

## The short-haul response to Covid and the Climate Emergency

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### **As we move from the emergency ad-hoc response to Covid 19, counterproductive road spending should switch to remote working, active travel and public transport**

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Policy reactions to the Covid 19 emergency have so far been ad-hoc. As we embark on the path back to normality, the decisions must be more strategic, so that the 'short-haul' response to CV19 addresses not only immediate threats, but also sets us up to take advantage of the opportunities to build-back-better – for the economy, for society and for the environment. A separate 2-pager<sup>1</sup> lays out the 'long-haul' to build-back-better.

#### **Superfast remote working hubs in every community**

There should be a major programme to provide superfast remote working hubs in every community, to cater for people whose home environment or equipment is unsuitable for remote working and for firms with inadequate socially distanced space to accommodate all their workers all the time. Access should be free or on a scale of payments according to ability of firms and individuals to pay. There are many good examples of not-for-profit community hubs, some of which may also be able to provide practical support for rapid expansion to national scale. To ensure expenditure will match need, there could be an advance sign-up scheme, as operated by some councils for provision of secure cycling facilities. To perpetuate remote working before the habit is lost, the first wave of superfast remote working hubs should be in place and ready for action within a few months. There should also be financial support to get superfast broadband to households who can feasibly work from home.

#### **Massive programme of road space re-allocation to cycling and walking**

The need for social distancing on public transport means that bus and rail capacity in the rush hour is down to less than a fifth of what it was. If public transport users switch to driving, pollution and congestion will dramatically worsen and residential roads will become dangerous rat runs.

Now is the moment to go hell-for-leather on building safe segregated space for walking and cycling. Rules of thumb should be:

- Wide major roads - reallocate one lane for cycling physically separated from traffic by, at the least, vertical wands, and preferably by more solid measures
- Residential areas - create emergency low traffic neighbourhoods using 'modal filters' that only let pedestrians and cyclists use them as through-routes
- School zones - create emergency 'school streets' that close roads around schools at all times or at school opening and closing times.

This should be backed by a 20 mph speed limit across all built-up areas.

#### **Use the rescue package for local public transport to build a better and fully integrated network**

Social distancing means that public transport services can carry fewer passengers, which means less income from fares, making most services uncommercial. This is likely to remain the case for many months until a vaccine for Covid is found.

The short-term Covid rescue package to the bus industry is keeping commercial bus operators on life-support, largely by paying them for concessionary trips by older people that are not being made<sup>2</sup>. When the funding runs out, as it shortly will, services may disappear overnight, bus workers will be laid off, and companies may go bust. The temptation for government will be to agree yet another emergency funding package at one minute to midnight.

Funding for public transport must continue so that over the long-term, cities can revive economically without gridlock. It makes sense for public money to be used to pay for the network we want, rather than just plugging the funding gap caused by the loss of fares and concessionary travel. Local transport authorities, who have the overview of all forms of local transport<sup>3</sup>, should become the conduit for (ring-fenced) Public Transport Coronavirus Recovery Grants. These should be backed by powers to let contracts for all local bus services, and tram and, where appropriate, local rail services, in a way that provides the best possible integrated local transport network, with unified services, timetabling and ticketing.

Competition law should be reformed as necessary and emergency powers deployed if required. Bus operators should be offered one year contracts to run individual routes, to finally create some operational planning certainty. This will give time for local transport operators to redesign their local public transport network, and then to let longer-term contracts for it. To avoid local authorities being held to ransom by the local bus monopolies that bus deregulation and privatisation have created, a publicly owned bus operator should be formed, ready to step in at any location where commercial operators do not offer good-value contracts, transferring at the point of deployment from national ownership to local transport authority control and ownership<sup>4</sup>.

### **Tackle the unsustainable growth in delivery vans by a levy on deliveries, regulation to consolidate deliveries and maximising use of publicly owned delivery services**

Home deliveries have burgeoned during CV19, and with them van delivery traffic. The many different companies providing deliveries make for a system that is inefficient, and bad for congestion, clean air and the climate. Two lines of action are required:

- **A levy on deliveries** should be introduced to stimulate more efficient operation, curtail the growth in van traffic, and invest in alternatives<sup>5</sup>. An added benefit is putting high street shops onto a more level playing field with online companies that don't pay high street business rates and rents.
- **Consolidation** should be mandated for parcel deliveries. Loads should be combined to be delivered at the same time to the same neighbourhoods. Funds from the delivery levy should be used to set up local micro-consolidation centres for delivery of the 'last mile' by zero emission vehicles, such as electrically assisted cargo bikes. This has been successfully trialled in Berlin and elsewhere<sup>6</sup>. In the Netherlands, DHL already make 60% of inner city deliveries by cargo bikes<sup>7</sup>. For maximum efficiency, and minimum traffic, the 'last mile' should be consolidated to a single carrier. Because this will create a local monopoly, it will be logical to use a not-for-dividend publicly owned carrier for the 'last mile'.

### **Cancel spending on building roads to enable spending on recovery measures**

The CV19 economic hit and the surge in remote working means rush hour traffic will be lower for some time. This makes the allocation of £27 billion to road building anachronistic<sup>8</sup>. Re-purposing roads funding to pay for thousands of remote working hubs, active travel networks, better local public transport networks and micro-consolidation centres makes far more sense.

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor I, Hopkinson L, Sloman L (2020) [The long-haul response to Covid and the Climate Emergency: a transport logic map](#)

<sup>2</sup> Centrally determined by governments of England, Scotland and Wales, with essentially the same approach to date in each country. Bus companies are receiving the same amounts of subsidy for older people's free travel and fuel costs as before Covid. This means that we are now paying bus companies for journeys that are not being made. Additional support is also provided in the form of a [Coronavirus Bus Services Support Grant](#) to ensure a basic level of bus services to get keyworkers to their jobs. See also [Urban Transport Group blog](#) and [UTG 2020 Supporting bus services in the Covid19 recovery period](#)

<sup>3</sup> Local control of funding is also required to be responsive to the possibilities and problems of each local area's transport network, which are likely to need more flexible handling where demand and capacity constraints fluctuate unpredictably as local public transport use picks up again.

<sup>4</sup> This measure would require amendment of the Bus Services Act 2017 which bans formation of bus companies owned by local authorities.

<sup>5</sup> This measure has been proposed by various bodies, including, reportedly, government scientific advisers <https://www.export.org.uk/news/514827/Government-considers-e-commerce-delivery-levy-to-control-emissions-following-online-purchasing-spike.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Cairns S and Sloman L (2019) [Potential for e-cargo bikes to reduce congestion and pollution from vans in cities](#)

<sup>7</sup> Bicycle Association 2018 [Response to the consultation "The last mile – a call for evidence"](#)

<sup>8</sup> Road building will also breach our climate obligations. See [The carbon impact of the national roads programme](#)