



CUT CARBON EMISSIONS – NOT PUBLIC TRANSPORT JOBS
Six steps to protecting public transport and the planet

A SPECIAL BRIEFING FROM TRANSPORT UNION RMT

1. Recognising climate change is a local and global threat to lives and livelihoods

The 26th United Nations annual 'Conference of the Parties' (COP26) global climate summit follows the last seven years being the world's hottest on record. Human activity is driving increases in greenhouse gas emissions leading to global temperature rises called climate change. This increases the risk of extreme ecological events such as heatwaves, rising sea levels, wildfires and habitat degradation which could lead to large scale displacement of populations and humanitarian disasters.

In the UK recent events, including flooding, moor fires, intense heatwaves and coastal erosion, are made more likely and more extreme by climate change. The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned that global warming of 1.5°C and 2°C will be exceeded during the 21st century *unless deep reductions in greenhouse gas emissions occur in the coming decades.*

2. Time to tackle harmful transport emissions

Transport is the UK's largest emitter of greenhouse gases. Passenger cars, vans and lorries account for the vast bulk of domestic transport emissions. In 2019, cars alone accounted for 55% of emissions from the sector with 5% from domestic shipping, 2.5% from buses and coaches and 1.4% from rail. Public transport is far more energy efficient than cars, consuming around half the energy per passenger kilometre than private cars, and even less during rush hour, with rail being the most efficient form of motorised transport in terms of energy use. Pre-Covid, emissions from all types of transport had only fallen 2.7% since 1990, while gas emissions from road transport increased by 6% from 1990 to 2017. This is not only bad for our planet but it is bad for our health.

The World Health Organisation estimates more than 40 UK cities are unsafe due to their high levels of pollution. Tens of thousands of people in the UK die unnecessarily each year from diseases caused by air pollution with the estimated financial costs of health impacts likely to exceed estimates of £8-20 bn. The level of carbon reduction necessary to meet UK climate targets means switching to electric vehicles will not be sufficient - instead the distance travelled by car will also need to significantly decrease. Despite this, in 2020 the UK Government announced its biggest ever investment in road building, £27bn over five

years. This will significantly increase car mileage and carbon emissions.

3. Cut carbon emissions, not public transport

We can cut harmful emissions by expanding public transport to encourage people out of cars and onto public transport. But the Covid - 19 pandemic has created a public transport crisis, driving down passenger numbers and driving up private car use. Whilst public transport use is steadily recovering it remains substantially below pre-Covid levels but car use has nearly returned to pre-Covid levels and in some cases is exceeding pre-pandemic usage. This means the Coronavirus crisis is accelerating the climate crisis.

Despite this, governments appear intent on making public transport unaffordable, unattractive, and unavailable. Services are being cut and instead of public transport expansion there is public transport austerity. Rail, bus, tube, metro and ferry services are being denied the funds they need and passengers face eye watering rail fare increases. Thousands of transport workers jobs are under threat - and with them the skills and services so essential for decent public transport. Workers are also facing pay freezes and pay cuts - making the sector less attractive to work in. Less staff for public transport infrastructure and operations means less safety, service and accessibility. Unsurprisingly the passenger watchdog Transport Focus has said passengers want more staff, not less. The Government must stop and reverse transport austerity.

4. A new deal for public transport

As well as ending public transport austerity, we need to begin a new deal for public transport through a green transport revolution that makes services more affordable, available, accessible, and attractive to use. That means reversing the



trend of recent decades where the cost of using public transport has risen above inflation, while the relative cost of using the car has fallen.

As we reduce the cost of using public transport, we must increase its availability. Too often public transport is too far from people's homes or workplaces and poorly integrated with connecting services, making it difficult for passengers to use public transport for the whole length of their journey. Large parts of the country lack easy access to the rail network, and since

2010 funding for bus services outside London has been reduced by 40%, contributing to over 3300 services being cut or altered and the loss of 14000 bus worker jobs. There needs to be a massive expansion of green, properly staffed, integrated public transport coverage, connecting regions, communities and workplaces through extending electrified rail connections and high-speed lines across the country, building hundreds of new regional lines, expanding metro connections and introducing thousands of new bus services.

As Friends of the Earth states *'to attract a significant proportion of people's travel, and hence save significant carbon emissions, a world-class public transport system must extend beyond urban areas to the much larger 'travel to work areas' of suburbs, smaller towns and villages'*.

5. Transforming transport - both ambitious and affordable

Transforming public transport is ambitious but also affordable, this is because the economic benefits of public transport expansion exceed the costs of paying for it. The Rail Industry Association has estimated that in 2019 for every £1 spent in rail, £2.50 of income was generated in the wider economy, while Transition Economics Research has projected that over the course of two years, a railway investment and expansion programme would create in the region of 126,000 jobs and an expansion of bus networks (with new electric

buses bought from domestic manufacturers) would create 9,500 jobs.

The £27bn the Government has allocated to road building over five years should be redirected to improving public transport. We can also release a green dividend of at least £2 bn a year to be invested into public transport by ending the profiteering and inefficiency of transport privatisation and fragmentation and taking public transport into public ownership.

This must include nationalising and expanding rail freight which produces 76% less carbon dioxide emissions than road freight and ensure it is properly integrated with greener road and shipping freight sectors. Transforming public transport can be underpinned by the government legislating to enshrine in policy the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights statement in 2018 that *'transport...should be considered an essential service, equivalent to water and electricity, and the government should regulate the sector to ensure people are adequately served. Abandoning people to the private market in relation to a service that affects every dimension of their basic wellbeing is incompatible with human rights requirements'*.

6. The climate challenge is a trade union and class challenge

Reducing harmful emissions can be achieved through urgent political action which is why RMT is campaigning to defend public transport jobs and services and why we are also prepared to take industrial action to do this. Public transport jobs are green jobs because they contribute to reducing carbon emissions.

If we lose green transport jobs, we sell out existing and future generations and the future of our planet. In common with the national and global trade union movement we believe the climate crisis is not just an environmental problem, it is a problem of social and economic justice. The concentration of global and national wealth and power in the hands of corporations and the governments they influence means decisions around climate change are currently being taken to protect power and profits rather than people and planet.

We must not allow the climate change agenda to be dictated by corporations. That is why a crucial step in challenging climate change is for decisions to be made in the interests of workers through strong trade unions and through campaigning for a more socialistic world where decisions to protect our planet, its species and our livelihoods are made by the many and not the few.

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