



Department
for Transport

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Lord Moylan

Built Environment Committee

House of Lords

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Dear Daniel,

‘Public Transport in Towns and Cities’ debate

Thank you again for the Built Environment Committee’s ‘Public Transport in Towns and Cities’ report and for securing the subsequent Grand Committee debate. As promised, I am writing to address the points raised in the debate that, due to time constraints, I was unable to address directly in my closing remarks. I am copying this letter to everyone who spoke in the debate and will place a copy of it in the Library of the House.

Local transport plans and local plans

A recurring theme during the debate was the importance of local transport planning in the wider context of local planning. As part of this discussion, Lord Best asked for an update on the Department for Transport’s progress with local transport plan guidance. Given the importance of this issue and the frequency with which it was raised during the debate, I want to set out the Government’s position as clearly as possible.

Integrated planning is an essential component of the new Local Transport Plan (LTP) guidance. It will set out best practice in discharging the statutory functions of consulting the local planning authority in the development of an LTP. To answer Lord Best’s question, the DfT hopes to be able to publish the consultation on new LTP guidance soon after the local elections, with a view to having the final guidance in place by the end of the year.

The Department is also working closely with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on wider planning reforms. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill contains a new requirement for local authorities to produce Infrastructure Delivery Strategies in close collaboration with stakeholders and infrastructure providers. Infrastructure Delivery Strategies will help to align

Local Transport Plans with the Local Plan-making process to ensure they are mutually supportive and drive forward sustainable patterns of development.

Levelling up mission and spending per capita

Lord Grocott requested an update on the DfT's progress with its levelling up mission to, by 2030, bring standards of local public transport connectivity significantly closer to those of London.

The core programmes that will contribute to delivery of DfT's mission are Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding and City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements (CRSTS). DfT has robust evaluation plans in place for both programmes. We have commissioned the Bus Transformation evaluation, which includes the delivery of programme-level monitoring and process, impact and value for money evaluation of initiatives implemented through BSIPs. One of the aims of the evaluation is to develop a comprehensive understanding of the impact and effectiveness of BSIPs and wider bus investments. DfT is also planning a five-year evaluation programme that will explore the delivery, impact, and value for money of the CRSTS programme. It will include the development of a national evaluation framework that can be used to collate and synthesise evidence on the overall impact of CRSTS.

The Department is still finalising the metrics it will use to measure progress against the levelling up mission to 2030. The Levelling Up White Paper was accompanied by a Technical Annex which set out a preliminary set of metrics, which included measures considering the modes of transport that individuals use to travel to work and bus punctuality. As set out in the Technical Annex, the DfT is also developing a new measure to estimate connectivity between regions and places.

Lord Grocott also asked whether it is the Department's intention to reduce regional disparities on spending per capita. In response to your letter of 3 February, the Secretary of State wrote to the Committee in March to provide clarity on this issue.

Buses

Another central theme of the Grand Committee debate was the importance of good local bus provision. As part of that discussion, you and Baroness Taylor of Stevenage raised concerns about concessions on buses. Baroness Taylor also asked whether there are robust processes in place for bus user consultation, and whether public operators will be allowed to take part in franchising schemes.

On concessionary fares, local authorities are able to voluntarily introduce discretionary concessions for certain groups of people. These decisions are

made and funded locally. In the National Bus Strategy, the Government committed to reviewing aspects of the concessionary bus travel scheme. The Department is undertaking this review in 2023. We will look at the value for money of the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme, as well as reimbursement guidance, appeals and the reimbursement calculator. DfT will use the conclusions of the review to help inform any future changes to concessionary policy.

On passenger engagement, the BSIP guidance that accompanied the National Bus Strategy made clear that BSIPs must report the views of passengers and third parties. This should include passenger survey data, as well as views of local transport users' groups. BSIPs must also include Passengers' Charters, giving users rights to certain standards of service relating to, for example, punctuality, vehicle cleanliness and information provision. The Strategy stipulated that there must be means of ensuring these standards are met and mechanisms for redress at a local level.

Regarding franchising, the Transport Act 2000 introduced powers that allow all Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) in England to franchise their local bus services. Under franchising, the MCA is responsible for all elements of the bus network – e.g. routes, timetables and fares – which is the same as TfL in London. However, they must tender for the provision of the services themselves with local private sector bus operators (as well as municipal companies) who will run the bus services 'on the ground'. Those local bus operators can also apply to the franchising authority for a service permit that allows them to run local bus services that are independent of the franchised network. So far only the Greater Manchester Combined Authority has decided to adopt franchising – five other MCAs in England are also preparing a franchising assessment and will need to decide, in the light of that assessment, whether to adopt franchising. Other types of local authority, such as county councils, can also apply to the Secretary of State for access to franchising powers. So far, none have done so.

E-scooters

Lord Berkeley and Lord Haselhurst raised the topics of e-scooter legislation, training and enforcement.

The Government recognises concerns that e-scooters must be safe for those on the road, especially the most vulnerable. Updated guidance was issued to local authorities and trial areas on 22 February 2022. This included additional requirements designed to enhance existing safety measures, including the introduction of unique identification numbers to aid enforcement and minimum training levels to enhance rider capability. Enforcement of offences relating to unlawful use of powered transporters is an operational matter for individual Chief Officers of police in conjunction with local policing plans.

When parliamentary time allows, the Government intends to introduce legislation for micromobility vehicles and create a new Low-speed Zero Emission Vehicle (LZEV) category which is distinct from the cycle and motor vehicle categories. The intention is for this to be a future-proofed, adaptable framework that will enable Government to set proportionate rules for vehicles that we see today, such as e-scooters, and vehicles that are not yet invented.

Once the Department has consulted on its proposals for future regulations, it will consider what updates are required to the Highway Code, alongside a wider communications strategy for alerting the public to forthcoming legislative changes and integration of a new vehicle type on our roads.

Electricity supply

Finally, I wish to take the opportunity to address your concern regarding electricity supply for electric vehicles (EVs). The Government is confident that the grid will be able to cope with increased demand from electric vehicles. Ensuring the electricity networks are able to cope with current and future demand from EVs is the responsibility of electricity network operators, and they are incentivised to do so through the regulatory framework set out by Ofgem, the independent regulator. The Government expects the transition to EVs to create significant new demand for electricity, and it has mechanisms in place to cope with this.

Smart charging of EVs (at off-peak times) can reduce peak demand from EV charging by ensuring it can flex to grid needs. In December 2021, the Government made legislation to mandate that most private chargepoints in domestic and workplace settings must include smart functionality and meet minimum device-level requirements, such as on cybersecurity.

Once again, I thank noble Lords for their interest in these issues and for their participation in the debate.

Yaws,
Charlotte

BARONESS VERE OF NORBITON