



Foreword by the Prime Minister CM 6234



Good transport is essential for a successful economy and society. It provides access to jobs, services and schools, gets goods to the shops and allows us to make the most of our free time. Yet our transport system has suffered from decades of under-investment. We are working hard to reverse this damage and to deliver the environmentally sustainable, reliable and safe transport system this country needs.

There has already been progress. Increased investment is starting to make a difference. Over 100 road schemes have been completed. The M25 is being widened. Bus use is increasing year on year for the first time in decades. More people are using trains than at any time since the 1960s. Our first high speed rail line is open. The West Coast Main Line upgrade will shortly cut journey times between London, Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow. New light rail schemes are open in Nottingham and Tyne & Wear.

But as everyone who travels in this country knows, there is huge room for improvement. This document sets out our vision for transport for the next 30 years with a funding commitment, at record levels, until 2015. The challenge we are setting ourselves is a tough one, but we will move even further and faster if we can.

Our strategy takes a balanced approach. Where it makes economic sense, and is realistic environmentally, we will provide additional transport capacity. We want to see Crossrail in London, road widening and bypasses to tackle the worst areas of congestion, better bus services in our urban and rural areas and many other improvements.

But we also recognise that we cannot simply build our way out of the problems we face. It would be environmentally irresponsible - and would not work. So we must make our existing transport networks work more efficiently and in a more environmentally friendly way. Some plans are in place such as tax benefits for the least polluting vehicles, traffic officers to clear motorways quickly, new traffic control centres, better information for motorists, and simplifying the rail industry.

We will need to go further to deliver faster, greener and more reliable journeys, especially in urban areas. If we do nothing, traffic and congestion will continue to grow, with more delays, higher costs and greater damage to our health and environment. London has demonstrated the potential of charging. There has been a big reduction in congestion as people consider alternatives including sharing a car, using different routes and taking public transport. We will offer local authorities prepared to introduce congestion charges greater control over bus services. This is part of a wider commitment to give more influence over transport to local and regional decision makers.

We must also prepare now for the long term. Over the next 30 years, the demand for travel will continue to grow. A report by transport experts, published today, says that national road charging may be feasible from 2014. This could cut congestion dramatically, while reducing carbon emissions. The key is how, not how much, motorists pay for road use. We will do the work necessary to allow the hard decisions to be taken nearer the time.

Over coming decades the need to tackle climate change will become even more urgent than is apparent today. So we will step up work with partners in business, and around the world, to develop cleaner, greener transport, and reduce reliance on fossil fuels. Progress towards these goals is an important element of our commitment to tackling climate change, reflected in a Government target now shared by the Department for Transport.

There is no quick fix to Britain's transport challenges. The long-term solution lies in the sustained programme of investment and innovation started under this administration and the courage to continue to take difficult decisions. That is what this strategy sets out.

Rt Hon Tony Blair MP
Prime Minister