

Transport Planning Network 2019 Annual Conference

Creating visions for better places

Monday 18 November | Arup, 8 Fitzroy Street, London

Thank you to all the delegates and speakers who took part in our annual Transport Planning Network conference. The theme for this year's conference was 'Creating Visions for Better Places', and our brilliant keynote speakers - Professor Phil Goodwin and Lynda Addison OBE - approached this topic by looking at the past, present and future of visioning.

- **Phil Goodwin, Emeritus Professor of Transport Policy at UCL & UWE, spoke on the history and politics of visioning.** He looked at the emergence of town planning as a visionary response to public health concerns, and how technocentric visions of effortless personal mobility led to the emergence of car-dependent societies. He described how progressive policies started to tackle this problem during the early 2000s, challenging the dominance of 'predict and provide', but warned of how vested interests and political risk-aversion can inhibit progress towards sustainable mobility – especially at the pace needed to address the climate emergency.
- **Lynda Addison OBE, Chair of the CIHT Sustainable Transport Panel, spoke about the need for visioning.** Drawing from recent CIHT advice, she called for local authorities to work together and with other stakeholders to create long-term visions for functional areas, underpinned by clear evidence. By placing transport at the heart of a vision for place, rather than as negative impact to be mitigated at the development-scale, Lynda described how local authorities can align their strategies, policies and funding streams towards achieving a common, sustainable future.

The need for visioning was reinforced through four provocations on the themes of **climate change**, the **future of mobility, equality and inclusivity**, and **housing and growth**. In rapid-fire sessions, our four speakers illustrated some of the most pertinent challenges facing planners as we move into the new decade, and the extent to which the current planning system is equipped to respond to them.

Keith Mitchell, Director of Community Development and Infrastructure at Peter Brett Associates (now part of Stantec), discussed the need to unlock development and boost economic productivity through transport planning.

He noted that despite an excessive political focus on the delivery of short-term housing numbers, private developers are looking at ways to contribute to wider visions for place, with issues such as climate change and social value are becoming more commonplace in tenders for work.

Leo Murray, Co-Director of Possible, spoke about delivering the transition to net zero carbon through transport planning.

He emphasised the urgent need for modal shifts towards public and active transport, and criticised decarbonisation strategies which focus solely on vehicle electrification while doing nothing to reduce demand (indeed, Leo noted that the amount of cobalt needed to electrify all existing cars electric is double the available amount on earth). He discussed why place-making must be at the heart of our efforts to help people drive less, rather than just incentives to switch to greener vehicles.

Joanna Ward, associate transport planner at Elliott Wood, talked about the need to embrace diversity when planning for transport.

She demonstrated how decisions made without representation from vulnerable groups often lead to spaces being designed around unsustainable modes of transport, and at the expense of women and children. The lack of flexibility afforded to care workers, as a result of the monocentric planning of bus networks, was just one example she gave of how greater representation is needed when envisaging a better future for transport.

James Gleave, Director of Mobility Lab, spoke about how transport planners can adapt to future mobility trends.

His presentation emphasised why planners need to look beyond surface-level problems to understand the deeper economic, social and environmental causes and worldviews that inform them. He called for visioning exercises which challenge existing power structures, and which consider giving greater agency to communities in shaping their own future.

These provocations were followed by a workshop where delegates discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the current planning system, in terms of its ability to respond to these challenges.

Key themes discussed in Workshop 1

Strengths and opportunities within the planning system

- **A desire for change:** a number of participants noted that strong climate activism could lend new weight to policies and actions which are aimed at overcoming longstanding barriers to more sustainable transport and land use
- **Technological advancement:** a number of improvements in technology were noted across the four themes, both as ways to better understand the challenges facing planners, and offering new ways to tackle them
- **A growing evidence base:** it was noted that planners can draw on an increasing number of good practice examples of towns and cities which are tackling car use and promoting sustainable transport, and there was a general sense that progressive policies were being shared across local authorities
- **New models of cooperation:** The emergence of combined authorities, growth boards and local enterprise partnerships were seen to offer new ways to bring stakeholders together across functional areas. These can be harnessed to create transformative visions, explore innovative ways to address these challenges, and lobby for the necessary investment and powers
- **Legislation and frameworks:** national legislation, such as the UK Climate Change Act or the Wales Future Generations Act, provides local planning authorities with stronger hooks for their plans and policies

Weaknesses within the planning system

- **A lack of power among local planning authorities:** delegates thought that planners lack the power to directly implement change, and can be limited to encouraging incremental improvements by influencing the development process
- **A lack of stakeholder collaboration:** this point extended to planners working across local authority boundaries, but also to planners working with relevant bodies such as health and social care to better promote visioning for healthy places.
- **Political will:** the tendency of local politicians to focus on issues such as traffic over holistic place-making was seen as detrimental to the process.

- **Funding:** this broad issue referred to the reductions in local authority funding from central government, but also the lack of flexibility for councils when raising finance for projects, with the result that funding is largely developer led.
- **Timing:** the planning process was seen to deliver change relatively slowly, with the benefits of progressive policies taking many years to materialise, during which support or momentum may be lost
- **Diversity:** local authority decision-making was seen as still dominated by older men who are more likely to travel by car, which could lead to planning which neglects the transport and place needs of underrepresented groups.
- **Failure of engagement/consultation:** current methods of community engagement were seen to benefit the needs of special interest groups at the expense of long term planning objectives.
- **Trends:** wider changes to behaviour, such as attitudes to different modes of transport, are driven by many factors outside of the planning system, which are difficult to model and influence.

In the afternoon, our second workshop looked at how to **create transformational visions at different spatial scales**. Delegates separated into different groups and looked at the process of visioning at the scale of a neighbourhood, town and country, city-region and region, and the important relationships between them.

Key themes discussed in Workshop 2

Delegates were asked...

How can the planning system help to deliver your vision?

- Delegates spoke of the hooks provided by legislation, such as the Welsh Future Generations Act 2015 and the Climate Change Act 2008, which place duties on local authorities
- During the public consultation process, using artist impressions to show people what the future could look like, bringing local businesses and councillors on fact-finding missions, and reaching out to all sections of the local community
- Building a comprehensive evidence base to inform policies and strategies for a local plan, showing how they contribute to wider place-making objectives, and making them robust enough to withstand opposition and examination
- When conducting short-term trials on initiatives such as filtered permeability, “ask for forgiveness not permission” in order to demonstrate that different futures are possible
- Through early engagement with bus operators in the planning process, ensuring that public transport connectivity informs the scale and design of new development, and is available when residents move in

What might hold back the delivery of your vision?

- A lack of public sector resources
- A lack of local employment opportunities, the consolidation of amenities and services into a few centralised areas, and the move away from local retail towards individual/personalised consumerism enabled by just-in time deliveries
- Parking controls and pricing, with high levels of support for free parking in towns and cities acting as a barrier to reductions in car use to reduce car ridership levels in urban areas.
- Restrictions on the Community Infrastructure Levy, which prevent funding to remedy transport and place-making issues that emerge post-occupation
- Community isolation driven by suburbanisation and the erosion of local public transport
- Land ownership rather than transport considerations driving decision-making in planning

What needs to happen at a larger or smaller spatial scale to realise your vision?

- Equalising public transport provision across cities and smaller towns, for example in cities, late buses are common but in towns a lack of funding means bus services end in the early evening, making it unfeasible for many.
- Opposition to major road building, where multiple local authorities should demonstrate how effective planning can reduce the need for new infrastructure, and work with developers to ensure that any new roads contain provision for walking and cycling networks
- Integrating strategies for residential and employment land use across wider functional areas to ensure local employment opportunities are available throughout urban areas, reducing the need to travel
- An agreement between local authorities to assess planning applications against a common vision in a consistent manner
- Sharing of evidence on the outcomes of interventions at the neighbourhood scale, such as Walthamstow's Mini Holland project

What to read next:

CIHT: *Better Planning, Better Transport, Better Places*

RTPI: *A Smarter Approach to Infrastructure Planning*

RTPI: *Ambitions for the North: A Spatial Framework for People and Places*

RTPI: *Settlement Patterns, Urban Form and Sustainability*

Transport Knowledge Hub: *Integrating the planning and delivery of sustainable transport with new housing development*

Phil Goodwin: *Various publications*

Leo Murray: *Away with All Cars*