

22 January 2025

Dear Kim McGuinness,

North East Local Transport Plan consultation

This letter provides the response of the City of Durham Trust to the above consultation document. The Trust is a registered charity, established in 1942, and its primary objective is to preserve, conserve and enhance for the benefit of the public the natural and built environment of the City of Durham and its surroundings. Transport has major impacts on the city and its hinterland, so because of this the Trust has for several decades been closely involved in planning processes relating to future transport provision in its area.

Summary

The Trust supports the plan's vision for a green, integrated regional transport network, and the recognition of the impacts of transport on the environment, society, and the economy. The “Greener Journeys” decision tree correctly sets out the ambition for travel and transport modes. The level of ambition in funding, including major investment in Metro and rail services, is good to see. The focus on public transport safety, especially for women and girls, and road safety is very welcome.

The plan is weaker, however, on the prioritisation of interventions and on evaluation and targets via key performance indicators. It is notably lacking in measures to discourage private car use and to reduce vehicle miles, both of which are essential in meeting climate change commitments. Safe routes to schools, to enable the next generation to form sustainable habits, are not mentioned, nor is car parking policy. Tackling pavement parking and lowering urban and rural speed limits would be more achievable if addressed region-wide.

There needs to be a much stronger link with spatial planning, and a review of local plans to strengthen sustainable transport delivery. Co-ordination with the Tees Valley Combined Authority is barely touched on, despite the area's significance as a destination for many people in County Durham. More effort needs to be made to improve local rail services, including those on the East Coast Main Line.

There is also still evidence in the plan of traditional and discredited thinking around the relief of road congestion through expanding capacity, and even the implication that improving road journey times will encourage use of public transport.

Structure of response

Comments on important over-arching themes are offered first. These are followed by sections going into the details of the plan, arranged in the order of the numbered policies found in section 5 of the plan, pages 39-61. Comments on the Delivery Plan are included within these sections under the relevant policy. All page references follow the numbers found at the top outside corner of the pages, rather than the numbers of the openings in the PDF.

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

Conclusion

Overall the Trust believes the plan will not be able to deliver on its laudable aims without significant strengthening. While there is undoubtedly political pressure to adopt the plan quickly and begin accessing devolved funding, there needs to be a readiness to review and adapt the plan swiftly if necessary. Setting key performance indicators and targets is essential if we are to judge how well the plan is delivering.

The Local Transport Plan has a key part to play in preparing the region for prosperity within a just transition to a low carbon future. Making rapid progress towards net zero must be the overriding concern when setting the priorities for investment.

Yours sincerely,

John Lowe
Chair, City of Durham Trust

High-level themes

Climate change

The Trust considers that a traffic reduction target is required, with yearly milestones to track progress, in line with UK carbon reduction commitments. Local authorities are still awaiting updated national guidance on local transport plans, but this has not prevented several local authorities setting such targets, reflecting their declaration of a climate emergency.

The Low Traffic Future alliance proposes various levels of ambition. These can be differentiated to take account of urban and rural areas. For example, Oxfordshire has committed to a reduction in car trips of 25% by 2030 and 33% by 2040.

In this context, the Trust takes issue with the idea expressed on p. 3 that “making any form of journey in the North East is good, as the movement of goods and people stimulates the economy, and even a trip for leisure purposes can improve health”.

Section 2.3 points out that in 2022 the average number of journeys per person made in the North East was more than for any other English region. If travel is always good, why do we have:

- childhood obesity levels significantly higher than the English average (see 2.6)
- the second lowest proportion of children walking or cycling to school (see 2.6)
- low productivity compared to national averages (see 4.3.2).

Clearly “making any form of journey” is not good in itself. It depends on the purpose of the journey, the mode of transport, and the opportunity cost of making that journey. If you have to travel half an hour to get groceries because your village shop has closed, or have to travel a long way to school or to the doctor because the housing development you live in has no amenities, these are not journeys that stimulate the economy in any way: they are in fact a drag on the economy. Journeys by motor vehicle have external costs, when they cause air pollution, contribute to obesity, or make the roads too dangerous for people who wish to walk or cycle. They take money out of the local economy through the import of fuel, or vehicle financing schemes. If a parent has to give a child a lift somewhere because there are no safe alternatives to enable independent travel, that is also not a wholly beneficial journey.

The LTP should therefore recognise that demand reduction is an essential part of the strategy we need to respond to the climate emergency. The KPI section includes the quantity of CO₂ emissions per person, with an aim to decrease it. Reducing travel demand in conjunction with shifting to sustainable modes is the most effective way to achieve this.

Key performance indicators

The KPIs identified in the plan have no targets, only an indication as to whether they are to be reduced or increased. While carbon emissions has to be the most important KPI in the current climate emergency, other indicators should also have targets developed, including interim targets to allow the efficacy of the plan to be judged.

It is good to see the steady decline in the number of active travel casualties from 2013 to 2022 shown in Figure 23 on p. 81, but this could be a simple consequence of declining participation in active travel. To be a true indication of the risks, the performance indicator should be casualties per distance travelled.

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

Congestion

The Trust questions whether a KPI on road network performance is necessary. If the plan delivers a modal shift to sustainable transport, this statistic will look after itself.

In the absence of road pricing or other constraints, congestion can be seen positively as a tool which can encourage people onto sustainable modes. The lack of congestion relief on arterial routes over the last fifty years is certainly one reason for Oxford's high Park and Ride and bus usage. But congestion also has downsides in reducing bus reliability (unless there are bus lanes) and worsening air quality (though free-flowing traffic can lead to more pollution).

In responding to the previous North East Transport Plan consultation in January 2021, we noted that:

The official DfT delay and journey speed statistics show that the LA7 authorities, individually, relatively, and collectively, experience some of the lowest levels of congestion among comparable areas anywhere in England. The council in the north east with the slowest average speeds on its local A roads is Newcastle, one of England's core cities. Only one comparator city, Leeds, has a higher average. But Leeds City Council extends over an area which is almost five times that of Newcastle and includes a considerable rural fringe. Every other major city in England experiences slower traffic speeds on its local A roads than Newcastle, with the worst outside London, Manchester, having an average in 2018 that was 22% below Newcastle's. (See DfT Table CGN0501(b), accessed via <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/travel-time-measures-for-the-strategic-road-network-and-local-a-roads-april-2019-to-march-2020>)

The current LTP is inconsistent in its stance on road congestion, portraying it variously as:

- a symptom of issues such as car dependence (pp. 9, 31) and lack of rail freight facilities (p. 73), which will be reduced by switching to sustainable modes (p. 7)
- a natural occurrence that drivers need to be advised of, in order to take evasive action (p. 41)
- something to be alleviated by increasing road capacity (pp. 50, 74) or improving traffic flow through more intelligent controls (p. 57) or Park and Ride (p. 86)
- a key performance indicator which should be reduced (pp. 71, 92)

The 2021 draft NETP noted that County Durham and Sunderland had congestion levels below the national average (as indeed did Northumberland). It is difficult to see why congestion should therefore be a key performance indicator, or why any of the measures in the Delivery Plan aimed at reducing congestion should be taken forward or prioritised over true sustainable transport measures.

Congestion reduction conflicts directly with other objectives, including increasing the share of sustainable travel within the region, reducing carbon emissions, and improving transport safety – on all-purpose roads, accident severity increases with the speed of traffic.

Prioritisation

Apart from the “Greener Journeys” decision tree, the process of prioritisation of interventions is not made clear in the plan. Annex C of the Delivery Plan scores the different sections of the plan against five policy drivers, but the results are not ranked. Besides, each of the numbered policy commitments tends to include a variety of ideas across multiple transport modes.

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

It would be helpful to explain how interventions will be judged against each other if the funding is tighter than desired. At present it just feels as if the list of 327 projects in the transport pipeline, starting on p. 82 of the Delivery Plan, is simply a compilation of shopping lists submitted by each constituent authority.

Moving fast: carrots and sticks

We are in a climate emergency. For every year that the world emits more greenhouse gases than can be absorbed by the earth's natural processes, the climate crisis will get worse. Reducing emissions rapidly is therefore of the essence. Temporary but effective interventions may be needed.

The “Greener Journeys” decision tree indicates which modes of transport are to be preferred, asking the questions “can you make this journey by walking, wheeling or cycling?” and “can this journey be made by public transport?”. Making sure that the answers to these questions change to “yes” as soon as possible is key.

We also cannot wait for purely voluntary behavioural change to take place. People will not be attracted onto public transport just through promotion of convenient services with simple ticketing if they already own and habitually use a car and benefit from free parking at both ends of the journey. We therefore need a combination of “carrots” and “sticks” to hasten the change.

To rebalance local travel to sustainable modes, we cannot wait for comprehensive cycle infrastructure to be built, or buses to be brought into franchising.

The Trust would therefore wish to see a greater emphasis on cheaper interventions which might be rolled out on a large scale and help to tip the balance faster, including:

- 20 mph limits on residential streets, and on any urban road without adequate pedestrian or cycle facilities
- school streets, implementing the recent DfT guidance
- low traffic neighbourhoods
- where a bypass or relief road has been provided, ensuring motor traffic uses it, allowing sustainable transport to claim priority on the route which was relieved by use of traffic filters or congestion charges
- better management of car parking
- discouraging SUV purchase and use in urban areas through differential charging

Some of these measures will require strong political leadership and investing political capital, but experience in other cities that have taken bolder measures suggests that after the initial vocal backlash, many of these interventions are popular at the ballot box. We are already in a fortunate position in having low car ownership in the North East compared with other English regions. Consequently, measures that inconvenience car drivers to some extent will be acceptable to a greater proportion of the population.

Land use planning

Section 7 on p. 46 calls for a joined-up approach to transport infrastructure investment and spatial planning. The Trust strongly supports this ambition, but planning authorities will need to give much more weight to sustainable transport issues when determining applications. There needs to be far greater clarity on the targets for travel demand reduction and modal shift, and what spatial planning features will be needed to achieve this.

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

For example, the viability of public transport networks is closely related to the density of development. The RTPPI research paper, “Settlement patterns, urban form & sustainability: an evidence review”, May 2018, section 3.5, pp. 17-18, covers the evidence on the spatial principles which encourage accessibility by sustainable transport. For good bus accessibility, densities of 50 to 100 dwellings per hectare are recommended. This figure is also recommended in the Committee on Climate Change report “UK housing: fit for the future?”, February 2019. This is recognised in section 11 of the National Planning Policy Framework which calls for “a significant uplift in the average density of residential development” in areas well served by public transport.

The County Durham Plan only aims for 30 dwellings per hectare “in and around town centres and locations where there is good access to facilities and frequent public transport services”. There is no other policy on density. This implies that it is acceptable to build dwellings where transport services are infrequent, and to do so at very low densities. Durham County Council's Parking and Accessibility SPD requires levels of car parking for new residential developments which significantly exceed current car ownership rates, despite the DCC Climate Emergency Response Plan's aim of lower car ownership by 2050.

The Trust considers that the North East Local Transport Plan will be ineffective in delivering its aims unless spatial planning policies are strengthened across the region. Requiring housing development to be higher density must be done in conjunction with strong design codes and a stronger steer towards meeting the identified housing needs. For example, in County Durham the strongest need is for accommodation for smaller households and for elderly people, yet the balance in recent housing developments tends towards provision of 4 and 5 bed detached houses. Rapid action is needed to identify new housing sites across the region to meet the revised government targets and maintain a five year supply. Major new sites should be concentrated around rail or light rail services wherever possible.

As well as strengthening planning policies, cultural change will be needed. In the Trust's experience commenting on numerous planning applications in County Durham, while the local plan is reasonably supportive of sustainable transport, insufficient weight is given to sustainable transport in actually determining applications. The internal consultee responses from Highways officers tend to be preoccupied with motor vehicle capacity. The whole local government apparatus will need to be realigned to supporting transport modal shift. There needs to be a vision that new developments will need to be radically different from the current offerings of the volume housebuilders.

Detailed comments on the plan

Planning journeys and informing users (sections 1-3)

The Trust agrees that live information is really important for people. The plan does not indicate which of the many types of information provision will be tackled first. For example, County Durham has hardly any bus stops with electronic information displays. Will this be a priority, or the “number of available car park spaces”?

The ambition also mentions using data from Urban Traffic Management and Control systems to inform motorists of issues as situations develop. Providers like Apple and Google already make live information available to drivers based on aggregated phone tracking. Would public investment in providing UTMC information be cost-effective?

The priority must surely be improving public transport information. The Trust is therefore sceptical of the inclusion of UTMC data feeds in the Delivery Plan (p. 22), where it is listed in the second paragraph of the proposed interventions.

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

The Delivery Plan does not make clear how quickly bus information will be improved. A vaguely-worded £16 million project led by Nexus is to deliver in 2030 to enhance passenger information. A programme of upgrades and new passenger information screens is to deliver in 2025 at a cost of £1 million, but there is no indication as to what proportion of bus stops will be covered by this, compared with the 400 across the region which currently have screens (LTP p. 64). Page 22 of the Delivery Plan mentions easy access to real time information via online web sites from 2027, but the Trust has not found a corresponding project in the detailed lists from p. 64 onwards.

There is a big prioritisation issue here: the cost of fixed electronic equipment at bus stops is high, whereas mobile phones now have very high usage.

Ticketing and fares (sections 4 and 5)

The Trust very much supports the delivery of integrated public transport ticketing. Making it simple to transfer between different bus operators would encourage more public transport use in Durham. It is important for the Pop Card to be expanded to local rail services such as the Northumberland line, but for local travel within County Durham users often have to rely on long-distance services on the East Coast Main Line, including LNER, Transpennine and Cross Country trains. The LTP should seek to ensure that intermodal ticketing is valid on all train services passing through the region. There is precedent for this in the poorly-publicised integrated ticket currently available from Durham railway station to Tyne and Wear Metro destinations. These are not, however, available for purchase at Metro ticket machines. This ticket has been omitted from the summary of the North East's integrated ticket options in Table 3 on p. 68-69.

Reach and resilience of infrastructure (sections 6-14)

This ambition covers a very wide range of general transport improvements across several different modes and it is hard to disagree with any of the summary in section 6. But neither is it specific enough to be useful in guiding decision-making or prioritisation.

There is an aim to improve bus services throughout the region. The Low Traffic Future coalition recommends a target that all settlements of 300 people or more should have at least an hourly bus service, as achieved in Germany. A key performance indicator along these lines would be valuable.

A significant part of the delivery should be the development of the future Metro and local rail network, as stated at the end of section 6. Rail is the most energy-efficient mode of motorised transport, and the easiest to decarbonise. While many local lines were built primarily to serve collieries, and might not be appropriate for reopening, it is embarrassing to see how sparse the current railway network is compared with the networks of Germany or even south-east England.

Leamside Line

The facing page (p. 45) expands on ideas for the Leamside Line reopening. This promises:

- relieving the East Coast Main Line of freight trains in order to expand long-distance rail connections between London and Edinburgh
- extension of the Metro to Washington
- access to rail services for Penshaw, West Rainton, Ferryhill and Fencehouses
- a new connection between Sunderland and the East Coast Main Line

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

Has a clear plan yet been developed and verified by timetabling experts that can demonstrate the delivery of all the above aspirations, some of which might conflict with each other?

The Trust is concerned that several communities close to the Leamside Line in County Durham have not been mentioned: Sherburn, High Shincliffe and Bowburn. The Park and Ride at Belmont could also be an important interchange.

Further comments on rail services are found under section 14 below.

Rural areas

The Trust agrees that the needs of those in rural areas must be taken into account. The rural nature and dispersed population of much of County Durham has been used to justify car-based transport solutions, and has hindered the promotion of sustainable transport. Section 6 mentions expanding the cycle network to cover rural areas, and providing “comprehensive” Park and Ride facilities, including in rural and coastal communities.

Again, there is little indication of priorities. Given the need to decarbonise transport rapidly, the plan should identify which interventions will have the fastest impact for the least cost. In the case of cycle infrastructure, this is likely to mean concentrating cycle route investment on the denser urban areas which will more quickly yield benefits. For rural areas a good start would be to reduce speed limits on single carriageway roads to 40mph by default, as recommended by the Low Traffic Future coalition, with higher limits being only by exception for well-engineered roads with appropriate active travel infrastructure. Many rural roads have a poor safety record. Lowering speeds would give an immediate reduction in carbon emissions, make cycling on rural routes a more attractive alternative, and allow bus journey times to be more competitive. This would also help respond to the women's safety concerns regarding lack of pavements, narrow roads, and high speed limits in rural areas, as expressed on p.77.

Spatial planning (section 7)

The Trust has commented on land use planning already, as one of the key areas for better co-ordination and improvement. In regards to this section, the Trust is very disappointed at how little is actually said about spatial planning. Most of the text is repetitive aspirations to improve transport networks and connectivity. The Trust would have liked to see commitments to prioritise new housing sites which can be served by rail or Metro, and to respond to Section 11 of the National Planning Policy Framework in its linking of higher density development and public transport connectivity.

Cross-border connections (section 9)

While this section talks about how important connections are beyond the region, the Trust is concerned that there is little mention of the important local transport flows between County Durham and Hartlepool, Darlington and Teesside. There is significant commuting traffic and economic activity linking the current Durham County Council with the rest of the historic County Durham, and beyond to North Yorkshire. The 2011 census shows that the southward commuter flow from County Durham into the Tees Valley was almost ten times the flow from County Durham to Sunderland.

Again there is a link with spatial planning. Table 1 in p. 22 shows how Northumberland and County Durham are the only local authorities in the region with significant rural populations. This simply reflects the artificial way that the major urban and industrial centres were separated administratively from the historic counties. The Local Transport Plan should help to steer decisions on where to locate new housing, to minimise the need for travel. Co-ordination on planning housing sites within the North East and across the border with Teesside is essential.

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

Cycling and walking network (section 10)

The Trust supports the ambition for well-connected routes serving key locations. Durham City can be challenging for those with mobility impairments, and it is good to see the emphasis on “wide, segregated and well-maintained pedestrian infrastructure with reduced street clutter, dropped kerbs, ramp access”. This will be very much for each local authority to implement and enforce. The Trust would be very keen for Durham County Council to tackle street clutter, such as on Saddler Street where pavements are narrowed by advertising boards and the space is not segregated effectively.

Section 6.4 of the LTP beginning on p. 70 describes the resilience and reach of the current transport network across all modes, but the assessment of active travel infrastructure is rather superficial. Page 71 mentions that the network “serves large parts of our region” and includes 16 routes which are part of the National Cycle Network. Page 72 acknowledges that high quality walking and cycling infrastructure is key to increasing uptake.

The only statements on the current level of quality are on p. 74 where a survey of existing cyclists by Nexus is mentioned. Considering most of the local authorities have adopted Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans it should be possible to say what size of network is required, and what proportion of that is at an acceptable standard. The extent of the current cycling network, judged by LTN 1/20 compliance, is currently extremely limited.

A more detailed assessment would have allowed NECA to devise a suitable key performance indicator, and set targets for what percentage of the desired network would be completed at various stages in the life of the plan.

Disruptions, accidents and extreme weather (section 11)

It is clear that budgets have been inadequate to keep on top of maintenance, let alone improving resilience to flash-flooding and other climate change related events. This section mentions potholes, which have been a political focus at a national level recently. Damage to roads is proportional to the fourth power of the axle weight. This means that if a member of the public replaces their car with an SUV which is twice the weight, the damage that vehicle will cause may be as much as sixteen times greater. This is a very good reason for finding means to discourage the purchase and use of larger vehicles, for example through differential charges on parking. Larger vehicles also counter the drive to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase danger for other road users.

A1 dualling in Northumberland (p. 50)

While this section of road is well outside the Trust's normal area of interest, the Trust highlights this as an example of tension and contradiction in the Local Transport Plan, and the apparent lack of rigour in the selection of interventions. Dualling of the A1 north to Scotland would involve large emissions of greenhouse gases in construction, and as noted in the ISA Report, there is a potential for cumulative environmental impacts. Induced demand is likely, and modal shift of passenger and freight traffic away from rail may occur.

The LTP does not appear to consider alternative mitigations. As safety is cited as one of the principal concerns, the use of average speed cameras at lower speed limits could be a very cost-effective option. In section 9 we have the aspiration that more freight should travel by rail, and the LTP also seeks more use of sustainable transport. If these aims are achieved, the case for dualling the A1 is weakened.

The Combined Authority should therefore be very wary of promoting A1 dualling when it may compete with sustainable transport alternatives and work against other policies in the plan. Because it would be National Highways funded, and not cost anything to the North East, it is

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

tempting to promote the scheme anyway, but this would be the wrong approach strategically, and would lead to more congestion on local distributor roads.

Bowburn relief road

Closer to home, the Bowburn relief road is included in the Delivery Plan, within the headline priorities for delivery in 2027 at a cost of £26 million. The aim is said to be reducing pressure on junction 61 of the A1(M) and reducing traffic through Bowburn village by intercepting traffic travelling between the A688 and the A177. In the County Durham Plan the route of the road is safeguarded, and described as the Bowburn Industrial Estate Access Road. There is clearly scope for diverting goods vehicles via this route.

Because this scheme might come forward within the next three years, it has been included in the Integrated Sustainability Appraisal (ISA) of the plan. Section E.3.2 of the ISA appendices scores the relief road against the seventeen ISA objectives.

The scheme is identified as having a positive long-term impact on many objectives, for example, health and well-being, equality of opportunity, air quality and noise. On inspection, all of these benefits are the result of the expected reduction in congestion on the existing road network. While the construction will result in significant CO₂ emissions, again the long-term effect is said to be a slight reduction in CO₂ emissions, as a result of reducing congestion. The most significant long-term impact is said to be the very positive effect on economic growth and job creation, through allowing development of the Integra 61 site. The assessment notes:

The scheme may also improve accessibility and connectivity to jobs and skills by reducing congestion and improving road capacity in the local area, supporting opportunities for future growth.

If the current situation hinders growth, it is clear that increasing road capacity in the area enables increased traffic in the future, and there is no reason to suppose that this will not, in time, lead to a return to congestion. Without other measures, that is almost certain. Yet the assessment of the various objectives has only considered the initial reduction in congestion through the village, and not the fact that this benefit may be eroded by future road-dependent growth.

Even more doubtful is the long-term effect on CO₂ emissions, which has been assessed positive, with no negative effects. Any local reduction in CO₂ emissions from congestion reduction could easily be outweighed by the total emissions of additional journeys generated by further development at Integra 61 and made possible by the extra road capacity. There is also no quantification of the wider impacts of increased traffic: even in the medium term, increased capacity at Bowburn may result in increased congestion elsewhere on the wider regional road network. The Trust does not consider the sustainability appraisal to be sound.

If a reduction to traffic through Bowburn village can be demonstrated, then after the road has opened it will be important to “lock in” these benefits and avoid the additional road capacity leading to levels of traffic creeping up again. This could be achieved through a reduced speed limit and weight limits through the village, by including traffic calming and place-making features, bus priority, and provision of segregated cycle routes and pedestrian improvements. This work should be an integral part of the proposal, and funded accordingly. It could help to achieve modal shift for local journeys within Bowburn and Coxhoe. Sustainable transport access to the major Integra 61 site is also currently very poor: the Trust made representation on this during the planning application process. The sustainable transport interventions must not be overlooked by merely funding a relief road.

Apart from diverting goods vehicles, the new road might also prove attractive to residents of the new housing on the Integra 61 site for access northwards to Durham City. No information has been provided in the ISA as to whether an increase in traffic along the A177 north out of

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

Bowburn is to be expected. If that were to occur, the Trust would have serious reservations. The bank down from High Shincliffe to Shincliffe is a safety concern, with local residents campaigning for safety improvements. Additional traffic entering Durham City might either use Hallgarth Street and add to the impact on the Air Quality Management Area, or might travel via Quarryheads Lane and Margery Lane, roads with high pedestrian flows and inadequate footways. The impact of the proposed relief road therefore needs careful consideration, with mitigation to avoid undesirable consequences. Active policies to improve air quality in the Durham City AQMA are required, such as a wider congestion zone or other forms of traffic restraint.

Looking to the future, it would be worth exploring whether a station on the reopened Leamside Line could be provided at Bowburn, especially if further housing allocations are made in the village. A Park and Ride site could be served both by rail services at the new station and an enhanced, frequent bus service into Durham via High Shincliffe and Shincliffe, potentially drawing commuters from Ferryhill, Spennymoor, Coxhoe and Sedgefield. Combined with traffic restraint measures in Durham city centre, this could achieve a significant shift to sustainable transport.

As with all new road proposals, we must remember that the main emphasis of the Local Transport Plan has to be reducing road traffic. The relief road could form a useful part of an integrated strategy to achieve a shift to sustainable transport, but this needs to be much more explicit.

Charging infrastructure for Zero Emission Vehicles (section 13)

This section is supported as a general statement of principles but there are further measures that could be included in the Delivery Plan that would make it more effective.

The call-out on page 67 relates to a perception in 2020 about poor chargepoint availability. Since then the number of chargepoints has quadrupled nationally, but provision in the NECA area has achieved only a 2.6 times increase (see the government's "Electric vehicle public charging infrastructure statistics", accessed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/electric-vehicle-public-charging-infrastructure-statistics-july-2024>).

Chargepoints should be flagged on road signs in the same way as petrol stations are. This would help EV drivers to find their next charge, and would help counter any perception of poor availability by showing the current and growing availability of EV chargepoints. This would be a relatively low cost intervention.

It should also be possible to get current statistics from Zapmap, to better inform the development of the plan.

People with a home charger can charge overnight at off-peak rates of 7p or 8p per kWh. Even with the capital cost of the charger (around £1,000), if they travel 10,000 miles a year they will recoup this outlay in around a year. The web page <https://www.zap-map.com/ev-stats/charging-price-index> has comparative costs. There are systems available to enable people without off-street parking to charge on-street by routing the cable under the pavement in a gully. One of our Trustees has participated in such a scheme using Kerbo Charge for the past 15 months, and it has proved very successful. This scheme should be rolled out as part of the delivery of charging in residential areas.

The Combined Authority should use its considerable purchasing power and subsidies to reduce the cost of public charging, especially for slow 7kW chargers, so that this option becomes cheaper than for a petrol-engined car.

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

It has been said (p. 70) that a simple “one size fits all” payment system must be in place to provide access to all chargers regardless of the provider. The Scottish Government has set up such a system, called Chargeplace Scotland. Rolling out such a system across the North East would still mean having to swap cards when leaving the region. Might it be possible to join Chargeplace Scotland? This possibility should be explored.

East Coast Main Line capacity (section 14)

This section seeks capacity enhancement on the East Coast main Line to meet the need for more long-distance passenger services and freight, but a pressing need, in terms of the everyday transport network of the North East is for more local services. While the Leamside line will help with this, there is still a need for more frequent local services calling at existing ECML stations such as Chester-le-Street, which currently has a very irregular service around every two hours between Durham and Newcastle (though shortly to move to an hourly service). A half-hourly service calling at Chester-le-Street, Durham and Ferryhill should be an aim, potentially running via Stillington to Stockton (mentioned in the Delivery Plan on p. 24).

NECA should seek to influence those with authority over national rail services to ensure that expansion of long-distance rail passenger capacity is achieved through running longer trains where possible. Relatively short train sets, as operated by Transpennine, Lumo and Cross Country, should not be allowed to deny paths to new local services. This has happened before, in the early years of privatisation, when Durham County Council funded local rail services were discontinued to accommodate more frequent Cross Country services.

Alongside developing plans for the Leamside line, NECA should explore the possibility for more local services on the ECML itself, which could bring residents of Birtley and Low Fell back onto the rail network. Between Durham and Newton Hall, and between Ouston (north of Chester-le-Street) and Gateshead, the formation historically accommodated quadruple track.

Safety and service quality (sections 15-23)

The Trust strongly supports the measures which would improve the safety, and perception of safety, of the transport network, especially for women and girls. While the plan's emphasis seems to be on the public transport network, the Trust notes that participation rates in active travel in the UK are much lower for women compared to men, while in countries with comprehensive, high-quality active travel networks such as the Netherlands they are roughly equal. The cycle networks of the Netherlands not only make women feel safer, but enable children to travel independently from a younger age, often giving women (who are disproportionately relied upon for the school run) more options for their own journeys. Enforcement action on the road network (mentioned in section 17) should also contribute to people feeling safer when travelling by foot or bike.

Section 18 is effectively “Vision zero for road safety” by 2040, in line with the Low Traffic Future coalition's key policies, but needs to be backed up by interim targets on reducing road casualties. The Trust strongly support the emphasis on improving safety for vulnerable road users.

At a glance, section 19 appears to be about public transport accessibility for disabled people. Not obviously fitting with this theme, one of the bullet points mentions reducing the impact of vehicular traffic: the volume, speed, and air pollution associated with it. Removing HGVs from residential areas is included. The Trust supports this aim. Better regional co-ordination and highways planning should seek to concentrate traffic onto the main roads which have been designed for it, and reduce the impact on residential areas, including those on historic arterial routes in towns.

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

It is clear that many aspects of this area of focus relate to highways, but the example interventions given on p. 25 of the Delivery Plan are almost exclusively relating to public transport.

Reliability and network performance (section 20)

Section 20 includes the statement that “the strategic highway network should offer more reliable journey times for the movement of both people and goods” and that this “should help lead to a greater share of journeys being made by sustainable travel, as well as freeing up capacity on road network for essential journeys”. First, the term “strategic highway network” is not defined. Does this refer to the Strategic Road Network, which is that part of the highway network managed by National Highways? There are very few roads in the region which form part of this network.

Secondly, the paragraph does not indicate what sort of interventions would help achieve more reliable journey times. Ultimately there are only two: capacity enhancement and demand reduction. The overwhelming evidence is that, except in the short term, increasing road capacity has the opposite effect. It will only achieve a greater sustainable travel share if it is combined with road pricing or reallocation of lanes to sustainable modes, neither of which are mentioned. It is unclear whether UTMC (Urban Traffic Management and Control), mentioned in the first and fifth bullet points, is to be used to enhance general motor traffic flow, or to prioritise public transport.

The Trust considers that the third bullet point has reversed the cause and effect. It would be far more accurate to state that a greater share of journeys being made by sustainable travel will lead to more reliable journey times and free up road capacity. This would then be consistent with section 2.5 on p. 7.

Overall section 20 is a strange mixture of ideas centred on customer experience, reliability and efficiency. It includes aspects as diverse as “improving the flow of traffic”, “comprehensive cleaning regimes” at public transport stops, “maintenance ... across the whole integrated transport network”, “pre-journey information on punctuality”, urban traffic management control, and maintenance of EV charging infrastructure. There is no indication as to how efforts will be prioritised among different modes. Snow and leaf clearance can matter a lot to people walking and cycling. Are these lost in the general “maintenance” bullet point? There may also be a gender bias in current autumn and winter maintenance regimes, as described by Caroline Criado Perez in chapter 1 of *Invisible women* (Chatto & Windus, 2019). Swedish towns which tried to redress the imbalance by prioritising the snow clearance of footways also experienced reductions in hospital admissions.

Connections between transport types (sections 24-28)

The Trust supports the aims of sections 24 and 25 to create a truly integrated network where people can move seamlessly from one mode of transport to another.

Cycle parking is promised at “key stations and interchanges” in section 25, and again in section 26. More Park and Ride provision “in more rural areas” is mentioned in section 28. These are two approaches to the same problem: how to enable people to connect with public transport services when bus stops lie beyond a convenient walking distance.

It should be standard practice to provide bike parking at the main bus stops in every settlement, not just “key stations and interchanges” because reducing the time from door to bus stop will increase the use and viability of public transport services. Such cycle parking can also be used by those visiting shops and other services in the centre of the settlement.

Park and Ride, however, has mixed impacts. Many academic studies have found that Park and Ride can encourage people who were previously taking the bus for the whole journey to drive to

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

the Park and Ride site instead, where more frequent, perhaps subsidised, services and free parking are available. While traffic on urban radial routes might be reduced, the overall effect can be an increase in vehicle miles and therefore emissions. See, for example, studies of Chelmsford and Cambridge in “Evaluating the long-term impacts of bus-based park and ride” by G. Mills and P. White, *Research in Transportation Economics*, 69, pp. 536-543, 2018 (available at <https://core.ac.uk/reader/161103559>). In the Chelmsford case, additional miles driven by people who had previously used public transport exceeded the reductions in miles driven by those who had previously parked in the city centre, and that was before taking into account the additional vehicle movements made by the Park and Ride buses. The Cambridge case was more successful at reducing overall vehicle miles, including attracting people who had free car parking available in Cambridge city centre, but this involved a 25km guided busway, rather than a service from the edge of the urban area.

The Delivery Plan includes scheme CA39, a £3.5 million package of suburban and rural Park and Ride sites across the region to enable people to join the bus and rail network, DU44, a £5 million scheme to create small car parks near key residential areas close to bus stops to encourage the “last miles” into Durham City via bus, and DU36, costing £7.5 million to extend Durham City's Park and Ride offer “including a potential new site”. These are all intended to be delivered by 2030.

There needs to be careful evaluation of the likely impacts of each scheme beforehand, as well as accurate measurement of the impacts of any scheme which is developed.

Managing car parking

Clearly for a city such as Durham, if we are seeking to enable more people to travel into the city, it is undoubtedly better that they park on the periphery, rather than requiring more land in the centre to be devoted to car parking. But it is even better for the surrounding villages if they do not drive at all and instead help support the local bus services. Some UK Park and Ride schemes are commercially viable (e.g. Oxford, Cambridge and Norwich) and in the case of York, a premium was even paid to the council by the bus operator for the right to run the service. Durham's Park and Ride is not currently commercially viable.

The Durham City Sustainable Transport Delivery Plan, adopted in 2019, identified the wide availability of free car parking at major employment sites (including the County Council and Durham University) as being an obstacle to modal shift, and assessed the on-street car parking as “reasonably priced relative to other historic towns and cities in England” (p. 27). No action has followed, nor has there been evidence of strategy regarding the existing on-street car parking, and council or privately-operated public car parks. If expanding the Park and Ride frees up city centre car parking spaces, will that just facilitate more short car journeys by city centre residents? What measures will be put in place to ensure more beneficial use of the land?

The LTP is silent about charging for car parking. It might be argued that this is a local authority matter, but the LTP does not shy away from statements about other local authority concerns. An individual local authority might be nervous about using a Workplace Parking Levy, for example, to constrain car use and raise transport funding. But if the LTP made some funding to LAs conditional on adopting such measures, a consensus across the region would be possible.