

The future for public transport

Greater use of public transport will help manage some of the challenges society faces today. It would reduce reliance on cars and generate cleaner, less congested cities and roads. The goal should be public transport systems that everyone wants to use.

What might public transport look like in 20 years time?

We can envisage a future where public transport is smooth, efficient, punctual, accessible and a natural choice for all. Developments in technology including integrated booking and ticketing arrangements will allow people to plan and book their journeys across more than one mode. Journey providers such as liftshare, car clubs, taxis, trains and buses will work together to provide a combination of high quality travel solutions. High-speed rail links will replace most domestic flights in the UK. Low carbon buses and trains will dominate the market, with technology and infrastructure planned to reduce carbon emissions still further.

What needs to happen?

This vision is achievable but demands a clear strategy on the role of public transport from both national and local government. Working more closely with public transport operators will ensure that the development of the transport infrastructure attracts more people to use buses and trains.

In order to develop effective, integrated transport networks, compatible technology systems must be put in place. Transportation will need to become a central consideration in planning new developments. Cities will have to be bolder in introducing measures that discourage car use and transport policy decisions must also reflect the full environmental and social costs of different transport modes.

“Transport policy has no choice but to respond to the challenge of climate change, for both environmental and economic reasons. Transport prices must fully reflect environmental externalities, and transport planning must take account of likely carbon prices.”

Source: The Eddington Transport Study

This vision can apply equally to all the countries in which we operate. However at the moment it has particular relevance to the UK where transport policy is evolving to address climate change and sustainability. Current proposals to reduce the carbon footprint of the national grid followed by a large-scale move to the use of electric cars must combine with programmes recognising the wider benefits of public transport. Congestion, accessibility and the resource demands of large-scale car ownership must be addressed. We are committed to working with our partners to make this case and encouraging policy shifts that will help to realise the wider benefits.

In North America equivalent policy is less well developed but is starting to evolve. The Obama Administration has recently earmarked \$100 million for transit investment to reduce greenhouse gases and has announced a \$13 billion strategy for high-speed rail. Apart from our Greyhound services, our business is contract-based, giving us less influence over the operation of our services. However, we anticipate a growing desire to reduce car dependency. In time, we expect issues such as addressing climate change to become part of our contract requirements and we are positioning ourselves to respond to this.

Examples of some of the work we are doing to encourage more integrated travel can be found at www.firstgroup.com/corporate/csr/our_customers

Public attitudes to public transport

Since November 2007 we have conducted three YouGov polls in the UK on attitudes to public transport. The polls demonstrate the importance of cost in influencing a greater move to public transport and the need to develop faster and more reliable services. An increase in motoring costs was consistently given as the most likely factor to encourage people to use public transport. More people now consider faster and more reliable services to be an important factor. When asked what measures people would like to see the Government introduce in relation to transport, the overwhelming majority cited greater investment in public transport. When asked what measures they could realistically envisage taking to help the environment, using public transport was ranked second after recycling.



The future of school travel

An increase in school bus travel offers the opportunity to reduce congestion and emissions. In 2007 the independent Yellow School Bus Commission in the UK was established to examine and quantify the potential benefits of yellow school bus-style dedicated home-to-school transport. The resulting report published in 2008 estimates that providing school buses to primary schools in the UK would lead to financial benefits to parents and road users of £460 million. It would also support net reductions in carbon emissions of 55,000 tonnes per annum.