

Sustainable Transport & Active Travel Summit – transcript

Norman Baker, Campaign for Better Transport - CBT

You are running about half an hour behind. So you all qualify for delay repay - is the good news.

I'm here to give you a national perspective and then to localise it in the content of what I want to say and I think Chris Todd is following me in this session.

The first thing to say is:

I was interested to see the 'Health' presentation, which you had, because 'Transport' and 'Health' are absolutely integrated together. There are up to 36,000 deaths a year from air pollution linked to long term exposure, from PM 2.5 the small particles referred to. They cause over 33,000 premature deaths a year, according to Public Health England. The majority of these are linked to road transport. So, we need to be aware, when we are driving our vehicles, driving our cars, then we are actually causing problems for people - including to ourselves from that activity.

It is also worth noting that the brand new diesel car or the worst sort of new diesel car actually emits more nitrogen oxide than a new bus - so we haven't got that right as a country. Electric cars are talked about as a solution but it is worth pointing out that electric cars (as was mentioned in the 'Health' presentation) have a problem with non-tailpipe emissions from brake dust and tyre wear. But also, they don't help congestion at all, and congestion is one of the main problems in terms of the economic consequences of transport which isn't solved at all by electric cars, particularly not by those which are getting bigger - the Chelsea tractors which are now becoming more common on our roads. If you used to like Chelsea tractors and you don't any more, then please do qualify yourself as an 'ex-tractor fan' because that's where we want to get to.

In terms of carbon!

Transport's share of carbon has gone up. We've seen quite a lot of progress in this country in terms of energy - particularly renewable energy - but the transport sector now is responsible for more than 30% of emissions compared to under 20% in 1990. We haven't made progress. That's partly because cars are getting bigger, and producing more emissions - even though they're becoming more efficient because they're bigger, they're not actually making a reduction in emissions.

It's worth pointing out by comparison, only 1.5% of Transport emissions come from rail so rail - even diesel rail- is an extremely clean form of transport compared to Road Transport.

We've heard a bit about buses just now and I welcome the steps the County Council has taken with the Department for Transport (DfT) to improve bus patronage locally, but up the story for bus over the last ten years leading up to the National Bus Strategy and indeed before covid came along was not a very happy one. Commercial services were down 16% in the 10 years to 2021 and council services (this is not East Sussex, this is England), were down by 50%, and that's because councils, let's face it, are so short of money. - (They are - including East Sussex) - that they've had to cut non-statutory services and buses are non-statutory services They've got to look after adult social

care and children services and put those first.. So across the country we have seen bus services lost, particularly in rural areas. And that's a very serious matter.

We at the Campaign for Better Transport believe that the money for buses from central government. first of all. should be all coordinated through the Department for Transport. It isn't at the moment. Some of it comes from the Levelling up department and some of it the Cabinet Office. And as a consequence of that, it's not coordinated properly. And secondly, we think it should be 'ring fenced', so that money for our buses is actually spent on buses, not diverted to something else. The council's going down the Flexi-bus route – not unusual, it's becoming quite common across the country. We have our suspicions about how effective that will be. You're still paying for a driver, you're still paying for a vehicle, you're still paying for maintenance. And all the other things associated with the transport vehicle.

It's just that you undertake to carry fewer passengers in that vehicle.

So I wish them well with FlexiBus, but certainly the evidence from across the country is that 95% of DRT (demand responsive transport) schemes are making a loss so they've got a huge challenge ahead to make that system work and what we mustn't have as a consequence of the government money is an upturn in bus services now and then they all drop off when the money runs out in 2026. We've been there before, because the Labour government in about 2008 poured money into local bus services and the county then brought on services here in East Sussex and as soon as the money ran out, the services were withdrawn. So we don't need that to happen so we've got to try and take the opportunity to make sure they embed bus transport usage so it doesn't disappear afterwards

Now part of that will be making sure - what the county said actually in the last presentation - that there are bus priority measures: bus lanes, the A259 between here and Rottingdean and onto Brighton is a great example of a bus lane that works very well in deed and a bus can take when it's full – and many of Brighton & Hove buses are - 90 cars off the road. That helps reduce congestion and gives the bus an edge and encourages people to get on buses It's interesting that whereas across the country bus services have declined in usage over the last ten years, they've actually gone up in Brighton & Hove because Brighton & Hove has got a really good arrangement with the bus company there and has been putting in priority measures and understands what needs to be done to get people on buses and the reality is, if you have a good bus service, if it's on time, if it's clean, if it's punctual and it's reasonably priced, people will use it. They really will use it and Brighton & Hove have proved that.

Now, unfortunately, government has also produced a so-called 'Plan for Drivers' which followed on from the by-election in Boris Johnson's old constituency, which I'm afraid takes us back about 20 years, and talks about sharing bus lanes with cars. I don't think that will last very long and I encourage DfT officials to go very, very slow in implementing that particular plan before the next election.

I welcome the fact – what the county's done for young persons' fares, which is a really good initiative and well overdue. Now in terms of rail, I've mentioned that they are only responsible for only 1.5 % of carbon emissions (*for transport*). We've got a better Coastway East service which came in recently - that was a creative thing by Southern to introduce that. We still haven't got reduced journey times to London, which we're pushing for and improved the East Coastway service between Hastings and Brighton. Gatwick – Southern tell us that the improvements at Gatwick gave made it quicker to get to Brighton, but it seems to have got longer to get from Eastbourne and

Lewes to London than it used to be.

The quickest journey from London to Lewes was 53 minutes in the old days, believe it or not. Now you take one hour and 14 minutes, during the rush hour.

We need to see the Lewes - Uckfield line reinstated and I have to say the county council's local transport plan still feels to me to be very road heavy in terms of the answers they have identified going forward. I hope the consultation that they are undertaking will be met with many people saying 'Why are we still putting in lots of new roads, because that's not really the answer we want to see?'

By the way Lewes-Uckfield I stress, not BML2 which is a very expensive and undeliverable scheme. Lewes-Uckfield reinstatement is actually practical. There was a study carried out, partly at my request, about 10-15 years ago by the county council and Network Rail demonstrated that the line could be reinstated and it would make an operational profit when it was there. Indeed, it made an operational profit before it was withdrawn and British Rail actually opposed the withdrawal of that line, but it was forced on them by the county council actually, who wanted to build the Phoenix Causeway in Lewes. That's why the line was actually withdrawn. The line will make an operational profit, it just needs to be reinstated.

And actually when you are spending, dare I say it, £140 million or more on the Hastings-Bexhill link road, that's money that could be spent on reinstating Lewes-Uckfield..

When I was a minister at the Department of Transport, by the way, I was responsible for local road schemes. We used to, very carefully, produce cost-benefit-ratios for all the local road schemes that had been proposed. I had 38 in front of me to look at. The one with the - worst cost-benefit-ratio in the whole country was the Hastings Bexhill link road, but that was the one the county council wanted to pursue

The county needs to do more, I think, looking at 'land value capture'. This has been used in France a great deal and some European countries. It was used for the Elizabeth Line in London and it's been used for some degree for the Ashington reopening in the North East.

You know we've got a position where lots of new houses are coming on stream. That housing money should be captured, because it will be a benefit to the house builders or use for public transport interventions.

There are lots of houses proposed for Uckfield. Why isn't that money being captured and used to help fund the reopening of the Lewes-Uckfield rail line

A lot of this is national, not just local. The increase in car costs between 1997 and 2020 – a 23 year period – was 68% - it cost more to run your car.

The increase for rail users was 138%.

The increase for bus users, 216%

So, this is going in the wrong direction. We want to get people on public transport. We are actually pricing them off public transport and into their cars.

There's a disconnect, I'm afraid, between the DfT, which generally does the right thing and the Treasury, which by and large does the wrong thing. So there's a national picture here to try and make sure we correct that. Fuel duty has been frozen for about 12-13 years and yet we've seen rail fares and bus fares inexorably rise. For bus fares now the government has come in with a £2 cap which we in the Campaign for Better Transport argued for. Congratulations to them for that - and that is showing an increase in bus patronage as a consequence.

I want to say something on road schemes now, which is the main thing I want to say. People seem to have forgotten, including the county council and the South East Local Economic Partnership (LEP) about the SACTRA (Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment) report of 1992. That was a report for the Department of Transport. It demonstrated very clearly that money spent on new roads generated more traffic.

Now that may seem very obvious. What is very clear is you cannot build your way out of a traffic jam, you just simply move the traffic elsewhere. If you want to have proof of that, look at Birmingham. Birmingham spent more money on roads than almost anywhere else in the country and has some of the worst traffic jams – the local council is now unpicking that.

The county council knows this because over the years it refused to change the junction at Rottingdean on the A259, because the evidence had quite correctly showed that if you widen the junction there, you simply pull more traffic off the A27 and you don't actually solve the problem. They are unfortunately I think, going ahead with the A59 widening at the Exceat Bridge outside Seaford. That will have the same consequence and pile traffic through Seaford and take it off the A27.

So on the A27, I'm going to say something about this. Chris Todd will say something in a moment about this.

One of the arguments for improvements, for spending over a billion pounds on the A27 between Lewes and Polegate; it will ease congestion. No, it won't. It will attract more traffic on it and more traffic off the railway.

It will cut accidents? No, it won't. What *has* cut accidents on the A27 has been the extra steps which were brought in by the DfT following my lobbying, I might say, to improve particular problem spots along road. The worst accident spot in East Sussex is on the A259 east of Eastbourne, not the A27 between Lewes and Polegate.

Lead to faster journeys? No, it won't - you just move the traffic jam to the other end of the road - you won't actually make the journey any faster.

Help the economy? There was a very interesting argument that it'll help the economy. When the A23 was dualled down to Brighton, what happened was that a whole lot of businesses in Brighton relocated; they didn't need to be in Brighton any more so Royal Mail, for example, went from Brighton to Gatwick.

When the M4 was built down to Wales, a lot of businesses relocated to Reading because you can get to Wales more quickly. You've got to be very careful with the argument that putting a new road helps the economy. It doesn't always do that. (SACTRA conclusions - sub Ed, DC.).

What you could do, you can actually incentivise the use of rail, particularly in this area, where there's a potentially really good rail service. Some years ago: I got Southern Railway to introduce a

scheme which had reduced season ticket costs between Eastbourne and , because there's a capacity on these 8 and 12 car trains going to London. Many passengers getting off at Lewes which is a major employment centre

Southern didn't want to do it, but I forced them to. They got fed up with me arguing for it and finally did it. They came back a year later, rather shamefaced and said, 'You know tht scheme you wanted, we've had a 33% increase in people on the trains and we've made a profit on it while reducing fares. Cost Southern nothing, they got more money. Cost the public taxpayer nothing and a reduced congestion on the roads. What's not to like about that? Can we have more imagination please in our transport, rather than reverting simply to this idea of having more and more tarmac down as the answer to our problems. It isn't.

What we've seen in Wales, by the way, is a stop to these large road building and using capital money now for revenue to get people onto public transport. Increase the amount of money coming into the fare box and that should pay for itself. Well done Wales.

And lastly, let's have a look at workplace parking levies. (WPL) The only one in the country are Nottingham that charges a levy to businesses if they've got more than 10 parking spaces to encourage them not to have those parking spaces. When that was propose, Boots, and other Nottingham employers said this is the end of civilisation. No-one will come to Nottingham any more.

Do you know what happened? Nottingham has got one of the best public transport systems in the country. It's also got one of the best economies in the country now - much better than Derby has next door. Nottingham has done the right thing through, investing in public transport, investing in sustainable transport actually is not just good for the environment, it's good for the economy as well.

Let's have some more imagination in our area please.

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