

## **David Walmsley, Transport Analyst – Written evidence (TTS0051)**

*About the author: Dr David Walmsley, BSc, PhD, CMILT, MCIHT, MTPS*

*I have worked in the field of transport, and particularly public transport, since 1968, and I continue to take an active role. Until I retired I was Fixed Track Executive at the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT), a trade association for the bus, coach and light rail industry, looking after the interests of light rail operators and acting as Secretary of the Light Rail Operators' Group. I was one of two UK representatives on a European tram safety project (COST Action TU1103) and I remain on its successor body, the European Urban Tram Forum, which meets each year to exchange knowledge and experience between tram professionals across most of Europe.*

*Before I joined CPT I worked at the Government's Transport Research Laboratory on a variety of projects, mostly in the field of public transport.*

*I am an Individual Member of the tram industry body UKTram and a Council member of the Light Rail Transit Association.*

### The Call for Evidence

The House of Lords Built Environment Committee has launched an inquiry into public transport in towns and cities in England.

I am pleased to submit this paper as my contribution to this discussion, based on my experience in working in the public transport and light rail industry. My comments are in the form of responses to the eight questions posed in the Call for Evidence.

#### **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?**

Currently the demand for public transport is low, having been depressed by the Covid pandemic. I would expect demand levels to rise again over the next one or two years, but not to their pre-Covid levels. This is because Covid has accelerated several trends which were already taking place, in particular the trend towards home working. Many workers who are able to work from home are likely to continue doing so, perhaps for 3 or 4 days a week.

The resulting reduction in demand will put continuing economic pressure on transport operators. It might be time to reconsider how public transport is funded; a purely commercial model might not be the best way of supplying it. Without public transport, a city might not function at all, and in most European countries it is normal for the public sector to provide support. Government should regard public transport as a public service, as it does schools or the fire service, and ensure it is funded accordingly.

As regards demographics, it is well known that many public transport users are less well off than average, so ensuring better access to public transport would be in line with the Government's levelling-up agenda.

**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?**

I have commented above about the probable impact of Covid on longer-term trends. There is also the Government's decarbonisation policy to consider, with its target of net zero CO2 emissions by 2050. If this target is to be achieved, emissions will need to be halved by 2030, and halved again by 2040. The only Government policy seems to be to encourage the use of electric cars, but this will not be sufficient; an actual reduction in car use is needed to achieve the objectives of reducing pollution, congestion, and carbon emissions. This can only be achieved by restraints on car use through pricing, pedestrianisation and parking policies, which can be made more acceptable when there is cheap, fast, frequent and attractive public transport available.

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

Integration means different things to different people. The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT) has identified four components of transport integration: (1) services and timetables, (2) fares and ticketing, (3) physical infrastructure and (4) information and publicity.

Integration of *services and timetables* has, since bus deregulation in 1986, been problematic as bus companies are prohibited from co-operating to co-ordinate their services, even where this would clearly be in the passengers' interests. This barrier is being broken down through recent legislation which allows some local authorities to participate in planning services. This trend needs to continue. However, I would not advocate the complete removal of bus deregulation, because it is mainly in the larger cities where it has led to problems. There are examples of smaller towns and cities, such as Reading, Oxford, Brighton and Nottingham, where deregulation has been successful, allowing bus companies to develop attractive and successful services.

Regarding *fares and ticketing*, it is attractive to the passenger to be able to buy a ticket which allows travel on all types of transport in the area, and such tickets are available in large cities. However, not everyone wants to travel all over the city. If a passenger makes the same journey regularly, always on one operator's services, that operator should be able to offer its own, normally cheaper, ticket, if that is what the passenger wants.

Integration of *physical infrastructure* such as stops and stations is highly desirable, to enable the passenger to interchange from one service to another easily. This is essential if public transport journeys are to be made attractive to car users. Stops and stations are normally a local authority responsibility, and they should be given the funds to develop them.

The provision of *publicity and information* is often very poor. It works well in London, co-ordinated by Transport for London, but in other cities it relies on operators providing information to the transport authority which is difficult to ensure in a deregulated environment. Local authorities should have a duty to produce good information and operators should be obliged to co-operate. All transport services should have a common, readily identifiable livery. This need not preclude operators using their own designs and logos; it works well in London.

**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?**

The current trend towards cleaner, greener fuels for buses will continue, and eventually the use of diesel and other fossil fuels should be eliminated. Government policy, in the form of grants and legislation, should be designed to aid this process.

The introduction of tramways to more cities should be considered as a way of achieving Government objectives. Trams have a number of proven advantages over other means of transport, as follows:

*Trams have a much greater capacity than buses, and carry many more passengers in corridors of high demand;*

*Trams get people out of cars; around 20 to 25 per cent of the passengers on a tram are former car travellers;*

*Trams are accessible for people with reduced mobility, and also for passengers with pushchairs, luggage or shopping bags;*

*Trams avoid pollution; they are non-polluting at the point of use, with no exhaust emissions and no particulates from tyre or road wear. Trams can use electricity generated from renewable sources, and can also use battery, supercapacitor or hydrogen power sources;*

*Trams are safe, with no more accidents than buses and many fewer than cars. The Sandilands (Croydon) tram incident in November 2016 was a terrible accident and cannot be ignored, but it has been thoroughly investigated and all recommendations have been implemented;*

*Trams have positive economic impacts on the city; they improve access to jobs and encourage inward investment, unlock hard-to-reach sites for development,*

trigger fresh growth, increase land and property values, promote urban development and regeneration, and improve the image of the city.

**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?**

In general, local authorities are strapped for cash and have to concentrate on areas where they have statutory duties, such as social services. No one would deny these are important, but this does mean that transport tends to have a lower priority and spending is confined to necessities such as road repairs.

Areas with a combined authority, such as West Midlands or Greater Manchester, have devolved powers and access to their own funding, and seem to cope better with transport problems than do other areas. Greater devolution should be considered.

**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?**

There definitely should be better coordination between departments, for example between planning, transport, health and education. New housing estates are often built in areas which are difficult to serve with public transport, and new hospitals and schools tend to be located on the edge of cities where there is no transport for patients or students to use. There should be a co-ordinated approach.

**7. What are the barriers to improving urban public transport, in terms of delivering the necessary infrastructure, increasing connectivity and improving the consumer experience?**

Money, as always, is a barrier. Government needs to give greater priority to transport and recognise that it is the life-blood of a city, without which the city cannot function.

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

As I have outlined above, trams should be recognised as providing quality public transport which fulfils multiple objectives. Of course, trams are expensive, mainly because they require a large amount of up-front cost, but in the long term they are better value for money than other modes. Trams will never replace buses, but in the right location they are a valuable component of the mix of public transport in a town or city.

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