

Connecting Communities Strategy | Consultation summary



April 2023

 TRANSPORT FOR THE
NORTH

Why we consulted

Connecting Communities defines a regional vision for reducing transport-related social exclusion, and delivering a more effective, equal, and inclusive transport system for the diverse areas and populations of the North. Transport for the North (TfN) developed this strategy following an in-depth process of primary and secondary research, and through engagement with Local Authorities and other regional partners.

Following Board approval in December 2022, we consulted on the draft of this strategy. This was to ensure that the strategy fully and accurately reflects the social inclusion challenge evident in the North, that it meets the needs of different populations and areas, and that it provides a compelling vision for achieving progress on this issue. The consultation covered all elements of the strategy, including the vision and objectives, the transport policy agenda, TfN's role, and a framework of policy impacts and outcomes.

The consultation process

Our consultation was open for responses from TfN's partners, from third sector and charity organisations, from universities and academics, and from members of the public. Responses were collected via email and an online survey.¹ The consultation was publicised via our existing mailing lists of key transport stakeholders, via our social media channels, and via the All Points North newsletter. Stakeholders, including community and charity groups working with populations at risk of social exclusion, were also encouraged to share the consultation among their clients, users, and members.

The consultation invited qualitative comments on each section of the strategy, along with a small number of demographic questions. All eligible qualitative responses were analysed using the following approach:

1. Thematic coding: A theme was identified for each part of each response, and a label (or 'code') was assigned to each part.
2. Identification of key themes: The codes for all responses were grouped and refined to identify the key themes evident across a number of responses.
3. Identification of actions: Changes to the strategy and areas for improvement and clarification were identified for each key theme.
4. Responding to actions: Each action was reviewed and responded to, with actions being either fully, partially, or not implemented in the final document. This decision was informed by compatibility with our evidence base, TfN's role as a sub-national transport body, and the balance of comments received in the consultation.

¹ Responses were also invited via post, but no responses postal were received.

Summary of responses

Total number of responses: 123 (including partially completed responses)

Number of responses providing qualitative comments: 41

Qualitative response by type:

Organisations (including Local Authorities)	21
Members of the public	20

Changes identified: 154

This includes direct requests for changes in the strategy, and themes in the consultation responses which were otherwise not fully reflected in the strategy.

Changes fully implemented: 97

All aspects of the change were implemented.

Example: *"Historically, methods for appraising transport schemes have prioritised journey time savings and economic benefits, over social inclusion impacts, as highlighted as a challenge here. TfN could plan a role in advocating for change in appraisal techniques and approaches to prioritise schemes that reduce TRSE and decarbonise transport, even where those schemes don't deliver more conventional travel time savings for private car."*

Response: The action on TfN's analytical framework has been expanded to include advocating for improvements in appraisal assumptions.

Changes partly implemented: 32

Most but not all aspects of the change were implemented. Most commonly, this was due to the change requested already being partly present in the draft strategy, but requiring further emphasis or clarification.

Example: *"Principle 5 regarding the introduction and use of technology in public transport should be inclusive of those with limited or no access to the internet and to banking services both at the point of use and in the provision of information – this principle could be expanded beyond public transport, to recognise that technology introduced for shared mobility and other innovations should be available to everyone."*

Response: There is a specific challenge around public transport information and ticketing, and this finding came through in the research more so than for other elements of the transport system. However, the point in the policy impact and outcome framework on the relevance of technological barriers in other modes has been made more explicit.

Changes not implemented: 25

The change was not implemented. In most cases this was due to the policy or theme highlighted already being present in the Strategy. In a minority of cases changes were requested that contradicted the evidence base underlying the strategy, or which were outside the scope of the strategy or TfN's role as a sub-national transport body.

Example: *"TSRE needs to be communicated in clearer words, which allude to environmental issues relating to transport choice. For example, instead of "TSRE", "Transport Related Social and Environmental Exclusion" might be used, or, for short, "Transport Environment" exclusion."*

Response: Changing the language in this way would mean the strategy does not align with the wider literature and policy context, or with the research that we have conducted. Environmental factors are already highlighted across the policy impact and outcome framework, and in the introduction to the Strategy.

Key themes and our responses

Through our analytical process, we identified the following key themes from the qualitative consultation comments:

Clarify the link between social inclusion and decarbonisation:

Responses stated the need to clarify and give greater detail on the link between the social inclusion challenge evident in the North and the need to decarbonise the transport system. This included recommendations that the central ambition of the strategy explicitly reference the context of decarbonisation. In response to this, we made the need for a fair and just transition explicit in the introduction, and made this commitment one of the four key principles that defines our ambition for the transport system in 2050.

Example: "Decarbonisation and delivering a just transition could be highlighted in the vision and should perhaps be an underpinning principle for addressing TRSE. Without this explicit recognition there is a risk that opportunities to ensure that action to reduce transport emissions may not address TRSE, and in fact could mean increased costs that may have a negative impact on social inclusion."

Response: The draft strategy already included some commentary on the links between social inclusion and transport decarbonisation. However, recognising these comments, a point has now been added in the introduction on the opportunity posed by the decarbonisation of the transport system, and the link to decarbonisation is now one of the four defining principles of our ambition for 2050. Alongside this, the refresh of TfN's decarbonisation strategy will also integrate these inclusion considerations.

Clarify and expand on how the strategy applies to rural areas:

Responses highlighted that there are significant differences between the experience and concentration of TRSE in major urban centres and in rural communities, and several stated that these differences had not been sufficiently represented in the strategy. In response to this, we added a section explaining how TRSE can impact different area types, and highlighted findings from our data analysis that shows that rural towns and fringes have on average the highest level of risk of TRSE. We also reviewed the policy impact and outcome framework to ensure that it was equally applicable to urban and rural areas, and made several changes to reflect this.

Example: "The Strategy captures the issues facing disadvantaged urban communities and their needs and challenges, however its approach to rural areas requires further development. There is little resilience in many rural communities for significant life changes such as redundancy or new health conditions. This creates a particular vulnerability to social exclusion for people in these areas."

Response: A section has been added showing the different nature of TRSE for different area types, including the point on resilience in rural areas. Additional data sources have also been added, showing that rural towns and rural-urban fringes areas have the highest average risk of TRSE of any area type.

Improve the central ambition for reducing TRSE:

Responses stated that the central target of the strategy was not sufficiently well defined, that it was difficult to interpret, and that the timescale and scope of change was not sufficiently clear. This included requests for further information on the underlying data

used to develop our ambition. In response to this, we clarified the time period and nature of the change expected, and the key principles on which this is based. This is now expressed in population terms rather than percentage terms, and reflects differences in the composition of area types between the North and the rest of England.

Example: *"The inclusion of targets for the level and/or rate of TRSE reduction would strengthen the strategy. Are TfN looking to eliminate TRSE from the North of England? And if not, what level of TRSE will be acceptable? Which people and places will be left to bear that burden and why? What alternatives can they be offered?"*

Response: The ambition section has been re-written to give a more precise timescale, with the change in the size of population and end date now more clearly specified. Alongside this, we have added the four principles which define the basis of this ambition for significantly reducing the population at high risk of TRSE by 2050.

Explain and clarify technical elements within the strategy:

Responses stated that some of the key concepts in the strategy were not sufficiently explained, and that the specific aspects of the evidence base underlying the strategy were not always directly cited. This included suggestions that it was difficult to read some aspects of the strategy as a standalone document, without having also read the research report. In response to this, we expanded the introduction and explanation of our data tool, cited key aspects of the evidence in our research publications, and clarified the core ambition for reducing the levels of TRSE in the North by 2050.

Example: *"The methodology used to account for risk of TRSE could create generalisations. There are many examples of isolated communities in urban areas where the areas overall have good public transport links, but communities are in fact poorly connected."*

Response: The nature and function of the data tool has been clarified in the measurement and metrics section of the strategy. This includes the clarification that TRSE can still affect individuals in areas where the risk is low, and that not all forms of TRSE are geographically concentrated. Alongside this, citations to research publications have been added.

Expand the policy impact and outcome framework:

Responses provided a diverse set of recommendations for clarifying and expanding elements of the policy impact and outcome framework. This included clarifications on how technological change can impact some people with disabilities, providing more detail on the role of affordability as a contributor to TRSE, including references to car sharing and mobility as a service technology, and clarifying the broader context of changes required to implement the measures in this framework. In response to this, we added several outcomes in this framework, and reviewed this framework to minimise duplication across the public transport, active travel, and road transport elements.

Example: *"Through the innovative use of new technology, changes in the use of personal transport – for example, Mobility as a Service (MAAS) – could support greater social inclusion in a cost-effective manner."*

Response: RT5 in the policy impact and outcome framework now explicitly includes the potential for addressing TRSE through new technologies, alongside changes in public transport and active travel provision. Detail has also been added on the capacity of different population groups to adopt these technologies, to ensure this reflects other consultation responses.

Highlight the role and contribution of community organisations:

Responses stated that the role of community transport organisations, community rail organisations, and other third sector transport stakeholders had not been included in the draft strategy. These comments highlighted that many of community groups work directly

with populations impacted by TRSE, and that resolving TRSE is closely related to their organisation aims. In response to this, we expanded the policy impact and outcome framework to include transport stakeholders from the community sector, both in their own right and through their capacity to complement the public transport system.

Example: *"We would welcome and encourage that the role of grassroots groups and the community sector, including community rail, be recognised in the strategy."*

Response: PT12 has been added to the policy impact and outcome framework to highlight the need to integrate and enable the community sector, alongside conventional public transport provision and improvements in active travel.

Add metrics and monitoring to the policy impact and outcome framework:

Responses stated the need for metrics in the policy impact and outcome framework, in order that progress towards the ambition of the strategy can be measured. In response to this, we added metrics for all elements of the policy impact and outcome framework or, where a metric is not currently available, highlighted what needs to be developed to enable measurement and monitoring. Alongside this, we have committed to developing an evidence-based trajectory for the rate of change required to achieve our ambition for significantly reducing TRSE by 2050. Where possible, this will also include interim targets on elements of the policy impact and outcome framework.

Example: *"None of the impacts and outcomes at the end have tangible measurable improvement targets, nor dates by which to achieve them."*

Response: The central ambition of the strategy has been clarified and expanded, and metrics have been added to the policy impact and outcome framework. At present, we are not able to specify targets for each metric, but will develop this by the next strategy refresh, drawing on research and data actions set out in the Strategy.

Expand the set of actions for TfN:

Responses recommended a set of additional actions for TfN to take, including conducting further research and data analysis around under-developed aspects of the evidence base. Alongside this, several recommendations were provided on the nuances and details of the actions in the draft strategy. In response to this, we have added additional actions to research the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and current cost of living pressures on TRSE, and have clarified requested details of the existing actions. This includes developing estimates of the level and nature of investment required to achieve our ambition for 2050.

Example: *"To be as effective and influential as possible, a checklist should be clearly based on robust and recent evidence to support challenge questions and any quantification/scoring that might be considered as part of the checklist. Case studies and examples of best and poor practice (to be avoided) would also be useful in making the checklist as useful as possible to local and combined authorities."*

Response: This action has been expanded to reflect the need for case study evidence and efforts to highlight best practice from the UK and elsewhere.

Next steps

The strategy has now been fully revised based on the comments gathered through consultation, and has been reviewed to ensure consistency and to remove any duplication of evidence and actions. The strategy will now be published, and we will deliver on the actions set out for 2023/24 and 2024/25.