

## Transport Focus workplan: October 2020-March 2021

### 1. Introduction

Transport and the way people think about making journeys has changed beyond recognition in recent months. Altered lifestyles, such as more remote working and less business travel, will bring long term change to both travel patterns and attitudes to transport. Attracting people back to transport networks, especially public transport, to help boost and level up the economy, decarbonise transport and build in more inclusivity, will create great challenges.

Transport Focus and our partner organisation, London TravelWatch, are uniquely placed to represent transport users throughout their door-to-door journeys. We represent transport users in Scotland and Wales as well as with various devolved transport bodies in England.

We offer unique, innovative, independent and trusted insight into attitudes, experiences and requirements. This will be vital as governments and the transport industry make difficult, complex decisions with scarce resources in the coming months and years with a strong pressure to grow the economy.

We will work with the transport industry and governments to:

- Identify, and help implement, what is required to build confidence among users and potential users, to support a strong return to public transport.
- Advocate for the consumer by protecting the public transport user and road user interests and defending them against unwelcome changes.
- Ensure the user voice – and that of the lapsed and potential future user - is central as transport is built back. This involves taking advantage of the changes brought about by the pandemic to deliver systems that are personalised, inclusive and responsive to local needs.

Through the Covid-19 crisis Transport Focus has made a considerable difference for transport users such as:

- We secured rail refunds and better information for passengers.
- We set up the now well-respected and heavily used weekly multi-modal omnibus survey of attitudes and experiences to travel. This has enabled us to press for improvements and ensure the needs of transport users are paramount in the delivery of services.
- Our new online rail, bus and road user ‘communities’ give us an unparalleled opportunity to understand user attitudes and needs within the broader context

of Covid-19. These have been used to inform the decisions of transport bodies.

Along with our achievements, Transport Focus's proven independent pan-GB mixture of world class insight and consumer advocacy means we are uniquely positioned to help governments, devolved transport authorities and the industry deliver strategic improvements. Such improvements are needed to support transformational economic growth, boost jobs and make a greater contribution to the world economy. We translate insight into action.

In these uncertain times we have adapted to new and changing circumstances but always with the user at the heart of what we do. For example, we necessarily stopped our face to face insight of our flagship surveys, such as the National Rail Passenger Survey, but have gathered users' views and experiences in new and innovative ways. Over the months ahead, we will continue to adapt to different challenges that emerge whether connected to changing travel patterns, Covid-19 or Brexit. We will also publish reports produced in advance of Covid-19 which are still relevant (see Appendix).

Our overall theme for the next six months is to help governments and the transport industry re-inforce - or rebuild - user or non-user confidence in travelling whether in thinking about or realising travel plans. We have ambitions to do more by applying our approach to new areas where we can be useful. Here we set out our plans, which will have to be flexible to cope with events, for the next six months.

## **2. Restarting travel and the economy: safe, sustainable and inclusive transport**

### **2.1 Identifying and rebuilding transport user confidence**

We will

- continue our highly successful and useful weekly omnibus survey of public attitudes to travel, covering all modes including road use, subject to adequate funding
- continue our online communities of rail, bus and road users
- continue to use our standing Transport User Panel to explore user issues in more depth
- at the same time, work towards restarting to measure satisfaction with rail, bus and tram journeys. In the shorter term, our new 'Barometer' could gather insight on user and non-user confidence and experience providing fast feedback.

## 2.2 Breaking down barriers to public transport

Our insight on Covid-19 identifies what people need to give them confidence to get back onto public transport when the time is right. Using this insight we will work with the transport industry to break down barriers to travel and build back services in a way that meets user needs.

- We will start preparation for new work based around our previous, successful ‘Give Bus a Go’ work in the West Midlands. This aims to break down barriers to bus use, increase confidence in choosing the bus again and help boost industry revenues.
- We will start a new workstream aimed to identify the current barriers to rail use, help break them down and restore passenger confidence, as well as boost industry revenues. Rail fares and retailing reform is likely to feature heavily in this.

## 2.3 Rail reform

The Covid-19 crisis has accelerated a process of reform already underway. As Government control over the railways has increased, and major changes will be made to the structure, funding, specification and operations of the railway, it is important that the passenger voice is heard in these decisions being made on their behalf. Big changes are looming in fares structures - the consumer voice must be clearly heard in these decisions.

## 2.4 Making a difference for passengers

We will make a difference for rail, bus, coach and tram passengers by:

- Continuing to advocate for transport users at a city/region level as tough decisions on long-term public transport priorities are made across major city regions. This will be achieved through our roles on strategic bodies including chair of the West Midlands Bus Alliance, co-chair of the Bristol City Transport Board; representing bus passengers on the Liverpool City Region Bus Alliance, the West Yorkshire Bus Partnership and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority bus partnership; representing transport users on the Mayor for Greater Manchester’s Transport board, Transport for the North’s Partnership Board and Transport for Wales Advisory Panel. We will get involved in other devolved transport authority areas where appropriate
- Ensuring the passenger voice is heard in discussions on any future bus strategy across Great Britain and on the way bus services are funded and controlled in those nations
- Updating and publishing guidance on the Covid-19 Bus Services Support Grant to help provide confidence for bus users and identify industry best practices
- Building on existing work checking the clarity of information provided on bus company and local transport authority websites. Explore potential to do similar for tram and coach operators

- Developing new ways of conducting the Bus Passenger Survey for 2021 – whether it be the gathering of data or the liaison and follow up with the operators and authorities
- Continuing to represent passengers on Network Rail’s supervisory boards across England and Wales, input to the TransPennine Route Upgrade Board and work with Network Rail on the reopening of passenger services on the Northumberland line re-opening project. We will work with Transport for Wales to provide consumer led insight to wider transport needs in South East Wales.
- Boosting the rail user voice. Some train companies fund additional consumer representation on behalf of their passengers. Through this Transport Focus will carry out extra work on behalf of those using Govia Thameslink Railway, Great Western Railway, Greater Anglia, Northern, South Western Railway, TransPennine Express, West Midlands Trains, Transport for Wales and Network Rail Wales
- Continuing our role in representing the passenger on licence conditions and policies such as Accessible Transport Policies, National Rail Conditions of Travel, ticket office opening hours, complaints handling procedures and Penalty Fare schemes
- Continuing to work with the Department for Transport on rail contracts, including checking and reporting on information provided to passengers on train company websites
- Continuing to push for improvements on: Delay Repay compensation, passenger information and, in association with London TravelWatch, on complaint handling and escalation procedures including the performance of the Rail Ombudsman.

### 3. A reliable road network

Britain relies on its roads. Our role of representing road users has never been more important as Highways England spends large sums of money on improving the network. Efficient roadworks and rapid clear up following accidents remain crucial for the user, as does a strong focus by Highways England on the basics like surface quality, signage and information benefits the road user.

#### 3.1 Making a difference for road users

We will make a difference for road users by:

- Measuring and reporting consumer opinion, as required by the second Road Investment Strategy. We will:
  - Restart the Strategic Roads User Survey (SRUS) as soon as possible. SRUS was suspended in March due to Covid-19.

- Launch our new Strategic Roads Logistics & Coach Survey - measuring satisfaction with Highways England's roads among businesses in these sectors.
- Complete development of our new survey into the needs of cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians using Highways England's roads.
- Ensuring road users' priorities are at the heart of the third Road Investment Strategy 2025-30 (RIS3), we will:
  - Deliver major new insight looking at road user priorities for improvement to Highways England's roads through RIS3.
  - Work with Highways England, DfT and the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) to ensure the yardsticks used in RIS3 properly measure what matters to users.
- Holding Highways England to account on behalf of consumers:
  - We'll review Highways England's actions in light of Transport Focus's recommendations. Where we can we'll acknowledge progress and push them to go further where necessary. The key areas include:
    - Roadworks management and other disruption, including managing the welfare of those trapped in traffic queues arising from disruption
    - Smart motorways including all-lane running
    - Road surface quality.

### 3.2 Campaigning on behalf of road users

- We'll launch phase two of *Sort My Sign*, pressing Highways England to focus on the basics that affect safety and journey experience. *Sort My Sign* will:
  - encourage road users to report things that need to be fixed
  - press Highways England to make changes where policy and process falls short of meeting users' needs.
- We'll plan a new campaign for launching in 2021. It's potential areas of focus include smart motorways, road surface quality and roadside facilities.

### 3.3 Allocation of road space

The allocation of road space between pedestrians, two-wheeled transport, buses, cars and vans/trucks is becoming a more vexed issue. What are the consumer issues that should underpin these decisions? Alongside London TravelWatch, we will identify funding partners to explore these issues further.

## 4. Understanding air passengers

We will adapt the successful approach of our omnibus survey and user communities to better understand how people are currently experiencing and perceiving air travel.

## **5. Inclusive transport**

While all of our work benefits all transport users, the needs of disabled users requires additional focus. We have a programme of Covid-related activities and will be speaking to motorway service operators, bus and train companies about reassurance around Covid-19 safety measures and barriers to travel.

We will continue to comment on train company Accessible Travel Policies and consultations on exemptions from accessibility regulations for trains, stations and rail replacement vehicles. We will also continue to support our Accessibility Forum but will be trialling a new digital format for hearing from transport operators and users.

## **6. A well run and governed, effective organisation that is seen and heard by transport users and decision makers**

Transport Focus needs a diverse, geographically representative Board that can help set its strategy, challenge and govern this new, larger, more wide-ranging organisation. One or more new Board members will be recruited to replace Isabel Liu who steps down in December 2020. We'll also continue our programme of public board meetings, including broadcasting these events to allow greater participation.

Our communications reach, including a greatly enhanced social media presence, has been significant in the first six months of 2020-21 so we'll continue to run our 24/7 press office. We will also launch our rebuilt website to improve access to our work by transport users and stakeholders.

The delivery of this plan relies on our staff who have demonstrated their effectiveness and resilience in the first part of the year. We'll ensure our policies and systems continue to provide flexibility to support smarter working, including in our plans for relocating the London office. We will be guided by Government advice about the safety of returning to the offices.

**September 2020**

## Appendix – pre Covid-19 reports awaiting publication

We have a number reports produced before the Covid-19 pandemic which will be published. Elements of these reports continue to be relevant to how we travel now:

- All-lane running smart motorways: road users' experiences and attitudes
- Monitoring satisfaction with the roadworks on the M4 between Heathrow and Reading – phase two
- 'Project future' best practice guides
- Research looking at the potential for park and ride for longer-distance journeys (say, Oxford to London) to release capacity on Highways England's roads.
- Additional insight into user satisfaction through in-depth analysis of SRUS data
- Results of the pre-launch wave of our Strategic Roads Logistics & Coach Survey
- Information provision around the King's Cross blockades
- Bus passenger (and non-user) priorities for improvement
- What future users would want from High Speed 2
- Rail passengers' experience of delays and claiming compensation
- NRPS pilot mini surveys
- MerseyRail community report and videos
- Lost property on rail – this will be published by Department for Transport
- GWR timetable change
- GWR sustainability
- Modelling the impact of bus lanes
- Traveline website review