

Independent Transport Commission – Written evidence (TTS0052)

Introduction:

The Independent Transport Commission (ITC) is Britain's leading pan transport and land use research charity. Our remit is to explore longer-term, strategic policy issues, and our focus is therefore on those 'big picture' topics which underpin policy formation. Trends in public transport usage, and policy issues related to urban design, are matters of keen interest to the ITC. This submission reflects the main findings raised through the ITC's work and provides reflections on the implications for longer-term policy making. We have selected to answer those questions most relevant to the ITC's own work and research.

Call for Evidence Questions

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?*

Public transport use has fallen significantly during the pandemic, and been more severely affected than private transport modes. Rail, bus and underground use collapsed during the lockdown phases of the pandemic, but over the course of 2021 and early 2022 rail and bus have recovered to about 70-75% of pre-pandemic levels of demand. This may yet rise further or fall depending on the trajectory of the pandemic and whether new virus variants pose a serious threat to public health.

In terms of influences on travel patterns, it is important to note the way in which housing and employment policies affect public transport usage. The ITC's research into the factors driving high growth in rail travel before the pandemic showed how residential and employment location were major contributors to rail demand. For more insights, please see the ITC report which can be downloaded at:

<http://www.theitc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/ITC-Report-Rail-Passenger-Demand-November-2018.pdf>

Rail and bus cater to rather different demographic markets. While rail use (pre-pandemic) was dominated by commuting and business travel, and tended to be used by higher-income groups, bus use tends to cater to those on lower incomes and pensioners. Bus usage traditionally has been used more for shopping and educational-related purposes. For more insights on the changing nature of the bus market on the eve of the pandemic, please read the following ITC report:

<http://www.theitc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/ITC-Bus-market-in-England-Jan-2020.pdf>

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?*

We expect that the pandemic will have had permanent behavioural impacts, particularly related to the accelerating digitalisation of our lives. This has been most evident in changing working patterns and the acceleration of moves towards flexible working practices. Such trends are likely to inhibit commuting travel (and

by extension rail usage) to a limited degree, as well as potentially reducing peak-time demand on public transport (but only if people choose different flexible working hours/days), easing capacity problems. At the same time, leisure travel by public transport has recovered well since the start of the pandemic, and it is probable that this will account for a larger segment of public transport journeys in the future. For more information on the way in which the pandemic has affected travel patterns, see the ITC's report which can be downloaded via this link:

http://www.theitc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/ITC-Impacts-of-the-Pandemic-on-Transport_Sept-21-final.pdf

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?

Local authorities need stronger funding mechanisms and enhanced powers to deliver high-quality public transport. Transport for London has demonstrated that such funding and powers can result in major improvements to public transport infrastructure. However, even TfL is now struggling to sustain such investment in the wake of funding problems caused by the pandemic and its impacts. This is because old assumptions about transport demand and revenue are no longer sustainable. Changing travel patterns (and the loss of premium peak-hour revenue due to those changes) mean that a funding model which pushes ever more of the cost of public transport onto the traveller is no longer viable. Taxpayers will therefore need to contribute more towards the upkeep of high-quality public transport, as is the case in many other European countries. This could be met through giving local authorities additional revenue raising powers, or a greater share of central tax revenue.

Devolution is to be welcomed where this genuinely results in more income and powers for local transport authorities. There are good examples from many of our European neighbours of how high-quality urban public transport has resulted from local authorities having more control (and the necessary funding) to shape local transport policy. Aligning local and national transport needs will be important, however, to ensure a properly integrated transport system. For more information on the issues that need to be considered, please view the following ITC policy paper:

<http://www.theitc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ITC-Occasional-Paper-8-Devolution-in-England-and-Transport-November-2015-Ebook.pdf>

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

A key barrier to improving urban public transport delivery is a lack of sufficient funding to deliver optimal outcomes. Public acceptability is a further major challenge, not only in terms of persuading people to shift from the private car to public transport, but also helping people understand the benefits that arise to their local community from investment in good public transport systems.

In terms of transport infrastructure and urban planning, it is essential that urban public transport is designed in a way that improves connectivity across the city and does not result in additional physical barriers or obstacles which can impede and divide neighbourhoods. Achieving local consensus and involving local people in the

design and planning of urban public transport can help to overcome some of these barriers and result in improved outcomes. Some examples of where these techniques have been used successfully can be found in the following ITC report:

<http://www.theitc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/ITC-HSR-Connected-Cities-Final-Small.pdf>

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