



3rd April 2022

An open Letter to Mayor and WMCA Board Members from Birmingham Living Streets Campaign group

LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN - CONSULTATION FEEDBACK TO WMCA BOARD

Dear Mayor , Council Leaders and Board Members,

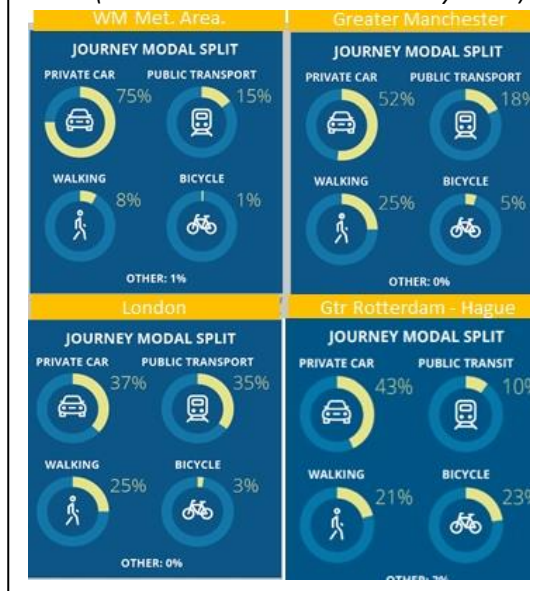
While the long-awaited Local Transport Plan includes a 'Vision' that - at last - focuses real attention and serious funding commitment toward all active travel modes, as a realistic 'plan' it fails in a number of regards, not least excluding required detail of how the 'Vision' can feasibly be delivered to the timescales required by the WMCA's own 'Five year plan' for the Climate Emergency and how it would address with the requisite urgency the poor performance in regard to health and wellbeing of many of the region's citizens due to historic transport policies.

Accordingly, we would respectfully suggest the urgent inclusion of the following improvements based on proven 'What Works' techniques for other conurbations – both within the UK and wider European competitor cities.

a) **"League Tables" for councils' performance on transport emissions reductions and mode-shift.**

We cannot dodge the Climate Emergency, so clear commitments and measurement processes for our reduction obligations are crucial. Sadly, as it stands, no phased annual targets for transport emissions or mode-shift are proposed at any level and, more alarmingly, the draft's 2030 and 2040 goals fail to match the stated targets in the WMCA's own Five Year Climate Emergency plan (5YP) – **as agreed just last March** . With Transport being the region's top emission source, at 36%, the 5YP's major reductions should be mirrored here, rather than ignoring the potentially planet-frying 50% shortfall revealed by comparing the two plans. Excuses are given in the draft ; suggesting a limit on 'local' initiatives' scope to fully reduce the region's staggering car over-usage; thus necessitating the unspecified carbon budget overspend be addressed by national government tackling car use with new pricing processes. Clearly such a major change, however worthy in challenging the massive hidden subsidies to motoring, is unlikely commence this side of national elections mid-decade and may be a further decade or more from implementation

Many regions even within the UK outperform WM councils' performance on greener, active travel using simple existing techniques and tools (Source Deloitte's Urban Mobility Index)



even with cross-party support beyond that point, despite the impacts of the climate emergency become clear to all at an alarming rate.

We believe the plan is unacceptably defeatist; dozens of major conurbations across Germany, Denmark, Holland and Scandinavia - **long ago** - achieved far lower levels of car usage via simple greener transport initiatives – prior to any electric cars and without tolls or similar government interventions. Effective tools and techniques are visibly working across other cities here and abroad. Better modelling and measurement, with high visibility ‘League Table’ performance reporting is essential to spur effort, attention and funding by decision-makers at all levels; ensuring proven techniques and tools get applied without further long delays.

Rather than over relying on distant government intervention., **and risking this becoming an potential excuse for inaction**, the WMCA should copy methods seen across the UK and continent’s high performers to transform travel choices, travel safety and thereby deliver carbon reductions via proven techniques like “20 minute neighbourhoods”, quality mass transit bike lanes and effective transport mini-hubs interfacing to public transport.

Measurement and ‘League Tables will be crucial to driving Councils and councillors into action on this. As page 1 of every business textbook reminds us, ***“You can’t manage what you don’t measure”***. Let’s get better measurement and modelling in place urgently and apply it to spur real achievement

- b) **Ruthlessly prioritizing Schemes for real cost- and carbon-effectiveness.** The plan hints at the need for much better analysis and modelling of proposals than previously. Historically the lion’s share of transport budgets has been applied to ‘grand projects’ (as the Eddington report characterises the problem) which frequently badly underperform in delivering changes to behaviour, reducing congestion, improving air quality or cutting carbon emissions. We need to move beyond lobbyists’ oversold ‘pet projects’ and prioritise far more ruthlessly.

For example, international examples time and again show the cost-effectiveness of ‘Cinderella’ Cycling and Walking schemes aimed at better local active travel – like cheap ‘Mini-Holland’ / 20-minute neighbourhoods effecting rapid change more effectively than many far more expensive and slow super-projects (also coincidentally significantly improving the safety and convenience of poorly-served ‘Cinderella’ demographic groups). Priorities and funding should only be applied on a strictly ‘what will work’ basis with committed and accountable benefit generation and rigorously monitored cost/benefits - ***not least in meeting climate emergency criteria, where “winning slowly is basically the same as losing”***

- c) **Transform Design Standards for immediate impact :** It is clear that much current on-going work performed by councils and partners – with significant costs even for ‘maintenance’ activities – does not align with the outcomes desired or proposed in the plan’s “Vision”. To avoid rework and waste, the plan should explicitly include a major revision to design standards across the region (including HE and other partners) such that all minor or major works and schemes deliver greater convenience and safety to walking, wheeling and connectivity; be it routinely adding bike stands, more crossing points or retiming traffic lights in minor works, up to major schemes wholly re-evaluating user space allocation. ***If the WMCA want Dutch or Danish levels of mode-shift, then every aspect of streetscape design needs to be built to equivalent 'end-game' standards to align with the vision – starting now***

d) **Fair and Safe Cycling and Walking won't 'just happen'**

– Even within a nation which is a weak performer for vulnerable road user road safety (PACTS report, 2016), this region itself has a particularly poor record with only one authority close to even national average injury riskⁱ. It is therefore remarkable that no quantified targets are given in the plan to close the safety gap, whereas elsewhere in Britain, from London to Leeds, we see clear commitments and timescales for improvements like “Vision Zero” (elimination of serious injuries from our roads) being published) and committed phased levels of achievement . As part of the overall improvements to measurements, far better regular, published reporting on risk reduction to cycling and walking should be in place for all authorities, with annual targets to get to ‘Vision Zero’ to the same time frame as London.

As Chris Boardman, erstwhile Greater Manchester active travel supremo put it, “ ***You shouldn't need to be brave to cycle***”.

Safer cycling and walking conditions, from "8 to 80" are essential. South Birmingham LTNs show that what's normal in Europe can also rapidly be achieved here.....provided there is real commitment.



We would welcome further discussion with any WMCA board member on any aspect of the above improvements – but also suggest a review of the ‘Plan’ in comparison to the detailed strategies now emerging from authorities with more detailed and advanced thinking (notably London and Leeds) would be instructive.

Yours Sincerely

Birmingham Living Streets campaign group.

Secretary, Denis Murphy, email : birminghamgroup@livingstreets.org.uk

ⁱ Living Streets Birmingham research sourcing DfT and NTS data

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1A09UMeZNYrw3BxrvGkuSm3hf-polr6oU/view?usp=sharing>