

Transport Focus workplan: April-September 2021

1. Overview

Our ambition is to provide world class transport user representation. A reliable, good quality transport system supports sustainable growth, an excellent quality of life and improved opportunities for all. It is vital that the needs and priorities of transport users across Great Britain are heard in all major decisions about how transport is operated, and future investment targeted. After the Covid-19 pandemic, we must build back a better, fairer, safer and greener transport system.

We help improve the day-to-day travel experience of many transport users through our unique, innovative, independent transport user insight and advocacy. We can help shape strategic transport improvements for the user and hence ensure value for money, improve diversity and inclusion and contribute to the 'levelling up' agenda. We translate insight into action.

Our role is even more crucial as the country, the transport industry and users respond to the highs and lows of the Covid-19 pandemic and the eventual need to attract people back to public transport.

In addition to Covid-19, we anticipate some significant reform for rail and bus in parts of Britain to engage in for the passenger benefit. We also have a role as the country takes steps towards another challenge: decarbonising transport. To succeed, the user must be at the heart of meeting these challenges. Here we set out what we plan to do over the next six months to meet them.

2. Introduction

What next? What should Transport Focus work on now?

Re-building the boat in open sea?

This is how someone described the process of change. Planning in such an uncertain environment seems difficult right now. The scenarios facing the UK and its nations could mean we have lockdowns and restrictions going on for months to a point where vaccination levels mean travel can re-start or even a re-opening causing a rush back to transport. The reality will probably be a messy period of vaccines, variants and false alerts and starts. We will be flexible in responding to whatever circumstances arise, and hopefully will return to or adapt previous campaigns. What should Transport Focus plan to do in this time?

Some certainty?

Some things do seem relatively certain. The way we live and move around has probably changed forever. More working at home for some, less commuting. But we

won't know by how much it has changed for some time. Many people still need to travel. So, we need to carry on talking to them about their experiences and representing their interests. As travel does re-open, there will be key issues around confidence in using public transport and lowering the barriers, through ticket retail reform, to getting people back on board when the time is right. Road travel will continue to grow back so our work with Highways England will affect even more people.

The climate crisis won't pass as quickly

While the Covid-19 crisis will hopefully pass, the climate crisis won't. This gives our traditional focus to make rail and bus transport better a new impetus to encourage a more sustainable choice.

Insight matters

Insight underpins everything we do. We will continue our Omnibus surveys (returning to weekly) of experiences and attitudes to travel which will be even more important for users in this period of potentially rapid change. We plan to expand the usefulness and size of our Transport User Panel to explore specific issues in more depth. We are developing new satisfaction surveys for bus and rail users which we plan to introduce later in the year. They will be more digital, always on, quicker, more representative and provide faster responses.

Diversity matters

We are reviewing the diversity of the people we talk to in our insight and other work. Can we do more to reach the seldom heard? We must capture as wide a range of views as possible and also that our people are as diverse and inclusive as possible. This will make us more effective and useful in representing a wider group of people.

Over the next six months, in particular, we will:

- Help rebuild passenger confidence in using public transport post pandemic guided by their needs, experiences and new ways of living
- Advocate for the user in reforms to rail and bus
- Continue to identify barriers to transport for those with disabilities to help improve their access to it
- Improve the organisation's inclusivity and diversity
- Ensure that the user view is at the heart of decarbonising transport
- Rebuild our insight and adapt it to the new circumstances
- Rebuild our campaigns as and when appropriate.

3. Restarting travel and the economy

3.1 Identifying and rebuilding transport user confidence through insight post Covid-19

We will

- continue our highly successful and widely used Omnibus survey of public

attitudes to travel, covering all modes including road use, subject to adequate funding and according to relevant timescales

- continue to use our standing Transport User Panel to explore user issues in more depth. We will expand its size and refresh its membership
- at the same time, work towards restarting the measurement of satisfaction with rail, bus and tram journeys. In the shorter term, our new 'Barometer' will gather insight on user and non-user confidence and experience providing fast feedback. This will enable us to gather and publish the views of representative samples of users or potential users of different types of transport and allow for more targeted and effective interventions.

3.2 Breaking down barriers to public transport

Our insight during Covid-19 identified 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 better and new services in a way that meets user needs. We will develop a new workstream aimed at identifying 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.

3.3 Balancing supply and demand

Lower passenger numbers and local authority/commercial funding pressures could lead to reductions in the levels of bus and rail services, hopefully only in the short term. It is important to maintain viable networks – otherwise people may not come back to public transport or find it no longer suits their travel needs. We will work to ensure any service reductions are proportionate, temporary and, wherever possible, not leading to a total reduction of choice in certain areas.

3.4 Bus Strategy

The Government's new National Bus Strategy will be welcome for bus passengers across Great Britain. For many, buses are a lifeline to employment, education, and leisure, as well as being essential to the economy. The Strategy proposes investment on what we know are current bus passengers' priorities that is more services running more reliably and providing better value.

We will work with Government, bus operators and transport authorities to make sure passengers' needs are at the heart of new arrangements. This includes developing:

- A new bus passenger charter and improved passenger representation
- A new measurement of bus user satisfaction to assess the impact of new investment and activities.

3.5 Rail reform

The Covid-19 crisis has accelerated a process of reform already underway. Government control over the railways has increased, and major changes will be made to their structure, funding, specification and operation in the forthcoming White Paper as well as big changes to fares structures. It is important that the passenger voice is heard in these decisions being made on their behalf.

We anticipate the proactive role we can play in rail reform will include:

- Developing and implementing proposals to become an even more effective passenger champion in line with any wider rail reform
- Supporting the vision for rail set out in any forthcoming White Paper
- Understanding and identifying opportunities for passengers arising from any rail reform process and
- Engaging strategically with the relevant areas of the rail industry to help shape reform for the benefit of passengers.

3.6 Making a difference for passengers

We will continue 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 in chairing and representing passengers on strategic bodies¹.

4. Making a difference for road users

England's motorways and major 'A' roads, the strategic road network, are crucial to the country. Lorry traffic remained high during the formal lockdowns and, while commuting and business travel patterns may change post-Covid-19, it is likely that traffic levels overall will rebound quickly as the economy and society reopens. We will continue our work representing the interests of all who use Highways England's roads, whether in a car, coach, lorry or van, riding a motorbike, bicycle or horse, or on foot.

We will look ahead to what road users need from the Government's third road investment strategy (2025-30), including to make journeys in a fully electric vehicle. We will also continue to provide constructive challenge to Highways England to help it better meet the needs of today's road users.

5. Sustainable transport

There are several user issues to be considered in encouraging sustainable transport beyond making sure that public transport is an attractive and convenient way to get around. Also, while electric car take up is slowly spreading, the price of purchasing or leasing vehicles and access to charging continue to be issues. We are looking at the consumer experience of using electric vehicle charging on England's Strategic Road Network. So we will:

- Carry out and publish new research to understand the steps road users want taken so they can switch to a fully electric vehicle for journeys on Highways England's roads
- Look more at 'nudge' techniques, widely used in Government messaging, to see if simple changes can help more people choose greener transport.

¹West Midlands Bus Alliance, Bristol City Transport Board, Liverpool City Region Bus Alliance, West Yorkshire Bus Alliance, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority bus partnership, Mayor for Greater Manchester's Transport Board, Transport for the North's Partnership Board, Pan, London Strategy Group (rail), Transport for Wales Advisory Panel, Scotland's Rail Recovery Task Force

6. Inclusive transport

While all our work benefits all transport users, the needs of disabled users require additional focus. We will be boosting this area of our work in the coming months. We have an ongoing programme of Covid-related activities which involves talking to motorway service operators, bus and train companies about Covid-19 safety measures and alleviating barriers to travel; the issues (and any good practice identified) will be discussed at a webinar. We will also boost our capacity to engage with disabled passengers, motorists and stakeholder groups. This will include expanding our Transport User Panel and trialling a new digital format for our Accessibility Forum.

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

We will continue to deepen our fruitful relationship with London TravelWatch enabling us to deliver more integrated user representation and better value for money.

We will also continue our programme of public board meetings and webinars, including broadcasting the events and using innovative digital channels to encourage greater participation and engagement.

Our communications reach, including a greatly enhanced social media presence, has been significant in 2020-21. We have relaunched the website after a detailed consultation with those who use it and will continue to refine it in the coming months.

We aim to build on these and other efforts, such as the newly-launched podcast, to reach more stakeholders and consumers with our work. We'll continue to run our 24/7 press office, service the social media channels, continually update the popular data hub and the new 'barometer' dashboard, and investigate new ways to bring the work of Transport Focus to the attention of those who need it.

The delivery of this plan relies on our staff who have demonstrated their effectiveness and resilience in the last year. We will 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 our offices.

Please note, more detailed projects are set out in the attached Appendix.

March 2021

Appendix: Detailed projects for April-September 2021 Workplan

1. Rail

- 1.1 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. We will work with Transport for Wales to provide consumer led insight to wider transport needs in South East Wales.
- 1.2 Boosting the rail user voice. Some train companies fund additional consumer representation on behalf of their passengers. So Transport Focus will carry out extra work on behalf of those using Great Western Railway, Greater Anglia, Northern Trains, South Western Railway, TransPennine Express, West Midlands Trains, Transport for Wales and Network Rail Wales
- 1.3 Continuing our role in representing the passenger on licence conditions and policies such as Accessible Transport Policies, National Rail Conditions of Carriage, ticket office opening hours, complaints handling procedures and Penalty Fare schemes
- 1.4 Continuing to work with the Department for Transport (DfT) on rail contracts, including checking and reporting on information provided to passengers on train company websites.
- 1.5 We will continue 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 through our roles on the Rail ADR Scheme Council.

2. Bus

- 2.1 Identify industry best practices as Government and industry move towards new partnership arrangements
- 2.2 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
- 2.3 Developing new ways of conducting bus passenger surveys whether it be the gathering of data or the liaison and follow up with the operators and authorities on that data.

3 Roads

3.1 Measuring and reporting consumer opinion, as required by the second Road Investment Strategy, we will:

- Carry out the Strategic Roads User Survey (SRUS) to continuously measure satisfaction with journeys on Highways England's roads and contribute to discussions about the target to apply from April 2022
- Carry out the Logistics & Coach Survey: Strategic Roads every four months to measure satisfaction with Highways England's roads among businesses in these sectors
- Complete the development of our new survey into the needs of cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians using Highways England's roads
- Explore options to update our understanding of attitudes to and experiences of roadside facilities.

3.2 Ensuring road users' priorities are at the heart of the third Road Investment Strategy 2025-30 (RIS3), we will:

- Publish new insight looking at road user priorities for improvement to Highways England's roads within RIS3
- Work with the DfT, Highways England and the Office of Road and Rail (ORR) to bring the road user view to the development of RIS3, for example by providing advice about road user input to the Route Strategies
- Continue to work with Highways England, DfT and ORR to ensure the yardsticks used in RIS3 – and in some cases before – properly measure what matters to users.

3.3 Holding Highways England to account on behalf of consumers

We will:

- Ensure that Highways England responds appropriately to our recommendations following research into road user experiences of all-lane running smart motorways. These include that Highways England should:
 - implement the conclusions of DfT's evidence stocktake as rapidly as possible and report publicly on progress. This includes the introduction of stopped vehicle detection technology
 - increase efforts to communicate practical advice, including what to do if you break down
 - help drivers understand that there's a coherent system - staff and technology - compensating for no hard shoulder
 - in the tone of communications, acknowledge that drivers have reasonable concerns about having no hard shoulder - guard against downplaying them
 - work with Government and the police to increase compliance with the law, particularly the 'red X'
 - measure, and strive to continuously improve, performance on each all-lane running section in respect of:
 - time to spot a stopped vehicle
 - time to then display 'red X'
 - time taken for traffic officer or emergency services to arrive.
- Explore whether arrangements to protect the welfare of those who are stranded on Highways England's roads are adequate, including in the event of disruption to cross-channel traffic
- Continue to review Highways England's actions in light of previous Transport Focus's recommendations. We'll acknowledge progress so far and push them to go further where necessary. The key areas include:
 - Roadworks management
 - Managing disruption and the lessons learned from it
 - Road surface quality.

3.4 Campaigning on behalf of road users

We will

- 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

- Plan a new campaign for launching later in 2021/22. Potential areas of focus include smart motorways, road surface quality and roadside facilities.

3.5 Allocation of road space

We will publish the findings of our research, working alongside London TravelWatch, to explore the consumer issues that should underpin such decisions.

4 Disabled transport users

We will

- identify partners with whom we can work from the disability organisations
- hold a webinar focused on good practice in service provision for disabled transport users
- review the Rail White Paper to identify any opportunities for improving accessibility for rail users
- continue to comment on train company Accessible Travel Policies and consultations on exemptions from accessibility regulations for trains, stations and rail replacement vehicles.