

Transport Committee

Oral evidence: [Coronavirus: implications for transport](#), HC 268

Wednesday 17 June 2020

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Huw Merriman (Chair); Ruth Cadbury; Lilian Greenwood; Simon Jupp; Robert Langan; Karl McCartney; Grahame Morris; Greg Smith; Sam Tarry.

Questions 278 - 316

Witnesses

[I](#): Tim Bowles, Metro Mayor, West of England; Andy Burnham, Metro Mayor, Greater Manchester Combined Authority; and Steve Rotheram, Metro Mayor, Liverpool City Region.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Tim Bowles, Andy Burnham and Steve Rotheram.

Q278 **Chair:** This is an evidence session on the coronavirus implications for local transport. We are delighted this morning to have with us three of the Metro Mayors from England. For the record, could you introduce yourselves? Let's start with the Mayor whose city is about to get its hands on the football premiership.

Steve Rotheram: Fingers crossed. My name is Steve Rotheram. I am the Metro Mayor of the Liverpool City Region.

Q279 **Chair:** Perhaps we will now move to the Mayor whose city usually gets its hands on the football premiership.

Andy Burnham: Not a good start with that football reference, but we will move on. I am Andy Burnham, the Mayor of Greater Manchester and former Member for Leigh.

Q280 **Chair:** Finally, we move to a Mayor who represents a city that normally gets its hands on the premiership with a different shaped ball.

Tim Bowles: Thank you for that introduction. I was wondering how you could follow the football analogy in the other two regions. A very good morning, everybody. I am Tim Bowles, the Mayor of the West of England Combined Authority.

Q281 **Chair:** Thank you all for being with us this morning. We are very grateful for your time, in what we hope will be an interesting session across local transport.

Mayor Bowles, I will start with you, but the question is for all three of you. I want to ask about the impacts of the coronavirus on transport usage in your region. Perhaps you could list a negative and a positive.

Tim Bowles: Our city region encompasses Bristol and Bath. It is a region that is relatively well served in terms of transport, both coming in and out. The impact for us is how our travel to work works, because the majority of people in our region live and work within our region.

There has clearly been a huge impact as businesses have been closed and people have been social distancing. People are working in different environments, from home. There has been an incredible impact. We have seen bus patronage reduce to less than 10% of earlier figures, bearing in mind that the last time I spoke to this Committee we were talking about the success of buses in our region. We have seen a huge reduction in the usage of public transport. Road use has been significantly reduced as well.

We have seen new patterns, both in working at home and in people walking and cycling. There has been a very big impact on every aspect of



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transport across the region. That is why I welcome the opportunity to talk to you today.

Q282 **Chair:** Thank you. Mayor Burnham, on the same point?

Andy Burnham: It is very similar to the picture that Tim Bowles has just given. There have been significant falls in passenger volumes and therefore revenues, presenting very big financial challenges for us looking to the future. As of Monday this week, Metrolink, our tram system, was carrying 15% of normal volumes. On the buses, it is around 25% of normal volumes. With rail, it is about 10%. You can see the impact in those figures. Certainly, with bus and tram we are close to capacity, even though we expect to see volumes continuing to rise.

In terms of the positives, very quickly, cycling has been a real positive. We normally expect around 850,000 trips by bike in Greater Manchester in any given week. That is close to 1 million now, so we have had a significant increase in cycling.

Finally, we see order and stability in the rail system. The timetable chaos has finally subsided, with this opportunity for the rail industry to strip back and build back up slowly. Comments on my social media from passengers were at an intense level going back a year or so. They have all but evaporated. The rail system in the north of England is comparatively stable at the moment.

Q283 **Chair:** Thank you. Mayor Rotheram?

Steve Rotheram: It has identified that the current commercialised model of public transport is not fit for purpose. There is the potential that some public transport systems will not be able to continue indefinitely unless there is significant central Government intervention and support. For the very reasons that both Tim and Andy have highlighted, we are currently running 75% of our public transport system. The overheads for that, the on-costs and the costs of operators are the same as they would be if it was at 100% of capacity usage. We are on about 15% and therefore sustaining huge losses on a daily basis. That cannot continue indefinitely.

On the positive side, we have seen many more people, as in Greater Manchester and elsewhere, choosing active travel. They are walking and cycling. Hopefully, that will continue post-Covid crisis into the future. We will then get a healthier population and address some of the climate emergency issues that are very prevalent in cities and city regions.

Q284 **Chair:** We will drill down in more detail, but I am intrigued by your point, Mayor Rotheram, that some of the transport systems will not continue unless something is done. Are you referring directly to Merseyrail?

Steve Rotheram: The costs of Merseyrail and, to tell you the truth, our bus system are the same as they were pre-Covid, but we can only carry a fraction of the passenger volumes and numbers that we did beforehand.



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As Tim Bowles said, we were bucking the national trend on buses. Our growth was higher than anywhere else in the whole country. We were attracting people on to public transport, especially using buses; 82% of our journeys were on buses.

The problem is that, when you have to socially distance, it reduces the numbers who can use each bus from 70 or 80 to around 20, but the costs are still the same. The commercial operators still have to pay staff and all the other associated costs in running a transport system. That is why we have said to the Government that we need to speak to them. One of the elements of that has to be about Merseyrail, which I believe is the only rail system yet to have some sort of intervention or an EMA.

Chair: We will drill down specifically to Merseyrail, and to rail and bus for all three of you. We want to ask you about the impact that the ease of the lockdown may have had.

Q285 **Greg Smith:** Good morning to all three Mayors. As the lockdown is being steadily eased, we saw non-essential retail open on Monday this week and a lot of people starting to go back to work who were working from home. In a couple of weeks, we hope to see a lot of leisure and hospitality—pubs, for example—get to reopen.

To start with, it would be interesting to get your take on how your local transport networks, be it buses, rail or active travel, are adapting to enable that greater number of people to come back to the shops and to go back to work. It would be great to hear some specific local examples. I know a lot depends on Government guidance, but could you give some local examples of how you are coping in your area?

Steve Rotheram: With regard to the easing of restrictions during the lockdown, we saw a 10% increase in the first day on public transport, and we expect to see that continue gradually, building up to some sort of level whereby we have to address the number of buses that are running on routes. For instance, if the Government were to ease the particular restriction on social distancing, what will that mean for capacity on buses? The 2-metre rule has a direct implication for the number of passengers per bus. Halving it would mean that we could probably double the capacity. That might be something we look at.

I am absolutely certain that we will all say the same thing. It all has to be predicated on what the scientific advice is. We have to put passengers first. Their safety has to be paramount. I am sure we all agree with that. We have to look at what the potential future options and scenarios might be so that we build that in.

We have to get back to 100% running for all services and routes. We are constrained in doing that because we have a deregulated system. Only London can ensure that the routes they want to run do run, because they are the only regulated service in the country. For me, the difficulty with Government passing money straight through to bus operating companies is that one of the sticks, or the carrots, that we could have to work with



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our bus operating companies to ensure that they do not cherry-pick has been taken away from us. I think future funding tranches should come through transport authorities or combined authorities, where they exist.

Andy Burnham: I will give you the figures and then pick up on what Steve has just said. In terms of the effect on the system, comparing Monday just gone with the one before, we saw a 35% increase in passenger volumes on Metrolink. To put that into context though, it was running at about 11% of normal volumes three Mondays ago, and this Monday it was up to 15%. It was quite a big increase, but it is already getting to capacity.

As a local example, we are going to add capacity from Monday. We are going to run double trams on pretty much every service to allow for distancing. That will come in from Monday as a 10-minute service so that there is more frequency.

We are, and have been, handing out face masks on Metrolink this week. Something that has quite surprised us is that compliance is running at about 90% on Metrolink in wearing face coverings. That is higher than we expected. It is about 75% on the bus, but that is still very high and says something really good about the travelling public.

To pick up on Steve's point, you rightly asked about local initiatives. The only bit that we really control—Steve with Merseyrail and me with Metrolink—has had the least secure funding arrangement so far. Rail got a very big deal, with all costs covered early on, plus, I believe, a management fee. Bus got a deal not long after, which also covered payment of concessions, or the requirement on local authorities to pay for people's concessions, even though people with concessionary passes were not travelling.

The bit we control, where we have more ability to do things, has not had the same level of certainty with regard to funding. We are grateful to the Government for what we have had from them, but it has been a little patchy. At the moment, it will run out in August. There is no long-term approach that we are able to apply as yet.

We are doing what we can, but I agree very strongly with Steve Rotheram, and I am making a pitch to the Committee this morning. This is now a unique opportunity to reform public transport outside London. We have public subsidy going into rail, bus and light rail. We are looking to the Committee to give us more control over the system so that we can do more on the kinds of examples you want us to give you. Give us more ability to provide those examples by bringing the public funding under one roof—basically a city region transport authority—so that in constrained circumstances we can make the system work much better for people. It would then lay a foundation for the reform of public transport outside London in the future.

Q286 **Greg Smith:** Before we drill into that a little bit, do you share the view,



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Tim, that it would be better for Metro Mayors and local transport authorities to directly control the budgets of public subsidy coming in? Do you share the views of your colleagues from Liverpool and Manchester?

Tim Bowles: Absolutely. I will go back, if I may, to a couple of stats, but I will drill into that with pleasure. While we were just under 10% during the majority of lockdown, I got update figures in the last two weeks. A week last Monday, we were back to 15% on our buses as lockdown was being eased. Our passenger numbers were up to 19% yesterday.

However, given social distancing and so on, we are still unable to meet demand on some of our routes. We have a very good relationship with our bus operators. They are running duplicate buses on many routes, but on key routes they find that they are at capacity already, in spite of the limited returns, due to social distancing.

We did an exercise with our main operator on what bus capacity would look like if social distancing was relaxed. If social distancing was relaxed to 1 metre on buses, we would only get one more passenger on to each bus. There is going to be a very significant challenge for a long time around our bus and public transport networks. Therefore, to feed into your direct question to me, we must see bus service support grants being properly devolved to the transport authorities in the combined authority areas.

We are the people who know what our main routes are. We are the people who know which routes need supporting. We can act at pace and be flexible, as opposed to directly paying operators to continue delivering in the old manner and in the old normal. We have to start using this as an opportunity to change the way we work.

I totally endorse the points made by Steve and Andy to the Committee. If it was not for the Government support of buses, our region would not have been able to operate at anything remotely like the level we have been able to or be returning at pace as we are already. We recognise the really important work that the Government did in supporting us through the emergency phase. Now is the time for us all to come together and start looking at how we can do things better, and making sure we give Andy, Steve, me and the other Metro Mayors the ability to manage our services at local level. We are going to be reliant on Government support for buses for a long time to keep them operating.

Q287 **Greg Smith:** Can I pick up on one thing you said? I don't know if it was because the sound quality in the room is not great, but did you say that if social distancing was dropped to 1 metre you would only be able to get one more passenger on a bus, or did I mishear?

Tim Bowles: No, you are correct. That is what I said. First Bus have done work and trials on that. They did modelling on 2-metre distancing, 1.5 metres and 1 metre. If you think about how tight bus seats are, even if you reduce it to 1 metre, they have worked out that you would get only



one additional passenger on a bus. The stats we have are similar to the ones Steve mentioned earlier. If you are around 25% capacity on a bus, it means a double-decker can only accommodate just over 20 people. Yes, we would only see one more on one of those routes, if they follow the rules.

Q288 Greg Smith: That is very interesting. I am fairly practical in the way I look at things. As lockdown is going to be lifted, hopefully—if R remains low; I appreciate the R rate is slightly different in different parts of the country—and more of the economy is going to open up, it sounds like you are all pretty much at capacity where social distancing stands at the moment. My open question, therefore, is this. What will it take to get more capacity into local transport? What are the practical measures that the Government need either to make or give you the resources to make yourselves to get capacity up, so that the reopening of the economy does not end up being a false start because nobody can get to shops, venues or pubs?

Andy Burnham: As Steve was saying, capacity is going to be a problem. We have no more trams that we can put out on the network. To answer your question on distancing, if it was reduced from 2 metres to 1 metre, we estimate that on our trams it would allow us to increase capacity from 10% at 2 metres to 23% at 1 metre. There is an increase, although it is not huge. The constraints on bus, tram and train will be there for as long as we do not have a vaccine. There is no question about that.

What do you do about that? I think we have to look at how people use public transport and at what times they travel. Outside London, I am always struck by the fact that the working day is still quite traditional. It is a very nine-to-five working day. We have to work hard with businesses in this period to ask them to stagger the start and end times of the working day, and allow the peak to be spread throughout the day. That is happening already to a degree. The message is going out and it is beginning to happen.

Steve and I use the phrase “Build back better”. That is one of the ways in which you could enshrine new behaviours that are beneficial to people anyway. I imagine that most people in Greater Manchester would benefit from a more flexible working day. We would all benefit from the peak not all being between 7.30 and 9 every morning. It would be better if there was a spread.

We are going to struggle with capacity. Yes, you could put funding in and put more buses on the roads. We would probably all encourage the Government to think about that. The coach industry is struggling. Maybe they could be brought in to provide extra capacity as well. All of those things should be looked at. It is going to be hard without getting some change, not just on the supply side but on the demand side. It is about restructuring the working day and giving people extra flexibility.



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We need to be really clear with businesses. I am going to say this to my own organisation, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. We need people to sign up to come in at a different time of the day. We need to structure it, otherwise we are going to have chaos at tram stops. We need to set an example as the organisation people look to in Greater Manchester for how they should bring people back to the office.

The problem will really kick in when the Government advice changes. Once we see the end of "Stay at home" or "Work at home if you can" to a more liberal position of letting people work from wherever they want to work, that is the moment when the chaos could hit if we are not careful. We could see unprecedented levels of traffic congestion on our roads as people just turn to the car.

Q289 Greg Smith: I am mindful of the time. As we move to easing lockdown, hopefully, there will be no second spike and, hopefully, R will remain below 1 everywhere; but if there needs to be a local lockdown, how are you all prepared in your area to implement that from a transport perspective? Obviously, a local lockdown only works if people are not able to travel within that area and are forced to stay at home and abide by the local lockdown. What are your preparations looking like for that?

Steve Rotheram: This is where there is some confusion over what local lockdown actually means. That is why sometimes Government announcements would be better if they came after consultation, and not the announcement and then a consultation period. For instance, during the announcement by Matt Hancock in a Downing Street briefing, he specifically mentioned areas like Liverpool and Manchester. That was the scale of what a local lockdown might look like, and what the thinking of the Government was at that time. You are talking about huge conurbations. How would that actually work?

The first thing we asked was, under what powers? There are currently no powers to allow that to happen. As a parliamentarian, you will know that better than me. If there is emergency legislation, how is that communicated? What happens if somebody works in one area but lives in another? If they live in Liverpool but work in Bootle, which is in Sefton, are they allowed to travel? Vice versa, are people allowed to travel into an area where there is lockdown? It was a very confused and disjointed announcement.

What we need to do, if there are suggestions about local lockdowns, is to speak to our local authorities first to get their views. Then, together, after consultation, we can ensure that if there are to be local lockdowns we can actually do them. Who would enforce it? The police do not have the capacity to do it. Would we ask the military to come in? There are so many questions that it threw up. If there is one plea I would make through this Committee to Government, it would be to please consult before they make these hashed decisions.

Q290 Greg Smith: I appreciate your point on consultation. My own council in



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Buckinghamshire has a number of questions around that too. I guess that in a fast-moving environment where there is a necessity to act as quickly as possible, either from a perspective of locking down to save lives or opening up the economy to get people's livelihoods secured again, there has to be a practical reality on the ground of some level of planning around that.

I appreciate that Government guidance is critical to you guys, but surely there must be some level of practical, on-the-ground planning of what it means for local transport and for all the services under your authority. Can you give us any guidance as to where your thinking is going on that?

Andy Burnham: I want to back up what Steve said. There is very little information beyond some of the statements that the Secretary of State for Health has made. He was on the radio this morning talking about a local lockdown relating to a GP surgery or potentially a hospital, a care home or a place of work.

If a local lockdown is linked to a specific building or a location, you could see how it might be doable. If it is applied to a community, I, like Steve, struggle to see how on earth it would be enforceable in the current climate. If the Government want to go that way, it is pretty urgent that they issue the guidance and the information as to how it would be brought about. We have not had that at the moment.

There is a bit of a pattern. The guidance on face masks on public transport—face coverings—came out on Sunday night, and it was coming in on Monday morning. I appreciate what you say about a fast-moving environment, but the phrase "local lockdown" was put into the public domain two weeks ago or possibly longer. We still do not really know what it means or under what powers it would be introduced.

We are here and ready to work in partnership. We do not want to see the virus spreading in our communities, but talk of putting communities under lockdown is not helpful, particularly in a situation where the virus is linked to deprivation. I would like to see a different approach, where we support those communities more in managing the risks they are facing with the provision of more localised data on the way the virus is changing on the ground.

There are steps before local lockdown that need to be considered. Tom Riordan, the chief executive of Leeds City Council, is working with the Government on these things. I welcome that as a helpful step in the consideration of local outbreak management plans. It sounds like a sensible thing. We need to move more into that language and less into the language of local lockdown. It is fraught with difficulties, to be honest, and I do not see how we would stop trams running through areas under lockdown, or buses skirting them. How would you do it? As Steve said, what would you do if people could not go to work from those areas? Would there be a local furlough scheme? We have no information on any of the detail.



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Q291 **Greg Smith:** Tim, do you share the concerns in Liverpool and Manchester?

Tim Bowles: I share a number of those concerns. We need to go back to what a local lockdown means. We talk about travel-to-work areas. How local is local in that sense? The challenge I have had, and we have had it when we have been talking to the chief medical officers and so on, is how we get statistical information back to us that is relevant to our region. Most of the ONS data talks about much bigger areas.

We need to be part of the conversation with Government when they are making statements, as Steve was saying. That is vital. Take my region as an example. I am literally 10 miles from a completely devolved country, which will have its own rules. We have a lot of people in the region who commute to and from south Wales. On a daily basis, we have thousands of people traditionally who either commute or travel for meetings and work, whether they are going to London or are on that lovely north/south axis moving up and down the country. How do you lock down rail, motorways and highways, bearing in mind that the combined authority is not the highway authority? How do we look at things like that, bearing in mind that we are focusing on transport today?

There are lots of other issues around how you do it with the economy as well. How do we bring those pieces into it? We have to be able to be flexible and look at local lockdowns, but at the moment we need to do an awful lot more work with Government, both around how they judge and announce things and on the ability then to pick it up with other fora. We work well with our transport operators. We would be able to have sensible conversations, but at the moment we need much clearer thinking from Government as to how that would be acted out.

Chair: Thank you. We have had a good, expansive 30 minutes to cover the first two sections. We have another seven sections to go, and Mayor Burnham has to depart at 11, so we may be more specific as we go further. Grahame Morris wants to take us through transport funding and the interaction that the Mayors have had with Government.

Q292 **Grahame Morris:** I am sorry. I am having some technical issues, so I will proceed with just audio.

All of you have announced either new funding packages or accelerated packages to invest in transport to support recovery from the pandemic. Could you tell the Committee how satisfied you are with the level of financial support provided by central Government?

Steve Rotheram: In all honesty, it is inadequate at the moment, but we are only at the very early stages of, hopefully, putting together a very comprehensive plan with Government for what the future will have to look like. Specifically on Merseyrail, I have constant conversations with DFT. Our officers liaise constantly with DFT about Merseyrail. As yet, we still do not have a deal, when emergency measures arrangements were made almost immediately with the national rail operators. That



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jeopardises our ability to run services. We are limping along, and Baroness Vere has heard me say on a number of occasions that this needs to be concluded very quickly.

With regard to other investment by Government, we always have to support and welcome Government funding when it is in the right areas. What the Government have done on active travel, which has enabled pop-up cycle lanes for instance, has been really good. There is stuff that we want to do to invest in cycling infrastructure and improvements to roads. That is important for cyclists. I think everybody will get behind those sorts of things.

It is to be welcomed that people have discovered a drug that reduces the death rate, but until we get a vaccine we are not going to encourage the same volumes back on to public transport as we had previously. That means modal shift. We need to get people out of cars, because at the moment road traffic numbers are increasing exponentially. That is no good for the future of the planet. It is certainly no good for public transport. We need some help and assistance to work with Government to tackle that. That is not just in the city region; it is a national and probably a global issue that needs to be tackled.

Q293 Grahame Morris: Andy, do you have a particular view on Government funding?

Andy Burnham: It is right for me to say that we have been fairly satisfied with the level at which the Government have supported Metrolink. I say fairly satisfied because the first package we got covered 73% of our losses. It did not fully fund the shortfall. As anyone will say right now, Grahame, where does any local system find that other 27%? The money just is not there, so that was a challenge.

We had a second arrangement that delivered close to 95%, which we are obviously much happier with. Here is where my caveats come in as to what the Government have done so far. It only runs until August. I am not satisfied with the level of forward planning that we have at the moment, because we have another cliff edge coming in the very early part of August.

It seems to me to be unfair in the differential way the different modes have been treated. Rail was paid up in full straightaway. Buses were not far after. Why treat public authorities differently when we are struggling to keep our services running? To be honest, different geographies are being treated differently. Obviously, London Transport is a very different entity from the transport set-up in any other city. A very big package was agreed for them. I know it had strings attached, but £1.6 billion is a huge amount of funding, covering all modes. We are still scratching round mode by mode with short-term funding. London's deal ran for a considerable period of time, whereas we are getting little chunks here and there.



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I understand how difficult it is for the Government, but this is one of the big appeals I make to the Committee today. To support recovery, city regions like ours need all funding brought under one roof so that we have the ability to integrate funding over bus, tram, and so on. We need a longer-term vista so that we can see how we can build public transport back as the city comes back. At the moment, we do not have that ability.

To take it a step further forward, this is a huge opportunity to reform public transport in cities outside London, given the level of public subsidy that will be in those systems. An appeal I want to make to the Government coming out of this is that levelling up has to come back with a vengeance. The poorest parts of the country are going to be hit hardest by the economic crisis, as they have already been hit hardest by the health crisis. Levelling up has to really come back on the agenda very quickly, but it has to be about much more than long-term infrastructure. That is often how it is spoken about, but it has to be about everyday transport—the cost, reliability and convenience of everyday transport, and integrating it across different systems. We all deserve a London-style transport system. There is no good reason at all, in my view, why London gets treated differently from Manchester, Bristol or Liverpool.

We have run Metrolink without public subsidy for years, ever since it began. It runs on its own revenue. That is not how transport systems have developed in London. This is a moment for the Government to put real meaning behind levelling up, saying that they are going to treat other cities in the same way as they treat London and putting in the money so that we can build an integrated system across the modes at city regional level. Ultimately, we should bring rail into that mix as well, as we look to implement the recommendations of the Williams review.

I am sorry to give you a long answer, but I feel absolutely passionately about this. The differential in the cost of transport between London and the rest of the country is unjustifiable. A single bus journey costs £4 or more in Manchester. It is £1.50 or so in London. If levelling up needs to tackle any injustice, why not start with that one? You will only do it if you start putting revenue support into city regional transport systems outside London. Critical to a successful recovery from this crisis is getting transport working for people, and making it affordable, reliable and convenient. It will not come without long-term funding at the discretion of city regional transport authorities.

Q294 **Grahame Morris:** Thank you, Andy. Tim, on short-term and longer-term funding, could you give us a view from the west country?

Tim Bowles: Thank you very much. May I quickly say that I have to leave at 11? The last I knew, Steve was also in the meeting we have at 11, so I will try to be brief in my responses.

Short term, it is very positive. I have already touched on the support for buses, both to operators and to us, in terms of Government support around the funding we provide for concessionary fares. That has been



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very positive. We would not be able to run any semblance of bus service without that support, and we would not be able to bring services up to the level they are now without it.

It is the same with regard to rail. The Government stepped in on rail. It is very positive there. We have all welcomed the short-term funding around active travel. If we were all honest, we would like to see that process being a lot easier and to see the money coming through to the combined authorities so that we can act at pace and flexibly to deliver, and not jump through hoops in terms of bidding.

That leads to the point that both Andy and Steve made. For the future, we have a chance to really back devolution and combined authorities. The three of us, as the witnesses on this call, are the people locally who look to delivering what the Government talk about. We are the people who can deliver for Government in this space. We must accelerate the process of combined authorities having genuine devolved transport settlements. That is the only way, in my opinion, and I am sure that my colleagues across England are going to agree. We have to be trusted by Government to be able to deliver.

We have the mandates locally. We have transport plans in place. We have projects in place. We are able to act at pace and flexibly, where we are given the opportunity. We have really good relationships with Highways England, Network Rail and other people in those spaces. In our region, we are improving the way we operate with those other bodies. Again, the ability for us to have controls over the mechanisms that allow us to deliver, primarily in this instance the funding, will mean that we can deliver even more quickly if we take the opportunity now to make those differences.

That is my plea. Let us use this opportunity to improve the way we deliver vital transport infrastructure improvements, both in our existing mode to meet my ambitions around our suburban rail as well, and then to allow us to deliver on our active travel and other modal shift pieces. Give us the opportunity, the tools and the funding to do that. That is my ask.

Chair: We are now aware that all three of you have to leave at 11 o'clock, so that has rather sharpened our pencil. Rob has a specific question, and then Karl will move to the section on buses. We will then cover rail and active travel.

Q295 **Robert Lorgan:** The crisis has been a big test of the devolution settlement and Metro Mayors. We have talked a lot about the performance of Government, but I am also keen to know about the performance of the Metro Mayors. I would like all three of you, knowing what you know now, briefly to tell me what you would have done differently through this crisis.

Steve Rotheram: I would probably have acted sooner on face coverings, if I am absolutely honest. I was alongside Sadiq Khan eight weeks ago,



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calling on the Government to implement face coverings on public transport. While it is difficult, because we do not have the legislative support for some things we would like to do, we could have got the messaging out sooner that face coverings were something people should start to work towards using. We did not do that.

There are things that we did, though, that I am proud of. We immediately identified our key workers. We gave key workers free travel through the Mersey tunnels when traffic was at a fraction of where it is currently. When shops were opening for pensioners, we relaxed the regulation around what we call the twirly—I think most people call it a twirly. It is the 9.30 concessionary travel card. When people used to get on before 9.30, they said it was too early, so it is called the twirly.

We promoted allowing NHS workers free travel on public transport. We did a number of things to try to ease things, but, of course, as it started to creep back to normality, we have had to ease some of those things ourselves. We have reintroduced tunnel tolls, for instance, for everybody, but there are loads of good things that we did.

The reason that Andy Burnham talks about “Build back better” is that we want to take some of those things forward. Just because they happened during a time of real crisis, we should not forget how those positive things have impacted on our communities, to huge benefit. I would like to do some of those things in the future. When we encourage more people back on to public transport and away from cars, perhaps on to active travel with cycling, our public transport system needs to respond to that. We want to get cycles on to buses. You can only possibly get one on at the moment.

Our new fleet of Merseyrail trains are £500 million-worth of the most sophisticated trains in the country. When they are running—there has been a delay with Covid—they will be the most accessible in the whole country. There are things we can do when we genuinely work in partnership with Government. I would like to build on those positives, while of course responding to any of the lessons that we need to learn.

Q296 **Robert Largan:** Tim, what would you have done differently, knowing what you know now?

Tim Bowles: It is a very good question. Our road usage was down to about 30% of normal, and bus and train travel down to less than 10%. Given that dramatic drop there was clearly going to be a limit to what we could do.

Picking up Steve’s point, we have never called it a twirly down here because we always operated at 9 o’clock, being progressive in the west of England, and not 9.30 as in the rest of the country. I am very proud that we relaxed and took away all of the restrictions on the concessionary bus service pieces that we provide. Those were things that we were able to



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do at pace locally because we had the ability to do that; we were controlling it via the combined authority.

The big thing I would have liked to see—we touched on it earlier—was even clearer messaging from Government about processes that were going to happen so that we were all able to react there and then as announcements were made. I would have liked us to have a clearer and sharper channel into Government to be able to understand what their plans were, help influence them with our local knowledge and make sure that we were all absolutely ready, at the point the announcements were made, both clearly to share that message and to deliver on a local basis.

Q297 **Robert Largan:** I have a specific question on buses for Andy. Andy, could you say, first, what you would do differently knowing what you know now? Secondly, when it comes to buses, I would be interested to know what you have been doing to work with local authorities surrounding Greater Manchester. I represent High Peak, which is just outside Greater Manchester, but a lot of your transport decisions impact hugely on my constituents. One thing that has been a real issue when it comes to buses is that there is no direct bus going from Glossop to Tameside Hospital. That has caused quite a few issues.

I would be interested to know your thoughts on that, and on what you are doing to work much more closely with other local authorities just outside Greater Manchester.

Andy Burnham: On the things that I would have done differently with hindsight, Steve was blaming himself on masks. I do not think he should, because he was trying to persuade me at least eight weeks ago that this was where it was going and we needed to act more quickly. Eventually, I said something, but it was not as quick as it should have been. I think we should all have seen that much more clearly.

Having said that, it is important to say that Mayors have led this debate. You were talking about the role of Mayors in this crisis; it was Mayors who were making this call. The Government responded to it and, to be fair, did something, but it was very much led by Sadiq Khan, Steve Rotheram and latterly me. To be honest, I think we should have embraced it more quickly.

Another thought on what we could have done differently is that maybe we should all have anticipated the effect of speeding on our roads as they quietened down. There has been a noticeable increase in the levels of speeding across the country. We did something, but it was already a bit of an issue before we properly identified it.

Let me touch on the services outside. I fully understand the importance of services circling Greater Manchester. We are not an island. I know how connected we are to Glossop and other parts of High Peak. If you look north, the same is true of Rossendale. Steve and I talk all the time about services between Liverpool City Region and Greater Manchester.



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If as a Committee you were to support what we are saying about more power and more funding for city regional transport authorities, we would be able to do more. That is the honest answer. Often, we have only a reactive role, in relation to bus in particular. Bus operators in the current system often threaten to remove a service. They tend to be rural services on the fringes of the conurbation. We are in a position where it is either throw some money in or lose it. It is not an attractive place to be; let me put it that way.

My best answer to your question is that we could do so much more if we had greater ability to protect the services that we know are important, particularly to the semi-rural fringes of the city region. At the moment, we are not in a position where we can actively decide what we want in our network. We are often trying to scabble around to protect the network because of the deregulated system that Steve Rotheram described.

Q298 Karl McCartney: Tim, Steve and Andy, it is good to see you this morning. I had a number of questions that were Chris's, but I am going to cut them because we are short of time.

If I understand correctly, the money that the Government have given to support buses, roughly £650 million in total with a further £254 million recently to support services during the pandemic, runs out in August. I think that is what you said, Andy; you might want to correct me. We have been told that it is impossible to run commercially viable bus services while social distancing is in place.

From what you have said, we understand the various issues around funding, and that is a priority for you. There are various options you can have. You can either charge people more for their tickets, which I am sure you do not want to do, or you can look for a magic money orchard from the taxpayer via the Government to get more funding. Maybe you could look at removing social distancing, particularly for schoolchildren travelling on buses to school, if they all go back to school. In a quick answer from all three of you, what would be your priority, or what would you accept that could be done to get more people back on buses?

Andy Burnham: Thanks, Karl; good to see you. I do not make any criticism of the level at which the Government have funded buses, or indeed the speed with which they stepped in to support bus services. It is generous, as you say, and it has helped to protect the network at a crucial time.

I also understand why they went straight to funding the bus companies directly, given the severity of the problem. My appeal to you is more on where we go from here. Yes, the deal they have runs out in August. What I am saying is, bring that funding under one roof—

Q299 Karl McCartney: I get that, but how do you get more people back on the buses, going to work, going shopping or going to school?



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Andy Burnham: If we had greater public control over the network, we would be able to optimise where the buses go and link them better to our trams. We would be able to optimise the way the whole thing works.

Q300 **Karl McCartney:** Do you want to see social distancing removed or do you want to see more funding from the Government?

Andy Burnham: You have to be led by the science, but I am trying to give you the answer that I think is the right answer, which is at the moment we can't say—

Karl McCartney: I am conscious of the time, Andy.

Andy Burnham: I am here to give evidence, if you will let me. We cannot say to the buses where they should go. Mention was made a moment ago about a service to a hospital. We cannot dictate that in a deregulated system. If we had more public control over the network, I think we would be able to optimise it so that we could get more people using it and give people the services that they want. Yes, possibly we could reduce the 2 metres, but it would have to be led by the science.

Q301 **Karl McCartney:** Steve, you covered this earlier on, when you mentioned that passenger safety was paramount, and we all agree about that. My personal view is that I do not think it is worth going to 1-metre social distancing. We either have social distancing or we do not. I do not know whether or not you agree with that. Could you give us an answer as quickly as you can?

Steve Rotheram: I think we should retain social distancing. It is the only way we are going to affect the R rate in our local areas. One of the factors in the R rate is the use of public transport. That obviously has a bearing on how Covid is reproduced. What you have done, Karl, is identify what the options might be, other than one, and that is that we will need sustained Government support for quite some time into the future. That is the only way that you are going to be able to tackle this.

If we say that we have a quarter of the people on the buses so we need to put the bus fares up by four times what they currently are, nobody is going to use them, so you might as well not have a public transport system or a train system if that is what we have to do. There have to be ways in which we can tackle this. As I said, it is only by working with Government that we can start to look at what the genuine options are. It might have to be a hybrid of different things, including fare increases. It is not a binary choice. We need to talk about the issues because they are not going to go away quickly.

Tim Bowles: As long as we have social distancing in force, it has to apply to transport. You cannot make an exemption in those spaces. The other question I would raise and put in for Members to think about is that there may be a presumption that we immediately look to return to 100% patronage as was on buses. We already know that a lot of people are going to continue working from home. The Government advice is still to



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continue to work from home where you can. We should not assume that we are going to have a very quick switch to 100% of previous usage figures. We need to look at it in that context.

The other challenge we have—it applies elsewhere—is that, given the limits on passengers on buses, at the moment we do not even have enough vehicles to do that. Our operators are working with coach companies and airports to look at drivers. There are a lot more complex challenges about how the bus services and public transport return. Fundamentally, we are not going to have the income through the fare box to keep services running.

Ultimately, it will have to be through the bus strategy. When we, as Metro Mayors, talk with Ministers, they make it very clear that the funding in the short term remains with operators but that it is through the bus recovery strategy that we look at devolving money to us in the regions to make the choices about how we deliver. My suggestion is that we need to broaden that conversation.

Chair: For the last 30 minutes, we move to the quick-fire round. Succinct answers or “I agree” will be absolutely fine. We will move from the bus to the train and light rail.

Q302 **Simon Jupp:** Good morning, panel. I wish to place on the record that I am a former adviser to the Mayor of the West of England, Tim Bowles, who is on the panel this morning.

I know that the DFT watches these sessions on a regular basis. I need to understand, and many people will want to understand, how much further funding you need to protect and stay in rail and tram services as the lockdown is unlocked. I am looking for figures so that we have an idea of how much you require.

Steve Rotheram: In all honesty, I do not do “back of a fag packet” guesstimates of what we will need. It will depend on the issues that we have spoken about previously, including, by the way, the mechanism by which funding is distributed.

Although we have had money for bus operating companies, it did not come via combined authorities; it went direct to the bus operating companies. On rail, we have Merseyrail, and it depends on what the Government do to distribute the funding. If it comes via us, we can do things to influence the sorts of issues that have been asked about in previous questions. If it goes by another route, the bus operating companies or the train operating companies do not even have to speak to us because they are getting money directly from Government. That is why we are making a play about the distribution mechanism.

Q303 **Simon Jupp:** But you must have an idea, for example, if social distancing remains at 2 metres or goes to 1 metre, how much money you will require. I know you have funding until August for the majority of your services, apart from Merseyrail. Do you have any ideas, or has your



combined authority team worked on what that would look like?

Steve Rotheram: They are working with central Government at the moment on those things. It is different in every area. We have Merseyrail, which we franchise to a company. We have ferries that we run ourselves. We have tunnels from which we raise income that goes towards the maintenance of the tunnels, and we have buses. There are different elements in different areas, and that is why it has to be a local plan, in consultation and in concert with central Government. Those discussions are ongoing at the moment, but we are talking in hundreds of millions—not tens of millions.

Andy Burnham: At the start of lockdown, Metrolink was losing about £6 million a month on the fare box. Even if you foresee an optimistic approach on social distancing along the lines that Karl McCartney was talking about—let's say we went to 1 metre—and you could get that down to £4 million or possibly £3 million, you would still be looking at a shortfall. We would imagine that from here we are going to be facing a shortfall of around £30 million or more in our budget, if you have a run rate of £4 million to £6 million every month. Obviously, it can come down. We can do our best to maximise capacity, but it is going to need a subsidy.

I was struck by Karl McCartney's questioning. Why is that outrageous? London has had a subsidy for decades. Why is it outrageous that we should be talking about a subsidy for a tram system like Metrolink or a rail system like Merseyrail? Currently, we fully fund it through ticket prices. The ticket price has to cover the borrowing and the running of the service. This is something that we have never been given. As far as I am concerned, it is something that we should be given to make public transport more affordable for people outside London.

Tim Bowles: I am delighted that you raised local rail, Simon. You will remember from the time when we worked together how passionate I am about the suburban rail services that we are building. I know from your constituency work how keen you are on rail in east Devon.

As you know, we are still working on delivering MetroWest, which will be a transformational suburban rail network. While I do not have precise numbers to answer your direct question, what we have been doing with our operators as we were planning our suburban rail network is looking at how to build into our franchise agreements with the operators how revenue models work.

I do not have a model at the moment to give you a direct answer, but what we were looking at was actually how we were building that. Clearly, all those negotiations are now being reviewed, given Covid, but for me suburban rail is one of the big ambitions to make sure that we are delivering in this part of the world.

Q304 **Simon Jupp:** Thank you, Tim. I appreciate that an awful lot of you are



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talking about needing clarity from the Government. Obviously, one of the key things is that we need clarity from you when it comes to Government with regard to negotiations over how much funding you need. I appreciate that some of those discussions may be confidential.

This is a question for everyone on the panel. If passenger numbers remain low on rail and tram services for the foreseeable future, for some of the reasons we have already explored this morning, have you considered whether those services are viable in the long term and whether you might have to actually close some rail or tram services in your regions?

Andy Burnham: I seriously considered mothballing Metrolink in the lockdown. As I said before, we were late getting the funding package and we could not have sustained losses of £6 million on the council tax or by whacking up fares.

As we sit here today, I have no certainty beyond August, so I do not know. We could not sustain losses at that level. Ticket prices are as low as we can get them, but they are still higher than London, as I keep saying. It is really tough. We need an ability to plan for the long term. I do not think it would be right to see a package in some parts of the country that keeps ticket prices low, and then we are left in the invidious position of either raising council tax, asking our districts for more money or raising ticket prices on the travelling public. Those would be the options to try to maintain services. None of them is palatable in the current climate.

Q305 **Simon Jupp:** Steve, have you considered closing services?

Steve Rotheram: Not at this moment in time, but it is not beyond the realms of what we have to consider. I am not certain that everybody fully understands how budgets for public transport are constructed.

Andy has just mentioned a really important point that the Committee should consider. We put a hell of a burden on our constituent local authorities, who pay a levy. That levy is used to subsidise buses, trains, ferries, and so on. Yet our local authorities have been absolutely battered during 10 years of austerity, and over the distribution of Covid support. They have literally been hollowed out, so there is no way in which our local authorities would be a cash cow for us to tap to run public services. If the Government do not step in, we have to look at a solution on fares, cutting routes, ditching services, closing stations or reducing numbers. These are all factors that we will have to consider as a combined authority.

Metro Mayors are only the directly elected representatives of those areas. The constituent body is made up of six local authorities in my particular area, 10 in Andy's and five or whatever it is in Tim's. They have to help us come to those decisions, to ensure that we have a public transport system that is worthy of the name at the end of this. If we need to



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receive subsidy, why shouldn't we, when other sectors and other geographical areas will be getting support?

Q306 **Simon Jupp:** I am conscious of the time, but the same question to Tim.

Tim Bowles: The question was about considering the future of certain services. If we focus on bus, which is where we have a more direct relationship with operators, we expect our services by about 5 July to return to about 80% of the routes. Tough asks and tough calls were made by operators, working with my colleagues on our integrated transport authority, around which services had to be mothballed.

There will be discussions taking place around the viability of those routes as they return. We had big ambitions, as you know from your old days, to increase our bus services through our bus strategy. That is why we had such a positive record in those spaces. We are really committed to seeing bus usage, train usage and public transport increase. Mothballing had to take place. We are slowly returning those, but there will be a very big question around the viability of a lot of those routes for the future.

Simon Jupp: Thank you to all the panel, and good luck accessing the Treasury's PayPal account.

Q307 **Robert Largan:** It is no secret that the hospitality industry, pubs and restaurants have been enormously impacted. Andy, I would be very interested to know what work you are doing to try to re-plan transport in your area to help support the night-time economy. If you have any thoughts, Steve and Tim, I would also like to know.

Right now, the last train from Manchester to Buxton is at 9.24, and from Manchester to Glossop it is 10 o'clock. There would be lots more people, as lockdown eases and pubs and restaurants start to reopen, who would be staying in the city centre and spending money in those businesses if they could get back safely and reliably. What work is being done there? It would be useful to know.

Andy Burnham: I strongly agree with you about the poor quality of night-time transport in the regions. I speak as somebody who goes to a lot of music gigs in Manchester. I never see an encore because I always have to run for the last train to my part of the world. It is a world away from what people expect in London.

What could we do? Obviously, we are grateful that the Government have brought the Northern franchise under public control. That offers more opportunity to ensure that we get services when people want to use them, as we look to reshape the timetable.

I ran Metrolink into the early hours over the recent Christmas and new year period on the advice of our night-time economy adviser, Sacha Lord. It is a question of funding. It is a challenge to run the services and the timetable that we have. We have an aspiration for later-running public transport, into the early hours. At the moment, we would not necessarily



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have the budget year-round to pay for that. With regard to rail, it would require a change to the timetable, and of course funding, to support later services.

Chair: Perish the thought that there is not a good night to be had in Liverpool or Bristol, but I want to move on to active travel—cycling and walking. Ruth Cadbury will take us through that.

Q308 **Ruth Cadbury:** The Government have been quite radical on active travel with the coronavirus initiatives. Have they done enough, and how will you ensure that walking and cycling remain long term a common mode of travel to a much higher extent than prior to the pandemic?

Andy Burnham: You are right; they have been radical. This is one area where we can absolutely say that they have gone out in a bold way, and in a very welcome way. They have helped in a range of ways with regard to funding for emergency active travel schemes. A week or so ago, we all put in bids for the funding that was set aside. We are looking to create around 200 km of emergency active travel provision for cyclists and pedestrians. That is very welcome.

Some of our local authorities have already put in traffic cones to create commuter routes on some of our main routes into the city. Trafford Council has done that on the A56. That is a very busy road, but it now has cones down it, providing space for active travel.

It is happening in Liverpool and Bristol. It is very positive. Predating the crisis, we had a plan for what we call the B network, which was developed by Chris Boardman, our cycling and walking commissioner. We had already dedicated the transforming cities fund largely to the building of that. We are about to accelerate a number of schemes under that. We approved the funding for it yesterday. There is probably more going on in that space than anything else, to be honest, right now. As I said, the public are responding. Cycling trips are up considerably; over 20%.

Tim Bowles: We are very supportive of the way the Government have made announcements. What we, as the people who are charged with delivering this, need to see from DFT is their ability to be as agile and flexible as we need them to be to get that delivery.

We are all still in the process of bidding into the different tranches. What we are doing as a combined authority is underwriting that, so that our local authorities have been able to start delivering. Whether it has been in Bath, south Gloucestershire or in Bristol, across the whole region, our authorities, who are the people who deliver on that space, are able to do that because we are underwriting the Government.

We are also committing, all being well in our Friday committee, an additional sum of money in the region of another £10 million. We will be looking to try to take some of the temporary measures that are effective and make them longer term and more permanent. In terms of delivering the modal shift that we genuinely need, we have—again through a DFT



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initiative—a local cycling and walking infrastructure plan coming for sign-off, which will give us the ability to work with Government on the much bigger sums we need. We go way beyond that in active travel in our local transport plan.

The other thing I would like to bring in is that, because of the nature of our region, we are also trying to make sure that we build cycling and walking into the new hubs—park and ride, stations and so on—so that people can use different modes across a journey and effectively leave the car at home. That is the sort of thing we have to start thinking about: how we do things differently to get real modal shift.

Steve Rotheram: The first thing is that we need to change the culture around cycling. That is about educating drivers and making it much safer for cyclists. There are a whole host of things that we need to do, including improving our roads. Being a cyclist, Ruth, you will know that potholes are an absolute nightmare and very dangerous. What we want to do is to encourage more people into cycling. That means you have to think about it strategically. Don't build 400 metres of cycle lane that doesn't go anywhere at either end. You just create pinch points and all sorts of obstructions. That gets people in cars angry and does not make it as safe as it needs to be for cyclists.

We are doing it in the round. Andy has Chris Boardman. Simon O'Brien is our tsar, if you like. He is our commissioner for cycling. We are looking at it in the round. For instance, we asked people about cycling. We did a survey and 70% responded positively that they would become a cyclist if we could make it safer for them. We have cycling safety schemes. I think one of them is the largest in the whole country. We are training thousands of young kids in cycling.

Some people cannot afford bikes. We are helping people at the wrong end of the socioeconomic ladder to purchase bikes. There are also schemes for people in work who can pay it off, bit by bit, over an extended period and get a very expensive bike. Some of the e-bikes now are brilliant. I don't know if you have seen them. The whole thing is about trying to see whether we can make it much more attractive. That means, again, that we have to pull many strands together because it is really fragmented. We have pop-up cycle lanes in Liverpool at the moment and across the city region. It is gathering momentum. It is part of "Build back better".

We should not lose all those good things and return to the bad old days, after Covid and the pandemic, hopefully, is overcome. We need to retain the best bits of what we are currently doing, including integrating cycling in our public transport strategies, as we have done. I mentioned our new trains. I am sure that at some stage the Committee will come to see those trains when they are running. You can walk straight on with cycles. We can get 10 times as many cycles on our trains now.

Andy Burnham: Chair, can I—



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Chair: Andy, I'm sorry but we only have 10 minutes until you need to go. I want Lilian and Sam Tarry to have a chance.

Q309 **Lilian Greenwood:** Disabled people have often raised concerns with this Committee about how their needs are taken into account. That is particularly a concern when things are changing very rapidly, whether it is wearing face masks, but they are not required in taxis and private hire vehicles, or whether it is limited capacity on public transport, changing the layout of city centres or perhaps even using coaches that are not always accessible. Can you tell us how you have consulted with disabled people during this period? Could you give one example of the impact that has had on the changes or proposals you have put forward?

Steve Rotheram: Thanks, Lilian; great to see you again. I will give you a practical example because we are short of time. We are going to introduce new trains. We could just buy off-the-shelf type trains, not that there are off-the-shelf type trains. We could just buy something that did not suit our needs. We actually consulted with disability groups and with people with disabilities to part-design what those trains would look like, and the accessibility points on them.

There is what is called the platform train interface. The train comes in, and on the tube it is "Mind the gap" and all that. Ours does not have a gap. Our trains come into the platform and they are bang on level. A plate comes out for the last few inches between the actual train and the platform.

Q310 **Lilian Greenwood:** That is great, Steve, but I was really asking about the urgent measures that are being brought in to deal with the pandemic. Was there anything particular in that period that you introduced? It is great news about the trains, of course.

Steve Rotheram: Those trains are being introduced now. During the pandemic, there were things like masks, and we are looking at audiovisual signage for people with disabilities. It is not just about them being in wheelchairs, for instance. We are doing everything we can. We are consulting widely. We have an active travel group on Merseytravel that consults on all of these issues. We get round to our communities all the time, not just during the pandemic but all the time.

Q311 **Lilian Greenwood:** Tim, are there any examples from transport in your neck of the woods of the way disabled people have been taken into account in responding to the pandemic?

Tim Bowles: I will try to be very brief. The last ministerial visit we had from Baroness Vere, funnily enough, was when we were with her looking at disabled access on to the new buses that we have in the region. We specifically had a cross-section of disabled groups in that meeting to pick up learning.

We have been picking that up with our operators, who have also been doing work on training their drivers. The critical point is making sure that



drivers are aware of the challenges for different people in terms of access and non-visible disabilities, to try to make sure that the people who are interacting on a daily basis have better training and understanding. It is difficult on older vehicles; we know that. We are trying to work with the operators to make sure that the people who have the contact have the awareness and the training.

Q312 **Lilian Greenwood:** Andy?

Andy Burnham: Thanks, Lilian; good to see you. We have a disabled people's panel in Greater Manchester. I have had a meeting with them during this period. There are a couple of quick issues to point to.

One is a concern around the use of face masks. Some people, particularly perhaps with autism, do not feel comfortable wearing face masks. I think that has been taken on board, so there is not a heavy-handed approach to enforcement. Frontline staff have been told to show understanding as to why some people may not feel comfortable wearing a face mask. That is the feedback we have.

Another issue is one that the Committee was brilliant on, when you were Chair, I think. That is pavement parking, and when we are talking more about promoting cycling and walking, that issue becomes a bigger question outside London, where we do not have the same powers. That is a call that we have renewed.

It goes back to the point I was going to mention to Ruth. Given that there will be more pressure on road and pavement space now, giving us the powers to enforce moving traffic offences is going to become critical as we have people competing for pavement and road space going forward. We need more ability to manage that space. That is related to the pavement parking point.

We probably should have done more, Lilian, but I have had a discussion with the disabled people's panel. The biggest issue they raise is more access to digital communications. That has been the biggest isolating factor, not transport so much. They found transport easier to use in this period, as opposed to normal transport.

Lilian Greenwood: Thank you. There are many more questions that I could raise, but I am conscious of the time.

Q313 **Sam Tarry:** This is a question for all three Mayors. You only have a few minutes to answer it, but can we think about what the long-term impacts of the pandemic will be on how people travel, and what that means for transport investment and your priorities for each of your cities or regions? Within that, I am thinking about specific devolved decision-making powers you might need that might help restart the process of local transport, in the context of what is going on with the pandemic.

Andy Burnham: This is a massive opportunity to reform public transport. Whether we like it or not, there is going to be public subsidy in



the system for the foreseeable future. On Friday, we publish the consultation on the proposed franchising scheme that Greater Manchester put forward. This is the first authority to look at the Bus Services Act and the potential use of the powers in it.

We would say that this situation does not mean that you stall reform. It is a moment to accelerate reform. The powers that we need are in the Bus Services Act. They are increasingly bringing rail into the mix. This is the moment to create London-style integrated transport in all our great city regions, including the three you have on this call this morning.

Steve Rotheram: I will not repeat what Andy has said. The Bus Services Act 2017 is almost impenetrable in bits. We need to make it easier to get it implemented for transport authorities who want to go down a franchise route for their bus services. It is pulling it all together. We need a London-style integrated transport system for areas. It has worked in London for decades. We can get something similar. We stand willing and able to do that. We just need the Government to work with us.

Q314 **Sam Tarry:** Tim, there is obviously a slightly different challenge for you in a different area geographically.

Tim Bowles: In fairness, Sam, it is a similar challenge. Integrated transport is the only route for us. We have already shown with buses that we can increase patronage. That was primarily because of infrastructure investment. As we move past the recovery stage, we need to continue being able to invest in the infrastructure to make sure that our buses are providing a real alternative and to leave cars at home. Hooking that in with our new challenges or ambitions around suburban rail starts to give us an integrated platform that we can work with.

We then have as a region a longer-term ambition around mass rapid transit, creating the layers that we see in other city regions at the moment. That will give us an integrated transport portfolio. We can then operate at combined authority level to manage and invest in that, and see general modal shift, linking active travel into that whole piece. That is a very speed-through answer.

Sam Tarry: Chair, do I have time for one more?

Chair: As long as it is to one person only.

Q315 **Sam Tarry:** I will ask Andy, as Steve's answer might be similar. London had its direct operating grant cut by £900 million year on year. That has had a massive impact. Are you and most of the other Mayors in agreement that there needs to be direct public subsidy to enable us to have an integrated transport system in the cities, or indeed in the regions?

Andy Burnham: Yes, absolutely. I do not necessarily support the deal that was done because I think it was unfair in some ways in terms of the strings that were attached. The level of the deal for London, £1.6 billion,



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reflects that Governments of all colours have never built up transport outside London. We would never get close to spending that kind of money, but I would have preferred to see a better deal for London.

Going forward, I think the direction of travel should be to subsidise public transport and bring down the cost of public transport. That is a responsible environmental policy, and it is the direction of travel around Europe. Cities are reducing public transport to very low levels because of the benefit to the environment of getting a shift from cars. This country should follow suit, in my view.

Public transport is far too expensive in our country. All tickets, and rail tickets in particular, are way too expensive. We need to move in a different direction and make it much more affordable, and, in particular, more affordable outside London. It is most expensive in some of the poorest parts of the country.

Sam Tarry: Thank you very much, all three of you.

Q316 **Robert Largan:** I have a final question for Andy. You have already talked about the work that Chris Boardman and you are doing on cycling, which is really positive and excellent. Lots of people in Manchester want to come out to the Peaks. Lots of people in High Peak want to cycle into Greater Manchester. What work are you doing with Derbyshire County Council to make certain that the work they are doing on cycling and the work you and Chris Boardman are doing on cycling matches up? That would be something that could have a big benefit for a lot of people.

Andy Burnham: You are absolutely right, Robert. That is a really good question. It is less to do with Derbyshire County Council and more to do with Dan Jarvis as Mayor of the Sheffield City Region, and with the National Trust, which covers part of your constituency. We have ambitions to create high-quality cycle routes from Manchester to Sheffield and everywhere in between. We think it would be a big thing if we could pull it off. It is an ambition at the moment, but it is one we would love to work with you and Derbyshire County Council on. I think it would be highly utilised if we were able to bring it about.

Chair: Thank you very much, all three of you. I am conscious that we have just run out of time. We had so much more that we wanted to ask you. You have talked about some exciting matters, as well as the difficult challenges. I very much hope that, as a Committee, we can come and see all three of your regions and find out more.

Thank you again. I wish you and all of your teams well and thank you for what you are doing. Mayor Bowles, Mayor Burnham and Mayor Rotherham, thank you very much.