

# Transport Committee

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

Wednesday 21 April 2021

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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 37–131

## Witnesses

[II](#): Baroness Vere of Norbiton, Minister for Roads, Department for Transport; and Stephen Fidler OBE, Director for Local Transport, Department for Transport.



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Baroness Vere of Norbiton and Stephen Fidler OBE.

Q1 **Chair:** We now move to our second panel. We are delighted to have the Minister and her official. For the record, would you both introduce yourselves?

**Baroness Vere:** I am Baroness Vere. I am the Minister for Roads, Buses and Places.

**Stephen Fidler:** I am Stephen Fidler. I am co-director for local transport at the DFT.

Q2 **Chair:** Minister and Mr Fidler, it is good to see you both again and in the room with us as well, which is great.

I was going to ask you about the bus strategy and what is required, but we drilled into some detail with the first panel. We have a whole series of deadlines and indeed some guidance, which I believe is still pending. Could you set out what is required to be delivered at each stage, and whether you are confident that there will be enough time on the ground to get it delivered?

**Baroness Vere:** Yes, I am very happy to do that. Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity. Of course, the bus strategy is the biggest reform and support package that we have done for buses in decades. We have given a great deal of thought as to how that is going to happen, and how we can ensure that the local accountability we are giving local transport authorities is put into place and they have all the plans and procedures ready to go.

What is going to happen? The bus strategy has been published. If I was a local transport authority, what I am doing now is thinking very much about 30 June, by which date a local transport authority needs to think about whether it will go down the enhanced partnership route, or might also consider going down the franchising route. On 30 June, they need to be able to provide a statutory notice to the Department informing us that they are intending to go down one of those two routes. We would expect that all local transport authorities will do that. It is obviously a key element of the bus strategy that they have the statutory arrangements in place because that is how we can really deliver better services.

The next stage, in terms of deadlines, is the bus service improvement plan, which is on 31 October. Between now and 31 October, if I was a local transport authority or a bus operator, I would be thinking very clearly about what sort of things are in the strategy that will be needed in the bus service improvement plan.

From a local authority's perspective, it is all about planning. It is about infrastructure and knowing the local community and providing those services. From an operator's perspective, it is also about knowing what



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the network currently looks like, how it can be better, what innovations you can put in and how it can be flexible, given new ways of working. Between now and October, that is the work that will need to happen. Those two groups of people will come together and do a bus service improvement plan.

The guidance that you are talking about is the guidance that will set out exactly what should be in the BSIP—let's call it a BSIP from now on—which will obviously help advise the two groups to make sure that the plan is as robust as possible. What I do not want this to be is a tick-box exercise by local authorities, where they look at the guidance and go, "We have done that, done that, done that and done that." That is not going to work. The guidance is to help, but the heart of what we want the plan to be is, what does their local community need? Of course, they need to talk to their community. They need to talk to services and businesses. They need to talk to passenger groups and accessibility groups to make it all work.

The next deadline after that is April 2022, by which time we would expect enhanced partnerships to be in place. Of course, we would expect franchising, if that is the route chosen, to be well under way. Obviously, it is a slightly longer process.

In terms of the operating side of buses, if we put zero emission to one side for the moment, if I were a local transport authority, that is what I would be thinking about.

**Q3 Chair:** It is so tempting for me to go into that in some detail, but four Members are going to do that, and they will all hate me if I do so. We will bank that and come back to it. Thank you so much for setting it out. The message is clear that this is an intuitive process, so that the local transport authorities can crack on already without waiting for the guidance.

Before we go into that level of detail, I want to bring in Ben Bradshaw. We had some talk about the Covid impact on buses. It is not a major area for us in this session, but Ben wanted to come in.

**Q4 Mr Bradshaw:** Thank you, Chair. Hello, Lady Vere. We have an immediate problem, don't we? How are you going to get people back on the buses? Some of my constituents are petrified of even leaving their homes, although our Covid rates are very low and the vaccinations are clearly working, let alone get on buses. How are you going to get them back on the buses?

**Baroness Vere:** Ben, we completely recognise that. Part of the strategy is all about returning bus passenger levels to where they were before, and then, hopefully, going beyond that. We will work with industry to get people back on to the buses when it is appropriate to do so.

We recognise that there will be people who are nervous. We know that whether social distancing is still in place will be important. Face coverings



will be important, as well as cleanliness of buses. We have found in various elements of public transport that it is very much show, not tell. If you can show people that public transport is clean and that the messaging is very much around, "This is what we have done to keep you safe," that will help.

Obviously, we are doing a lot of research into this. We are trying to segment the audiences that we will be looking at getting back on to the buses. I will not go into the detail, but there are five different audiences that we will be looking at getting back on to the buses. Of course, as you know, the key part of this, coming back to social distancing, is the review that will take place after step 3. At the moment, it is 2 metres or 1 metre-plus if you have other interventions. Does that still need to be the case, and how do we make that happen?

Having said that, I came into the House today on public transport. I was amazed at the number of people wearing face coverings. I did not see a single person without. People are behaving particularly well. Provided that message gets out, I hope it will give confidence to other people to return.

**Q5 Mr Bradshaw:** Are you prepared to give that message? I personally feel completely safe travelling on buses and other public transport now. Rates are so low and the vaccinations are working. Can we not bring the dates forward? Rather than people feeling so scared that they will not even leave their homes or go on a bus, can you not say that it is safe now, given where the virus is?

**Baroness Vere:** What we absolutely need is to do the return to normality in a measured and cautious fashion. That is what the Government's position is. When it is right to give full-throated encouragement to people to return to public transport, we will absolutely do that. In the meantime, my message would be that public transport is safe. I use public transport and have no problem with it whatsoever, but there is still the message out there to minimise travel, and therefore only use public transport if you are going to be travelling. Do not avoid it because you feel it is unsafe in any way, because it is not.

**Q6 Mr Bradshaw:** If masks are going to be part of the medium solution, which I suspect they are, can you do something about enforcement? I have had a number of experiences—not in Exeter, I have to say, but in London—over the last few months on buses where there has been quite a lot of non-compliance with mask wearing. The bus drivers themselves will not enforce the rules. In other countries in the last year or so, when I have been on buses during Covid, you are not allowed on the bus or you are chucked off the bus if you are not wearing a mask. Couldn't we do that in this country?

**Baroness Vere:** We are not going to suddenly require bus drivers to enforce face coverings. This is, as it has always been, a collaborative effort with the general public. I feel, as I have just mentioned, that



compliance is extremely high. Where there are elements where it is not high, obviously the British transport police on the rail system and the police on other systems have very significant enforcement powers. They try to engage, encourage and then enforce. I think that is the right way to go about it. In London, of course, TfL can also enforce face coverings, and they do that.

**Q7** **Mr Bradshaw:** Finally, on ventilation, one of the things we have learnt during this pandemic is the importance of good ventilation in an enclosed space. It is very difficult to get Covid unless you are in close proximity to someone for a prolonged period of time, and ventilation helps.

I have traditionally found that, whenever I open a window on a bus, someone moves very quickly to close it again. Some buses do not have windows. What are you going to do about ventilation in the guidance you give to operators and the public in terms of keeping windows open, even as the weather gets colder again in the autumn and winter?

**Baroness Vere:** If there is one area where we need to improve our messaging and our guidance to operators, it is on ventilation. The importance of ventilation and the knowledge about how it reduces transmission of the virus has built up over the course of the pandemic. It was the case that we did not feel that it was an airborne infection right at the outset. It now is very likely that it is, and it is something that we will take forward. I accept your point, but particularly as the weather is a bit warmer it should be easier. People have a habit of closing windows if people open them, but they should be open for other reasons, not just for fresh air.

**Q8** **Mr Bradshaw:** Should we still be building and putting into service buses where you cannot open the windows?

**Baroness Vere:** They have other interventions. They have very high-quality filters. That is how the air gets circulated in those vehicles.

**Q9** **Mr Bradshaw:** But they are not as good as aircraft filters, are they?

**Baroness Vere:** They can be, in some circumstances.

**Mr Bradshaw:** Thank you.

**Chair:** Let's delve into the bus strategy in a little more detail. We want to look at delivering local bus service improvement plans, or BSIPs as they have been termed, and the enhanced partnerships.

**Q10** **Greg Smith:** Good morning, Minister. I want to return to the question that the Chair opened this session with about the improvement plans, and particularly the date of October for getting across the first hurdle.

Obviously, the only reason for doing this is to improve bus services across the country. Given that tight timescale, and given that virtually everywhere has a question mark over bus demand because of Covid—there are other factors—and because of getting passenger numbers back and some of the things that Ben Bradshaw was touching on in his



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questioning just now, what happens, come October, if the local transport authorities say, “We just don’t have the data because we are seeing too big a variance in the way that we are coming out of lockdown, passenger numbers, and so on”? Or if what is put on the table, come the October deadline, frankly, from the Department of Transport’s perspective, is not actually good enough and if, as you said in your answer earlier, it was a tick-box exercise rather than a detailed solid plan to improve those local services—what will the Government step in and do in October if we have not got there?

**Baroness Vere:** It is a really good point. Obviously, we are asking local authorities to be very ambitious in what they do. I think that one of the things we will find is that the return to public transport may well be quite regionalised. I get stats that tell me that bus ridership is now X% across the whole country. That is fine, but it probably varies wildly in terms of what it actually is.

However, just because you are in a situation of uncertainty does not mean that you do not plan. We have learnt that during Covid. Sometimes it is really tempting to sit back and say, “There’s too much uncertainty, I can’t do anything.” You have to. That is why collaboration with the bus operators is so important. They have the data; they will know what is going on. One of the key parts of building the BSIP will be something that I call bus advisory boards because I think that sounds very grand. The local transport authorities need to bring people together, businesses, services and local community representatives, and say, “Okay, from the operators’ data this is where we were in 2019 and this is what our network looked like. This is where we think things have changed. There will be people who will not be travelling to work in a certain place. They might be going to other places. This is where we think things have changed.” That is where I would encourage them to at least start thinking about their network, by taking that information from them.

You ask what we will do if it is not good enough. We will go back to them and say it is not good enough. It is very clear to us that they have to be ambitious. We are looking for interventions and infrastructure. We will be looking for improvements and reliability. We will go back to them and say it is not good enough, and if it is not good enough they will not be getting the funding that they ask for.

Q11 **Greg Smith:** That is very helpful. Are there some metrics that you will be judging the plans against? You talk about infrastructure. You talked about some of the other factors. What is it that will actually get the authorities across the line from the Government’s perspective? It is one of those classics: “The Government says, but local authorities need to do.”

**Baroness Vere:** Yes, absolutely.

Q12 **Greg Smith:** That is the scenario. What are the hard metrics? Is it that a town that currently only has two buses a day going to it should now have 10? In terms of infrastructure, is it all about the physical infrastructure of



the rolling stock—we are going to come to zero emissions later—or the infrastructure around bus stations, bus stops and live-time screens and things like that? What are the actual metrics that you are going to judge against?

**Baroness Vere:** It will be all of those things and many more. The issue is that no two areas are alike. We expect that some local transport authorities will come forward with a specific plan because their local area suits it, which will be areas that have lots of bus corridors and where they have very fast and frequent services. There will be other areas that will be reliant upon demand responsive transport, and so on. It will be very dependent on the local area.

However, we will ask them to set out targets for their current bus performance and targets for how they are going to reach that bus performance, and also what interventions they can put in place in order to reach those targets. I am going to turn to Stephen Fidler because he and I have had lots of conversations about this. He will be able to fill in the gaps.

**Stephen Fidler:** Thank you, Minister. What I would add is that the key thing is really demonstrating that you have thought about the needs of your area, as the Minister says. There needs to be a real sense of priority. What are the issues with bus in this place or this area? It might not be the same for the whole of the local authority's area. One town might be different from another town. It may be different for the rural communities around it. There needs to be a real sense of what the priorities are, how they will be targeted and how delivery will change. Where are the corridors that need bus priority? Is that more or less important for growing patronage than getting fares changed? That is what we are looking for. It is a real vision and a real strategy.

As the Minister said, it is not a tick-box, but the things that we have clearly said we want to see are targets, so that we can see whether a difference is being made. That is around journey time and reliability, bus speeds and the interventions that the highways authorities can take. Importantly, it is around customer satisfaction. It is around growing patronage and getting that.

BSIPs are not a one-time document, to come back to your earlier point. Yes, all the evidence will not necessarily be there for the first iteration, but we are hoping to see the ambition. We would like to see where people want to be over time, and there is the opportunity to revisit that on a regular basis. We will address that in a bit more detail in the guidance when it issues. We have been engaging with a number of operators and authorities to get their thoughts and input on exactly these kinds of questions as we finalise the drafting.

Q13 **Greg Smith:** That is very helpful. Perhaps I could briefly touch on how central Government are going to—enforce is probably too strong a word—monitor and encourage how these plans interact cross-border. A lot of



the villages on the western flank of my constituency would gravitate for their shopping and doctors surgeries more into Oxfordshire and towns like Thame. On the eastern flank, they would go across the border into Bedfordshire to Leighton Buzzard or into Hertfordshire to Tring. How are you going to ensure, particularly if local authorities go for different models—one has an enhanced partnership and another franchising—that they marry up and we are not confining within authority areas, within counties or within cities, particularly for communities that live in border areas?

**Stephen Fidler:** It is a really important point, and one we have thought quite hard about. There is always going to be an issue at the margins about how we get this right with local authorities. The key from my perspective is talking to authorities and engaging with them. We have an area lead team that engages with authorities right across the country and we talk to them regularly. My team and that team will be talking to them about their plans and asking them exactly that question as they develop and shape their BSIPs, and we are addressing it in the guidance. It is one of the factors that we will absolutely look for in the drafts that come in as we are talking about the funding.

Enhanced partnerships particularly, and franchises too, do not have to be on the basis of a local authority area. They are flexible tools. Two authorities can come together. They can provide for the enhanced partnership or the franchise to cover the entire area. You can have multiple plans that affect different bus markets. We will encourage that where it is appropriate.

**Greg Smith:** Thank you.

**Chair:** We will go to Chris Loder on the same thing.

Q14 **Chris Loder:** Good morning, Minister. I want to ask you first of all about the capabilities of local authorities. For example, London will receive net support for its travel on a population basis per person 10 times the amount of that in rural places such as Dorset. I am sure there are others as well. Therefore, the capability of local authorities, given the money they receive, to be forward thinking and do lots of good things about transport, is much more limited.

Could you outline how you are taking into account the different capabilities of local authorities, in effect, to come up to the mark on delivering this? I would not want to see local authorities penalised because they have received, in comparison to others, very small amounts of money, and therefore their capabilities are much restricted.

**Baroness Vere:** It is an incredibly important point, given the importance of the BSIPs and their development by local transport authorities. What we did at the outset when we published the strategy was to give each local transport authority £100,000 to get them going. They have to build up skills and expertise in their own local transport authorities.



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At the same time, we are doing a survey of the current level of resources in each local authority so that we can get a better feel for what we have. Over the course of 2021-22, we have a pot of £25 million that will be available to provide support and expertise. Layered on top of that, we have the bus centre of excellence, which I call BCOE. Stephen does not know this yet, but I think it will be called BCOE from now on. That will bring together lots of toolkits and templates, and there will be training.

I think there are two levels we have to worry about in local transport authorities. There is official-level skills and expertise, and I think it is about the political level of skills and expertise as well. It is making sure that people understand what the Government want to see from buses and how we build that.

Q15 **Chris Loder:** So £100,000 has gone to every local transport authority.

**Baroness Vere:** Already. Correct.

Q16 **Chris Loder:** Regardless of their size and capability.

**Baroness Vere:** Yes.

Q17 **Chris Loder:** For example, if there is a local authority with very small capability at the moment, that will pay for—if they are lucky—a couple of people to work full-time.

**Baroness Vere:** It was just to get them going while we did the survey to understand exactly where the gaps lie.

Q18 **Chris Loder:** Do you think that is fair? Is it fair that TfL or an organisation that is so capable receives the same amount of money as a local authority that has little, if any, capability?

**Baroness Vere:** Of course, the £25 million will be apportioned according to need. The £100,000 was just, "Look, we know we have just scared the horses by putting out this bus strategy and telling you that you've got to do all this work. Here's some money to be getting on with." There is £25 million in this current financial year that will be going out, particularly to those that I call my recalcitrant local authorities. They are the ones who are going to be less keen on coming and supporting—

Q19 **Chris Loder:** We will all encourage them, Minister; I guarantee you that.

**Baroness Vere:** Our work will be cut out for us sometimes, I think, but we are going to try.

Q20 **Chris Loder:** If a local authority does not enjoy a good relationship with its local bus operator and does not want to work with them, but maybe would like to work with a competitor going forward, has that been factored into the capabilities or possibilities in the strategy?

**Baroness Vere:** Yes, that absolutely can happen.



**Stephen Fidler:** It is factored in in a number of different ways. If they choose to go down the enhanced partnership route, we have very deliberately put incentives on operators through the funding that is provided to them through the coronavirus support grant, but also potentially in the future BSOG funding, to participate in good faith with plans. I think there are remarkably few operators where there may be an issue with them coming to the table. If that were the case, I would expect that to act as a strong incentive for them to engage with the local authority, and for that to change.

It has also been factored into the choices that are available. We have said to local authorities that are not MCAs that they have the opportunity to come forward and request franchising powers if they can demonstrate that that will deliver better benefits than partnership, and make a difference in that way. That is exactly the kind of circumstance where there might be a very clearcut case.

Q21 **Chris Loder:** If a private sector operator refuses to share ridership or demand data with a local authority in order to achieve those objectives, what will the Department do to make sure that they comply, deliver and work with the local authority, even though they might not end up in an enhanced partnership or be looked on favourably during a franchise?

**Stephen Fidler:** One of the reasons that we have asked everybody to issue statutory notices on enhanced partnerships and on franchising is that that triggers under some secondary legislation a power for authorities to request exactly that kind of data from operators, who are then required to provide it and can potentially face enforcement action from the traffic commissioners if they do not.

Q22 **Chris Loder:** I am very conscious that the Department's budget, and expenditure, on management consultancy has increased massively in the last four years—some 156% to be precise. Local authorities are clearly not going to be in a position to have that amount of money, nor are they going to be in the position, particularly in rural areas of the country, to get that resource in because there are no consultancies nearby that could help.

To what extent are you taking into account in the next pot of money that we just talked about the need for those local authorities not necessarily to fall into the same category of having a high requirement for management consultants, but to be much more capable in their own right and to grow their resources?

**Baroness Vere:** I think it is a question of balance. I am not an anti-consultant type person. Sometimes it is worth bringing in expertise. I am not sure that they would be using management consultants; it would be more transport-type consultants, as we use in the transport demand management that we did for local authorities. I think that each local authority will need to combine the two, but I am hoping that the BCOE will of course provide a lot of information through peer review of other



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people's work. We have had the enhanced partnership in Hertfordshire, so I would expect them to share their learning of how it worked for them.

It will be up to each local transport authority to consider what they want to do in-house, and what they might also want to bring in specialist transport consultants to do. You might find that you get a group of local transport authorities doing that within a particular region. As you mentioned, cross-border services are so important. Have I forgotten anything, Stephen?

**Stephen Fidler:** I don't think so, Minister.

**Baroness Vere:** Excellent.

**Chris Loder:** Wonderful. On that point I will hand back to the Chair.

Q23

**Chair:** Thank you, Chris. Tapping a little further into this, all MPs speak to their local authorities and we are currently pressing them for exciting bids on levelling-up applications. Now they have these requirements. When I spoke to my bus expert—the head of transport for my local authority—the reply was, “Well, we're just going to have to use consultants.”

My question comes off the back of that. We have touched on it a little but I want to drill in a little more. We have tight timescales and a lack of internal resourcing. It is patchy. We all know that. Of course, the areas that need the most imagination do not have the expertise, otherwise they would have the imagination. Therefore, they are the ones likely to use consultants.

You have also talked of the need to really look at local requirements and what works locally. How will consultants be able to do that? How do you break the cycle of the local transport authorities that tend to deliver? They are the ones that have the interest, dynamism and excitement, and partnership with bus companies. It is the other authorities that always get left behind.

**Baroness Vere:** Yes. You have identified all of the things that keep me up at night. We know that local authorities anyway should be producing local transport plans. That is what they should be doing. The diminution of skills and expertise in local authorities has to be reversed. The Government want the country to build back better. There are, as you mentioned, so many very positive interventions that could be done, from the levelling-up fund through, obviously, to the funding from the bus strategy for cycling and walking.

One of the things we did not talk about enough during the BSIP section is integration. Integration is key. It is all very well having a bus expert, but that person needs to be in the context of a local transport expert team.

I see this as a bit of a step change in the way local authorities should be looking at transport and the way they should be prioritising it. I have had a number of conversations with MPs where they have expressed their



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disappointment in the amount of priority that is given to local authorities, but I think everybody in this room would agree that transport is the great enabler. If we are to get our economy back on track and growing strongly, we need stronger transport systems, and for that we will rely on local authorities. We will continue to think about this and how we can incentivise them, from a Government perspective, to focus more on the cohesive and integrated nature of their transport planning and then, within it, by mode.

**Q24 Chair:** This reveals a real shortcoming inside local government with regard to transport. An example is the levelling-up fund. If it is a transport application, it has the ability to go from £20 million to £50 million. If a county has four districts within the priority zone, they could apply for £200 million if they have something ready, yet many counties are saying, "Oh, we haven't got anything ready and we are all a bit tied up." Therefore, you end up with the cultural jewels applying because they tend to be ready. They are much more creative and ready for it. This reveals a massive hole in expertise, and even priority, that local authorities have when it comes to transport, which is the biggest enabler of levelling up.

**Baroness Vere:** Yes, so what are we going to do to change that? We absolutely need to think about that really carefully. I would not be too down on local authorities. There are quite a big number—

**Q25 Chair:** I didn't name any.

**Baroness Vere:** No, I noticed that. There are quite a big number who are very good. I work with them on the roads side on funding MRN and LLM projects and things like that. We know that development needs to happen. We want it to be long term and sustainable in terms of their focus and prioritisation on the skills and expertise they need in their transport planning groups. The bus strategy is not going away. The BSIPs will need to be refreshed. The targets will have to be met. There will need to be an ongoing focus on providing the services that people want to see. It will be a slight shift, but I think that local communities will value that shift. At the end of the day, it will be up to them at the ballot box to support the people who are providing them with the services they want.

**Q26 Chair:** Do you have plans to get in the consultants that you know will be used by the transport authorities we are talking to and say, "They may not be marking your homework quite as closely, but we, the Department, will. You need to be creative and imaginative and not lazy and tick-box"? Have you had that conversation with them? I doubt that the local transport authorities will.

**Stephen Fidler:** I have already had that conversation with most of the consultants I might expect to be in the field for this, quite soon after the strategy came out. I expect that we have not quite covered everybody, but we have done quite a lot of it.



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Perhaps I could make three other points on bus-specific skills. The first is that I absolutely recognise the short-term consultancy issue and need. I think the work we are trying to do to make sure consultancy firms understand where we are coming from and what we are looking for is in everybody's interest. One of the things we are saying in BSIPs as well is, "Tell us what resources you need to make the partnership or the franchising arrangement work in the local authority in the longer term," so that there is the opportunity to fund some of those skills in the local authority and the partnership through the BSIPs.

We are also, through the bus centre of excellence, or BCOE as I now call it, looking at how we work on skills and what kind of professional qualifications might be missing, and how we build skills on bus in the local authority world for the medium term.

The other point is, don't forget the operators. Several of the MDs of the big five operators have said to me, "We have some great skills. What has not happened in the past is the joined-up conversation with the local authorities on how we can deploy them. We can do a lot of this work if we can agree a shared agenda and shared outcomes."

**Q27 Chair:** I have experienced that as well in terms of the bus operators, but Mr Vidler made the point that they are used to running buses and not necessarily putting contracts in place. In fact, there is only one enhanced partnership in place, and we heard from Hertfordshire earlier.

**Stephen Fidler:** I would agree with that in terms of the partnership documentation and the legals. We will help with that, with templates and the like, but on what service pattern you need, what are the top priority issues to tackle and what will make the difference—the content, if you like—I think the operators will be really well placed. That is provided—to pick up the points from earlier—that there is the right kind of engagement and shared objectives.

**Chair:** Thank you both. In a minute, Chris is going to come in on the quandary of how you spend £3 billion well. We will stay on the local section and the powers for councils, and indeed giving more powers to councils when we are talking about how well they deal with the existing levels.

**Q28 Simon Jupp:** It is a pity I cannot put forward all my ideas for investment in Devon at this point, but don't worry, I won't.

Minister, why have you not let councils decide for themselves how much control and involvement they want in their local bus services?

**Baroness Vere:** They can. They can decide to do an enhanced partnership or a franchise. Obviously, those are two different things. Are you talking about whether they need to be involved at all?

**Q29 Simon Jupp:** No. Those are two options on the table, but obviously you are forcing them into a corner in some ways by placing the two options



there. What was the onus on that? Why was it the decision to offer those two options and the tight timescale involved?

**Baroness Vere:** I think one of the positive things that came out of the pandemic is that we saw local authorities and bus operators work much more closely together than they ever had before. We also know that in areas where we have seen high levels of bus ridership and increasing passenger usage of buses, it has been because there has been a very good relationship between the operator and the local authority. Places like Brighton, Reading and Nottingham have good levels of ridership. They have done it because they saw the benefit.

Now we have to turn to places like Cheshire East, Windsor and Maidenhead, and Rutland, where there are very low levels of passenger ridership and show them, "Look, this is how they achieved it. They achieved it because of these close relationships. These are the statutory interventions we want you to take. The funding will be coming as well. Therefore, we think you can get to the same place."

Q30 **Simon Jupp:** I understand that. Why have you chosen enhanced partnerships and franchising in particular as the operating models to push from the Government's point of view?

**Baroness Vere:** Because we want there to be a statutory framework. We want people to sign up to a longer-term future together, otherwise we will end up with people dropping out and people not fulfilling the things that we want them to do. We believe that that is the best outcome. Stephen, is there anything else as to why particularly?

**Stephen Fidler:** The only thing I would add is that there is the other option of the advanced quality partnership, but that is, effectively, a bit of an opt-out for an operator. It is tied to the use of facilities such as bus stops or bus lanes. What it does not do in the same way as an enhanced partnership or franchising is set standards that apply to every single operator, so that you have a guarantee that that level of service will be met, regardless of who is operating the services and who comes in.

Q31 **Simon Jupp:** Is that an acknowledgment that these proposals or plans—enhanced partnerships and franchising—have been around for some time? For example, metro mayors have been able to franchise for quite some time, since 2017 in some cases. Very few of them have explored the option or taken it up. Is this basically the Government saying, "It is now the time to fix this. These are the two proposals we want you to get on with, and here is the money to do it."? Is that the idea? Is it an admittance that the soft push did not work and now it is the hard push to get authorities to back this?

**Baroness Vere:** You could put it like that. It is an admittance that we are disappointed by the number of people who have taken advantage. However, it showed us that the market needed a nudge in this direction. The pandemic started to provide that nudge, and now the bus strategy has finished it, in order to get people to work together in the long term.



If you look back over decades, bus ridership has declined. We know that we need to break the cycle of decline. The way to do that is to get people to focus on the future and on building bus reliability, focusing on fair fares for everybody. Eventually, you will end up with ridership going up and car usage going down. There will be modal shift and then the whole system begins to function more effectively.

**Q32 Simon Jupp:** One of the interesting points about this is that most local authorities need the Secretary of State's approval to franchise bus services if they want to go down that particular route. Would it not be off-putting for some authorities who work up plans to put a franchise proposal in place, and then have it rejected? Is that something that might be loosened in the coming years?

**Baroness Vere:** Obviously, the Secretary of State will look favourably on any franchising proposals that come forward. Franchising takes much longer than an enhanced partnership, and some local authorities use franchising to kick the problem down the road a bit and say, "Oh well, we'll get to franchising eventually." What we will say to those local authorities is, "Dear local authority, thank you so much for your interest in franchising. The Secretary of State will consider it extremely carefully. In the meantime, please can you put in place an enhanced partnership." They will already be in the mindset of working closely with their bus operators. They will be developing the network of the future for their local area. We will of course look very favourably on applications for franchising, depending on what the reasons for doing so are. People need to understand why a franchise would be better than an enhanced partnership. That will be region by region.

**Q33 Simon Jupp:** Using that example though—I think I recognise it—of a franchising proposal coming forward and then you returning it to that authority to say, "What about an enhanced partnership?", doesn't that further delay the improvements needed to that transport network?

**Baroness Vere:** No. It shouldn't. It should be a progression. The BSIP guidance will be coming out as soon as possible, and one of the other things we are doing is updating the guidance around enhanced partnerships and franchising to make sure that things can happen as quickly as possible.

One of the issues from the Bus Services Act is that people did not feel that it was clear enough as to what the route to the franchising end game was. If you look at Manchester's case, it has taken quite a long time. We will be looking for ways to speed that up, and to speed up the way that an enhanced partnership comes into fruition.

**Simon Jupp:** Thank you, Minister, that is much appreciated.

**Chair:** Next, we go to the bus market in England and the role of competition and municipal bus companies. At this juncture, I will hand over to our champion of competition, Grahame Morris.



- Q34 **Grahame Morris:** Thank you, Chair. Minister, I was very interested in your answer to the earlier question from my colleague Simon Jupp, when you very eloquently put the case for a national bus strategy, addressing the issues arising out of deregulation and the gradual decline of the availability and use of buses, particularly outside London, over a number of years.

I wonder whether you would agree that there is an issue. We are all trying to develop a national bus strategy to address this issue and to improve services. We have seen the issue of fire and rehire used by some employers, particularly the big five bus companies, in particular Go North West in Manchester. A number of leading politicians, including the Prime Minister, have condemned this practice. Would you join me and others in doing that, and indicating that it is detrimental to developing a national bus strategy?

**Baroness Vere:** I am certainly not going to go into the details of any of the particular industrial disputes that are happening at the moment, but I think—

- Q35 **Grahame Morris:** I am not asking for detail, Minister. I am just asking for a general condemnation of the principle, where unscrupulous employers are using this increasingly as a tactic.

**Baroness Vere:** I am not going to do a universal condemnation of something about which there are very different circumstances across the country. I happen to know of a circumstance where the contracts for the employees were changed, and they overwhelmingly voted in favour of them. It depends, I think is the answer to that, because in some circumstances employees have warmly welcomed the changes that have been put in place. There are some where there have been productivity issues, where productivity is much lower than it should be. There have been changes made and incentives given to those employees, and they have warmly welcomed the change.

- Q36 **Grahame Morris:** Minister, I am very disappointed in that response, to be candid with you. I think there are precious few examples that I can think of, if any, where employees welcome reductions in their wages and terms and conditions and the serving of section 188 notices terminating their employment, but we will move on from that.

**Baroness Vere:** That is not what I said. You know that; I didn't say that it was okay in all circumstances.

- Q37 **Grahame Morris:** In terms of cartels, there has been a lot recently about the European football super league. I just wonder whether there are some parallels.

**Baroness Vere:** I can't see any.

- Q38 **Grahame Morris:** The five largest bus companies operate about 80% of the market outside London. Quite often, a single operator provides more than half the services in any area. Do you think this is likely to be a



problem? How is the national bus strategy going to address the issue of ensuring that we do not have a cartel controlling services?

**Baroness Vere:** In any area, the local authority will of course be working with the local bus operator. They will be coming up with the plan to improve bus services. In most areas, actually, there is not just one single operator. As Stephen outlined before, it is possible for new operators to join an enhanced partnership to provide services in any particular area. I am afraid I am not entirely following the premise of your question.

Q39 **Grahame Morris:** Minister, is it conceivable that enhanced partnerships are going to give more power to the larger companies—the big five in particular—because they have more resources, more capacity and more experience in negotiating agreements with local authorities? Is it likely to concentrate power in the hands of a small number of private sector operators?

**Baroness Vere:** I think the enhanced partnerships give more power to the passenger, and that is entirely our goal—the passenger, as represented by their local authority who will provide, in collaboration with the bus operator, the services that passengers want.

Q40 **Grahame Morris:** I do not think people were convinced by the arguments of the big six in the football super league, and I am not quite convinced that will necessarily serve the interests of passengers either.

Can I move on to the issue of municipal bus companies? You have previously indicated that the creation of municipal bus companies, which as we know is outlawed under the terms of the 2017 Bus Services Act, has to be changed. Do you see a role for new municipal bus companies, such as we have operating quite successfully in Nottingham and in Reading? Are you minded, Minister, to place any conditions on the creation of new municipal bus companies if enhanced partnerships and franchising arrangements do not find favour locally?

**Baroness Vere:** I think that the municipal operators in Nottingham and Reading are outstanding. They are great examples of bus operators. I am also aware that there have been a number of municipal bus operators who have folded because they were not so good. What I will say is that it is not a case of municipal, good, and commercial operators, bad, but we will review the legislation that is currently in place about whether new municipals can be set up. It may be that we decide there should be no restriction on new municipals, but we need to make sure that, if they are set up, they are set up to succeed and that they do not end up failing. There are many examples of local authorities dipping their toe into the commercial waters and failing in lots of different sectors.

**Grahame Morris:** Thank you for those responses, Minister.

Q41 **Chair:** Looking back on municipals, Minister, I remember that when one of your predecessors came before us some time back, we could never quite get to the bottom of why municipals were prohibited. We see that the door may be open to them. Is it likely to be the case that you will



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look at how the programme with the enhanced partnerships works in terms of the application process, and then assess whether that shows there is a gap that municipalities need potentially to come in to fill?

**Baroness Vere:** I do not think it will be a question of filling the gap. I think it will be a question of making sure that we have the right variety of operators in the system. It will be something that we take forward alongside all the other work we are doing. It is not necessarily related to one thing or another.

Sadly, what has come home on a few occasions over the pandemic is that some bus operators have quite limited reserves. Obviously, we hope to get them all through and we hope to build them up to the strength that they had before, but we need to ensure that we have the greatest variety of potential operators to serve passengers.

Q42 **Chair:** In terms of the big five that Grahame touched on, we heard some years back that there was concern that they did not tend to compete with each other. Do you think this will shake it up a bit in terms of competition as well?

**Baroness Vere:** Yes, I do.

**Chair:** We are going to look at the provision of bus routes and services. Lilian Greenwood will start us off.

Q43 **Lilian Greenwood:** Good morning, Minister and Mr Fidler. Many members of this Committee really welcome the national bus strategy. Obviously, it is something that the predecessor Committee called for, and many of our recommendations are in it. It starts from a position where buses are in a very difficult place. In many parts of the country, there was a real reduction in services over a period, and now we have the coronavirus impacts on top of that. How will the measures described in the national bus strategy deliver more comprehensive services across the country?

**Baroness Vere:** Thanks very much, Lilian. I am pleased that we were able to get some of your previous recommendations into the bus strategy. It has appeared after a lot of consultation and we are pleased with where we have got to.

Going back to your question about bus routes and how we are going to take it forward, it all links back to the BSIP and the interaction between the local authorities and the operators. Each has a very important role to play. The operators will know which network they currently run. They will have data on which are successful, and which are less so. The local authorities will have information about where people will want to go now and in the future. It is a question of putting those two bits of information together and then figuring out what sort of category of routes you are going to end up with.



In certain circumstances, you will be talking about very fast and frequent services on bus corridors. Indeed, we would also look favourably on Glider services on specific routes, like the Belfast Glider. The next level of services will be those with slightly less frequencies, but we still want more services going into the evening and at weekends. Then there will be areas where the density of the population is so low that offering a fixed route service becomes almost irrelevant because people will not get it if it only operates twice a day. That is why we have looked very closely at demand responsive transport. We have funded 17 pilots for demand responsive transport. A combination of those different types of services will build up to create the network that the local community needs.

**Q44 Lilian Greenwood:** On where you see this £3 billion going, is the focus on urban areas with the faster, frequent services that the Committee on Climate Change has suggested can enable people to get out of their cars and on to public transport? Is it more on that part of the bus network?

**Baroness Vere:** Absolutely not. Definitely not. I have had more conversations with people about the importance of rural and suburban services than I have on the importance of urban services.

It is a very tough nut to crack, which is why we are very focused on what we can do for areas of slightly lower population density. When it comes to the £3 billion-worth of funding, essentially, there are going to be two elements to it, if we put zero emission buses to one side for the time being.

There is the capital spend. Even the most rural areas will still have market towns that might need a bit of capital spend to help buses get to their destinations reliably and efficiently. Then there will be the resource spend that goes alongside that, which will be supporting other interventions such as fares or other things you might need to support from a resource perspective. It is not fair to say that this is an urban-centred bus strategy at all.

**Q45 Lilian Greenwood:** I was asking the question. I was not suggesting that that was what you wanted to do.

**Baroness Vere:** I know.

**Q46 Lilian Greenwood:** When it comes to the rural areas, do you lack ambition? Do you think it is possible that demand responsive transport can ever be commercially viable?

In the CPRE report, "Every village, every hour", they look at a Swiss-style thing or what applies in parts of Germany, where there is a universal basic right to public transport, envisaging a bus every hour from 6 am to midnight, seven days a week. We are a long way from that, and I don't think that the level of funding you are providing would come close, would it?



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**Baroness Vere:** I went to the CPRE launch of their report. I told them what I thought. It was interesting that they were the only organisation that managed to comment on the bus strategy before it had been published, so they had not even seen it when they commented on it, which was also interesting.

However, their plan for every village, every bus, every hour, or whatever it is, would be absolutely horrific for our environment. I would not want that to happen at all. I do not think we should be dismissive of demand responsive transport. We are entering a new era of transport. It is a slight watershed, actually, and we are all going to have to embrace it. Elements of data, digitisation and technology are going to provide not only bus services but will be across all elements of transport.

Demand responsive transport has its challenges. We need the people we want to use it to feel confident to use it and to understand how to use it, because it is a new service. Many of us who use ride-hailing apps would completely get it. "Yes, I just click a thing on my phone and my bus will turn up." A lot of people do not use ride-hailing apps, so the challenge is encouraging people to use it.

It is not the only way we can support rural services. There are a number of other things we can do, and that will particularly be for local authorities to think about—whether there are more hub and spoke type models to local villages and always thinking about the last mile. It may be that you end up having parking, cycle paths or scooter parks near bus stops. All of these things need to be thought about in an integrated way.

Let's see what happens to the demand responsive transport pilots. That is why we are doing them. We need to learn. There is no single solution to rural public transport, but it is a key focus for the Department.

Q47 **Lilian Greenwood:** In the strategy, the aspiration is not to go back to what we had before but to do better than before. I know there is concern that once Covid-19 support for bus services is removed, and potentially there seems to be a gap before some of the transformational funding starts to come forward, there will be a risk of cuts to bus routes or increases in fares because demand will not have fully returned. How are you going to ensure that that does not happen?

**Baroness Vere:** That is really important. It is something that Stephen and I are working very closely on at the moment. We recognise that in due course the CBSSG restart grant will end. At the moment, it is not going to, and there is a notice period, but we recognise that there will be a time when it will end and further funding will be needed. Of course, at the moment we do not know when it is going to end. We also do not know at what level of demand it will end. Rest assured that we are in conversations with the Treasury about what interim support will be offered prior to 2022-23.

Q48 **Lilian Greenwood:** Are you envisaging that there will be additional



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funding, and that it will not have to eat into the money for transformational funding?

**Baroness Vere:** That funding will come from the £300 million that we have been allocated from the Treasury this year.

Q49 **Lilian Greenwood:** Can you envisage asking the Treasury for more if there is still a gap when demand has not caught up?

**Baroness Vere:** I can always envisage asking the Treasury for more.

Q50 **Lilian Greenwood:** You are going to provide new guidance defining bus routes and services that are socially or economically necessary. Is it your expectation that councils will fund them if they cannot be provided commercially?

**Baroness Vere:** Yes.

Q51 **Lilian Greenwood:** Will you place a statutory duty on councils to provide those socially and economically necessary services?

**Baroness Vere:** We may well do. We will be updating the guidance on socially necessary services. We will include economically necessary services too. Obviously, in the bus service improvement plans we would expect all that to be set out. We will consider a statutory duty if we feel it is needed. Of course, what we want to happen is for local authorities to provide those services because they have talked to their local community and they understand what they are, but we may need to go further.

Q52 **Lilian Greenwood:** I will briefly ask two questions about accessibility. I was really pleased to see in "Bus Back Better" the recognition that disabled people must be able to use bus services as easily as other passengers, and that providing accessibility measures often helps everybody—for example, next stop announcements. We have been talking about those for years. Can you confirm when the final deadline will be for all buses to have audio-visual announcements?

**Baroness Vere:** When are we going to do it, Stephen?

**Stephen Fidler:** We said in the strategy that we would lay the regulations by summer 2022 at the latest. We have been working through a lot of the very detailed responses to the technical issues, of which we had over 300, but we are keen to move as quickly as we can. In the meantime, we have been really clear that where we are purchasing and funding new vehicles, such as through the zero emission bus regional areas scheme, they will have enhanced accessibility, and those new vehicles will absolutely have audio-visual on board if they are receiving Government funding.

Q53 **Lilian Greenwood:** I heard that answer, and it is welcome that the regulations are going to be laid, but when is the deadline going to be for a disabled person to know that whatever bus turns up, it will have next stop announcement? How far away is that?



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**Stephen Fidler:** We will confirm that, I expect, in the response to the consultation, which I hope will be later this year.

**Baroness Vere:** Lilian, I assure you that I am very keen to get it in place as soon as possible.

Q54 **Lilian Greenwood:** That is good to hear. The July 2018 inclusive transport strategy promised a monitoring and enforcement framework for mandatory bus driver disability awareness training. When is that going to be published?

**Baroness Vere:** Unfortunately, I am afraid I do not have information on that. Can I write to the Committee with further information on that? I am sorry, Lilian.

**Chair:** Please do.

**Lilian Greenwood:** Thank you.

Q55 **Chair:** Before I bring in Chris Loder, let me ask about socially necessary stops. This came to our attention during the evidence we took in 2017, when we put forward the idea for a bus strategy. I think it was the MP for Sheffield Heeley, Louise Haigh, who brought to our attention that a GP surgery had moved but the bus service had not moved with it. Commercially, you would think that would make sense, but it does not always work like that.

In the guidance you give from the Department about the enhanced partnership plans, do you envisage that as something you would require to be included, or are you looking at it by a different form of regulation, potentially, to make it baked into local plans?

**Stephen Fidler:** I think it comes back to what I was saying earlier about the BSIPs and the local plans being living documents. We would absolutely expect, as social and economic needs change, the plans that local authorities have and the expectations they set in BSIPs—and therefore the networks that operators provide—to evolve and change to reflect them. We will probably mostly do that through the guidance. As the Minister said, if we need to come back with statutory backing for some of it, we may do so.

Q56 **Chair:** Would the whole idea of the strategy be to cut out that type of anomaly, so it would be less likely to occur?

**Stephen Fidler:** Yes.

**Baroness Vere:** One of the other things is that an increase in local accountability should stop those sorts of things occurring. One of the things in the BSIP is that we will require each local authority to have a bus passenger charter and to be more responsive to complaints that they receive from passengers about, “Why isn’t my bus stopping at the doctor’s surgery?” That would seem mad. I think that level of responsiveness will be much greater once the strategy is all in place.



**Chair:** More agile. Chris, over to you to finish this section, and then you have the next two sections on the £3 billion investment, and fares and ticketing.

Q57 **Chris Loder:** Minister, I would like to return to the area of provision of bus services and routes that Lilian touched on a moment ago. I am of the view that the CPRE is increasingly becoming out of touch with the needs of rural communities, and I think the report demonstrated that.

However, one of the organisations that I believe is increasingly in touch and is coming through as a very wholesome, real and grounded organisation is the National Federation of Women's Institutes. I want to ask whether or not you have been able to review their paper in response to the bus strategy and, if not, whether you would commit to do so to take into account the points they have made in it.

**Baroness Vere:** I have not reviewed the paper, but one of the ladies from the National Federation of Women's Institutes was on the same panel as me when we did the CPRE thing, so I heard at first hand what they were proposing.

Q58 **Chris Loder:** I have it here. It is an excellent document and I commend it to you. It touches on the key issues in rural areas and what is necessary. I wholly agree with you that there is clearly not a demand for a frequent service, to the extent of hourly, for every village across the country, but there is of course demand for areas that do not have a service at all.

I want to ask about concessionary bus passes in that context. If I were to speak to a number of owning groups or bus operators, they would tell me that the concessionary bus pass as we currently have it affects the commerciality of many groups. For those in areas such as mine in Dorset that do not receive high Government financial support, it means that we are curtailing the commerciality of routes because they are not allowed to charge those who have concessionary bus passes, yet they receive directly a fraction of what they might have received if the passenger had looked to pay for it.

Could you comment on the future of the concessionary bus passes as you see it, as part of the strategy? When I looked through it, I could not quite understand what the future might be. Could you articulate that, please?

**Baroness Vere:** We do not plan any major changes to the future of concessionary fares. Certainly, we will look at potentially extending the validity of the ticket for disabled people into other hours to see if that is a viable option. We will also look at digitising the older person's—I'm probably not allowed to call them that—bus pass, as we think that will be quite beneficial. In general, it should be that the operators are refunded for the journeys they provide. Is there anything further on concessions, Stephen?

**Stephen Fidler:** I don't think so. We update the guidance on how they are paid on an annual basis to make sure it is fair against the legislation.



**Q59 Chris Loder:** Might I suggest that this is an area that we need to understand in much more detail? I have market towns in my constituency of West Dorset where the bus service has been completely removed because, for example, although almost a third of the population is retired and there is a high requirement for the bus, because of the bus pass, which most of them have, the bus company does not receive the full fare and it is no longer commercial. It is an enormous issue. If there was one thing, even before the bus strategy comes into fruition, that I would also urge you to consider, it would be whether or not that can be changed, and what changes can be made to the concessionary bus pass. If we are not careful it is going to be too late.

I have already lost bus connectivity to my local hospital—for market towns to get to another town, to get to the hospital and to the doctor. I have people who cannot get to work because the bus service has been removed because of this point. I am slightly concerned that we have not fully considered that as part of the bus strategy. I urge you to do so. Is there something you think you might be able to do beforehand, to see what we can do, in effect, to save some of those ailing routes that are already in difficulty, if not ceased operating?

**Baroness Vere:** Let me take it away and dig around a bit to find out exactly what the problem is.

**Q60 Chris Loder:** I would appreciate that. I would like to talk to you about it in more detail.

Closely related to that is the section on fares and ticketing, which we will go straight into, if that is all right. Could you outline to us what your views are as to how fares and ticketing will work, going forward? How will the revenue apportionment work? My colleague Lilian Greenwood asked earlier whether you were going to mandate local authorities to pay for this. That is all very well and good if local authorities get plenty of Government support, but in local authority areas such as mine, where we get hardly any, it is going to be very difficult. Could you articulate that for us?

**Baroness Vere:** Yes. In many areas of the country, fares are insanely complex. In many areas, you cannot get a daily price cap and you cannot get a weekly fare cap. In many areas, your ticket is only valid on a single operator. What we are very keen to do, via the EPs—these can be mandated via the EPs or indeed franchising, but that is slightly different—is a simplification of the fare structures locally. It will probably end up being done on a local or regional basis because it is more effective that way. It has to be the case that we need simpler fares, such as we have in London. We do not have London-type fares anywhere in the country.

**Q61 Chris Loder:** I appreciate that may be the case for urban areas, but I have a number of bus routes in West Dorset that I can count on one hand or maybe two where the principle or the fact is that the local authority will not, today, be in a financial position to further subsidise the routes. If it were, I do not think we would be having some of the



difficulties we have at the moment with buses not being able to run.

Is the Department going to reform its view about how local authorities are to be funded, or is it the view that basically the local authority will have to up the council tax in order to pay for services where they are not commercial? That is the key point.

**Baroness Vere:** I completely understand that. Of course, unfortunately, bus funding is a little complicated, perhaps more complicated than it should be. You have the concessionary fares. You have the funding for vulnerable routes from MHCLG. You have BSOG, which is £260 million. Then you obviously have the money that we will be putting in for transformational funding.

As I was saying to Lilian earlier, the funding, going forward, will be separated into capital and revenue funding. It is the revenue funding that could support better and more effective fares. For example, in Cornwall, they have put forward proposals to the Government for a super-bus network that has low, simple fares leading to the whole breaking of the cycle of decline, to encourage people back on buses. Yes, the funding could be bid for, to support simple, low fares in Dorset, for example—

Q62 **Chris Loder:** And Cornwall.

**Baroness Vere:** All over the country.

**Stephen Fidler:** We are already funding Cornwall, and we announced that alongside the bus strategy. We are doing a pilot there and we are in year one. The fares are coming down by about a third. Hopefully, it will give us some evidence to see whether that helps to grow the overall passenger levels.

Q63 **Chris Loder:** Correct me if I am wrong, but this is a strategy that, basically, is not necessarily yield matched. Those of us who have worked in the industry previously would call it boiling the frogs. Actually, it is revenue strategy that goes for volume, rather than specific yield. Would you agree with that?

**Stephen Fidler:** It could be in some circumstances, yes. The other thing is about a more urban context. Part of the strategy is what I like to describe as the virtuous circle, where different bits of the strategy come together. If we get good bus priority, the journey gets shorter and faster. That attracts more passengers and creates more fare revenue. It also lowers the operating cost, so you can lower the fares and attract more passengers. That will not be the same in a rural context but, hopefully, over time, it will perhaps allow for a greater share of the funding to be used in the rural context.

Q64 **Chris Loder:** With the example you have used, of Cornwall, does that basically guarantee the funding for socially or economically necessary bus services to operate?



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**Stephen Fidler:** That funding is specifically about the fares pilot. Cornwall is putting significant investment from their resources into socially and economically necessary services.

Q65 **Chair:** To be clear, are you saying that in parts of Cornwall the fares look like they will come down by a third?

**Stephen Fidler:** Yes. In the pilot that we are running, I think they have about four fare bands. I think their second fare band at the moment is £4.20, and that comes down to about £2.80 in the first year of the pilot.

Q66 **Chair:** Is that because they are being given funding from Government that makes up for that?

**Stephen Fidler:** Yes, a bit like the rural mobility fund project. It is a pilot to see what some of the impacts will be.

Q67 **Chair:** The reason I got excited there is that Cornwall was the only unitary that was allowed to put in franchising, so it had more of a whip hand against the bus operators as a result. I wondered if they had been able to use that to crack down on fares, but perhaps not.

**Baroness Vere:** You should be very excited about Cornwall, because they are one of the areas that has grasped buses. They love buses and are really focused on them. They are putting in a lot of local resources. Obviously, we have supported them as well, because we appreciate what they are trying to do. It is a hugely varied county with different types of routes, so it is well worth watching Cornwall and learning from them.

**Chair:** Over to the excitement of Dorset.

Q68 **Chris Loder:** I am very pleased to sit with Cornwall because my experience of Cornwall, Minister, is that the owning group has put some of its oldest buses into Cornwall over the last three to four years, or maybe a little bit longer. What safeguards are there in place to prevent owning groups from manipulating the strategy, which basically means that places such as Cornwall, which once had slightly newer buses, no longer have those buses? They are basically manipulating it for their ends.

**Stephen Fidler:** That comes back to the partnership framework, and why we chose that. Standards around vehicles are the kinds of things that can be set in that on a binding basis for operators. Obviously, there will be some challenges about how the fleet is deployed nationally. There are some issues specifically in Cornwall around the tenders and the difference between the tendered services or otherwise. I think their tendered service fleet is now one of the youngest in the country, at around two years or so.

Q69 **Chris Loder:** Indeed. Thank you. I want to go back to the section about the overall £3 billion investment, which I think we skipped over. I hope you didn't think you had escaped from talking about that.

Minister, I would like to ask about the £3 billion overall investment. A



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little bit earlier, you started to talk about the very top tier capital investment and others. Could you articulate a bit more detail about that £3 billion? I think Dorset falls into 0.1% of that number for our overall transport spend, for example. What are we going to be using that £3 billion for?

**Baroness Vere:** It depends what Dorset tells us they want to be using the £3 billion for. Dorset is not getting £3 billion.

Q70 **Chris Loder:** I was going to say—I will have all of it please.

**Baroness Vere:** The point about the bus strategy and the BSIPs that will be coming out in October is that they will give us an indication. It will absolutely be the case that you might have one area that prioritises capital investment because it recognises that bus reliability and bus priority is the key to improving services. You might have another area that is very much focused not on capital investment at all, but more on the revenue side of things, where they feel that they can get more people on buses by doing some sort of fares intervention.

I am not going to be able to tell you exactly or give you an indication of how the £3 billion is going to be divided, but there will be capital and revenue interventions. Of course, within the capital interventions there will either be infrastructure interventions in terms of roads and road space allocation or zero emission buses, which will also come from that.

Q71 **Chris Loder:** Have you any idea at the moment what percentage we might be looking at for zero emission buses?

**Baroness Vere:** No, and I will tell you why. What is quite interesting around zero emission buses is that there will be a lot of change very quickly. I suspect that the price per unit will decline very substantially. What we have to take into account going forward is not only the cost of the vehicle, the cost of the infrastructure and the cost of the connectivity for energy supply—the latter two are probably slightly more established—but the information and data around the lifecycle costs of a zero emission vehicle, which is very much in development at the moment. There are some who would say that we are getting close to equivalence with a diesel bus. I think there is more that we can do, for example, on reform of BSOG, which currently is a fossil fuel subsidy. If we are able to reform it to include an environmental element and our environmental ambitions, again that changes the economics around a zero emission bus.

Can I absolutely promise you that over the lifetime of this Parliament we will do X% a year on zero emission buses? That would be absolutely the wrong thing to do, because in three years' time it could be that the price of a zero emission bus has halved.

Q72 **Chris Loder:** Of the £3 billion, do you think we will spend any money on bus lanes?

**Baroness Vere:** Bus lanes? Definitely. Yes.



Q73 **Chris Loder:** From recollection, the last bus lane project that I recall—I should say that when I say bus lanes, I include guided busways. I beg your pardon; I should have been crystal clear about that. Are we going to spend any money on those?

**Baroness Vere:** It depends on what local authorities come up with. I am a big fan of guided busways. I think they can really help, and they can often be very good value for money. Remember, the £3 billion is not the only funding pot. If you are in an urban area, you have the transforming cities funding. There is also the levelling-up fund. There are lots of different opportunities for investing in guided busways, but it is up to the local authority to move forward.

Q74 **Chris Loder:** The last recollection I have of a guided busway was in Cambridge. I do not think it was the most successful of them. There was considerable concern in the industry at that time—and it has probably continued—that guided busways cost an enormous amount of money but the amount of benefit from them is quite limited.

**Baroness Vere:** Look at the Glider service in Belfast.

**Stephen Fidler:** The overall evidence we have is pretty strong. The Crawley scheme, I think, had about 160% growth in 10 years. It had a benefit-cost ratio of about five. When we have looked at bus priority and major guided busway schemes together, we are seeing benefit-cost ratios of three to four across the programme.

Q75 **Chris Loder:** Wonderful. Thank you. In terms of the prioritisation of this money, which is probably where we need to look towards, we have £3 billion, which is excellent. I am sure a good number of local authorities will come to the Government and will want a gold-plated or silver-plated bus network because it delivers a number of things, social and economic connectivity as well as environmental benefits. It could be that, when the local authorities put forward their proposals, it costs more than the money available. How will the Government prioritise, and what are the criteria on which the Government will assess those bids to make sure that they fit to the amount available?

**Baroness Vere:** There will be two key criteria: one, does it deliver for the passengers and, two, does it deliver for the environment? We have said that at the heart of all of this would be passengers, and that will always be the case. If they are gold-plating anything, they can take that gold off immediately unless the passengers really want it, because it will not make any difference to them. It is all about providing the best improvement in services over a period of time.

Q76 **Chris Loder:** Where passengers may not exist today because buses do not run, how can that be reflected?

**Baroness Vere:** That goes back to collaboration between the local authority and the local community through the bus advisory boards. We need to hear from people who do not currently use buses.



**Q77 Chris Loder:** I hear from people on an hourly basis, so I have lots to share in that way. What I want to understand is this: you say passengers will be used to assess the prioritisation of the money available, but where routes do not exist today there will be provision of brand-new routes, which will be wonderful news. I am looking for assurance that the Government will be thoroughly considering services where routes do not exist today, maybe where they once used to do so.

**Baroness Vere:** Absolutely. It is all part of the plan, yes.

**Q78 Chris Loder:** Wonderful. I look forward to it. In terms of environmental benefits, does the £3 billion have to completely meet environmental and climate change objectives? Does everything that is spent have to have an objective to meet them?

**Baroness Vere:** Do you mean in terms of the 4,000 buses, and does that come out of the £3 billion? Is that what you are saying?

**Q79 Chris Loder:** As part of your assessment of whether or not money is spent or given to a local authority, does there have to be a direct correlation or direct link to an environmental benefit or a climate change benefit for every pound that is spent?

**Baroness Vere:** Not for every pound that is spent, but we will expect in the bus service improvement plans that plans to decarbonise their bus route will be included. I would also expect a focus on air quality as well, if they have local air quality issues.

**Chris Loder:** Thank you.

**Chair:** Over to Gavin Newlands for zero emission buses.

**Gavin Newlands:** Thank you, Chair. Before I start I want to place on record my disappointment in the rather off-message response to my colleague Grahame Morris on the fire and rehire issue. Nobody warmly welcomes or accepts the metaphorical changes that reduced terms and conditions actually are. I hope the Minister reflects on that response, but on to the issue at hand.

**Chair:** Gavin, you may not have heard it, but I think the Minister clarified exactly what she said. We have touched on that quite a lot, so let's crack on with zero emissions.

**Q80 Gavin Newlands:** Fair enough. Will all 4,000 zero emission buses be on the road carrying passengers by the end of this Parliament?

**Baroness Vere:** Will the 4,000 zero emission buses be carrying passengers by the end of this Parliament?

**Gavin Newlands:** Yes.

**Baroness Vere:** All 4,000 zero emission buses will have been ordered, or the funding will have been given out, by the end of this Parliament. I cannot say how quickly they will be built, but our ambition is to make sure that those orders are in place.



Q81 **Gavin Newlands:** There is concern in the industry itself that the procurement process announced at the end of March will actually fall significantly short of 4,000 bus orders, let alone carrying passengers, by the end of this Parliament. How are you going to get there?

**Baroness Vere:** The 4,000 buses?

**Gavin Newlands:** Yes.

**Baroness Vere:** As you know, we have £50 million that we have given to Coventry for an all-electric bus town or city. That is 300 zero emission vehicles. Then we have £120 million that we are looking to allocate this year, which we believe will cover another 500 zero emission buses. Obviously, the learning that we get from what is happening in Coventry and for those successful areas—the ZEBRAs—over the course of this year will very much play into how we fund future zero emission bus orders. As I said earlier, the market, the context and the revenue support may well change for zero emission buses over the course of it. What I want to make sure is that we are delivering the best bang for our buck in terms of decarbonisation over the course of the Parliament.

We know where we are going for this year. Obviously, subsequent years will depend on what we learn from this year. It is quite difficult to set in stone a particular process when the bus operators are literally being supported by the taxpayer. We have to slightly move on from that, which I think we will.

Q82 **Gavin Newlands:** I appreciate that. You mentioned that it may change. Presumably by that, you mean that support will reduce for the zero emission buses, potentially, over the course of this Parliament. I am sure you are not going to commit to that because, obviously, the grant for zero emission cars was recently cut without warning and has been cut a couple of times over the last few years. How much warning might bus operators and local authorities get in England if the scheme is going to be changed?

**Baroness Vere:** I am sorry, I do not think that question was phrased in a way that reflects what the Government are trying to do. On zero emission cars, the total amount of funding, of course, has not changed, as you know. All we have done is reduce the amount of grant per car and made sure that it applies to cheaper vehicles, so that the funding actually goes to the people who need it most—the people who cannot afford the £50,000-plus cars that would also get the funding, which is slightly mad. It goes to the people who are less able to afford expensive cars. I think that is very positive.

The same goes for zero emission buses. We are not saying that we are going to be withdrawing support, but I certainly do not want to commit taxpayer funding now to buying a bus in four years' time, when we literally do not know what the lifecycle costs will look like in four years' time, nor what amount of Government support will be coming through via a revenue stream. It would make no sense to make that promise now.



**Q83** **Gavin Newlands:** The big question is, are 4,000 zero emission buses enough? As far as I understand it, this represents only around a tenth of the English bus fleet. As you are probably aware, the Scottish Government have committed to a majority zero emission bus fleet by 2023. How are you going to decarbonise the rest of the bus fleet in England, or even get to 50%?

**Baroness Vere:** Absolutely. We have big plans for decarbonisation of the bus fleet. As you know, we also published an initial consultation on the date for banning the sale of new diesel buses alongside the bus strategy. I think it is very important that a country as large as England, which is obviously much greater in size than Scotland and has a very significant influence over the amount of development that will go into this innovative technology, should signal that by a certain date new diesel buses will not be able to be sold. I think that will have a very significant impact on the market and on the ability of the bus manufacturers to be confident about investing, whether that be in electric technology or hydrogen fuel cell technology.

**Q84** **Gavin Newlands:** My colleague wants to come in on hydrogen after I have finished my questions, so I will keep my powder dry on hydrogen.

You have mentioned already that English counties can bid for a share of, I think, £120 million currently. As you are aware, the Scottish Government have committed over £50 million in recent months. In equivalent terms, that amounts to 2,700 buses being ordered in the last few months. That has obviously secured hundreds of jobs in a sector where hundreds of jobs have been unnecessarily lost because of the delays. It will be roughly two years by the time there are buses on the road since the announcement the Prime Minister made on buses. When, exactly, can bus manufacturers expect orders for English zero emission buses?

**Baroness Vere:** As you know, the competition for the £120 million is out there in the wild. There are two closing dates, one for the fast track and one for the standard track. We look forward to receiving expressions of interest between now and those closing dates.

It is in everybody's interest to get the money out there as quickly as possible, but what I am not prepared to do is to rush it and risk getting poor value for money for the taxpayer. I speak to the bus manufacturers very regularly. I know exactly what they think and how they have been feeling. I am absolutely ambitious that we get the buses built in Britain; 80% of buses currently on our roads are actually built in Britain. There is a great future for the bus manufacturers, and we are very keen to play a big part in that.

**Q85** **Gavin Newlands:** The Government have come under a fair bit of criticism for lack of urgency and a relative lack of ambition. The Scottish Government have a target of reducing car journeys by 20% by 2030, and giving free bus travel to the under-22s. It is committing £5 billion in



relative terms to bus infrastructure. Why has it taken so long, and why is there such relative paucity of ambition from the UK Government?

**Baroness Vere:** We have been working as quickly as we possibly could on this. It is all very closely interlinked. Scotland is a different place. It is not England. It has a whole different bus market. It is a different place; let's put it that way. Making sure that the elements in the strategy interact with the elements of our investment in zero emission buses was really important. We already have £50 million out of the door anyway. That was in addition to the £120 million that is currently in process.

I am not going to diss the Scottish Government in this regard. There is an incredible amount of free stuff that the Scottish Government give away. It is marvellous. In terms of them supporting local manufacturers, that is brilliant. Northern Ireland has done the same thing. Again, I think that is a great move for Northern Ireland. The British Government are doing it and it is a great move from us too.

**Q86 Gavin Newlands:** The Scottish Government have taken it to a balanced budget, but irrespective of what I have said in the questions thus far, this investment will require a huge and significant improvement in the charging infrastructure. Are you confident that you have appropriately scaled plans in place, and will it be installed in good time for the buses being delivered?

**Baroness Vere:** That is one of the points about the bids and the expressions of interest if you are bidding for any Government funding; you have to bring together various elements. The local authority will have to bring together the bus operators. They will have to make sure that the charging infrastructure can be available at the depot. It also has to make sure that there is sufficient electricity supply.

One of the challenges that the entire country has going forward, as we decarbonise and move over to more electric powered things—not only buses—is getting the power supply to the right place at the right time.

**Gavin Newlands:** A point we can agree on, with which to end.

**Chair:** Excellent. That is always very positive, Gavin. Two more colleagues want to come in very briefly. First of all, Greg Smith and then Ruth Cadbury.

**Q87 Greg Smith:** I am mindful of time so I will be brief. Hydrogen was mentioned as a clean future technology, and current technology, in Gavin Newlands's questioning.

I absolutely agree that bang for buck and value for the taxpayer is king, but, as we look at zero emission vehicles, to what extent in the research you have done and the talks you have held so far do you believe that hydrogen will emerge in the long term as the ultimate cleaner technology over battery electric in its reduced carbon footprint across the lifecycle of the vehicle? Will that be considered in the DFT when modelling future contracts and future sign-off of taxpayer subsidy for cleaner vehicles



going forward?

**Baroness Vere:** We could have an entire TSC session on this, couldn't we?

**Greg Smith:** We could.

**Baroness Vere:** At the moment, it is very much horses for courses. We are aware that there are some areas that are very interested in hydrogen. I was speaking to one metro mayor in particular recently who was very keen because they are producing hydrogen as a by-product where he is.

We are open-minded. We are technology agnostic. Hydrogen is a slightly different thing from battery electric because, of course, it has to have greater strategic reach for it to make sense, which is obviously why we have done the intervention in Teesside. From a Roads Minister perspective, I look at hydrogen and I look at HGVs and buses and think there is a lot of heavy stuff that needs to be pulled around. Hydrogen would make sense, but, of course, we now have to make sure that the technology for making clean hydrogen is there and is efficient. The energy efficiency ratio is not brilliant. We can try to improve that. There is a long way to go. We could have a long conversation about it. We are keen. It is important.

Q88 **Greg Smith:** I agree that we could have a long conversation. The crux of my question is, in getting this right, is the DFT committed? You said that you are not rushing anything, which is the right thing to do, but are you committed to holding out potentially that little bit longer to see the emergence of the tech on hydrogen?

**Baroness Vere:** I think it is there. I think that we will get an expression of interest for hydrogen in this current round. I would be surprised if we did not.

**Greg Smith:** Thank you.

Q89 **Ruth Cadbury:** Minister, London accounts for nearly a third of the UK's total bus fleet. The size of that market could support the UK's electric drivetrain and battery manufacturing and other zero emission technology and could supply the whole of the country's bus requirements.

At the moment, TfL does not have the funding for that level of kickstart investment. If you really wanted to get zero emission bus manufacturing going in the UK, improve the technology and bring down costs, could you not start with supporting TfL in this when the next funding settlement is due?

**Baroness Vere:** I do not see why London is better than anywhere else or should get priority over anywhere else. I know more about TfL than I have ever wanted to know, quite frankly. When I took on the devolution role, I was told it would be a tiny part of my portfolio, and then TfL blew up.



We are aware that the Mayor of London, quite rightly, has very ambitious decarbonisation plans. He wants to try to decarbonise the fleet by 2030. Of course, what we are trying to do at the moment is to support TfL through the challenge of the pandemic and get it back to financial sustainability, such that the Mayor of London is well able to make his own decisions about decarbonisation, and indeed about air quality, which is also a significant issue in London.

**Chair:** We will leave it there. Chris, the last question from you.

Q90 **Chris Loder:** Minister, this is the last time. I want to talk about long-term funding as a result of the strategy. According to the National Audit Office, as it stands at the moment, 40% of bus operators' income comes from public money. I want to ask your views as to how that will go forward in the context of the strategy. Will that be broadly consistent? Do you see it changing? Will the model be completely different?

**Baroness Vere:** Do I see it changing? Probably. Can I imagine how? No, because it all depends on the farebox. It all depends on how the BSIPs come through in terms of increasing the number of passengers that use buses, and therefore getting an increasing amount of revenue from the passengers themselves.

The Government are very keen to support a vibrant and effective bus network across the country. That is what we absolutely want to see. The extent to which that is supported by the farebox and passengers or by Government via various interventions, particularly for socially and economically necessary services, is really important. The Government will stand there.

Q91 **Chris Loder:** You mentioned earlier that there has been a considerable amount of travel demand modelling done as part of the strategy work. Does that insight as to what passenger demand is likely to be in the future suggest that bus operators today are too reliant on public subsidy and therefore we need to move towards a more revenue-based, passenger farebox-based income or not?

**Baroness Vere:** I don't think I would particularly draw that conclusion. What I would definitely say is that we will be in a period of transition. We do not quite know what business as usual demand will look like. We can do some scenario planning, but we do not know what it is really going to look like.

One of the things that the Government will be doing is working with the industry, particularly the CPT, on a marketing programme and getting back to bus when it is appropriate to do so according to the unlocking, and the road map. When it is appropriate to do so, we will absolutely stand by the CPT and the bus industry to make sure that we get as many people back on the bus as possible, and then of course we hope to go further.

Q92 **Chris Loder:** Is it possible to share that demand management modelling



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work?

**Stephen Fidler:** I think a lot of the material on expectations is published by Transport Focus and others.

Q93 **Chris Loder:** It would be good to understand that.

**Baroness Vere:** We will send you a little list.

**Chris Loder:** Thank you very much. That would be wonderful.

Q94 **Chair:** Minister, I gave you advance notice that I would like to ask about one other area of your portfolio. It is with regard to yesterday's announcement on smart motorways.

Could you briefly describe where your thinking is? You will be aware that the Transport Select Committee has opened an inquiry on the matter, albeit we have not taken evidence and this is not part of that process, but it would be remiss of me not to ask you about current thinking.

**Baroness Vere:** I am delighted that you have asked me today because it enables me to summarise where we are, what we announced yesterday and where we will be heading in the short to medium term.

It is the case that there have been concerns raised about smart motorways. The Secretary of State and I have listened to those concerns, and we have been taking action on them and pressuring Highways England since the Secretary of State came in, which was 18 months ago or so. You will have seen that in March 2020 we published a stock-take of the evidence available on the safety of smart motorways. We published an action plan that had 18 actions in it. Unfortunately, coronavirus slightly buried that intervention; none the less, work has progressed at great speed since then. The document that was published yesterday was an update from Highways England about those 18 actions. I am pleased to say that they are all either on track, have been completed or, in some cases, are being accelerated.

There are three big buckets of actions that we are taking forward. The first is clarity and information for drivers, which I think is absolutely critical. The national campaign has already started, and I am sure you have seen it. We are on track to convert dynamic hard shoulder motorways to all-lane running motorways. That continues. We have managed to bring forward the publication of the highway code by six months, and it will be coming before Parliament in the autumn. It will have updated information for drivers on driving on all-lane running motorways. Of course, we have been working with the recovery industry as well to give them the information they need when working in live lanes.

The next big area is finding a safe place to stop. That is very much focused around the emergency areas. The new design standards are in place. There are now 10 additional emergency areas on the M25. We are accelerating the analysis of those interventions to see what difference



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they have on live lane stops. All emergency areas are now easier to see; they are bright orange. The approach signage, which tells you how long you have to go before you see an emergency area, is being put in place six months early. We have brought that forward to September 2022.

The final area is being safer in moving traffic. It is the case that some people will stop in a live lane. Indeed, most roads at the national speed limit do not have a hard shoulder, and you have no option but to stop in a live lane if you really have to stop.

It is a benefit of smart motorways that there is technology that will help to spot those vehicles. We are rolling out that technology more quickly than we promised last year. We have brought it forward by six months, and it will be rolled out by September 2022. At the same time, in September 2022, 10 months early, all enforcement cameras for Red X enforcement of closed live lanes will be in place. By September 2022, all the tech will be in place.

We have also committed that we will not open any new smart motorways without stopped vehicle protection in place. By September 2022, all new roads will have stopped vehicle detection. All existing all-lane running motorways will have stopped vehicle detection. All the red enforcement will be done. All the signs will be in place. Therefore, we believe that the roads will not only be safer but will have the perception of being safer to road users.

**Q95 Chair:** Thank you for the comprehensive explanation as to what has been announced, Minister. I will just touch on one part of that, and it will be the only question on it.

You will be aware that back in 2016 our predecessor Select Committee issued a report that recommended that smart motorways did not proceed amid concerns over safety. I was a member of that Committee. At the time, Highways England told the Committee that going forward—this was in 2016—no new smart motorways would be put in place without the stopped vehicle detection technology that you just referenced would be in place by 2022.

Do you have concerns with regard to the performance of Highways England? They gave assurances then, and in 2019 they came back and said the reason why they opened the lane before the technology was brought in was that drivers liked to try it because it is new. Yet again, it has not been put alongside it. Did you consider saying no more smart motorways, even with the vehicle detection technology in place, until Highways England finish the job that they promised five years ago?

**Baroness Vere:** I think what is important to understand is that the data shows that all-lane running motorways, in terms of fatalities, are safer than conventional motorways. That was really clear. In terms of what Highways England promised in 2016 and did not deliver, I too am astonished and very disappointed. What I have found in my time as Roads Minister, which is about 18 months, is that Highways England have



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responded extremely well to some very significant pressure from myself and the Secretary of State to make sure that these systems are in place.

It is the case that stopped vehicle detection is an important intervention. We have brought it forward as quickly as we possibly can. There is just a single supplier of stopped vehicle detection, which is why getting the supply and calibrating it takes quite a long time.

Going forward, I am confident that Highways England have heard the concerns. I am confident that they are able to respond to these concerns, and that is exactly what their report sets out. All of the acceleration and the new commitments show a new ambition from Highways England to make sure that these roads are as safe as possible.

One of the things that we must never lose sight of is that what makes all drivers safer is to provide more capacity on our safest roads. That is what all-lane running motorways do. If you increase capacity on those roads, which are our safest roads in terms of fatalities, you take traffic off less safe roads. To people who say, "Well, I'd just ban smart motorways and put back the hard shoulder," I would say, "Where are you going to push that traffic? Which less safe road would you push that traffic to, and how many people is it okay to kill in order to do that?"

**Chair:** Minister, thank you for the response. We have our first evidence session next month on that, and we will be hearing from you again at the end of it. It was very good of you to indulge us.

Thank you for all the evidence you and Mr Fidler have given on the bus strategy. As Lilian Greenwood said, it was something this Committee had pushed for and we are delighted to see it. Now our concern is making sure that it works. The areas we picked up in terms of delivery on the ground and the local basis is exactly where you have drilled into as well, so that should give us great heart.

Thank you both. I wish you well and wish you every success with the strategy roll-out.