

# ICE West Midlands response to the DfT Transport Decarbonisation Plan

## Introduction

ICE West Midlands welcomes the Transport Decarbonisation Plan published by the Department for Transport in July 2021. It is comprehensive in that it considers all modes for both people and goods; and all purposes from commuting through deliveries; to leisure and international travel. Importantly, it focuses on achieving net zero by 2050 but some of the proposals raise more questions than answers.

There is much to be commended within the 220-page document. Decarbonising transport is not an easy issue to get to grips with but the quantity of the information, the descriptions and explanations contained in Part 1 '*Our path to net zero transport*' is well-written, well-illustrated and easy to understand.

In addition, there are sections in Part 2 '*The plan in detail: commitments, actions, and timings*' that discuss a range of proposals that should reduce the carbon impact of transport. However, those engaged in the field of sustainable transport will be aware that many of these proposals have been around for quite a long time. For example, the proposals for '*Increasing cycling and walking*' have been deployed by our members for more than three decades and while these modes have grown, the growth cannot be described as the step-change that the plan requires for success. Similar points can be made about bus use.

## Changing behaviours

The plan, correctly, focuses on the need to change public attitudes to encourage more sustainable modes. The section '*Behaviour change research*' highlights some of the work that our members have been engaged in for many years, but often with limited effects. Unfortunately, the business, economic and social nudges have been far greater in the other direction.

We are especially pleased to see the inclusion of case studies, highlighting the work that our ICE members in the West Midlands have been engaged in. The West Midlands is a leader in the field of sustainable travel and we are pleased that our learning is being shared with other regions. But we also recognise that we have a long way to go, not least because we are a major exporter, a major logistics hub and a crossroads for most forms of transport across the UK.

We are pleased to see that the Plan recognises that we will not achieve decarbonisation with a few simple, one-off, policy initiatives and that there are a range of proposals leading up to 2050. But those with long memories will also know that any plan that spans several parliaments is a hostage to fortune and how political and public support can waiver for any long-term plans.

## Focus of this response

The plan highlights plenty of examples of financial support and commitment to a variety of projects, but the reality is that new issues and priorities all too often overtake existing projects. As an example, the plan highlights the need to encourage bus patronage, but this has been the 'Cinderella' of public transport policy for many years, similarly railway electrification.

So, a critical issue will be for the plan to achieve wide-spread and long-term public and political support. Unfortunately, the plan is silent on this issue and that is a crucial omission. We look forward to understanding how this will be rectified.

Finally, the section '*Technology requirements for reducing and removing direct emissions from UK transport*' is encouraging because this will be an important element in making changes. However, it is worrying to see how much is still to be "*demonstrated at scale to test options*" and how little is yet "*commercially deployed*". We have already commented that aspects of the plan are a hostage to fortune and this is probably the biggest hostage. While very few of our members are engaged in blue-sky research, many are engaged in testing and commercial deployment. They know, all too well, how difficult and expensive it is to develop new technology at speed, at scale and to a challenging timetable.

There are, however, positive elements of the plan that show a pragmatic attitude towards achieving the decarbonisation of transport. The Government's '*Gear Change*' document (2020), showed a commitment towards cycling and walking which was backed by funding and policy. The new 'Active Travel England' body and its role as a statutory consultee will help to embed cycling and walking as a viable mode of transport as new development schemes are proposed. This is complemented by new 'Cycle Infrastructure Design Guidance' to support high-quality, safe schemes, which aim to address the main barrier to cycling – a lack of safe, segregated cycleways. The recent £338 million package announced by Grant Schapps<sup>1</sup> to boost cycling and walking in the country, further helps to embed the design guidance into schemes, as bids will be awarded to projects compliant with LTN 1/20 (Cycle Infrastructure Design Guidance). These recent spending commitments and policy changes form a coherent strategy that will help to increase active travel, as well as help to achieve the goal of halving of all journeys in towns and cities *not* being made on bike or on foot by 2030.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, while ICE West Midlands supports the ambition of the DfT Transport Decarbonisation Plan and welcomes its broad grasp of the issues. We recognise that having a plan is not the same thing as delivering the desired outcomes, however, and more work is required to address the areas we have highlighted - and we are more than willing to work with others to overcome these challenges.

### For more information, please contact:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/capability-fund-local-transport-authority-allocations>