

Go-Ahead – Written evidence (TTS0010)

Background

Go-Ahead is a leading UK public transport operator, providing high quality services.

We run bus companies across the country, from Plymouth to Newcastle, and provide a quarter of Transport for London (TfL) services. Nationally we operate 5,200 buses, and pre-pandemic we carried more than two million passengers a day. We successfully led the call for the creation of a National Bus Strategy to revitalise a mode of transport which provides two-thirds of all public transport journeys in the UK. Delivery of the National Bus Strategy (Bus Back Better) and of revitalising rail through effective delivery of the Williams-Shapps Plan should play a key role in a green recovery from the pandemic.

Go-Ahead operates the largest UK rail franchise carrying around 20% of all passenger journeys, Govia Thameslink Railway.

Internationally, we provide bus services in Singapore and Ireland, and rail services in Germany and Norway. We employ around 27,000 people globally.

Summary

- Public transport and active travel play an essential role for thriving, healthy and sustainable communities, and shouldn't just be seen within the domain of transport policy.
- Government action is required to deliver its stated ambitions to make it easier for people to choose active travel and public transport. This could be through national measures, such as road pricing or by dissuading short local journeys by car where alternatives are available, or local measures like bus priority lanes and making public transport and active travel links a requirement for new urban or suburban housing developments.
- The Government has a target to deliver 4,000 new zero emission buses by 2024 but is not on track to meet it. To accelerate the national transition to zero emission, we would like to see:
 - reform of the Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) to incentivise zero emission mileage
 - innovation in financing (e.g. leasing models for vehicles or batteries)
 - a strategic approach to power upgrades and infrastructure
 - reduced reliance on competition-based grant funding which is cumbersome, distorts priorities and allocates funding inefficiently.

1. What are the current and anticipated levels of public transport demand and capacity in towns and cities in England? What influences public transport travel patterns? How does the choice of public transport vary across different demographic groups?

- 1.1. Buses are the dominant mode of public transport for intra-urban journeys in England, and nearly two thirds of all public transport journeys. On average, in 2019, there were 50 local bus trips per person. 25% of people took the bus at

least every week but just under half took it less than once a year.¹ Rail is more significant for inter-urban journeys; surface rail accounts for 2% of total trips but 10% of total distance travelled. Nevertheless, the preponderance of passengers on some networks, such as Govia Thameslink's, were commuters in 2019.

- 1.2. However, trips per person per year on bus declined 25% in the nine years to 2019². Three main factors were involved with this:
 - 1.2.1. *Cuts in funding for Local Authority supported services* – 46% cut since 2010/11³, with some authorities not providing any supported services.
 - 1.2.2. *Social change* – ongoing rising car ownership in some areas (e.g. carless households have declined in the North East of England from 29% in 2011 to 17% in 2020, the English average excl. London⁴), the decline in physical retail and rise of online shopping & entertainment. These trends, along with working from home, have been accelerated by Covid.
 - 1.2.3. *Congestion* – 14% increase in UK's largest cities over five years (pre Covid).
- 1.3. The shift towards working from home for office-based employment has led to significant differences by location in relative passenger numbers. In Plymouth, demand has remained relatively robust, achieving up to 90% of pre Covid passenger numbers. In Brighton, demand has been more suppressed, generally staying below 70%. Where there is high office-based employment, there is more variation across the week with customer numbers lower on Mondays and Fridays.
- 1.4. Covid and the 'avoid public transport' message in 2020 generated fear. 'The virus takes the bus' campaign (early 2021) stigmatised public transport. Passengers and non-passengers have significantly different perceptions of safety from covid on public transport. Transport Focus data shows that while only 58% and 66% of non-users would, respectively, feel safe from Covid on a bus or train, 87% of bus users and rail users feel safe from Covid.⁵
- 1.5. The problem has been institutionalised. Professional and trade bodies, advisors and employers of all sizes are recovering from the pandemic alongside other business critical priorities. So, advice and working practices related to managing the COVID risk don't snap back as quickly as they were applied. For instance, organisations must manage employee hesitancy and review their own advice that stems from long-since updated guidance. The CIPD highlights that "many employees may have legitimate concerns about using public transport, especially as government advice says crowded transport may be an issue."⁶ It was recently reported that Government agency ACAS was advising employers that they should provide extra car parking so staff could avoid public transport⁷

¹ National Travel Survey, NTS0313: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/nts03-modal-comparisons>

² National Travel Survey, NTS0303: [National Travel Survey: 2020 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/nts03-modal-comparisons)

³ Campaign for Better Transport, 2018, Buses in Crisis, [New report shows rural public transport is in crisis | Campaign For Better Transport](https://www.campaignforbettertransport.org.uk/news/new-report-shows-rural-public-transport-is-in-crisis)

⁴ NTS9902: Household car ownership by region, [Region and Rural-Urban Classification - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/nts9902-household-car-ownership-by-region)

⁵ Passenger confidence barometer, 18 February: [Home - Transport Focus](https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/news/home-transport-focus)

⁶ [Coronavirus: workplace safety FAQs | CIPD](https://www.cipd.co.uk/news/coronavirus-workplace-safety-faqs) (31 Jan 2022, accessed 24 February)

⁷ [Government agency encourages staff to drive instead of using public transport to avoid catching Covid | The Independent](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/government/government-agency-acas-staff-drive-public-transport-avoid-covid-b1000000.html)

- 1.6. This 'fear factor' has reduced discretionary travel on public transport in some instances, probably among less frequent users. Uptake of Oxford Bus Company park and ride services lags the overall figures for our Oxford services. However, demand for leisure travel on Saturdays returned towards 2019 levels much faster than weekday services.
- 1.7. Greater vulnerability and fear has suppressed demand amongst older people.
- 1.8. Young people are less likely to own a driving licence (35% of 17-20 year olds and 62% of 21-29 year olds compared to an average of 75% in 2019)⁸. Pre Covid our Go North East company achieved double digit growth in youth bus travel by introducing simple cheap fares for under 18s, with other operators then following its lead. Likewise, Plymouth Citybus introduced a £1 fare for under 18s during school holidays.
- 1.9. Long-term factors affecting the demand for public transport also include density of cities and the cost or availability of parking.
 - 1.9.1. The essential conclusion from the Centre for Cities report, *Comparing public transport in the UK and Europe's biggest cities*, was that UK cities are less dense than their European comparators. So, while the spatial coverage of public transport networks in places like Newcastle – served by Go North East – is equivalent to a European counterpart, the size of the market is much smaller.⁹ Transport for New Homes' update report described 'cowpat' housing developments (new housing built on fields separately to existing urban areas) which typically promised walkability but in practice built in car dependency.¹⁰
 - 1.9.2. *Cost or availability of parking* – Oxford has encouraged a high proportion of public transport journeys into its city centre by limiting car parking availability and through charging. Its 2,999 city centre public parking spaces are the most expensive in the UK outside London¹¹. Oxford's zero emission zone began operations on the 28th of February. However, there are 15,929 workplace parking spaces in Oxford outside the city centre. Well over half of these are in the 'Eastern Arc' of the city where there is a high propensity to drive to work. The 'Connecting Oxford' joint local authority strategy proposes a Workplace Parking Levy to enable a shift to more sustainable transport.¹²

2. How might public transport travel patterns shift in the next 10 years? What impact could digitalisation and the COVID-19 pandemic have on travel patterns in the long term?

- 2.1. Covid accelerated trends like aspects of digitalisation, e.g. working from home, online retail. Public transport will continue to be fundamentally impacted by 'mega trends' – climate change, urbanisation, digitalisation and an ageing population.

⁸ NTS0201: Full car driving licence holders by age and gender: England (with chart). https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1016874/nts0201.ods

⁹ Centre for Cities also concludes that this suppresses the competitiveness of UK cities. [Measuring-Up-Comparing-Public-Transport-in-the-UK-and-Europes-Biggest-Cities.pdf](https://centreforcities.org/Comparing-Public-Transport-in-the-UK-and-Europes-Biggest-Cities.pdf) (centreforcities.org)

¹⁰ [Building-Car-Dependency-2022.pdf](https://transportfornewhomes.org.uk/Building-Car-Dependency-2022.pdf) (transportfornewhomes.org.uk)

¹¹ [Oxford second most expensive place in UK for parking](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/oxford-second-most-expensive-place-in-uk-for-parking) | Oxford Mail

¹² [connecting_oxford_brochure.pdf](https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/media/10000/Connecting_Oxford_Brochure.pdf) (oxfordshire.gov.uk)

- 2.2. Climate change will require a shift in behaviours as well as adoption of zero emission fleets. DfT's Decarbonising Transport plan refers to public transport and active travel as the 'natural first choice' for local journeys. Around 9-12% of car mileage must be shifted to walking, cycling or public transport by 2035 and 17% by 2050 according to the Climate Change Committee¹³. To fulfil this aim will need a range of measures that encourage, nudge and cajole. Public messaging should ask people to 'Walk and cycle where possible, alternatively, take public transport. Only drive when you really need to'. Measures to make it faster and safer to walk, cycle, use the bus and rail are important. Road pricing should address the significant subsidy currently provided to electric car owners, who are wealthier.
- 2.3. *Urbanisation* – Covid is not likely to impact the long term trend towards urbanisation. Although Covid led to speculation of urban depopulation, GLA City Intelligence are suggesting that London's population has been increasing since Spring 2021, albeit at a slower rate.¹⁴
- 2.4. *Digitalisation*
 - 2.4.1. It's never been easier to work from home and the limitations of working from home for relationships and genuine collaboration have never been clearer.
 - 2.4.2. Meanwhile, there is increased opportunity – and expectation to deliver real time information and integrated journeys.
 - 2.4.3. Much better use of data (of carriage 'loadings', staff and passenger apps) also enabled Govia Thameslink to respond more accurately and swiftly to – and influence – demand fluctuations through the pandemic, alongside traditional communication channels.
- 2.5. *Ageing population* – The baby boomer generation are now pensioners or soon to be. 87% of sexagenarians in 2020 have a driving licence, compared to just 70% in 2002 and 35% in 1976.¹⁵ The number of people aged 85 and over is projected to double in the next 25 years and are distributed unevenly across the country. The working age population, who might provide home services, will proportionately shrink¹⁶. This will increase need for transport services and they will be new to many. In our response to question 4 we cover potential innovations to encourage more non-users to take the bus, including demand responsive services.
- 2.6. Levels of public transport adoption over the next decade will be influenced significantly by these trends and the policy choices taken by Government and Parliament.

3. What can be done to improve connectivity across public transport modes? How could better integration be delivered in urban areas outside London?

- 3.1. The recent Levelling Up White Paper set out an aim of achieving London-style public transport services across England by 2030. Three main challenges to achieving that involve: tackling congestion, keeping fares affordable (whilst ensuring services are financially sustainable) and providing integrated ticketing.

¹³ <https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Sector-summary-Surface-transport.pdf>

¹⁴ [Population change in London during the pandemic - London Datastore](#) – Update Feb 2022

¹⁵ NTS0201: [Driving licence holding and vehicle availability - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁶ [2020-based population projections: a GAD technical bulletin - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

- 3.2. *Tackling congestion* – a 10% increase in journey time leads to 10% reduction in patronage¹⁷, and makes services more expensive to operate. At the start of 2020, five Go North East routes each cost £100k more per year to operate than five years previously. The costs associated with the former London to Oxford X90 coach service increased significantly when journey times to and from London exceeded four and a half hours, necessitating paid breaks.
- 3.3. As recognised in Bus Back Better, bus priority journeys enables a 'virtuous circle' whereby we can deliver more attractive – faster – services and keep costs low, enabling more investment in better services.
- 3.4. The solutions for demand management will vary by location (e.g. parking levies, as mentioned in answer 1 regarding Oxford). Cities like Birmingham, Bath and Oxford have followed London in having urban charging schemes based on vehicle emissions, but as the transition to low/zero emissions continues, cities will need to consider congestion charging schemes like those successfully established in cities as diverse as London¹⁸, Stockholm and Singapore.
- 3.5. *Keeping fares affordable* – London fares helped boost bus demand in London but comes with a price tag. In TfL's 2019/20 budget the London bus network planned for £722m in subsidy. Some services have recently been cut back due to financial pressures.
- 3.6. Bus fares are generally less than £5 per day for journeys within a city or town¹⁹. We recognise the potential for fares initiatives to help increase access to public transport.
- 3.7. We welcome the Superbus network fares initiatives being piloted as part of Bus Back Better. We are participating in Transport for Cornwall's initiative, due to be launched this Spring, so tickets can be used with any operator on a given route, Day Town Zone tickets for unlimited travel within a town for £3 and reductions for under 19s.²⁰ This is part of the wider goal to integrate services and ticketing.
- 3.8. Last summer some Go-Ahead companies piloted £1 evening fares to encourage bus use and help support the recovery of night-time economy
- 3.9. Our companies have participated in youth fare schemes to retain them as bus users into adulthood.
- 3.10. We do expect there to be fares initiatives through the Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIP) process and we wait to see what funding Government will allocate for these. Ultimately there are funding choices that Government needs to make if it wishes to deliver a step change in bus patronage through reducing fares.
- 3.11. Ahead of the pandemic, the Rail Delivery Group called for substantial fares reform that would make them simple, flexible, fair and providing value for money.²¹ The Williams Shapps Plan for Rail promises improvements including greater simplicity, flexibility and integration.²² With lower levels of commuting anticipated into the future, urgent progress is needed towards encouraging

¹⁷ The Impact of Congestion on Bus Passengers, 2016 [ttbusreport_digital-single-30aug.pdf](https://www.transporttimes.co.uk/ttbusreport_digital-single-30aug.pdf) ([transporttimes.co.uk](https://www.transporttimes.co.uk))

¹⁸ [London's congestion charge](https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/major/london-congestion-charge) | Centre For Public Impact (CPI)

¹⁹ [30281-REP-TAS-National-Fares-Survey-2019.pdf](https://www.taspartnership.co.uk/30281-REP-TAS-National-Fares-Survey-2019.pdf) (taspartnership.co.uk)

²⁰ [Council welcomes reduced bus fare initiatives in boost to low carbon travel](https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/news/council-welcomes-reduced-bus-fare-initiatives-in-boost-to-low-carbon-travel) - Cornwall Council

²¹ [Easier fares for all](https://www.raildeliverygroup.com/easier-fares-for-all) (raildeliverygroup.com)

²² [Great British Railways](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/684441/gbr-plan-for-rail.pdf) (publishing.service.gov.uk)

people to move journeys towards walking, cycling, bus and rail, the number one priority in the transport decarbonisation plan.²³

- 3.12. *Integrated ticketing* – Smart ticketing is the foundation of integration between operators and modes, such as with Transport for London or Transport for Cornwall. Multi-operator ticketing is now available in various locations. For instance, Oxford has had SmartZone in place since 2011. The bus industry has a cost-effective plan to deliver integrated smart ticketing nationally, known as Project Coral. Pilot schemes are due to be rolled out in Bournemouth, Leicester and York this year, and these will test solutions for wider deployment. Project Coral will require c.£15m-20m central Government funding to develop a solution that can enable all areas of the country to have multi-operator ticketing scheme in their area.
- 3.13. Contactless or digital payments also make it easier for, especially infrequent, passengers to access our services. All Go-Ahead buses take contactless. Cash payments on bus have fallen in fewer than four years from over half of transactions to 21%. Brighton & Hove and Crawley now have flexible capping to better cater for part time commuting. 60% of GTR's tickets are digital with only a small percentage of paper tickets bought with cash.
- 3.14. We believe there is potential for 'Mobility as a Service' schemes, where people purchase mobility involving different modes including potentially car hire or cycle hire. However, our experience indicates that it needs local authority leadership (e.g. Kent County Council are currently tendering for a MaaS solution) and some public funding support.
- 3.15. *Accessibility* – Public transport also provides vital connections for disabled people and we are strongly committed to removing barriers to their participation in society. For instance, all of our buses are fully accessible and Govia Thameslink Railway accessible travel policy provides for assistance at rural stations and, while not necessary, shortens the time for pre-booking any assistance to two hours in April.

4. What are the likely areas of innovation in urban public transport over the next 10 years? How should public policy be shaped considering both incremental and transformational innovations? How could data help transport services meet consumer demand?

Modal shift

- 4.1. In addition to removing barriers to multi-modal transport integration, as above, we support policies that will encourage and enable more development of the following
- 4.2. *Better customer information* – Better real time information about services is a key element to enticing non-users to use the bus. Our survey of almost 800 people found that two thirds of non-users wanted a real-time app, especially among 16-30 year olds. Whilst our customer apps provide real time integrated information, having more widespread real time info at bus stops would help reassure occasional/discretionary users. We hope to see more investment in real time information through BSIPs and it is important that this momentum is sustained.
- 4.3. *Mobility hubs*²⁴ – Many authorities are considering the potential of mobility hubs. Go-Ahead commissioned report from Arup highlighting their potential

²³ [Decarbonising Transport – A Better, Greener Britain \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/publications/decarbonising-transport-a-better-greener-britain)

²⁴ [Future Mobility Hubs | The Go-Ahead Group](https://www.go-ahead.co.uk/press-releases/future-mobility-hubs)

for making it easier for people to leave their cars at home in favour of active travel, public transport and micro mobility.

- 4.4. Hubs could include solar-powered heating, lighting, digital services such as WiFi and real-time journey information, bike storage and electric charging points. Larger hubs could be enhanced with gardens, co-working spaces, playgrounds and catering
- 4.5. *Personalised information on environmental impacts* – our apps now provide information on carbon emissions saved by choosing the bus. We anticipate more developments in this area, including air quality measurements at micro level – to help encourage green choices, potentially combined with incentives/rewards.
- 4.6. *Demand responsive services* – Go-Ahead operated the UK's largest demand responsive service (DRT) in Oxford (PickMeUp), averaging 4,000 weekly journeys. Despite its patronage success and some support from local businesses, a lack of local authority support and the impact of congestion on reliability led to the service being withdrawn in June 2020.
- 4.7. We proved the attractiveness of the service, and the technology involved. Since August 2020 we've successfully operated a 'JustGo' DRT service for North Lincolnshire Council, incorporating some of these learnings.
- 4.8. DRT can be an important part of the future but it needs a partnership approach with public sector (and/or local employers) to make it work.
- 4.9. *Putting transport at the heart of the community* – Govia Thameslink's recent collaboration with Energy Garden will install 526 solar panels on its Streatham Hill depot to power the depot and export green energy to local businesses. Income generated from the project would fund education, training and community gardens. Govia Thameslink has also used its stations to host mental health hubs in collaboration with local NHS, supported covid vaccination sites and worked with local charities to refurbish abandoned bikes for the local community. Similarly, targeted initiatives with the Prince's Trust, Groundwork and Kickstart multiply the benefit of training and recruitment investment to support people at risk of local term unemployment.

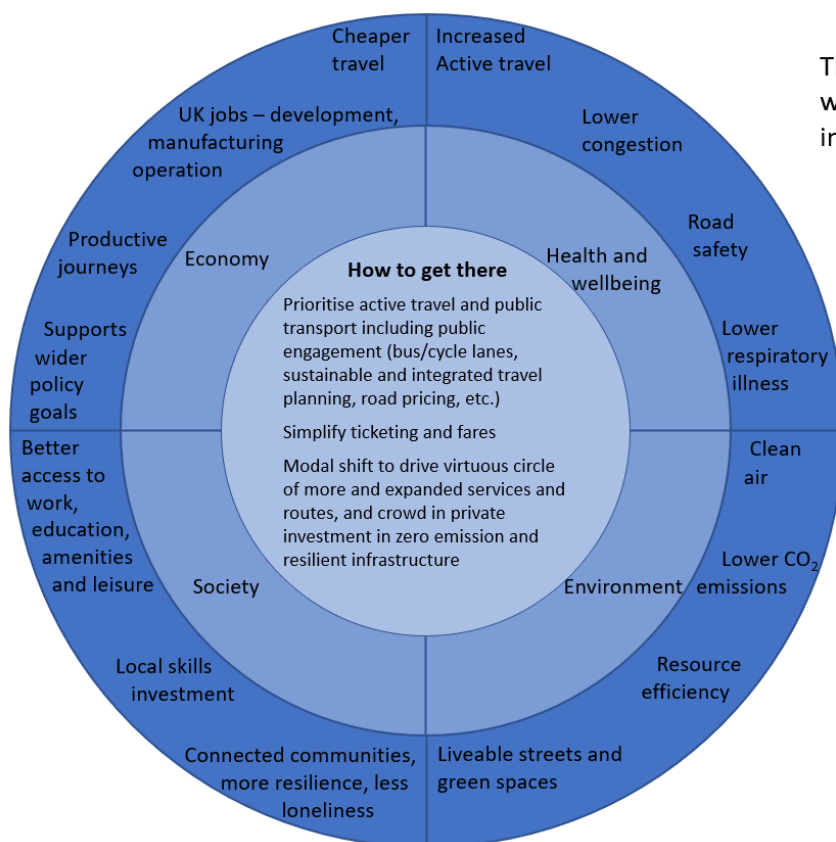
5. Are local authorities well equipped with appropriate funding and powers to deliver high-quality public transport services? Would further devolution of transport policy contribute to better outcomes?

- 5.1. Bus Back Better recognised that local authority capability in regard to bus and local transport was often insufficient and needed to be addressed, including through creation of a Bus Centre of Excellence.
- 5.2. Sub-national transport bodies like Transport for the South East could assist in being a catalyst for programmes like the wider adoption of smart ticketing (often linked to rail corridors), strategic transport planning and development of locally/regional relevant solutions.
- 5.3. However, their relative lack of democratic accountability, compared with Combined Authorities that have directly elected Metro Mayors, provides challenges. There is scope for more devolution of transport powers and policy but it should be done in tandem with devolution of wider powers and roll out of Metro Mayors or Governors, as envisaged in the Levelling Up White Paper. This would enable better coordination with wider urban development and provision of public services. It may help address current challenges where there are differences in approach between county councils with transport responsibility and district councils with planning responsibility.

- 5.4. Public transport operates within the context of the communities they serve, or the built environment. Therefore, public transport is part of and subject to many broader decisions in “place shaping” such as relative priority of public transport and active travel, their integration into new developments, the value placed on accessibility and inclusion, and the ambition and vision for their town centre (see Q6 below).
- 5.5. Effective devolution of transport powers also necessitates ‘critical mass’ to achieve economies of scale and strategic interventions. Depending on geography, devolution can often be best achieved through clusters of local authorities, such as ‘city regions’. An example of this in our operating area include Transport for North East (which itself includes two Combined Authorities). However, Go South Coast’s partnership with Hampshire County Council bucked the national trend prior to 2020 by delivering passenger growth.

6. Could better policy coordination across government departments, and between central and local government, improve public transport outcomes? If so, how can this be achieved?

- 6.1. Public transport and active travel play an essential role for thriving, healthy and sustainable communities, not just within the domain of ‘transport policy’.
- 6.2. Bus services in particular fulfill many wider policy goals. A report for the National Audit Office on bus provision in England²⁵ showed they can positively impact the policy aims of two thirds of Government departments – reduced carbon emissions, economic growth, social inclusion, better air quality, improving public health, tackling loneliness. Our chart below shows some of the wider benefits of active travel and public transport.



²⁵ [Improving local bus services in England outside London - National Audit Office \(NAO\) Report](#)

- 6.3. In doing so, costs can be saved elsewhere, e.g. commissioning of taxi services, health and social care costs arising from loneliness.
- 6.4. We strongly agree that better coordination is important to creating more sustainable communities. Government has put in place a number of initiatives in place such as the blueprint coalition and BEIS's local net zero forum and a clear steer from advisers such as the Committee on Climate Change.
- 6.5. The Treasury's Net Zero Review in October (2021) was "a first step in understanding trade offs over a 30-year transition", published 15 years after the Stern Review²⁶. It was a missed opportunity. The role of public transport was referenced once; this is despite its potential in reducing the total investment required to decarbonise road transport, reducing reliance on oil and gas, or the broader accessibility it provides economically or physically marginalised communities. The review did recognise the unequal access to cars across geography, income and age and that higher income households will benefit most from private electric vehicles.
- 6.6. There's significant scope for further integration, but Government action is first required to deliver its stated ambitions to make it easier for people to choose active travel and public transport. This could be through national measures, such as road pricing or by dissuading short local journeys by car where alternatives are available, or local measures like bus priority lanes and making public transport and active travel links a requirement for new urban or suburban housing developments.

7. Are there other important changes, not covered elsewhere in these questions, which would improve matters?

- 7.1. Decarbonisation is a priority within the delivery of public transport in the coming years. As discussed in our response to Question 2, this must include a significant shift to the use of public transport and active travel in towns and cities
- 7.2. Tackling climate change also necessitates the decarbonisation of our UK fleets. Go-Ahead aims to have zero carbon bus and rail fleets in the UK by 2035, as part of its Climate Change Strategy to become a net zero company by 2045.
- 7.3. Go-Ahead is already an industry leader on zero emission buses (over 260 in UK). We continue to innovate with zero emission buses. We have placed our first order for hydrogen buses, are shortly to introduce opportunity charging and are trialling roof-based solar panels on diesel buses.
- 7.4. The Government has a target to deliver 4,000 new zero emission buses by 2024 but is not on track to meet it. In order to accelerate the national transition to zero emission we would like to see
 - reform of the Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) to incentivise zero emission mileage
 - innovation in financing (e.g. leasing models for vehicles or batteries)
 - a strategic approach to power upgrades and infrastructure
 - reducing reliance on competition-based grant funding. The process is cumbersome, distorts priorities and allocates funding inefficiently.

March 2022

²⁶ Stern Review into the Economics of Climate Change: [\[ARCHIVED CONTENT\] Stern Review final report - HM Treasury \(nationalarchives.gov.uk\)](#)