

# Socialising Transport

A strategy for the  
left

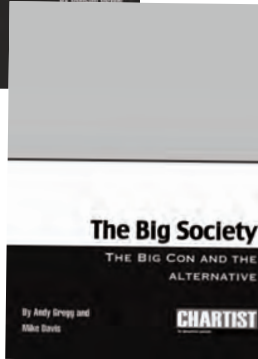
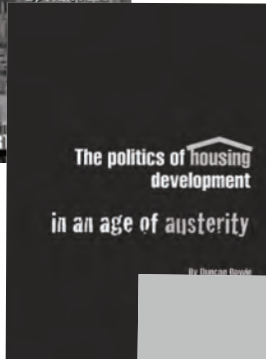
By Paul Salveson

Foreword by  
Maria Eagle MP

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**A strategy for the left**

By Paul Salveson

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Maria Eagle MP



# Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Labour's Record and the Policy Review
3. Taking an Holistic Approach to Transport and Sustainability
4. The Railways: time to change track
5. On the Buses
6. Transport for the Community
7. Streets for People: Cars, Cycling and Walking
8. Conclusion

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# Foreword

## By Maria Eagle - Shadow Transport Secretary

**T**he rising cost of transport should be a priority for the next Labour government. Yet we will inherit a significant deficit, not least thanks to the Tory-led Government's failure to pursue a credible strategy for jobs and growth. Therefore, the solutions of 1997 simply won't work in 2015. The New Labour approach was to be relaxed about the eye-watering profits being made by private train and bus companies, despite the transport system being heavily subsidised by the taxpayer, then to use the proceeds of growth to mitigate the worst impacts. For example, spending a billion pounds to pay bus companies to deliver free travel for older people. There simply will not be the money to repeat that approach in the years ahead.

Instead, a One Nation Labour approach will require us to be bolder about taking on the vested interests in the privatised rail and deregulated bus industries to get a better deal for fare-payers and tax-payers. For rail, it requires doing more to tackle the costly fragmented structure of the industry that emerged from the botched privatisation. And it means looking at extending the not for dividend model that we introduced for rail infrastructure, through the creation of Network Rail, to rail services. That's why, as a first step, Labour is opposing the reprivatisation of the Intercity East Coast service which has delivered £416million back to taxpayers since being run by the Government's own rail company.

For buses, we must recognise the gulf between London and the rest of the country in the ability of elected transport authorities to set fares and plan routes on behalf of passengers. We legislated to make it possible in theory to reverse bus deregulation, but it remains difficult in practice. The next Labour government must do more to ensure the private bus companies can no longer stand in the way of elected transport authorities who are simply seeking a better deal for the tax-payers money already being put

into local bus services. And we need to be much more ambitious about delivering the strategies and infrastructure needed to place cycling and walking at the heart of local transport. Only by being bolder than we have been in the past can Labour secure a better deal for fare-payers and tax-payers and deliver a genuinely accessible, affordable and sustainable transport system.

**February 2013.**

# **Socialising Transport**

**Paul Salveson**

## **1. Introduction**

**T**ransport is one of those subjects upon which everyone has an opinion, because nearly all of us, one way or another, are dependent on it. Transport is an essential means of living our lives, and making the economy work. Few would say we've got it right. In the UK we have a huge imbalance towards private transport – the last 50 years have seen billions invested in roads whilst rail has been starved of funds. Healthy and environment-friendly options such as cycling and walking have declined, leading to further car dependence.

Villages, towns and cities have been wrecked by an exaggerated emphasis on the private car whilst pedestrians and cyclists have been pushed out of the frame. Heritage buildings have been destroyed and homes demolished to make way for highway 'improvements' and people have become terrified to walk or cycle. At last, people are realising that streets, be they in towns or cities, are for people.

The Coalition Government has taken an ambivalent approach towards transport. It is investing a lot more in rail, highlighting the missed opportunities of the last Labour Government. Yet support for local bus services continues to decline. Local authorities are facing huge budget cuts and this translates into less money for subsidised bus services. Even in towns and cities, evening and Sunday bus services are being cut. In more rural areas there has been virtual wipe-out.

Some of the biggest challenges are in roads policy. Few would argue that cars are necessary for some journeys, by some people. What we challenge is whether the current balance is right. There should be much more emphasis on encouraging cycling and walking, bus, tram and rail. More freight should be carried by the railways and

waterways.

But what should a socialist approach to transport look like in the 21st century? Is it just about throwing money at the problem, or reverting to old certainties around nationalisation? There has been a vacuum of thinking on the left for the last ten years, with little creative debate. In some ways, the guild socialists, syndicalists and socialists of a century ago had more creative and radical ideas about the issues than we have shown recently. Social ownership was not seen as synonymous with nationalisation, but could encompass employee ownership/workers' control, and municipalisation of local tram systems. We have some things to learn from that decentralist and democratic approach, which could chime with a public mood which has never been convinced by the 'benefits' of rail and bus privatisation, but has little sympathy for traditional nationalisation.

The basics of a socialist transport policy must be about more than getting people and goods from A to B. The foundations should be:

- Promoting sustainable development
- Supporting social inclusion
- Supporting vibrant local economies
- Providing accessible and affordable connectivity
- Providing good value for money to the taxpayer and Government
- Providing good quality jobs in the transport industry
- Ensuring democratic accountability at all levels – local, regional and national

This pamphlet sets out a radical vision for how we can socialise transport, to the benefit of our communities, our economy and our environment.



## 2. Labour's record and The Policy Review

The last Labour Government largely accepted the framework for transport inherited from the Tories. Rail privatisation and bus de-regulation were largely taken as 'given' though the Transport Act 2000 did provide enabling powers for local authorities to establish 'quality contracts' with bus operators. Most progress was made in the metropolitan authorities, where mostly Labour-controlled transport authorities pushed for investment in local transport networks. Policy towards cars, and the highway network, lacked coherence. The dramatic climb-down in the face of the petrol protests in 2000 suggested a government which had no firm policy on transport priorities, let alone a programme that could reverse previous administration's pro-car policies.

Since Ed Miliband's election as leader there have been encouraging signs of a more imaginative approach, with Maria Eagle developing radical policies in her role as shadow transport secretary.

This short booklet is intended to contribute to a debate within and beyond the centre-left on how Labour can prepare for power and have a realistic and deliverable transport plan ready to implement. Labour's Policy Review – Empowering Communities to Improve Transport – was published in June 2012. In its introduction, Maria Eagle states that:

"Many communities feel that they have little influence over the local transport on which many depend. It can prove impossible to prevent the loss of a much valued bus service or improve the condition of a local train station. Services often do not join up and the absence of integrated ticketing and co-ordinated time tables put barriers in the way of making use of public transport. The nature of the privatised train industry and deregulated bus market outside London make it difficult to influence decision-making, not least over the loss of services and increases in fares.

Labour's Policy Review has heard how we should also have been more willing to tackle the consequences of the Tories' disastrous privatisation of the rail industry and

deregulation of bus services outside London. Passengers have been left frustrated by the lack of any influence in decisions over services and fares. Many increasingly feel priced off public transport with consequences for their quality of life as well as for congestion and the environment.

The Tory-led Government's decision to cut transport funding too far and too fast has made this situation worse with one in five supported bus services already lost and inflation-busting increases in rail and bus fares filling the gap in funding. Transport is now the single biggest monthly cost for many households, greater even than mortgage or rent payments.

I am clear that we need a new approach that enables people to have a real influence over the local transport services on which they depend. I want to see the rest of England benefit from London-style powers to manage bus and train services in the way that can make integrated transport a reality. It's time that fares and services were agreed not with profits but with passengers in mind. A real commitment to devolving powers and funding over transport will require a cultural change away from the 'Whitehall knows best' approach. It will mean being willing to take on the vested interests in the private train and bus companies that benefit from the current system.

Labour has listened to the call for more accountability over how decisions are taken over local transport fares and services. It is clear that without greater support to intervene in the local bus market, take responsibility for local and regional rail services and make the strategic decisions over investment in major local transport schemes, communities will not be able to match London's ability to deliver high quality reliable and affordable integrated transport networks."

Maria's comments are very welcome and represent a breath of fresh air. This document takes its cue from Empowering Communities but looks at some of the wider issues relating to sustainable development and democratic accountability.

## **Governance, accountability and communities**

The current way in which transport is delivered in the UK is an appalling mess. Looking at England alone, there are different arrangements in the shire counties, where the county councils are the transport authority responsible for both highways and bus tendering. In metropolitan counties the Integrated Transport Authorities (ITAs) are the tendering bodies who also support local rail; but it's the metropolitan districts which are responsible for highways. Unitary authorities exist in many parts of England, with highways and transport powers, but not a lot of money to do anything. London has completely different arrangements, with Transport for London, accountable to the Mayor, having sweeping powers over all forms of transport.

To get better and more cost-effective delivery of transport there needs to be a major change in forms of governance, and this debate goes far beyond trains, buses and highways. It needs to include planning and land-use, economic development and a whole swathe of other services.

Currently, several metropolitan authorities in the North of England are looking at the 'combined authority' approach which is already working in Greater Manchester. The 'combined authority' has growing powers over transport and other areas, and is formed of the ten leaders of the metropolitan districts. There are many advantages of this approach and it effectively re-creates the former metropolitan county councils which Thatcher abolished, along with the GLC. Yet questions have to be asked about their democratic accountability – indirectly-elected bodies seldom come under public scrutiny – and what powers combined authorities should have.

In this document we assume that existing powers remain broadly the same, recognising the benefits of authorities combining across a clearly defined region to deliver strategic services, such as rail. However, a debate needs to be had about the structure of local and regional government in the UK which might lead to a more sensible structure which combines democratic accountability and community engagement with a

clearer focus on delivery.

### **3. Taking a holistic approach to transport and sustainability**

Transport is a means to an end, connecting people with employment, education and leisure facilities. A central aim of sustainable transport policy should be to reduce the actual need to travel, with jobs, schools, services and public facilities close to where people are. The links between transport and planning are vital and we need to get that relationship stronger. The Netherlands has perhaps the most advanced approach to transport and planning, with transport infrastructure built in to all major planning developments. In a de-regulated environment that is much more difficult to do and we need to recognise that de-regulation, whilst bringing very little in terms of passenger benefit, has huge dis-benefits in terms of intelligent spatial planning.

Most European countries now have well-established forms of regional governance which are able to integrate regional planning, economic development and transport. Within the UK, Scotland and Wales have a substantial degree of devolution which allows them to take an integrated approach. Yet England itself has a muddled patchwork of decision-making, behind which sits the all-powerful London civil service.

A socialist approach to transport should have clear objectives which are more than just about mobility for its own sake. They should include maximising social, environmental and economic external benefits. That has big implications for current appraisal methods which lean too much towards journey time savings. We need a balanced transport network which is not totally focussed on the capital, important though investment in the London rail network is (and recognising that three quarters of all rail journeys start or finish there!).

#### **The urban dilemma: transport poverty, pollution and safety**

Britain's urban transport networks suffer from the effects of bus de-regulation (out-

side London), above-inflation fare rises on both buses and local train services, car traffic and ensuing problems of pollution, deaths and injuries, combined with lack of space for walkers and pedestrians. And it's not much fun for motorists either, having to face a daily grind of congested roads.

As fuel prices are pushed higher and become more volatile as a result of decreasing supplies and international political unrest, the lack of feasible alternatives to car use is a significant concern for many households. It's a particular problem in more rural areas but is a big issue in urban areas too. Due to non-existent, infrequent or impractical public transport services many households have no alternative than to use a car to gain access to jobs, education, healthcare and shops. So whilst car dependency is more pronounced in rural areas it's also a big issue in many urban areas of Britain. This has a disproportionate impact on those on lower incomes. According to Citizen's Advice this leads many low-income families to run into debt. Fuel poverty arises when a household spends 10 per cent or more of their income on fuel to keep their home warm. Although there is no official definition of 'transport poverty', some families have to allocate a similar proportion of the family income to transport costs.

Let's not forget that more than a quarter of households in the UK still do not have regular access to a car. Non-car-owning households are overwhelmingly concentrated in the lowest-income quintile of the population, with less than half (47 per cent) owning cars, although car ownership among this sector of the population is increasing more rapidly year on year than for the other income sectors. This trend of increasing car ownership even among the lowest income groups can be taken as an indication of the basic social and economic need to own and use cars in highly mobile and affluent societies, such as the UK. There are many down sides to this car dependence, including ill health through rising obesity, and towns and cities which become a challenge to walk around. In the US, where the obsession with the car has gone much further, the very concept of a town or city centre in many areas has become unfamiliar.

The impact of transport poverty on the lives of people who are already experiencing

or who are at risk of social exclusion is now well documented in the UK policy literature. In 2003, the UK Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) reported that transport is ‘a significant contributing factor’ in the exclusion of many low-income groups and communities. It acts as a barrier to the take-up of employment, is also linked with low participation in post-16 education and college dropouts, and can lead to failed health appointments and associated delays in medical intervention. The problem is particularly acute in rural areas but is also prevalent in the urban periphery on low-income estates.

## Transport in rural areas

Many of the problems facing people in urban areas are exacerbated in more rural areas. Government cuts have led to a serious reduction in rural bus services, with some shire counties having no Sunday services at all and evening buses becoming an endangered species. Transport poverty has a particularly acute impact on people living in rural areas where even journeys into larger centres have become difficult by any other form of transport than the car.

Yet a relatively large number of people in rural areas live close to market towns. Smaller communities may only be a few miles from a town centre but there is often little incentive to walk or cycle. For a change in travel behaviour it is necessary to create safe and attractive environments for users, combined with a core bus or rail service. The National Institute of Health & Clinical Excellence (NICE) recommends that local authorities should apportion part of local transport budgets “to promote walking, cycling and other forms of travel that involve physical activity.” Crucially “the proportion allocated should be in line with growth targets for the use of these modes of transport.”

Encouraging people to make journeys by sustainable low-carbon modes of transport is crucial to tackling carbon emissions but equally as important is reducing the need to travel. Promoting alternatives to travel does not mean stopping people travelling but helping individuals and businesses to minimise their journeys where possible and

appropriate. Travelling to and from work accounts for a significant number of journeys therefore encouraging home or remote working would reduce road congestion especially at peak-times in the morning and afternoon.

As services such as post offices and shops continue to close in rural parts of the country, residents have to travel further to access these services. In some areas, local authorities and community groups have developed flexible services operated by the voluntary sector which cater for the differing needs and requirements of older people, young people, families, working people and disabled people (see below on 'Community Transport'). Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) is a more flexible form of bus service that is tailored to the needs of the passengers by operating in response to pre-booked journey requests. However, DRT is not a panacea and there remains a need for core, scheduled services, both bus and train which are co-ordinated. Visitors to rural areas are effectively excluded from using many DRT services because they simply don't understand how the system works, or need to register as a 'user' in advance.

We can do more with the private car. A car club – possibly structured as a co-op – can relieve some households from the burden of owning a car (or second car) while giving the flexibility should they need a car for particular trips. Car clubs have been established for more than a decade in Britain and many run without on-going subsidy, though start-up funding is often vital. Members pay for the use of a vehicle via a mix of joining fees, annual or monthly charges on an hourly or daily tariff that also includes an allowance for distance travelled. The car club operator, rather than the member pays for running costs (i.e. vehicle excise duty, insurance and vehicle maintenance) as well as fuel costs.

## **4. The Railways: time to change track**

There's no doubt that both passengers and staff (including many managers) are far from happy with the current structure and how it delivers. Fares are much higher than in other parts of Europe and reliability compares poorly with some continental net-

works. And passengers are bewildered by the complexities of the privatised system. It isn't as though privatisation has led to lower costs – quite the contrary. The cost of running Britain's railways is around four times as expensive as it was under British Rail. But is the answer a knee-jerk reaction that says 'Re-nationalise it!?' Many people who worked for BR in the 1970s would question that. The old BR was never a model of socialist enterprise. It was cash-starved and, by the 1960s, run by managers who were chosen by how fast they could cut services, rather than provide outstanding service to the country. But there is an alternative to the short-termist and profit hungry structure at present.

## **Rail could do so much better**

The performance of Britain's railways is showing some steady improvement, in terms of reliability. More trains are running on time and a degree of confidence has returned to the system, across the country. Investment totalling over £9 billion was announced by the Coalition Government in July which will see many routes electrified and some lines re-opened. But it is at a cost. We are pumping four times the amount of public money into the railways now, than we did in the last year of BR ownership. The costs of doing things like opening new stations, providing new infrastructure or procuring rolling stock is much, much greater than in pre-privatisation days. Part of the problem is the large number of interfaces within the industry, with each component wanting its slice of the cake – adding profit onto profit. The rolling stock leasing companies – owned by banks – are notorious for making super-profits from trains which are fully depreciated. The 2011 McNulty Review identified potential 'savings' though this does not extend to curbing super-profits made by the banks which own the rolling stock companies, or the plethora of supplier organisations. Whilst the profits being made by the train operator owning groups are not so extreme, nonetheless Northern Rail, for example, made £30million last year, which went back to Serco shareholders and Dutch Railways with only about £3m invested back in the railway.

It isn't just the North of England that needs investment. Campaigners have been ar-



guing for the re-opening of the Lewes-Uckfield line in Sussex for many years. In the West Country, re-opening the former Southern Railway main line from Crediton to Plymouth would link sizeable communities such as Tavistock and Okehampton with Exeter and Plymouth. The new mayor for Bristol has shown interest in re-opening the former Portishead branch as a commuter link to the city centre whilst activists in the Chilterns have been lobbying for the Honeybourne to Stratford-on-Avon link to re-open. It's good news that the Oxford-Bicester-Bedford line will re-open but to maximise the benefit, the route should continue through to its original destination, Cambridge.

## **Rail for the regions**

Many parts of the UK – particular England outside of London - are stuck with an ageing fleet and serious overcrowding on many routes; and a lack of infrastructure capacity to handle any increase in traffic. The most urgent need is new rolling stock to extend existing train lengths. Investing in the infrastructure to allow more trains to run will take time, and the most pressing issue is to provide seat capacity now. Scotland has got rail re-openings, electrification and new trains. So has London. Even Wales, with a far less dense population, is seeing railways re-opened which would not stand a chance of getting approved in England. Looking beyond the Channel, we see the same process of investment in regional lines, in Germany, France and Scandinavia. In the North of England, the Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs) have seized the opportunity offered by partial devolution of powers over rail to a 'sub-national' level; a new body called 'Rail in the North Executive' is emerging which may take on wide responsibilities including franchising powers (see below).

Relatively small infrastructure projects can deliver a lot, though they currently cost far too much. There is a need to lengthen some platforms to accommodate longer trains and ensure better interchange facilities for buses at stations. Some very short sections of line, currently non-operational, could provide new journey opportunities. For example the Todmorden Curve, about 250 yards of track, if re-instated could allow for direct trains from Burnley to Manchester. The programme of North West electrifi-

cation needs to be cranked up and accelerated, with key strategic routes across the Pennines given greater priority: Trans-Pennine is already approved, but the Caldervale route via Hebden Bridge urgently needs major investment. In the medium to longer term, re-openings such as the Woodhead route for North – West – Humberside freight, and Skipton – Colne to re-connect East Lancashire with West and North Yorkshire, also need progressing as does Bradford Cross-Rail. It gives much wider regional benefits than conventional assessments suggest. If a case can be made for re-opening Bathgate – Airdrie and Ebbw Vale, there are many equally deserving projects in the North of England which would bring major social and economic benefits. Probably the easiest and most desirable project would be re-opening the Ashington Blyth and Tyne route in Northumberland; the route is used for freight and the main capital work would be station development, not the more costly track and signalling works.

Some larger-term projects have implications now for decision-making. Is High-Speed 2, at least as currently planned, the right solution? There is certainly an issue with capacity on the existing network – the main lines are nearly full – but questions are being asked about the sense in spending £34 billion on a scheme which will take 20 years and more to deliver and will, at best, have a ‘neutral’ environmental impact. Money could be better used enhancing the existing network and some selective new stretches of line engineered for conventional (i.e. up to 125 mph) speeds.

The current structures for delivering transport in the regions are changing and the ‘combined authority’ approach may be more widely adopted. The experience of the metropolitan passenger transport executives (PTEs) and their political overseers in the Integrated Transport Authorities (ITAs) is invaluable. But transport for the English regions must not ignore the needs of less urbanised areas and – particularly in rail – there should be strategic authorities that involve the shires as well as the PTEs. The proposed ‘Rail in the North Executive’ must be inclusive of all partners in the North, and similar bodies will be required elsewhere in the regions. Ultimately, the best approach would be region-wide transport authorities which are accountable to democratically-elected regional assemblies.

## **A better railway needs structural change: A Mutual Network Rail**

There is much that a centre-left Government could do which would be electorally popular, deliver a better transport system and save money. Network Rail, which owns and manages the national rail infrastructure, is already set up as a not-for-dividend company. However, it has little accountability either to Government or the public – let alone its employees. Yet the current ‘company limited by guarantee’ could relatively easily be transformed into a more democratic structure which potentially could include employees, passenger groups and local authorities. This would incentivise the staff, give them a real say in how the company is run, and ensure that senior managers and directors are accountable and not paid silly bonuses. We need to get away from the idea you only get good leaders if you have huge bonus incentives. You don’t. You get people who are just in it for the money.

A mutual, socially responsive Network Rail would ensure high standards of efficiency and bring more activities in house, so that excess profits are no longer funnelled into sub-contractors pockets. Surpluses and savings made by Network Rail would go back into the company to deliver ever-higher maintenance and safety standards.

Network Rail should concentrate on what it does well, which is managing and developing the infrastructure, over a long investment horizon. It should work closely with train operators who have a shared vision of a railway which is run to meet wider social and economic objectives, not the narrow interests of shareholders. Further in this report we suggest that Network Rail could form the ‘infrastructure’ arm of a Strategic Rail Agency.

## **Failure of franchising**

Network Rail is only one side of the equation. The franchising system foisted on us by the 1993 Railways Act has not worked. Costs have risen dramatically and the collapse of the West Coast franchising process should be the final nail in its coffin. Fran-

chising delivers a demoralised workforce with employees who have little or no loyalty to what is inevitably a transient employer. Management is de-motivated because franchise specifications leave little room for commercial initiative and short-term franchises don't allow for investment by the franchisee unless specified in the contract. Coalition proposals to reform franchising in the wake of the West Coast fiasco will not address the fundamental issues i.e. the underlying malaise of centralised, price-driven, franchising.

It has been argued that if you get the franchise specification right, it doesn't matter who runs the operation, subject to appropriate safeguards. We profoundly disagree with this idea. The sort of company actually running the trains is crucial and there are a thousand and one issues which you could never enshrine in a contract which are absolutely critical to how a service is perceived by passengers, and what the company is like to work for. It's about 'culture' and getting one which combines entrepreneurial flair with social responsibility and excellent customer care. We need a new kind of rail operator which combines many of the good things achieved by the private TOCs but with an ethical approach, founded on co-operative values, which recognises there is more to the business than the financial bottom-line. There should also be a social and environmental bottom-line which ought to be of equal importance.

Franchising is common on the regional networks of other European countries, though there is a decisive difference. In general, regional rail services are franchised by regional governments on a 'concession' basis where the public body simply pays an operator to deliver a service at an agreed price, taking the commercial risk. We see this more clearly in Germany, where the land governments, or devolved agencies, franchise most local and regional rail services. In many cases, the regional authority, and not a profit-hungry 'leasing company' (viz., bank) owns the rolling stock.

Yet even the 'concession' approach can be costly. The private operator, typically one of the big multi-national transport groups, will still want a healthy profit. Passengers – as well as employees – still have all the instability of a short-term operation. Con-

cessions need managing as much as any other franchise which pushes up costs still more.

And it should be stressed that many senior railway managers would welcome being part of a social enterprise which puts people before profits rather than be at the whim of faceless international groups whose only concern in their 'bottom line'. There is no fundamental reason why regional franchises could not be re-structured as licences, with periodic reviews but not necessarily a compulsory competition at periodic intervals. If performance is good, why have to go through the turmoil and cost of a new competition? It's not good for passengers, for the employees, or for the wider public interest.

A 'social enterprise' train operator could be composed of several constituent bodies. Employees need to have a stake, but so do passengers and other stakeholders such as local businesses. Back in the early 1900s the Railway Clerks' Association (today's TSSA) argued for boards of socially owned railway companies having Chamber of Commerce representation!

## **What form of regional operation?**

If we move away from the current approach of franchising to something which is more focused on community needs (markets), a future operation might look like this:

- A big enough bundle of train services to justify basic overheads including depot facilities (possibly leased and possibly shared with other operators), but not too big to be unwieldy.
- Synergy with local and regional government and development agency boundaries.

This assumes an end to the nonsensical franchising policy, and encouraging not-for-profit regional operators which are accountable to democratic regional bodies. An

obvious place to start is Wales, which has a Labour Government and a franchise which expires at 2018. Ironically, it is currently operated by state-owned German Rail (DB) which owns Arriva, the franchisee. The North of England is another area where there are huge opportunities, with a rail network desperately in need of investment and subject to the whims of a London-centric Department for Transport. The current Northern Rail franchise is too unwieldy. It should either be broken down into smaller concessions (e.g. Greater Manchester; Merseyside; North-West; North-East and Yorkshire) or have strongly devolved management units covering these areas. The latter approach may bring benefits of scale providing there is strong representation from transport authorities at all levels. Within the North of England, there needs to be a premier 'inter-regional' operation based on the existing TransPennine Express franchise (which last year made a profit of £108m for its First/Keolis shareholders) which connects the main centres of the North. However, a number of semi-autonomous sub-regional operations for local services, closely linked at one end to InterCity and inter-regional services, and at the other with buses and trams, would bring real benefits to passengers, employees and the wider community.

## **The importance of stations**

Stations are an incredibly important part of the railway but the most neglected. While the station buildings should remain in Network Rail ownership, they should – in their entirety – be leased to either the concessionaire or to the regional authority. For smaller stations there is considerable scope for involving community groups in developing stations, using facilities for meetings, tourist information centres, post offices and the like.

Stations should, in appropriate locations, be developed as business centres with low-rent 'starter' units available for small businesses. A central, easily-accessible location where there is a cluster of enterprises would stimulate local economic development and provide quality, accessible jobs. A good example already is Redcar where the former station buildings have been converted into a business centre.

An advantage of local authorities leasing the station is that they could locate a range of public services, e.g. libraries, nurseries, tourist information centres etc., within them. Again, it happens in Sweden and in other countries. It makes sense in transport terms but also in ensuring local services are protected in smaller communities. Bringing a mix of services under one roof, with easy access by train, bus and bike and car, would help sustain the local economy and services which may well disappear if they are viewed as 'stand-alone' facilities.

## **Integrated transport and ticketing**

One final part of the equation is transport integration. Why not use some of the powers of the Transport Act 2000, which allows for quality bus contracts, to form part of a rail concession? In other words, make some, or possibly all, of the local bus network part of the license so there is one integrated transport provider in the defined area. This would give you the level of integration and efficiency enjoyed in countries like the Netherlands. The 'Syntus' operation in western Holland is a combined bus and rail concession where drivers are competent for both bus and train driving, and buses and trains are totally integrated. This is not just about timetabling, but also fully integrated fares and ticketing, information services and physical interchange at stations.

Ticketing – and fare levels – is one of the biggest challenges facing the transport industry. London, with its popular Oystercard, has got it right and having one card valid on all modes is not just convenient, it stimulates use of public transport. Smart-card technology now allows the user to have a single card for a multitude of uses allowing really smart choices.

A de-regulated multi-operators environment runs against any sort of fully integrated ticketing system. However, the approach of 'quality contracts' (see above) provides a means by which all revenue goes to the public body and even with a private operator delivering the actual service there is clear transparency..

## The national and inter-regional network

Most gains are to be made from reforming the regional networks, which swallow up a lot of public support and which have been – with boring regularity – subject to whispering campaigns within the DfT about ‘poor value for money’ and ‘how much cheaper it would be to give all passengers on the such-and-such line their own car’. The DfT has made some welcome steps towards devolving responsibility for local rail to the regions and this should be encouraged. Nobody would suggest that bus services should be tendered by the DfT; and they shouldn’t be meddling with the detail of local and regional services. Where they can assist is in providing basic ground-rules, agreed by ministers, for how regional services should be delivered, be it franchises or licenses/concessions – then give regional bodies the money and let them get on with it. Much as happens now with Merseyrail.

That leaves the core national network. The UK needs a single ‘InterCity’ operation which connects all the main centres of the country. We had it under BR and it worked: in fact many other European operators copied the idea and you can see it today, operating superbly in Germany, France, Sweden and many other parts of Europe.

There is already the basis to do it. The Government has its own operation called ‘Directly-Owned Railways’ (DOR) which is ‘the operator of last resort. It currently runs East Coast, a major part of the national network. If it hadn’t been politically embarrassing, it would have been given West Coast as well, effectively putting a majority of the main InterCity network in public ownership!

The current intention of the Coalition is to privatise East Coast when the current franchising mess is sorted out, if indeed it ever will be. An incoming Labour Government has another option: make DOR the national ‘InterCity’ network (InterCity UK) and continue it as a publicly-owned company, with more democratic governance involving not only DfT but employees, the Scottish and Welsh governments, local authorities and passenger groups. It may well be that the West Coast shambles is still not resolved



by 2015 so add it into the 'IC UK' portfolio; do the same with Great Western, which is also due for renewal. That only leaves CrossCountry which could be included when its franchise (currently operated by German state-owned Arriva) expires. There may be scope for bringing in other routes to InterCity UK, notably Manchester to Glasgow/Edinburgh (currently part of TransPennine Express).

## **Support rail freight but with a light touch**

Freight is a hugely important part of what rail can deliver. The current moratorium (and possible abolition) of Freight Facilities Grants is a major backwards step which will stymie future rail freight development. Investment in infrastructure capacity will benefit freight as well as passenger operations but there needs to be on-going investment in depot and rolling stock resources, and without FFG that is far less likely to happen.

Freight should be allowed to get on and win business, with support in the form of freight facilities grants and low track access charges. In the USA and Canada several short-line freight railroads are co-ops and it would be good to see that evolve here. With freight, and indeed possible passenger operations, a future Centre-Left Government could help by establishing a social enterprise development agency (such as existed in the 1970s!) to assist co-ops/social enterprises with expertise and soft loans/grants.

## **Saving Money**

Any incoming Labour Government will be faced with acute financial constraints and policies need to reflect that. The suggestions here can be implemented gradually, e.g. as franchises come up for renewal. The gradual absorption of franchises into InterCity UK, or as regionally-specified concessions, will actually be cheaper than the costly franchising process and deliver much greater benefit.

Converting Network Rail into a more democratic organisation should not be a hugely expensive undertaking. Bringing more services in-house by Network Rail will help to control costs, and the company needs to develop its on-going programme of cost reduction. Devolving routine maintenance to a more local level in some areas will help and at the margins using local skills for basic work (e.g. fencing, station maintenance etc.) will reduce the cost of the local railway. If train operations were the responsibility of social enterprises we would see profits recycled back into the business, rather than (literally in many cases) exported. The biggest prize is rolling stock. Developing a strategy to take back rolling stock from the banks will not be easy, but a start could be made by ensuring that new stock for the regional network is owned by regional public bodies, individually or as a consortium. It isn't just about cost cutting. We need an expanding railway which is carrying more passengers and freight, and thus earning more money. These proposals will help make rail more attractive for both long and shorter distance journeys, attracting a bigger slice of the transport market by improved integration between bus and rail.

## **Strategic co-ordination**

The railways have, over the last decade, suffered from lack of overall strategic co-ordination. In BR days this was achieved by the British Railways Board; bringing that back would be difficult and would not necessarily provide the right structure for a UK which is increasingly devolved. More recently, the Strategic Rail Authority, set up by John Prescott, did provide some strategic guidance; it should not have been abolished and re-creating it in an appropriate form, is the right direction to take. There is a need for a relatively small co-ordinating body, a Strategic Rail Agency, arms-length from Government and the Department for Transport, which could provide the right degree of co-ordination that the industry needs. Its duties could include handling franchises that are not devolved to the regions (and progressively taking them back under public control) and having responsibility for 'Directly Operated Railways' which already operates East Coast as a state-owned enterprise. In due course, all the InterCity network could come under its wing. Potentially, Network Rail could also come under its um-

brella as a distinct infrastructure business and that could be linked to a new railway research centre which works with universities across the UK. The 'new' SRA could also be responsible for freight grants and other targeted interventions in the national rail network.

## 5. On the Buses

More people use the bus than any other form of public transport, yet it has tended to be over-shadowed by rail in terms of policy. Currently, bus services across the UK, but particularly in more rural areas, are taking a massive hit as local authorities face reduced Government support and less money to support local bus services.

So unlike rail, passenger numbers on the bus network, outside London, have been going steadily down. In the last two years cuts in subsidised bus services have begun to bite, and that decline is at risk of going into free-fall. Why has it happened? To understand the issues, it's important to understand how privatisation of the buses has worked.

Up until 1986 bus services were 'regulated' with Traffic Commissioners exercising control over both safety and 'quantity' of bus services and most (but not all) bus services were run by council-owned operators. The 1985 Transport Act changed all that. Anyone with a small amount of cash (like Brian Souter) could set up in business, as long as they met basic safety standards. Almost overnight new services on routes where operators thought they might make a bit of money became clogged with antiquated life-expired buses. It was capitalism raw in tooth and claw. Some people (like Brian Souter) became immensely rich.

The way it works is like this. Under the 1985 Act provision was made for 'socially necessary' bus services which would be tendered by local authorities. Once again this led to a race to the bottom, with operators providing ever-worsening pay and conditions to staff.

The 1985 act didn't privatise bus services, but lay the ground for a creeping privatisation which saw local authorities divest themselves of their bus operations over several years. The big metropolitan bus operations, owned by the passenger transport executives, were forced to sell. In the first place many converted to 'ESOPs' – employee share ownership plans but within a few years all had been sold off to the big private operators.

Anyone can set up a bus company and providing they meet minimum standards can register services with the Traffic Commissioner. It may be a new service along a route already served reasonably well by an existing operator, but it doesn't matter. It is still common to see 'bus wars' where new entrants try to under-price a well-established operator and basically drive them off the road. It is less common for a new operator to introduce services along a route not covered by existing operators, to provide a service to isolated communities.

Whilst over three-quarters of the bus network outside London is operated on this basis, as 'commercial', local authorities and passenger transport executives do have powers, and a shrinking pot of money, to subsidise local bus services. This is done by competitive tendering, with the local authority or PTE setting the basic parameters in terms of times of operation. In the last two years several county councils have drastically cut their tendered services with some pulling out altogether.

Interestingly, London was excluded from de-regulation and instead enjoyed a much greater degree of public control through franchising of local networks. Transport for London is responsible for managing London's bus services through franchises for distinct local networks which are bid for by accredited operators. A small number of not-for-profit operators like Hackney Community Transport have won some of the contracts.

In London, Transport for London (which is accountable to the Mayor) specifies in detail what bus services are to be provided. TfL decides the routes, timetables and fares – everything down to the colour of the buses. The services themselves are op-

erated by private companies through a competitive tendering process. There is no on-road competition.

This has given London a world-class, 24/7 bus network with a fully accessible, green and clean vehicle fleet. It has also made it possible for London to introduce integrated smartcard ticketing in the form of Oyster. Yet in the rest of the country, it's a free market meaning that anyone (subject to minimum safety and operating standards) can start up a bus service. In this environment, bus operators are free to run whatever services they like as well as decide the fares they will charge and the vehicles they will use. Although in theory, it is a competitive market, in reality, most bus services are provided by five large companies who rarely compete against each other (Arriva, First, Go-Ahead, National Express and Stagecoach). Under this two-tier system, buses in London have thrived. London has almost doubled (up 95%), mileage has increased by over 70% and fares have stayed lower than in the rest of the country. Outside London, the picture has been very different. Over the same period, patronage in the Shires fell by 18% and in the Metropolitan areas passenger numbers fell further still – by 42%. Meanwhile, fares outside London have followed a largely upward trajectory in real terms with some of the steepest increases occurring in the Metropolitan areas

## **The challenges facing bus services**

Buses can play a key role in enabling our cities to play a full part in rebalancing the national economy. In helping to tackle congestion, connect people to jobs and services as well as cut carbon emissions. However, outside London, the bus industry is facing major challenges in the years ahead that could threaten this vital contribution. Amongst those challenges are:

- A planned cut of 20% to the bus service operators grant (BSOG) from 2012. BSOG rebates bus operators for the fuel duty they pay in running local bus services. BSOG reduces the cost of providing a bus service and helps keep fares low.

- Reductions in Department for Communities and Local Government funding for local government, putting local authority budgets for supported bus services under pressure. Local government funds bus services that would not be profitable for bus companies to run on a commercial basis. Often these are evening or weekend services or buses to isolated housing estates or rural areas.
- A halving of Integrated Transport Block funding for small to medium size public transport schemes which funds measures such as bus priority schemes.
- Meeting the rising demand for concessionary travel for older and disabled people in the context of reduced funding from Government (local transport authorities are required by law to fund free off-peak bus travel for older and disabled people).
- Abolition of Rural Bus Grant which helps provide non-commercial rural services. These challenges have played out differently in the Metropolitan areas compared to the Shires. As of October 2011, it is estimated that one in five supported bus services in the Shires have already been cut, and 77% of local transport authorities in England were either planning, or could not rule out, further cuts. In the most extreme cases, councils have chosen to withdraw all of their supported bus services. In the first year of spending cuts, the Metropolitan areas were able to protect their supported services, however, maintaining this position is set to get harder every year.

A detailed report for the Passenger Transport Executive Group (pteg) modelling the likely impact of the challenges to bus services in the PTE areas forecasted that between 2009 and 2014 patronage will fall by 20%, fares will increase by 24% in real terms, service kilometres will decline by 19% and urban congestion costs will rise by £68m.

## Pockets of municipal enterprise

Amazingly, some local authorities managed to cling on to their bus operations and

compete with the private sector. A total of eleven bus companies, including those serving Edinburgh, Blackpool, Cardiff, Warrington and Swindon ('Thamesdown') remain wholly local authority owned. Lothian Buses, serving Edinburgh and its surroundings, is owned by a consortium of local authorities. Lothian Buses is a very successful example of municipal enterprise, operating a fleet of nearly 700 vehicles. Thamesdown Transport was named as 'Britain's best bus operator' in 2011. The Isle of Wight may seem to have been an unlikely place for an experiment in municipal enterprise, but 'Wight Bus' has lots of relevance to other parts of the UK. 'Wightbus' was the trading name of the Isle of Wight Council's own bus fleet which lasted 14 years before the council decided to sell up to private operator Southern Vectis. Today's 'municipals' are models of public sector enterprise and have been able to demonstrate innovation and progressive management, as well as providing outstanding service to their communities.

## **Quality Contracts and Partnerships: using existing powers**

The Local Transport Act 2008 gave passenger transport executives (PTEs) and local transport authorities a new suite of powers and options for improving bus services. The Act made it easier to negotiate voluntary partnerships and gave more powers to Traffic Commissioners to protect these arrangements. Voluntary partnerships are where a local transport authority (or authorities) undertake to provide facilities or to do other things of benefit to passengers and a bus operator (or operators) undertake to provide services to a particular standard. It expanded the scope of Statutory Quality Partnerships (SQPs). SQPs allow for binding agreements to be voluntarily entered into between PTEs and bus operators. Under an SQP a PTE can provide improved infrastructure (such as bus priority measures) on a corridor and negotiate the arrangements for the use of that infrastructure by bus operators. Following the Act, SQPs can now cover maximum fares, frequencies and timings.

The Act made 'Quality Contracts' (QC) a more realistic option. A QC involves replacing the existing deregulated bus markets with a franchising system (similar to that in London) where the local transport authority specifies what the bus network will pro-

vide and the private sector competes for the right to provide it. All PTEs are investing heavily in voluntary partnerships to benefit passengers wherever they can (with the West Midlands having arguably the biggest in the country). PTEs were also the first to introduce an SQP (in Sheffield) and the largest suite of SQPs in the country is currently being implemented in Merseyside. A number of PTEs also have well developed proposals for Quality Contracts.

## **The way forward for buses**

It's time Labour grasped the problem of buses and the failures of de-regulation. There are strong grounds for optimism. Labour's transport shadow spokesperson Maria Eagle made this key point at the 2012 Labour Party Conference:

"The reality is that bus deregulation outside London is a dogmatic experiment that has failed. Yet those transport authorities who are seeking to use the Quality Contracts legislation passed by Labour in government to protect local bus routes and regulate fares are being penalised by Ministers. It is completely wrong for the Government to bar from accessing Better Bus Area funding those transport authorities who seek to reverse bus deregulation in their area. The Government is putting the wrong people first by siding with the private bus companies over passengers. In contrast, Labour's Policy Review has been looking at how government could better support transport authorities who seek to reverse bus deregulation, including through the introduction of Deregulation Exemption zones. It's time that passengers across England were able to benefit from an integrated transport network with smart ticketing and regulated fares on local bus and rail services as exists in London."

This represents a big step forward in Labour's thinking. De-regulation 'exemption zones' could, in theory, be as wide as you want. De-regulation has clearly failed to deliver and making the most of exemption zones could help deliver a more efficient, passenger-focused bus network quickly and effectively.



This would still mean that many bus services are delivered by the private sector. After decades of cuts in resources, few local authorities would have the appetite to set up new, wholly-owned municipal bus companies, though the surviving operations need to be retained and developed. The private bus sector is a huge international force and it will not be easy to reduce its power. The 'quality contracts' being considered by transport authorities in West Yorkshire, Tyne and Wear and Greater Manchester, offer a way forward that will re-balance the relationship between public and private. It would basically give these metropolitan areas a bus network similar to that enjoyed by Londoners. However, it would still see the bulk of bus services delivered by private, for-profit operators.

There isn't a single UK-wide solution for the bus industry but a sensible approach would be about encouraging the better private operators within a publicly-specified framework and looking at ways of opening up the market to social enterprise and municipally-owned (or part-owned) operators.

The key thing is to end the current mess that de-regulation has introduced, with a free-for-all of which actually results in a poorer overall service for passengers and the ridiculous spectacle of two or more bus companies competing on lucrative corridors whilst large swathes of towns and cities are not covered at all – particularly at evenings and Sundays.

## 6. Transport in the Community

A recurring theme of this pamphlet is the great unmet potential for community involvement in transport. 'Community transport' in its more traditional sense typically involves fairly small-scale operations (though not always) using minibuses and a mix of voluntary and paid staff. 'Community Rail' has been applied to dozens of local railways across the UK where community rail partnerships support the railway industry through a wide range of interventions. A possible future development might combine 'com-

munity transport’ and the experience of community rail partnerships, applied to mainstream bus services.

## Community Transport – meeting unmet needs

Britain has a thriving ‘community transport’ sector delivered by not-for-profit organisations of varying size. Community transport is a lifeline in both rural and urban areas. It takes disabled people to work, children to school, sick people to healthcare and older people to the shops. It runs local bus routes and provides transport for a wide range of clubs, voluntary bodies and care homes. People shape the services they want and community transport makes it happen.

The federal organisation representing most CT operations is the Community Transport Association (CTA). The CTA is a UK-wide charity giving voice and providing leadership, learning and enterprise support to 1,500 member organisations in society which deliver innovative and flexible transport solutions to achieve social change in their communities. The CTA promotes excellence by providing training, e-based resources, publications, advice, consultancy, support on voluntary, accessible and community transport.

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A typical CT operation may employ one or two core staff with a team of drivers who are often volunteers. The kind of service they deliver varies enormously but includes:

- ‘Group Hire’ for local community organisations
- ‘Ring and Ride’ services – demand responsive operations within a local framework, aimed at people who can’t use conventional public transport (referred to as ‘Section

19' services)

- Scheduled services – typically a minibus operation in a rural area operating to a regular timetable, sometimes driven by volunteers (referred to as 'Section 22' services)
- In addition, there is a growing number of car clubs which form part of the broader 'community transport family'. Community transport is often seen as a largely 'rural' phenomenon but this is far from the case. Two of the trail-blazers of community transport have been Ealing and Hackney Community Transport. Both are big employers and have huge fleets of vehicles.

## **Community Rail – a success story**

Community rail partnerships have transformed many of Britain's local railways, ranging from rural branch lines in Devon and Cornwall through to urban routes in major cities. The partnerships cover some sixty lines with over a hundred individual 'station friends' groups. They bring together train operators, infrastructure owner Network Rail, local authorities and community groups to promote lines which were, in many cases, threatened with closure in the 1960s. Many of the routes have experienced double-digit growth thanks to imaginative promotion and community involvement, backed up by modest investment. There are about 50 community rail partnerships across the country and they generally work to some basic principles. 'Partnership' is a much abused term but developing a relationship of trust between train operator, local authority and wider community is fundamental. CRPs don't insist on huge investment or a much-improved timetable as a precondition for doing any promotion. It accepts 'what is' and takes an incremental approach to developing it – in many cases with amazing success, but over a period of time.

'Community rail' is about more than just promoting scenic rural lines. It can play a key role in urban regeneration. The Severnside Community Rail Partnership, a community interest company, covers local routes in the Bristol area, including the branch to Avonmouth and Severn Beach. It runs through some of the most deprived parts of

the south-west. The Partnership is working to make stations more friendly and welcoming and to reduce crime, vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

Stapleton Road station, on the Severn Beach Line, serves one of the most crime-hit areas in Britain. It has been transformed through community involvement, including a mural celebrating the multi-cultural communities served by the station. Alongside the station is 'Roots', a community-run garden centre, located on formerly derelict railway land. The partnership worked with Network Rail to clear the space and it's now a flourishing example of social enterprise. At other stations along the line school students have created artwork which transforms the appearance of what were once run-down and depressing eyesores. The most innovative partnership activity has been its work with the Probation Service in using offenders to help with environmental projects. The local 'Community Payback' team has worked to clear decades of accumulated debris at stations prior to local community groups moving in to plant up the areas with shrubs and flowers.

Devon and Cornwall has a network of rural branch lines, most of which Beeching wanted to axe; today they are thriving thanks to the work of the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership. Based at the University of Plymouth, it brings together the two county councils, train operator First Great Western and other partners including national parks and Plymouth University Students' Union.

The North Staffordshire Line, from Crewe via Stoke to Derby wouldn't make it into any tourist guidebook but its lack of scenery is compensated by its high level of community engagement. Volunteer gardeners are busy at a string of stations; Kidsgrove is the jewel in the crown. Partnership officer Faye Lambert has worked with schools and community groups to transform a dull, 1960s style station into a showpiece for community action. Long-forgotten gardens, tended by generations of railwaymen, have been re-discovered and brought to life. Local schools have created art work which is displayed inside the station waiting rooms and booking office.

The Penistone Line Partnership, in Yorkshire, was one of Britain's first community rail partnerships, set up in 1993. Its live music and real ale trains are legendary, though the innovative work with local schools and Huddersfield's black and minority ethnic communities are an equally important aspect of its work. The partnership is a not-for-profit company with a part-time worker. Partnership chair is Neil Bentley, whose day job is driving trains for Northern Rail. The partnership generates some income through bar sales on the music trains, which run on a regular monthly basis during the summer, using scheduled evening services. Other partnerships generate revenue through catering: The Settle-Carlisle Railway Development Company runs a flourishing station café at Skipton and provides an on-train trolley service along the scenic route.

## Station Partnerships

At a more local level, dozens of station-based groups have been formed which are purely volunteer-run, though they work closely with the train operator which leases the station from Network Rail. Many station partnerships are on routes without a formal community rail partnership, though some area and link up with neighbouring station groups to organise special events, such as the Christmas station carol singing evening on the Caldervale Line in Yorkshire, when singers stop off at each station along the line to welcome home-coming commuters with Christmas carols and mince pies!

A typical example of a station partnership is Todmorden, on the Lancashire-Yorkshire border in the Pennine hills. The station serves a small market town which has become famous for its promotion of local food growing – the 'Incredible Edible Todmorden' project, started by the local wholefood store and taken up by a wide cross-section of the community. The station partnership agreed with the train operator, Northern rail, to take over some vacant land by the station to grow vegetables. On the platform itself there is a herb garden. Local artists use some of the station buildings. Each year the group organises a festival in the station car park, attracting local bands, artists, stalls from community groups and other displays.

Betws-y-Coed station, in the Snowdonia National Park of Wales, is a superb example of how station development can lead local sustainable development. The old station building was derelict for many years but thanks to the efforts of the local community council and Welsh Development Agency, the building was slowly brought back to life. It now houses several cafes and shops and is the focus of the popular tourist resort. It even has a railway museum with a functioning miniature railway! It is on the scenic Conwy Valley railway from Llandudno to Blaenau Ffestiniog and is supported by the Conwy Valley Community rail Partnership.

## **A flexible tool**

Community rail' is a flexible tool which can be applied in many different contexts, from scenic rural lines whose main business is tourism, through to inner-city routes serving diverse communities. It has taken off in a diverse mix of areas. It is not dependent just on middle class railway enthusiasts. Many of the 'station partnerships' are run by community activists whose main focus is the town or village community which they are part of, rather than the railway. 'The station' is a gateway into the community and needs to be protected and enhanced. The Severnside Community Rail Partnership, working in an area every bit as challenging as inner-city London, has been able to harness the creativity of local, socially-excluded, young people. Stations should become community hubs – centres of economic, social and cultural life instead of desolate, abandoned halts protected only by the gaze of CCTV cameras.

Could community rail go further? In some European countries e.g. Switzerland small publicly owned train companies provide high quality services which connect seamlessly with buses. Within the suggested regional not-for-profit train companies suggested earlier there should be room for experiments with the more peripheral rural lines (e.g. Heart of Wales from Shrewsbury to Swansea, or Esk Valley from Middlesbrough to Whitby) where more decentralised arrangements could apply, possibly involving a greater degree of integration between operations and infrastructure, with a single 'route manager'. Taking this option further, a local social enterprise railway

company could provide other services including connecting buses, cycle hire, catering and other revenue-generating and employment-creating activities.

## **Community Rail Partnerships – could they work for buses?**

Could the same approach work with buses? Whilst growth on local rail services continues to go from strength to strength, that isn't the case with most rural and semi-rural bus services. Many have already been withdrawn as councils struggle to cope with declining Government support. We certainly need to find that 'bit of imagination' which Darling referred to, and apply it to local bus services. If we don't, they will become a thing of the past, making the Beeching rail cuts of the 1960s seem mild in comparison. And it's so much easier to do – no long, complicated inquiries, and very often little in the way of articulate, well-organised opposition. It's an easy decision to cut tendered services, some of which are perhaps just carrying 'fresh air'. It's happening all over the country, now. The Government can conveniently wash its hands of responsibility, saying that it's up to local councils to decide how to allocate its resources. Bye bye, rural bus.

So could those principles which have transformed many of Britain's local railways work for buses? Maybe. In some ways, the approach could go much further, and in some communities already has, with not-for-profit community transport providing good quality, accessible, scheduled services.

The starting point in applying 'community rail partnership' principles to rural buses is bringing people together. There are four different constituencies who are key to making something happen:

- The users
- The operator/s
- The local authority
- The wider community (shops, pubs, visitor attractions, schools etc.)

It doesn't 'just happen' – it requires effort and determination. When community rail was in its infancy the most difficult people to get on board were very often the train operators who didn't see the point of it all. They were convinced by evidence of rising passenger numbers, and political and community pressure in some cases. Some transport managers – rail as well as bus – don't like other people playing with their toys.

The different partners of a community rail partnership have differing agendas but there is enough shared interest for it to work – which is essentially supporting and developing the local rail service in ways which benefit local communities. Operators want more people and thus more revenue; local authorities want more people with fewer cars on the road and a thriving village economy. Local people want a reliable train service that meets their needs with good station facilities. Local businesses want people to come and visit their village or town to spend money and preferably not add to car parking problems.

The real gains are likely to be won through either persuading commercial bus operators to try the 'community' approach and persuade them it's in their commercial interest to do it, or insist on it, through a 'Quality Contract'. Bus operators would also find that their drivers like it too, increasing staff satisfaction rates with all the benefits that brings in reduced staff turnover, lower absenteeism and the like.

A 'community bus partnership' (CBP) would probably have similar involvement to that of a community rail partnership: the operator (possibly more than one but I'm not sure that would work), the local authority, and 'community activists' who are bus users. Just having a few token users is no use – you need people with some vision who are ideally already active in the community.

The 'CBT' would probably cover several routes – unlike some rail partnerships. But it would need to take a 'route-based' approach. It would need some or all of the following features:



- A clear, fixed route which is specially branded (a number and a name)
- At least six, ideally seven, day operations
- Drivers solely dedicated to the route
- Drivers trained in high levels of customer care - encouraged to go the extra mile
- Some means of involving regular users – a ‘Friends of the xxx’
- Community adoption of bus stops and bus shelters
- Sale of tickets/information distribution in shops and pubs
- A manager who has a wider ‘external relations’ role
- Dedicated, specially-branded vehicles
- A presence (by the ‘Friends’ and/or operator itself) at community events
- Extension into other services e.g. parcels delivery, vehicle repairs, etc.
- Objectives of a Community Bus Partnership
- The case studies below give a sense of how a community bus partnership might work, in different kinds of community.

## **Objectives of a Community Bus Partnership**

These should be to raise the profile of local bus services, to increase usage of local bus services and other public transport and to improve connectivity of rural communities with larger centres. It would also be

- To attract visitors into the area
- To reduce car dependence
- To create a culture of public transport usage
- To contribute to the viability of village economies

The Community Bus Partnership would have a responsibility for monitoring the service and looking at opportunities to enhance the service where possible. It could be a fairly informal partnership based within a local authority (as with some rail partnerships) or it could mature into a stand-alone social enterprise with access to a wider range of funding and greater flexibility.

The 'Route Friends' would be a complementary, voluntary, group which helps deliver some of the CBT's objectives (and may have some of its own in addition).

## **Towards genuine transport integration**

In more rural areas, it is absurd to have bus and rail services competing on the same corridors. A sensible transport strategy should have buses – and community transport – feeding into local rail hubs as part of a co-ordinated local strategy - RITZs ('Rural Transport Integration Zones'). This means abandoning de-regulation, or at least creating 'exemption zones', and moving away from the meaningless 'competition' which benefits nobody other than a few operators.

## **7. Streets for People: Cars, Walking and Cycling**

We are too car dependent. Compared with most European countries, we make far too many trips by car, compared with train, bus, bike or foot. That imposes a huge toll in terms of accidents, pollution, ill-health and the whole 'feel' of our communities, be they rural or urban. In previous sections we have explored some opportunities to promote rail and road-based public transport. But clearly there is much more that can be done to encourage cycling and walking. The car has its place, and the issue isn't about car ownership per se. It's about how often, and for what purpose, we use the car. It's a perfectly realistic objective in urban areas to aim for drastic reductions in both ownership and use, with a greater role for community car clubs. Realistically, in more rural areas, having a car will continue to be essential for many people. The challenge is about retaining and developing a core of integrated public transport services (rail, bus, community transport and taxi) whilst encouraging walking and cycling for short trips and reducing car dependency. We should not be incentivising motorists to maximise use of their car; rather we should not discourage car ownership per se but the disproportionate use of the car for long journeys. This can be achieved by a major increase in fuel tax with the additional revenue being hypothecated into public transport

investment. The Germans have been doing it for years.

## The dangerous man of Europe

Most transport journeys in the UK – around two-thirds of all trips - are less than five miles. Yet the numbers of people cycling lag way behind many of our continental partners. Cycle casualties increased dramatically in 2011 compared to the previous year, while deaths and serious injuries also rose for many other road users. This is now the fifth year in a row that cycle serious injuries have risen, and while cycle use has also increased, the risk of injury has not improved over that period. Serious injuries to cyclists rose 16% in 2011, from 2,660 to 3,085. Britain's cycle safety record is falling even further behind other north European countries which have far higher levels of cycle use. We still have only a tiny fraction of our residential streets covered by 20 mph schemes, while hostile roads, bad driving, and weak law enforcement remain serious barriers to getting more people cycling. Politicians are to blame for this. There is strong evidence that politicians hide behind their perception that 'the public' will not support measures which are seen as 'anti-car'. Research has shown this to be untrue and the general public's willingness to support quite radical measures of car restraint combined with investment in safer and more environmentally benign modes, is much higher than our elected representatives think. Could it be that most politicians are much bigger car users than the rest of us? As Marx said, material existence determines consciousness. We need more cycling councillors and MPs.

## Becoming more like Copenhagen

In Copenhagen, a third of all commuter journeys are made by bicycle, while car usage is falling. A quarter of two-children families own a cargo-style bike to get around the busy streets, encouraged to use the 346km (215 miles) of segregated cycle lanes, maintained by the relatively low budget of €10 million (£8 million) a year. Copenhagen may have a smaller population than London — 550,000 compared with more than 8 million — but it has a greater population density, with more than a thousand

extra people per square kilometre in its centre, so space is still at a premium.

When the health benefits, time saved and reduction in congestion and car crashes are taken into account, Copenhagen authorities have calculated that society makes a net profit of 1.22 Danish kroner (around 13p) for every kilometre cycled by one of its citizens. By the same criteria, society makes a net loss of 8p for every kilometre driven by car. The Lord Mayor, Frank Jensen, admitted that he found it scary when he cycled around London and said that there was far more animosity between drivers and cyclists than in Copenhagen. “Drivers are very peaceful towards cyclists in Copenhagen,” he said, “Many drivers are cyclists themselves and are also aware that more cyclists mean fewer cars.” Ingvar Sejr Hansen, a senior civil servant at Copenhagen City Hall, said: “More cyclists mean you can have more and more people living together in the same space, as they can move around within the city so much more easily. But you need a critical mass to demand it.” In Copenhagen, this critical mass was achieved in the late 1970s, when thousands of people converged on the town hall amid spiralling petrol prices to demand better conditions for cycling.

## **Becoming more bike and walking aware**

Cycling has to become an integral part of the way we plan towns and cities, not an extra ‘bolt-on’ if funding can be found. Martin Gibbs, British Cycling Policy and Legal Affairs Director said “Making sure that cycling is designed into our infrastructure is key to making cycling an easy, safe and appealing choice for everyone. We have been asking the current government to include cycling assessments in all their policy decisions as we believe it is common sense that in order to encourage cycling we must design our infrastructure and transport policies to take account of cycling”.

Local authorities have a key role in designing and implementing schemes which benefit walkers and cyclists. But they need to have the resources to do it. In part that involves a shift from the emphasis on road building but it also means having adequate funding from central government. There needs to be a major re-allocation of road

space in favour of cycles with safe cycle lanes and good signage. Much more widespread introduction of 20 mph zones encourages walking and cycling, reduces accident rates and makes the urban environment more attractive.

## **Benefitting all road users**

Finally, alongside lower traffic speeds there needs to be sufficient funding for local authorities to ensure that streets and roads are properly maintained. This benefits all road users, including motorists, pedestrians and cyclists. It must be recognised that in some locations heavy goods vehicles are inappropriate and inflict massive damage to residential streets. Local authorities need to work with industry to ensure that appropriate routes are provided for access to and from industrial sites and other routes are clearly prohibited to HGVs.

## **8. Conclusion**

Now is the time to develop radical but realistic policies on how a future Labour Government can start the long journey towards a sustainable transport system. Part of that must involve fundamental reform of the transport industry to ensure that private profit is no longer the main driver of our transport services. We must develop policies which can benefit communities and promote sustainable development.

This is not about going back to some mythical 'golden age' of integrated publicly-owned transport. Such a thing never existed. There is a socialist approach which addresses quality of service, cost and also ensures fair treatment for employees. It is also about making sure transport plays its full part in an environmental strategy which makes a positive contribution to reducing Co2 emissions.

What should be done:

- Abandon rail privatisation and move towards a national, publicly-owned, InterCity network covering main centres in the UK with a new Strategic Rail Agency acting as a

co-ordinating and leadership body for the railway industry

- Establish regional not for profit rail passenger operations with high levels of public accountability, staff and community involvement
- Democratise Network Rail with a more representative governance structure
- Promote a new generation of tram (and tram-train) networks in both urban and sensitive rural areas e.g. national parks
- Make a radical shift from road to rail (or bi-modal) freight and develop combined freight facilities at key centres
- Support a new approach for Britain's buses which is based on public accountability, co-ordination with rail and community transport, and avoiding costly duplication
- Support innovative community-based projects which make the best of rail, bus and community transport
- Invest heavily in cycling and walking schemes, in both urban and rural areas

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