

Transport Committee

Oral evidence: [Strategic transport objectives](#), HC 84

Wednesday 29 November 2023

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Iain Stewart (Chair); Jack Brereton; Sara Britcliffe; Paul Howell; Grahame Morris; Gavin Newlands: Greg Smith.

Questions 38–67

Witnesses

[II](#): Professor Jillian Anable, Chair in Transport and Energy, University of Leeds; Professor Stephen Glaister, Emeritus Professor of Transport and Infrastructure, Imperial College London; and Jonathan Spruce, Policy Fellow, Institution of Civil Engineers.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Institution of Civil Engineers](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Professor Anable, Professor Glaister and Jonathan Spruce.

Q38 **Chair:** Welcome to our second panel. For the purposes of our records, could I ask each of you in turn to introduce yourself and your organisation, please?

Professor Anable: Good morning, everyone. I am Professor Jillian Anable. I work at the Institute for Transport Studies at the University of Leeds. My official title is Professor of Transport and Energy. I focus on trying to understand the impacts of individual policies and packages of policies over the short term and long term, and how they potentially meet societal objectives. Lots of measurement is involved, both of the trends around mobility and how we may actually account for various types of impact. In particular, I focus on decarbonisation. I have worked a lot with regard to various pathways to decarbonisation from the sector, various scenarios of how we might get there and assessments of whether we are on track.

Professor Glaister: Good morning. I am Stephen Glaister, Professor Emeritus of Transport and Infrastructure at Imperial College. I was at one stage the chair of the Office of Rail and Road. I was a member of the advisory panel to the Oakervee review for HS2.

Jonathan Spruce: My name is Jonathan Spruce. I am the trustee for policy and external affairs at the Institution of Civil Engineers. The institution has about 98,000 members globally. We not only accredit the profession but use the knowledge of our members to improve people's lives. I am a director at Hydrock, which is one of the UK's leading sustainability and infrastructure consultancies.

Q39 **Chair:** Thank you. Welcome all, and thank you for your patience while we had, I hope, an interesting discussion with our first panel.

I will start with some very high-level questions. What do you understand to be the Government's strategic transport objectives, and how well are those being articulated?

Professor Anable: I couldn't begin to recite them to you. That is due to the fact that there is a total mosaic of different documents and variously labelled priority outcomes, objectives, aims, focus themes, and so on. Not only are they spread out across a number of different documents—it is perfectly understandable that there would be mode-specific detailed documentation with its own priorities—but it is not clear what the priorities are that are aligned to a consistent set of Government outcomes and what the Department's role is in delivering those outcomes. As it stands, the disparate sets of plans that exist are not only changing very quickly, often without any particular announcement or justification for those changes, but if we were to try to take them as a whole at any one point in time, they would not add up to an integrated transport policy.



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In my view, there is certainly no clear set of strategic aims. What there is lacks some alignment with Government policy, which would include some key defining challenges and objectives around issues such as decarbonisation, inequality and fairness in particular, and issues around health and wellbeing. Those are issues that are sorely lacking at the moment.

Q40 **Chair:** Thank you. Professor Glaister.

Professor Glaister: I agree. I wouldn't know where to go and look to find a simple statement of what the objectives are. I would therefore go to the place where Government objectives are encapsulated in the appraisal of projects and how you make decisions about projects, presumably to meet the objectives. That place is the Treasury Green Book, which has recently been revised. I believe that document, and the procedures described in it, are a jolly good place to start. They are very useful. They are operational in helping Ministers to make decisions. If it is used properly, it provides a conduit towards consistency in making decisions on projects to meet the objectives. That is where I would look.

Q41 **Chair:** Thank you. Jonathan.

Jonathan Spruce: Exactly the same as my fellow panellists; there isn't one solitary place. There are disparate strategies, not only in the Transport Department but across Government Departments. The analogy I would use is that it is a bit like a jigsaw. What we have is a framework—the pieces around the outside—from different Government strategies, whether that be net zero, levelling up or decarbonisation, and a whole pile of bits in the middle. What we don't have is the picture on the box. We do not have clarity over the key objectives. What are the strategic objectives—the “why” that Sir John talked about? Because we do not have the picture on the box, those pieces are all in a pile and we do not know what our ultimate aim is.

Q42 **Chair:** That is a very good analogy. Drawing on what the first panel said and our discussion, we touched on areas where there have been some moves in reforming the Green Book appraisal process and the devolution of powers and funding within England. We have had the introduction of control periods for rail and now road. Are those all heading in the right direction, and we just need to develop them, or is there still something missing in how the picture is set?

Professor Anable: To pick up something that Stephen said about the Green Book being a good place to start, I think there is a real danger in that. Many of the issues that we currently face in the transport sector have come about as a result of the failure of our appraisal process and the fact that it is not currently fit for purpose. Although ostensibly, yes, the appraisal process that we have should be covering the objectives as they are stated, wherever they may be stated, the issue is the role that it plays in decision making.



Appraisal is not something that should decide what the options are. We need to do the optioneering before we get to that point. We need to spend a lot more time thinking about what the problems are and what the different options are for tackling those problems before we even get to the point of comparing them through an appraisal process. The appraisal process, as it stands, places far too much emphasis on individual user benefits that are not measurable afterwards for a long-term monitoring programme.

There is a whole series of other types of benefits, both the wider economic benefits around land use, value, uplift and so on that are not taken into consideration well enough, as well as other priorities that need to set the framework for developing the options in the first place, such as our decarbonisation targets and what that means for the amount of traffic that we can accommodate in the system that sets the framework for what the system needs to accommodate and can accommodate. I disagree that we have the whole framework, let alone the picture in the middle.

Q43 **Chair:** Professor Glaister.

Professor Glaister: To clarify, the Green Book procedures, which I give weight to, have the four-case model in them. There is the economic case, which is one of them. There is the financial case, the commercial case and, overall, the strategic case. It is all part of a piece.

To answer your question, I think we have quite a few processes in place that would be very helpful if they were more consistently used. We have the national policy statement, which is a really important document. I know that you have commented on the current draft, but the extant operation goes back to 2015, I believe.

In principle, that should say what the big picture objectives are and give some context for the planning decisions that have to go ahead. We have the system that I was involved with in Rail and Road, which I would advocate as a very good exemplar of how things should work; namely, the five-year cycle for the railways and for the roads of the Government saying what they want—the high-level output specification. The Government say how much money they are willing to pay for that programme of work. Crucially, the independent regulator adjudicates whether those two things are consistent or not, in public. Everything that the regulator does is transparent, so the public can see what is going on. When that process has been determined, the outcome for the five-year period is not completely fixed in law, but there is a strong element of guarantee that that programme will be delivered over a five-year period. That is what I think needs to happen much more on a national scale. Of course, five years is not enough, but it is a lot better than the non-transparent year-by-year fluctuations that happened at one time.

My feeling about the broader picture is that our strategic planning fails to put in place a method of governance that stretches beyond the four or



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five-year parliamentary term so that we can deliver a programme of work in a sensible way over a longer horizon. Secondly, the decisions that are made on projects do not put the budget up against the options. Decisions are made to put particular schemes in terms of an overall strategy, without a consideration of whether the money is available. If you don't have a consideration of what the money is likely to be, you cannot sensibly choose between the projects. You do not know which ones to put in and which ones to leave out.

A particular example of that is the 2020 national infrastructure strategy of the Treasury. It is a long list of projects, including HS2 and lots of rail schemes in the north, but never any consideration of whether there would be enough public funds available to deliver them. As we later discovered, there wasn't the money and particular schemes got dropped out on a whim. That is not good strategic planning, but it is because there is no systematic way of making choices in relation to the money that is going to be available.

Q44 **Chair:** Jonathan, what do you say, and then I will hand over to Gavin?

Jonathan Spruce: I would agree, Chair. You are right that they are definitely different and are definitely making a difference, but they are processes and tools. To go back to the discussion in the previous session about the why, what and how, I would probably add who and when to the list as well.

The Green Book appraisal reforms help you make the decision on what. As an institution, some of the work that our members do is the how. The who goes back to the devolution. The when is often the control periods and the budget available. All of the things you have articulated are definitely improving the process, but without the why—going back to Lord Hendy and the overall 30-year plan—what are the key strategic social, economic and environmental objectives? They are not even transport objectives that we are trying to do. What does the picture on the front of the box look like? All of those tools and processes cannot be as effective as they probably should be, even if they are the best tools and processes going. You have to go back to why you are doing it and follow that through.

Chair: I have lots more questions that I want to ask, but for now I will hand over to colleagues.

Q45 **Gavin Newlands:** Thank you, Chair. We have already mentioned this in the first panel, as you guys have in answer to the first question about where you would find these strategic transport objectives and how difficult that is. There is a whole series and array of disconnected and sometimes competing objectives across the system. Jillian, are the objectives, such as they are, the right ones? If not, what would you change?

Professor Anable: I have already mentioned that I don't think they are. There is a lack of overarching key defining challenges. I mentioned



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decarbonisation. That has been watered down into the concept of sustainable transport, which can mean just about anything to anyone. That has been a concept—

- Q46 **Gavin Newlands:** Sorry. If I can interrupt you there, I was going to develop that and go on to a national transport strategy, which obviously the Institution of Civil Engineers has recommended, such as we have in Scotland. There is one in Wales. In most developed countries, you would have an overarching transport strategy and then you would develop the modal strategies from that. If that is where you were going to head, how do you envisage that it would work?

Professor Anable: First of all, we need the tier above that, as I mentioned earlier, which is something akin to the national performance framework in Scotland, with the key outcomes. We would start by defining what the transport system is. That is something that we do not take a step back and think about, but we have a situation, as you mentioned in the questions for this inquiry, where we have to think about the linkages between other parts of the infrastructure system, such as digital, energy and so on. What, now, are we defining as the transport system and what is the most effective way of designing that transport system in an integrated way to meet those outcomes? What can the transport system achieve against those outcomes?

I completely agree with the fact that we need one overarching plan to start with, but we need to take a broad view of what the transport system is. We then need to take account of our overarching governmental aims and key challenges.

- Q47 **Gavin Newlands:** Thank you. Professor Glaister, would you agree? Do we need an overarching strategy? How do you see that working? Beneath that, what would you change about the Government's current objectives?

Professor Glaister: I would not presume to comment on the overall high-level objectives. It is for Ministers and Parliament to state those. At a personal level, I have no problem with what I perceive to be the objectives. It is the implementation that is not working at all well in England. I don't know how well things work in Scotland.

For me, to make things work better it has to come to the Secretary of State for Transport, and the Government more generally, to resolve that and have a strategy. Therefore, it involves the Treasury providing the appropriate funding. I think the failing, and there is lots of failing in the English system, is the failure of Secretaries of State generally—I am not referring to any particular one—to produce a consistent picture of how they are going to meet their objectives and to demonstrate that the schemes being approved are good value for money in the very broad sense and are strategically contributing towards meeting those objectives and then delivering those schemes. That is what does not happen. In my mind, it is not a problem about objectives; it is delivery and decision making.



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Q48 **Gavin Newlands:** Jonathan, before we dig into the overarching strategy, which you guys recommend, are there any current strategic transport objectives that you would like to see changed?

Jonathan Spruce: I go back to the point that Jillian and Stephen alluded to. They sit beneath us as wider objectives. Transport can play a role in improving people's lives. The challenges for the world and the UK these days are very similar: net zero, climate adaptation, reducing inequality. With any transport objectives or infrastructure objectives that flow from that, the question is how this intervention is achieving or addressing the challenges that we set out.

If we have a transport objective to get more people on to public transport, that is a great transport objective, but where does it link back to the big picture? How is it achieving that big picture? We know it does. More people on public transport should reduce carbon emissions. It should reduce congestion and improve connectivity. That link is not always made.

Going back to the analogy, when you place those pieces in the jigsaw, how are you making the big picture? How do you convey that picture? It is not set out, and until we make that link, I think the set of transport objectives that we have are almost set in sand. They are weaker because they do not have firm embeddedness in where we are trying to get to as a country.

Professor Glaister: I don't see getting more people on public transport as being an objective in itself.

Jonathan Spruce: That is the current objective that is set, though, Stephen.

Professor Glaister: I know, but there are high-level objectives, and you need to evidence that getting more people on to public transport is a good way of meeting some higher-level objective. That is what the appraisal is all about. It is not an objective in itself. Getting more people on to public transport, if it is too expensive, may not be the right thing to do. People so often drop into that.

Jonathan Spruce: Absolutely, but that was the point Mr Newlands was asking. That is one of the current transport objectives, but unless it is embedded and set against what you are trying to do as a wider objective—because transport is a wider thing—it is weaker, and it is set in sand. It has no real foundation. Therefore, how can it be judged? How can you credibly judge what interventions you develop from it?

Q49 **Gavin Newlands:** On interventions, it is always handy when we do not need to be here. In terms of your recommendation for an overarching strategy, how would that work with all the various and disparate documents and objectives that we currently have? Would we have a bonfire of at least some of them? How would you see it working?



Jonathan Spruce: A bonfire of policies sounds very grand and potentially has its advantages, but a number of current documents have the strands that we are looking for. We talked before about some of the devolved nations' work. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, which embeds principles of wellbeing in how the Welsh Government will invest their devolved funding, is a really good principle to take. Can we apply that to England? The Scottish Government have the national performance framework. There are elements of what I am trying to say that exist in other policies, particularly in the devolved nations, that we can take to England. Maybe the first step towards it is to get the English system aligned more with what is happening in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and then build on top of that a national transport strategy. Trying to take everything away would leave a vacuum. Uncertainty and even more prevarication are not what we need at this moment in time.

Q50 **Gavin Newlands:** If you could get the UK Government for England to align with the Scottish and Welsh Governments across a number of policy areas, that would be fantastic, in my view. Professor Glaister, do you want to come in?

Professor Glaister: I have two suggestions that might help. One of them is in relation to the national policy statement, which is an incredibly important document. As we all know, it is in draft. It then goes to Parliament—not to the Government—is debated in Parliament and, hopefully, approved by Parliament as a whole. It has the status of an agreed policy document and, hopefully, will apply for some years.

I would expect to see such a policy statement being consistent, bringing together all the piles of documents you refer to and providing clear guidance for what is going to happen next and what happens at planning inquiries and so on. At the moment, we do not have that. It took years to get the first document approved. We now have a document that I know this Committee has commented on in draft, but I do not see clarity in that draft myself. It is an enormously long document, with chapters about this, that and the other thing, but you do not get clarity in it. I hope that Parliament, in processing it, will do what it can to make the document much more single-minded, if that is the right word, and much clearer in resolving the issues.

The other thing that might help would be to make the National Infrastructure Commission a fully independent body. What we are missing in all of this is the power of a well-informed independent commentator who can say, "Look, there are problems. There are inconsistencies here." Maybe the Office for Budget Responsibility is an example of the kind of thing that could be useful. The NIC does really good work. I think its assessments are enormously useful. It does not have the full independence that I would like to see, or, to put it another way, the full independence that might be helpful.

Q51 **Gavin Newlands:** As the SNP politician in the room, I will leave the open



goal of full independence being helpful.

My last question relates to something Jonathan started to refer to. If an overarching strategy were to come in, what tensions do you see in the current system that would have to be resolved before it could be implemented? I am talking about all the various documents and competing parts—the DFT, local transport authorities and so on. What would have to be addressed before you could implement a national strategy? Or are we overthinking it?

Professor Anable: What I feel very conscious of in this discussion is timescale—how long it takes. The length of time that it takes to develop one strategy, let alone to align all subsequent strategies—rip them up, or whatever the term might be—is a prospect that I do not think we can afford even to contemplate.

What we need, and it is unequivocal, is one overarching strategy. What has not come through, although I am sure that the sentiment is probably there, is not only that this document needs to set out some objectives, but that those objectives need to be incredibly ambitious. The ambition for the transport sector—its transformative potential across all kinds of different sectors—is lacking. Once that is set out, it will inevitably mean that very many other documents that sit underneath it are highlighted and exposed as being not ambitious enough.

Q52 **Gavin Newlands:** Would one example be the Scottish objective of reducing car kilometres by 20% by the end of the decade, and then the rest of your transport strategy being reflective of that? Obviously, that is a very difficult target to meet.

Professor Anable: I think that's right. As I have said in other submissions to the Committee, a traffic reduction target that is evidence-based is something that we absolutely need with respect to meeting our carbon emissions targets and in the context of the fact that we cannot meet our congestion targets either by trying to accommodate traffic. However, I am with Stephen in that that is not so much a strategic objective. The strategic objective may be congestion or decarbonisation. What the plan needs to contain is what the evidence suggests will be required in various elements of the transport system in order to meet those objectives. It may then set out targets—maybe mode-specific or integrated targets—across modes, to meet those objectives.

Q53 **Gavin Newlands:** I agree. Politicians always struggle with what is actually strategic and what is not. Do you have any last comments on this before we move on?

Jonathan Spruce: I have to be careful because of where I am, but the more difficult bit might be the Whitehall silos. In some of the devolved nations and the devolved subnational transport bodies, their transport plans start with a very clear why. What is the economic and social reasoning behind what we are trying to do? Very often in Whitehall, because you have Government Departments, it's energy and net zero, it's



business, it's communities and it's transport, so straightaway that siloed approach leads you to siloed strategies. Then you go into modes in the Transport Department.

At the devolved level—at local level and devolved Government level—there is much more awareness in their existing plans of the role of transport in the wider context. They start from trying to paint a picture of their area. It might be that we learn from the devolved nations and Administrations about how that type of plan can be articulated. Then you reflect that back; you do a reconnaissance of the individual modal strategies and say, "Does this now fit with what our big plan is?"

Q54 **Gavin Newlands:** Professor Glaister.

Professor Glaister: There are two things. When coming to a proposal, with objectives and proposals for meeting those objectives, such as reducing traffic by 20%, you have, of course, to use the best evidence. Jillian used the word. So many of the proposals that are around the place are not properly based on the available evidence. They are wish lists.

Secondly, it is not enough just to have an objective like that. You have to say what you are going to do to meet it. It is no good just saying, "We're going to win the war." You have to say, "Our strategy is to do this, that and the other thing to win the war." So often people say, "We are going to reduce carbon emissions by this and reduce traffic by that," But how? They won't say what realistic measures they are going to impose to achieve that. Maybe the answer is a dramatic change in motoring taxation or whatever it may be, or rationing, but that is not articulated. Without that articulation, it is not a strategy. It is just a wish list. It is aspiration.

Gavin Newlands: That is fair. On the shock news that politicians create policy without evidence, I hand back to the Chair.

Chair: Paul, I will come to you first and then Grahame.

Q55 **Paul Howell:** There is a line of questioning, for want of a better phrase, that you have just opened up by some of your answers. It is all about improving co-ordination and alignment between the different sectors. Jonathan, you touched on the different Departments—energy, planning, skills and so on—and the co-ordination of those. The theme I am going to follow is about co-ordination across different directions. Would you like to elaborate on how you think it could be improved and moved into a different space?

Jonathan Spruce: John Armitt asked, "Where is the vision? Where is the big vision?" You will know yourself, Mr Howell, from local authority and combined authority level that you understand the area, the challenges and what you need to do. You develop strategies and plans based on holistic change to people's lives. When we get to national level, we automatically go straight into the idea of silos. We say, "It's a transport strategy," or, "It's a net zero strategy." Actually, all of those are about



achieving a difference. I am sure that you guys and everybody sitting in Parliament, in this building, are about making a difference to people's lives. Transport makes a difference to people's lives. Where do we articulate that? Where do we set out the big picture on the front of the jigsaw?

That is the bit that is missing. Whether that is across Government, with the Treasury, or in a new Department is a difficult one to answer. Mr Smith asked this question: what institutional change could be made? Until that big, strategic vision is set out, any transport strategy that flows from it will be weaker.

I will pick up on a couple of points from previous discussions. If you have the big picture of what you are trying to do, three things come from that. First, when things go awry or change, you can always ask yourself, "Are we still achieving that big picture? Are we still delivering what we are trying to do?" Secondly, the opportunity comes because you create certainty for other investment, as we have talked about before. Thirdly, it allows industry like ours, as the Institution of Civil Engineers, and our members to gear up the skills required to deliver it.

In your own backyard, there is the really good example of improvements at Darlington station. It has taken a long time to battle through various things, but the vision of what that was trying to do and how it was trying to open up investment in the area, connectivity and what it would bring in terms of additional investment, was always held. Whenever the project ran into a bit of sand or there were issues, there was a set of objectives, set very clearly by local leaders at the start, that said what it was trying to do. If we can replicate that clarity of vision at national level, it will help everything flow down.

Q56 Paul Howell: I would like to develop that a stage further as regards the regional impact. A counter-position is what has happened with the Leamside line further north. That is not all within the gift of Durham County Council, Northumberland County Council, Newcastle City Council, Sunderland City Council or whatever, so it falls through the gaps. There hasn't been an articulated vision strong enough to come into this place to drive it forward. Is that a support to the argument that you are making about the different positions of different things?

Jonathan Spruce: Absolutely. That example is a really good one. I know that Mr Morris is aware of it as well. That particular scheme has so many benefits that articulating them would take the whole day, so I do not want to take them up. It does not have one overriding benefit that, "This is the thing that it drives," so it does not necessarily have a home or a driver, but it has a wide range of benefits. It opens up new communities. It relieves pressure on the east coast main line. It potentially frees up paths into Newcastle, because of changes to the network. It has so many benefits, but it is about articulating those in a vision. There is no vision to say what we want.



To go back to Jillian's point, if that vision is about decarbonisation, regional inequalities and changing people's lives—giving people access to opportunity—you take a project like the Leamside line and go tick, tick, tick, tick, tick. Hopefully, through the Green Book approach and the reforms to the strategic case, you can then see why that is a really worthwhile investment, but you don't have that. Therefore, you are back into quite a siloed view of the world.

Professor Glaister: Your question started to be—

- Q57 **Paul Howell:** Can I give you a bit more to build on, to take it to another level? This is an easy example, so I will use it as a structure to build around. The Leamside line is a train line, but when you develop a platform in that space you also have freight and the problems that come from multimodal co-ordination. I don't know whether you can develop that argument at the same time. Have I thrown you somewhat?

Professor Glaister: In terms of analysis, I don't understand the difficulty, if it is all within the transport field. If the question is about—

- Q58 **Paul Howell:** On Jonathan's point, I think that the argument was more about getting the co-ordination of the case put forward, because of the different structures of government that sit there to create the case in the first place.

Professor Glaister: It is about the relationship with local government. I don't know whether I can help on that. Jillian?

Professor Anable: I certainly don't have any answers. I would start by saying that I agree absolutely that getting co-ordinated outcomes across whatever we are talking about will be much more likely if the strategic need is specified and so on. That is the first point. But we can only actually get integrated planning if we have integrated delivery processes and, to some extent—maybe a large extent—integrated funding processes as well. That may suggest some greater hard integration across different layers of decision making at the level of implementation.

- Q59 **Paul Howell:** Can I throw one in there? In modal considerations, is it fair to say that when you are trying to consider things cross-modally it is very much a local decision, whereas national things tend to be big picture things like the east coast main line? The modal connections are all about the local and the places people live in.

Professor Anable: That is right in terms of what happens now, but it is wrong in terms of what should happen, in the sense that longer-distance travel is where we have a vacuum of integration, certainly of integrated delivery mechanisms. I am sorry for jumping around slightly. Long-distance travel is where most of the mileage happens. Most of the trips happen locally, but most of the distance is eaten up on the longer-distance journeys. That also equates to carbon, obviously. Some real thinking needs to happen about how we tackle journeys that happen cross-border.



Q60 Paul Howell: How would you suggest that we do that? How would you suggest that we structure the decision making or the proposals?

Professor Anable: We have some mechanisms by which certain bodies, such as the ORR, can be included as statutory bodies in various applications, and vice versa; more local bodies are also brought to the table to think about more strategic networks.

Professor Glaister: One thing we have to get right that we do not is accountability for the money. Earlier, we heard from Lord Hendy that most transport activity is actually local. The vast majority of movement is regional at the very least, not national. I believe that there is a strong argument for giving more genuine devolution of decision making over that to the competent authorities. At the moment we have moved in that direction without giving those authorities genuine control over the money. The decisions all come back to Westminster. You see that in the Network North document. They are all decisions made here, rather than in the Birminghams, Manchesters and Leedses of this world.

Until the money, including the ability of local authorities to raise the money on their own tax base—to spend their own money on these things—is properly devolved, it will never come right, in my view, unless you are willing to say, “Let’s keep the decisions all made in Westminster.” That is another way to go. It is the way we have done it traditionally, relying on Departments of State to do sensible calculations using Green Book principles. That is one way to do it, but if you really want to have devolution, and I think there is an argument for that, you have to devolve power over the money properly.

Q61 Paul Howell: This is purely because of something that you said earlier, Professor Glaister. You were talking about road schemes, where you have five-year pots of money. I seem to recall that in a fairly recent session one of our big challenges was understanding the control of the money that was in those pots because they were not being managed particularly well, or it did not appear that way. There was no clarity about what was going on. Do you think that that is a structure that could be improved? I am all for cost control and cost boxes. I am an accountant by history.

Professor Glaister: You heard from the previous witnesses about what happens in London. In the London region, the Mayor is accountable for a spatial development strategy, the Mayor’s transport strategy, and for the money. There is a coherent picture. One could argue that London should also have more control over and responsibility for its own money, but that is perhaps for another day. There is a model there, which seems to work reasonably well and could help in other regions, if that is an answer to your question.

Q62 Paul Howell: Jonathan, can I come to you?

Jonathan Spruce: It is quite interesting that we plan and strategise in a way that forgets how we use the network. We automatically go into modal strategy. In roads, and sometimes in rail, we get into ownership.



Is it a National Highways road or a local road? We forget that, for the user, it is a road or a railway. It is a means to an end, which goes back to what we were saying before.

To take your example, you will say, "It's the AI," "It's the A19," "It's the east coast main line," "It's the Leamside line," or, "It's the Durham coast line." Straightaway, you are into, "Who goes on what? What do we do with each?" What we should be saying is, what are the connectivity needs on that corridor to achieve the goals that we are trying to reach, whether that be economic regeneration or net zero—whatever the big picture is? We have a connectivity need on that wide corridor. We have a set of assets. How do we achieve those needs in the most balanced, affordable, deliverable way? But we are straight into, "It's the east coast main line," or, "It's the A1. They own that and they own that. They've got this and they've got that." We jump three or four levels to that modal split and ownership split.

Because we do that, we end up missing the ability to deliver quite transformational projects across the north of England, one of which you described—the Leamside line. They could have a transformational effect on local, national and regional connectivity and, crucially, on people's lives and on key objectives, if we set them and were clear about them.

- Q63 **Paul Howell:** To draw the picture, if you like, from a north-east point of view, in my constituency I have two industrial parks, one at Newton Aycliffe and one at Sedgefield. The Sedgefield one is all about technology. The people going to work there have come from the universities of Newcastle. Part of our strategy should be to have a connection between the universities of Newcastle and those technology parks for jobs and economics. You would start from there, rather than working out whether it is a train, a bus, a car or a cycle.

Jonathan Spruce: Yes.

- Q64 **Grahame Morris:** I have just a couple of points. You know what we are trying to do with this inquiry. We are evaluating strategic transport objectives. I want to aid my and the Committee's understanding of current planning and appraisal processes. I really liked your picture of why and the guiding mind—how, what and who—with the regional element, but that is looking forward to an ideal. What is your view of the current planning and appraisal processes? Jillian, you mentioned carbon reduction and social, environmental and economic impacts. Does the process properly take all of those into account, particularly transport projects and the broader benefits that they bring? I note that we do not have a lot of time, so I have to push you for quick answers.

Professor Glaister: Properly is a strong word, but it does its best. If there is evidence of how it could be done better, the Green Book procedures are amended in due course. People make a judgment about what is useful to include.



To a point that came earlier, how do you get consistency across Departments of State—health, transport, education, training and so on? Of course, transport proposals have implications for those things. I don't see the difficulty in principle. We have plenty of very competent officials across the board in all of the Departments who can operate the system very well.

Q65 **Grahame Morris:** Is there an established methodology?

Professor Glaister: There is. Yes, absolutely. In my view, it is about making the best use, in a competent way, of the available evidence. The problem comes because the budgets are fixed. A classic example is road safety. A small amount of money in road safety would save an immense amount of money in the health service, but the budgets do not allow that to happen. It is not the appraisal methods that are the problem; it is the budgeting being siloed. What you need is for Government as a whole to be more flexible, to use the evidence that is available to get a better outcome.

Jonathan Spruce: Yes. Can I follow on from that, Mr Morris? The tools are the best that we have at the moment and have developed a lot. The issue comes back down to value. We cannot really quantify or value an infrastructure investment. A transport infrastructure investment will have a Green Book appraisal and get a benefit-cost ratio—that sort of thing. Let's take the example we were talking about. The Leamside line will be transformational for connectivity to so many people in those areas in being able to get a job, to access healthcare and to lead a more active lifestyle. We do not value that in the appraisal, so how can we articulate it?

Q66 **Grahame Morris:** Are we quantifying it as a cost—

Jonathan Spruce: We don't quantify it, but we all know what the outcome is. That comes back to the big picture. How do we articulate that outcome to the individuals who would benefit from that particular investment outside the quantification? The Green Book does the quantification, as best it can. It is about the value of the investment. That is the bit that we really need to go—

Professor Glaister: On a point of information, the Green Book is not just the EqMat. It is the five business cases, including a strategic case, so your things would be articulated in the strategic case.

Professor Anable: Yes, but that relies on the strategic case actually being considered and given the effort and consideration that it deserves.

Professor Glaister: Correct.

Professor Anable: We know that time and again that has not been the case.



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Professor Glaister: Correct. The Green Book is a perfectly good system. It is just not used properly.

Professor Anable: I disagree with the statement that it is a perfectly good system. As I mentioned before, and as Jonathan is alluding to, the benefits that are considered are not holistic—the wider transformational value. It can only capture incremental change. It doesn't consider the spatial and social distribution of those impacts.

Professor Glaister: The Green Book does do that.

Professor Anable: It doesn't do it at the level that is required, particularly when we are looking at these kinds of transformational projects over time, which are trying to capture a number of different changes over a larger area. It does not account for the cumulative impacts across different road schemes, or whatever schemes they might be. That is something that you brought up in your previous inquiry.

I go back to my earlier point. It has a role in the decision-making process, but, down the line, appraisal is not the decision-making mechanism that we need in order to bring forward transformational change. It is there as a check and a balance once we have brought through options that align with our strategic objectives.

Professor Glaister: Can I make a suggestion?

Chair: Briefly, please. I need to wrap up the session in a moment.

Professor Glaister: Get somebody to look at what the Green Book and its procedures actually say. To what extent does it or does it not deal with those issues?

Q67 **Grahame Morris:** You should do a check.

Professor Anable: Then we need a mechanism to have that taken on board in practice.

Professor Glaister: I agree with that.

Jonathan Spruce: It is still not the picture on the front of the box. That is the bit that is missing, I think.

Chair: I would love to continue this discussion now, but time is against us. As I said at the outset, this is just the overture for this inquiry. We will be having a good think about the different areas we want to focus on. You have given us a very good suggestion to do with the appraisal fit for purposeness, if I can put it that way, which we will certainly consider. We may well have other questions we want to come back to you on as the inquiry progresses. For now, I thank all three of you very much for your time and evidence this morning.