

This is a response to the South East Transport Strategy on behalf of the Surrey Federation of Green parties.

8th January 2020

General points

1. We welcome the start that has been made on this task, which is not only essential but urgent.
2. The Transport Strategy needs to overtly and as a top priority commit to decarbonise transport in the South East. While we welcome the net-zero carbon target, as transport is the major emitter in the region, we need to front load the targets for the transport sector to avoid tipping into climate chaos. The biggest gains in terms of carbon cutting should be identified as priorities to be fully implemented as soon as possible, and certainly by 2030.
3. Overall we welcome the shift from planning for vehicles, to planning for people and places. There should be an urgent assessment carried out of the carbon burden from transport in the region – this would enable the speedy identification of the priorities for action.
4. The climate emergency means stopping the most polluting activities, whilst enabling new ways of doing things. Whilst it is recognised in the foreword to the main Strategy that public transport is key to decarbonisation, alongside that must be strategies which promote and enable walking and cycling and not travelling in the first place – much easier, cheaper and more beneficial to local communities. The health and well-being potential is massive, yet not mentioned in the cost benefit analysis which only talks about jobs and money. Health improvements associated with active transport could save millions of pounds in NHS cost savings.
5. The vision statement focuses too heavily on journeys – economies have grown, prospered and enabled thriving human communities and environmental security for thousands of years, without necessitating people and goods moving about to the extent that is currently accepted as the norm. Modern technologies such as web and video conferencing alleviate the need for much business travel – as is seen by the reduction seen in business flights. A climate proof transport strategy which reduces overall transport use, will be more successful than one that thinks inside the same old box. Net zero carbon requires a very different way of working or it will just prove to be an empty promise. The second paragraph of the vision statement should be revisited to reflect this (and thus the priorities outlined elsewhere in the Strategy which do recognise that a more fundamental change is needed).
6. The definition of the environment is too narrow (natural/built/historic) – it needs to embrace a safe and stable climate - our means of survival. This is consistent with the headlines in the Strategy but not carried through to the document. There needs to be a clear focus on this as the number one outcome of the Strategy, from which the other benefits will flow.
7. We do not agree with the priorities set out in the document, which will not achieve net zero carbon by 2050 or even make a good start by 2030 - as is urgently needed. In particular we suggest the following changes, to help meet this target:
 - oppose airport expansion in the region, rather than aim to facilitate it;
 - oppose further expansion of the highways network, except to enable a shift to public transport use with interchanges between local provision onto the strategic network;

- develop clear targets for carbon reduction:
 - 40% reduction in private car use;
 - positive incentives provided for a switch of the remaining vehicles to electric (including all taxis);
 - at least doubling the number of journeys made by bike or on foot across the county through partnerships with local district/borough councils;
 - implementing the installation of cycle tracks alongside all trunk roads, following those started in the 1930s and as found in many in Northern European countries;
 - supporting a huge expansion in the bus network based on the use of smaller, electric buses and lowering of fares;
 - encouraging substantial investment in the rail network leading to a doubling in its use;
 - affordable, reliable, predictable, integrated, provision of public transport which starts early and runs late, supported by real time information;
 - a joined- up approach which links planning into transport so that any new developments do not rely on or promote the use of private cars, but embrace alternatives.

Airports

If net zero is to be achieved the Strategy should come out strongly against the expansion of Heathrow and Gatwick airports as major hubs. Expansion at both airports is currently planned, effectively wiping out any gain from decarbonising transport in other sectors. The answer is not to make sure expansion at either airport is served by better rail services (as the Strategy proposes). Air travel has a disproportionate and highly damaging impact on climate security and should be constrained, not facilitated. A clear statement on this would be most welcome. This should be underpinned by positive promotion of alternatives to air transport, working, for example, with rail providers to support strategies to encourage the use of UK and European rail travel as an alternative to air transport for businesses and private citizens.

Highways

The Strategy is unclear about its guiding principle on highways, at least in relation to private cars and freight. With a net zero carbon objective in sight the Strategy should commit to no further expansion of the highways network, except to facilitate the use of the network by cycles and public transport (eg dedicated cycle/bus/coach lanes, feeder routes from urban areas to strategic routes with accessible interchange points). Research shows we need at least a 20% reduction in private vehicle use, yet the preferred strategy would increase traffic by over 8%. A move to electric vehicles and greater use of public transport are not enough to meet our carbon reduction targets. The Strategy should limit the supply, in order to reduce demand, whilst providing competitively priced, accessible alternatives.

Rail

We support the aims to improve rail services throughout the South East, which are letting down local communities and confounding environmental goals. This will continue unless radical action is taken (eg removal of franchise licenses) and substantial investment is made. Partnerships with rail providers should focus on our shared objectives of environmental improvement and carbon reduction and deliver a fare policy which provides incentives to use public transport, rather than many journeys being cheaper by car.

Buses

Buses are key to achieving the transition away from private car ownership for many local or medium length journeys (which are most of the journeys made). Yet the strategy appears to ignore this opportunity. In Surrey a fleet of electric mini buses linking up rural communities and the strategic routes to urban areas is vital to achieve the modal shift. This will require strong leadership and community acceptance based on reliability, affordability, long operating hours and real-time service information at bus stops and remotely. The Strategy should set targets for a bus service revolution within an overall plan for improving public transport around centres of population to the level of service provided in Greater London. The role of buses in the Strategy is barely discussed, yet is one of the keys to unlocking some of the challenges discussed.

Walking and Cycling

The Strategy should aim substantially to increase walking and cycling – a target should be set for this. Multiplying these journeys with the aim of moving 80% of journeys of less than 5kms out of cars and onto these low and no carbon alternatives will provide the biggest benefit. An extensive cycle path network, combined with e-bikes to enable journeys of 10- 15 miles, should be part of the Strategy. At the moment the Strategy appears to reduce walking and cycling, whereas it should be a priority for action. The objective must be to connect all of Surrey's towns with dedicated cycle routeways by 2025.

The availability of electric and adapted bikes means cycling is now a mode of transport available to groups previously considered less likely to use cycles as a main means of transport, for example the disabled, elderly or those living in more rural or hilly areas. E-bikes mean a journey of 10 – 15 miles is now within reach of almost all adults. Safe cycle infrastructure (ideally segregated from motorised transport) and secure cycle parking are key to fully exploiting the opportunities this transport mode offers.

Secure cycle parking and e-bike charging should be included in all plans for development.

Air Quality levels

As well as focusing on carbon, air quality is also a major issue in the region. The Strategy should aim to reduce Nitrogen Dioxide levels to less than 30 µg/m³. Although the European and UK current limit is at 40 µg/m³, this is too high. Vegetation is damaged at 30 µg/m³ (brown spots develop on leaves). We need similar levels for PM_{2.5} to be set with a 24-hour maximum of 35.4 µg/m³, which may still be too high for some people.

Any transport development that will cause these levels to be exceeded should be rejected. Moreover, a plan must be developed for any existing transport operations that exceed these levels to reduce their emissions to meet these targets.

Behaviour Change

Transport for the South East is a good forum for supporting the level of behaviour change needed to involve everyone in delivering these goals. A Climate Citizens' Assembly on transport should be established which will promote democratic discussion of these issues, raising awareness, engagement and action. Introduction of a South East Travelcard across different modes of transport could be considered, with a flat fare across the whole journey. A Citizens' Assembly would generate more creative ideas like this.

Submitted by Vicki Elcoate, chair/coordinator of the Surrey Federation of Green Parties