



Building on the first [Pathways to Net Zero Series](#) in March 2022, [Pathways to Net Zero Series 2](#) in October 2022 sought to identify solutions to deliver emissions reductions at the scale and pace needed.

The Future We Want chaired by Professor Jillian Anable, Chair in Transport and Energy, Institute for Transport Studies, University of Leeds, focused on how we can create an inspiring greener vision for the future, which will help build the mandate for change and tough decisions for the long term.

The discussion took place at a key time for net zero agenda in UK politics. At the previous roundtable discussion (10th October) concern had been expressed at a change of tone on net zero. The new government reportedly remains committed to the agenda, but only if it doesn't interfere with the central mission to drive economic growth. However, there is a strong need for consistency of policy over time for businesses and investor confidence. We cannot afford a stop and start approach to net zero.

A report recently published (12th October) by the House of Lords Environment and Climate Change Committee had concluded that government will fail to meet its medium-term carbon targets without action to drive behaviour change and that the PM urgently needs to set out a vision of a country where low carbon choices and behaviours can flourish. Participants at the second roundtable discussion held on 14th October were invited to consider:

- What would a sustainable aspirational lifestyle look like?
- How do we move beyond the language of sacrifice and narratives of doom and gloom, and develop an inspiring and hopeful vision for the future?
- What do we want our towns and cities to look like, and how do we bring that about?
- How do we empower our local leaders? What support is needed for local councils? What is the role of enterprise and business?
- 84% of people are concerned about climate change. How do we build on that?
- How do we move from a culture that is primarily focused on consumerism to one that recognises our fundamental interdependence with each other and the biosphere?

This paper sets out a detailed account of the discussion. Comments by participants are grouped under three main themes:

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1 Creating a vision for the future

- Framing of the discussion
- Challenges and opportunities
- Transition pathways
- Vision and validate

Framing of the discussion

In opening the discussion, the roundtable chair **Professor Jillian Anable, Chair in Transport and Energy, University of Leeds ITS** highlighted the urgency and scale of the net zero challenge and said that she was also acutely aware that competing priorities are likely to make progress difficult.

However, whether we like it or not behaviour is going to have to change. We are either going to have to react to future events (extreme weather events, climate impacts, cost of living crises) or we change proactively so that we become more able to adapt, to be more resilient and protect ourselves into the future.

The question for today's discussion is how do we inspire with a greener vision for the future? How do we communicate the trade-offs? How do we get the mandate to change now? She suggested that today's discussion should focus primarily on solutions and how we can make progress happen.

On the framing of the discussion, **Ashok Sinha, London Cycling Campaign & London Sustainable Development Commission** emphasised that we should keep in mind that the key audience for our vision for the future must be government. He argued that individual behaviour change is not going to deliver decarbonisation. We need big ticket interventions from government. The importance of behaviour change is to create space for government to act. People's priorities are jobs, warm homes and to be able to get around.

The Chair agreed that government was a key audience and that in engaging with the public we need to focus on the pressing issues of the day impacting directly on people's lives [See 'Section 3: Engaging with the Public/ Do we need to be visionary or transactional?']

The Chair emphasised that participants should consider the audience for today's reflections, and any emerging vision for the future, was not just government but all key actors operating in the net zero space.

Challenges and opportunities

Professor Peter Jones, UCL gave an overview of the main challenges and opportunities. The government is committed nationally to net zero – but what that means for individual peoples' lives is yet to be worked out.

He noted that until recently the idea of increasing wealth and increasing happiness was very much tied into increased material consumption. This has implications not just for carbon but also resources. However, if we are aspiring to better futures for all we need to refocus on what that involves.

Young people are less focused on using material consumption as a measure of success. Life is becoming more digital and potentially that has fewer resource implications. Amongst transport professionals there is a strong consensus about what sustainability means i.e.



more active travel and public transport and less car use. However, that tends to have an urban focus.

Professor Jones noted that there is a danger that many people will think with the advent of electric vehicles (EVs) “job done!” when they do not solve other externalities, such as break dust, congestion. However, he highlights some other positive developments:

Firstly, as was discussed in detail at the previous Pathways to Net Zero series, transport is a derived demand. This means that there is huge scope to work with other sectors to reduce demand or encourage more walking and cycling. He pointed to the opportunities to reduce carbon enabled by digitalisation, such as NHS remote appointments, homeworking.

Secondly, he noted that we are awaiting new Local Transport Plan (LTP) guidance. It is necessary to look at transition pathways from now to the end point, and to schedule interventions at the right times. Not all problems can be solved in five years. It will be valuable to have a framework to deal with that.

Finally, he highlighted the key importance of public dialogue, how we need to deliberate and go forward on a co-creation basis. Citizens Assemblies are a very useful forum to discuss potentially contentious policies such as Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs).

The Chair asked whether LTNs would get a better reaction if people saw the bigger picture? **Professor Jones** suggested that when we make clear how climate change will affect people’s children and grandchildren there will be greater willingness to rearrange society in ways that are liveable, sustainable, enjoyable and hit net zero targets.

He noted that reaction to LTNs may be also affected by the design or where they have been implemented. For example, in Waltham Forest people seem to be very happy their High Street has come to life, and they have a heart to their community by cutting back on traffic.

Transition pathways

Professor Jones explained that by mapping out what needs to happen and what can work now, we can identify not only what needs to be done in total but also what can’t be done yet. This means we can start lobbying for those policy changes where there are barriers. The European Union has a requirement for cities over 100,000 to produce a sustainable mobility plan. The European Investment Bank (EIB) has just sponsored a new topic guide on decarbonisation and carbon mitigation where they talk about 20/30-year transition pathways.

He highlighted the danger that if you only focus on the short-term targets, you can make things worse in the long term. The quick dash from coal to gas in the US got part of the way in the short term, but it won’t get the rest of the way and it will lock in fossil fuels. A series of short-term measures won’t achieve net zero. We need a 20- or 30-year pathway.

The Chair agreed that transition pathways that stretch out into the longer term are very important and asked how we should have that conversation with the public? How do we ensure that we are not kicking the can down the road?

Professor Jones responded that by showing the long term you highlight the danger of not doing what needs to be done. The message to public is: what does this mean for my children and grandchildren? He also referred to how the market has been responding and cited the example of Blackrock telling companies: “unless you have a strategy for net zero, we won’t invest in you because you won’t have a long-term future”.



Vision and validate

Professor Laurie Pickup, Vectos, argued it is time for government to accept that “predict and provide” is dead in the water.

“We can’t get sustainability and zero carbon if we amble along in the old way of doing things.”

He noted that “vision and validate” is written into government’s transport strategy, which is positive, but we need to go further. Whilst “vision and validate” is an important step forward, it also needs to be encapsulated within a wider mind-set that is centrally focused on low-carbon, sustainable development and accessibility. We must fully embrace the reality that mobility in the 2020s will not be solely physical but ‘phygital’ – physical and digital.

Lifestyle needs to be more localised, with neighbourhood planning more focused on walking and cycling. We particularly need more focus on walking infrastructure. Cycling has seen good progress over past 20 years but walking less so. Neighbourhood work spaces are a good half-way house between home working and office working.

Safety for women of travelling on public transport must be improved. We need to listen to all generations and respect social diversity. We must also be aware of social realities. New designs of neighbourhoods with green spaces won’t necessarily be used as envisaged (people sleeping rough, dealing drugs)

With regards public transport, we need to ensure core networks, then allow space for bottom-up innovation investment by local business community in local transport.

Above all, we must focus on low carbon and resilience. We need more local activity and more locally supported facilities, with new business models, new governance arrangements – more ‘phygital’.

David Milner, Create Streets, also argued for vision-based planning. Movement needs to be about providing access not maximising speed. We should move away from “predict and provide” to “decide and provide” and “vision and validate”. [See Section 2: Transforming our towns and cities/ The importance of place making]

Stephen Frost, IPPR argued that government has not created a sufficient vision for net zero. The existing UK wide vision for transport and associated decarbonisation pathway is not clear enough. The pathway doesn’t deliver even on its own terms and does not contain firm and funded commitments. Messaging at national level is not good enough, but he highlighted some opportunities to challenge this:

1. Government is not appealing the High Court decision that Net Zero Strategy is unlawful and needs to come back with a revised plan
2. Net Zero Review provides the opportunity to include things we want to see. The Conservative Environment Network is a strong caucus in the Conservative Party.
3. Labour is very much in listening mode.



2 Transforming our towns and cities

- Inspiring local leadership
- Challenges faced by local authorities
- The importance of place making
- The role of business and innovation
- The value of demand side response

Inspiring local leadership

Bridget Smith, the Leader of South Cambridgeshire District Council described how South Cambridgeshire aspires to be the greenest county in the UK.

Firstly, “we put our own house in order”. This means that South Cambs has a strong focus on ensuring that their own buildings are zero carbon, that they are driving EVs, procurement of electric or biofuel bin lorries, and have a retrofitting campaign for council houses.

She stressed that the climate, cost of living and health and wellbeing crises are inextricably linked. South Cambs have joint local plan with Cambridge City Council which is a unique local plan in that it is predicated entirely on climate.

“Our local plan is our most powerful tool to address our dependency on cars” (which is 25% above the national average). Whilst acknowledging it is very difficult to get people out of their cars, **Cllr Smith** stressed, “We need to build communities where not only is car ownership unnecessary, but it is positively undesirable”. Spatial planning and transport planning will be critical. At South Cambs they adopt the “15 minute” city philosophy.

Unlike most of the UK, Cambridgeshire has strong economic growth, and house prices are unaffordable for most people. **Cllr Smith** emphasised “We need to build homes that are affordable for people to live in”. These must have the highest energy efficiency standards, remove need for reliance on cars, enable people to grow their own food, cheaper to live there. She also stressed the importance of building resilience into planning so that people are healthier, have access to green space (for example come another pandemic).

South Cambs are building three new towns, but as **Cllr Smith** underlined, these need to be self-contained entities where people can live and work, not dormitories. There needs to be ready access to green and blue space. South Cambs also have a call out for green sites, as they are aiming for 20% net gain biodiversity.

The Chair asked what the experience has been working with larger housing developers? **Cllr Smith** stressed the need for government to legislate to ensure that renewables were mandatory, not optional extras. “Why don’t all loos flush with rainwater? It is so cheap to install at the outset”. Photovoltaics and rainwater recycling should be fitted as standard.

In Cambourne (another new town) **Cllr Smith** described how she is working on a joint venture with a developer building 265 new homes, 40% of which affordable, all zero carbon, cycling will be even easier, people will be able to grow their own vegetables. “We are using our own housing stock as an exemplar of what can be done”. She concluded that we need to get to the point where people are calling for better health and wellbeing and cheaper to run households, and that we must stop talking about the environment in isolation.



The Chair highlighted that South Cambs are also leading on road pricing. **Cllr Smith** noted that South Cambs are starting their fourth consultation on Monday on road charging. The Citizen's Assembly was the most influential. It is very tough indeed. The £50million revenue per annum allows for the creation of a London style public transport service. The question is whether this will be enough to convince people when even the local MP is against it.

Challenges faced by local authorities

Kamal Panchal, Local Government Association, said that there is a lot that councils can do around managing demand, CAZs, parking policy, WPL, congestion charging, spatial planning powers, moving traffic enforcement powers.

So why is more not happening? He believed the reason is that there is a lack of will power. There are lots of trade-offs at the local level, lots of competing demands with councils providing at least 700 services. Not everywhere wants to implement policies to manage demand, and these are not statutory duties. The key question is how you affect and influence local leaders.

You need also resources. When councils were starting to set their budgets, inflation was expected to reach 4.4% but since then, spiralling inflation, energy prices, wage pressures have led to £2.4 billion extra cost pressures this year alone required leading to a potential funding gap of £3.6 billion next year, and £4.5 billion year after. Since these figures were published inflation rose further to 9.9% and Bank of England predicts 13% later this year.

“Without resources we don't have the people to use the policy tools and deliver change”

Panchal stressed that long term funding certainty is needed. This would help to bring in the private sector, and influence Network Rail and Highways England. Without funding certainty, local authorities can't invest in people and skills. He argued that local authorities should be awarded five-year funding settlements like other major infrastructure providers.

He noted that it is also important to get the basics right: maintenance of roads, encouraging active travel such as providing walking maps at car parks etc.

The Chair asked whether given that Covid had shown what was meant by key services and key workers, has the social value of local public transport been elevated in any way?

Panchal responded that buses are still only at 80%/85% passenger levels, with many older people having stayed away. Public transport is still recognised as important, but it is felt that we should also be embracing car clubs, micro mobility, e-scooters, e-bikes etc.

The importance of place making

David Milner, Create Streets, introduced the important theme of place making. The reality, he observed, is that we are still building business parks and dormitories – not places – and in so doing we are locking in car dependency.

He argued we need more positive messaging to build public support. Hammersmith and Fulham have put together a really impressive package of LTNs, but they have called them “Clean Air Neighbourhoods” and use terms such as “school streets” “play streets”.

Movement needs to be about providing access not maximising speed. He argued that we should repurpose transport budgets, such as expensive road schemes, to make more efficient use of space, where for example a light rail scheme would be feasible. We need a



more vision-based transport planning. We should move away from “predict and provide” to “decide and provide” and “vision and validate”.

On mass planning, he advocated modal share targets. Instead of a parking minimum we should move to parking maximum. He cited London, Cambridgeshire and Sunderland as areas where this had been successfully implemented. He felt that outside London it was perfectly possible to create a higher density, low & mid-rise neighbourhood acceptable to more people, with one instead of two cars per dwelling.

He advocated for codifying high streets. We should make solar panels, more sustainable buildings and better energy efficiency mandatory. We can then move not just to sustainable streets but sustainable communities. The costs will increase a bit, but he argued that when they know they have to provide these things as standard, developers will just take it out of the land price. Farmers will just get a little less land value uplift.

Finally, **Milner** argued for more urban road space reallocation. He advocated building on the “road belt” rather than the “green belt”! We should allow more intensification of the suburbs, because then you can create the places, businesses, retail opportunities and jobs. This would support more walking and cycling.

Milner’s comments underlined is the essence of place making. Our High Streets could evolve to places we actually want to live and meet!

However notwithstanding examples of best practice, **Richard Blythe, RTPI** commented that across the country the harsh reality was that as a whole planning is almost at a standstill. Some local planning authorities have no staff at all! There are unfilled vacancies. Finance is urgently needed for local planning departments.

The Cambridge local plan is excellent, he said, but additional development is at the margins. We need to work with the existing housing stock we’ve got. Also, we must not penalise new houses, but treat all residents the same.

Long term funding of bus services is a critical problem. Bus cuts mean that young people and students are being excluded from college or work. RTPI research has shown that in some parts of the country it is quicker to walk to hospital than to take public transport.

The Chair asked whether more public engagement and participation was needed? **Blythe** responded that involving local people in consultation is expensive. However, there are opportunities presented by moving online to involve local people in planning, also more people as councillors and in decision-making. Digital is a potential way forward, but we must beware of digital exclusion.

The role of business and innovation

Ali Clabburn, Liftshare outlined how their principal focus was on zero carbon commuting. The commute accounts for 5% of all carbon emissions in the UK. It is the single biggest source of carbon emissions producing 18 billion kilos (850 kilos of carbon per commuter)

However, alternative low carbon alternatives are available right now! We just need policies in place to motivate and inspire people. **Clabburn** argues that the situation could be transformed over night by behaviour change.

Liftshare have analysed over 0.5 million commutes. For example, one study they did for a hospital revealed that:



- 7% of staff walked but 13% could
- 5% of staff cycled but 39% could
- 2% of staff lift shared but 95% could
- 1% of staff took bus but 55% could

To change the nation's travel habits we have to give people better options. **Clabburn** said that: "Action drives belief, rather than belief driving action. And data drives action". For action to happen you need firstly to have better options. Secondly you need there to be awareness that better options exist. Finally, you need an audience to perceive that an option is worth trying at least once. He stressed that the trick is in getting people to try it once, and for this you need to start with the data.

The Chair asked what the motivations were for businesses and employers to take part. **Clabburn** replied that these included reducing their environmental impact, staff retention and cost savings. "Once employers see that only 3% are traveling by bus but 55% could they want to know what more can be done"

Professor Jones noted that a big incentive for employers would be that Scope 3 accounting includes travel emissions of employees, that larger employers recognise this and know they need to take action. **The Chair** noted that Scope 3 emissions reporting is not yet mandatory. **Clabburn** said that it should be because for some employers, 30% of their emissions comes from commuting.

To a question about the school run or weekend travel, **Clabburn** replied that Liftshare were also engaged in these areas and the same methodology applies

The value of demand side response

Yumman Siddiq, Energy UK and Young Energy Professionals Forum spoke about the value of demand side response: bringing forward benefits of EVs to both energy system and consumers by allowing consumers to use electricity at a lower cost whilst also allowing for energy to be more evenly distributed on the grid. This helps to iron out peaks in demand, and reduces need for carbon intensive generation, thereby balancing cost and lowering bills for consumers.

These are some of the benefits of owning an EV and they need to be clearly communicated. **Siddiq** noted that there is an important role for government in encouraging people to make the switch, but there is an important role for industry as well. EVs are products but industry depends too much on government to sell the narrative to consumers. Tesla is the exception! Other OEMs have not been as effective.

Anthony Smith, Transport Focus argued to the contrary that OEMs were very successfully selling an EV "vision". He said that car manufacturers are pushing their EVs even though delivery times are 12-18 months, and second-hand prices are above what they sold them for. The "vision" is being sold ahead of the reality of where EV manufacturing is really at.

The Chair asked what do energy companies need to do to get people more engaged? **Siddiq** said that the smart meter roll out was very important, currently only 50% of meters are smart. However, it is not mandated that there is a smart meter in every new build.

To a question on whether we are missing a trick about peer-to-peer trading of energy and mobility, **Siddiq** replied that communities are also looking at demand side response and that the role of friends and families would be very important.



3 Engaging with the public

- **Key elements of a successful vision**
- **Do we need to be visionary or transactional?**
- **Involving local communities**

Key elements of a successful vision

Anna Rothnie, Mott Macdonald, posed the question: what is a successful vision?

She referred to the famous “I have a dream” speech by Martin Luther King. The reason his speech had such a profound effect was that it didn’t deny reality, but it painted an inspiring picture of what was possible. She summarised that there are three key elements to a successful vision:

1. It is important to be real about where we are now
2. But we can dream of something better
3. We need to include some ideas of how we get there, of how we bridge the gap between where we are now and where we want to be. How we achieve that dream.

Rothnie suggested that life without needing to own a car was a dream worth aspiring to. She described the random acts of kindness one experiences on public transport, or on the street, the smiles, the spontaneity, the fresh air, and the exercise. She described the freedom of not having to own a car, to be able to do useful things with your travel time, only paying for what you use, compared with the sunk costs of owning a car.

Often the harsh reality can mean less direct/convenient journeys and delayed trains. However, that doesn’t mean that the dream of living car-free isn’t worthwhile. She concluded, “Everything we see is made up – but we have the power to change things. So let’s imagine something better!”.

So how can we move away from quite an isolated way of living? How can we reimagine our daily lives? We all experienced a glimpse of something better during the Covid-19 lockdown when the air was cleaner, the skies were clearer, and we could hear the birds singing.

The Chair suggested that as we go forward, we need to share examples of what success can look like and build on those.

Xavier Brice, Sustrans, said that “healthier places and happier lifestyles for everyone” is Sustrans’ central mission.

However, he cautioned that there is a risk of polarisation on the climate debate. We need to make sure we don’t pour oil on the fire on issues that can become really divisive, such as LTNs. We need to bring people together. “Co-creation is part of that. It takes longer but is well worth it.”

He argued that technology brings positive unintended consequences, and a way of avoiding polarisation. Some form of national road user charging has to be inevitable because of the impact on tax take of EVs. Technology provides means to do that without polarising people.

Anthony Smith, Transport Focus, stressed the importance of getting the tone of the net zero discussion right. “We need to help people cheer up!” A narrative of doom and gloom is depressing and disempowering. And “if we get into kicking government, government stops listening.”



Do we need to be visionary or transactional?

Ashok Sinha emphasised that people's priorities are jobs, warm homes, to be able to get around. "Yes of course we need a happy vision of a circular zero carbon economy but engagement with people needs to be more transactional and getting them through the next five years." We need leadership from government.

Stephen Frost, IPPR suggested we need to be both transactional and aspirational. IPPR deliberative research has found that people want jobs and access to things they care about; public transport that is affordable; safe streets for their children to get to school.

Sinha argued that we need big ticket interventions from government to achieve net zero. The priority must be to focus on what will flick the switch of government and of different politicians. "Shared mobility" interventions provided by the private sector are more likely to appeal to the current government. Whereas for Labour, there needs to be a greater focus on jobs, skills, local regeneration.

He argued that "the vision thing" is not going to help local leaders like Bridget at the cutting edge of trying to deliver positive change. In response, **Cllr Smith** noted, "All our ambition to make things better is politicised by people with political mileage to make out of it...I'm pretty well sure I will lose my position because of the road pricing issue!"

Anthony Smith argued that cost and convenience are key deciders of how to choose how to travel. "Once you've bought a car it becomes the default way to get around". The key question is how do we get planning focused on giving people the opportunities to make the right more sustainable choices? And we need to think deeply about how we pay for our roads and using our roads. We need to nudge people forwards, small steps.

On a note of realism, he added that no matter how much you nudge people into more sustainable behaviour it will only make changes at the margin. He referred to a recent study in West Yorkshire which showed that making public transport effectively free (£1 a month) could achieve 10% modal switch, but the subsidy needed to run local transport network almost doubled. You are still left with 90% of car use even if you make public transport free.

He argued that we need a mixture of micro interventions improving local choices such as providing better walking facilities, implementing LTNs, and big-ticket items such as how pay for road use and how we pay for flying. Nudge has to come in areas where we can most make a difference. There are inherent contradictions, but we have to be honest about these if we are to win hearts and mind.

Anthony Smith suggested that events will drive change. We are in for more bouts of protracted extreme hot weather and local pressure will grow for more radical interventions such as making car use more expensive and public transport easier.

Local pressure can be very effective. He referred to the example of Putney High Street which was a disaster from an air pollution perspective but thanks to pressure from mums and others, electric buses now drive up and down!

The Chair noted that we need to engage with people on the issues facing them and that we might not even have climate as a lead topic, or a topic at all. This applies across the board. **Yumman Siddiq** spoke of her flatmate who wanted a Tesla for status rather than environmental reasons. **The Chair** suggested that whilst we have to hope that environmental impact rises up agenda, in the meantime whatever gets people to switch!



Involving local communities

Jools Townsend, Community Rail Network, said “we need to help people make change together”.

To the question ‘How can we treat people more like citizens?’ she suggested it was really important that we stop assuming everyone likes the status quo. We don’t necessarily need to persuade people to make better choices. If we think that we do, we are essentially constructing people as consumers.

She argued that it’s not hard to build a positive vision if we really engage with communities. In her experience people are really up for having those conversations. Transport operators need to listen to local communities. Many communities are working collaboratively with the private sector.

There are an infinite number of ways to involve local communities in process of change on green travel, which are also not as expensive as running climate assemblies. Community rail initiatives are community led, hugely beneficial, bringing connectedness, innovations, and solutions better suited to local needs.

Stephen Frost, IPPR completely agreed that there are an infinite number of ways to involve local communities in process of change.

Central to a future vision is that we must tackle inequalities in our current transport system, avoid them being even further locked in. IPPR concludes that the public needs more of a role in shaping that vision and understanding what the benefits would be, and more of a role in holding areas to account. It needs to be an ongoing relationship.

Jake Ainscough, Environmental Governance and Ecological Economist said that people need to feel they have agency. There is currently a disconnect. People don’t believe that there is much they can do, perhaps just cycle a bit more. They feel they have a low level of political efficacy, and don’t think that they have the power to change things. They don’t have high trust in our institutions, but they recognise that change needs to come centrally.

Ainscough noted that if people don’t see material benefits from engagement, then that cycle will go in reverse. **The Chair** agreed that even if we set up good deliberative processes, people need to feel that their efforts in engagement will lead to fruition and see something happening on the ground.

Closing remarks by the Chair

Action is what drives belief. We need to find pockets of success and share them.

We all have different views of what we mean by vision, but essentially who is listening to our vision? What are their priorities?

We don’t necessarily have good evidence of the benefits (e.g. jobs, skills, levelling up, social benefits etc) to demonstrate to all layers of decision makers.

We need increased focus on future challenges and the value of resilience.