

CHAPTER 12

GETTING AROUND: TRANSPORT

Imagine being able to leave your car in the garage – or not needing one at all... because reliable, affordable public transport, coupled with safe, clean, welcoming streets for walking and cycling, meets your transport needs. Could that not be the real world?

Like so much else, the UK has got transport upside down. The big picture is a world of finite resources, especially the type that runs much of our transport – petroleum. This is running out, and we know we need to leave much of what is left in the ground. We have to create a transport system based on sustainable alternatives.

We also have an increasingly car-dependent population because the cost of public transport has risen faster than wages and faster than the total cost of driving, and in many areas public transport is so scarce that people have little alternative but to get around by car. This has led to a public health crisis caused by rising levels of physical inactivity and health-damaging air pollution. We also face an increasing toll of death and injury on the roads, particularly among pedestrians and cyclists who face unacceptable danger in our vehicle-dominated and congested towns, cities and villages.

Our privatised railways are fragmented and uncoordinated, ticket prices are high and unpredictable, and timetables do not connect seamlessly with buses at stations. This means rail fails to play its full part in delivering an effective alternative to the private car.

Long-distance travel by air is one of the most energy-intensive and polluting forms of transport and causes health-damaging local pollution near airports. Aviation fuel goes untaxed and there is no VAT on tickets, amounting to a £16 billion a year subsidy in the UK. We need a shift in priority, removing subsidies from air travel to invest in public transport that supports the common good.

In the long run we have to create a transport system that is socially just and addresses health inequality by prioritising affordable access to services by walking, cycling and public transport, by reducing road danger, by cleaning up our air and by minimising congestion. This transport system should use electricity, not oil, and make our towns, cities and villages into more liveable, socially inclusive places.

Against this backdrop, mainstream transport policy, which urges us to travel further and faster than ever before, is senseless, yet this is what all parties except the Green Party offer you.

The key to getting this right is to manage demand rather than increase it; that is, to reduce the need to travel in the first place. We need to:

- Reduce the distances travelled, reduce the number of journeys made by car and switch as many journeys as possible to walking, cycling and public transport;
- Encourage alternatives to travel, such as video-conferencing;
- Integrate different transport options and provide seamless door-to-door journeys;
- Prioritise everyday access for everybody wherever they live to local facilities such as the shops, the doctors' surgery, schools and workplaces; and
- Enable more people to get to where they need to go while using a car less.