



Anthony Rae

The adoption by Transport for the North of its first strategic transport plan is an opportunity to revisit one of the important questions that my Viewpoint article (*LTT* 13 Apr 18) judged its still evolving approach had yet to confront: “Does the strategy pass its ‘carbon test’?”

Our grouping of volunteer transport campaigners was motivated by the Committee on Climate Change’s (CCC) 2017 recommendation that a 44 per cent reduction in surface transport emissions by 2030 was urgently required. The Government, on the other hand, is not. As *LTT*’s ‘Squaring the circle’ editorial in the last issue noted, the impact of the 2008 Climate Change Act on transport policy has been slight. A decade later the DfT has failed to provide carbon reduction pathways for both surface transport and aviation; and this omission can’t be accidental. As a result their combined emissions are 12.5 per cent above 1990 levels, and rising.

By August 2018, despite all our constructive engagement, TfN was still refusing to insert a carbon target into the draft strategy. Yet six months later the adopted plan now includes a CCC-compliant carbon reduction pathway with a specific focus on the 2020s, and covering a 15 million population. So how did this fundamentally important transformation come about?

Right at the start of our work we noted that within the foundational statute for sub-national transport bodies (STBs) such as TfN – the Cities & Local Government Devolution Act 2016 – a new clause 102I inserted into the 2008 Local Transport Act set out the criteria that an STB’s strategy had to fulfil. The par-

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VIEWPOINT

If climate change targets can be enforced in the North, then why not everywhere?

ticular language of subsections 8 and 10 seemed to provide powerful tools to shape the prospective strategy and its subsequent programmes.

Subsection 8b states: “*In preparing or revising its transport strategy an STB must ... have regard to ... (b) the social and environmental impacts in connection with the implementation of the proposals contained in the strategy.*” Thus the eventual strategy would need to demonstrate that it had quantified the environmental – and carbon – impacts of the programmes it was proposing to recommend before it could say that it had “had regard to” them, and then be lawfully adopted. And we also knew that TfN did not have the evidence to prove that this had been done.

So in September we addressed these concerns directly to the TfN board, and suggested that they needed to commission an independent carbon review to satisfy themselves that ‘8b’ had been met. TfN must have sensed its legal vulnerability because wisely that’s what it did, and when the Atkins review was finally published in January it completely vindicated our analysis. Its critique of TfN’s previous carbon approach was sharp, and so a now revised strategic transport plan had to fall into line.

There were just two unresolved issues. Since the carbon pathway would not be available until 2020, how could a strategy and its investment programme to be adopted in February 2019 “have regard to” those as yet unquantified carbon impacts? We suggested that a clause needed to be added that, in due course, the STP’s programmes, schemes and demand scenarios would if necessary be constrained to fit the carbon pathway. TfN accepted this wording. Whilst the status of aviation emissions within the pathway is still unclear, the pioneering position of Greater Manchester mayor Andy Burnham’s *Springboard to a green city-region* strategy points a way forward.

What of subsection 10? This states that “the constituent authorities of an STB must exercise transport functions with a view to securing the implementation of the proposals” in the strategy. Doesn’t in essence that mean that TfN’s carbon pathway must also be applied by all the subsidiary combined authorities and district councils across the entire North of England?

There’s more. If the inclusion of a CCC-compliant carbon pathway has been judged to be a lawful

requirement for TfN, then won’t that also be the case for all the other applicants for STB status, such as Midlands Connect, Transport for the South West, etc?

On this interpretation, the consequences of TfN’s pathway inclusion now wash pervasively across and down through the English regions. Up to now transport planners in these subsidiary tiers have failed to use carbon as a critical policy driver because of the vacuum imposed from the very top. Might that spell now be broken?

How much carbon could be saved by adopting such pathways? An approximate quantification for the TfN area would suggest that across the 2020s this could cumulatively amount to more than 50MtCO₂. By contrast, continuing with the DfT’s refusal to provide national carbon reduction frameworks for both surface transport and aviation could, on one calculation, see these two emissions segments reaching 60 per cent of the total UK carbon budget in 2030. The failure of the DfT’s *Road to Zero* to provide a national reduction pathway for surface transport seems to have gone unnoticed, whilst brazenly the Aviation Green Paper, now out for consultation, is in effect promoting a carbon expansion pathway. This recklessness threatens to destabilise the Climate Change Act itself.

Is it possible that our improbable campaigning success in the North might represent a tipping point in national transport carbon policy, which could begin to resolve the ‘glaring disparity’ between the DfT’s airport and road expansion policies and the Government’s carbon budgets that the *LTT* editorial pinpointed?

Unfortunately so far even the principal campaigning NGOs have been reluctant to attempt slaying the transport carbon hydra (apparently there’s an absence of ‘political traction’). Isn’t it time for campaigners, politicians and transport policy-makers to all lay siege to the citadel of Great Minster House, determinedly garrisoned by *de facto* climate sceptics, in order to insist that it too now becomes Climate Change Act compliant? **LTT**

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Anthony Rae is a volunteer campaigner who coordinated the engagement of activists across the North with the TfN strategy. The papers chronicling that campaign can be found on his website transportnorth.org.uk

In Passing

LTT Back in August 2016 Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn found himself at the centre of the proverbial storm in a teacup after photographs were published in the media of him sitting on the floor of an ‘overcrowded’ train when there were, allegedly, actually quite a few seats available. Fast forward to January 2019, when Corbyn seemingly pulled another great media photo opportunity out of the hat by having to accept a lift (in a car, obviously) to give a talk about bus service cuts after the bus that he had been scheduled to take to the meeting failed to put in an appearance. “Despite saying he was ‘stoic’ and would ‘see it through’, he ended up accepting a lift to ensure he was not late,” the BBC reported. “I think this kind of proves our point about private operators running buses

and not doing it terribly well,” the BBC then quoted Corbyn as saying. And the reason for the bus in question’s non-appearance? “We’ve seen delays to services today due to freezing temperatures,” a Trent Barton bus company spokesman said. Which may actually prove Corbyn’s political point – cold weather, in England, in January? Who saw that coming? Certainly not the bus company!

LTT Darren Shirley’s reputation as chief executive of the Campaign for Better Transport is spreading rapidly. However, one politician at least seems not to have twigged that Stephen Joseph is no longer at the helm. Welsh Assembly Member Rhianon Passmore was suffi-

ciently impressed by the CBT’s recent report on reopening railways that she quoted from it in a Cardiff Bay debate on rail, but prefaced the quotes with: “The Press Association’s chief executive officer Darren Shirley has stated ...” As she appears to have picked up the quote from the PA news agency, *LTT*’s sage advice to her is: Don’t quote the messenger!

LTT Pictograms are usually self-explanatory but this one in a Transport for London bus strategy report had us scratching our head. Fuel efficiency, perhaps? Nope! The text alongside reads: “Delivering 40+ new driver toilets on routes which currently have no or limited access.”



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Three problems with Labour's under 25 free bus travel pledge

In his examination of the how public transport should be financed, I hope that Phil Goodwin will take a critical look at Labour's pledge to fund free bus travel for under 25s ('Labour commissions Goodwin to review UK transport funding' *LTT* 1 Feb).

I have three objections to this proposal. Firstly, it will result in another large group of 'freebie' passengers travelling alongside an ever-decreasing number of paying passengers (those between 25 and 65) whose fares will continue to rise, probably at a rate above the general rate of inflation.

Secondly, it will not help under 25s living in rural areas without bus services. Nor will it help under 25s who commute by train, tram or boat. Nor will it help those who work 'antisocial hours' but whose local bus does not run evenings or Sundays.

Thirdly, there is the problem of reimbursement of commercial bus operators for their carrying under 25s. Unless the reimbursement rate is substantially more generous than that currently paid for English National Concessionary Travel Scheme passengers, many urban routes will cease to be attractive to commercial operators.

I particularly fear for routes whose target market is university students, e.g. Nottingham's routes 4 and 34, Brighton's route 25 and many of the routes run by the University of Hertfordshire's own bus company, Uno.

Currently these routes are commercial, but free travel for under 25s would mean very few (if any) fare-paying passengers. With very few passengers from whom the operator can (legally) make a profit, these heavily used 'commercial' routes will be withdrawn!

Roger Sexton
Nottingham NG1

TfN's absurd plan for a new Trans-Pennine rail link

Northerners visiting London and the South East for the first time frequently express astonishment at the length of local trains. In the south, formations of eight, ten and twelve cars are not uncommon, but up north a six-car set is regarded as a long train, and many are barely half that length. This brings me on to your coverage of Transport for the North's Strategic Transport Plan ('Can TfN turn its ambitious vision into reality?' *LTT* 01 Feb).

While TfN acknowledges short formation as a key problem (i.e. chronic overcrowding) it is difficult to see what it can do to fix things – and achieve its other aspirations as well – given the current structure and set-up of the rail industry (which is likely to remain unchanged for the foreseeable future).

As currently constituted, TfN is little more than a talking shop and a think tank; it can make suggestions and float ideas, but it has no powers to raise revenue or borrow money and can accomplish little.

Decision-making and fund-raising will, in all probability, continue to be made in London by London-centric and London-dominated bodies. So Network Rail will remain responsible for infrastructure upgrades, and the DfT for service specifications through the franchising system. (And, on the latter point, there is no reason why the DfT should not also stipulate minimum train length requirements – it micro-manages just about everything else).

Regarding the other items on TfN's wish list, it would be absurd even to contemplate construction of a new trans-Pennine rail link; the costs would be astronomical, it would take decades to complete, and involve much disruption. It is also unnecessary as there are quicker, cheaper and easier solutions for increasing capacity. Has TfN considered any of the following?

- Manchester-Sheffield: re-opening the Woodhead line and tunnel (the 1954 electric twin-bore construction,

not the two single-bore Victorian era steam hellholes). This would make a useful freight/diversionary route and could be cleared to maximum loading gauge;

- Manchester-Huddersfield-Leeds: reopening the two single-bore Standedge tunnels, and also the adjoining closed eight-mile 'Micklehurst Loop' line (between Stalybridge and Diggle) to provide an extra pair of tracks (the trackbed is largely in situ);

- Bradford: connecting the two dead-end terminal station stubs (Interchange and Forster Square) with a heavy rail link, a long talked about project; this would provide much operational flexibility by joining up the two Leeds-Bradford lines.

The combined cost of these projects is likely to be a drop in the ocean compared to constructing a new line under the Pennines.

Another point: with HS2 now gobbling up one-third of the total national rail spend – £2.1bn out of £6.4bn according to the latest Office of Rail and Road statistics – there's not going to be much left for anything else for years to come.

Over-zealous rationalisation of the rail network in the past has contributed in no small way to today's current capacity problems.

Finally, a cursory examination of your (reproduced) TfN map might lead some readers into thinking that the Hull-Doncaster-Sheffield service, currently routed by Goole (population 20,000), will in future be redirected through Selby (population 15,000). If so, this would be another blow to the town (not even shown on map), which lost its direct London service many years ago.

Maybe someone from TfN might care to clarify?

John Helm
Chatham ME4

DfT's 20mph research exposes another road safety myth

The embarrassing fiasco of 20mph limit campaign group 20's Plenty for Us trying, but failing miserably, to rubbish an expert independent report on the failure of signed-only 20mph limits to reduce casualties, exemplifies what is wrong with groups meddling in road safety that seem to lack safety or statistical expertise and primarily have an axe to grind against drivers ('DfT research author criticises 20's Plenty' *LTT* 1 Feb).

Is inconveniencing or prosecuting drivers for exceeding inappropriate speed limits what is really most important to them?

The high costs involved in changing speed limit signs from 30 to 20 is an absolute scandal and is money that should have been used usefully elsewhere.

Meanwhile, at a meeting of PACTS (the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety) on 28 January, its executive director David Davies, apparently expressed surprise that a 1mph reduction in average speeds delivered by 20mph limits didn't result in a 7 per cent reduction in casualties. He was of course referring to flawed studies that make such an unreliable claim.

Perhaps those of us with a longstanding interest in sound thinking on road safety should be grateful to 20's Plenty for inadvertently helping to shoot down some of the basic misconceptions that have blighted policy for so long.

Paul Biggs
Environment spokesman
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> MORE ON P24

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LOCAL TRANSPORT TODAY

A clash of ideologies

Having discussed transport and climate change in this column last issue, we find ourselves making a return journey, albeit via a different route. The question last time concerned the consistency between the Climate Change Act obligations and the infrastructure plans of Government and bodies such as Transport for the North. This time round, the question is how, indeed, whether, a Government can bring transport policy as a whole into line with its climate targets.

Friends of the Earth and the environmental transport consultancy Transport for Quality of Life are leading the thinking on this and will present their conclusions in a series of eight reports over the coming months. The first three were released this month, covering the topics of road traffic, urban public transport, and land-use planning. By the end we will know their comprehensive blueprint for bringing about change. From what we can already see, the changes to transport policy would be huge and wide-ranging. Substantial traffic reduction, restrictions on new greenfield housing developments, and massive public transport investment and subsidy.

One thing climate campaigners have been very skilled at is creating a sense that the climate question is the single most important challenge facing society, and must override all other interests. Politicians have gone along with this narrative through making legislation that demands dramatic reductions to emissions.

Even so, no one should be expecting ministers to grasp the FoE reports as a ready-made action plan. Acting single-mindedly is possible in highly technical fields that lie below politics but whenever multiple interests come to bear on an issue, it becomes the job of Government to find a way to navigate between competing interests and usually come up with compromise solutions that are no one's ideal answer but most people can live with.

We know that in transport there are multiple competing interests and so, even though the Government is bound by strict binding emissions targets, when it comes to taking actions, it will find itself having to navigate through choppy waters. Assuming no one is in favour of abandoning democratic principles, how can radical change be delivered in a political system that is prone to incrementalism and muddling through?