

Setting the Agenda for the Next Government



The Public Transport Consortium (PTC) is a special interest group of the Local Government Association, representing the interests of shire counties and unitary authorities in England and Wales.

The Consortium aims to:

1. act as a forum for discussion and promotion of public transport issues affecting local authorities outside metropolitan areas;
2. promote the exchange of experience and good practice between member authorities and in liaison with other bodies;
3. advise appropriate committees or other executive bodies of the LGA on public transport issues; and
4. represent interests of member authorities to Government, the Local Government Association, operators and other organisations involved in public transport

BUSES

Buses are vital to our communities, enabling people to have an independent lifestyle and gain access to work, education, healthcare, shopping and leisure activities.

Whilst they directly link people and services they manage congestion giving a better journey to those that do not use them and for those delivering goods and services.

For 48% of users, the bus is their only means of travel – 10% of bus commuters would be unable to access their job without the bus. A strong bus network supports the vitality of urban centres – bus users spend almost £30 per shopping visit. 43% of bus users are travelling to or from work or education, 32% are going shopping.

Working in partnership with the Local Government Association as a Special Interest Group



Local authorities recognise the vital role of the bus and seek to implement strategies to increase use of the local bus network, maximising the economic and social benefits to people, business and communities: in this way people are provided with the transport they need. Buses are responsive to changes in demand, enabling local economies to grow. Support of Central Government is essential to deliver these vital services, but local authorities are best placed to allocate such funding.

The National Concessionary Travel Scheme for people of state pension age and with disabilities offering free travel on local buses outside peak hours has been an enormous benefit – 10 million people have a pass and make an average of 110 bus journeys a year. This enables them to live independently and reduce the costs to other public services. The scheme is statutory, but many local authorities who administer the scheme on behalf of Central Government are inadequately financed by Central Government to deliver this concession. Coupled with reduced funding to local authorities, recent years have been characterised by reductions in bus services (2000 routes reduced or withdrawn since 2010), directly contrary to the wishes of local authorities and communities. Central Government must act nationally to reverse this situation, as inadequate reimbursement to operators reduces the commercial viability of services, increasing local authority costs. Local authorities need central Government support to deliver infrastructure that drives up the attractiveness and dependability of bus services. Bus service punctuality is the most important criteria for users, and measures to reduce congestion should be enhanced by implementing the Traffic Management Act 2004 part 6 and the use of CCTV. These measures will enable local authorities to prevent issues such as illegal parking and yellow box junction infringements. Government must give greater recognition to the vital role of the bus to ensure investment by local authorities and operators. Funding should be provided for bus services from other government departments to recognise the vital role played in enabling them to deliver their policies. For those authorities that wish to provide bus services in a different way, the legal process should be made much simpler.

Inevitably, a conventional bus service cannot meet all needs and Government must create a climate in which Community Transport schemes can develop.

RAIL

There has been a 60% increase in rail travel since 1995 from more people travelling rather than existing users travelling more. Rail travel for business purposes has nearly tripled. Rail growth is a reflection of changes in society with less use of cars amongst some groups. A greater proportion of the population travel by train, across all regions, not just the traditional London commuter area, which has also experienced growth and whose growth is predicted to continue. In 1995 63% of national rail journeys were to, from or within London but by 2005 it was 57%, demonstrating growth in rail use outside London. Crowding on rail services is now a major issue.

This growth has clearly exceeded expectation and there is a need to resolve immediate issues and to commit to long term investment. The chronic shortage of adequate rolling stock needs urgent attention through the franchising process. However, investment in rail is a long term process and the priority must be to safeguard land to develop new rail connections, as has been demonstrated with east west rail. Single track lines returning or becoming dual track will assist in building capacity (there are currently over 19,000 miles of single track railway), and the electrification programme should be enhanced – the south west of England is the only mainline without planned electrification. Greater resilience of the rail network must be built in to ensure it can still function in times of disruption as rail lines are crucial to achieving significant economic growth. No new diesel rolling stock has been ordered since 2008. There is a need to provide more funding for regional rail services.

To deliver transport infrastructure it is essential to maximise access to external funding; local authorities need more flexibility in the use of such funds. Devolution of decision making, with appropriate funding, is required. Development should take place in areas where there is an existing good provision of public transport, avoiding increasing car use.

The Consortium is anxious to engage with prospective Parliamentary candidates and is interested in your views. A response to the issues raised would be appreciated – a response of agree or disagree with the following statements is all that is required.

The Government should provide funding:

- 1) To develop local bus services
 - Recognise the value of bus services in delivering economic growth and regeneration, reducing traffic congestion and contributing to carbon reduction targets
 - Enabling people to live independent lives
 - Encourage bus operators to invest and innovate
 - Bring together existing bus funding with a top-up from other government departments specifically to fund bus services

- 2) To fund the current concessionary fares scheme for those currently entitled
 - Recognise the social and economic benefits the scheme brings
 - Recognise the need for travel assistance for young people entering work and give tax breaks on the cost of bus season tickets

- 3) To create additional rail capacity urgently and invest in rail infrastructure
 - Recognise rail services are cost effective
 - Consider social value as part of franchise determination
 - Fund additional stations
 - Offer more bespoke ticket options
 - support new rail lines and reinstatement of rail services, restoring two tracks
 - urge the introduction of digital technology

- 4) Provide devolution to local authorities to use funding more flexibly, specifically for transport, as they see appropriate
 - Bring together the commissioning of local transport services by different public bodies
 - Recognise the cross sector benefits of transport
 - Leverage in sources of funding for use as locally determined.