

Transport Committee

Oral evidence: [National Bus Strategy](#), HC 1344

Wednesday 21 April 2021

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 21 April 2021.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Huw Merriman (Chair); Mr Ben Bradshaw; Ruth Cadbury; Lilian Greenwood; Simon Jupp; Chris Loder; Karl McCartney; Grahame Morris; Gavin Newlands; Greg Smith.

Questions 1–36

Witnesses

I: Graham Vidler, Chief Executive, Confederation of Passenger Transport; John Carr, Board Member, Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers; and Mark Kemp, Director of Environment and Infrastructure, Hertfordshire County Council.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Graham Vidler, John Carr and Mark Kemp.

Q1 Chair: This is the Transport Select Committee's oral evidence session on the national bus strategy for England. Coming up, we have the Buses Minister. Before that we have a panel from local authorities and the bus operator industry. I will ask them to introduce themselves for the record.

Graham Vidler: I am Graham Vidler. I am chief executive of the Confederation of Passenger Transport.

John Carr: Good morning. My name is John Carr. I am actually retired, but I represent the Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers. It is probably indicative of the stress that ATCO members are under at the moment that we could not get a serving ATCO member, so you have had to rely on the Home Guard. I am responsible for policy in ATCO.

Q2 Chair: Mr Carr, we are delighted to bring you out of retirement for this session. Thank you for being with us.

Mark Kemp: I am Mark Kemp. I am the director for environment and infrastructure at Hertfordshire County Council. I am also the chair of the ADEPT Transport and Connectivity Board.

Q3 Chair: Good morning, Mr Kemp. Thank you, all three, for being with us. As I mentioned, we have the Buses Minister coming up. We are very keen to get evidence from you of what it is going to take to deliver this bus strategy, not from Whitehall but actually at the local transport authority level, and indeed at the bus operator level as well. We are keen to get your expertise.

Let me start by asking about the national bus strategy. As a bit of an opening, I want to ask what the Government need to do to actually get this right and ensure that the national bus strategy is a success when it is put into action. We should start with Mr Carr, given that you have come out of retirement especially for us.

John Carr: Thank you, Chair. There is a little agenda that I would suggest. First of all, we believe that the strategy was published late. That is going to place great difficulties both on transport co-ordinators and on operators in achieving the targets that are set in the strategy for the EPs and the bus service improvement plans.

Secondly, we are in a state of great uncertainty, and obviously we are not alone, in knowing what is going to follow the release of the lockdown, which, hopefully, will be in accordance with the Government's timetable. All sorts of habits have changed during the lockdowns. Some of them will be permanent. Some people will modify the frequency with which they do things, and some of them will return to what they did before.

The best estimates, which I think are shared between the authorities and the operators, are that we might expect by the end of 2022-23 to see



HOUSE OF COMMONS

patronage return to pre-Covid levels, but it is going to be very much longer before we get back to commercial levels.

One of the factors that concerns us very much is that the Government's messaging has been negative on using public transport, and buses in particular. We do not believe that the evidence supports that. It will be very difficult, unless we can lift the restriction on bus capacity, to provide enough service to cater for the demand that the strategy expects us to deliver. Associated with that, I would make a plea that the Government do something to reverse the impact of a message where both the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State use terms such as "Use your private car" or "Only use public transport if you must".

Q4 Chair: Mr Carr, to interrupt—I beg your pardon—about six weeks ago we drilled in on the whole issue of Covid, buses and what the Government needed to do, very much with that message in mind. I want to bring you back to the actual strategy. I think you were going to come to another part of it, and what the Government need to do to make a success of the actual strategy.

John Carr: There is the obvious one that it will need more resources than are there at the moment. It also needs to recognise that outside the major conurbations there probably are not going to be the opportunities for the level of bus priority that the strategy expects. Therefore, it has to be very proactive in encouraging people to look at alternative ways of providing that speeding up of buses.

That brings me to another point. We have probably had almost 50 years since car ownership exploded, where the mindset of, dare I say it, local politicians and their traffic officers has been very much, "We must keep traffic as a whole moving"—in other words, the vehicles. What is required to make a success of this strategy, and also of the decarbonisation strategy, is that we have to get that mindset changed to maximise the number of people who can travel sustainably on the road network.

Q5 Chair: We will pause there. That is a great opener in terms of the resourcing and, indeed, the mindset. Those are two things that have been added. Mr Kemp, do you agree with those, or is there more that the Government have to do to make this work on the ground?

Mark Kemp: Building on what John has said, there are a couple of things for me. One is that in terms of financial security and understanding, the strategy relies on a relationship between the local transport authority and the operators to deliver an enhanced service for communities in the round. That is, effectively, a deal between us which says that we, as the transport authorities, will provide infrastructure that enables priority and regularity of bus service, and in return our operator colleagues will provide quality of bus, frequency of service, price of ticket and those sorts of things.



For us, as local authorities, to make those commitments and get that priority work put in, we need clear visibility of the funding that we will have, not for next year but probably for the next five years. We need some kind of understanding of what our budget profiles are going to be like for five years to enable us to properly plan what works we can put in, working with the operators, to make sure that we can remove pinch points and those sorts of things.

If I was asking for one thing, it would be clarity of funding. If I was asking for a second thing, it would be building on John's item around leadership. It is going to be very difficult in many places to put in some of those priority measures to support the bus industry. We need strong leadership to help us do that.

Q6 Chair: Thank you, Mr Kemp. Mr Vidler, we have talked before about the challenge, not from the bus industry internally, which you are here representing, but at the local transport authority level, where it is patchy in terms of expertise and resources. They are going to have to step up now to deliver. What do you feel is the key challenge in that regard?

Graham Vidler: I want to make a few remarks about the context in which the strategy will be delivered because I think that is really important. To flag two points, if I may—first, it is absolutely crucial that the social distancing review, when it comes in June, does not leave bus and other forms of public transport behind. We need the same freedom that, hopefully, the rest of society will get in opening up and removing social distancing requirements.

Secondly, it is really important that the enhanced partnerships, which will be formed in April 2022, are on the best possible base of network and passenger numbers. That means making sure that sufficient funding is available to maintain the network throughout the very challenging year ahead, and that the Government work with us to very clearly promote a return to bus by people who may have stopped using it over the last year.

Turning to your specific question, it is absolutely essential that in building the partnership that Mark has so eloquently described, there is resource from the Department devoted to rebuilding capacity in local authorities to be effective partners in those relationships. It is really important that there is clarity over the funding mechanisms for the next financial year and beyond, as well as about the funding for this year, as I said. In the immediate term, what local authority partners and the industry are looking for is clear guidance around how bus service improvement plans should be developed, and in particular about the funding we are likely to be able to gain.

There are some critical questions such as whether there will be a once-and-for-all bidding process through the bus service improvement plans, or whether money will be released a tranche at a time. These are all



HOUSE OF COMMONS

going to be really important when we pull those crucial bus service improvement plans together.

Chair: Thank you, Mr Vidler. We want to focus and drill in on some of the specifics that have come to our attention. The first is around the planning and regulation of bus services. I will hand over to Greg Smith.

Q7 Greg Smith: Good morning to all of the witnesses. One of the things that the Government have said in the process of talking about the future is that “there can simply be no return to” planning bus services “on a purely commercial basis”. That obviously sets off the need for subsidy, and the need for funding to come from other places. Can I start with Mr Vidler in a very open way? Is that realistic? Do you agree that it can actually happen?

Graham Vidler: I think I read those words slightly differently. What the strategy is trying to articulate is a future where bus services in every part of the country are run, overseen and delivered in the way in which they are delivered in the best parts of the country at the moment. That means working in close partnership with local authorities and other local stakeholders.

It means that most bus services will continue to be run commercially, but they will be run within the context of a network that is agreed and developed in close partnership with the local authorities, and will also include the newly defined category of socially necessary service, which will be funded by local authority partners. I have a slightly different read on what that bit of the strategy means. I think it is a very clear call to us, and one the industry is ready to accept, to work completely hand in hand with local authority partners, as we have done throughout the pandemic.

Q8 Greg Smith: That is very helpful. Thinking through some of the practicalities of commissioning bus services alongside local authorities, do you have a concern from the industry’s perspective? I know from my own past in local government that when you tender a service, waste collection or whatever it might be, the big companies have the ability to deal with the bureaucracy and the cost of tendering for these things. Do you think there is a risk that smaller bus operators could be pushed to one side and pushed out by the process that is being mooted?

Graham Vidler: No, I don’t think that is the case at all. I think there are examples across the country of very vibrant small local operators providing services, both on a commercial basis and under tender arrangements with local authority partners. I think a well-designed and thought-through enhanced partnership will make sure that it provides room for a wide range of operators to make their services available, and to provide the service that provides the best value to local taxpayers.

Q9 Greg Smith: I have a final question for you, and then maybe I could bring in Mr Kemp for the local authority perspective. We are talking about getting the right model for the right place. Is the enhanced partnership process and model going to be right for everywhere? Rural communities



are very different from inner-city environments, for example. Is the enhanced partnership model going to work across the board, or do we need to be more fragmented across the country?

Graham Vidler: The enhanced partnership model is not one size fits all. It is a very fluid concept, both in the plan, which forms, if you like, the visionary element of the enhanced partnership, and in the scheme or schemes that will actually deliver transformational change in parts of an area. The concept of an enhanced partnership is really flexible. It can deliver the things that are right for different local circumstances.

For example, in more urban areas we would expect to see partnerships focus much more on bus priority, high frequency services and making sure that bus journey times are more reliable. In more rural areas, we think the enhanced partnership concept will be flexible enough to encourage and enable innovation, such as demand responsive transport and more support for socially necessary services. It is important that we do not think of enhanced partnerships as one single thing that works the same way everywhere, because there is no reason why they should.

Q10 Greg Smith: Mr Kemp, thinking about those few questions I have just put to Mr Vidler, from your local government experience, can you offer us some thoughts on whether the enhanced partnership model will work everywhere?

Mark Kemp: To give you an example, Hertfordshire is a population of about 1.1 million. We have everything from the really urban areas like Watford to some very rural areas in north Hertfordshire where you could quite easily get lost if you took a wrong turn. We have the whole range, and we have the first enhanced bus quality partnership in the country.

Building on the things that Graham was saying, I guess there is a question in my mind as to whether you consider a contract with the local council as a subsidy. In my mind, if it is public money spent to provide a service, in reality, that is a subsidy. We need to be realistic; in the more rural areas, it is going to be very difficult to make any kind of public transport service become a pure commercial service. As Graham said, we need to be quite creative about how we do that. We also have one of the early demand responsive transport pilots in Hertfordshire, to try to work out how that goes.

If I have a real concern about the whole thing, it is around the SMEs, as you say. We have a number of providers where the managing director also drives the bus; it is that kind of environment. Those people are critical to us for delivering our home to school transport. It is that broader thought about how you make sure you maintain the other knock-on bits of service while maintaining and developing a flourishing bus market.

Q11 Greg Smith: A final question from me before my colleague Chris Loder comes in. You have done one of these partnerships, so the wheels are



HOUSE OF COMMONS

literally rolling—forgive the pun—on your partnership. How do you foresee it working, as you move forward, to protect the small business interest, in the way that you let contracts and design services across Hertfordshire? Are you as constrained as you would be, for example, in letting a waste contract or a grounds maintenance contract? Do you have the flexibility you need almost to prioritise local firms and give them a level playing field so that the mega companies that can afford a few hundred thousand pounds for the bidding process don't win everything?

Mark Kemp: I think it goes a little bit further. John mentioned decarbonisation earlier. One of the real challenges is that, if we start writing contracts that ask for all-electric vehicles and those sorts of things, we could end up in a position where we are putting our SME organisations in a difficult place. We have to think about the vehicles that we are looking to procure and the service that we are looking to procure. I would love a little bit more flexibility to enable me to provide help to the smaller enterprises and let them thrive in that environment, but I also need my bigger commercial partners to be able to run the services that they need to run. We are something like 96% commercial in Hertfordshire, so a big percentage of our services are done commercially. It is how you deal with the stuff around the edges.

Greg Smith: Thank you. I will hand over to my colleague, Chris Loder, if that is all right, Chair.

Chair: Yes, no problem.

Q12 **Chris Loder:** Good morning, everybody. I would like to ask Mark a couple of questions about enhanced partnerships. Could you tell us, first of all, how has the enhanced partnership been different for you and your local authority compared to what you had before in the relationship with your bus operators?

Mark Kemp: To be fair, the partnership started last April, so obviously we have been dealing with a Covid issue, which you have already talked about. We had a bus partnership before that, so we built on what we already had. It has enabled us to agree a bit more focus on the things that we need to concentrate on to help the bus industry thrive. In Hertfordshire, our local transport plan prioritises walking, cycling and bus travel above car, so it has helped us to drive that policy through.

In reality, it helped us when we responded to the reopening of schools and those sorts of things. Working with the partnership was really helpful in getting a very smooth transition from kids not going to school to kids being able to go to school.

Q13 **Chris Loder:** I am sorry to interrupt you, but I am asking what the actual difference is. I understand that you are building on previous relationships and a previous partnership, but I am trying to understand what is different. Why is this a good thing?

Mark Kemp: We have agreed five themes, and under that we have 14 actions that now focus us on what we are going to do. With the original



HOUSE OF COMMONS

partnership, it was not quite so structured. We have developed a structure.

Why I am being a little bit reticent in my answer is that, because of the time we have gone through, we have not had a chance to properly get it working and give you some concrete evidence on the things that we are now doing that are different. In reality, as you know, bus services have really struggled, not least because people have been discouraged from using them. We have been going out and putting new bus measures in; we spent £1 million last year enhancing bus stops and making sure that there were raised kerbs so that people could access buses more easily. We have identified a further £2 million for this financial year to invest in the network, which was not there before we agreed to sign up to the enhanced bus quality partnership. That is county council money. We need more than that to deliver the outcomes that we are hoping for from the partnership.

Q14 Chris Loder: The Bus Services Act 2017 gave you the ability to have an enhanced partnership four years ago. I note that you entered into yours last year. Was there a reason why you did not do it before? Why was it three years from the point of being able to do it to the point of you deciding to do it?

Mark Kemp: It is partly around the complexity of the negotiation. We have 10 operators signed up with us. We have 10 district councils as well, which we need to think about. That balance has been quite difficult. In a two-tier area, where parking strategy is an important element of the things you discuss around how the public transport network works, and where the parking infrastructure is managed, generally speaking, by your district colleagues, there is a piece of negotiation that has to go on.

The other thing for me, going back to the comment I made earlier, is clear visibility of forward funding.

Q15 Chris Loder: How long are the enhanced partnerships taking? I do not think you are saying this, but could you just be clear? It has not taken you three years to have an enhanced partnership, has it? How long has it taken you to establish it?

Mark Kemp: It took us about 12 months.

Q16 Chris Loder: And that was for a two-tier area.

Mark Kemp: Yes.

Q17 Chris Loder: Do you think that for a single unitary area it would be much quicker?

Mark Kemp: Possibly, yes. We are busy sharing our learning with others. I am hoping that part of it was because we were the first and that we will be able to help people get through the process a lot more easily.

Q18 Chair: On the same subject, perhaps I could ask Mr Carr a question. I



HOUSE OF COMMONS

certainly remember when the then Buses Minister came before us at the time of the Bus Services Act. There was great talk of these enhanced partnerships and how exciting they would be. In fact, Mr Kemp is the only person who has managed to put one together.

Why do you think your members have not taken this up? Does it give us cause for concern, given that it will be a requirement in short order?

John Carr: That is a complex question. One thing I will say immediately is that we should remember that the concept of quality bus partnerships has been accepted by Governments since 1993. There are partnerships that are working very well. You know the names: Brighton, Nottingham, Oxford, and so on. There is a de facto partnership, but there are no complex legal agreements underwriting it. It is almost an old-style British gentleman's understanding as to what they are doing.

A question that I have been asked—I had not really considered it until it was asked—is why should Brighton, for example, change something that is working perfectly well? It probably has the second best patronage in the whole of the country, doesn't it, Graham? If it ain't broke, why fix it?

Coming to the specific point, you have to remember that the loss of resources that the smaller counties have experienced over the last decade or so has been not only financial but also in staff. Mark is fortunate in that he is at very senior officer level. He has the highways, planning and public transport teams reporting to him. There is a logical structure, but it still took him a year to do it. I accept what he is saying, and that it might be speeded up, but that sort of investment is required.

The other point is that in some smaller authorities the same departmental director may not be responsible for all of those three essential functions, which should be together for public transport to be managed efficiently. There has been a gradual degradation, as authorities have introduced early retirement schemes. Experienced officers have left and have quite often been replaced by rather more junior officers without experience. They are very good administrators, but they are not good at the sort of planning mentality that is required to work alongside very experienced bus operators. There is a skills gap that I think has to be addressed. I think that the centre for excellence idea is a very good one and is to be welcomed.

Chair: Mr Carr, I will pause there. We are going to lead into how it gets done now, so we will come back on that. Thank you. That gave us a heck of a lot of information in terms of the challenge.

I will move on to how we are going to deliver local bus service improvement plans and the enhanced partnerships in practice. Grahame Morris will take the lead.

Q19 **Grahame Morris:** Thanks, Chair, and good morning, witnesses. Maybe we can get to some of the specifics. Notwithstanding Mr Carr's earlier reservations about the consequence of delaying the national bus strategy,



HOUSE OF COMMONS

perhaps I might begin by asking Mr Kemp to go through, step by step, what councils, and indeed bus operators, need to do between now and the end of October when the bus service improvement plans have to be published. Can you also touch on the issues Mr Carr mentioned—personnel capacity and capability—and the formal objection period and the consultation period?

Mark Kemp: I will do my best, but I suspect that some of the others will be able to add to this. In terms of the process, in Hertfordshire the challenge in some ways is that we are not quite doing it in the way that the current legislation has set out. We are now developing our BSIP. We have a series of strategies and actions, and we are now developing our BSIP. There now has to be a deal of negotiation with our operator colleagues to understand where their priorities are, what their commercial returns are and how the footfall works, so that we can identify what the commercial networks are, where the pinch points are and where the gaps are that we then need to fill. That is not a small piece of work. As John rightly said, whether authorities have the skills to do all that is a big challenge.

Having done that, we have to develop an action plan that responds to those challenges. We then have to go out and consult on that and get it returned. You will have to forgive me because I do not have the process for that end of the spectrum on the tip of my tongue, but there is an awful lot of work to do in a very short period of time. This is for authorities that have not yet actually got their enhanced bus quality partnership in place. We at least have an enhanced bus quality partnership in place and, as I said, five themes and 14 actions that we are building on to develop the BSIP.

Q20 **Grahame Morris:** Thank you. Mr Vidler, it is clear from Mr Kemp's answer that there is a wide variety in authorities in how far they have progressed this and whether they are going to meet the timetable. From your perspective, what do you think operators and indeed local transport authorities can reasonably do to meet those quite onerous requirements within the timetable?

Graham Vidler: Thank you. I very much agree with what Mark said, in particular the importance of getting on with starting to shape the BSIP. I know that all of my members are reaching out to their local authority partners to try to start those conversations.

What I would add to Mark's answer is a critical early piece in the jigsaw because it helps operators plan their networks, and helps Mark and his peers respond to those commercial networks; that is the view of what the network is going to look like throughout this financial year.

I come back to the point that I made to the Committee previously. We need clarity over the funding that will be available when the current CBSSG system is wound up, which we expect will be in mid-August. That will enable us to form a view, jointly with our local authority partners, of



HOUSE OF COMMONS

which services will be commercially viable and how quickly we might be able to get passenger demand back. Having that certainty very soon is important to helping all of us plan the best possible bus service improvement plans and the best possible enhanced partnerships to start to execute them from next April.

Q21 **Grahame Morris:** Mr Carr, is there anything further? I am looking to give advice to my own local authority, which is grappling with levelling-up bids and the very tight timetables for that. Do you have any advice that you can give, or an overview from your position?

John Carr: One thing that would be enormously helpful to the generality of local authorities, apart from the one or two that are in the fortunate position that Mark is in—Mark is very much an outlier, unfortunately, in the state of preparedness that we have—would be to ask the Minister if we can have the guidance both for the revisions to EPs that are implicit in what the strategy says and for the BSIPs as quickly as possible. There is nothing more frustrating when, with the best will in the world, you have started off on a particular path and then suddenly a piece of guidance comes along and you say, “Oh golly, I have missed that.” Sorry if “golly” is a non-PC term these days. That is one thing.

The other thing is, what is the network intended to look like? Where we have a commercially dominated network, that is quite easy. In some counties—I will name Cumbria as one that is not providing any revenue support at the moment—you have no existing network that you can look at and say, “Well, the logical thing is to start with that.” My own rule of thumb would be to say that using a mobility service of some kind, whether that is a bus, DRT or a shared car, you should be able to get to your local GP surgery, which might be in a quite distant village, at least once a week. That is the sort of minimum level of access that we should expect. The plan is silent about anything to do with levelling up expectation across the country of what are reasonable levels of public transport service. I will leave it at that.

Grahame Morris: Thank you, Mr Carr. That is useful. I hope we will get the opportunity to put some of these points to the Minister in the second panel. Thank you very much indeed for your responses. I will hand over to my colleague Simon Jupp, who wants to pursue this matter a bit further.

Q22 **Simon Jupp:** On resourcing, I used to work for a transport authority. Transport authorities vary vastly in size, expertise and staffing. Do you think they have the right skills in-house, or do you expect many of them to have to rely on external consultants to do most of the work to meet these tight deadlines? I will come to you first, Mr Vidler.

Graham Vidler: In many ways, that is more a question for my local authority partners, but what I hear from talking to them is that there are real shortfalls in local authorities to provide thought and direction in developing bus service improvement plans. The Government have said



that they will make £25 million available to build up capacity, including through the creation of a bus centre of excellence. I think those are important measures that need to happen really quickly because they will provide the people power that will enable us to make a success of these plans and partnerships over the coming months.

Q23 Simon Jupp: Thank you. Mr Carr, the same question to you. Do you think that local authorities have the right skills in-house, or are external consultants going to be heavily relied on to meet the deadlines to come up with these plans?

John Carr: There is already considerable demand on both large and small consultants to have at least preliminary chats with local authorities as to the help that they will require. The skills are definitely not there in some authorities. Some of the larger metropolitan authorities and some of the larger shire counties have been fortunate enough to retain a reasonable level of skill, but what you generally do not have there, which in my younger days you did, are people who understand well the skills the operators have. Some of them were ex-operators and some had spent their whole career in public transport in local authorities. Those sorts of people have gone, through retirement and early retirement. There is therefore a level in many authorities where there is no longer that skill, which is why the centre for excellence is such a useful idea.

In my view, there is a problem with consultancies. You can go to the large consultancies, who are probably on framework contracts, and they will probably have some sort of standardised model, but public transport is essentially local. We want people capable of responding to local circumstances. You then look at the smaller consultancies, the sort of people who advertise in small ads in the transport press. Some of them are very skilled in development planning and supporting planning applications. A few of them make a specialism of public transport, but even within the consultancies there is probably a skills shortage. It is probably not terribly useful to the local authorities for me to say this, but a group of bus operators I work with recently did a straw poll among their members, and 50% of them expressed doubts that their local authority would be able to deliver BSIPs against the required timescale. It is a small sample, but I think it is probably a reasonable reflection of the level of difficulty there is.

Q24 Simon Jupp: Thank you, Mr Carr; I appreciate that. It is a good note that you mention about consultants, because what works in Exeter would not work in Eastleigh, and vice versa. Mr Kemp, drawing on your experience, what do councils need to have in place to make a success of these partnerships and plans?

Mark Kemp: Obviously, as I said, we are still developing our plan. So much comes down to relationships and making sure that you can develop the right relationship with your operator colleagues. Building on the answer that John gave, one of the things we probably need to think about is how we can work with our operators to develop the BSIPs, rather than



HOUSE OF COMMONS

people going off and putting a hot towel over their heads in a dark corner and trying to do something. Collaborative working is really important.

They need the skills. Everything that we have said about skills is right. We are really short, and even in Hertfordshire we will be looking to go out to gain some support to deliver, even at the stage we are at. I cannot see how many, apart from the big mets, will be able to do this without getting external support.

- Q25 **Simon Jupp:** Building on that, the Government have allocated £25 million to help councils implement the partnerships. Obviously, you are a fair way down the road with your plans. Have you seen that money? Is it forthcoming?

Mark Kemp: Yes. The first £100,000 has gone out to each authority and that is helpful. I guess the challenge is that money is not people with the right skills. It is really helpful and very welcome, but we still need to find the warm bodies to do the work.

- Q26 **Simon Jupp:** Interesting. Expanding on that question a little bit further, Mr Vidler, do you think £25 million is enough for all the transport authorities we have in the country, dotted around and different sizes as they are? How would you like to see the money spent?

Graham Vidler: The critical point, as Mark puts it, is where the people are going to come from. There is a lack of people with skills and experience on the local authority side. If we look on the bus operator side as well, we tend to employ people who can run bus services. We do not tend to employ people who can negotiate complex enhanced partnerships. Therefore, there will be some capacity constraints on our side as well, both at the small operator end, where they are perhaps not used to working in this way, and also at the larger operator end, where they might have to do 30, 40 or 50 partnership agreements at roughly the same time.

There is a challenge on both sides of the house. To an extent, we will be looking for similar types of people to help us tackle that challenge. It is important that this central centre of bus excellence is a powerful resource that we can all pull down on, and that it enables us to take some national tools and templates that can be tailored to local circumstances. Otherwise, it is going to be a real struggle for both sides of the equation.

- Q27 **Simon Jupp:** It is a good time to be a transport consultant, one would suggest. Building on that point, Mr Carr, do you think it is enough money? Do you think it is wise of the Government to invest this money, and do you think it will be spent wisely?

John Carr: I should have checked my numbers, but as I recall it there are something like 80 local transport authorities. Not all of those are local highway authorities. In the two-tier areas, I think it is essential, as Mark has already said, that you have a relationship with your districts as well and have their highways people on board. They will have to be involved.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Maybe if we said there were 100-plus, it is £25 million divided by 100. Given that you have very big jobs to be done very quickly, and the consultancy bills are not going to be low, that sort of money, in my opinion, will pretty soon run out.

Simon Jupp: Thank you, Mr Carr; that is very interesting. I will hand back to the Chair, given the time.

Q28 **Chair:** Thank you. I want to be completely up to speed with the process. Perhaps I might put this to Mr Kemp—brief answers, if you could. The £100,000 was allocated on 16 April to each authority. Did you have to apply for that or did it just get sent to you?

Mark Kemp: It was just sent to us.

Q29 **Chair:** In terms of the guidance for the revisions for the enhanced partnership and the bus service improvement plan, are you expecting some guidance from the Department? The first deadline is 31 October for the BSIP.

Mark Kemp: Yes, I think there is further guidance to come on the enhanced partnerships situation.

Q30 **Chair:** Is it likely that that guidance will almost look like a template to assist authorities to fill it in? On the one hand, that is helpful because it means you can do it without expensive consultants. On the other hand, it means that you are going to get identikit partnerships across the country.

Mark Kemp: I am afraid I do not know the answer to that question.

Q31 **Chair:** Because you are still waiting for the guidance?

Mark Kemp: Yes.

Q32 **Chair:** Time will be incredibly tight by the time you get the guidance. You have to get this done by the end of October and come up with an imaginative first document.

Mark Kemp: John wants to say something, but there is some pretty clear direction in the documentation we have already. We, as a county, have already been through it and are discussing it with a range of colleagues across the country to try to help them. You are right: clarity is important.

Q33 **Chair:** Briefly, Mr Carr, because Mr Newlands wants to come in as well.

John Carr: Could I slightly correct Mark, or add to what he said? The first deadline is the end of June for providing a commitment to getting an enhanced partnership. The enhanced partnership guidance should come out first, and the latest indication I have is that it is still three or four weeks away. I don't know if Mr Vidler has more up-to-date information than that.

Q34 **Chair:** Do you, Mr Vidler?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Graham Vidler: I don't, but I want to add a third piece of guidance to the equation, which is the guidance on how to do a bus service improvement plan. That is also imminent and is obviously on the critical path to getting those plans done at the end of October, which is 138 working days away.

Q35 **Chair:** As Mr Carr has thrown in another deadline, I will put it to the man in the hot seat to deliver it. At the end of June, is the understanding that you just need to signal your intent to do this, rather than a lot more?

Graham Vidler: Yes.

Chair: That was for Mr Kemp.

Mark Kemp: Yes.

Chair: You said that without moving your lips. Let's hand over to Gavin Newlands, who has one final question for one of the witnesses.

Q36 **Gavin Newlands:** Thank you, Chair. I want to ask Mr Vidler one thing before we move on to the Minister. Obviously, there are lots of things to be welcomed in the national bus strategy for England. There is absolutely no denying that.

If we were to look at Scotland in comparison, the current Government have a £500 million commitment for bus infrastructure and congestion, which in relative terms is £5 billion. There is a commitment to £1.2 billion for zero emission buses. In fact, over the last few months, in relative terms, £500 million has been spent on 272 buses. In relative terms, that is 2,700 buses. They are moving to a majority of zero emission buses by 2023, whereas the current UK Government ambition is only to move to a tenth of its fleet, or 4,000 buses. That is combined with under-22 free bus travel to get more young folk back on buses. If that scale of ambition and investment was matched by the UK Government for England, what difference would it make?

Graham Vidler: Thank you, Mr Newlands. There is lots that we welcome in the direction of transport policy in Scotland, right from the very top part of the commitment on reducing car journeys. You will forgive me if I get the figure wrong, but I think it is a 20% reduction over the course of this decade. That is a big, bold and ambitious target that we would like to see matched in the UK Government's decarbonisation plan. It goes right through to the ambitious commitment to bus priority. As you say, £500 million is broadly the equivalent of £5 billion in England. As we have raised with the UK Government many times, there is the relative generosity of the SULEB scheme in Scotland, in particular the way in which it provides an ongoing support mechanism. It is not just the up-front capital support but an ongoing supplement alongside the bus services grant in Scotland.

There is lots to welcome in what is happening in Scotland. The area of concern for us is around how some of that is playing out on the ground. That £500 million for bus priority is perhaps not being spent quickly



HOUSE OF COMMONS

enough because there is not the same tradition of working in partnership between bus operators and local authorities in Scotland that there is in England. The thing that my team in CPT Scotland are trying to focus on is how we can get partnership working going, so that that £500 million is not just a budget line but is spent on improving services for bus passengers. There is lots to like in what is happening in Scotland, but more to do in translating it into action on the ground.

Gavin Newlands: Thank you very much, Mr Vidler. Back to you, Chair, to move to the next session.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed, Gavin. Our second panel has joined us and we are just trying to work out where they are allowed to sit. It is a bit like being on the bus these days, Minister.

A huge thank you, Mr Carr, Mr Kemp and Mr Vidler, for giving us a really good whistle-stop tour of what is going to be required, and by when. We are much obliged to you all for your evidence. I wish you well. Mr Carr, it looks as if there is a market for those who may be non-retired or retired. We wish you well as far as sharing your expertise is concerned.

John Carr: Retirement is a relative term.

Chair: Indeed. Thanks again. We wish the three of you well.