Local Transport Accelerator programme: Interim report

October 2020

Executive summary

As part of the National Lottery-funded *Big Local* project, Campaign for Better Transport (CfBT) worked with a number of *Big Local* areas that had identified local transport provision as an issue to prepare detailed reports examining the problems. This report summarises the main findings from the six areas examined so far. It highlights common themes in terms of problems faced, local solutions that can be considered and opportunities for influencing national policy.

The areas examined had diverse geographical context, but shared a number of characteristics:
- Greater concentrations of older people, disabled people and those in poor health who are more reliant on public transport;
- Higher levels of poverty and unemployment;
- Lower levels of car availability, especially in rural and lower-income areas;
- Commuting and other trips dominated by the private car, yet high importance of public transport for those with no access to a car.

They shared a number of common issues with local transport:
- Limited bus services available within walking distance;
- Infrequent bus services with poor or no provision in the evening and weekends;
- Service provision fragmented between different operators;
- Lack of integrated network planning meaning interchange is required to reach common destinations;
- Employment centres and amenities dispersed into neighbouring towns and cities;
- Lack of direct access to rail services;
- No multi-operator and multi-modal ticketing and high fares;
- Community transport common but underfunded and no service coordination;
- No safe cycling infrastructure.

In addition, there were issues faced by all local authorities with how local transport is funded and planned, which exacerbated problems in the *Big Local* areas we examined:
- Local authority supported bus services have declined to a much greater extent (total vehicle miles were down by 49 per cent between 2011/12- 2018/19) than commercial services (down two per cent in the same period).
- Yorkshire and the Humber and the South West have seen the biggest declines in local authority supported bus services (by 23 and 14 per cent respectively) over the last year (2017/18-2018/19).
- Across England (outside London), local authority spending on supported bus services has declined by 43 per cent between 2009/10 and 2018/19.
- Of the areas examined, Southampton City Council (*SO18*) had the biggest reduction in bus services spend, by 86 per cent between 2009/10 and 2018/19.

Additional challenges for *Big Local* areas included:
- Further falls in passenger numbers and strained local authority funding during the Covid-19 crisis has put services at greater risk.
- Different types of provision – commercial, subsidised and community transport and provision around school, health and social care services – are all planned separately, leading to inefficiencies and gaps in provision.
- Local strategies have ambition on sustainable travel, but funding and delivery are challenging.
- New developments offer opportunities to lock in sustainable travel from the beginning.

The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted weaknesses in the way public transport is planned, funded and delivered. If the public transport offer is allowed to decline, this could lead to an increasing number of communities suffering worsening exclusion, particularly for people relying on public transport to access jobs, education, public services, shops and their friends and family.

There are some shorter-term solutions, which can be led by the *Big Local* communities and their local authorities, with existing powers:
- Greater focus on local communities' needs;
- Better integration between modes;
- Better coordination between different types of provision;
- Improved infrastructure and bike share schemes to encourage active travel;
- Lift sharing platforms to improve private journey occupancy;
- School and commute journey planning;
- Applying for suitable funding pots.

Other, more long-term, solutions require new powers and funding, and need to be led by central government:
- Giving local authorities the power to plan, fund and commission transport locally, with new delivery and funding models.
- Moving to a single, ring-fenced, multi-year funding framework for local bus service provision to give long-term certainty.
- Improving local authorities' access to alternative sources of revenue to reduce reliance on central government funding.
- Building local authority capacity and capability to advocate for local needs and to plan and deliver services.

This report has highlighted the issues that exist in some local communities with delivering a suitable public transport offer. Due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is now even more important for us to support even more *Big Local* areas to better understand the factors behind poor connectivity and to provide options for how to address these. At the same time, the government needs to support and empower local authorities to deliver improvement, while setting out an ambitious programme for transport renewal post-Covid in order to deliver on its ambition of levelling up "left behind areas".

Introduction

Big Local is a resident-led funding programme providing people in 150 areas in England with £1.15m each to spend across 10-15 years to create lasting change in their neighburhoods. The areas were selected by National Lottery Community Fund as they had historically missed out on Lottery and other funding. Local Trust provides capacity-building support to the resident-led partnerships in each area who decide how their *Big Local* funding will be used to improve their

neighbourhood and their quality of life.[1]

Several *Big Local* areas identified transport shortcomings as a problem for their community. Since 2018, Campaign for Better Transport (CfBT) has worked with a number of *Big Local* partnerships, to support them in identifying key transport issues in their community and to recommend actions to improve transport provision locally.

Over the last year and half, CfBT has worked with six *Big Local* areas:
1) *Ramsey Million Partnership* in Ramsey, Cambridgeshire – a small town and surrounding villages in an economically fast-growing area;
2) *SO18* covering the Harefield, Midanbury and Townhill Park neighbourhoods in Southampton – an outer suburban area;
3) *3 Together* covering Moorsley, Easington Lane and Hetton in County Durham – three closely connected villages near Sunderland, on the edge of the Tyne and Wear conurbation;
4) *Sale West* in Sale, Trafford, Greater Manchester – an estate in a large town on the outskirts of Manchester;
5) *Warwick Ahead* in Knottingley, West Yorkshire – a small town housing estate;
6) *Villages Together* covering Woolavington and Puriton, Somerset – two neighbouring villages near Weston-super-Mare.

CfBT undertook research and interviews to develop a detailed picture of needs and opportunities in each location. This included an overview of demographic issues, an assessment of existing transport provision compared to similar areas, analysis of the public policy context and suggestions for remedial actions. Our analysis of the *Big Local* areas were conducted in 2019-20, therefore the information given was correct at the time of our studies.

This report sets out a summary of the main findings from the six areas examined. It highlights common themes in terms of problems faced, local solutions that can be considered and opportunities for national policy influencing to support *Big Local* areas struggling with transport provision.

Area characteristics

Geographically, there was a range of different types of areas covered, from a collection of villages (*3 Together, Villages Together*) to town housing estates (*Sale West, Warwick Ahead*) to suburban neighbourhoods (*SO18*). They were spread from the South West to the North East of England.

We started each report by examining demographic and socio-economic data for each of the *Big Local* areas. Traditionally, younger and older people, disabled people and those in poor health, as well as low-income households, tend to be more reliant on public transport, mainly because they physically cannot drive or because they cannot afford a private vehicle. But if there is attractive public transport provision, it is often the case that other people do not feel the need to own a personal vehicle.

The *Big Local* areas we examined, which reported transport-related issues, had greater concentrations of these demographics (see Appendix). For instance, at the last census in 2011, 16 per cent of the UK population was aged 65 and over, whereas in Puriton and Woolavington (*Villages Together*) a quarter (25 per cent) of residents were 65 and over.[2] Because of its relative affluence, the area has higher than average car ownership, but this does not mean older residents

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[1] Local Trust (2019), The halfway point: Reflections on Big Local, https://localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Local-Trust-The-Halfway-Point-19-November-2019.pdf
[2]
https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/2011censuspopulationestimatesfortheunitedkingdom/2012-12-17; https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/localarea?compare=E05008912

do not rely on public transport. Across England, just over eight per cent of people with a long-term health problem or disability reported they had their 'day-to-day activities limited a lot'.[3] In the *3 Together* area in County Durham, this figure was 15 per cent and in the *Warwick Ahead* area of Knottingley, it was 13 per cent.[4] These two areas also have lower than average car availability.

Several of the areas also had greater levels of deprivation, unemployment and lower qualification levels, which mean that residents are less able to afford cars or high public transport fares. The Knottingley ward (*Warwick Ahead*), for example, ranks among the 20 per cent most deprived wards in England.[5] People living on the estate are poorer (four in ten children live in poverty, more than double the regional average), with lower qualifications (44 per cent of people compared to 26 per cent across Yorkshire and Humber) and more reliant on benefits (a quarter of the working age population are on out-of-work benefits compared to 8.5 per cent in the rest of England) than the average population across the wider region. *Sale West* in Greater Manchester and *3 Together* area in County Durham also had high levels of deprivation and unemployment.

Access to a private car also varies and is linked to affluence. Across England, over three quarters (76 per cent) of households have access to a car. However, car availability is higher outside of urban areas and for higher-income households (see Figure 1).[6] This has been borne out by our research of *Big Locals*, with those in more affluent rural areas like *Villages Together* having greater car ownership (88 per cent of households in Puriton and Woolavington have access to a car), and lower levels of ownership in more deprived areas like Knottingley (at 68 per cent), despite poor public transport provision. Despite being in a rural area, *3 Together* also had lower levels of car access (67 per cent), likely linked to lower household incomes.

Figure 1: Household car availability by household income quintile, England, 2019. Source: DfT (2020), National Travel Survey 2019, Table NTS0703: Household car availability by household income quintile: England, from 2002
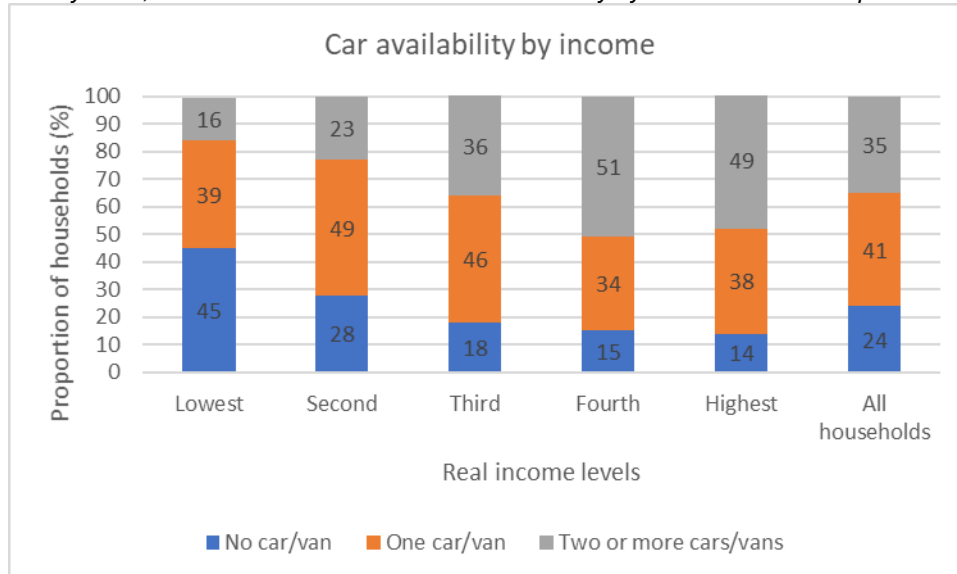
The car does dominate transport outside of London, where a relatively small proportion (five per cent) of all trips made are by public transport, while the vast majority (59 per cent) are by car. The proportion of car trips is much higher in rural areas where populations and buildings are much sparser than in urban areas and distances travelled are greater (see Figure 2).[7] Yet, access to public transport is important to those with no alternatives.

Figure 2: Trips per person per year, by mode and region or urban/rural classification, Source: DfT (2019), National

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[3] ONS (2011), Table KS301EW, 2011 Census: Health and provision of unpaid care, local authorities in England and Wales
[4] https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/localarea?compare=E05001159;
https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/localarea?compare=E05001452
[5] http://dclgapps.communities.gov.uk/imd/iod_index.html
[6] DfT (2020), National Travel Survey 2019, Table NTS0703: Household car availability by household income quintile: England, from 2002
[7] DfT (2020), National Travel Survey 2019, Table NTS9903: Average number of trips (trip rates) by main mode, region and Rural-Urban Classification: England, 2002/2003 onwards
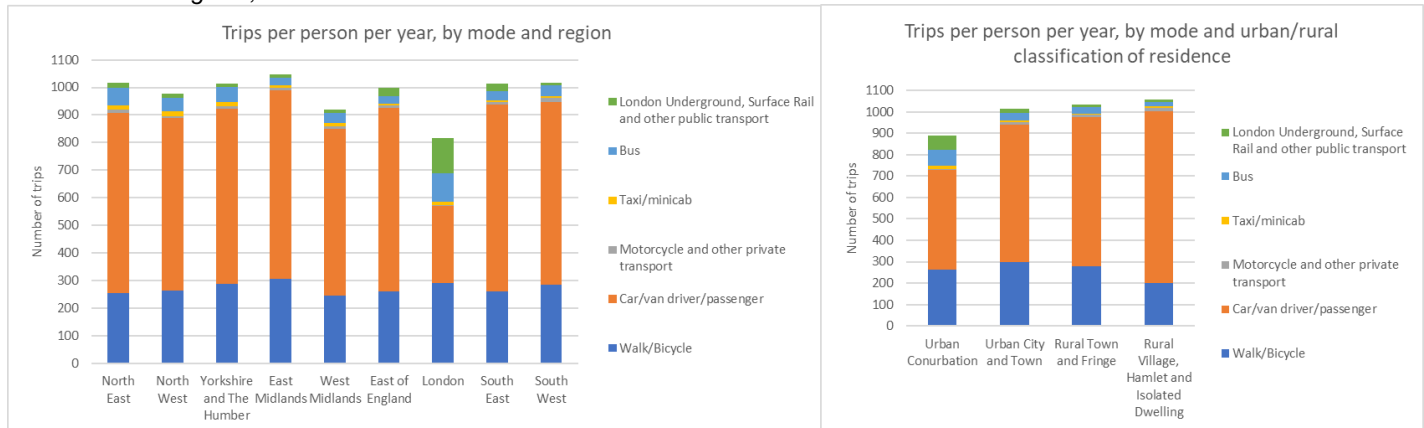
Even if only a small proportion of residents have no access to car, these tend to be people who rely on public transport because of ill health, disability or age or because they cannot afford a private car. This means that for the proportion of households that do not have a car, where public transport provision is poor, employment and training opportunities tend to be out of reach leading to high unemployment and poverty rates.

The local reports examined commuting data to determine the extent to which residents rely on public transport for employment. Across England, 64 per cent of commuting and business trips are made by car and 20 per cent by public transport.[8] A significant proportion of public transport trips are by rail, as many people may commute longer distances. But due to the rural or suburban location of the areas examined, large employment centres tend to be within nearby cities and towns. In all the areas we examined, the vast majority of commutes tend to be done by car and a small proportion by bus. In areas like Woolavington and Puriton, residents rely on commuting by car to a much greater extent than the national average.[9]

Figure 3: Trips per person per year, by purpose and mode. Source: DfT (2020), National Travel Survey 2019, Table NTS0409a: Average number of trips (trip rates) by purpose and main mode: England, from 2002
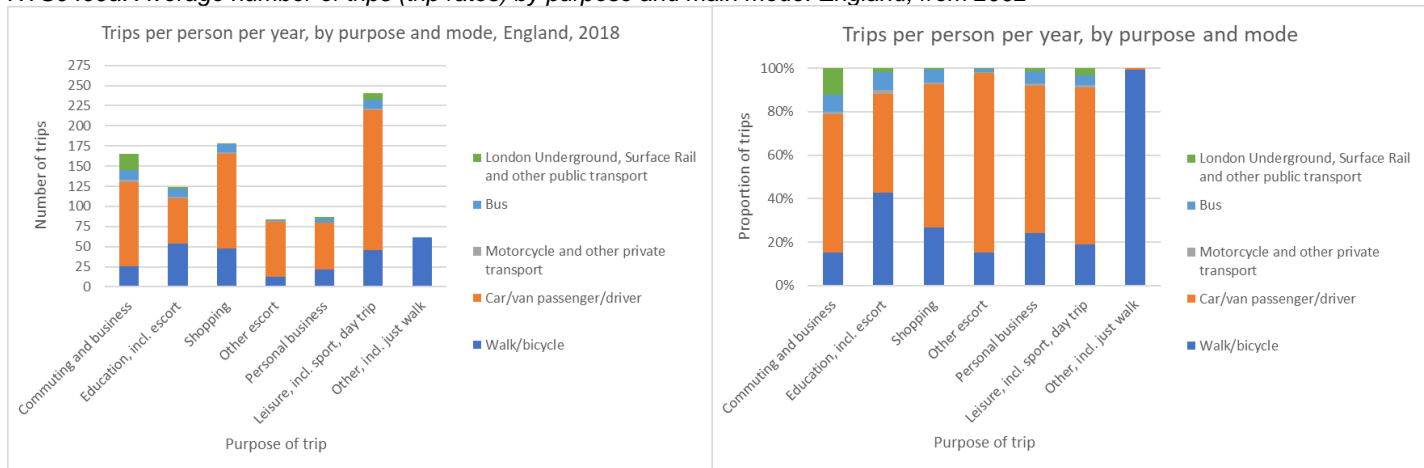
However, a relatively small proportion of all trips made are for commuting or business purposes. A much larger proportion are for leisure, shopping or personal business purposes (see Figure 3). Yet, due to the rural or suburban location of the areas examined, many of the essential amenities – such as hospitals, GP practices, schools, colleges, grocery shops and retail centres, post office and bank branches – are not available within walking distance in the immediate vicinity. This means that residents need to travel to neighbouring towns, which often involves more than one bus change.

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[8] DfT (2019), National Travel Survey 2018, Table NTS0409a: Average number of trips (trip rates) by purpose and main mode: England, from 2002
[9] https://datashine.org.uk/#table=QS701EW&col=QS701EW0008&ramp=RdYlGn&layers=BTTT&zoom=14&lon=-2.9534&lat=51.1658

Issues with local transport

The areas we examined had many common problems with sustainable transport provision. As density declines and it becomes less economically viable to serve dispersed populations, transport provision becomes less common outside of urban areas.

While all the areas examined were served by at least one bus route, for most of them these services were infrequent, even on weekdays, while many of the routes did not run in the evenings and at weekends. For example, across peak, daytime and weekend services, Ramsey offers less than 25 per cent of bus service levels of similar-sized towns in South Cambridgeshire. Daytime weekday services from Ramsey are only every two hours, compared with between two and three services per hour for comparable towns, while weekday services finish by 6pm and there are no services on Sundays. Similarly, *Sale West* is only served by one route that stops within walking distance, while another one that used to also run through the estate has been recently rerouted to bypass it.

All the *Big Local* areas examined also lack a rail station that is easily accessible, with residents needing to take the bus or drive to neighbouring larger towns or cities to access National Rail services. Even then, lack of integration between the modes means that in many cases, bus stops are far from the rail stations, further discouraging rather than enabling public transport use. Lack of rail connectivity severely limits residents' ability to reach more distant destinations.

When public transport services are infrequent or the nearest bus stop too far away, they do not provide easy access to destinations and employment opportunities within a reasonable time, even if these destinations are a relatively short distance away. As our analysis for *Warwick Ahead* showed, when walking to and from bus stops or stations, waiting and interchange time are taken into account, a journey (such as from Knottingley to Wakefield) that takes less than 30 minutes by car could take more than an hour by public transport door-to-door.

In the areas we examined, bus services were not planned as a coherent network, resulting in fragmented provision. In some cases, routes in the same area were provided by different bus operators. For example, the *SO18* area of Southampton has ten bus services run by three different operators under five separate brands. In *Sale West*, the only route that runs through the estate is operated by different companies on different days of the week.

This not only complicates travel planning for consumers, but the lack of joined-up network planning means that, in most of the areas, residents lack direct public transport routes to common destinations, such as nearby employment centres or neighbouring towns. So many journeys require interchanging between two buses or a bus and then train. As well as longer journey times, interchanges also mean increased financial costs, due to a lack of multi-operator and multi-modal ticketing.

Bus and rail fares are also generally expensive and beyond what people on low incomes can afford. Single tickets tend to be between £4-5. A single ticket in First Greater Manchester costs £5; a bundle package can reduce this to £3 and a weekly pass is £17.[10] An adult day ticket on Arriva West Yorkshire costs £5, with a weekly ticket costing £19; a 4-weekly ticket costs £70, and an annual ticket costs £700.[11] By comparison, bus fares in London are capped at £4.50 a day.

Due to the gaps left by local bus services, volunteer-run community transport provision is common in the *Big Local* areas we examined. Providers offer scheduled or on-demand pre-booked rides to residents who cannot travel by other means. In some cases, it is for disabled users or for medical appointments only, while in others access extends to older people, single parents, etc. or can be booked by whole school or community groups.

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[10] https://www.firstgroup.com/greater-manchester/tickets/ticket-prices
[11] https://www.arrivabus.co.uk/yorkshirefares

In some cases, services are only available at specific times and days of the week, while in others there are several operators that provide a range of scheduled or on-demand services. For example, in the *3 Together* area, the Easington Lane Community Access Point (ELCAP) charity offers a popular pre-booked door-to-door service for shopping and access to ELCAP group activities, while the Peterlee-based East Durham Community Transport and Sunderland-based Compass Community Transport also serves the area. Commonly, however, community transport providers are underfunded and there is no formal attempt to coordinate different services.

Active travel provision tends to be poor. All the areas we examined had no proximity to any national cycling routes or other safe, segregated cycling lanes, with busy main roads dominated by motor vehicle traffic. Cycling is not actively encouraged in areas outside of large cities.

Local funding and strategies

Apart from in London, bus services in the UK are deregulated with bus services delivered by private companies, and the individual companies deciding their own routes, timetables, ticket prices and standards. However, local authorities can choose to subsidise certain routes if they are needed but not delivered by the bus companies' private operations.

Both commercial and local authority supported services have been declining over the long term, but supported services have done so to a much greater extent. Across England (excluding London), total vehicle miles run by commercial services declined by two per cent between 2011/12- 2018/19, while local authority-supported services declined by 49 per cent in the same period.[12]

Rural areas have been affected to a greater extent by reduced supported services (53 per cent) than urban areas (44 per cent), and the former have much lower levels of commercial services provision too (see Figure 4). Differences by region are also pronounced. Some, like the North West and North East, have seen local authority-supported bus services provision actually increase (by 23 and 19 per cent respectively). However, this has been an increase in a small amount of nominal bus vehicle miles run by local authorities in response to much greater cuts in commercially-operated services. Other regions, like Yorkshire and the Humber and the South West have seen significant declines (by 23 and 14 per cent respectively) in the last year, partly due to increases in commercially-operated services (see Figure 5).[13]

Figure 4: Vehicle miles on local bus services by urban-rural classification and service type (England, annual from 2011/12). Source: DfT Annual Bus Statistics 2019, Table BUS0207a

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[12] DfT (2019), Annual Bus Statistics 2019, Table BUS0207a: Vehicle miles on local bus services by urban-rural classification, and service type: England, annual from 2011/12
[13] DfT (2019), Annual Bus Statistics 2019, Table BUS0208a: Vehicle miles on local bus services by local authority, and service type: England, 2018/19
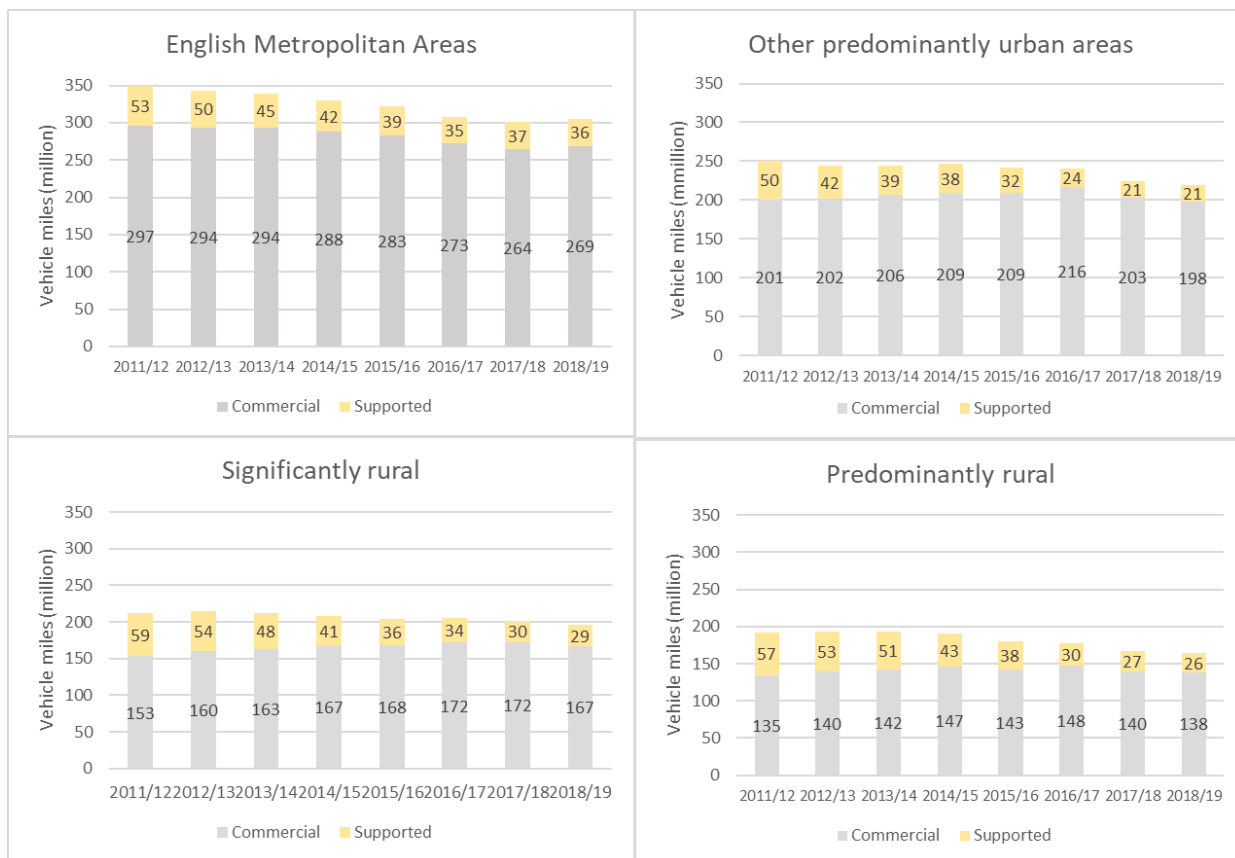
Figure 5: Local authority supported bus services, by region. Source: DfT Annual Bus Statistics 2019 and 2018, Table BUS0208a

Region	Total vehicle miles (millions), 2018/19	Percent change between 2017/18-2018/19
North East	7.5	19%
North West	24.5	23%
Yorkshire and The Humber	13.5	-23%
East Midlands	9.3	-2%
West Midlands	12.9	1%
East of England	12.0	0%
South East	17.2	-3%
South West	15.5	-14%

The same trends were in play for the *Big Local* areas we examined, with subsidised services cut to a greater extent than commercial. For example, in Somerset (*Villages Together*), local authority supported services declined by 46 per cent in the space of a year (between 2017/18 and 2018/19), while commercial services declined by ten per cent, which together represents a substantial cut in bus services provision locally.[14]

The main factor behind declining bus service provision is funding. Across the country, local authority spending to support bus services has collapsed in recent years. CfBT's 2019 report on bus funding showed a 43 per cent reduction in funding for bus services in England (outside London) between 2009/10 and 2018/19.[15] Out of the six *Big Local* areas examined, the local authority with the biggest reduction in spend on buses is Southampton City Council (*SO18*) with an 86 per cent reduction between 2009/10 and 2018/19, followed by Durham County Council (*3

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[14] CfBT analysis based on DfT (2018, 2019), Annual Bus Statistics 2018 and 2019, Table BUS0208a: Vehicle miles on local bus services by local authority, and service type: England, comparison between 2017/18 and 2018/19
[15] https://bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/research-files/future-bus-funding-arrangements.pdf

Together) and Somerset County Council (*Villages Together*), both with a 57 per cent reduction. By comparison, Cambridgeshire County Council (*Ramsey*) has a reduction of less than two per cent.

Several local authorities also saw bus services cut or reduced. For example, in Greater Manchester (*Sale West*), 11 bus routes were completely cut and another 18 partially cut in 2018/19, while in West Yorkshire (*Warwick Ahead*), seven bus routes were completely cut and another 24 partially cut in the same year.[16] Our analysis also found, for some local authorities like Southampton, the bulk of transport spending is on capital investment, with low proportion of spending on revenue support for running services.

The Covid-19 crisis risks diminishing local bus services even further. At the height of the pandemic, central government called for everyone to avoid public transport for all but essential journeys and this message has not been substantially relaxed, even as more and more workplaces, retailers and hospitality business have been allowed to reopen.[17] Public polling has also demonstrated a significant and sustained concern from passengers about the risk of transmission on buses and trains.[18]

Due to social distancing measures in place, government has required operators to maintain a pre-Covid service levels and frequency, to ensure that people who need to use public transport can do so safely.[19] Despite this, usage levels have remained well below normal levels.[20] While public transport operators are currently propped up by central government funding, if the low passenger numbers persist for some time, this would fundamentally threaten local transport provision across the country.[21]

Furthermore, local authorities' finances have also been hugely reduced by the Covid-19 crisis. Collectively, councils face an estimated £6 billion shortfall in their budgets due to loss of business rates and council tax revenue and increased costs of supporting vulnerable residents.[22] There has been £3.2 billion of emergency central government funding released, but there is long-term uncertainty. The combined impact on both commercial and local authority supported transport services puts their continued provision at greater risk.

However, the Covid-19 pandemic also provides the opportunity for a complete rethink of how local transport is provided. Our research into *Big Local* areas found that currently, planning and provision of local transport services is fragmented and disjointed:

- Until the change of arrangements in September, rail franchises used to be determined and let by the Department for Transport and operated by commercial operators.
- On the other hand, commercial operators are free to set and operate bus routes which are economically viable for them.
- Local authorities determine and fund provision of routes, which they determine to be socially necessary but are not delivered by private operators.
- Charities and social enterprises support vulnerable residents through community transport provision, which is a mixture of fixed and scheduled routes and on-demand services.
- Local authorities also have a statutory duty to provide home to school transport for pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs, as well as for Adult Social Care users who need support to access services.

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[16] Ibid.

[17] 10 Downing Street (23 June 2020), Prime Minister's statement to the House on COVID-19: 23 June 2020, https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/prime-ministers-statement-to-the-house-on-covid-19-23-june-2020

[18] Transport Focus (2020), Travel during Covid-19 weekly surveys, https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research-publications/all/

[19] Department for Transport (last updated 14 October 2020), Coronavirus (COVID-19): safer transport guidance for operators, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-transport-guidance-for-operators/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-transport-guidance-for-operators

[20] For daily usage levels since the beginning of the pandemic, please see https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/transport-use-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic

[21] Campaign for Better Transport (2020), Covid-19 Recovery: Renewing the transport system, https://bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/research-files/Covid_19_Recovery_Renewing_the_Transport_System.pdf

[22] Local Government Association (29 May 2020), Coronavirus: certainty needed over ongoing COVID-19 funding for vital local services, https://www.local.gov.uk/coronavirus-certainty-needed-over-ongoing-covid-19-funding-vital-local-services; BBC (25 June 2020), Coronavirus: UK councils fear bankruptcy amid Covid-19 costs, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-53069772

- The NHS has a duty to provide non-emergency patient transport (NEPT) for patients with medical and mobility needs for non-urgent appointments and treatment.

All these services are planned and delivered separately, leading to inefficiencies and gaps in provision.

In terms of local transport strategies, there is no shortage of vision and ambition to deliver transport improvements. The district and county council strategies we examined all contained plans for integrated transport networks, coordinated planning and sustainable transport infrastructure. However, funding and delivery remain challenging, with existing land use and road design encouraging car dependency. Nevertheless, in many cases, housing and mixed use developments offer opportunities for redesigning existing layouts and ensuring walking, cycling and public transport priority are integral to new road designs.

Local solutions

During the research process, we reviewed local transport needs, provision and gaps, transport strategies and plans being delivered, and the roles of different stakeholders. This highlighted a number of opportunities for improving transport provision, which can be delivered locally within a relatively short time scale. These included:

- Greater focus on local communities' needs

There are opportunities for the *Big Local* communities and the organisations supporting them to commission detailed local travel surveys. This will allow them to better understand:
- how people currently travel, for what purposes and what affects their choice of mode;
- the proportion of traffic which does not start or end in the area but only passes through;
- who is currently unable to make the journeys they would like and why.

This detailed evidence base can serve to bring the gaps in local provision to light, so that policy-makers can respond accordingly in addressing the needs of people not served by existing public transport services. If high levels of through traffic are identified, it could also provide an impetus for measures that address non-residents' vehicle use through the area and improve residents' quality of life.

- Better network integration between modes

As discussed, different services and types of provision are disjointed and not planned as a coherent local network. Local authorities should play a greater role in planning an integrated provision that encourages interchange between modes. Specific measures can include:
- Working with bus operators to reroute services and move bus stops nearer to rail stations;
- Providing more "park and ride" facilities at major bus and rail termini to encourage passengers to park their car or bike at the station and to continue their journeys by public transport;
- Dedicating space in land use plans for mobility hubs for interchanging between different modes, including bus, on-demand mobility, taxi ranks, bike lockers and bike share stations, charging points for electric vehicles, places to rest, etc.
- Encouraging operators and ticket retailers to adopt multi-operator and multi-modal ticketing to simplify the ticket purchasing process and improve journey affordability.

- Better coordination between different types of provision

In addition, local authorities should take the lead in coordinating different types of provision,

including commercial and subsidised bus services, community transport, as well as school, hospital and social care transport. Local authorities should work with different providers to avoid duplication and reach more users more efficiently. Taking this a step further, the "Total Transport" approach involves pooling funding and resources from different providers into a service, which meets the collective needs of the wider community. Once commercial and local authority supported local bus routes are reviewed so as to serve the needs of as many users as possible, on-demand vehicles should be available to meet any remaining specialist needs, be they for school, hospital or social care appointments. This could be run as a social enterprise, with commercial or community providers commissioned to deliver the services, and any efficiency savings recycled back into transport services.

- Improved infrastructure and bike share schemes to encourage active travel

Local authorities should explore ways to encourage more people to walk and cycle for short journeys and for first and last mile journeys connecting to public transport for onward travel. In May 2020, the Department for Transport launched a fund and new guidance for local authorities to implement temporary measures, such as wider pavements and 'pop-up' cycle lanes to enable people to walk and cycle safely during the pandemic. Local authorities should take full advantage of this, as well as funding committed to cycling over the longer term to improve walking and cycling infrastructure.

Once safe infrastructure is in place, local authorities should incentivise more people to cycle. For example, enabling bike share schemes to operate locally and subsidising introductory offers (such as free journeys up to an hour for a specified time or free memberships for people on certain benefits) alongside widespread publicity campaigns can encourage more people to try cycling. Local authorities or *Big Local* communities could also invest in standard, adapted, electric and cargo bikes (as well as e-scooters if and when they become legal) and make them available for local residents and businesses to "try before you buy".

- Lift sharing platforms to improve private journey occupancy

Lift sharing (or car pooling) is a good way to use private vehicles more efficiently and to reduce car traffic on the roads, along with air pollution and emissions. Some local communities have organised car sharing through their Facebook or WhatsApp groups but there is also a plethora of dedicated online platforms for organising lift sharing that the *Big Local* communities and the local authorities can promote. A further step in the same direction is enabling car clubs to operate locally, so that people can hire a shared car at any time, without the need to own a private vehicle.

- School and commute journey planning

Local authorities should work collaboratively with schools and employers to help pupils and employees put travel plans in place based around walking, cycling and public transport. Schemes like Modeshift STARS can help support this.[23] Encouraging schools and employers to stagger start and end times can also reduce peak-time demand for travel, enabling more people to use public transport. The pandemic has also accelerated trends towards increased home working, which reduces overall travel demand.

- Applying for suitable funding pots

Local authorities should also take full advantage of different competitive funding pots available, such as the emergency active travel fund, restoring your railway fund and the rural mobility fund.[24] *Big Local* areas could also put themselves forward for any pilots funded by local, regional or central government, such as the all electric bus town pilot or e-scooter trials. Highways England's designated funds are another option for funding infrastructure projects, modal integration and new

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[23] https://www.modeshiftstars.org/
[24] The transforming cities fund and the future mobility zones fund may also reopen for new rounds.

services.[25]

National policy opportunities

There are also opportunities to reform public transport provision more long-term and to enable local authorities to take greater control. Such solutions will require new powers and funding, and need to be led by central government.

The Covid-19 crisis highlighted weaknesses in the way public transport is planned, funded and delivered. With low public transport use post-Covid, there is a risk of some services not being reinstated, which would lead to an increasing number of communities suffering worsening exclusion and rising costs of travel. Those reliant on public transport may end up disconnected from jobs, education, public services, shops and their friends and family.

Now is the opportunity to reform the commercial and operating models for transport to ensure communities across the country have access to reliable, convenient, affordable and sustainable transport. Transport decisions should be made at the administrative level best placed to make these. Local authorities – or combined authorities where these are in place – are best placed to review local transport needs, plan for how these should be met and to work with operators and other partners to deliver these services.

Local authorities should be required to produce local integrated transport plans that outline how they will reprioritise provision locally to ensure a sustainable transport system that meets the needs of the community. It should be based around active travel and passenger-centric, zero emission and more responsive public transport services, with gaps being filled by shared transport services.

Pre-Covid, local authorities already had the option to move to franchising models for delivering local bus services, whereby local authorities devise the local networks and specifications, which are then put out to tender for private operators to deliver. Some larger combined authorities like Greater Manchester were examining the potential, but smaller authorities did not consider using these powers. Franchised and tendered networks have the benefit of providing a means for local needs to be accounted for through specifying the network, while giving some certainty for the industry on expected returns, particularly in the current situation of low passenger numbers. By working collaboratively with commercial operators, local authorities can develop integrated networks offering high-quality services, with strengthened core commercial services and franchised supporting elements.

To support more areas to move to this new operating model, the government needs to provide clear commitments for future year funding to provide long-term certainty. Funding sources for bus services should be combined within a single, ring-fenced, multi-year funding framework covering revenue and capital support from taxpayer funds to local authorities. The government has already announced a £3 billion funding package for local bus services over five years (alongside another £2 billion for cycling).[26] Although this year's Comprehensive Spending Review has now been announced to only cover one year,[27] the committed bus funding should be confirmed with more details on how it should be allocated. Alongside it, the government is due to publish a National Bus Strategy. It should provide a clear direction and detailed delivery plan for reforming bus services for the future post-pandemic.

Alongside this funding, local authorities should explore alternative sources of income so they can

[25] https://highwaysengland.co.uk/designated-funds/

[26] HM Government (10 February 2020), Major boost for bus services as PM outlines new vision for local transport, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-boost-for-bus-services-as-pm-outlines-new-vision-for-local-transport

[27] HM Treasury (21 October 2020), Spending Review to conclude late November, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/spending-review-to-conclude-late-november

be less reliant on central government funding to support their local transport networks. As well as being additional revenue streams, tools such as Workplace Parking Levies and road use charges that embrace the "polluter pays" principle have the added benefit of influencing behaviour by rewarding sustainable travel choices. The income can be used for road maintenance and to fund improvements to public transport networks and services. To expedite the adoption of such mechanisms, the government should clarify the process and lead the way for adoption at the national level.

While local authorities are best placed to review local travel needs and transport networks, their ability to engage with the development and delivery of local transport services currently varies significantly. Therefore, one of the biggest barriers to tackle will be the capacity and capability constraints at local authority level. Many places have suffered declining public transport services in recent years and capacity across local government has similarly been weakened through budget cuts and resourcing constraints. There are gaps in authorities' capability to take on the negotiation and management of partnerships and management contracts for transport services given the reduction in expertise and staffing.

The government should provide support for local authorities where it is needed to boost the capacity and capability in transport oversight and planning. This support should be staged to achieve the most impact to benefit the most people at the fastest possible pace. Initially, the Combined Authorities with transport powers will be in a better position to move at pace. Alongside these, there is a cohort of local authorities and towns that will be most able to produce integrated transport plans early and should receive early support. Other local authorities with greater capacity and capability gaps will require enhanced support to develop their transport plans, in order to gain access to funds for transport improvements. This process will take some time, but should result in significantly improved outcomes for local residents.

Conclusion

The Local Transport Accelerator has so far provided a valuable evidence base for how gaps in public transport provision can leave communities feeling disconnected and isolated. In the post-Covid context, it is even more important to continue to support *Big Local* areas to better understand the factors behind poor connectivity and to provide options for how to address these.

If the government is serious about delivering on its agenda to level up "left behind areas", it should take up this opportunity to set out an ambitious programme for transport renewal post-Covid. Empowering local authorities to deliver this programme would be central to meeting the needs of local communities.

Appendix: summary of findings for each *Big Local*

Please note: Our analysis of the Big Local areas were conducted in 2019-20, therefore the information given was correct at the time of our studies.

Big Local	Characteristics	Main transport issues	Policy opportunities
1. Ramsey Million Partnership (Ramsey Parish, Cambridgeshire)	A small town and surrounding villages (Ramsey ward, Huntingdonshire) - Average proportion of residents over 65 (17%) and with limited mobility (8%) - High levels of car	- bus service fragmented between several operators - very low frequency - no evening and weekend services - on-demand community transport available - no direct access to rail	- strategic bus services review - expand community transport - improvement opportunities around new developments - network integration

	availability (85%)	- no cycle route provision - 2% reduction in Cambridgeshire County Council spend on buses between 2009/10-2018/19	
2. SO18 (Harefield, Midanbury and Townhill Park areas of Southampton)	Neighbourhoods on the edge of Southampton (Harefield ward) - Slightly higher proportion of residents 65 and over (19%) and with limiting health conditions (9%) - Average car availability (74%)	- commuting dominated by car journeys - some parts well served by bus but other less frequent - several bus operators - no direct access to rail but reachable by bus - community transport options - 86% reduction in Southampton City Council spend on buses between 2009/10-2018/19	- local bus partnership being developed - audit of services and passenger needs - better multi-modal integration, ticketing and interchange - New iteration of the local transport plan, including park and travel hubs
3. 3 Together (Moorsley, Easington Lane and Hetton-le-Hole, County Durham)	A group of three villages near Sunderland (Hetton ward) - Slightly higher proportion of older residents (19%) - Higher proportion of residents with limiting health conditions (15%) - High deprivation and low qualification levels - Lower than average car availability (67%)	- commuting mostly local but dominated by car journeys - served directly by several bus routes, with direct services to all amenities - not served directly by rail - pre-booked community transport available - 57% reduction in Durham County Council spend on buses between 2009/10-2018/19	- a shared strategic plan for transport being developed by the Combined Authorities - better integration between bus and rail services needed - explore demand for expanded community transport provision
4. Sale West (Trafford, Greater Manchester)	An estate in Sale on the outskirts of Manchester (St Mary's Ward) - higher than average poverty and unemployment - Average proportion of older people (17%) and with limiting health conditions (10%) - Average car availability (76%) - commute by bus relatively high	- only served by one route within walking distance, with another one recently rerouted to bypass the estate - different operators run the same routes on different days - infrequent services and limited off-peak provision - pre-booked on-demand service for disabled users available - no nearby rail station - close to national cycling routes but no segregated lanes - 37% reduction in	- consultation to move to bus franchising and multi-modal ticketing - forthcoming bus review - housing development plans for the estate will require a review of transport provision

		Greater Manchester spend on buses between 2009/10-2018/19	
5. Warwick Ahead (Knottingley, West Yorkshire)	A housing estate in a small town (Knottingley ward) - High deprivation and unemployment levels - Higher proportion of residents with limiting health conditions (13%) - Average proportion of over 65s (17%) - Low levels of car availability (69%)	- served by three bus routes, but they are infrequent and not running evenings or Sundays (antisocial behaviour has been partly blamed) - dial-a-ride service for disabled residents - no direct entry or level access to the rail station - community transport trial did not become permanent - 37% reduction in West Yorkshire spend on buses between 2009/10-2018/19	- West Yorkshire devolution deal agreed in March 2020, including powers over transport and a funding settlement[28] - rail improvements planned by Northern Powerhouse Rail, and HS2 in future - demand-responsive service planned - review options for community transport and reinstatement of evening services - provide more direct access to the railway station
6. Villages Together (Woolavington and Puriton, Somerset)	- Two villages near Weston-super-Mare (Puriton and Woolavington ward) - Higher proportion of residents over 65 (25%) - Average proportion of people with limiting health conditions (9%) - Higher than average car availability levels (88%) - Relatively affluent	- Served by only one bus route, not running evenings or Sundays - high fares (cheapest single £4) - local authority funded service one afternoon a week only, plus community transport option for medical appointments - no rail station within walking distance - most amenities are in nearby towns - 57% reduction in Somerset County Council spend on buses between 2009/10-2018/19	- potential connectivity enhancements at Hinkley Point construction and employment site, as well as This is Gravity Ltd's 'Smart Campus' redeveloping of the Royal Ordnance Factory site - tools to reduce car reliance, including school travel planning and car sharing

[28] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/west-yorkshire-devolution-deal