

North East Transport Plan 2021-2035

Policy context

1. The North East Joint Transport Committee have prepared a consultation draft of the first Transport Plan for the North East. This will provide the future framework for management of and investment in the region's transport network.

Background

2. The North East Joint Transport Committee is preparing its first transport plan covering the North East. This will replace the current framework provide by the Local Transport Plans for Tyne and Wear, Durham and Northumberland. As such this will be an important document in seeking to guide the future development of the region's transport network. The Plan is intended to cover the period 2021-2035.
3. A full copy of the consultation draft, together with further information on the plan development process, is available to view at:

<https://www.transportnortheast.gov.uk/transportplan/>

Contents

4. The vision for the Plan is:
“Moving to a green, healthy, dynamic and thriving North East.”
5. The Vision is developed into 5 objectives for:
 - a carbon neutral North East;
 - overcoming inequality and growing the economy;
 - a healthier North East;
 - providing appealing sustainable transport choices;
 - providing a safe, secure network.
6. The Plan seeks to enable people to make greener and healthier travel choices whenever possible, and to ensure that sustainable transport networks take people where they need to go at a price they can afford. The approach is then developed through four over-arching policy areas:
 - integration within and between different types of transport so that each contributes to its full potential;
 - seeking funding opportunities to deliver objectives;
 - taking action to make travel net zero in relation to carbon emissions and improving safety and security; and
 - working with partners to develop new roles and promote innovation.

7. Six more specific policy areas are then the subject of more detailed examination:
 - active travel;
 - public transport (bus, ferry and on demand);
 - public transport (local rail and Metro);
 - private transport (travelling by car and using road infrastructure);
 - connectivity beyond our own boundaries;
 - research, development and innovation.
8. Finally the Plan outlines how it will be delivered, including an indicative pipeline of future regional schemes.

Comment

9. The production of the draft Transport Plan is a major step forward for the North East. Transport use is not defined by local authority boundaries, and so a regional framework of this kind is much to be welcomed.
10. The vision and objectives for the Plan are wholly to be supported. These cover the main areas where the transport system needs to make a positive impact in order to deliver improvements for people who live, work or visit the region.
11. Other specific areas in which the Plan is to be welcomed include:
 - the inclusion of the need for continued revenue funding to support the transport network, as well as capital investment. This is particularly relevant at the current time with passenger levels on public transport likely to be depressed for some time as a result of Covid 19, with a consequent need for increased revenue support;
 - recognising the importance of climate change and carbon neutrality. Transport has proved a particularly difficult area to achieve reductions in carbon emissions, and further work is needed to emphasise the scale of the challenge and link this more directly to actions needed to meet the region's aspirations;
 - recognising the importance of maintenance of the network in addition to improvement. This should cover traditional road maintenance but also other areas such as the extent of the bus network as well as important support services, such as cycle and pedestrian safety training for children in schools;
 - presenting an ambitious future programme for action, and one with in-built flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances and new evidence. It will be important that schemes that are brought forward through this support the Plan objectives as a whole, and avoid the kind of conflict (for example between economic and climate objectives) that has sometimes been evident in the past.
12. There are also some areas where the Plan could be developed further:

- physical improvements to the network should be accompanied by complementary supporting action in relation to travel awareness and travel planning. While these are mentioned separately the importance of bringing them together as an integral part of scheme design should be recognised. This would help maximise the benefits of investment and minimise the risk of schemes having unintended detrimental impacts;
- the importance of continued investment in small scale transport schemes is perhaps currently under-played. Relatively minor schemes can often have a major impact in local areas and need to continue to be funded as the basis on which more major investment can build;
- more emphasis could be given to the role of transport investment in creating places that are attractive to live and work in or visit. Existing town and city centres face major challenges, especially following the Covid pandemic, and the role of the transport network in creating accessible but attractive locations should be highlighted as an important element in meeting health, economic and environmental objectives. In more residential areas initiatives such as 20mph zones or action to promote children to walk to school can be important;
- there is currently limited attention paid to improving the resilience of existing and new infrastructure to current and future flood risk/extreme weather. Future investments in transport infrastructure should consider the climate in 100 years, taking an adaptive approach which considers a range of scenarios;
- while development of the existing ferry service between North and South Shields is highlighted, little attention is given to exploring the possibilities of further use of the River Tyne for transport purposes;
- local bus services remain the most extensive and most used element of the public transport network. Their primary role in public transport provision, and the importance of sustaining an effective network that is affordable for all users should be reinforced through both the Plan's general approach and proposed actions.

Response

13. It is proposed that the above comments are forwarded as the Council's response to the Plan.

Consultation

14. The Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport has been consulted on the response and is supportive of it.

Alternative options

15. The main alternative option would be for the Joint Transport Committee not to produce a single plan for the region. This would have meant the opportunity for a co-ordinated and coherent approach to future planning would have been lost.

Implications of the recommendations

16. Resources:

a. **Financial Implications** – the Strategic Director, Resources and Digital confirms there are no direct implications arising from this response. The Plan should provide a positive basis for discussions with Government around future funding and the preparation of related bids.

b. **Human Resources** – there are no human resource implications arising from the consultation.

c. **Property Implications** - there are no property implications arising from the consultation.

17. **Risk Management Implications** – none.

18. **Equality and Diversity Implications** – the nature of transport provision can have impacts on different groups, including those related to sex, age, disability and income.

19. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – crime and anti-social behaviour are often associated with transport through a variety of different kinds of behaviour, for example intimidating behaviour on public transport, poorly lit or insecure pedestrian routes, or speeding traffic.

20. **Health Implications** – the importance of transport's role in promoting better health, particularly through encouraging increased levels of active and healthy is recognised in the overall objectives of the Plan.

21. **Climate Emergency and Sustainability Implications** – transport has a major role to play in achieving carbon neutrality, and this is recognised as one of the Plan's main objectives.

22. **Human Rights Implications** – None

23. **Ward implications** – None