Urban Mobility Partnership

Consumers in the driving seat

We live in an age of dramatic technological change. What was regarded as “cutting edge” just a few years ago can quickly become part of the accepted landscape. Debates rage about the impact of Artificial Intelligence, robotics, automation and all the other changes that are being brought about by the 4th Industrial Revolution.

Our connected world still has far too many disjointed parts – and transport policy is no exception. For too long we have approached the different modes of our transport system as self-contained areas with their own issues and concerns.

The Department for Transport still operates, for understandable reasons, with distinctive road and rail divisions. But it is time to change our mindset and develop transport policy solutions that place the consumer at their heart.

And we know that consumers are changing. Our demand for convenient, tailored services has never been greater. Consumers want convenience and flexibility and it is the challenge for policy makers to develop solutions that meet these increased demands.

Urban Mobility – how we get around is changing

Working and travel patterns are changing as we live more agile lives, with the traditional office-based Monday to Friday, 9 to 5 increasingly overtaken by new forms of communication. But while the overall number of journeys has fallen, the private car remains the biggest mode of transport.

At the same time, perhaps understandably, the average age of a car on Britain’s roads is going up. 2018 official statistics released by the Department for Transport revealed that petrol cars on the road are on average 9.1 years old with diesel cars averaging 6.6 years. Almost one in five of the UK’s cars are more than 13 years old. New vehicle registrations were 3.1m in 2017, a 6% drop since 2011. The ageing profile of the UK’s car fleet and the drop in new car registrations suggests that motorists are holding onto older vehicles for longer.

There is a significant tension in transport policy emerging - many consumers are unwilling or unable to give up their primary form of transport, a private car, but despite this the private car is often the least convenient way to get around in urban areas.

To put this into context - ***privately owned vehicles in our cities are parked 97% of the time***. That is why a flexible, multi-modal future of electric vehicles, public transit, bike share and other shared modes of transport is key to delivering efficient urban transport.

The challenges facing our cities

Urban cities and their surrounding communities face ever growing populations, congestion and air pollution challenges. Congestion is strangling our towns and cities across the UK, causing gridlock and costing the economy more than £13 billion every year. Ageing, inefficient, underused and polluting vehicles add, and will continue to add, to these problems. The prospect of congestion charging and rising Vehicle Excise Duty charges means that consumers are facing an increased financial cost to own and retain their vehicle. It is essential that national and local government ensure these consumers have an option that is viable and supports them as they transition away from their high polluting diesel vehicles.

Each year in the UK, around 40,000 deaths are attributable to exposure to outdoor air pollution. The health problems resulting from exposure to air pollution have a high cost to people who suffer from illness and premature death, to our health services and to business. In the UK, these costs add up to more than £20 billion every year.

Mobility Credits: a modern multi-modal transport solution

The Urban Transport Partnership has developed a policy solution to address the challenges outlined above.

In March 2018, the government announced a Clean Air Fund worth more than £260 million that will be made available to local authorities to tackle roadside NOx concentrations. The Clean Air Fund is a welcome and positive first step. Our solution is focused, initially, on how the Clean Air Fund could most effectively be utilised. We have commissioned expert transport analysis to support us and we have detailed figures to support our arguments.

Trading in their old diesel vehicles (Euro 1-5 initially), local people will be given “Mobility Credits” (in excess of the market value of the car) that can be used to choose from a range of clean and efficient modes of transports as flexibly as suits their lives. In the form of a pre-paid card, locals will be able to use credits on trains, buses, car daily rental, boats and bikes (or whatever schemes are locally appropriate). If the consumer wants to replace their vehicle with another privately owned vehicle then this option will also be available.

Not only will Mobility Credits get people out of older polluting vehicles (and off the driveway or the parking space) it will encourage locals to think differently about how they travel – and most importantly, the choice of how to make their journey will be in their hands.

Mobility Credits are therefore a radical approach that will improve the environment, congestion and air quality. For example, a double decker bus can take 75 cars off the road, and a modern diesel bus emits 10 times fewer NOx emissions per passenger than a modern diesel car. Most importantly, Mobility Credits also empower citizens to be able to choose the clean, safe, and efficient modes of transport that suit their needs and the needs of their city. Mobility Credits would also be a long-term cost-effective use of the Clean Air Fund as it encourages sustained behaviour change.

We are pleased that a number of local authority leaders have shown great interest in rolling out Mobility Credits in their local area. We have also had positive discussions with central Government on how Mobility Credits could be funded and made available at scale. The challenge for policy makers is to seize this opportunity, work in partnership with transport providers and deliver a solution that works.