to use the phrase—“within a zone” do not fare very well, and some of those zones are quite large. When we are looking at that retail traffic that is moving between warehouses, rather than from a port, it does not work as well. Some of my members would also like to see a bit more tilt, so that at the beginning of a new service—where it is harder to get the economics to work, because you do not have the scale of use while you are building that up—you get a bit more, and a bit less later on. There are definitely some options that a review could helpfully look at.

You are quite right that the current state aid clearance, as it was, expires in 2025. It will have to go through the successor UK scheme, which is a little bit of uncharted territory, so we do need to be getting on with that review.

Q11 Chair: One last question from me, following on from the point that Gavin has made and your answer. You represent the rail freight groups, so you are, quite understandably, pitching for a rail freight inquiry. To what extent would you agree with potentially doing a freight inquiry looking across modes, whether that is maritime, aviation or road haulage, as well as rail?

Maggie Simpson: Obviously the Committee’s time is precious, so it makes sense to look at how to group topics. Moving freight is critically important to the UK economy. We have seen that through the covid pandemic and the global supply chain disruption that has happened recently. When it wobbles, it wobbles, and we have been lucky that that wobble has stabilised, those toilet rolls are back on the shelves and that fuel is back on the forecourts.

Government has tried to look at how it can better support freight through the “Future of Freight” plan, and there are some good actions in that. However, as I said before, we have had a lot of words and not much delivery. From a rail freight point of view—I am sure my road freight colleagues would say the same—we probably need to be getting on with some of the delivery of these actions now.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed for your time this afternoon. As I explained at the beginning, we are seeing six proposals this afternoon and six tomorrow morning. Then we will make a decision about which inquiry or inquiries we will choose to conduct afterwards. For now, thank you again for your time.

Examination of witness

Witness: Peter Gordon.

Q12 Chair: Could I call second proposer, Peter Gordon, to the lectern, please? Again, for the purpose of our records, could I ask you to state your name and organisation, please?



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Peter Gordon: I am Peter Gordon. I am retired, but I have various affiliations. I chair the Transport Statistics Users Group and I edit the in-house magazine of the Transport Economist Group, but I am not working any longer.

My pitch today is to say that we know that, in this country, rail is very London orientated—you would probably use a train to get to London but not for other journeys. The rail market share is 11%, which compares with Switzerland at 15%. However, in fact, it is very heavily dominated by a certain number of journeys. My pitch is that if we are going to improve this, we need to have a network where we can get from almost anywhere in this country to anywhere else relatively straightforwardly and with far less hassle than you have at the moment.

We know why journeys not going to London are slow. The journeys themselves are slower and the frequency is less. Frequency is just as important as journey time. People often do not trust connections, and in my experience they may well be right not to. In consequence, what is known as a generalised journey time, which is the amount of time that your journey will take, is a lot slower and the rail market share for non-London journeys is very low.

What we need to do is develop a network that does a lot better. There are examples from abroad. The reason that the network is like it is historic. London is very centralised in the country, in the same way as France has a lot of very good train services into Paris and is not so good in the provinces.

There are countries where it is very different. Switzerland is the obvious example. Switzerland only has about an eighth of the population of the United Kingdom, but there is no reason why you cannot scale it up. In fact, Germany is developing something called Deutschlandtakt. It is facing a few problems, like these schemes always do. Things are always a bit slower when you build rail lines, but it believes that it is possible.

In terms of rail being a problem with London, we talk about levelling up. There is a desire to move some institutions out from London, which is fine. Great British Railways is going to be in Derby. I am all in favour of localisation. The only problem is that if you want to go for a visit to the Great British Railways office in Derby, it is likely to be faster by car than by train for a lot of journeys. I am not saying do not move things out of London; I am saying that if you do move things out of London, you have to improve the network. If that is the case for business journeys, what is it like for VFR, where a lot of people do not live in the centre of towns? Of course, leisure is somewhere in the middle.

How do we go about developing that? The way that we do it is that we have a number of key hubs. That could be Crewe, Derby, Manchester—you can name them. You try to have links between them that are just under 30 minutes, one hour or whatever, with things coming together, and then they connect with buses. I am interested in rail, but it is



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important to integrate other modes. Therefore, you get a very seamless journey, which is what you do not get at the moment.

Obviously there are going to be downsides. Some journeys will be slow because you may have to slow trains down to fit in with the hubs. However, if you are going to upgrade tracks, you say that it takes 70 minutes to get between Crewe and Manchester—that is a bad example; say, between Derby and Manchester—and we have to get it down to 55 or 56 minutes. You go about it that way. That is going to be a 20, 30 or 40-year task, but if we want to increase the share of public transport, and in a way that is carrot rather than a stick, because it is important to adopt that approach, that is what we have to do.

Look at the CrossCountry network. It is not particularly fast at the moment. I am sure a lot of people do journeys by car. It needs to be upgraded. In terms of the north at the moment, 750,000 people come into London on a typical Saturday; it is far less in the north. There is no reason why you cannot look at the Dutch network as an example. It is a very decentralised country, with various cities around the Randstad, yet the links between them are pretty good because of the way that the network has developed. We have to do the same thing in this country. It is going to be a long job. People ask what it is like. I say, “I cannot explain—certainly not in five minutes—but look at Switzerland, look at the Netherlands and look at what Germany is planning to do.” That is where you have to go.

Q13 Chair: Thank you very much indeed. Given the current changes that are happening or are planned to happen with the advent of GBR and with the devolution of powers and budgets to the Metro Mayors, how time-critical do you think us doing an inquiry into this subject would be?

Peter Gordon: Any time is a good time. It is not a case of if we do not do it now we have missed our opportunity. Any time would be a good time, but now is a very good time to have a look at it. What does strike me is that we always talk about lack of infrastructure—which I agree with—but why do we never hear about how you upgrade the infrastructure to help everything? Therefore, now is a very good time—the sooner, the better.

Q14 Chair: One question from me before I pass over to my colleague Greg. Are you primarily looking at timetable reform with the existing infrastructure, or are you looking at significant investment and increasing infrastructure as well?

Peter Gordon: Both. It is always said that one of the problems with the railway as it is—I know it is one of the things that Great British Railways is designed to improve—is that the connections are not always very good. They are often random and they are not symmetrical, so they might be good in one direction but not in the other direction. I was travelling on a train and looked for the Skegness connection, which would be okay. The LNER train was a bit late. They could have held the connection for two



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minutes, but they did not because they were different companies or whatever. Therefore, there is more that you can do within the existing timetable.

However, what will happen is that you will find that there are so many timetabling restraints that there is a limit to what you can do. You could say that if we had a bit of infrastructure here, we could do this better and if we had a bit there, we could do that a bit better. What I am saying is that you will need more infrastructure. The concept is a massive, great infrastructure scheme—we are talking £100 billion or whatever—but it is made up of lots of smaller schemes, and you would do the ones with the greater benefit first.

Q15 Greg Smith: Can I pick up on the practicalities of how you would make this work. When I talked to the principal rail operator in my constituency, Chiltern, which you have worked for before—

Peter Gordon: I worked with them for about 10 years.

Greg Smith: In their new timetable, which is coming out later this month, they are actively trying to marry up their trains with the bus network and with other key transport infrastructure hubs. I am sure that every rail operator wants to be doing that and every bus operator wants to be as joined up to other transport modes as possible. On the grounds that there is good will out here, what is the practical thing that is stopping this happening at the moment?

Peter Gordon: There are several things. One of the problems, if you look at the Swiss network, is that you do not get as high a utilisation in several ways. Let's say you have a large hub at Banbury and you need a train there every half hour, and let's say you are going to have hub at High Wycombe. Therefore, you need to run between those two stations in half an hour. It could be that trains do it in less time at the moment. Therefore, you need to hold them so that they depart two or three minutes past the hour in order to connect with everything.

The example I give is in the west country. Let's say you go to Truro. You need trains to arrive in both directions at the same time and then for the train to Falmouth Docks to leave two or three minutes afterwards so that there is a good connection. If you look at the west country, the branches do not marry up at all. To do that you need a combination of things—improving infrastructure, so that you can arrive a few minutes early if necessary, but you may have to hold the train for a couple of minutes.

The other issue is that now it is a case of sweating your assets as much as possible. If you have a journey that takes 50 minutes and you run it every half-hour, you are going to need four trains. In Switzerland it might be that you need to wait at the terminal for about 20 minutes at one end and 20 or 30 minutes at the other end. Therefore, you need an additional train to do that. The reason is that you know where the train in the other direction will go because you deduct when it arrives from the 60 and you



get the time that it is going to depart. That is very good and makes life good for the passenger and reduces the journey time, but it might reduce the utilisation of the rolling stock, the drivers and everything, and that is going to cost you money, at least in the short term. That is another problem that you are going to have.

Q16 **Greg Smith:** I understand that. Clearly, in this country, we have multiple train operating companies, some competing on the same track, but not many. However, the bus sector is a much more diverse, competitive marketplace, certainly in our bigger towns and cities. What is the mechanism that the Swiss use or that the Germans are looking at that will force those independent operators, when they are setting their timetables, to operate on what would essentially be a national model, if not a countrywide model, to do this?

Peter Gordon: When we had bus deregulation, the operators were going their way. Now there is a move towards, if you like, re-regulation. The question is, where is all the money coming from? But you can move towards a London system, whereby the local authority—Transport for the North or whatever—will specify the services. That is similar to what happens in London.

With high-frequency services, some in London, where you have a service every seven and a half or 10 minutes, it probably does not matter. You just rely on random connections like you do if you are travelling on the underground. However, in the countryside, you only have a bus every half-hour. Obviously, it all depends, because you have so many different constraints.

For instance, my parents live in a place called Amesbury, and during the rail strike I had to go to Basingstoke and get a couple of buses. Do you work on the basis that every bus comes to the bus station at the same time? National Express used to do that for a time at Cheltenham. When I was in Orlando, that is what they did. To get from the airport to my hotel, you would go and they would have hubs like that. That is one way you can go around it; you do it like that if you only have frequencies of about half an hour.

The other problem is if you have a connection, potentially, at the bus station and at the rail station and they are in different locations. The problem there is that you hope that the rail station will be in the same location as the bus station—I went to school in Salisbury, and the bus station and the rail station are. If they are not, then, yes, it is a problem that you are going to have to solve, but that is the way that you have to go.

Q17 **Greg Smith:** Looking at those international comparisons, you mentioned countryside and rural communities. Clearly, Switzerland has many heavily rural parts, similar to us. How does it work out in the rural communities in Switzerland compared to the urban centres?



Peter Gordon: Generally, pretty well. I have been looking at rail timetables more than their bus timetables. I have just come back from Switzerland—I spent a couple of weeks travelling around there. Often it works out, but sometimes it does not. For instance, my sister lives in Switzerland, in a place called Huémoz. The bus comes in and it connects with a train in one direction but not in the other direction. In fact, I did catch the train, because the bus was a couple of minutes early, but I would have missed it otherwise. There are always constraints but, by and large, that is what you would do. If you look at the Swiss national timetable and you look at the bus timetable, it would say what the times for trains are, and everything is timetabled to connect, although obviously there are going to be certain constraints.

Q18 **Greg Smith:** That is very helpful. Could I ask you another question, taking it slightly into the loftier policy sphere? If it is the Government that make this happen—there is a big if in that—what is the one thing they have to do to make it happen?

Peter Gordon: Two things. Finance is the obvious first answer, because it will cost money. In my view, if you can afford £100 billion for HS2, why can you not afford £100 billion. We could have a very long discussion about that, but the first thing would be finance.

You asked for one thing, but I will give you two answers. Secondly, you would need to lay down some national guidelines to say that we will have a national timetable. If you look at Germany, for instance, it is interesting because it has its Länder and it is very decentralised, but it is still trying to instigate a countrywide timetable in a country that is very decentralised. In fact, the Länder specify and finance most of the local train services. I do not see that as being impossible to reconcile, but there is a potential issue there.

Q19 **Jack Brereton:** You mentioned about CrossCountry, some of the issues with the time it takes to do that journey and some of the wider issues. How much is this to do with the rolling stock and issues with the rolling stock, whether it be capacity, speed or other issues?

Peter Gordon: If the rail network is going to grow, I think you would expect CrossCountry to be one of the networks to grow the fastest. I can think of at least two issues with CrossCountry. It has a lower frequency now than it did when Operation Princess was first instigated 15 years ago, as the Government have been looking for savings. I can understand why the Government's purse strings are very tight, but there is a problem that if you reduce the frequency, that does not help.

The other issue is the lack of space. In the case of the Voyagers, I am not sure that they were particularly well-designed trains, so there is going to be a lack of space in them anyway. Why don't you say that if you have a wheelchair, you can travel first class? Therefore, you do not need three large wheelchair-accessible toilets? You are still meeting the needs of the individuals. There are various issues with that.



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If you want to spend a bit of money on the rail network and you want to level up, one of the TOCs you would start with would be CrossCountry. Avanti is getting new trains. The obvious thing would be to cascade some of those down to CrossCountry so that they could run longer trains, because there is an issue there. The other problem it has is that because it is the widest network, if it does have any problems, you are going to get delays.

I have to be careful what I say about Germany, because its punctuality is very poor. If you look at Switzerland, its punctuality is very good. It is very tight operating, so it is very good at what it does. The other thing is that there are performance allowances of another 7%, which is about four minutes in an hour. What you do is you allow four minutes in order to catch up with things if the train is running late. On single-track sections, I have known trains to run quite late and they still arrive on time. This is the paradox: you would need to slow the service down to make it more reliable. That may sound counterintuitive, but it may help in the long run.

Q20 Ruth Cadbury: It all sounds very logical, and some of us have used transport networks where the bus has the train timetable and vice versa, and they integrate much better. Have you or anyone else done any modelling? When we talk about modal shift, I assume that you mean getting more people out of private cars to reduce congestion by encouraging rail transport, if it was more reliable. What modelling has been done, by whom and in what scenarios? Does it show significant modal shift?

Peter Gordon: I am not aware of many exercises. There is a man called Jonathan Tyler, who I should have mentioned, who has done a lot of work looking at the timetables. There is a system called MOIRA, which is the standard British rail system—I used to be the help desk locum, but that was many years ago. You could put the timetable into that and see what the effect would be. However, you have various issues. First, if you make the timetable quicker and reduce the generalised journey time, that would show up on the—

Q21 Ruth Cadbury: Aren't there an awful lot of factors that determine people's travel choices, where they have travel choices? How significant is what you are describing compared with all the other reasons that people travel? In particular, as you said, we have a very geographically centralised economy and a historic set of six or however many historic rail companies that are still there. To what extent is this significant enough to make real modal shift?

Peter Gordon: I think that it would make real modal shift because there is absolutely no reason why you could not double the amount of traffic on non-London flows. They are very small at the moment, but they are the ones that would increase. Since the rail market share—the total number of people travelling by train—has virtually doubled over 15 years, there is no reason why we cannot replicate that. To some extent I am saying that



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this is what happens in Switzerland and, therefore, we will take it as an act of faith that if the Swiss can do it, we can do it. That is very true.

Ruth Cadbury: Reliability in itself is as much a factor.

Peter Gordon: There are so many factors. For instance, I mentioned VFR. If you are travelling with lots of luggage, it may be that you are going to go by car anyway. There are any number of items, but certainly my experience with rail schemes is that where you do things like this and you reduce rail time, over a period of time it does increase market share. Yes, there is definitely a degree of faith with it, but I believe that it would happen.

Chair: We are right up against the clock, but Gavin has a quick question.

Q22 **Gavin Newlands:** On modal shift targets, in Scotland we also have car usage reduction targets. Should car usage targets—not necessarily statutory—be part of an inquiry looking into this issue?

Peter Gordon: Yes, they should, but I would prefer the carrot approach to the stick approach.

Chair: Thank you very much, Peter, for your time this afternoon.

Examination of witness

Witness: Malcolm Brown.

Q23 **Chair:** Could I invite our third proposer, Malcom Brown, to the lectern, please? For the purposes of our records could you state your name and organisation, please?

Malcolm Brown: Good afternoon, everybody. I am Malcolm Brown; I am chief executive officer of Angel Trains. We deliver green rolling stock and rail infrastructure right across the country, working in partnership with most of the leading manufacturers, train operators and other infrastructure suppliers.

We are backed by pension funds and infrastructure funds, investing people's pensions money into the delivery of sustainable transport for the future. Our projects range from the largest train refurbishment in the UK—west coast Pendolino—to putting in about £117 million up in Widnes, and Scotland's first hydrogen train, where we have a hydrogen electrolyser—think of the flux capacitor of "Back to the Future"; it sort of does that thing. We also contribute the electrification of the midland main line. I also chair the Sustainable Rail Executive, which is a cross-industry body bringing everybody together to develop a sustainable rail blueprint for the UK.

Today I want to focus on how we can drive investment in green, innovative transport networks for both passengers and freight. You have already heard Maggie speak, and that is a crucial part—a lot of attention



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goes on passenger transport, but it is about freight as well and how this can support modal shift. Peter has just talked about that as well.

There are three things that I would put in front of the inquiry: how do we make investment decisions more straightforward? How do we make decisions holistic—how do we take everything into account, including benefits beyond the traditional BCR? And how do we take decisions that bridge economic and political cycles? This is about both public and private, but for private this would accelerate UK investment, creating jobs and wealth.

We would like the Committee to consider an inquiry into how we unleash new investment and innovation in the UK's transport network—not just rail but the whole system. This inquiry could look at the progress to date, how long investments can continue to transform the experience, encourage freight, better connect businesses and community, and help us reach net zero in a way that supports economic growth.

However, we need to look forward as well. How can we develop the traditional business case into a more holistic one, capturing social and environmental benefits? By its nature, infrastructure investment is capital investment and it is long term. It is not based on a five-year cycle, as many national decisions seem to be. How do we make this decision process more streamlined, but also bridge economic and political cycles? The UK has a proud record in attracting investment into transport infrastructure. This inquiry, if selected, would help focus how we ensure that we continue that and capitalise on every opportunity.

We want to encourage more UK institutional investors and more global pension funds to invest in the long term and hence create jobs in the UK. This will support the Government's priorities, whether it is decarbonisation, national infrastructure investment or net zero—basically, any Government's logical priorities would be served by this.

This inquiry would be timely, given welcome moves to devolve transport to the regions, but also the local needs that the new structures, such as GBR, are there to serve, and including also the UK Infrastructure Bank. New infrastructure can supercharge the UK's transport network. It can really accelerate it, if you pardon the pun.

We are focused on the future, but we have to be acutely aware of the immediate challenges. The rail industry, like other transport modes, is still building back passenger numbers after the pandemic, and also encouraging freight. Constraints on public finances remain, which makes it more important to unlock private investment from other sources and allow public finances to be focused on other areas. By unlocking this investment, we can provide modern, green, accessible services that passengers expect, and encourage modal shift and a financially sustainable future for the transport network in the UK.



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Talking about rail specifically, we believe there are major opportunities to unleash investment in new and existing rail infrastructure, including depots, stations, signalling and rolling stock, as you have just heard. Given the extreme weather and climate change, we could use this investment to help to protect the national infrastructure. AI is not just about my daughter passing her degree; it is also about protecting our infrastructure and utilising it cleverly. By investing in this we will be using third-party money to allow constrained public finances to be focused elsewhere. We think that this could be replicated not just in rail but right across the transport networks.

To reiterate, the inquiry should consider how to make investment decisions more straightforward, how to make these decisions holistic and how to bridge the cycles. Thank you for your consideration. I would ask you to take this inquiry seriously, and I am open to questions.

Q24 Chair: Thank you very much indeed. Is there a change afoot among private investors, be that institutional funds—with the post-Solvency II changes and some of the other reforms the Government are making about institutional investment—or private equity more generally? Is there a shift in appetite among potential investors?

Malcolm Brown: There is a move among private investors. By that, I am putting everything into the box here. I am talking about pension funds all the way through. UK infrastructure is well regarded, and we have been at this for a while. We have stable government, we have policy that backs it up and we have a track record in this. Therefore, there is a growing appetite to invest in UK infrastructure.

Q25 Chair: Who would we best quiz as part of this inquiry?

Malcolm Brown: The Committee should look at some of the leading lights and some of the traditional names that you would expect to see, but also at disruptors—people who have entered the infrastructure market and the transport market. In the UK there are some really good examples. I would point you to Newcastle airport and to Forth Ports up at Leith and its green freeport.

I would also say look abroad. Look to other countries. There is no country, despite popular public opinion, that has blown the lights out on this, but there are some extremely good pockets of best practice elsewhere across the world. After all, these funds and the investment we are talking about are global—they can go anywhere. We are saying that the UK is competing to draw them in to invest in this country.

Q26 Chair: One supplementary from me before I hand to Jack. You said there are some good pockets of behaviour. Where are they?

Malcolm Brown: I have mentioned Newcastle and Forth. I would go to Denmark and look there. There is some radical thinking that has gone on. If you take the case study of Ørsted, there is a commercial business that came out of oil and gas and into renewables—I know that that it is not



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related to transport but it is infrastructure, and the business completely reinvented itself in a relatively short period of time. There is also Germany and Australia. Airports in Australia tend to be really good hubs. I would look right across the piece. As I say, it is pockets. Rather than just saying, "Go and see Japan"—the industrial tourism to Japan for transport is legendary—I would say that there are good pockets elsewhere.

Q27 Jack Brereton: In terms of the barriers to private investment, what do you see are the current main barriers that are preventing private investment into UK infrastructure?

Malcolm Brown: One of the first things is creating opportunities and saying, "Here is a bundle that is a set value that you can come and invest in." Right now, a lot of investments are self-generated; they are about the investors going out, generating interest and creating the package. If we could package infrastructure investments and say, "Here it is. This is how much it's going to cost. Come and bid for it."

There is also the element of complexity. To bid for a project in the UK takes a huge amount of money and a great amount of time. If we can streamline that down and make it not necessarily simpler but just less complex, with fewer levels, that would be a huge benefit for us.

For the avoidance of doubt, I am not suggesting that this should not stand up to rigour. These are large amounts of money. They are important projects, and there has to be a degree of rigour in them. I am not being slipshod about it, but we could simplify it. How many stages do we have in one process? Cut those down.

Q28 Jack Brereton: On wider governance and how decisions are being made, is that something that you think is going to be addressed? There are some changes that are being made at the moment. Do you think that that is going to be sufficiently addressed, or are there further steps that need to be taken around how we make decisions about investment in infrastructure?

Malcolm Brown: I do not have the detail because, as you say, these are in the evolutionary stage at this point. I think that the investors are looking for guiding minds, not controlling minds. Set an objective, set a framework, set a clear line of where we want to get to, and then public and private sectors—it is not just about private—can work together to deliver.

Q29 Jack Brereton: Do you think that we are going to get that?

Malcolm Brown: The jury is out at this point in time. I genuinely cannot answer that question. The point that I was going to make is that there is a view that it is either private sector or public sector, and never the twain should meet. I totally disagree with that. There is no reason why they shouldn't. We see it in lots of different places where public and private sector can work jointly to deliver a common aim.



Q30 **Jack Brereton:** If you look at the UK and the few international comparators you have mentioned, how would we fare in terms of the amount of private investment that is going into infrastructure projects?

Malcolm Brown: I used to work across Europe, and I think we are reasonably well placed. There is nobody doing exceptionally well. Where we differ is the speed to get to the actual point of investment and to get the shovels in the ground, to use that terminology. Other projects, which seem like a natural gift—not huge projects, not glamorous projects—and which we could be getting on with and delivering, both existing or new, do not seem to be coming to market at this point.

Q31 **Jack Brereton:** Particularly on rail infrastructure, we have heard that risk and reward is all sitting with the Treasury, effectively, which has happened because of the pandemic. Has this been a backward step, and is it deterring future investment?

Malcolm Brown: No, I do not think it is deterring future investment. What the Treasury did during the pandemic with rail and the support it gave kept the railway running. On reflection, when the studies are done, that should be applauded. We got the railway moving in that sense.

You talk about risk and reward. Risk should sit with the appropriate entity. It should not all sit with Treasury. Equally, it should not sit with some SME in Rotherham because somebody has managed to pass it down the line to them. It should sit with the appropriate entity. When you are doing the investment case you have to be clear that that is where it sits. Organisations that are investing in infrastructure understand risk. We manage it and we price it. What we do not like is ambiguity.

Q32 **Paul Howell:** I want to pick up on a couple of issues and how we consider them. One you have mentioned a couple of times is speed. How do we make these decisions quicker? How do we get to a quicker decision? There is another consideration that you might want to think about at the same time. A lot of decisions are made on BCRs and things like this, which is wholly driven by the Treasury and the DfT making their decisions. Do you think there is a space somewhere for the private sector to come in and make its own decisions on what it thinks is the BCR or what it thinks the payback would be, which might give the Treasury or the DfT a different perspective on what the investability of that space is?

Malcolm Brown: Taking your last point first, investment in infrastructure is now a relatively well-developed and relatively sophisticated process in the private sector. Remember that what I am talking about here specifically is pension money. Incredibly carefully considered and well-developed business cases and thought processes goes into that. There is a whole pile of knowledge that is sitting out there that could be better utilised and taken forward.

Again, I come to the point that there needs to be rigour, and this needs to be evaluated. I am not suggesting that that is not the case. However, there is a whole pile of knowledge that could be better utilised and



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enhanced in that. With regard to the speed point, that is one of the things that I am asking for the inquiry to look at: how do we speed up the process while maintaining a degree of rigour about it?

Looking back to the second point, the holistic point, when we are talking about infrastructure projects, very often we are talking about infrastructure projects that touch local community. We cannot lose sight of the need for the public, freight, environment and so on. How do we take this holistic approach with a BCR that is two to one and all about money, and we would reject it? But if you can connect communities and allow local urban areas to develop, that has a huge benefit as well.

Q33 Paul Howell: I could not agree more. I particularly look at Ferryhill station and the Stillington line in the north-east of England, which is a very simple case. It seems to take forever to get a decisions, and it fits all the buttons. It is how we get that holistic assessment that is worth consideration.

Malcolm Brown: With that station, what is to stop a private investor taking it on, on a concession basis, for 35 years and investing in it so that the Network Rail estate effectively still has the asset? But for 35 years you have an investment in that station that can operate it.

Q34 Ruth Cadbury: You are one person working in the rail industry, but what you are covering is not just rail, and not even just transport, in effect, but a culture of public-private investment in infrastructure that we have not got right in your sector. Is this a UK problem, or is it a UK transport problem? Where do you think the lessons have been learned in the UK that have been positive? Do you think that this is a systemic and cross-sector challenge? I have heard this before in another sector, where the pension funds are up for it but they are finding a block of risk aversion in the public sector. Where are the main blocks?

Malcolm Brown: To give you some background, I used to be asset director for a fund, and I covered 13 assets across Europe and Australia—not just rail, but right across the piece—so I do speak from a level of experience on that. As I say, there are some fantastic pockets where you can see public-private, you can see the pension funds coming in and you can see them investing in a sensible manner, taking a sensible return for it.

Ruth Cadbury: Such as?

Malcolm Brown: The one I recall is Newcastle airport. It is jointly owned by the local council and a pension fund, and it works a treat. They continue to invest and they continue to grow the market up there.

What seems to stop is a myriad of things. You can point to land planning—getting permissions to build something new. You can point to decision making, where there have been cases put forward that are sitting somewhere in government—I use the term with a small “g”—and you are never sure which Department it sits across. By the time the



answer comes back, the price has moved, especially just now with inflation. I can point to examples of that. There are a number of places. Is it systemic? Yes, but not 100%.

Q35 **Ruth Cadbury:** Are there other countries that generally—culturally or systemically—do this better across infrastructure?

Malcolm Brown: I go back to the point that I do not necessarily see countries that are 100% perfect. I see other countries—I have quoted Denmark and Australia, and Germany to a degree—where there are more examples that I would point to that happen better.

Q36 **Ruth Cadbury:** Is there a gang of you working on this, or is it just you?

Malcolm Brown: There is me and my investors looking at it. My major investor is a Canadian pension fund.

Q37 **Mr Bradshaw:** On what you just said, wouldn't this be a better inquiry for the Treasury Committee than the Transport Committee?

Malcolm Brown: You will have better insight into that. I am not meaning to avoid it, but what I am focused on here predominantly is transport. I did not limit myself to rail because, as our previous speaker talked about, we need to look at this as a system.

Mr Bradshaw: Treasury or Business. I am just putting it out there.

Malcolm Brown: Yes.

Q38 **Chair:** One final question from me linked to that: is there a good example elsewhere of how that wider, more holistic evaluation takes place? The cost of the infrastructure might be Transport, and Transport will gain some revenue from it, but the wider benefit—say it improves air quality—will come in the Health Department or somewhere else. Is there a good example of another country that is able to evaluate that investment appraisal taking a wider, whole-Government approach?

Malcolm Brown: In the interests of time, let me take that away and come back to you with some suggestions and some examples, if I may. *[Interruption.]* Sorry, I think Paul—

Chair: Sorry, Paul, we are up against time.

Malcolm Brown: Let's take it offline.

Chair: Thank you very much, Malcolm.

Examination of witness

Witness: Fran Collins.

Q39 **Chair:** Could I invite our next proposer, Fran Collins, to the lectern? For the purposes of the record, could you state your name and organisation, please?



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Fran Collins: I am Fran Collins. I am the Chair of the central south's Maritime and Transport Action Group, also known as MTAG. I am also the Chief Executive of Red Funnel Group and a reservist in the British Army. On behalf of MTAG, thank you to the Committee for giving me the opportunity to make our representation in respect of the forward agenda. MTAG represents suppliers across all aspects of the central south's maritime and transport sectors. Our members provide the infrastructure and skills needed to enable nearly all freight and passenger movements that come in, through and out of the central south. In working within the MTAG framework, we are able to work collaboratively to make both short and long-term improvements for the social and economic benefit of our region.

We are made up of senior leaders of firms such as Portsmouth International Port, Solent Stevedores, Southampton airport, Red Funnel Group, Meachers Global Logistics, Carnival Cruises, South Western Railway and other major international operators such as DP World and ABP. Collectively, we employ over 250,000 people and we provide national and international expertise and experience that spans the entirety of the transport and logistics sector.

Members of MTAG, from the Solent and across the central south, experience first hand how the UK's supply chain connects with our national logistics networks using all forms of transport. We see daily how consumer demands for personal mobility have changed, and they continue to do so. We deal with the frustrations, the expense and the limitations caused by bottlenecks and historic solutions, but we see too the opportunities to expedite decarbonisation and maximise social and economic opportunities by reframing the national transport strategy.

As has already been acknowledged in many reports and indeed earlier in the session, the adoption of a multimodal transportation strategy, focusing on end-to-end mass transport options, significantly reduces dependence on car travel and is one of the fastest ways to reduce carbon emissions and improve the sustainability of the wider supply chain.

It is in the pursuit of these goals that MTAG members today ask the Committee to scrutinise Government's current and future plans to integrate the UK's road, rail, sea and air transport networks for passengers and freight. We ask the Committee to ensure that such plans support the provision of a truly holistic, multimodal transport strategy and to consider how best Government might better support local authorities to ensure that the focus is placed on modal shift towards seamless mass transit solutions.

However, these policies must also capture the end-to-end requirements. A rail network will only be utilised if users have easy and efficient access from their homes or depots directly to the station. Equally, we will only see car use diminish when drivers deem that an acceptable alternative is freely available. Too often our core infrastructure is let down by a lack of



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strategic consideration and a failure to understand the wider consumer and business needs, both of which have changed significantly in recent years and will continue to do so as technology advances.

The central south is a superb example of the opportunities and challenges facing the wider UK, and it provides an excellent case study of how national policy could be changed to bring about greater connectivity, but this is bigger than the central south. It is in our national interest to accelerate meaningful change to reduce emissions and improve our economic prosperity across the UK. To do so, our national transport strategy must set clear and comprehensive expectations and enforce the regional delivery of multimodal, sustainable and end-to-end transport for people and goods.

MTAG's suggested goal is set out in UKRI's "UK Transport Vision 2050". This report described a future transport system as "fully integrated, providing interconnected mobility that allows the seamless and sustainable transition of people and goods from one location to another, regardless of the methods or modes used."

The inherent challenges of connectivity and modal integration are particularly felt by people and businesses in regions such as the central south, where our road, rail and sea networks meet ports and airports, and our trading, business and leisure routes are supported further by personal transport infrastructure, including taxis, bicycles and e-scooters.

Transit capabilities of the central south's remote and rural regions are very different from those of our urban cities, and like all local authorities our councils must make difficult decisions to support the end-to-end connectivity to drive the local economy, improve the lives and prosperity of those who live and work here, and expedite the route to net zero. Frequently, short-term and small-scale local improvements are prioritised and the wider strategic aim is not able to be met at the point of delivery.

MTAG members are confident that placing substantial emphasis on national, multimodal connectivity, to make it easier for people and businesses to choose the right options for the environment and their own needs, will have a direct and measurable effect on regional economies and environments, and indeed those of the wider UK. We know our ask is broad-reaching. However, it is this level of strategic oversight that is necessary to ensure we accelerate national decarbonisation and provide seamless transport connectivity for all passengers and freight.

Q40 Chair: Thank you very much indeed. As most MPs will tell you, coming up against the clock is never an easy thing. We have a countdown clock in the Chamber as well.

I would like to start by asking this: if we were to do an inquiry into this issue, what single thing would we seek to influence? How time-critical is it?



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Fran Collins: It is very critical because, from an industry perspective, industry is making decisions in silos and councils are making decisions. In the inquiry, the focus has to be on the holistic strategy. It needs to be comprehensive and it needs to be clear, and the policy needs to drive or enforce the behaviour of councils to consider the end-to-end journey.

Too often we see that the journeys are picked up—as previous colleagues have spoken about—around the railway network and the bus network. We heard a little about the connectivity between bus timetables or ferry timetables. But it is more than that: it is getting people and goods from their point of origin to their destination seamlessly.

Q41 **Chair:** Who would you suggest we quiz as part of our inquiry? Where would we start?

Fran Collins: I think you would get a lot of different answers, but there are three key points for me. One is business and industry. The second is consumers, both from a business perspective and from a passenger perspective. Finally, there are the councils and the local authorities themselves, who come up against the blockages and probably best understand the challenges they face, whereas I am here representing MTAG. We are experiencing some of those challenges in two authorities, both of whom have different priorities; one, for example, has a huge amount of rural infrastructure, and the other is very urban.

Q42 **Chair:** We have considered looking as a Committee at the balance between national-level strategic transport objectives and those that have been devolved down, whether it is to the devolved Parliaments in the country or, increasingly, to the combined mayoral authorities. What would you suggest we look at first—the local level or the strategic national level?

Fran Collins: The strategic level. If you do not have the strategy set correctly, people will make their own decisions as you move further down the decision-making tree. If you have a clear objective, as in any business, the people who are then making the decisions further down know what the long-term direction of travel is.

Q43 **Chair:** A question that colleagues and I have put to the other proposers is, where would you look overseas for an exemplar, if indeed an exemplar exists? Where is there best practice?

Fran Collins: Best practice is probably different to the best strategy, because we have a different fiscal entity in the UK. If you take Norway, for example, it has a fantastic public transport network, but it is mostly Government-funded, whereas in the UK it is mostly privately backed. One of the places that has an interesting transport strategy and is a good place to start for vision, I think, is the NEOM development in Saudi. What they are trying to achieve is clear and concise. It probably talks about things that are a long way off for the UK, but taking that principle and then taking that into something that is workable and deliverable for the UK is a good place to start.



Q44 **Paul Howell:** Fran, I want to pick up on something you have just said. You talked about the difference between the fiscal model and the actual model. It sounds to me as though there are two different things to look at, one of which is the model of integration that you would like to see—what the end game or the transport vision should look like—and the other is how you get there in terms of the structures to get there. Is that a fair comment? Should we look at them as distinct?

Fran Collins: Yes, I think they are two separate pieces. Certainly in my day job with Red Funnel Group we have strong pension fund investors who are keen to invest. The concern they have is the modal shift side of things. What is the Government's policy on modal shift? When they are making an investment in an asset that will last for 40 years or more for our shore infrastructure, what is the return likely to be on that and how can they support Government policy to make the business a success?

There is a balance in that but, fundamentally, we have to start with the longer-term strategy so that we know that the decisions that we as businesses are making and the decisions of the authorities on the planning side of things are focused on the right things.

Q45 **Paul Howell:** To go back to the question I was originally going to ask, you talk about the difference between a national strategy and a local strategy. We all look at our part of the world, where we understand the bits better—you are central south; I am north-east. If I look at the north-east in terms of decision making, I have the Tees Valley, which is a joined-up piece of information, and then I have County Durham, which goes into the Newcastle and Sunderland links. It feels to me as though the strategy should be at a north-east level as opposed to just the Tees Valley or just the others, but if you do it too much at a national level you do not get to the detail of how you are going to link the buses to the trains to the planes to the airports to the seaports. Would you be able to give a view as to where the level—

Fran Collins: Yes, there is always going to be a boundary. Are we at the level of detail where we are saying, "Trains, buses and ferries, you have to connect"? Quite frankly, we all know that anyway and we do our best to fit those timetables together. Are we in a place where Government should be suggesting?

To decarbonise, the easiest way is to get people out of their cars. We know that all of us as consumers are quite wedded to our cars, so how do we do that? We need to look at the last mile, for example, that direct connectivity, and then go back to the transport operators to say, "How can you support that?" An example I would give would be the provision of water taxis in the Solent, where we have developments coming up along the western side of the Solent. It currently takes 40 minutes to drive around whereas a water taxi could do that route in 10 to 15 minutes.

Q46 **Paul Howell:** Obviously you have talked about the last mile, which we all understand is a difficult one. At the other end of that equation—the



longest link—if you were missing a relatively short, say, 20 or 30-mile rail link for everything else to build around, you end up with lots of car journeys or other things. It is making sure you make the decisions at the right level from both ends of that conundrum.

Fran Collins: Yes. It is making sure that local authorities understand the priorities of Government. It goes back to the timescale that local authorities seem to be working on at the moment, as well as the funding side of things, and encouraging and enforcing local authorities to think further ahead.

One of the things that the MTAG members have had a conversation about is VTOL. From a local authority perspective, it is so far ahead that it is just out of scope. In terms of bringing AI technology into ferry ports, from a local authority perspective that is a long way out. In reality, it is about five years away.

Q47 **Mr Bradshaw:** The two countries that you mentioned as good practice—Norway and Saudi—are obviously very different from us because, as you mentioned, Norway has public-owned transport infrastructure and Saudi is not really a democracy, or not a democracy at all. Is there anywhere else that is a bit more like us that would be a more useful comparator in terms of good practice?

Fran Collins: A lot of central Europe is very good. We would be on the forefront, again, looking at the end-to-end journey in its entirety. There is a lot of ambition out there and, if I am honest, I do not think anyone is doing it really well yet. That is an opportunity for us.

Q48 **Mr Bradshaw:** Is there any region or nation of the UK where it is better, or is it pretty poor everywhere?

Fran Collins: The rural regions are the ones that find it the hardest. For me, living in Dorset, coming up and working in Southampton, it is bliss to be able to get off at Waterloo, get on the Tube, use the bus and use the scooters, but rurally we are constrained in the UK and it affects people's lives.

Q49 **Chair:** From a machinery of government perspective, how do you see your proposals fitting in across different Government Departments? Obviously, we are focusing on transport, but you do not have to go very far into an inquiry to see that it is impacting other areas. To give an example, I visited the Port of Dover recently. If its ambitions to decarbonise are to be realised, it is going to need massive national grid upgrades. How would you want to see our inquiry, if we did one, approach things from a cross-Government perspective?

Fran Collins: From a Government perspective, I think the inquiry should take it from a transport perspective first, because, primarily, it is around the end-to-end transport. It is about the transport strategy for the future. It enables membership organisations, businesses and authorities to start to implement and build their own strategies and their own business plans



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for that. The wider benefit then, I expect, would get taken down through Government.

On things like decarbonisation, this is not directly affecting decarbonisation requirements. From the grid perspective, it is the same as we have in Southampton and doubtless across the rest of the UK. Encouraging people on to trains is not going to affect the demand for electricity particularly until we start to move more to electric trains.

Keeping it slightly tighter—albeit I appreciate it is a massive topic—and looking at transport first would be my suggestion of where to take it.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed for your time.

Examination of witness

Witness: Councillor O'Boyle.

Q50 **Chair:** Could I invite our fifth proposer, Councillor Jim O'Boyle, to the lectern, please? For the purposes of our records again, could you just state your name and organisation, please?

Councillor O'Boyle: Councillor Jim O'Boyle, Coventry City Council. I am the cabinet member for jobs and regeneration.

Chair: Great, thank you. The floor is yours.

Councillor O'Boyle: Thank you. Good afternoon, everybody, and thank you very much for inviting me today to make this pitch to you.

Coventry is the birthplace of the British motor industry. Innovation and invention are in our DNA, and we are ready to help lead the way on the public transport of the future.

Let me talk to you about very light rail. At this moment in time, France and Germany are racing ahead. France has 28 light rail systems, and Germany 57. Britain has just nine. Coventry is hoping to help change all of that. It seems to us that perhaps the Treasury does not think investment in light rail outside of London is worth it, and of course our laws make it more expensive to install.

Coventry is addressing all of those challenges. The core technology in trams has stayed stagnant for over a century, but we believe they belong in the heart of our cities, helping people get out and about, without damaging our environment.

As I have said, Coventry has a long, proud history as a hub of transport innovation, and today we are working with very light rail innovators and R&D specialists in the region. We are completely rethinking trams and their track. Existing trams start at circa £25 million per kilometre and can rise to over £100 million in difficult city centres, with disruption lasting sometimes well over two years. In Coventry, we are targeting just £10



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million per kilometre, with disruption to businesses and the public measured in weeks rather than years. That is an incredible saving and would revolutionise the use of trams in our country and around the world.

CVLR, as we call it, has already been incredibly well received by industry and is making great progress. It has delivered two groundbreaking innovations: an innovative vehicle and a first-of-its-kind track. Most trams cannot turn tight corners and need extensive, expensive and even ugly overhead line equipment. CVLR is battery-powered and has a turning radius of 15 metres so it can run on tighter roads. That means retrofitting into cities is not only doable, but faster and cheaper. We are ready to deliver this in Coventry, making our city centre a living lab for CVLR.

Then there is the track. Before a tram is installed, millions of pounds need to be invested to divert utilities. Our track will allow most of that equipment to stay in the ground, slashing costs and disruption. New materials will allow the track form to be thinner but just as strong, and its design means it can be installed at a pace unheard of in the industry.

Together, these two breakthroughs could unlock high-quality transport investment in our nations and regions. Both the vehicle and the track have been built in the midlands, creating jobs. The challenge now is to ensure Government Departments and industry work together so that these very light rail innovations can be delivered, but there are challenges to overcome.

Our first challenge is the Transport and Works Act. The process applies to all rail-based vehicle systems, but is slow and costly and a cutting-edge system like ours needs legislation that is fit for the 21st century. We can speed up delivery, but we need to speed up the Transport and Works Act process too.

Our second challenge is, of course, finding the money. The CVLR scheme has incredible support at all levels, including cross-party support across the region. We applied to the Department of Transport and the combined authority for funds to build a trailblazing city demonstrator in Coventry, but, like many projects, a lack of clarity over the final allocation of funding creates delays and disruption. Innovation requires ambition. Now we need the Government to trust us to deliver.

The third challenge is autonomy. I have spoken today about reducing installation costs, but we can go even further. Brilliant work has been done to support autonomous cars, but the same focus isn't there for trams. Therefore, we are calling on Government to accelerate its work on the automation of trams in the road.

As you can tell, Coventry is very excited by the prospect of very light rail. Together we can change the face of public transport but, first, we in Coventry believe the Committee must investigate the three major challenges I have outlined today. As a reminder, they are the Transport



and Works Act, funding and autonomy. There is a fourth in there, which of course is battery technology, but perhaps that is for another day. These three areas, if taken seriously by Government, would usher in a new era of low-cost, high-quality and sustainable public transport for all and tackle climate change for future generations. We are that close—as I am to the time. Thank you.

Q51 Chair: Spot on—well done. You win the prize for hitting the end point. Thank you very much indeed. Just a few questions for clarification first. I take it from your presentation that this scheme is still at the concept stage in Coventry, or have you progressed it further?

Councillor O'Boyle: It is still, technically, in the industry, at concept, but in reality we have a vehicle built in Coventry. It is being tested at the Dudley light rail innovation centre as we speak. We have the track, which has been built by a company in Stoke-on-Trent. I have been working on this with my officers at Coventry City Council. Believe it or not, I have been in this job for seven years—it is quite unusual for someone in my position to have been here right from the start. We have seen it right through. I have seen this vehicle move. I have actually ridden on the vehicle. It is 8 tonnes altogether, fully laden—much lighter than a 60 or 80-tonne tram and great for our roads in comparison.

So, no, the vehicle exists. The issue is that we have to go through a whole process of rules and regulations. For example, if I went tomorrow and decided I was going to be an HGV driver and passed my test, I could be driving a 60-tonne artic up and down the roads in Coventry or London, but I cannot ride a tram that is eight tonnes. That is something that we really want to help change.

Q52 Chair: I understand you have outlined the three asks for the inquiry, but even if those were not able to be amended, would you still be able to deliver this project?

Councillor O'Boyle: Yes. We are delivering. In fact, we have funding now. Initially we started with £4.2 million from the growth deal through the LEP that I was a director of. From the combined authority devolution deal going back some years ago to 2017, when the West Midlands Combined Authority was set up, we added £12.2 million. As a council, we have put in a considerable amount of resource—something like over £3 million, plus all the officer time that has been taken up in this.

We have applied to the city region sustainable transport settlement, through which the DfT has identified combined authorities for transport funding over a five-year period. We asked for £71.5 million; we received £54.5 million. It is that that I was alluding to. There are then a whole other number of processes we have to go through in order to get to where we need to get.

In the meantime, we are a far-reaching and far-looking local authority, but we are constrained by the financial constraints that all local



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authorities have. If we cannot get the funding going forward, it puts at jeopardy, at each stage, the potential opportunity to take the project to the next level. That is the issue that we are really facing.

Q53 Chair: When you look at other projects in cities that have reintroduced the more conventional tramlines—Edinburgh, Nottingham, Croydon and places like that—each one will have their own costs and issues but, roughly speaking, how much cheaper is your very light rail system compared to a traditional tram?

Councillor O’Boyle: I will give you two examples, Chair. One is Birmingham and the extension of the Midlands Metro there. It is costing about £100 million per kilometre at the moment. Interestingly, Norman Baker—who was the Transport Minister under the coalition Government—came to see it recently and we had quite a long conversation with him. Of course, he oversaw the Edinburgh tram system and he was fuming about how much that cost because of the utility diversions that had to take place.

That is why ours is completely unique, because the track we need to talk about sits just 30 cm into the road. Most utilities should be at least 45 cm beneath the ground so it will not interfere with them. Plus, we have a sectional track that can be lifted up. Utility companies can go in, make whatever changes they need to make, and then put the track back in. That is what is unique. That is why we are working with the utility companies. We have two sets of track down in Coventry at the moment. We obviously need them on board. They understand this, and they are very supportive of what we are doing.

Like I said, this is complete innovation, it is happening now and it is going to save the taxpayer hundreds of millions of pounds just in Coventry, never mind elsewhere.

Q54 Chair: One last question from me before I hand to colleagues. Is there an operating system in another city in the world that uses this technology, or is Coventry pioneering in the world?

Councillor O’Boyle: No, that is exactly it: it is completely unique. I said at the beginning of my pitch that Coventry is the birthplace of the UK automotive industry. We have used light-weighting technology from the car industry to make sure that this tram system is lighter. It is as strong as any other system, but that saves a massive amount of cost. We are working with Warwick Manufacturing Group, who are world leaders in this sector, in terms of creating both track but also a vehicle that can really take people and make a heck of a difference.

Q55 Ruth Cadbury: I am just trying to get my head around this. I accept that the Coventry proposal may have unique elements, but I think you said at the beginning that there are other examples of VLR in the country. There is one in Redditch that is using old rail track bed but that is very much urban—is it Redditch? No, Stourbridge, sorry.



Councillor O'Boyle: The difference is that it is light rail; it is not very light rail, and it does not have the sort of turning circle—

Ruth Cadbury: All right. They use the term “VLR”.

Councillor O'Boyle: Yes, but it is not. In fact, the one you are referring to—I know the one you are on about—is very old technology. It is not the latest. This is the latest cutting edge, because as well as that, Ruth, it is worth saying that this is also battery-driven. There are no overhead wires. Of course Coventry is the location for UK Battery Industrialisation Centre, so we are developing the batteries of the future as well.

Q56 **Ruth Cadbury:** I have heard the term “VLR”. We are just trying to understand whether this is a definition that distinguishes a technology, or a form of transport, that is different from a tram and lighter than light rail, and where it is in the mix. Obviously, we are looking not so much at the big picture, and you are making a case for Coventry—I think the Chair just asked you, “Would it go ahead even if we did not do an inquiry?”—but there seem to be issues where you, as an exemplar, might be changing stuff in terms of urban transport across the UK around funding mechanisms, the law and so on.

Councillor O'Boyle: I use “light rail” or “trams” as an example so people can get their heads around exactly what it is that we are doing here and what this project is about. When you talk about trams, that is what people see, but what we are delivering here is something quite unique and quite different. Interestingly, we have had interest not just from around the country but from around the world on this. I have spoken to a bank through colleagues because we are looking for private investment in this as well. This is prime for a public-private partnership.

Q57 **Ruth Cadbury:** You heard the previous presentation?

Councillor O'Boyle: It is something we have been doing. In fact, someone who used to be an MP a few years ago—Margot James—is the chair of the Warwick Manufacturing Group, and I made her chair of my climate change board in Coventry. Through her contacts, we have talked with a number of very influential banks. We have a product that we could sell in other countries, potentially, because they do not have the sort of Transport Acts that we have. This comes back to the point I have heard a lot today. If I make no other point, I make this point today: we have the chance to do something unique here. We are building it here. We are creating jobs here. If we invest here, we have the opportunity to do it all around the country.

Q58 **Ruth Cadbury:** It does not sound like you will be held back if we do not do an inquiry on it.

Councillor O'Boyle: We will not be held back, but we will not be going at the pace that we need to go if we are going to create an industry and create an opportunity for the travelling public and for the taxpayer to get a return. I think it is important that we do that, because this is a sellable



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product. As Coventry City Council, we own the intellectual property of this. Nobody else does. We own it and we can sell that on. That is not something I am just saying; it is a fact. There is a real opportunity. I look to investors to say, "Perhaps you could do something here."

By the way, Midlands Metro and other trams are not built in this country; they are built in Spain. We built this in Coventry. We can do that. We have the technology already. Let us invest now. We are not talking about hundreds of millions; we are talking about tens of millions. That is the difference. The pitch here is: can we save the taxpayer lots of money and create the modal shift I heard about earlier? People do move on to trams when they replace buses, and they leave their cars at home. We can see it happens, and we can do that. That is great for our economy, but it is great for our environment as well.

Q59 Paul Howell: I hear what you are saying. It seems to me as though the reason you would want the inquiry is so that Government becomes aware of a product that could be, therefore, put into other places.

Just in terms of understanding the product—your very light rail—we have talked about modal integration and all this sort of thing. Going back to our own local things, the Leamside line in the north-east of England wants, on one level, to put resilience into the east coast main line—proper rail lines, if you like—but there are a lot of spurs off it that go into your Washingtons and your Sunderlands, and join up to the Tyneside Metro and things. Is it possible for your product to integrate across the different platforms so that you can use heavy rail at one point and very light rail at the other with the same rolling stock?

Councillor O'Boyle: This has been designed quite deliberately to run on the same gauge as those types of vehicles that you refer to. It could run along the west coast main line. It can run along Midlands Metro. The point about the track, and I come back to it, is that where that track is in situ, it can run on it. Equally, when you come into the city centre—because this is often about very short hops—our first location is from the city centre to the hospital. Hospitals are huge hubs of thousands of people every day, and we have car parks completely overloaded, because people do not get the bus in the way that they used to or the way that we expected. You put them on this, and they are there.

It is about changing that modal shift. Someone mentioned the last mile earlier on. When someone comes into Coventry on the train, they might then jump on an e-scooter, an electric bike or some other bike, or maybe jump on the tram to university. That is what we are talking about. These are not long-haul, but very short trips, but they can make a heck of a difference to our traffic systems in terms of our air quality and our environment in our cities.

Q60 Gavin Newlands: We are asking some questions that might be more pertinent to an actual inquiry, but obviously yours is a very specific request. I have three very quick questions, if I can. I may be wrong but



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you mentioned £2 million per kilometre, roughly, as an aim?

Councillor O'Boyle: Ten million.

Gavin Newlands: Ten million. That is more realistic, certainly.

Councillor O'Boyle: I wish £2 million.

Q61 **Gavin Newlands:** Ten million. How does that compare to other tram/light rail systems? You obviously mentioned Edinburgh.

Councillor O'Boyle: Yes. I said at the start that, on average, they start around £25 million. That is if they do not have to move any utilities. You start moving utilities, and there is disruption. As I said, in Birmingham, at the moment, the extension is £100 per kilometre. That is the difference.

Q62 **Gavin Newlands:** You mentioned batteries. The trams are very light and can perhaps use batteries, rather than overhead lines. But, obviously, speaking to others across sectors, the big way of making transport work in a lot of them is to sweat the asset. Would there be enough energy in the batteries to run for the whole day, essentially, without being charged, or is it charged at some points throughout the journey? What is the plan for that?

Councillor O'Boyle: That is a good question. Two answers to that. One is that, interestingly, Coventry is going to be one of the only cities in the UK where, by 2025, all of our bus fleet is going to be electric—all 300 buses. They are using technology that means they can be out and about on the streets all day long and they have charging points. Coventry has the most electric charge points for vehicles anywhere in the country outside of London at the moment, and we have been targeting this particular area.

That is why I mentioned earlier that the UK Battery Industrialisation Centre is located in Coventry. It is now creating the batteries of the future. There are all sorts of things about on-the-move charging, but it is also about making sure that we have an innovation centre directly where our bus station is at the moment.

Some of this work still needs to be done, let's be clear, but the challenge is, can we go to the routes we have and have 56 passengers on the vehicle? Yes, we can. We can do that now because we have tested it.

Gavin Newlands: Not to argue, but Renfrewshire actually has more electric buses, outside of London, per capita than anywhere else for the moment, until you guys get some delivered.

Councillor O'Boyle: I am not going to argue with you—

Q63 **Gavin Newlands:** Anyway, a quick question. Is there any interest from elsewhere? Obviously in west Glasgow there is a metro scheme proposed, and I am sure that, in a lot of other places around the country, with city deals and levelling up, there is interest to perhaps look at this. Is there



any interest from anybody else in the UK to come and see what you are doing yet?

Councillor O'Boyle: Yes, there has been a lot of interest. I have met the combined authority in Peterborough. I have met the combined authority down in the west of England. We have also had contacts from lots of councils, including Leeds, interestingly, who got interested in this. Stoke-on-Trent are very interested in this because, as I mentioned earlier, a company in Stoke-on-Trent are building the track because they have expertise there. We have had interest from overseas as well.

Clearly, until we have a product that we can actually take, we do not have anything, technically, to sell. Yes, we do have a concept, but we are that close now. We will have the demonstrator track, probably at the beginning of next year, actually running on the streets of Coventry. The thing is, you see, people do not believe it often until they see it. That is the thing.

The reality is that, because of the Transport and Works Act, we cannot take paying passengers on it, so we have to do it on a voluntary basis. That is the other thing that holds us back. We have the innovation. We know it is there. People can drive, as I said, a 60-tonne truck up and down the roads, but we cannot ride an 8-tonne vehicle, which is on a fixed track, so we know where it is going.

Gavin Newlands: Thanks very much, and I promise not to hold it against Coventry when we are considering this that you stole City of Culture from Paisley.

Councillor O'Boyle: You can try.

Chair: I am worried where this might end up. The last question is from Ben.

Q64 **Mr Bradshaw:** Congratulations on what you have achieved so far. It sounds very impressive. Is there anything to actually see at the moment? There would be next year, is what you are saying, or is there already something to see?

Councillor O'Boyle: No, there is something to see now, Ben. In fact, I should have said this earlier on: I invite you to come along to have a look at it yourself. The very light rail innovation centre in Dudley was set up through the funding that we put in place to set this in motion. It is being tested up there now. I have ridden on it there. It exists. The track form exists.

Interestingly, the track form is probably the thing that makes this different in terms of the cost differences, because of the type of track that is going to be used. The concrete that we are using, which is not used anywhere else in this country—it is from America—means this is strong and it is durable, and it only has to go 30 cm into the road. That saves millions.



Q65 **Mr Bradshaw:** I was going to suggest that it might be worth a visit, regardless of whether we do an inquiry or not. Is there any international interest in your technology?

Councillor O'Boyle: There has been, certainly in writing. I have been on a few calls via Zoom or Teams with various people. I was saying earlier that we met an international bank, because we want to see how we can potentially commercialise this. The key point, again, is that, first, we need it on the road so people can actually see it. The reality is that we believe—all the experts are telling us, and we know—that this technology works; it is the process of how we get it to work on the roads of our country and our city.

Q66 **Mr Bradshaw:** In two minutes, maximum, how on earth did this all come about? Was it a coalition of companies and a visionary council or councillors?

Councillor O'Boyle: It was my idea.

Mr Bradshaw: Your enthusiasm?

Councillor O'Boyle: Yes. I will tell you how it came about, and of course I will not say anything other than the truth here. In 2016 I got appointed as the cabinet member. We were in the process of setting up the combined authority in the midlands at the time. One of the things we were looking at was connectivity with HS2, which I think most people would say has been controversial in the way it is has been done. It obviously goes from London, and the first stop is the NEC, Solihull; it does not go past Coventry. It does not go into the rest of the west midlands, so what benefit do they derive from that?

The conversation was about having these Sprint buses—these buses that were guided by kerbs, in effect. I did not think that was good enough, and I said to officers, “I want to know if there is an alternative”. Very light rail came about, but it does not exist in the way that we have done it. For the last seven years, we have been working on this and we have pushed it and pushed it. That is why I said at the start that it is quite unique that I am here seven years later—normally in this job you get moved on or you get voted out. Obviously, I must be doing something right—*[Interruption.]* Sorry, the SNP just looked up there when I talked about getting voted out—the election is not until next year.

That is the reality. I am pushing it because I know this can make a difference. I used to work in the car industry. I saw what the car industry could do for people like me—the jobs it could give me. We can create not just a transport system but the jobs and economic opportunities for people. That is what we should be doing. That is why I want to do it, and that is why we are doing it.

Mr Bradshaw: Great. Thank you.

Q67 **Chair:** A very quick last question. You mentioned linking up HS2. Is there



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interest from other authorities within the West Midlands Combined Authority—Solihull, Birmingham and so on—to have a similar scheme?

Councillor O'Boyle: Yes, there is. In fact, part of their wider work at the moment is the wider point about stretching out Midland Metro to other parts of the conurbation. Because of the gauge that I talked about earlier, they are talking now about using the vehicle and the very light rail as an extension to Midlands Metro because they can see. It has wide support both from the Mayor and from all the different parties. We have something going here and, honestly, I urge the Committee to have a good look at it, because it will be the best day's work you have ever done.

Chair: Great. Thank you very much indeed for your time this afternoon.

Councillor O'Boyle: Thank you. Lovely. Thanks very much.

Examination of witness

Witness: Chris Paul.

Q68 **Chair:** Could I invite, last but not least, our final presenter for this afternoon? Again, for the purposes of our record, could you state your name and organisation, please?

Chris Paul: My name is Chris Paul. I am a graduate student at the University of Manchester. I work for NatCen, which does various types of Government research and OECD research, and I am a trustee of a large outdoor arts charity called Walk the Plank, which delivered something big in UNBOXED recently.

Chair: Great, thank you. The floor is yours.

Chris Paul: Cars typically spend 95% of their lives stationary, parked, stored or seeking parking. Almost every trip, in a private vehicle certainly, begins and ends with a stationary vehicle somewhere. Vehicles with the capacity to carry four or more people are typically used as single-occupancy. It is like driving around with a three-seater sofa and a pair of armchairs. Vehicles are typically capable of driving at several times the speed limit in towns. They are often bigger and heavier, and are even outgrowing the garages and hard standing designed to store them.

Parking locations may be off-road, at home, or on visits for work, shopping, leisure, school and health, and they are often impermeable and located on previous garden land. They could be returned to being gardens or even parks—the other sort of parks. People can store a car, often free of charge, in all of sorts of places where society would not let them store a small shipping container, a wooden crate, a boat on a trailer or a caravan, all of which are around the same size and weight.



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In most cases, parking and storage of vehicles in the UK is poorly thought through. Parking policy and practice often seems highly controversial and part of the culture wars thing, so it is often placed in the “too difficult”, “wicked problems” category and it does not get dealt with.

Supply of parking influences the amount of driving, obviously. This is well known. You can restrict or increase driving by providing or reducing parking. As with highways, reducing supply or charging more for it may reduce driving, and increasing supply may induce driving.

Although driving and, therefore, parking give great liberties—we all understand that—they are also widely recognised as the source of many harms and reductions in liberties, as well.

Parking policy, which may reduce or induce driving, should be studied and understood. Although there have been a number of items on parking enforcement practices in front of this Committee, and some on parking on footways in the work programme, it is a very long time since wider parking policy was considered. I think it was 2005 when there was a wider investigation, and that too largely concentrated on parking rules and enforcement, with just a few paragraphs in the recommendations on wider policy and a realisation from the Committee that spatial planning was not covered because of a lack of submissions for that area in the evidence-gathering.

Parking is of course an issue independent of vehicle power plant being required by both internal combustion engine vehicles and electric vehicles, with possibly larger units for larger electric vehicles. They seem to be getting larger—for example, the dear Ford Fiesta may be discontinued because they do not think it is big enough to be changed to electric plant. The parking required could fall, of course, with modal shift, which several of the presenters have talked about, and also if there is more sharing through more community transport maybe, more lift sharing or more autonomous vehicles. We are not really sure if that is going to happen or not.

The harms from roads and from parking are estimated currently to amount to between £80 billion and £100 billion—non-trivial amounts. Eighty billion pounds was the figure used by Chris Boardman and others in the Made to Move proposition in 2017 in Greater Manchester. That was considerably higher than the earlier Cabinet Office strategy unit figure in 2009, but that was still getting towards £50 billion. This is a huge amount of money.

The harms that are typically connected to driving, and therefore parking, include global heating, congestion, collisions and casualties, causing inactivity in the population, chronic air quality issues, noise pollution and various other harms that are not usually counted in. All of those have social aspects, but they also all have economic aspects.



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The sorts of harm that are not calculated include the opportunity cost of the space for highways, parking and car storage, reckoned to be about 50% of most cities; spatial planning effects, including sprawl; and a phenomenon called forced car ownership—a different sort of FCO. Isolation and loneliness are caused by driving, cars and parking, and there is a dampening effect on passenger transport, both because of the space being used and also the easy opportunity to use your own vehicle.

Many of the harms are known to fall most heavily on those with protected characteristics and in the lowest income deciles, while auto mobility is most prevalent and most beneficial to those in the highest deciles. It is an equality issue as well as everything else.

Over the decades, every 20 years or so, there seem to have been key texts referring to parking issues in the UK. I did list those in my written submission, and they go from “Traffic in Towns” in 1963 all the way forward to the decarbonising transport work done by Greg Marsden in 2019. I will leave it there for now.

Q69 Chair: Thank you very much indeed. I am going to open up the questioning by asking how time-sensitive this is. Is there a particular decision or particular work that an inquiry by us would help to influence?

Chris Paul: As an academic, or would-be academic, it is always interesting to see these things moved on, but the four documents that I mentioned in the written submission date back to 1963. The first one was called “Traffic in Towns” and it recognised the problems of parking, the problems of too many cars and the issues with them, and actually had an uncannily correct prediction of how many vehicles we would have. It predicted 34 million in 2010 and that was fairly near to being on the money. That is somebody predicting 50 years ahead what would happen. We have let motor transport rip, and it has grown, in the worst-case scenario.

Others include the “Urban Renaissance” report, which was done for the Environment Committee in 1980, and Lord Rogers’s report in 1999. These are about every 20 years and they always recommend something to be done about parking. Then there was the decarbonising transport work done for the LGA around 2019. It just keeps coming back.

It is something that has been put in the “too difficult” box, I would say—something that is reckoned to be a bit hard and complicated. It has not been gripped and it really needs to be. It has been going on for 40 years already, at least.

Q70 Chair: To what extent is it a national Government issue, and to what extent is it a devolved issue, whether that is for an individual town or city council, or a combined authority? If it is the latter, what is stopping an authority changing policy now?

Chris Paul: It is a great question. A lot of this is devolved in one way or another, or delegated or whatever. For example, currently action on



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footway parking—which is a hugely hot problem and has come to this Committee, I know—is something that we have been waiting for in local government for many, many years. For 25 years at least it has been discussed—having a national law about this. London is really the only place that has a grip on pavement parking. There are obstacles to people who have mobility impairments parked up along every kerb, so it is harder to cross the road, there are road safety issues for children and so forth. It has not been gripped. That one is still a national issue and it needs to be dealt with.

The workplace parking levy, for example, was in the Lord Rogers report in 1999 that I mentioned, and the law came through in 2000, I think, to allow local authorities to do it. Currently only one has done that, which is Nottingham, and all the others are hemming and hawing about it. For 20 years, in some cases, they have been considering whether to do it and they are just not able or willing to do it. It is an unpopular thing, restricting people's freedom to park wherever they want or to drive wherever they want, and for that reason I would argue that it is something that national Government should deal with to help those local authorities get over the line with workplace parking.

Q71 Chair: I just have one supplementary before I hand over to colleagues. I would just like to probe that a little further—I am trying to get it clear in my mind. You have referenced workplace parking, with Nottingham being the only example, but other cities and towns could do it. That was a political decision for them. Would changing the regulation of more general parking require legislation from this place, or do authorities have the ability to introduce or change things at the moment?

Chris Paul: There is a mixed answer to that. On some things, they already do have the power to change, and on some things they don't. Something that strikes me every time I go outside in a city is that there is a lot of yellow paint on the roads. If you go outside in a city in Holland you don't find lots of yellow paint, because they just tell you where it is permitted to park, not where it is not permitted. That would be an extraordinary thing. That is because of national rules; it isn't because of local authority decisions to use lots of yellow paint. There are a mixture of levels of operation, I think.

Q72 Mr Bradshaw: It is a really interesting subject. It has always struck me as odd that people seem to feel that they have a right to take up a lot of public space and not pay very much for it. I think the problem we would have as a Committee is how we would hone in on this. Apart from the workplace charging recommendation, were there any other headline recommendations that you remember from the Rogers report that either were or were not implemented that are relevant to this subject?

Chris Paul: There was a recommendation, I think, that 80% of transport spend should get spent on sustainable transport and not on public transport, something that is a great idea but was perhaps never going to happen because it is so ambitious.



Q73 **Mr Bradshaw:** Spatial planning is an important one. We have had home zones. We have LTNs now. There are small, piecemeal schemes in various towns and cities. Is there anywhere that you can pinpoint, either in the UK or abroad, that does parking well, in your view?

Chris Paul: I could give you some examples. A standout one—a country that was as bad as us for parking and as bad as us for active travel until about 15 years ago—is Spain. Seville is a prime example of where they have done something about parking. They have removed 5,000 parking spaces from the roadside and they created, in two or three years, 70 miles of protected or at least comfortable cycling space. There was a massive change in mode share—15 to 20 times growth in cycling in that city.

Q74 **Mr Bradshaw:** You may not be aware of this, but we have had a couple of other interesting bids that we are considering tomorrow, one into the use of the kerbside and the other into shared transport, CoMo. That is one of the areas where, apart from modal shift, you could help address this. I just wondered, if we felt that we did not have the capacity for a standalone inquiry into this, whether you thought that looking at parking as part of one or more of those inquiries, or bringing two or more of those issues together in one inquiry, would work and be helpful.

Chris Paul: Definitely two of them belong together.

Mr Bradshaw: The kerbside and the parking? The two are obviously so related.

Chris Paul: Definitely. The CoMo could, as well, I think, be—

Mr Bradshaw: It could be part of it?

Chris Paul: It could be, yes.

Mr Bradshaw: Thank you. That is very helpful.

Q75 **Chair:** You mentioned Seville and the Netherlands as two good examples. Looking outside of Europe, is there an international example you would point to?

Chris Paul: There are various places in the world that have been removing parking and replacing it with more pedestrian and cycling space. New York City under Sadik-Khan, who was the Mayor's Transport Commissioner, successfully removed quite a bit of the kerbside parking and repurposed it for activities, whether it be widened footways or cycleways. That would be a great example, I would say, on a further-afield basis.

Q76 **Mr Bradshaw:** Are you aware of a parking guru? Do people study parking? Is there somebody in the country who knows more about it than anyone else or an organisation or an institution that we could get detailed academic evidence from?



Chris Paul: The parking guru of the world is based in the States—there are several fat books from that person—but there are academics in the UK working on it.

Q77 **Mr Bradshaw:** There are people we could go to?

Chris Paul: Yes. Professor Rachel Aldred, who I think is at Westminster, Dr Greg Marsden, who is in Leeds, Karen Lucas at Manchester, and Professor Melia at the West of England. Then you could also talk to some data people like Robin Lovelace, who is currently working for Chris Boardman on active travel, and Tom—sorry, I have the wrong surname here, but I can forward it. They are more interested in making the case with data and so on.

Mr Bradshaw: That is very helpful, thank you.

Q78 **Ruth Cadbury:** Obviously, you are coming at this very much from the perspective of parking's role in the resistance to modal shift away from use of the private car.

Chris Paul: I am not against the use of private cars.

Q79 **Ruth Cadbury:** No, but in terms of a lot of your context, when you talk about parking policy, I am thinking of issues that I have had as an elected representative over many years. Who does get the right to park? There are new developments where there is a restriction on on-street parking and no access to controlled parking zones, which are paid for by the development that is home to the people who are not allowed to park out on the street.

Are there issues around equity in access to parking that are being debated? I always had people who lived in these flats, often in social rented flats in these developments, and who needed vehicles for work. They were core frontline workers like health visitors, midwives, repair people and those sorts of things. There was the challenge of, do they not have a right to park? If not, why not? Do issues of that level of equity come into your debate?

Chris Paul: I think they do. In a city like London—you represent a London constituency—there is huge pressure on parking and huge difficulty for people finding parking, but there are other examples. In Brighton, for example, they have done developments where there is no parking and they have also controlled the kerbside throughout Brighton so that you cannot get a parking permit if you have bought a unit within a “no parking” development. It has that extra pressure. In Manchester we build “no parking” developments, but we do not put the pressure on to not use cars.

Chair: A last quick question from Gavin.

Q80 **Gavin Newlands:** Very briefly, I concur: having been in Catalonia over the weekend to avoid the coronation, I very much saw all the active



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travel measures that have been put in place there of late. Locally, we see a lot of resistance to a lot of the active travel. Obviously, Scotland is spending, or trying to spend, a lot of money on active travel. Quite often that meets with resistance. In terms of parking, from a public point of view, if we are telling the public that access to parking will be restricted or more expensive, obviously this will not be popular. It will be popular with some, but not with the majority. Do you think there could be the political will to see something like this through?

Chris Paul: Someone has to grip this. As I said in my literature review, it has been 40 years-plus. It is 50 years now, or 60 years—sorry, I am losing count. Every 20 years they say, “We need to do something about this,” and they do not do anything about it. It needs to be gripped because you cannot just let it run and run. The RAC Foundation predicted that there could be up to 50% more journeys going on in 20 years’ time. Can we afford that in cars? Probably not.

Chair: That brings us very neatly to the end of today’s session. Thank you very much indeed for your time. Indeed, I see several of our proposers still in the audience. Thank you all for your time and contributions today.