

A REVIEW OF LOCAL TRANSPORT PLANS IN ENGLAND

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1. ABSTRACT

In July 2000, 86 Local Authorities in England submitted their first full Local Transport Plans to the UK Government. The Plans set out the local transport investment programmes for 2001 to 2006 to deliver the Government's integrated transport agenda. This paper presents a review of a sample of 23 of the Local Transport Plans.

The Plans have been developed to follow a detailed list of guidelines developed by the DETR and a best practice guide, published after the submission of a series of provisional plans in 1999. The guidelines and national policy objectives have been strictly adhered to. However, as would be expected, each local authority has a different character and set of problems to be met. The review has highlighted a difference in levels of detail with which the problems are identified.

This paper provides a qualitative assessment of the likely impacts of the main measures proposed within the plans. Many of the measures proposed are relatively new and certainly have received only limited implementation. Against this background, the Local Transport Plans can be seen as the key to managing a large experiment to restrain traffic growth and effect a sustainable modal shift. Reliable monitoring of the experiment must be undertaken to ensure that good practice is identified and quantified against the background of varying local factors. The targets set and monitoring procedures in place are discussed before conclusions are drawn about the implications of success and failure in the achievement of the objectives of the plans.

1. INTRODUCTION TO LOCAL TRANSPORT PLANS

The Local Transport Plan process was announced in the Government Transport White Paper, "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone", in July 1998 (DETR, 1998). Local Transport Plans have subsequently been described by Government as a 'cornerstone' in the process of delivering its commitment to modernise Britain's transport infrastructure, and when Parliament approved the Transport Act 2000 a statutory duty was placed upon local authorities to prepare and implement a Local Transport Plan.

As the name implies, the Local Transport Plan (LTP) focuses on local transport needs and the process produces a 5-year strategy and a statement of resources required to deliver them. The strategy is prepared in

consultation with the local community and must comply with the 'over-arching' objectives of the governments integrated transport strategy (see section 4.4). The resulting Plan is submitted to Government for approval and includes targets and performance indicators that Government can use to monitor the local authority's progress towards achieving the local transport strategy.

This paper reports on a review of the general strengths and weaknesses of the Local Transport Plans. The review examined 23 of the 86 Plans submitted to Government at the end of July 2000. The Plans selected (Figure 1) include the 6 Metropolitan Areas outside London with the other 17 providing geographic coverage and a balance between rural areas, small and large towns.

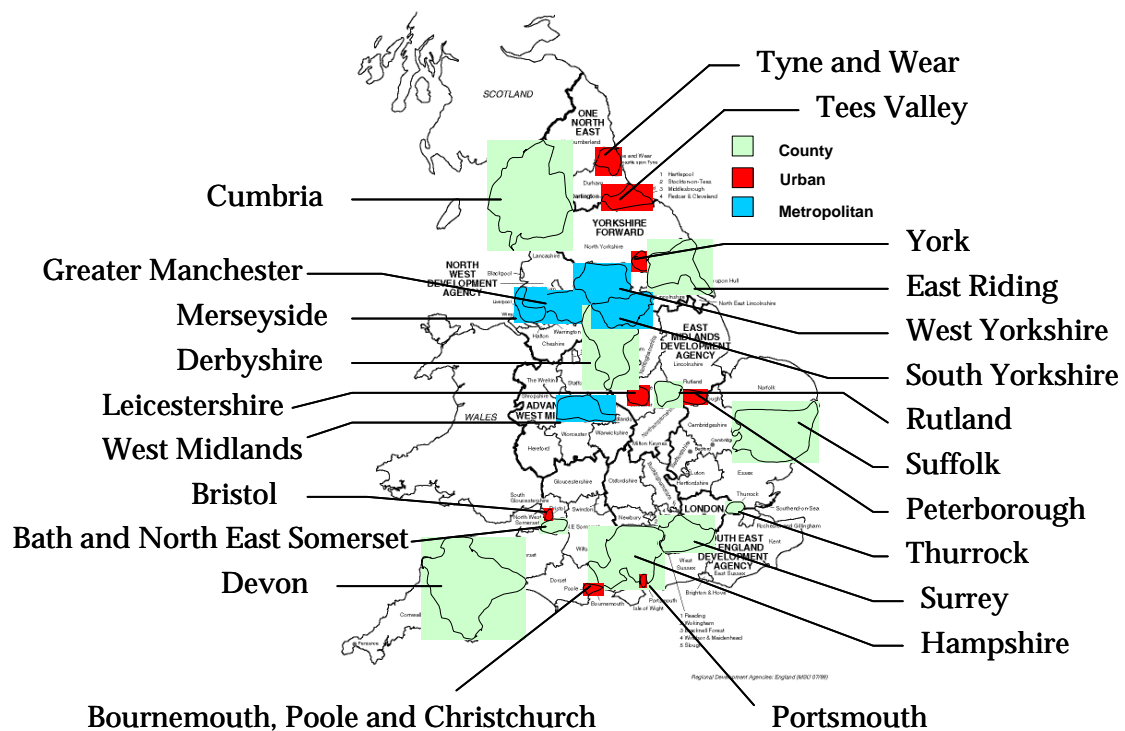


Figure 1: Local Transport Plans Examined

The paper begins with a review of the local transport plan process using examples from the plans reviewed before reviewing how the Government's current surface transport policies will be implemented. The paper is not a commentary on individual plans but uses examples from individual plans to illustrate general points and to develop thinking on the likely direction and magnitude of change that the Local Transport Plans will deliver.

1. WHAT IS IN A LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN?

The process of preparing a Local Transport Plan evolved over a period of two years, with the submission of 'Provisional Local Transport Plans' in July 1999

and 'Full Local Transport Plans' in July 2000. The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) produced two guidelines to assist local authorities in the preparation of the 'Full Local Transport Plans' for submission in July 2000. The first guideline, 'Guidance on Full Local Transport Plans' (DETR, 2000a), is concerned with the content and presentation of the full LTPs and the second, 'A Good Practice Guide for the Development of Local Transport Plans' (DETR, 2000b), provides examples of the best practice Government found in the 'Provisional Plans'.

The 'Guidance on Full Local Transport Plans' (the Guidance) was published in March 2000 and is in three parts. The first part is concerned with the process of preparing and submitting the Local Transport Plan. It is prescriptive, even to the extent of specifying five key elements a Plan should contain and the discrete sections or chapters DETR expects to find within an LTP.

The second part of the Guidance is concerned with "scope". It lists specific topics the Government expects the LTP to cover and is also prescriptive in detailing the methods it is appropriate to use.

The third part of the Guidance is concerned with the Local Authorities' responses to the Road Traffic Reduction Act 1997. While the responsibility for taking action to meet with the provisions of the Act falls on County Councils and Unitary Authorities the Guidance acknowledges that the Local Transport Plans are linked, particularly through the targets, to the demands of the Act.

1. THE STEPS TO STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Figure 2 identifies the steps the Local Authorities took in preparing their Local Transport Plans. The five key elements specified by Government are represented by the five boxes 'Identify Problems and Opportunities, Objectives, Strategy, Implementation Plan, Targets and Monitoring'.

This section of the paper summarises the response the Local Authorities made to Government up to the stage of developing a strategy. The Government's Guidance (shown in italics) is summarised first and this is followed by some examples and limited discussion of how the guidance has been interpreted across the plans.

4.1 Public Consultation

"Local people know the problems that they face better than anyone. By working with a wide range of partners, authorities can produce the strategies to tackle the problems causing local people and businesses most concern, and produce a LTP that commands widespread support". (Guidance p10)

The local authorities have carefully followed this guidance, and consultation has formed an important part in identifying the transport problems concerning the local community.

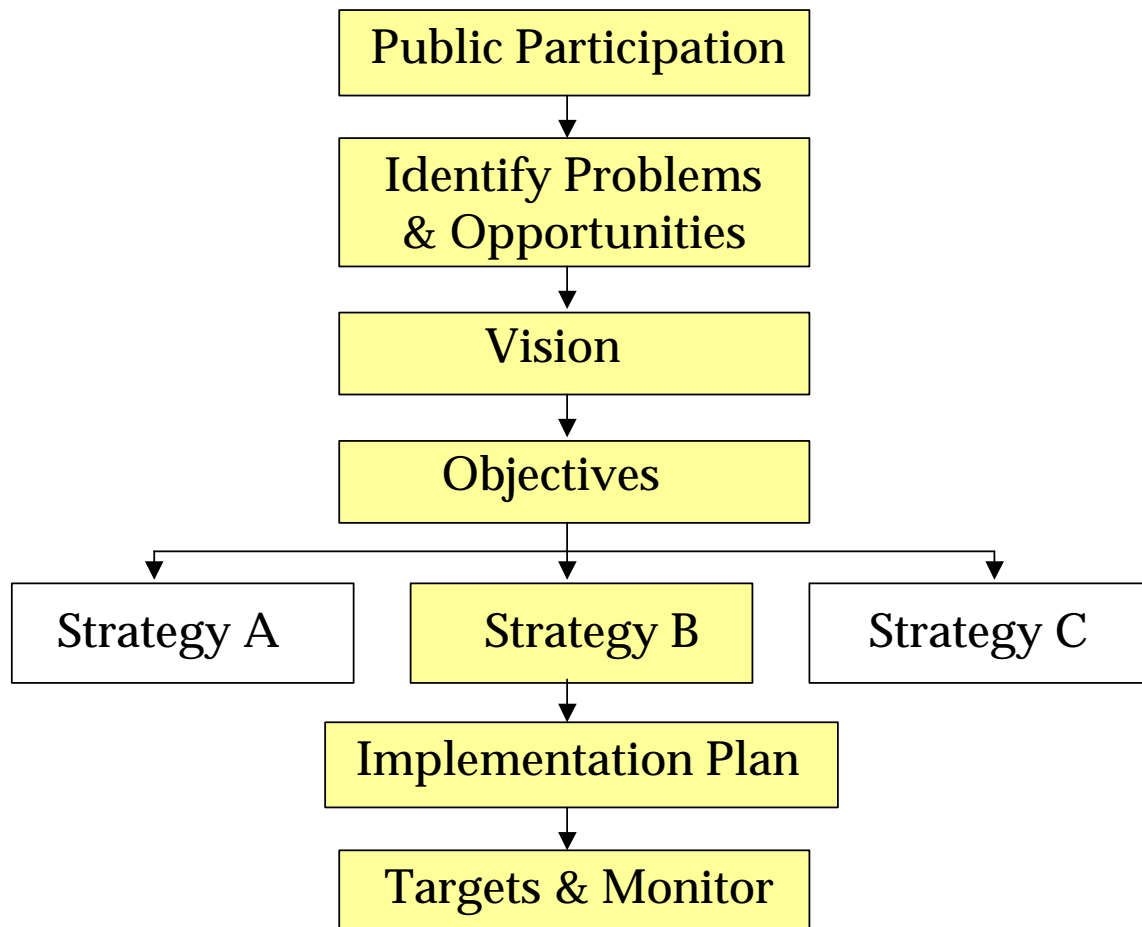


Figure 2: Steps In The Local Transport Plan Process

Consultation is generally quite broad, covering the participation of the general public through to partnership development with business, transport companies, the police and other groups. Consultation with the public has generally taken place in a staged manner. Newsletters, questionnaires, phone-in radio debates, staffed library displays, advertisements, presentations and telephone interviews were all widely employed (e.g. Merseyside). A more focussed, targeted approach has generally been undertaken in a second stage of consultation with the use of focus groups and presentations to groups. In many instances public consultation has built on the work already underway through Travelwise and Headstart type campaigns.

Detailed development of area-based solutions (e.g. Hampshire County Council) has ensured that a local focus has been maintained within a strategic regional framework for the larger area plans. The consultation exercise has enabled the Authorities to prioritise their actions within the Government's five over-arching objectives (see section 4.4) and to foster local

support, all of which should aid the implementation of schemes when difficult choices have to be made.

4.2 Identify Problems and Opportunities

“LTPs will need to describe existing travel patterns and the level of service offered by existing transport networks. This description should highlight current problems on the transport system (congestion on the roads, poor conditions for pedestrians and cyclists, inadequate public transport services, poor interchange facilities etc.). In the case of road safety, authorities are required by law to carry out studies into road traffic accidents. This section of the plan must also include consideration of transport-related problems, such as poor access to employment and services and adverse impacts on the environment.” (Guidance p23).

The difference in characteristics between urban and rural areas manifests itself in the identification of problems. The most obvious differences are in the levels of congestion, with urban areas experiencing much higher levels of congestion than rural areas, and concern over air quality. Bristol for example has significant air quality problems, which have been the focus of a number of public information campaigns and a number of traffic management measures for some time. 85% of respondents from Bristol were concerned about air quality levels. This can be contrasted with responses in Hampshire, large areas of which are rural, where only 13% of respondents felt air quality was a problem.

The concern over a particular problem is often counter balanced by the economic interests of the region. For example many large towns and small cities are feeling the effects of increasing traffic growth (e.g. Bath, Bristol, York and Winchester), but some Metropolitan areas e.g. West Yorkshire (outside of Leeds) and Merseyside, have a policy for economic regeneration and accept that this will result in extra road traffic.

As regards opportunities, many authorities note the potential importance of intelligent transport systems and outline plans for implementing new traffic control systems and public transport information systems, but such plans do not, in general, form a major part of the strategies for solving the current problems. Local authorities have also recognised opportunities for public-private partnerships.

While each authority has a good understanding of the nature of the problems they face, the magnitude of the problems are less clear. When data are used to quantify the problems they are often derived from the early 1990s. For example the population and employment statistics, which are fundamental to the amount of travel, are generally based on the 1991 census. Considerable changes in land-use and travel patterns and in vehicle ownership and use have clearly happened over the intervening period but the impact of such changes has not been quantified.

4.3 Visions

“Local authorities must lead their local communities, organise and support partnerships to develop a ‘vision’ for their locality and to contribute to achieving it. The vision describes what the area should be like in the future. It identifies how people want to live and recognises local strengths, weaknesses and opportunities. The overall vision gives broad direction to objective setting within the LTP”. (Good Practice Guide, para 4.1)

Local Authorities have mission statements and visions covering the whole range of services they provide to their community, not just transport. The vision for transport is therefore set within their broader vision and within the regional context.

Derbyshire's LTP, which excludes the city of Derby, has a vision for transport provision that is typical of many of the other largely rural communities and market towns:

“At the heart of our vision is a transport system that is both fair and efficient. Healthier lifestyles, safer communities and better access to jobs and local facilities will be the result. To get there we will improve the choice and accessibility of transport while balancing the economic, social and environmental needs of everyone.” (Derbyshire LTP, 2000, p8)

The broad vision of a vibrant, sustainable community where people want to live and work is a recurring theme in the LTPs. Within the transport visions the strong influence of central government's integrated transport policy and the associated over-arching national transport objectives occurs repeatedly.

4.4 Objectives

“The objectives contained in a plan must be consistent with the integrated transport policy and our over-arching objectives underlying the New Approach to Appraisal. These are:

- 1. To protect and enhance the built and natural **environment**;*
- 2. to improve **safety** for all travellers.*
- 3. to contribute to an efficient **economy**, and to support sustainable economic growth in appropriate locations;*
- 4. to promote **accessibility** to everyday facilities for all, especially those without a car; and*
- 5. to promote the **integration** of all forms of transport and land use planning, leading to a better, more efficient transport system”. (Guidance p22)*

The authors of the Plans have been meticulous in following the DETR Guidance. Invariably the LTPs list the over-arching national objectives before interpreting them in the local context. All of the Plans have an objective to provide “safer, healthier communities”. The great majority also wish to provide “better travel choices and accessibility”; have “sustainable economic

growth”; “improve the integration of modes”; and improve “air quality and the environment”.

4.5 Strategies

“The LTP system is built round 5-year integrated transport strategies, devised at a local level in partnership with the community” (p9)..... “Local strategies will need to support national strategies” (Guidance p10).

The Guidance for Full Local Transport Plans goes on to state that the LTPs should contain an overview of how the separate programmes and policies form the overall strategy. In addition, and more difficult to achieve, they ask local authorities to justify the strategy choice that was made: *“It may not be possible to work up alternatives to the same level of detail as the one adopted, but in developing the strategy it will be necessary to demonstrate that the chosen solutions are likely to perform better than the alternatives.”* (Guidance p23).

The assessment of the alternative strategies proposed within the LTPs is made using tables, which set out the impact each alternative strategy is expected to have in terms of the key assessment criteria for each of the Government’s over-arching national transport objectives. The assessments are highly subjective, especially in rural areas, showing, usually with a tick mark for ‘acceptable’, the local authorities judgement of whether a strategy is beneficial in terms of each of the key criteria. There is no attempt to quantify any elements of the assessment at this stage. This only happens after the strategy has been selected and the specific schemes that are designed to achieve the selected strategy are subjected to the Government’s recommended ‘New Approach to Appraisal’.

While subjective assessments are the rule in rural areas, the selection of the preferred strategy in predominantly urban authorities, though still essentially qualitative, is slightly less so. Urban authorities often have a strategic transport model and elements of their alternative strategies can be assessed using the model. Bristol City Council, for example, has examined a number of strategies in recent years using their BRITES model and this is well represented in the discussion in their LTP. Greater Manchester used their Strategic Planning Model, which they state is in their view “the most complex transport and land-use model currently available in the UK”.

Devon County Council is notable in having adopted a slightly different approach. They do not compare different strategies, but have chosen to have a set of strategies aimed at particular topics. They group these strategies into three types:

1. “Why people travel – strategies for travel to different types of destination.
2. How people travel – strategies that focus on integration, mobility and different modes of transport.

3. What impacts transport has – strategies that tackle key impacts of transport: road and bridge maintenance, road safety, air quality, noise and climate change.” (Devon County Council, 2000, p41)

These themes give the strategies a stronger focus than is found in many other LTPs and lead directly to headline targets and performance indicators that can be used to measure the success of the strategies.

The greatest concern arising from the strategy development process is the general lack of quantitative assessments of the proposed strategies, which leads one to question the magnitude of the changes that can be achieved and the risk to be attached to these policies. There is not an easy way of assessing the risk to be attached to the Plans at this stage, except to note they should be regarded as risky if only because there are no measurements of the likely success or failure of many of the proposed solutions. Section 5 therefore examines the general implications of trying to satisfy the Government’s over-arching national transport objectives for the environment, safety, the economy, accessibility and integration.

1. SATISFYING THE GOVERNMENT’S OVER-ARCHING OBJECTIVES

5.1 Environment

The Government lists ten areas of environmental concern in their Guidance to Local Authorities - Noise, Local Air Quality, Greenhouse Gases (climate change), Landscape, Townscape, Heritage of Historic Resources, Biodiversity, Water Environment, Physical Fitness and Journey Ambience.

It is clear that the Local Authorities understand the significance of climate change initiatives. The measures they propose in the LTPs to reduce CO₂ are mainly directed at reducing the amount of traffic, but the resulting reduction in CO₂ will be small in comparison to the reduction the Government can achieve by encouraging the rapid introduction of more fuel efficient vehicles using new technology (Figure 3). A few LTPs consider reducing CO₂ emissions from their own vehicle fleets, but otherwise do not consider the introduction of more fuel efficient vehicles.

Local authorities have been developing and undertaking air quality reviews for some time and the maturity of this process is evident in the understanding presented within the LTPs. All authorities are working towards the 2005 national objectives for air quality and these objectives feature as a target within the plans. Public consultation on the issue has also been common and the local authorities realise that local improvement schemes can make a significant improvement to local air quality even if they do not make a large contribution to national targets.

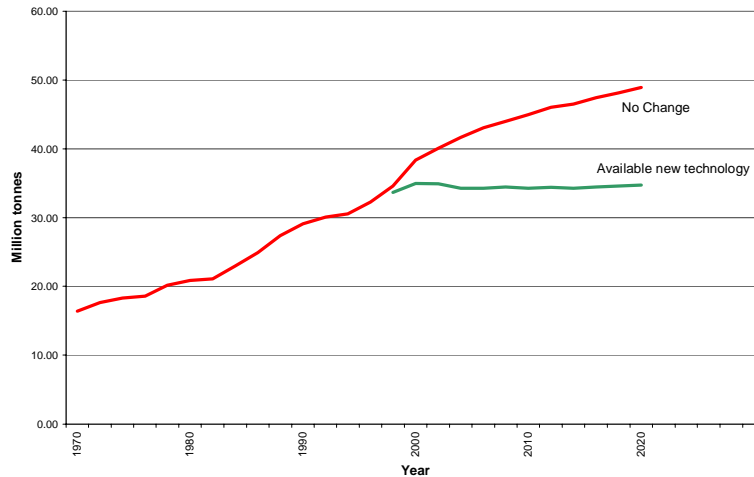


Figure 3: The effect on CO₂ emissions of the rapid introduction of new technology into vehicles (Wootton and Poulton, 1994)

One potential area for Local Authorities to consider is the impact that developing strategic routes will have on flows and subsequent emissions and air quality on heavily trafficked routes. Noise, like air quality assessments and other areas of environmental concern, are an integral part of new scheme assessment and are treated this way in the LTPs.

5.2 Safety

Local authorities are required to have local casualty reduction targets, but there is little room given for them to set casualty targets less stringent than the new national targets. All authorities accept this and work to at least the national targets with some setting more stringent local standards, though in some areas it is difficult to do this. Peterborough for example has so few fatal accidents that the pattern of occurrence is not easy to predict.

Road Safety has long been a concern at a local level and the analysis of the current road safety problems presented within the Local Transport Plans is on the whole extremely detailed and of excellent quality. The local authorities have demonstrated, through their efforts in helping to achieve the previous road safety targets, that they have the ability to make a major contribution towards achieving the new targets.

Benchmarking will be a useful tool in helping to understand which safety measures are working well and in what context. A number of authorities have compared their performance to the national and regional averages and Surrey, Hampshire, East and West Sussex and Kent are taking part in a collaborative benchmarking club.

5.3 Economy

The Government offer little guidance on how to achieve their over-arching economic objective. The implicit assumption throughout the guidelines is that

by following the Government's approach to integrated transport an efficient, sustainable economy will result.

Local authorities use the Appraisal Summary Tables set out in the 'New Approach to Appraisal' to assess the benefits of the schemes that are proposed in their Plans. These tables require qualitative and quantitative statements of the benefits/disbenefits the schemes are expected to produce. Inspection of the Plans shows there is a lack of detailed economic assessment regarding the likely impacts of proposed schemes, especially multi-modal schemes, yet the plans often put forward targets for the changes in modal shift. This is contrary to best practice, as for example suggested in the guidance provided by SACTRA (1999), who said in their report on 'Transport and the Economy' that cost benefit analysis "can be expected to promote better decision-making than adopting arbitrary policy measures, such as target levels of transport intensity" (3.41, Chapter 3).

There is a telling statement in the Surrey Local Transport Plan: "*In the past, it was assumed that economic growth and traffic growth went hand in hand. A growing economy automatically created more journeys, more vehicles and more congestion, all of which required substantial investment in new roads and improvements to existing ones. It is now clear that, if there is to be sustainable economic growth, any direct links between economic growth and traffic growth have to be severed*" (p7). This severance is accepted implicitly in many of the LTPs, yet any evidence that this can be achieved, or that is beneficial, is subjective and unconvincing.

Most of the traffic growth that has occurred over the past 40 years has come from new trips that are generated when a car is acquired. These new trips are estimated to be worth at least £42 billion to the economy (Wootton and Marsden, 2001). The concern is that public transport services cannot satisfy this demand and there is an unquantified risk that the local economies could decline rather than grow from implementation of the strategies adopted in the LTPs to reduce car travel. Further, there is little evidence that the local economies will be monitored to determine the effect the adopted strategies will have or the context that their impacts will be measured in. The risk of failing to achieve targets and of failing to provide value for money must be considered to be high.

5.4 Accessibility

Local Authorities have proposed plans that will assist those whom the Government defines as socially excluded - the transport needs of women, disabled people, older people, younger people, people from ethnic communities and people on low incomes - thereby enabling them to gain access to the wide range of facilities enjoyed by others.

The plans set out in the LTPs emphasise the roles of public transport, walking (particularly in town centres) and cycling. While the plans should deliver an improved public transport system throughout the country, in terms of more services, quality, ease of access, provision of information and personal

security, too much is expected from the improved public transport services in terms of the number of passengers better services will attract away from the car. This concern is intensified by the subjective nature of the appraisal of the need for new public transport services. The plans are largely justified on the basis of social inclusion, but the lack of quantification gives no indication of cost, subsidies or long-term viability.

If the paramount objective is to improve social inclusion it has to be recognised that public transport services, walking and cycling can never provide the range and frequency of choices and opportunities that are provided by the car. To achieve this is not a question of providing new public transport services, pedestrian areas (though these can be very attractive) or dedicated cycle routes, but of ensuring that workplaces, shops, leisure facilities, etc. are relocated to be adjacent to these transport networks and within an acceptable travel time to where people live. While some of the LTPs recognise this dilemma none suggest subsidising new activities to reduce travel by car and widen choice, for example shops in deprived or rural areas, nor do they suggest encouraging people to live within walking distance of their work or live on an existing bus route.

5.5 Integration

The Government's 'integrated transport policy' is adopted enthusiastically in the Local Transport Plans. All of the plans contain initiatives to improve and renew existing interchange facilities (both bus and rail) and many contain a commitment to increasing the availability of high quality Park and Ride sites. Bus quality partnerships are also a feature of the plans, with operators committed to improving the quality of buses on selected "showcase" routes in response to improved infrastructure. Public Transport Information is based around the national Passenger Transport Information centre and how local sources of data can feed into this. Integrated ticketing is also a key feature of many plans.

Tackling journeys to work and journeys to school forms a strong element of all plans. Safer routes to school and green travel plans have been widely discussed and targets are put forward for the number of schools and large employers in which transport plans will be in place by the end of the plan period.

Freight accessibility is discussed in line with Government's Guidance, with many authorities having already identified priority freight routes to service key interchange points (e.g. ports). Most plans also include a target to develop a number of Freight Quality Partnerships to improve freight efficiency.

A general concern is that the plans do not contain clear indications of the assistance careful land-use planning can make to reducing travel demand. Tyne & Wear highlight a dilemma in locating new development. The local Unitary Development Plans in the Tyne & Wear Area locate new employment, housing and shopping centres adjacent to the A1 and A19, which apparently have no existing or proposed public transport services to serve them. Tyne &

Wear intend to encourage future development at new public transport hubs but say: *“we must recognise the obstacles to achieving these goals immediately. Existing Unitary Development Plans (UDP) were prepared before the new approach to transport. They include significant allocations for future development at the urban fringe. Although many of these allocations have yet to be developed, rescinding them is unlikely to be practicable. We will examine the potential for retaining these fringe allocations but ensuring their accessibility through development of public transport networks.....As land-use policies determine future travel patterns, they are critical to the Local Transport Plan. As part of the Plan we intend to develop a broad land-use strategy (to 2016). This will provide a framework for the reviews of detailed UDP policies in the future.”* (Tyne and Wear LTP p49) Many other authorities face the same dilemma.

Land-use patterns and the transport systems that serve them are inextricably linked. The only point to add to Tyne & Wear’s analysis of the dilemma they face is that just as land-use policies shape future travel patterns so improved transport access changes the land-use patterns. The two go hand in hand and there is far too little evidence that this message has been understood in preparing the integrated transport policies set out in the Local Transport Plan submissions.

5.6 Asset Management and New Schemes

The importance of the management and maintenance of the UK’s road network is summed up by Suffolk County Council: *“Effective asset management is a key part of the LTP, since sustainable transport solutions will mostly make use of the existing highway network”* (Suffolk County Council, 2000). The maintenance of the road network accounts for about 40% of capital investment bids in the plans studied and the maintenance backlog should be significantly reduced by 2006.

The majority of the LTPs include bids for new schemes, especially the metropolitan areas and larger cities. Most of these are related to new public transport provision, but there are instances where there are plans for new roads, generally where these can be shown to provide much needed relief and environmental benefits.

5.7 Implementation and Funding

The LTPs are to be welcomed as part of a disciplined 5-year forward planning process. In general, the implementation plans set out in them are sound and acceptable, with the capital bids spread uniformly over the 5-year period. Nearly 60% of the funds requested are related to plans for investment in public transport, cycling, walking, safety measures and measures to support social policies. The remaining 40% is required to maintain the existing infrastructure.

The “Local Transport Plan Settlement”, December 2000, has provided £8.43 billion over 5 years in support of the Local Transport Plans. This sum

includes £4.4 billion for public transport, covering the Government's contribution to 28 major public transport schemes and including £2.8 billion earmarked for the smaller transport schemes. Of the remaining £4 billion, £3 billion is for maintenance of the existing infrastructure and £1 billion for 39 major road schemes.

A possible concern is the need for additional revenue to maintain the new capital projects, for example ongoing provision of information to a new public transport information system. The revenue will come from the local authorities account and it is not clear that the local authorities have the necessary funding in place to satisfy this new ongoing requirement.

5.8 Targets, Performance Indicators and Monitoring

The process of solving local transport problems is based on setting objectives and achieving these objectives through targets. This is a legitimate approach and it can be successful, as demonstrated by the success of the programme of road safety measures implemented throughout the 1990s to achieve the initial road safety target.

The new safety targets are simple to understand and the procedures for monitoring them are well established. The same can be said for the air quality targets, but the Government's aim of having meaningful targets that are easily understood is not achieved in most other areas. Policy targets are intermingled with good management practice; there is little consistency to be found, which makes monitoring and benchmarking difficult; targets are frequently expressed as deliverables, for example how many firms will be targeted to adopt journey to work travel plans; others as percentage changes and a few in absolute terms. There are simply too many targets and there is great potential for future confusion, misinterpretation and misleading statistics.

Government should be concerned that there is no consistency in the LTP targets, performance indicators and monitoring regimes, especially as the Government still expects the increase in travel by car over the next ten years to far exceed the increase in travel by all the other modes combined (DETR, 2000 – see Figure 4). A possible way forward for the Government is to monitor the changes independently of the local authorities, to publish the progress towards the targets they have set out in their 10 Year Plan and to promote best practice through annual revisions of their 'Good Practice Guide'.

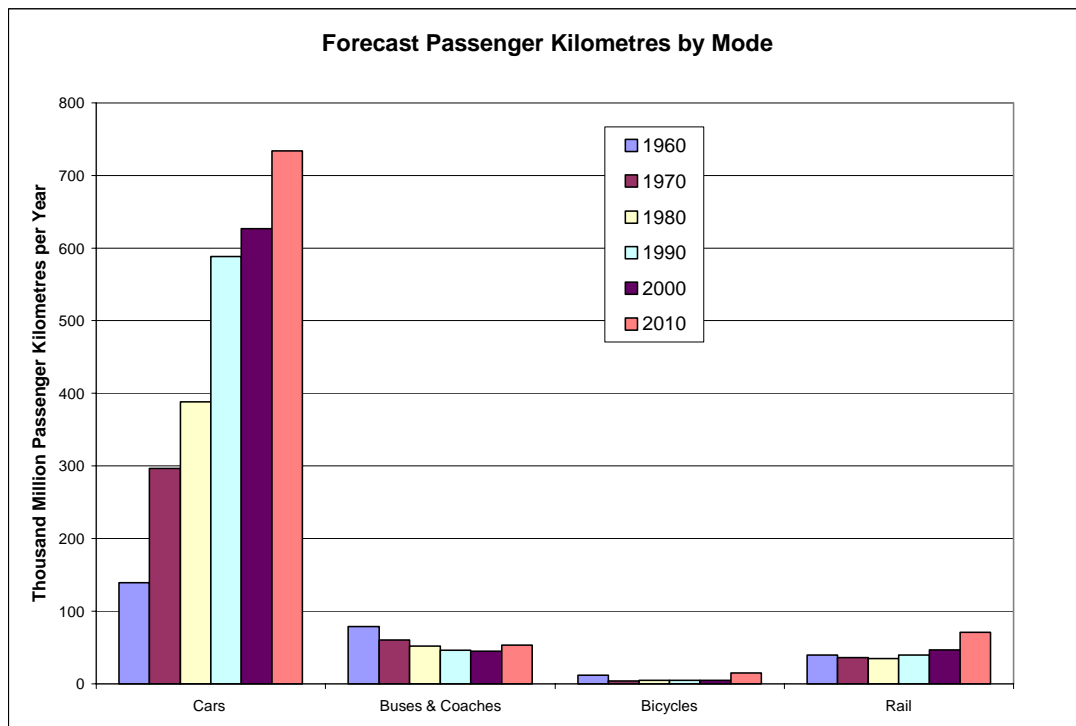


Figure 4: Passenger Kilometres by mode of travel, 1960 to 2010

1. CONCLUSIONS

The Local Transport Plan process is to be welcomed as an opportunity to develop an integrated transport strategy with significant stakeholder involvement. The overall impression of the plans reviewed is that they are of a good quality and if all of the measures are delivered, and there seems to be no reason to doubt that they will be, the UK will have a significantly enhanced transport system for all modes at a local level.

However, the extent to which travel choices will be widened, people will be persuaded out of their cars and local economies will benefit is unknown. The justification for the strategies adopted in the Local Transport Plans is largely subjective and there is simply too little quantitative evidence or justification to know whether the Plans will provide value for money in satisfying the Government's over-arching objectives or those of the LTPs. There is certainly a considerable risk that the benefits arising from implementation of the new transport strategies will not be as great as the public expects. Standardised monitoring and regular dissemination of best practice are essential in understanding the successes that are achieved and ensuring they are transferable.

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