

# RTPI response to Transport for the North's Draft Decarbonisation Strategy

*August 2021*

This is the RTPI's response to Transport for the North's (TfN) consultation on their [Draft Decarbonisation Strategy](#). In their consultation, TfN identifies the need for the North of England to respond to the imminent climate emergency by outlining a roadmap for the transportation sector to achieve net zero emissions of road transport by 2045. It is TfN's vision that this transition will be coupled with increased economic opportunities and improved quality of life.

Transport is the largest contributor to the UK's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. While emissions from other sectors have fallen dramatically since 1990, those from transport have reduced by under 3%<sup>1</sup> and the North of England contributes to 23% of UK road emissions<sup>2</sup>. Recent RTPI research<sup>3</sup> highlighted there is a clear relationship between spatial planning and carbon, and that only a place-based approach can deliver net zero transport emissions *and* be a catalyst for better placemaking to deliver healthier, happier, more resilient communities.

The RTPI's response praises the ambitions of TfN to achieve net zero in surface transport emissions by 2045, five years ahead of the current UK Government commitment to achieve Net Zero through a variety of means. Although the RTPI acknowledges the inherent legal limits of TfN and their capacity to enact changes unilaterally, there is scope for TfN to influence policy and set an example for other regions. The RTPI believes that spatial planning can play a larger role in the decarbonisation process and looks forward to working with TfN in the future to support making this a reality.

## About the RTPI

The RTPI champions the power of planning in creating sustainable, prosperous places and vibrant communities. As a learned society, we use our expertise and research to bring evidence and thought leadership to shape planning policies and thinking. As a professional body, we have over 25,000 members across all sectors, and are responsible for setting formal standards for planning practice and education.

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<sup>1</sup> Department for Transport (2020) [Decarbonising transport: setting the challenge](#)

<sup>2</sup> Transport for the North (2021) [Decarbonisation Strategy for Consultation](#)

<sup>3</sup> RTPI (2021) [Net Zero Transport: the role of spatial planning and place-based solutions](#)

## General comments

The Draft Decarbonisation Strategy proposes comprehensive action taken across the North of England to embrace new technologies, mode-shift, and reduce demand for surface transport. The Strategy addresses many of the concerns raised in our net zero transport paper, especially on promoting a reduction in travel<sup>4</sup>. The RTPI is pleased that TfN places a strong emphasis on demand reduction in contrast to the Department for Transport's decarbonisation plan which does not focus on proactively encouraging demand reduction<sup>5</sup>. Rather wisely, TfN has examined a range of different scenarios and how they may affect the decarbonisation process. Each of these scenarios sees a significant decrease in emissions and the overall document provides a positive direction towards achieving net zero. The ambitions of the Decarbonisation Strategy also align with themes from another RTPI research document, *Ambitions for the North*, which outlines a spatial framework to deliver “*a better future for the people and places of the North*”<sup>6</sup>.

We recommend that the regional vision outlined in the Strategy be supported by greater emphasis on spatial planning and ensuring that Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) collaborate to ensure greater connectivity. To achieve full decarbonisation the city regions and local authorities of the North must work together with TfN. It is especially important that future development considers accessibility to large employment centres by modes other than private vehicles. RTPI's net zero transport emphasises how spatial planning can be at the centre of decarbonisation by focusing on demand reduction, enabling mode-shift and demonstrating best practices for a variety of urban morphologies.

The excellent analytical capability to model carbon output and reductions demonstrated by TfN could potentially compliment efforts of LPAs in preparing local plans across the North of England. The RTPI encourages the use of new technologies to guide the plan making process<sup>7</sup> and the ability to understand the carbon cost of different decisions could prove to be especially useful.

TfN's Decarbonisation Strategy has addressed its own limits in what it can accomplish, however, the Strategy sends a coordinated message from the North of England about its climate ambitions, establishes the context to engage local partners, and provides a template for other regions.

## Questions

**Q2. We have presented a range of information about present day emissions being generated by surface transport in the North, as well as the emissions we expect to be generated in the future without additional policy measures in place. Are there any other factors affecting these emissions, or additional areas for analysis, that would be important for us to consider?**

The scenarios described reflect unique possibilities with some degree of overlap. This range of expected emissions is useful to identify the policies needed to bridge the gap, however, it may

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<sup>4</sup> RTPI (2021) [Net Zero Transport: the role of spatial planning and place-based solutions](#)

<sup>5</sup> Department for Transport (2021) [Transport decarbonisation plan](#)

<sup>6</sup> RTPI (2019) [Ambitions for the North](#)

<sup>7</sup> RTPI & CPC: [A shared vision for the digital future of planning](#)



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be similarly useful to identify the best practices—particularly related to long term endeavours like planning—to achieve decarbonisation and identify whether these are ‘on track’. While spatial planning is listed as one of the areas of uncertainty for the future emissions forecasts, it may be worth evaluating spatial plans recently produced or currently in progress to identify the potential impact on travel demand and mode use. Although this window into the future of development is limited to a few years, the impact of today’s spatial planning will have significant effects on the ability to achieve net zero emissions for surface transport.

**Q3. To what extent do you agree with or disagree with TfN’s approach to developing a Decarbonisation Trajectory?**

Yes, we generally agree with the approach used to develop the Decarbonisation Trajectory.

**Q4. Please explain your response:**

The use of different scenarios to examine the ‘Policy Gaps’ is an effective tool to explore a range of different outcomes and ways in which they can be bridged.

There is a very strong focus on shifting to Zero Emissions Vehicles (ZEVs) which includes the suggestion of incentives such as free parking for such vehicles to accelerate the transition to this mode of transportation. However, we would prefer to see a principal focus on delivering active travel networks, reducing congestion and thereby creating liveable streets. RTPI would therefore welcome a greater focus on demand reduction and mode-shifting, though we do acknowledge the importance of moving away from petrol and diesel fuels.

We agree with the strategy’s policy analysis that regions should be given greater devolution of funding and powers to make the zero carbon investments needed to achieve these ambitious goals. Greater Manchester represents one example of using its devolution deal to invest heavily in expanding service delivery<sup>8</sup>.

**Q5a. Choose the three Policy Gap Actions (for TfN to prioritise), that you consider to be of most importance:**

We recommend the following Policy Gap Actions:

**PGA8:** Develop and implement comprehensive plans for the regional public transport network, such as Northern Powerhouse Rail and wider improvements to the rail network.

**PAG12:** Work with Government to support regional coordination of measures to improve logistics efficiency, including consolidation centres, mode-shift to rail and information democratisation schemes.

**PGA11:** Provide evidence and strategic support to partners to identify opportunities for shared mobility.

**Q5b. Choose the three recommendations for national government, that you consider to be of most importance:**

We support the following recommendations for national government as the most important:

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<sup>8</sup> GMCA (2021): [Andy Burnham vows to accelerate plans for improved, London-style transport network](#)



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**2:** Provide a substantial and consistent funding stream to Local Authorities to improve public transportation and active travel networks.

**11:** Use the National Planning Framework to promote '15/20-minute neighbourhoods'

**12:** Develop appraisal guidance that includes the full impacts of transport on carbon.

**Q5c. Choose the three recommendations for local government, that you consider to be of most importance:**

We support the following recommendations for local government as the most important:

**2:** Subject to Government funding, invest in bus and light rail networks to offer improved journey quality, accessibility and cheaper fares to passengers.

**3:** Implement policies to enhance dedicated cycle networks, low-traffic neighbourhoods, and activities to promote behaviour change.

**11:** Use local planning policy to promote '15/20-minute neighbourhoods', prioritise development close to public transport hubs and encourage car-free or car-lite development.

**Q6. Do you feel we have missed any policy actions or recommendations?**

The RTPI greatly encourages the promotion of '15/20-minute neighbourhoods'<sup>9</sup>, however, we also see local plans and strategic planning as crucial to delivering net zero transport systems. It is our hope that TfN can play a role in bringing stakeholders together to deliver on new projects which will encourage a shift in transport modes.

We have recommended the introduction of Green Growth Boards (GGBs)<sup>10</sup> to bring about cross boundary cooperation for housing numbers and the coordination of all the essential services necessary to support growth within an area, including health care, public health, transport, utilities, housing and environmental recovery.

Although the Strategy mentions an intention to identify a funding stream for public transport, the RTPI would like to see stronger recognition for the role of devolution in accomplishing this.

The RTPI welcomes the inclusion of data to drive decision making in the decarbonisation process. Quantifying the carbon emissions of different policy actions is important, especially where it can include the cost of embodied carbon. TfN's analysis on this topic with Decarbon8 is a potentially valuable tool to support local partners and local plan making.

**Q7. To achieve the required demand management targets, where do you feel the policy focus should lie?**

The RTPI recommends a priority towards mode shift and demand reduction with proactive spatial planning playing a powerful role in encouraging behaviour change. Although technological innovations will be essential in reducing overall emissions, the RTPI prefers to focus on spatial planning measures to facilitate greater uptake of walking, cycling and public

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<sup>9</sup> RTPI (2021) [20 Minute Neighbourhoods: Implementing 20 Minute Neighbourhoods in Planning Policy and Practice](#)

<sup>10</sup> RTPI (2021): [Planning for a Better Future: RTPI Proposals for Planning Reform in England](#)



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transport provision to reduce travel demand and encourage behaviour change in immediate response to the aggressive timeline to achieve near Net Zero.

## **ZEV and ICE Efficiency**

**Q8a. Choose the three Policy Gap Actions (for TfN to prioritise), that you consider to be of most importance:**

No answer proposed for this question.

**Q8b. Choose the three recommendations for national government, that you consider to be of most importance:**

No answer proposed for this question.

**Q8c. Choose the three recommendations for local government, that you consider to be of most importance:**

No answer proposed for this question.

**Q9. Do you feel we have missed any policy actions or recommendations?**

No answer proposed for this question.

## **The wider benefits and risks of decarbonising transport**

**Q10. Are there any important potential wider risks or benefits that you feel have not been considered?**

There is the potential to better coordinate decarbonisation efforts in the North of England with the Government's 'Levelling Up' agenda to address regional inequalities and ensure that Northern communities have access to low-cost, carbon neutral public transport and active travel options. A potential risk is that this benefit will not be shared equally across the North. It will be especially important to ensure that an urban-rural divide within the North does not grow and increase inequalities<sup>11</sup>. TfN's analysis on transport related social exclusion and its willingness to share the data with its partners is strongly supported by the RTPI. This can be complimented with coordinated strategic planning across multiple local authorities to ensure that the risks are properly mitigated.

**Q11. Are there any parts of the population that you think will be disproportionately impacted by transport decarbonisation? Why?**

Individuals living in large, urban areas appear most likely to reap the benefits of transport decarbonisation (i.e., reduced congestion, improved air quality, better transport options) while rural communities may be less likely to share these benefits or have the resources to support the decarbonisation process.

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<sup>11</sup> IPPR North (2019) **Divided and Connected: Regional inequalities in the North, the UK and the developed world – State of the North 2019**



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**Q12. In addition to the Government’s proposed measures, documented in their Net Zero Review, what additional actions could TfN take to ensure that all parts of the population benefit from transportation decarbonisation?**

The RTPI advocates for climate justice in the spatial planning process to ensure that vulnerable communities are not left behind<sup>12</sup>. It will be prudent to ensure that the cost of improving services to urban areas does not come at the expense of decreasing public transport services or passing along price increases to more rural or less connected areas. This stance is complimented by IPPR’s final report from their Environmental Justice Commission which reflects that a successful transition to net zero emissions has the potential to provide new economic opportunities and draw upon existing assets to address economic and social inequalities<sup>13</sup>. It is essential that the impact of the decarbonisation process is scrutinised through the lens of climate justice to ensure that the benefits are shared fairly.

## Stimulating clean growth in the North

**Q13. Are there any clean growth opportunities that you feel have not been considered?**

None that have not already been discussed.

The RTPI is pleased to see that the clean growth opportunities mentioned by TfN align with the first ambition outlined in Ambitions for the North<sup>14</sup>: *“To become a globally competitive, sustainable and attractive North, underpinned by a vision which aligns strategic opportunities for housing, economic development and environmental enhancement with investment and infrastructure proposals.”*

## Transport for the North’s Interactive Decarbonisation Evidence Portal

**Q14. Are there any other areas where TfN should focus its future decarbonisation analysis?**

We feel that TfN’s ambitions would be well served by proactively engaging with the need to consider climate justice in their decarbonisation analysis. The analysis would be most effective if it included an assessment of which communities might be disproportionately affected by the steps taken to achieve net zero emissions of surface transport.

## Next steps and proposed priority actions

**Q15. For each of the ‘priority activities to 2025’ identified by TfN, which role do you feel TfN is best places to fulfil?**

No answer proposed for this question.

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<sup>12</sup> RTPI (2020) [Five Reasons for Climate Justice in Spatial Planning](#)

<sup>13</sup> IPPR (2021) [Fairness and Opportunity: A people-powered plan for the green transition](#)

<sup>14</sup> RTPI (2019) [Ambitions for the North: A Spatial Framework For People and Places](#)



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**Q16. Of the 'priority activities to 2025' identified, choose the three which you consider to be the top priority for urgent action:**

We support the following 'priority activities to 2025' as the most important:

**SD2:** Developing place-based decarbonisation pathways for rural typologies.

**SD3:** Formation of decarbonisation working groups with TfN partners.

**PGA8:** Develop infrastructure to improve regional public transport network.