

Supporting Cities - Urban Challenge Fund consultation ~ Response from Campaign for Better Transport

Overview

Campaign for Better Transport welcomes the proposed Urban Challenge Fund. Although proposed under the previous administration, the proposals outlined in the discussion document are consistent with policies developed by the Coalition parties when in opposition.

We welcomed the Department for Transport's review of the Transport Innovation Fund (TIF) and the lessons learnt from the Cabinet Office's review of urban transport and its associated costs.

We support the Fund's broader focus than TIF and its aim to achieve:

- enhanced mobility through offering people wider choices for their journeys;
- reduced congestion and increased journey time reliability;
- better health as a result of improved safety and much greater levels of walking and cycling;
- streets and public spaces which are enjoyable places to be, where exposure to harmful emissions is reduced and where quality of life is transformed
- improved safety; and
- reduced levels of carbon emission from transport.

"Wider choices" of transport mode should not just be about increased provision of different choices but should ensure that more sustainable modes have a competitive edge in terms of accessibility, convenience, price and perceptions of safety.

Context within decentralisation agenda

Despite the changed political and fiscal context compared to when it was first proposed, there is still a place for the Fund. Even with moves to less ring-fencing and with cuts in grants to local government, the Department for Transport would be right to use the Fund to challenge local authorities to up their game on transport given the scale of improvement needed (as set out in the Cabinet Office report on urban transport). We contend that transport has not featured strongly within the wider local government modernisation agenda and the Fund could help support the step change needed. It could provide real incentives to local authorities to deliver the outcomes outlined above, similar to the incentives being discussed to support housing growth and renewable energy.

The Department should have the confidence to say what success looks like but leave local transport authorities to set out how exactly they would achieve that in their area. We agree with the description by officials at the launch of the discussion paper that successful areas are those which have sought to reduce traffic levels and to lock in the benefits of this, for instance through roadspace reallocation to other modes (such as bus and cycle lanes) and functions (eg areas where pedestrians have priority).

As such, funding should not just respond to what is currently in local transport plans (LTPs) but should challenge local authorities to do more around sustainable transport and smarter choices.

Governance and partnerships

We support the expectation that cities and authorities should put in place stronger decision making and delivery arrangements across boundaries and in relation to highways, demand management, traffic management and public transport measures. Campaign for Better Transport supports the integration of these powers at a spatial level that is appropriate for significant interventions (eg city-wide or city-region level). In addition spatial planning powers need to be better integrated with transport so that, correctly applied, planning can help reduce the need to travel and support modes like walking and cycling.

In addition, applicants should set out how they are working in partnership with civil society and private sector organisations, including transport operators. The Urban Challenge Fund should also be widened to allow for bids from civil society organisations who have experience of delivering the kinds of interventions which would achieve the aims of the Fund, particularly around smarter choices, rather than just the more local authority based bids that the proposals currently envisage. This could also allow for bids that are not necessarily based on a single urban place, but which could be created around types of trip generators across a number of areas (such as workplaces or hospitals).

How might the Fund work?

We strongly support a Fund that is ambitious and which has the funding to challenge local transport authorities to improve their performance on transport. The discussion document suggests that the Fund would enable accelerated and enhanced delivery of its benefits. As such, levels of funding need to be more along the lines of the integrated transport block within the local transport capital settlement than the much more modest sums on offer for the Sustainable Travel Towns.¹

However, we recognise that the DfT faces significant funding constraints at this time. The benefits of the Fund in tackling costs from road collisions, poor air quality, physical inactivity and noise justify additional funding for the Urban Challenge Fund from other government departments whose agendas would be helped by this Fund (ie those departments with lead responsibility for agencies who would see reductions in their costs from, for instance, healthier individuals or fewer collisions).

The Department should also consider more than one band for applications. There could be one band with larger levels of funding for a smaller number of schemes involving significant public transport improvements and investment, and a different band for a larger number of smaller schemes focussed on promotion of walking, cycling and public transport. Funding a larger number of areas should help incentivise local authorities to work together, which is a major potential benefit of the Fund at a time when other joint structures and processes are under review or being cancelled.

The Urban Challenge Fund should allow flexibility for the sums to be spent on either capital or revenue.

What measures should the Fund support?

Although the Fund comes out of the Cabinet Office work on urban transport, the Department for Transport should consider again whether the Fund could cover non-urban areas.

¹ Funding for the integrated transport block within the local transport capital settlement is £602m in 2010/11.

We support the emphasis on smarter choices within the discussion paper. Smarter choices should include the wider spectrum of interventions, including individualised information and marketing, cycle training and workplace walking and cycling schemes.

As set out earlier, funding should encourage and enable areas to reduce overall traffic levels and lock-in the benefits through infrastructure changes, particularly roadspace reallocation. As such, we support the inclusion of demand management measures.

The discussion paper mentions park and ride schemes under demand management. Although park and ride can have its benefits, it has been developed already in many LTPs and the Department should reconsider whether it would be the best use of scarce resources through the Fund.

Appraising bids – what success looks like

As set above, the Department needs to have a strong conception of what successful schemes would achieve – both for larger projects and for those with smaller levels of funding.

Appraisal of bids should be proportionate to the level of funding requested with lighter-touch appraisal and business cases for smaller levels of funding and smarter choices, and consideration of ways to assess how it meets wider the Fund's objectives that may not be adequately appraised through existing appraisal methods.

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Richard Hebditch
Campaign for Better Transport

Campaign for Better Transport is the leading transport NGO. Our compelling arguments and ideas have won us the support of national decision-makers and local activists, enabling us to secure transport policies and programmes that improve people's lives and reduce environmental impact.

16 Waterside, 44-48 Wharf Road, London N1 7UX
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