

Industry reacts as Government publishes Transport Decarbonisation Plan

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The Government has today (14th July 2021) released its Transport Decarbonisation Plan, in which it aims to decarbonise all modes of domestic transport by 2050.

As part of his address delivered to Parliament, the Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP said that the plan was the first in the world and will outline how the UK will deliver a step change in the breadth and scale of its ambition to reduce transport's greenhouse gas emissions to reach net zero.

Cleaner transport will create and support highly skilled jobs, with the production of zero emission road vehicles alone having the potential to support tens of thousands of jobs worth up to £9.7 billion GVA in 2050. This will also ensure the air we breathe is cleaner in our communities and reduce time spent in traffic.

Mr Shapps said: "The plan published today is genuinely high ambition – technically and feasibly – for all areas of transport and notes that decarbonisation will rely, in part, on future transport technology, coupled with the necessary behavioural and societal change.

“Because of the pandemic, we are already seeing some of these changes in behaviour happen much faster than expected. We’ve seen homeworking change traditional commuter and leisure trips, video conferencing has changed business travel and we’ve seen a rise in cycling and walking all of which could save thousands of tonnes of carbon themselves.”

In March 2020, Government set out the challenge faced and committed to bring together a transport decarbonisation plan to deliver transport’s contribution to carbon budgets and net zero across all forms of transport. [You can read this here.](#)

The commitments set out today include linking local infrastructure funding to solutions that cut emissions – aligning that investment to the Government’s net zero programme, improving public transport, increasing support for active travel so mass transit and cycling and walking play a bigger role than ever, a net zero rail network by 2050, net zero domestic aviation emissions by 2040 and leading the transition to green shipping.

The Government is also publishing its rail environment policy statement, which will set the direction for the rail industry on environment issues and inform the forthcoming sustainable rail strategy. The document will look at traction decarbonisation, air quality, decarbonising the rail estate and a range of other environmental-related issues on the railway, including biodiversity and waste.

[You can read the report here.](#)

[You can read the Government’s Rail Environment Policy Statement here.](#)

Reaction from the industry - “This demonstrates Government’s commitment to building a cleaner, greener and more sustainable transport network.”

Darren Caplan, Chief Executive of the Railway Industry Association (RIA), said: “It is really positive to see the Transport Decarbonisation Plan commit to a ‘cost-effective’ and ‘sustained’ programme of electrification, and to support the deployment of battery and hydrogen trains. It is also heartening to see the Government recognise the role that rail freight can play in cutting emissions, extending to freight the commitment to remove all diesel-only trains from the network by 2040. The Railway Industry Association and our members welcome the Government’s ambition on this.

“As Transport Secretary Grant Shapps has said, the pace of change will be ‘unparalleled’, which we agree it will need to be. There is clearly plenty of work to do. With only 38% of the UK’s railway network currently electrified, compared to a target of electrifying the majority of the network as set out in the Transport Decarbonisation and Williams-Shapps plans, we cannot afford to delay work any longer. Every tonne of carbon which we start to save now will be almost 30 tonnes saved by 2050, supporting thousands of green jobs for the future. Rail suppliers await the details of which schemes will be given the green light and look forward to supporting a rolling programme of electrification.

“As our Rail Decarbonisation 21 campaign calls for, further electrification and fleet orders of battery and hydrogen trains is the best way to decarbonise the railway at good value for the taxpayer – supporting the Government’s ‘build back better’ agenda and helping the UK show genuine global leadership ahead of COP26 in November.”

Andy Bagnall, Director General of the Rail Delivery Group, said: “Taking the train is already one of the greenest ways for people and goods to move around the country and rail companies are eager to work with government to make it even greener.

“In the longer-term, that means a rolling programme of electrifying lines and investing in new battery and hydrogen technology.

“To make it easier for people to get on board with going green now, government should take a ‘polluter pays’ approach when it comes transport taxes like air passenger duty, and reform the rail fares system to encourage more passengers back by making it simpler to use and easier to get a good deal.”

Maria Machancoses, CEO of Midlands Connect, said: “This decisive strategy is what we’ve been waiting for, and demonstrates Government’s commitment to building a cleaner, greener and more sustainable transport network. Policymakers must now work with industry and the private sector to develop a comprehensive delivery plan to make sure change happens.”

“A zero-emission rail network can only be achieved through widespread electrification, we’ve stalled on this for too long – it’s now time to move ahead with development and delivery of a pipeline of projects, starting with the full electrification of the Midland Main Line, and other priority routes across the country.

“Once Government confirms what parts of the rail network will be electrified and which will be serviced by hydrogen and battery-powered trains, it will give suppliers the certainty they need to invest and hire skilled staff, keeping costs down.”

“We know that decarbonising our transport network is essential in achieving our target of becoming carbon-neutral by 2050, and that so far we’ve lagged behind other industries. In the past 30 years the energy industry has reduced its carbon emissions by 62 per cent, whereas the transport industry has only managed a 5 per cent reduction. There is much to do but today’s release of the strategy is an important and critical milestone as we look to meet the challenge ahead.”

“The Midlands is home to the biggest cluster of rail and automotive businesses in the UK, this announcement is great news for the region, and will support the creation of highly skilled jobs in the transport sector. Our region was home to the first industrial revolution and can now be at the heart of a green revolution.”

Silviya Barrett, Head of Policy, Research and Projects at Campaign for Better Transport, said: “This is a bold and ambitious plan which identifies public transport and active travel as key to decarbonising the transport sector. There is a lot that we are happy to welcome, the proposed zero emission vehicles mandate and the phase-out of the sale of new diesel and petrol heavy goods vehicles by 2040 for instance, and we are pleased to see local authorities will all need to make carbon reductions. This needs to translate

to specific modal shift and motor traffic reduction, and we are committed to helping authorities achieve this.

“What this plan does lack is any concrete measures to rebalance transport spending away from road building and towards more sustainable modes. Reform of vehicle taxation is long overdue, so we’re glad to see this is being hinted at in the plan, but we need to see a formal commitment and a timeframe for replacing the current system with distance-based road pricing to help support the transition to cleaner vehicles and greater use of public transport and other green modes.”

Maggie Simpson OBE, RFG Director General, said: “This Plan sets out a clear vision for the decarbonisation of freight transport and recognises the vital role that rail has to play in reducing carbon emissions. We welcome Government’s commitment to setting a target for rail freight growth, and to the electrification of strategic gaps in the network, allowing more freight to be electrically hauled. “Businesses across the country are looking to make more use of rail freight as they work to decarbonise their supply chain. This Plan should help underpin the investments they need to make to do so – but it must now be backed by the necessary action to deliver on the Government’s ambition.”

Tim Wood, Interim Chief Executive at Transport for the North, said: “Addressing the climate emergency through the decarbonisation of our transport network is an urgent priority, and this national plan is to be welcomed. The key will be to translate its aims into action as swiftly as possible.

“As our Decarbonisation Strategy for the North of England is finalised later this year we’re confident that our region will set the pace for climate action and hit our target of near-zero carbon emissions from surface transport by 2045 – ahead of national policy.

“The North is at the cutting edge of green innovation and is perfectly positioned to lead the way on many of the opportunities and initiatives – such as the rollout of electric vehicle charging networks and adoption of hydrogen as a clean fuel. Investment in our region will support the critical Green Economic Revolution and aid the wider levelling-up agenda.

“Publishing the Integrated Rail Plan must now be a priority in order to understand when HS2, Northern Powerhouse Rail and other major projects such as the Transpennine Route Upgrade and rail electrification will be delivered.”

Image credit: Rail Delivery Group