

ICE Green Paper: Does England need a national transport strategy?

March 2023

Executive summary

An accessible, reliable and safe transport network is essential to enable the UK to achieve its long-term strategic objectives.

Decarbonising the economy to reach net zero by 2050, adapting to the impact of a changing climate and achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are all crucial to the UK's future economic and social prosperity.

Productivity and living standards need to rise in many regions, which the government is aiming to address through levelling up. The UK will also have to manage demographic change, including a growing and ageing population.

However, the country is falling behind in meeting many of its long-term and interim targets towards these goals.

In part, this is because key sectors, including transport, lack sufficiently detailed policies, delivery plans or metrics against which to make investment decisions that are geared towards achieving the right outcomes.

In the UK, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have each developed national transport strategies. However, England, which has a much larger population than the other UK nations, does not have its own transport strategy. Nor is there an overarching transport strategy for the UK.

Instead, a fragmented landscape of modal, thematic and regional strategies encourages siloed planning and results in transport services that often do not serve the needs of transport users. Nor does it ensure that transport investment in the UK's largest nation is directed towards the UK's strategic objectives.

The underlying problems with transport planning in England have been highlighted by ongoing uncertainty and fresh delays to major projects such as the Integrated Rail Plan for the North and Midlands (IRP), which includes parts of High Speed 2.

Given the urgency of the challenges the UK faces, the need for a clear focus on outcomes, combined with robust evidence and a holistic view of the entire transport network, is vital to make the progress the country needs in the timeframe required.

This ICE Green Paper focuses on why England could benefit from having a national transport strategy. It explores how a strategy could be developed and put into practice to strengthen decision-making and improve the lives of the people who use the transport network.

This consultation seeks to gather evidence and views from infrastructure professionals, civil engineers, civil society groups, transport experts and other interested stakeholders across a short number of key questions on developing a national transport strategy for England.

The questions are:

Understanding the challenge

- **Question 1:** What are the key gaps and challenges within the existing approach to transport planning in England?
 - What are the long-term drivers of transport demand in England?

Achieving better outcomes

- **Question 2:** Should a new national transport strategy be developed for England or the UK as a whole?
 - How would an overarching strategy strengthen decision-making, help meet the UK's long-term objectives, improve infrastructure delivery and better the lives of the public?
 - What specific issues and challenges should it address?
 - How should a national transport strategy address connectivity between the UK's nations?
 - How would a strategy for England be integrated with those of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland?
- **Question 3:** What role should different stakeholders play in delivering better transport outcomes in England (e.g. central government, subnational transport bodies, the National Infrastructure Commission)?

Developing an effective strategy

- **Question 4:** What timeframe should a strategy cover and how often should it be reviewed?
- **Question 5:** How can a strategy be made resilient to political change?
- **Question 6:** How can existing data be best used to improve transport outcomes – and what data gaps exist?
- **Question 7:** What existing mechanisms and approaches could be used to achieve the desired integration if it proves impossible to get an integrated transport strategy off the ground?
- **Question 8:** What lessons can be learnt from other countries with national transport strategies?

Responses should be sent to policy@ice.org.uk

The consultation will close on 12th May 2023.

The findings from responses to this paper, alongside further evidence gathering, will be formed into an ICE policy paper later in 2023 with a series of recommendations for policymakers in relation to developing and implementing a national transport strategy.

Strategic transport planning in England

The challenges facing transport in England today have many origins. They include decades of comparative underinvestment in some regions' transport networks and overly centralised decision-making.

Analysis by IPPR North (Institute for Public Policy Research) of transport spending between 2009/10 and 2019/20 found that the North received £349 per person, below the UK average of £430 per person. In London, the figure was £864 per person.¹ For transport users, this has caused stark regional disparities in service levels, such that, for example, trains between Reading and London run at almost double the speed of trains between Manchester and Leeds.²

The challenges across the transport network have been exacerbated by the continued impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on transport agencies and operators, government priorities and public finances. Public transport usage has started to recover from the impact of Covid-19 lockdowns, but travel patterns have not returned to pre-2020 levels:

- Rail passenger journeys in Britain as a whole for July to September 2022, the last quarter with available statistics, were 80.3% of the same quarter three years ago. Total passenger revenue was 71% of the corresponding quarter from three years ago.³
- The number of local bus passenger journeys in England rose to 2.8 billion in the year ending March 2022. However, this was still far lower than the 4.1 billion passenger journeys taken in England two years before.⁴
- In contrast, car and taxi traffic across Britain has recovered much more strongly and was just 8.8% below pre-pandemic levels in the year to September 2022.⁵

The trends are concerning for the UK's aspirations of reaching net zero by 2050. Transport is the largest emitting sector in the UK, but carbon emissions have remained flat for three decades.⁶

At the same time, recent extreme weather events have highlighted how vulnerable much of our transport infrastructure is to the impact of a changing climate. Following the July 2022 heatwave in the UK, the then Transport Secretary admitted that the nation's transport networks could not cope with extreme temperatures.⁷ He indicated it would take decades for retrofitting to replace an ageing rail system with infrastructure that could withstand extreme temperatures.

High inflation is also putting additional pressure on the cost of fuel and investment in capital projects. The price of materials and fuel for manufacturing rose by 12.7% in the year to December 2022 – much higher than many infrastructure projects planned for.⁸ However, the government will freeze capital budgets in cash terms from 2025/26 rather than increasing them in line with inflation – effectively therefore a cut. It has already announced delays to several major projects, including High Speed 2, parts of the second Road Investment Strategy and the Lower Thames Crossing, to manage rising costs.

On the public transport network, the government invested huge sums to support operators through the pandemic. It has continued to support rail and bus operators with short-term emergency funding deals while seeking savings in how public transport is run.⁹ These arrangements do not address the issue of long-term sustainability or provide the certainty to

¹ IPPR North (2021) [Broken Transport Promises Come as New Evidence Shows Widening Transport Spending Gap](#)

² National Infrastructure Commission (2020) [Rail Needs Assessment for the Midlands and the North](#)

³ Office of Rail and Road (2022) [Passenger Rail Usage July to September 2022](#)

⁴ Department for Transport (2023) [Annual Bus Statistics: Year Ending March 2022](#)

⁵ Department for Transport (2022) [Provisional Road Traffic Estimates, Great Britain: October 2021 to September 2022](#)

⁶ Climate Change Committee (2020) [The Sixth Carbon Budget – Surface Transport](#)

⁷ SEC Newgate (2022) [Why Can't Britain's Railways Take the Heat?](#)

⁸ Office for National Statistics (2022) [Producer Price Inflation, UK: February 2023](#)

⁹ Department for Transport (2022) [Over £150 Million Provided to Safeguard Local Transport Services as the Country Emerges from the Pandemic](#)

enable long-term planning. Service cuts, staff shortages and industrial action have all impacted service levels and risk making public transport less attractive at a time when increasing usage is vital.

The strategic framework

This uncertain, challenging context means decision-makers face significant difficulties in assessing which transport infrastructure projects to prioritise. Even before the current pressures arose, the UK faced long-term challenges in planning and delivering major infrastructure projects and programmes efficiently.¹⁰

Decision-makers need to be able to assess the benefits and trade-offs between transport projects and ensure that any investment is working towards and not against wider social, economic and environmental objectives, including the UK's long-term strategic goals. The ability to base investment decisions on clear, evidence-based principles and objectives can also reduce the need for further reviews which delay key infrastructure projects.

However, the UK's fragmented strategic framework for transport is not set up to facilitate this approach. The ICE and the All Party Parliamentary Group on Infrastructure (APPGI) examined this issue in relation to the IRP. The IRP represents a potentially transformative £96 billion investment in the North and Midlands. However, delays and uncertainty about the scope of key projects mean what will actually be built, when the public will see the benefits and the strategic outcomes that will be achieved are all unclear.

In a policy paper, drawing on insight from industry stakeholders and transport experts, the ICE and APPGI recommended developing a national transport strategy for England to help cut through that uncertainty and align England with the UK's other constituent nations to make strategic transport planning more coherent.¹¹

At present, transport planning across the UK is spread across relevant departments in central government, primarily the Department for Transport (DfT), as well as devolved national transport bodies in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. There are also modal transport bodies such as Network Rail and National Highways.

There are seven Subnational Transport Bodies (STBs) in England, although only Transport for the North (TfN) is currently on a statutory footing. In addition, Transport for London (TfL) is a statutory body with responsibility for implementing the transport strategy and managing services across Greater London. England's local authorities are also required to prepare Local Transport Plans for maintaining and improving local transport across a five-year period.

England itself does not have a national transport body or strategy, despite having a population of 56.5 million people, compared to 5.5 million in Scotland, 3.1 million in Wales and 1.9 million in Northern Ireland.¹²

Instead, a wide number of individual transport strategies currently sit across these bodies, which apply to either England or the UK as a whole. These include the IRP and Network Rail's Control Periods and route strategies for rail. For the Strategic Road Network there is the Road Investment Strategy model, while Bus Back Better and the Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy cover buses and active travel. There are also strategies which cut across modes, such as the Future of Freight: A Long-Term Plan, the Transport Decarbonisation Plan, the Clean Air Strategy and the Inclusive Transport Strategy.

This fragmentation of transport planning functions between sometimes competing bodies and across different regions can make effective decision-making difficult. It means England itself has no overarching strategic vision or principles for decision-makers to refer to. Instead, siloed thinking about different modes of transport means national policy risks being incoherent, contradictory and counter to the UK's strategic goals and the needs of transport users.

¹⁰ ICE (2019) [Reducing the Gap between Cost Estimates and Outturns for Major Infrastructure Projects and Programmes](#)

¹¹ APPGI and ICE (2022) [Policy Paper: Accelerating Delivery of the Integrated Rail Plan](#)

¹² Office for National Statistics (2022) [Population Estimates for the UK, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland: Mid-2021](#)

A recent history of strategic transport planning in the UK

The then Labour government's New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone White Paper, in 1998, was the last attempt to provide an overarching strategy for integrated transport in the UK. It was followed by Transport 2010: The 10 Year Plan, a ten-year implementation plan in 2000 which set out £180 billion of planned investment for the decade ahead.¹³

The strategy was intended to tackle pollution and congestion, increase choice and 'ensure that transport plays its full part in delivering [the government's] wider objectives'. However, it was undone by personnel changes in the government and external events, including protests at the rising cost of fuel.

More recently, the Transport Investment Strategy (2017) set out objectives for transport infrastructure.¹⁴ However, the strategy was linked to the Industrial Strategy championed by Theresa May's government which fell away under her successor, Boris Johnson. It was also criticised for setting objectives that were too broad to effectively help decision-makers prioritise projects and assess what should happen when competing objectives clashed.¹⁵

The UK's framework for strategic planning and prioritisation of infrastructure has been strengthened by the creation of the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) in 2015 to provide independent analysis and advice to the government.

Based on the NIC's work, the government published the UK's first National Infrastructure Strategy (NIS) in 2020.¹⁶ The NIS provides an overarching framework for UK infrastructure investment and includes pledges on transport investment linked to the UK's net zero and levelling up objectives.

In addition, the Union Connectivity Review (2021) was commissioned by the government to take a multi-modal perspective of strengthening the UK's key transport corridors. It recommended developing UKNET – a new strategic transport network for the whole of the UK. However, the government has not yet responded to its recommendations.¹⁷

Siloed thinking between modes is one reason that progress on reducing transport emissions has plateaued. The Climate Change Committee (CCC) has called for 'a more coherent vision for how [transport] investments will work together to deliver an improved overall transport system' in order to help the UK meet its climate targets.¹⁸ The independent review of the government's Net Zero Strategy, led by Chris Skidmore MP, noted that 'intermodality is not at the heart of transport planning' which is a barrier to making sustainable transport easier and more appealing to the public.¹⁹

Under the current approach, the ambition to make walking and cycling the natural choice for short journeys can be undermined by road-building strategies and appraisal processes that encourage car-based development.²⁰ Research suggests the Covid-19 pandemic has increased car dependency in the UK. However, it was already growing before the pandemic due to a lack of alternative modes of transport, despite a majority of drivers being willing to use their car less.²¹

This indicates a strategic framework that does not give sufficient consideration to the needs and ambitions of the people and businesses who use the transport network. In contrast to the siloed thinking about individual modes of transport at a strategic level, transport users themselves are 'much more likely to think in terms of journeys from A to B, often including several modes of transportation'.²²

¹³ Department for Transport, Local Government and Regions (1998) [A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone](#); Department for Transport, Local Government and Regions (2000) [Transport 2010: The 10 Year Plan](#)

¹⁴ Department for Transport (2017) [Transport Investment Strategy](#)

¹⁵ Institute for Government (2017) [Is the Transport Investment Strategy a Road to Success?](#)

¹⁶ HM Treasury (2020) [National Infrastructure Strategy](#)

¹⁷ Department for Transport (2021) [Union Connectivity Review: Final Report](#)

¹⁸ Climate Change Committee (2022) [2022 Progress Report to Parliament](#)

¹⁹ Rt Hon Chris Skidmore MP (2023) [Mission Zero: Independent Review of Net Zero – Final Report](#)

²⁰ Royal Town Planning Institute (2021) [Overcoming Barriers to Net Zero Transport](#)

²¹ RAC (2019 and 2021) [RAC Report on Motoring 2019](#); [RAC Report on Motoring 2021](#)

²² Institute for Government (2021) [How Governments Use Evidence to Make Transport Policy](#)

Freight transportation cuts across modes but questions of how to optimise freight corridors, decarbonise supply chains and transfer more freight from road to rail can seem to be a secondary priority in transport planning.²³

Resolving this means taking an approach to infrastructure planning that is driven by outcomes, based on the needs of users and strategic national objectives. This can benefit both the planning and delivery of transport projects. The National Audit Office (NAO) has highlighted ‘the importance of developing and maintaining a focus on benefits throughout a programme and of building this into decision-making’ to optimise delivery of major projects.²⁴

High Speed 2

The High Speed 2 (HS2) rail link is an example of a major transport project that has been developed in the absence of any overarching strategic objectives and the problems that creates.

In 2011, a House of Commons review noted that: ‘The absence of a transport strategy makes it hard to assess how HS2 relates to other major transport infrastructure schemes, regional planning and wider objectives, such as bridging the north-south divide.’²⁵

Without an agreed set of objectives to refer back to, decision-making about the project has been frequently delayed and defaulted to applying the Green Book, which until recent changes focused on an economic cost-benefit analysis rather than assessing the wider social and environmental objectives and how they could best be achieved. This has impacted the cost and level of public and political support for HS2, while delaying indefinitely the realisation of any benefits to users.

The House of Commons review concluded that: ‘The biggest single transport investment proposed in this parliament should be grounded in a well thought-through strategic framework and we are disappointed that the Government has not developed a strategy.’

People and businesses use transport as a network, but England’s network is not currently planned as a system. Instead, the approach to planning creates too many siloes to enable systems thinking. The need to address this was summarised by the New Zealand Infrastructure Commission in its analysis of New Zealand’s transport network:

‘The transport system operates through a network of interconnected pieces of infrastructure, which together enable journeys of people and goods. Effective integration between transport modes, such as integration of walking and cycling access to public transport stations and integration of road and rail infrastructure for freight services, are critical parts of a successful transport system ... The transport system needs to enable the movement (mobility) of people and goods as well as provide people with opportunities to access a wide range of social or economic activities.’²⁶

Without an overarching strategic vision, it will remain difficult to achieve a genuinely coherent, outcomes-focused transport network in England that serves the needs of the people and businesses that use it.

²³ ICE (2022) [Presidential Roundtable Summary – Decarbonising Transport: How Do We Design Effective Policies?](#)

²⁴ National Audit Office (2022) [The Transpennine Route Upgrade Programme](#)

²⁵ House of Commons Transport Committee (2011) [High Speed Rail](#)

²⁶ New Zealand Infrastructure Commission – Te Waihangā (2021) [Sector State of Play: Transport](#)

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Other countries' approaches to strategic transport planning

Scotland and Wales

Scotland's and Wales's national transport strategies set out 20-year visions for their transport networks. The strategies do not identify specific projects or interventions, but provide a framework for making decisions to enable infrastructure interventions directly linked to the wider national outcomes being targeted.

In Scotland, the strategic framework is underpinned by four priorities: reducing inequalities, taking climate action, helping deliver inclusive economic growth and improving health and wellbeing.²⁷ Wales has three priorities which focus on reducing the need to travel, removing barriers to make transport more accessible and enabling sustainable transport choices.²⁸

Both strategies are published alongside more regularly updated delivery plans that set out the actions that will be taken to deliver on the overarching vision in the short term.²⁹

How this works in practice was recently highlighted by the Welsh Government's decision to cancel all major road-building projects in Wales, which was taken based on the objectives and priorities outlined in its transport strategy.

The Welsh Transport Plan commits to making best use of existing transport infrastructure. The need for new infrastructure will be assessed against a 'Sustainable Transport Hierarchy' outlined in the strategy. This prioritises walking and cycling, followed by public transport, ultra-low emission vehicles and finally other private motor vehicles.

In its response to the roads review, the government said any new road projects will be considered in terms of how they support modal shift and reduce carbon emissions, improve safety, support climate change adaptation and provide access and connectivity to jobs and centres of economic activity.³⁰

This approach to road planning highlights the divergences in certain policy areas between the UK's nations. Scotland and Wales have also sought to use their transport strategies to integrate transport planning more closely with spatial planning. The aim is to focus new developments around public transport links and existing town centres. In England, spatial planning, particularly for new housing, focuses on the number of houses being built and tends to reinforce car dependence. With little linkage between spatial planning and transport planning, it is difficult to refuse new development on transport grounds.³¹

Scotland, Wales and many of England's city regions have also committed to targets for traffic reduction and increases in the mode share of public transport and active travel. However, similar targets are not yet policy for England or the UK as a whole.³²

Global approaches

Norway has implemented a series of medium-term national transport plans since 2002. Each plan covers 12 years to enable future planning and cut across political cycles, but they are renewed every four years to allow for adjustments to new circumstances. The plans are based on joint proposals developed by Norway's four transport agencies as well as balancing wide stakeholder input, expert advice and political buy-in.

²⁷ Transport Scotland (2020) [National Transport Strategy](#)

²⁸ Welsh Government (2021) [Llwybr Newydd: The Wales Transport Strategy 2021](#)

²⁹ Transport Scotland (2022) [National Transport Strategy \(NTS2\) – Second Delivery Plan – 2022–2023](#); Welsh Government (2022) [National Transport Delivery Plan 2022 to 2027](#)

³⁰ Welsh Government (2023) [Roads Review: Welsh Government Response](#)

³¹ Transport Planning Society (2022) [State of the Nations Update: Transport Planning for a Sustainable Future](#)

³² Ibid.

The overriding objective for the current strategy, covering the period 2022–2033, is an ‘efficient, environmental-friendly and safe transport system in 2050’. It highlights that transport planning underpins Norway’s commitment to achieving the SDGs and its climate and environmental goals.³³

The plans set out an investment framework and key projects and measures per mode for the period. The current strategy introduces a shift in emphasis from project to portfolio management to enable agencies to navigate the uncertainty arising from the Covid-19 pandemic and optimise the order and scope of projects within the framework of the plan.

In 2019, the Netherlands published a longer-term strategic document setting out its ambitions for its public transport network. *Public Transport in 2040: Outlines of a Vision for the Future* examines challenges and objectives for the country’s public transport network.³⁴

To give more substance to that long-term vision, the strategy estimates the costs and the follow-up process needed for more tangible decision-making and sets out the actions relevant parties are expected to undertake in the near future. The government has taken an adaptive approach to planning and the goal is to monitor and update the strategy regularly.

New Zealand: Putting wellbeing at the core of transport planning

New Zealand faces many similar transport infrastructure challenges to the UK. Priorities highlighted by the country’s Infrastructure Commission include ‘the integration of infrastructure with urban land use outcomes, the move to a genuine system-based approach to transport infrastructure (including energy for electric vehicles), the adoption of demand management in conjunction with supply side investment, and the movement towards carbon neutrality’.³⁵

More broadly, New Zealand’s Wellbeing Budgets, first introduced in 2019, have sought to prioritise wellbeing over economic growth.³⁶ This means the processes and evidence the government requires to develop and approve transport projects have changed in recent years.³⁷

Strategic transport planning in New Zealand is now based on the Transport Outcomes Framework, which sets a purpose for the transport system focused on improving the wellbeing of New Zealanders and the liveability of places.³⁸ The framework identifies five outcome areas to direct transport policymaking towards these objectives: inclusive access, healthy and safe people, economic prosperity, environmental sustainability, and resilience and security.

The framework guides the government’s priorities for transport and its investment strategy, which are set out in detail in the Government Policy Statement on Land Transport (GPS). This is a ten-year strategy, but the Minister of Transport is required to review it every three years and issue a new statement at least once every six years.

The GPS can be used to set priorities but not to specify individual projects. Instead, Waka Kotahi, the transport agency, implements the strategy through the National Land Transport Programme (NLTP), a three-year cycle of land transport investments. Waka Kotahi has the independence to select projects for the NLTP based on the strategic priorities and expectations set out by the government in the GPS.

³³ Ministry of Transport (2021) [National Transport Plan 2022–2033](#)

³⁴ Government of the Netherlands (2019) [Public Transport in 2040: Outlines of a Vision for the Future](#)

³⁵ New Zealand Infrastructure Commission (2021) [Sector State of Play: Transport](#)

³⁶ Government of New Zealand (2019) [The Wellbeing Budget 2019](#)

³⁷ Institute for Government (2021) [How Governments Use Evidence to Make Transport Policy](#)

³⁸ Te Manatū Waka Ministry of Transport [Transport Outcomes Framework](#)

Developing an effective transport strategy

Developing a national transport strategy will only be worthwhile if it is put into practice and strengthens infrastructure decision-making and delivery. A strategy should enable better decision-making, allowing planners to examine projects in the round, consider trade-offs and prioritise investments that are clearly linked to achieving national objectives.

User-centred planning

Other countries have shown how national transport strategies can help link transport planning with wider strategic policy areas, such as spatial planning, or long-term national missions, like raising wellbeing in New Zealand. Developing a national transport strategy would be an opportunity to align transport planning in England with the UK's wider strategic objectives, such as net zero, climate resilience and levelling up.

England itself does not have a set of strategic objectives, but participants at an ICE roundtable emphasised the importance of putting the needs of current and future transport users – both people and freight – at the core of transport planning in a more coordinated way, as a basis for a more strategic, outcomes-focused approach to transport planning.³⁹

Transport planning should begin by understanding who transport is serving, what their economic and wellbeing needs are and how transport systems can enable, or hinder, those goals. Only then can the right infrastructure solutions be identified to achieve those outcomes.

A user-centred approach could examine a range of issues, including:

- mobility as a service (MAAS) – integrating transport modes to enable seamless end-to-end journeys and moving away from different modes competing for funding and customers
- reducing social exclusion and addressing the needs of an ageing population, with a consequently reduced mobility, to ensure the transport network is accessible to all
- other gaps where the market has not supported customer demand, such as electric vehicle charging and lorry parking facilities.

Stakeholder roles and responsibilities

The UK's complex landscape of devolved powers and existing transport bodies presents a range of challenges and opportunities for how a new national transport strategy for England might be effectively developed, integrated with existing frameworks and implemented.

In addition to those of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, many of England's regions already have their own transport strategies, such as TfN's Strategic Transport Plan.⁴⁰ However, these encompass a range of approaches, policies and levels of progress.

Regional bodies are well placed to understand local needs and identify opportunities for major transport investment to unlock wider local benefits. For example, East West Rail will be delivered with enough fibre capacity along the route to roll out broadband in the surrounding areas.⁴¹ These opportunities risk being missed by overly centralised planning.

Indeed, criticism of the government following the publication of the IRP suggested that it overlooked regional expertise and abandoned years of consensus-building between national, regional and local stakeholders. Critics have argued that this

³⁹ ICE (2023) [Presidential Roundtable Summary: A National Transport Strategy for England](#)

⁴⁰ Transport for the North (2019) [Strategic Transport Plan](#)

⁴¹ ICE (2023) [Presidential Roundtable Summary: A National Transport Strategy for England](#)

means the IRP in its current form may not maximise the benefits of the proposed £96 billion investment in the North and Midlands.⁴²

On the other hand, England already has in place existing mechanisms at national level that could be evolved into a new strategic framework. For example, Network Rail's Control Periods and DfT's Road Investment Strategies each have their own objectives to be delivered over a five-year period. If these strategies were better aligned with each other and with overarching frameworks, such as the NIS, it could enable more joined-up thinking across modes to achieve better outcomes.

In developing a new strategy, there is a need to assess the extent to which existing gaps require more centralised action against the capabilities and benefits of subnational action. This includes how regional priorities should be assessed against an overarching strategic view of national transport needs, and objectives against which to prioritise investment and resources.

A strategy with longevity

Meaningful stakeholder engagement can also help secure the buy-in that a long-term strategy needs to be effective. Norway's process of developing its transport strategies is designed to be inclusive so that key stakeholders can provide input and build support for its vision and implementation.

Any long-term strategy risks being cast aside amid the shorter-term cycle of political change, so minimising that risk through how a strategy is developed and maintained is crucial if it is to be effective.

Integrating transport with overarching national missions can help build this resilience to political change. Long-term strategic objectives such as net zero, climate resilience and public wellbeing may have cross-party consensus and be more likely to outlast any single government than shorter-term priorities.

Other countries have sought to balance long-term vision-setting with regular reviews of their transport strategies to enable regular stakeholder input, evaluation of progress and adjustments to changed circumstances that keep strategies relevant.

Once developed, a strategy can increase the ability of stakeholders to engage with and scrutinise transport policymaking, which can, in turn, secure buy-in.

Under England's present approach to transport planning, Parliament has only a marginal role in debating transport priorities, policy and major projects. The media and the public can also struggle to scrutinise how policies are made and how interventions align with national objectives.⁴³

Yet scrutiny that demands the use of robust evidence and clear links between spending and national objectives should enhance the quality of decision-making. Transparency and meaningful engagement with transport policymaking are particularly important given the complexity of projects, the scale of investment and the size of the public interest.

An effective national transport strategy could help achieve this approach to planning and benefit both decision-makers and the future beneficiaries of those decisions.

⁴² APPGI and ICE (2022) [Green Paper: Accelerating Delivery of the Integrated Rail Plan](#)

⁴³ Institute for Government (2021) [How Governments Use Evidence to Make Transport Policy](#)

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About ICE

Established in 1818 and with over 96,000 members worldwide, the Institution of Civil Engineers exists to deliver insights on infrastructure for societal benefit, using the professional engineering knowledge of our global membership.

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