

North East Public Transport Users Group: response to North East Local Transport Plan consultation, January 2025.

The North East Public Transport Users Group (NEPTUG) is a voluntary organisation that campaigns on behalf of current and future users of public transport (including walking and cycling) in the region. NEPTUG believe that a re-regulated, integrated, accessible, safe, and affordable public transport service is the way to enable, rather than encourage, people to change travel behaviour to reduce their use of private cars, and thus tackle the economic, social, and environmental problems created by our current transport mix. We have campaigned for over a decade to make the case to local authorities and transport providers in the region to develop a transport system that enables people to choose the most sustainable mode of transport for their journey, not be locked into car dependency.

NEPTUG welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the draft North East Local Transport Plan (LTP), given the importance of setting the right vision for transport in our region. While the LTP's core objectives of integration, sustainability, and resilience align with the aspirations of our members, the region continues to face significant transport challenges and, given transport's vital role in underpinning economic activity and enabling day-to-day activities, social, economic and environmental challenges too. Limited and unreliable local rail services, expensive and infrequent bus services, a failing Metro system, car-dependent housing development, unsafe and inconsistent cycling infrastructure, poorly-maintained pavements, and inadequate provisions for those with accessibility needs hinder the region's economy and restrict access to employment, education, and essential services.

Overview

It is hard to disagree with the LTP's overall vision for a green, integrated regional transport network that delivers seamless integration between modes (including active travel), and a safer, more resilient, and simpler network enabling travel by sustainable means. We fully-support the commitment made by Mayor McGuinness in her election manifesto to *"make the North East the best connected and greenest region in the UK"* and applaud NECA for creating a bold vision for transport in the North East. We also fully support the re-regulation of buses as a first step to a unified, integrated, publicly-owned transport system in our region.

The LTP makes an excellent case for change in our region, setting out in Section 4 the many economic, societal, and environmental challenges that we face in the North East. We believe that sustainable transport, underpinned by the three pillars of sustainability, will address those issues if adopted in a way that measures performance broadly and puts people and planet, not profit, at the heart of the transport plan. We would, however, like to qualify the statement that "travel is good" (Page 14). What is "good" is enabling people to meet daily needs, to take part in society and the economy, to contribute to the success of our region, and to live healthy lives. If this can be done without the need for excessive travel and therefore provision of expensive infrastructure, with opportunities reachable by walking or cycling from where people live, then this is far better than enabling long-distance journeys for basic needs. To do this requires a holistic approach encompassing not just transport but wider planning policy.

Section 5 sets out a compelling vision for our region, but one that NEPTUG feels does not go far enough to tackle the issues identified in the LTP. For our urban areas, we would encourage NECA to look elsewhere for the kind of Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan that is now common in many European regions (<https://changing-transport.org/content-overview-sump-toolkit/>). Such a plan begins with ensuring political buy-in, assessing the current transport situation in the region, and then determining an agreed set of future scenarios. These should then be discussed with citizens and stakeholders to agree a common vision of the future that all parties in the region can sign up to. Crucial in that process is the setting of targets and indicators that will measure progress against the plan, agreement on actions and responsibilities for implementation, and then monitoring and evaluation. Much of this is missing in the North East LTP. (<https://tinyurl.com/2ke4stee>)

On rural transport, the plan acknowledges the difficulty of transport in our more rural areas. Transport for the North's report on social exclusion (<https://www.transportforthenorth.com/wp-content/uploads/TRSEintheNorth-2023-2024.pdf>) recognised the high cost of transport for rural communities, many of whom are already facing poverty (<https://doi.org/10.51952/9781447367147.ch005>) The role of digital connectivity is acknowledged, but there is also a role for local services. If the daily needs of rural residents, including employment, can be provided in their local area than it drastically reduces the need to travel long distances, saving money for households and reducing energy use and emissions. Greater integration can also improve rural accessibility, with bus services connecting to frequent local rail services (e.g. on the East Coast Mainline in Northumberland) or cycling hubs at bus stops to allow villagers to access faster bus services to rural and urban centres.

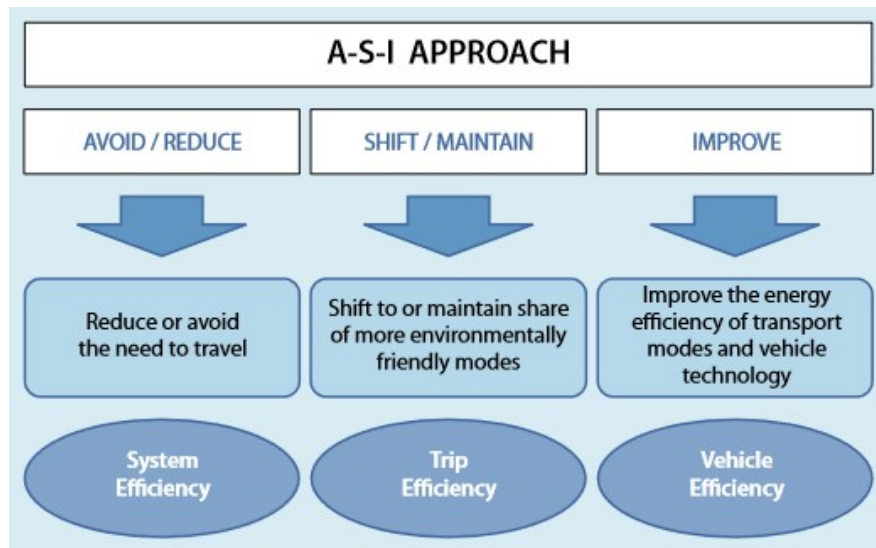
Finally, what is also missing from the LTP is a sense of urgency. We have known about issues such as high levels of road injuries and deaths, high levels of air pollution, high levels of car dependency, and flatlining CO2 emissions for decades. Given that the LTP is to last until 2040, it is imperative that scale of ambition matches the scale of the challenge. The plan must define both the direction of change but also the pace at which this change will happen. Reducing CO2 emissions from transport per se is not sufficient, as it is the cumulative emissions over time that drive global warming and climate change. Thus, carbon budgets are important, not the date at which transport becomes zero carbon.

The decarbonisation rate of the LTP should be set by the carbon budget for achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement and the UK Climate Change Committee carbon budgets defined for the period of the LTP (<https://www.creds.ac.uk/publications/reverse-gear-the-reality-and-implications-of-national-transport-emission-reduction-policies/#where-next>), the air quality ambitions should be set by the latest WHO guidance (e.g. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240034228>), and latest public health research should guide reallocation of road space, pedestrianisation of urban centres, and promotion of active travel (e.g. <https://www.health.org.uk/evidence-hub/transport>). The London Net Zero Strategy aims for carbon neutrality by 2030 and includes "a 27 per cent reduction in car vehicle kilometres travelled by 2030", demonstrating what is possible in terms of ambition. <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/environment-and-climate-change/climate-change/zero-carbon-london/pathways-net-zero-carbon-2030>

All North East local authorities have declared climate emergencies and adopted target dates for carbon neutrality between 2030 and 2050. The LTP should support, not hinder, these targets. To enable this, a large-scale reduction in car use is essential (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-023-37728-x>), something that will require the bravery to use both carrots (e.g. more affordable public transport, safer and connected active travel infrastructure) and sticks (increased parking costs, a region-wide

Workplace Parking Levy, road space reallocation to sustainable modes). Shifting and avoiding travel and goods movements (providing large co-benefits of improved public health and local air pollution in the process) is achievable, with the region unlikely to meet its climate targets without significant demand reduction for transport (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1364032124006671>).

Adopting an ‘Avoid-Shift-Improve’ approach to transport in the region would help frame the ambitions around those modes that contribute most to economic, social, and environmental goods.



Firstly, **‘Avoid’** refers to the need to improve the efficiency of the transport system through integrated land-use planning and transport demand management. The LTP recognises the need, in Ambition 7, for a “joined-up approach to transport infrastructure investment and spatial planning”. Given new government housebuilding targets, it is imperative that NECA work together with local authorities to ensure housing is delivered in a way that locks in sustainable transport. The current paradigm of low-density sprawl locking in car dependency and forcing families to drive for the most basic necessities increases greenhouse gas emissions and reduces physical activity (<https://www.transportfornewhomes.org.uk/the-project/building-car-dependency/>).

Using roads to “unlock” new development goes against many of the ambitions of the plan. Ensuring that residents and employees of new developments can travel by public transport and active travel would existing roads will be more than sufficient for those that need to drive including freight and other deliveries. New development should be designed to be accessed by public transport and active travel as ‘retro-fitting’ will be either expensive or not possible. Using a vision-led approach to transport planning can help avoid the default assumption that new developments must lead to increase private car traffic.

Secondly, the **‘Shift’** part seeks to improve trip efficiency through a modal shift from the most energy consuming urban transport mode (i.e. cars) towards more environmentally friendly modes, particularly walking and cycling (the lowest carbon, healthiest, and most space-efficient modes), and public transport (lower energy consumption per km and higher occupancy levels). This shift is identified in the LTP but enabling the transition will require strong policy commitments.

Measures such as implementation of low traffic neighbourhoods and school streets, safe crossings on major roads that favour walking and cycling, a review of speed limits in line with the successful implementation of 20 mph speed limits in Wales, improved bus priority (and thus reduction in private

vehicle space), extension of the Tyne and Wear Metro, development of tram systems, and increased capacity and frequency on local rail services will help to achieve the required shift.

Thirdly, the **'Improve'** component focuses on vehicle and fuel efficiency as well as on the optimisation of transport infrastructure, including the use of alternative fuels such as electric or hydrogen vehicles. This technological aspect should come last, after as many journeys as possible have been avoided or shifted.

Adopting such a framing for the measures identified in the LTP would focus on those which enable the use of the healthiest, cheapest, most space-efficient modes, reducing the costs for expensive infrastructure investments by reducing the demand for travel overall. The residual journeys can then be accommodated on existing infrastructure, especially if road space is reallocated to those more space-efficient modes. Investment in walking, cycling, and public transport infrastructure will obviously be needed to implement this approach, but investment in new road capacity will not be needed in a future with significantly fewer car and lorry journeys.

Key Recommendations

The North East Public Transport Users Group has developed a number of key recommendations to deliver an improvement to public transport to ensure an accessible, affordable, reliable, and sustainable transport system for our region. These recommendations are designed to address transport inequalities and poverty, support the region's economy, improve public health, and enable a shift from private cars in favour of public and active transport.

NEPTUG broadly agrees with the five priority areas of focus (Planning journeys/informing users/supporting customers; Ticketing and fares; Reach and resilience of infrastructure; Safety, especially of women and girls; and Connections between different transport types). We also support the key themes of a more inclusive economy, a better environment, and a healthier North East, all three of which will be supported by a move away from private car travel towards a wider adoption of sustainable modes.

Other key themes for transport that NEPTUG members would like to see addressed are:

- **Ownership and Oversight**

We applaud the Mayor's ambition to follow the lead of Greater Manchester in taking buses back under public control, and integrating tickets across the region's public transport systems (see below). We see this as a necessary first step, however, to reform of who owns, who controls, and who has a say in public transport in the North East.

Whilst franchising is crucial to re-integrate and redesign our bus services in the short-term, arresting the decline in bus patronage that we have seen in recent years, further steps will be needed. Research by Friends of the Earth and the University of Leeds, which involved an analysis of all available local and national timetable data in England and Wales over the last 15 years, has shown that while London has had an almost constant level of bus provision, many other parts of the country have seen declines of more than two-thirds. Since 2008, urban bus services (except London) have dropped by 48% and rural bus services have dropped by 52%. These reductions have the biggest impact on the poorest in society, on women, on those with disabilities, and on people of colour.

Given the failure of franchising on Britain's railways, and the new government's proposal to take franchises back into public control as they expire, NEPTUG is worried that franchised bus services could lead us down the same path in the long-term. Money is still syphoned from the system to pay dividends for commercial interests (mostly hedge funds) instead of being retained and reinvested for use in the bus system, cross-subsidising quiet routes with busy ones.

We would therefore urge NECA to look to Edinburgh and Nottingham for examples of successful (and award-winning) bus services that are owned by the public. Lothian Buses, owned by Edinburgh and neighbouring local authorities, has low fares, integrated tickets, high-standard vehicles, and consistent branding. This shows what should be possible in the North East with political will and ambition.

In addition to public ownership, NEPTUG also believes in public input to the services that we rely upon. Some North East local authorities run public forums where residents can discuss and shape transport in their borough. We call on NECA to follow the same principle, allowing public discussion of transport schemes, ensuring that Bus Boards are open to all, and encouraging the local authorities in the region to run open Transport Forums, allowing scrutiny and input to transport plans as they develop.

We strongly believe that transport is something that should be done *with* people, not *to* people. We constantly hear from members about the lack of accountability of the private companies who currently run transport, and the lack of opportunity to input on transport schemes being delivered in the region. We would happily work with NECA to change this and call on the Mayor to establish a NECA Transport Stakeholder Forum that meets regularly, consults genuinely, and allows meaningful challenge to policies as they are developed.

- **Integration and Infrastructure**

We applaud the LTP's vision to integrate transport in the region. Ambitions 1-5 suggest a vision for an integrated system, bringing together buses, Metro, rail, and ferries, which is an essential part of making public transport the first choice for all. This integration should also extend to active travel, as everyone needs to walk, wheel, or cycle to reach public transport at the outset of their journey. To this end, we fully support Ambitions 24-28.

All public transport journeys begin with walking, wheeling, or cycling, and as such infrastructure to reach stations and stops is important as the road and rail infrastructure on which services run. The region should adopt a moratorium on removal of pedestrian infrastructure (e.g. Leazes Footbridge in Durham) where alternatives increase distance and reduce the attractiveness of walking or wheeling. Maintenance of pavements should be given priority, especially in light of the low cost of maintaining walking and cycling infrastructure compared to roads, to ensure they are safe and accessible to all.

All cycle infrastructure in the region should be built to a high standard (e.g. LTN 1/20), something which is currently very variable across the region. A uniform and clear standard for walking and cycling infrastructure should be adopted across the North East, so that users don't encounter different standards on crossing local authority boundaries. This should also extend to wayfinding and signage, helping more people to travel by active modes.

We would encourage NECA to build quickly on the existing Pop technology, bringing local rail and bus services into the fare cap. It is confusing to passengers that the new Northumberland line is included in the Pop system, yet local services to Gateshead Metrocentre, Blaydon, Heworth, or Sunderland aren't. This must be addressed. The introduction of a London-style automatic fare cap would significantly simplify the current confusing mix of fares and tickets, automatically providing transfares for those changing between modes and capping at day saver rates for those making multiple journeys. Season ticket holders could be charged a small additional fare for journeys outside of their usual zones.

The integration of fares on public transport is a necessary first step, but we would encourage NECA to look to examples like the OV Card in the Netherlands for the obvious next step. This allows people to also hire bikes (and e-bikes) at railway stations, ensuring greater connectivity and coverage between modes (Ambitions 6 and 10). This could also include integration with car clubs, allowing those in rural areas to connect with public transport easily and cheaply instead of driving long distances.

To support greater integration and reach of public transport, some expansion of infrastructure is vital (Ambition 6). The Tyne and Wear Metro should be the backbone of the region's transport infrastructure, offering a high-capacity, frequent, and rapid connection between origins and destinations, and integrating with bus services at key interchanges (as envisaged in the initial plan for the system in the 1970s). Competition between buses and the Metro should be eliminated as much as possible, and we fully support Ambition 26 for coordinated timetables and services. We advocate that the North East bus map be started again from first principles, redesigning bus services to serve modern demand patterns, ensuring orbital as well as radial journeys in our region, and avoiding duplication of bus numbers for different services.

We are surprised that there is no mention of Metro Flow frequency improvements to 6 trains per hour per line, which was meant to be implemented when new fleet fully in service. As new fleet has fewer seats it would only be with the extra train per hour that number of seats per hour increases on Metro. Also, Metro frequency on Sunday mornings should be better than the current half hourly until mid-morning and increased to at least a train every 12 minutes through the day. The sequence of reducing frequency on weekday evenings and terminating at South Gosforth/Regent Centre should also be pushed later than 19:00, and the possibility of night Metros to the Airport should be explored to assist workers and passengers.

NEPTUG recognises that there are many areas of our region that aren't, however, currently served by the Metro system. We strongly advocate for the prioritisation of the extension of the system to Washington (one of the largest towns in the UK with no rail access), offering a faster, more reliable alternative for residents. We also strongly urge NECA to consider the role of trams in our transport mix. Sheffield, Nottingham, the West Midlands, Manchester, and Edinburgh have all benefitted from the introduction of modern tram systems in their cities, bringing multiple social, economic, and environmental benefits. Trams could be employed in our region too, offering improved connectivity, efficiency and reliability to areas like Team Valley, southern Sunderland, the West End of Newcastle, and the business parks of North Tyneside.

We fully support Ambition 14, to expand capacity on the region's rail network. Local rail services in the North East are often a poor relation to the high speed, intercity services. We

support the ambition to reopen the Leamside line to increase connectivity and capacity, but there are also opportunities on existing infrastructure. Reinstating slow lines on the East Coast mainline from Chester-le-Street to Low Fell could allow the reopening of stations at Birtley and Low Fell, and north of Newcastle stations at Killingworth and Forest Hall could transform public transport connectivity using the rail network. In rural Northumberland, we would strongly support our partners at Rail Future and SENRUG who are seeking regular, frequent, and rapid local services on the ECML, serving stations in towns and villages like Acklington, Widdrington, Warkworth, Belford, and Beal. Utilising electric multiple units displaced from elsewhere would provide higher top speeds and acceleration, ensuring local hourly stopping trains could fit in between high-speed intercity services.

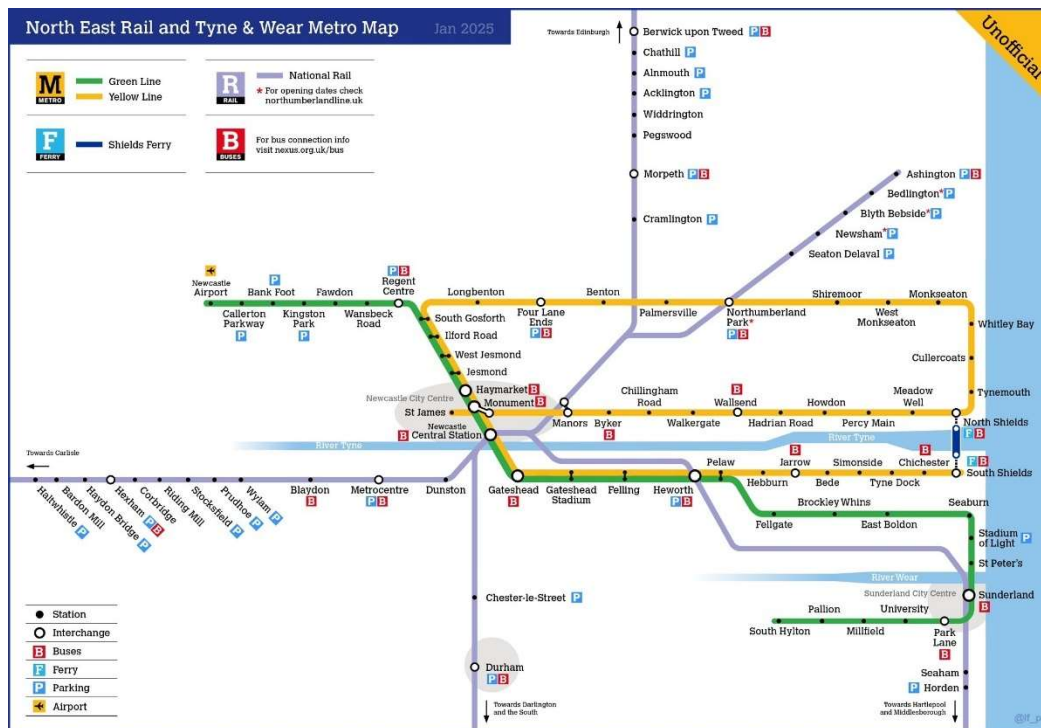
Integration between public transport and active travel is vital, so ensuring bikes can be carried on as many forms of public transport as possible will greatly improve the reach of the system. When the new Tyne and Wear Metro rolling stock is fully rolled-out there should be a revision to the bikes on Metro policy to permit travel through the central section of Newcastle and Gateshead (as there is in Sunderland) and boarding/alighting at Central for rail connections as a minimum (if not Haymarket/Monument). Similarly, time restrictions where this can be done safely should be relaxed to enable multi-modal journeys. Alongside this, carriage of bikes on buses should also be improved. Go North East currently provides bike space on a small number of buses, but the ability to take bikes on a wider range of bus services (when wheelchair or pushchair spaces are not occupied) would increase the coverage of the bus network significantly at little additional cost. Alternatively, the LTP could investigate buses having front racks to allow carrying of bikes on some key corridors as is the case in some other European/US cities.

Cycle storage at Metro stations must be updated, as the existing smart lockers have been unreliable for a number of years and are being phased out of use. Their replacement must be brought forward as a matter of urgency. It must be made easier for anyone to access these lockers when needed, not just the few regular users who managed to take time out of their day to book an appointment during office hours at South Gosforth to get their card activated. Similarly, cycle storage provisions of some kind should also be available at bus stations and stops, even if just a simple Sheffield stand. This is the norm in countries like Denmark, enabling people to cycle to bus stops and negating the need for all bus services to negotiate housing estates or rural villages, adding to journey times and reducing attractiveness of services.

Integration mainly happens at interchanges, and a number of these are overlooked in the current LTP. Within Newcastle, Manors railways station is neglected as a key interchange between local services on the ECML, Northumberland line, and Tyne and Wear Metro and local buses. Manors will be key for the new Pilgrim Street East development, with 7000 jobs being delivered, and is closer to the two universities in Newcastle than Central Station. Visibility, accessibility, connectivity and safety of Manors station should be included in the LTP.

We support Ambition 3 for the development of a unified identity for public transport in the region. NEPTUG would encourage the adoption of the current Tyne and Wear 'Calvert' identity (M for Metro, B for bus, F for Ferry, R for Rail) across the wider region, playing on our heritage and the pioneering work of Margaret Calvert. We also strongly advocate for the adoption of regional maps for transport to be displayed at stations and stops, giving the travelling public a much better understanding of the integration between modes. This is an example of work

done by a NEPTUG member to better reflect the connectivity between Metro and rail in the region:



Integration between coach services and other modes must also be improved. Many people rely on coaches for long-distance travel, and coaches currently serve the major bus stations in Sunderland and Middleborough, but do not stop in Gateshead and serve a semi-derelict, neglected station in Newcastle. Reintegration of coaches into the transport mix should be explored, potentially through a new coach and bus station in Newcastle serving the Pilgrim Street East redevelopment.

Under Ambition 9, NEPTUG would strongly advocate for the inclusion of an ambition to expand the region's role as a key gateway for UK-Europe ferry traffic. Until recently, it was possible for people and freight to travel from North Shields ferry terminal to Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Germany alongside the remaining route to the Netherlands, enabling low-carbon transport for business and leisure purposes. We urge the Mayor to work with DFDS and other operators to explore the reintroduction of the historic UK-Scandinavia ferry routes, opening our region to tourism from Europe as well as providing residents of the North of England and Scotland the option to travel abroad without flying. This should be prioritised above improving access to the airport.

Finally, the integration of policies must be considered in light of the targets and metrics set out above, adopting only the policies that genuinely address the social, environmental, and economic challenges we face. This will inevitably involve the integration of carrots (pull measures) and sticks (push measures) to enable change to happen. An attractive, affordable, accessible public transport network will only be fully utilised if it is also delivered alongside measures to disincentivise unnecessary car use. Nottingham's Workplace Parking Levy demonstrates an example of a policy that both dissuades car journeys but also generates ringfenced revenue for the development of sustainable transport alternatives. We explore

NECA to consider a similar scheme in the region, linked with park and ride or stricter urban parking policies, to underpin transformative change.

Safety and Security

We applaud the LTP's focus on the Safety and Security of transport users, and this should extend to all modes. The biggest source of death and injury on transport in the North East is road traffic accidents, with 236 people killed and 3,016 seriously injured on the region's roads since 2020. Of these 49 deaths and 938 serious injuries were women or girls. We therefore fully support Ambition 18 to reduce road fatalities to zero by 2040. To be effective, this must also include collaboration with the region's two Police and Crime Commissioners and targeted interventions to reduce road danger. Evidence from Wales and Scotland shows that interventions like 20mph speed limits in urban areas can significantly reduce casualties (by over 20%) with minimal cost implications. If the region were to adopt Vision Zero, this provides an opportunity to pioneer an independent road accident investigation team for the region. https://www.racfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/International_review_of_road_collision_investigation_approaches_jeavons_runacres_december_2020.pdf

Safety and security should begin when leaving the front door, so more must be done to ensure the safety of people walking to access their destinations or reach public transport, including when women and girls are travelling to and from and waiting at public transport stops as well as when on a bus or Metro (Ambition 16). Measures to tackle the danger of pavement parking, which often forces parents with pushchairs to walk in the road, must be advanced in collaboration with national government.

In line with best practice, the road safety plan should focus on reducing danger, which begins with reducing both the speed and volume of motor traffic on our roads. This must include working with highways authorities and Active Travel England to redesign and reallocate road space, narrowing vehicle lanes, tightening corner radii, and implementing Low Traffic Neighbourhood approaches to remove vehicles from residential areas.

The region should also, as a matter of principle, ensure that every road pedestrian crossing which is not part of a signalised junction / bus signal priority measure automatically changes immediately to allow pedestrians to cross without making them wait 30 seconds or more for no reason other than making a different set of car drivers wait. This would instantly improve pedestrian journeys, reduce frustration and improve safety, as people would be less likely to cross while the red man is on.

Making transport safer should include First aid/ Active bystander training for all public transport staff and provision of more defibrillators and first aid kits on buses, trains and major stations. The new Tyne and Wear Metro trains have defibrillators, so should all stations.

Accessibility and Equity

All users should be able to travel across the region, regardless of physical ability, age, gender, or any other protected characteristic. The current transport system, with its high dependence on car use, excludes many users either directly or indirectly, economically or physically, reducing transport equity. To address this, traffic reduction is essential alongside a range of other measures to reallocate road space for the most vulnerable users, enable the poorest in society to access services, and ensure that all users can use all modes. A number of impacts of future transport to 2040 on equity have been identified by the Government Office for Science: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/784685/future_of_mobility_access.pdf

Wheelchair users should be able to access transport without the need to pre-book, with step-free access to stations and services a priority. It is disappointing that the new Northumberland Line does not allow step-free access between trains and platforms, but this is the case across most of the North East rail network. Those with physical disabilities should also be able to wheel or cycle, through the provision of dropped kerbs, removal of barriers on cycle infrastructure (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c0d3yl93dv2o>), and maintenance of footpaths to ensure wheelchair users are not subject to painful bumpy journeys.

We support Ambition 2 to provide accurate real-time information for all passengers, and this must be accessible for disabled passengers through: audio and visual announcements at all stations and on vehicles, and the provision of real-time information at bus stops. Whilst the provision of information through an app is attractive for many, we urge NECA to be mindful of digital exclusion and avoid forcing people to own a smartphone to access basic public transport information. Stop-based displays, informing passengers of the time until the next service, are ubiquitous in many places in the UK and Europe and should be the norm in the North East.

The use of toilets on the transport network is a major issue, and currently a barrier to many people using public and sustainable transport options. Toilets are not just about passenger comfort, but their absence also discourages many people, particularly older individuals, families, and disabled travellers, from using public transport. A transport system that lacks basic facilities like toilets excludes vulnerable groups so addressing this issue enhances the region's commitment to accessibility.

NECA should prioritise the installation of public toilets at major Metro, rail, and bus interchanges, including Sunderland, Newcastle Central, Gateshead Interchange, and key suburban stations. All new transport developments incorporate free-to-use toilet facilities as standard, ensuring that cost is not a barrier to toilet access for passengers. The LTP should also set out an approach to address issues with cleanliness, lack of maintenance, and security issues in the few transport-linked toilets that do exist, including regular cleaning schedules and security measures to ensure facilities remain safe, hygienic, and accessible at all times. Accessible toilets should remain unlocked and available during transport operating hours, particularly for disabled passengers.

Toilet use is also an issue for transport workers, so arrangements to access toilets at appropriate points elsewhere on bus routes for use by bus drivers to make the role more inclusive for women and anyone who may need to use the toilet more often.

Metrics and Measurement

Finally, in order to chart progress against the many noble ambitions included in the LTP, the set of measures of success and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) must be significantly strengthened. We encourage the inclusion of realistic interim targets setting out the rate of change expected and what will be achieved by the end of the Mayor's term of office under each KPI, with appropriate monitoring and evaluation to ensure corrective action can be taken where KPIs are in danger of being missed.

On the Sustainable Travel KPI, this should link to the Active Travel England target of "over half of all shorter journeys (under five miles) to be made using active travel by 2030", also reflected in the Government Decarbonising Transport Plan target of 50% of all journeys in towns and cities cycled or walked by 2030.

(<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/610d63ffe90e0706d92fa282/decarbonising-transport-a-better-greener-britain.pdf>).

On the Public Transport KPI, care must be taken to distinguish between the percentage of households who have access, and the percentage of households who choose to use public transport to make that journey. As such, success of the public transport network should be measured in terms of use, and in terms of car journeys avoided, rather than just in terms of network coverage.

The Climate Action KPI must be strengthened to identify the rate of change, not just the direction. Reducing annual CO₂ emissions by 0.1% per year would be measured as a success under the current criteria, but this risks missing the necessary rate of reductions to achieve the carbon budget for the region and the UK as a whole. We agree with Section 5.1 of the Integrated Sustainability Assessment Carbon Assessment Report section 5.1 which states "emissions will not reduce at the pace required to meet national decarbonisation commitments if the region relies solely on future uptake of zero emissions vehicles: it will also be necessary to reduce vehicle traffic."

To meet UK carbon budgets, as set out by the UK Committee on Climate Change, transport demand will need to be significantly reduced (<https://www.theccc.org.uk/2021/07/14/ccc-responds-to-governments-transport-decarbonisation-plan/>). The Centre of Energy Demand Reduction stated recently that "there are no future scenarios in which the UK can meet its carbon reduction milestones over the next two decades whilst car traffic is allowed to grow." and that "this is true even if electric vehicle uptake is massively accelerated." They also say that "plans to build more road capacity ... will be a waste of resources in the face of the necessity of lower traffic growth" (<https://www.creds.ac.uk/six-ways-for-government-to-make-a-serious-shift-to-net-zero-transport/>). In its [Review of Energy Policy 2021](#) the UK Energy Research Centre (UKERC) concluded that "a 30-50% reduction in car kilometres is needed by 2030, relative to 2020, to meet the UK's 6th Carbon Budget." This should be reflected in the Climate Action KPI in the LTP for it to be meaningful and evidence-based.

We strongly believe that NECA should prioritise the provision of sustainable transport alternatives instead of increasing road capacity that would increase traffic and carbon emissions, spending financial resources that could be used to support active travel or public transport instead. As the Carbon Assessment Report concludes "it will be important to apply whole life carbon management principles" to infrastructure schemes. As such, NECA ensure

that this KPI includes measurement on non-tailpipe emissions, such as road construction emissions and embodied carbon in new infrastructure, increased emissions due to induced demand driven by additional road capacity, and emissions caused by additional air travel and/or air freight caused by improving transport to Newcastle Airport.

Finally, the Air Quality KPI should reference the statutory targets for air quality, not just a reduction per se. It is important, in light of the legal duty set out after the government's defeat by Client Earth, that air quality limits (e.g. $40\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ for NO_2) are met in the shortest possible time. Reference should also be made to the WHO recommendations for air quality, and the KPI should measure compliance with these (<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240034228>). To assess performance against this KPI, NECA should work with organisations like Newcastle University's Urban Observatory to ensure as wide a network of monitoring stations as possible.

The setting KPIs needs to go hand-in-hand with considering how they will be monitored, including currently available data such as that collected by TADU, what additional data may be needed in order that progress can be monitored, and what resources are needed to gather and analyse these data. Monitoring of the LTP should include:

- Manual, automatic or video counts of vehicles or people, e.g. crossing cordons or screenlines - this will reveal levels of transport activity at the locations in question (and hence changes over time in this activity), but not the demographics of the people travelling, nor the start or end-points of those journeys or the reasons why they are being made;
- Surveys – the North East is long overdue a comprehensive travel survey, which would allow the particular travel patterns of our region to be better understood, and a baseline for monitoring established.

We recommend the guidance on [sustainable transport monitoring strategies](#), produced by the Distillate project.

Concluding Remarks

NEPTUG applauds the North East Combined Authority for the development of an ambitious and comprehensive Local Transport Plan. The need for change is clear, and the scale of the challenge is daunting, but we are willing to work alongside other organisations to help shape a plan that delivers for the people of the region, socially, economically, and environmentally. To tackle the challenges we face, we need bold action, decisive leadership, and the inclusion of transport users across the North East. North East Public Transport Users Group has worked for over a decade to bring together local authorities, transport operators, trade unions, voluntary organisations, and the travelling public to collectively define a vision for our transport system that delivers social and public good for the benefit of all. We now stand ready to work with NECA and Mayor McGuinness to continue this work.

North East Public Transport Users Group, 26th of January 2025 hello@neptug.org.uk

"It's the action, not the fruit of the action, that's important. You have to do the right thing. It may not be in your power, may not be in your time, that there'll be any fruit. But that doesn't mean you stop doing the right thing. You may never know what results come from your action. But if you do nothing, there will be no result." Mahatma Gandhi