Integrated National Transport Strategy: Call for ideas

London TravelWatch response

About London TravelWatch

London TravelWatch is the official independent watchdog set up to advocate for people travelling in and around London. Our sister organisation, Transport Focus, covers the rest of Great Britain.

London TravelWatch promotes integrated transport policies and presses for better journeys for everyone, with higher standards of quality, performance and accessibility. We work directly with users, other transport user groups as well as transport operators, providers, regulators and local authorities. In turn, transport operators consult us on proposed changes to services or closures of lines or stations.

In your opinion, how could the transport network be better 'joined-up'?

For people travelling, every part of the journey matters. Problems on even one link can be enough to create dissatisfaction and a lack of confidence across the board, and can put people off travelling that way in future. This is particularly the case for multi-modal trips. A deserted, vandalised station with no information is unlikely to help attract passengers. A bus may have extra amenities like wi-fi but if people aren't convinced it will arrive in time to get them to the station in time to catch their train they may not use it. A high quality cycle route is not enough if it stops just short of the town centre where people want to go.

The easier and more seamless the journey can be made, the better. To have truly integrated transport you must make a smooth and easy journey chain out of all the individual links.

We believe there are three main ways in which the transport system could better joined up:

- More integration between functions, so that the information systems know when transport services are coming
- More integration between services, so that people can easily make connections. For example, operators co-operating to provide integrated timetables that line up services, and making sure there is high quality interchange between modes. This can include clear information and signposting, a good quality streetscape, and step-free access.
- More integration across operational and/or ownership boundaries. However many different modes or operators someone's journey involves, to them it is still just one journey

When doing this, it is vital that everything is made as accessible and sustainable as possible. Anyone should be able to use the transport network, no matter their requirements – whether they are Disabled, if they have small children or lots of luggage, no access to the internet, or any other characteristic. This accessibility should be by design, not just an afterthought.

How could data be used to improve the transport network?

In London, TfL's decision to open source its data for passengers has been successful in encouraging innovation, whilst their own app, TfL Go, continues to improve its functionality and the range of information provided. More widely across the transport industry, apps with live travel information, journey planning, accessibility information and the ability to buy tickets are now commonplace. Third party retailers such as Trainline have also helped to improve the quality and quantity of information available to passengers. This, in turn, has increased passenger expectations of the information they believe should be at their fingertips, which continues to drive a virtuous cycle of improvement.

Data has a key role to play in encouraging further use of the transport network. For those with accessibility needs, the availability (or lack) of live data can be crucial in need to plan for an alternative route, if possible, or in deciding whether a discretionary journey should be attempted at all. In this area, it can be particularly crucial to be able to see whether lifts or escalators are operating before making the journey. Similarly, the provision of live data showing the availability of toilets in stations and the location of disabled toilets on trains (where applicable) is important.

Yet whilst the prevalence of data in digital products can benefit passengers, it is important to remember that a significant number of people do not have digital access. London TravelWatch's research[1] into those who are either digitally excluded or digitally disadvantaged revealed that 1 in 6 Londoners had been unable to buy a ticket without a smartphone or internet connection, which had stopped them from travelling – the equivalent of more than 1.5 million Londoners. And so, printed maps and timetables, along with posters in stations containing information such as timetables and details of engineering works (rather than posters with merely a QR code to obtain the details) are important tools for ensuring that information remains available to the widest number of people.

To ensure that the provision of information is as widespread as possible, it is also critical that transport providers take a pan-impairment approach, using a variety of formats. This can mean, for example, not just putting information on screens or not just providing it through tannoy announcements.

[1] Left behind Londoners - London TravelWatch

Similarly, transport providers should welcome receiving feedback from passengers on an ongoing basis and in a variety of formats, to ensure that everyone can have their say and improve the service.

How could technology be used to improve the transport network?

Technology can certainly be used to improve the transport network, if it is harnessed correctly. New technologies, such as autonomous vehicles, electric scooters and e-hailing rides could make life easier for people. For example:

- Personal micromobility solutions have the potential to be a much greener transport option for many people. TfL have been running an e-scooter trial in a number of London boroughs since 2021. TfL's analysis of the first phase of the trial in 2023[2] highlighted the benefits of using e-scooters, with over three million trips made and more than 7.5m km travelled, with no fatalities and 22 serious injuries. There was higher use of the e-scooters during the peaks which suggests that they were being used for at least part of a commute. If even only some of these journeys are replacing those on private vehicles, then it will help ease congestion levels and have an environmental benefit too.
- The ability to e-hail taxis and private hire vehicles can offer passengers a safer and more convenient way to travel, in the speed and ease of booking, clarity of the journey cost at the start of the journey, no need to pay in cash and in knowing that they are entering a safe vehicle. Such a service can also reduce the need to buy a private vehicle and, as with micromobility solutions, this may help reduce levels of road congestion.
- Autonomous vehicles may have the potential to make roads safer by reducing the number of collisions involving human error and accident risks. They could also reduce congestion through communication with other autonomous vehicles and other road infrastructure such as traffic lights. More widely, they could improve access to education, work and leisure for those who are unable or unwilling to drive. This would particularly benefit people in areas with limited public transport options.

Whilst there are benefits with new technologies, it is important that there is appropriate regulation to go along with them. The need for this regulation has been highlighted with private electric scooters which, although not legal to use on public roads, have become a commonplace sight on the road. But this has not been without concern, with the Department for Transport reporting that there were 1,292 collisions involving e-scooters in 2023, and 1,387 casualties involving people riding them.[3][2] Another example is dockless bikes, which again can bring many benefits, but as they are currently used also present issues. This includes e-bikes blocking pavements

[2] London e-scooter rental trial: interim findings
[3] Reported road casualties Great Britain: e-Scooter factsheet 2023 - GOV.UK

when left in inappropriate locations, particularly impacting blind and visually impaired people and those with mobility impairments.

At present, TfL and local authorities do not have the powers they need to regulate these new technologies. It is important that such gaps are addressed, through legislation where needed. Effective regulation at a national level is a key part of helping to manage and mitigate against any potential downsides with these technologies, both to those who use them and other people those who may interact with those users. These regulatory frameworks should be created with a view to futureproofing them. Technology will continue to develop, so it is important that the relevant regulation can adapt in line.

In the understandable enthusiasm to embrace new technologies, it is important to ensure that they are as accessible for as many potential users as possible. This includes those who are either digitally excluded or digitally disadvantaged, as explained previously. The full benefits of new technologies cannot be fulfilled if they create a new type of inaccessible transport which excludes those who are digitally excluded or disadvantaged.

And it must be remembered that there will always be many people who either can't or don't want to use the new technology. Transport modes such as trains, tubes, buses, walking and cycling will therefore remain the travel options for most people, and this won't change in the foreseeable future. It is critical that they do not lose access to reliable, affordable and accessible public in the rush to use new technologies.

How, if at all, would you improve the way decisions are made about the transport network?

When making decisions about the transport network it is crucial that relevant stakeholders are meaningfully engaged, whether transport operators, organisations representing passengers or the travelling public itself.

Cross-industry communication is important to make sure all aspects of the network are appropriately considered. For example, when making changes to a service or station, are other modes or services that also operate there considered? This collaboration can create a better outcome for both industry and passengers, by making sure decisions are fully informed, considered holistically and shared resources used to deliver things efficiently.

More meaningful and targeted engagement with the public would also improve decisions made about the transport network. Proper consultation can strengthen outcomes by providing more insight and wider views on a topic, giving the opportunity to address issues highlighted or incorporate new ideas. It is important that this is done in an inclusive and accessible way, to capture a range of views and

build trust in the process. Additionally, extra efforts need to be made to make sure engagement takes place with people who may be disproportionately impacted by something. This includes people with protected characteristics, such as Disabled people.

Where possible and appropriate, we would also like to see a shift from consultation to co-design. This would make sure people's voices and insights are built in throughout the process, not just at one or two points.

Any other comments?

While the new Integrated National Transport Strategy may cover all the key points in theory, in order to deliver it sufficient funding is vital. Without this, poor implementation may mean the benefits are not fully realised. Proper resourcing not only applies to transport operators and bodies, but also local government. London boroughs are responsible for 95% of the city's roads, and so they ability to invest in improvements is vital to making our streets more accessible for all.

As well as providing the needed levels of funding, it is important that agreements are long-term. The short-term capital funding settlements TfL have received in recent years are an example of where, when the long-term certainty is missing, spending ends up not being as efficient as it could be. A long-term capital funding settlement for TfL would allow it to move away from the current annual approach, which TfL says would enable it to plan and deliver much-needed capital projects more effectively. This principle applies nationally too, and is indeed already the case for organisations like Network Rail, National Highways and other major city regions in the country.

The interface between national and devolved institutions also needs to be considered. Rail is a key example of this. For example, if reform of national rail fares happens, how will it interact with TfL's zonal fare structure for public transport? And will Government funding for TfL continue to depend on an expectation that the Mayor will mirror the national increase in rail fares each year? With regards to infrastructure, will there be further devolution of responsibility for rail services to the Mayor for London, with some metro rail lines brought under TfL?

This extends to making sure there is a consistent approach where possible across boundaries and operators themselves. For example, at present people may have to follow one process to request passenger assistance from one TOC, but a different process when they change to a train (or mode) operated by a different TOC. This can make using the transport network more confusing and complex than is necessary. One standardised process can take best practice from across operators and simplify the journey for passengers.

The recent scrutiny Euston station has been under highlighted the problems that can occur when operators are not sufficiently joined up. More optimistically, the recent changes, including the move towards a "one-team" approach to managing the station

by Network Rail and TOCs, shows the benefits that a more integrated approach can bring. However, there is still more to do, for example working more closely with TfL to improve the poor interchange between trains, the underground and buses. The running of HS2 to Euston makes it even more important this is done well by the industry. And while we use London examples, it is undoubtedly true that there are similar issues at other stations across the country.