

Transport Decarbonisation Plan briefing

April 2021



Summary

The Transport Decarbonisation Plan (TDP) is due to be published by the Department for Transport (DfT) in May or June 2021. It will set out what government, business and society need to do to decarbonise all modes of transport.

Transport is the UK's largest emitting sector. As we recover from the pandemic, DfT has a crucial role to play in getting the UK on track to meet its climate targets. An ambitious TDP will provide a solid foundation for the government's net zero strategy, which should set out the policies needed to achieve the government's climate ambitions and be published in 2021.

The need for a decarbonised transport sector

The transport sector accounts for 34% of the UK's emissions. While other sectors such as energy have made significant progress in decarbonisation, surface transport emissions have [remained flat](#) since 1990 while aviation emissions have [doubled](#). The share of the UK's annual carbon emissions taken up by transport has nearly doubled since 1990.

In March 2020 DfT published its [Decarbonising Transport: setting the challenge](#) policy paper. It takes stock of the current situation and recognises the need for the sector to move further and faster to deliver emissions reductions across all modes of transport, putting us on a pathway to achieving carbon budgets and net zero emissions by 2050.

The government has taken several positive steps to decarbonise transport. The most significant was bringing forward the [phase out date](#) for petrol and diesel cars to 2030. The government has also published a [National Bus Strategy](#), which includes £3 billion investment to promote bus use. DfT plans to publish consultations and strategies on freight, aviation and hydrogen in 2021.

However, the UK still lacks a comprehensive, coherent plan to get transport on track for net zero emissions. The TDP was due to be published in November 2020 and has been pushed back to Spring 2021. Given the climate impact of transport, it is vital that the TDP sets out an ambitious, comprehensive plan that supports rapid decarbonisation and enables a green recovery.

Four priorities for the TDP

1. A decarbonisation roadmap that delivers emissions cuts in the near term

The transport sector is made up of complex networks and a wide range of transport 'modes' – cars, buses, vans, trains, ships, planes, and more. The TDP must deliver the emissions reductions needed to be in line with zero, including by increasing cycling and walking, decarbonising public transport and increasing its use, reducing car use, electrifying railways and buses, speeding up the uptake of electric vehicles and zero emission trucks, and reducing demand for flying.

To this end, the TDP must set out quantified decarbonisation pathways and interim targets for all parts of the transport sector, including aviation and shipping which make up [32% of transport emissions](#). This will help set out clear expectations and drive action in the near term.

Unless the TDP sets out a detailed and holistic net zero aligned plan, transport emissions could scupper the government's pledge under the Paris climate agreement to reduce emissions by 68% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels and meet the UK's legally binding carbon budgets.

2. Contributing to the green recovery and levelling up across the country

£8.7 billion is needed every year to boost low carbon transport and ensure transport infrastructure is fit for the future. This could help create 240,000 jobs by 2030. The TDP must set out how the public and private sectors will promote industrial leadership and facilitate job creation in low carbon industries and applications. Transport decarbonisation offers several opportunities, including with regards to electric vehicle and battery manufacturing, public transport, active travel infrastructure, the electric vehicle charging network and electrification of railways and buses.

The TDP must promote that low carbon transport and employment opportunities across the country, ensuring investment is brought to areas that will be most affected by the transition or worst hit by economic repercussions of the pandemic.

Finally, the health and wellbeing benefits of transport decarbonisation must be maximised. Public transport, cycling and walking should be prioritised to improve air quality, reduce congestion and encourage more active lifestyles. The TDP should also introduce measures to reduce overall traffic levels and the need to travel. To ensure everyone enjoys these benefits, transport decarbonisation policies must be rolled out across the country, in rural and urban areas alike.

3. Policies and regulations to deliver on net zero

The TDP must set out the policies, regulations, taxation and funding that will kickstart decarbonisation over this decade. New policies must be put in place to increase the supply and demand of electric vehicles and accelerate the move away from petrol, diesel and all hybrid cars and vans. The TDP should also facilitate a shift from private car use to walking, cycling and public transport, including through greater investment in active travel infrastructure.

All new transport infrastructure projects should be subject to a test ensuring they are compatible with the UK's carbon budgets and net zero emissions target. Moreover, the government should review its plan for road expansions, which as it stands would significantly increase demand for driving, and consider the need for road pricing. Finally the planning system should be designed so that it prioritises the transition to a low carbon future, including through the delivery of a low carbon transport system.

4. Outlining roles for decision makers at every level

The TDP must call on DfT to measure progress on its decarbonisation targets and report to Parliament each year. It must set out how DfT plans to work with other departments – including HMT and MHCLG – to deliver on low carbon transport policies.

To ensure transport decarbonisation happens at speed on a local level, councils and mayors must be appropriately resourced. The TDP should also provide a framework for decision making so that infrastructure decisions made locally are compatible with the national climate strategy and contribute to the low carbon transition. The TDP must outline how transport bodies like highway authorities will contribute to decarbonising transport. The role of business and the private sector must also be clearly set out.

A more detailed briefing on the Transport Decarbonisation Plan can be found [here](#).

For more information contact

Agathe de Canson, Policy adviser
adcanson@green-alliance.org.uk 020 7630 4553