
New Localism in Action: **Transport**

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about the authors and acknowledgements

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Professor David Begg is Chairman of the Commission for Integrated Transport (CfIT). CfIT is an independent body advising the Government on integrated transport policy. The Commission provides expert advice and carries out independent research on transport issues and their interface with environment, health, the economy and society generally.

David is also Director of the Centre for Transport Policy at the Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, and Director of the Portobello Partnership. He is a non-Executive Director for the Strategic Rail Authority, a Board Member of Transport for London, and non-Executive Director at the Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive. David also advised the Government during the preparation of the Integrated Transport White Paper and, more recently, the Transport 10 Year Plan.

From 1994 to 1999, David was Convenor of the Transportation Committee on the City of Edinburgh Council and Transport Spokesperson for the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. He was also a member of the Panel of Experts advising on transport policy in Northern Ireland, and a member of the independent Panel of Experts which advised the Railways Task Force on the future of the railway network in Northern Ireland during 2000.

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Stephen Joseph has been Executive Director of Transport 2000 since 1988. He previously worked for a range of environmental and voluntary organisations in the UK and abroad, including the British Youth Council, the Civic Trust and the Town & Country Planning Association.

At Transport 2000, Stephen has written or co-authored many publications and has been involved in promoting policies to give priority to public transport, walking and cycling and to reduce road building and dependence on cars and lorries.

Stephen was awarded the OBE in 1996 for services to transport and the environment. He is currently a member of the Commission for Integrated Transport, having been one of the panel of external advisers on the Transport White Paper, and was a member of the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment during its inquiry on Transport and the Economy.

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Phil White is Chief Executive of National Express Group PLC. A Chartered Accountant, Phil was born in Sheffield and began his career in the bus industry in 1975 with South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive (PTE). In 1981 he moved to West Yorkshire PTE and was involved in setting up Yorkshire Rider, following deregulation of the bus industry.

In 1988, Phil was part of the team which completed a management/employee buyout of Yorkshire Rider. He joined West Midlands Travel (WMT), the main bus company which operates around the West Midlands, as Finance Director in 1994 and was subsequently appointed Chief Executive in 1995. WMT was acquired by National Express Group in 1995 and Phil was invited to join the National Express Group Board in January 1996. He was appointed Group Chief Executive in 1997. He currently manages a business with turnover of over £2.5bn and bus, coach and train operations in the UK, the United States and Australia.

Dan Corry

Dan Corry became Director of the New Local Government Network in September 2002. Prior to this, he spent five years as a Special Advisor, first at Department of Trade and Industry and then at the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, covering all policy areas and working for Margaret Beckett then Peter Mandelson and finally Stephen Byers.

From 1992 to 1997, Dan was Senior Economist at the ippr, where he also founded and edited the journal *New Economy*. He began his career as an economist in the civil service, at both the Department of Employment and HM Treasury, and from 1989 to 1992 headed the Economic Secretariat of the Labour Party.

Dan's publications include *Public Private Partnerships* (with Julian Le Grand and Rosemary Radcliffe) (ippr, 1996); *Regulating in the Public Interest* (ippr, 1995); *Public Expenditure: Effective Management and Control* (Dryden Press, 1997); *New Localism: refashioning the centre-local relationship* (with Gerry Stoker) (NLGN, 2002); *The Regulatory State: Labour and the Utilities 1997-2002* (ippr, 2003); *Joining-Up Local Democracy* (with Warren Hatter, Ian Parker, Anna Randle and Professor Gerry Stoker) (NLGN, 2004) and a recent edited collection *London Calling: reflections on four years of the GLA and solutions for the future* (NLGN, 2004).

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The papers have been edited by Ian Parker of NLGN, who would like to thank Lisa Cunningham and Kiran Dhillon for their assistance in helping him fine tune this collection. He would also like to thank Eleanor Southwood for organising the original seminar.

introduction

The New Localism in Action Project

NLGN has been a key protagonist in the debates about the way we deliver our public services and govern ourselves. Our argument, laid out in the 2002 report, *New Localism: refashioning the centre-local relationship* is that we need to devolve down decision making to the lowest sensible level. Our belief is that - wherever possible – decision-making should be as close to the user as possible, that the ‘joining-up’ agenda happens more easily at more localised levels and that clear accountability, efficiency and engagement are much more likely to be achieved when this is the case. But we have also been clear that in almost all services there will be key roles for all the different tiers of governance – national, regional, local and even neighbourhood. We are not arguing for a naive ‘localist’, ‘free-for-all’ position.

As a think tank focused on local government, we have also been keen to see how these agendas play out with respect to local authorities. Despite many false starts from New Labour, they are now being given new freedoms and flexibilities, with the prospect of more to follow. These are mostly in the form of reduced ring-fencing of funds, ‘lighter touch’ inspection from the centre, having to produce fewer strategies and plans for central government departments, and freedom to trade and to borrow. We need to know how these freedoms and flexibilities can be used innovatively to make a difference on the ground. We also need to know what the barriers are to effective action – and which freedoms most need to be developed in the near future.

Rightly, there is now a debate about the perceived drawbacks of New Localism. For instance, won’t more local freedoms and less centralism lead to more ‘postcode lotteries’? As centrally-imposed targets are relaxed, what will happen? Will there be an even wider range of service levels and quality, and is this acceptable? We need to address these issues head on, to see what practical issues they raise – and find out how to overcome them.

So much for the theory. For in truth the key question has to be whether if we did alter our centralised state in a New Localist direction it would lead to better outcomes for citizens. In a series of seminars entitled ‘New Localism in Action’, NLGN has therefore been trying to pin down the implications of New Localism across a range of key services delivered locally. We wanted to look at the opportunities and challenges presented by potential moves to decentralise decision-making across a range of policy areas, namely transport, education, anti-social behaviour and housing. We will publish a collection of essays on these topics in Autumn 2004 and draw out some overall conclusions. In the mean-time however, we are producing a series of ‘e-pamphlets’ reflecting the papers presented at the seminars, aimed particularly at specialists in those areas. This publication is the first in that series.

Transport and New Localism

In the transport seminar, we focused both on the key issues affecting the transport agenda and on the implications of moves to enhance the powers of local government, devolve decision-making and bring in regional tiers.

This ‘e-pamphlet’ represents the papers produced on the transport issue. The papers were given at an event in March 2004 and subsequently revised. We are very grateful for financial support to National Express and to those who have attended the seminars and/or given the authors comments. The authors are:

- David Begg, Chair of the Commission for Integrated Transport, who gives an overview of transport policy and challenges;
- Stephen Joseph, Chair of Transport 2000, who examines the transport opportunities and threats from a more local perspective;
- Phil White, the Chief Executive of National Express, who gives his insights from the perspective of the private sector.

The papers that follow were prepared and revised before the recent publication of two government White Papers on transport: *The Future of Rail*¹ and *The Future of Transport*². While the details lying behind the proposals outlined in these two documents are yet to be fully explained and worked out, it is very encouraging to see that some of the basic thrust of our discussions – about devolving where possible – looks like it has been heeded. Indeed some of the statements and policies show that the concepts behind New Localism are in different ways being embraced.

Some of the Government's words could have come straight out of these papers:

'The Government is committed to an increased role for the devolved administrations, and for local and regional stakeholders on rail, where there are politically accountable and financially robust institutions, a clear financial responsibility and a distinct geographical pattern of service responsibility'. (The Future of Rail, paragraph 5.3.1)

'... as far as possible decisions should be made at the local level, close to those whose lives they will affect. But this needs to be balanced with the impact at regional and national level and with the benefits that can be gained from taking advantage of economies of scale'. (The Future of Transport, paragraph 9.2)

On some specifics, the White Papers suggest that Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs) look set for increased powers and the Mayor of London is to get more powers over rail in the capital. In both cases these changes reflect attempts to shift the decisions onto the accountable tier more fully so that rather than, for example, PTEs seeing trams and local trains as a 'free' good financed from the centre (or not built at all), they themselves will have to make trade offs between these options and arguably more cost effective ones, like more buses.

The White Papers also make clear that local councils are seen as crucial in the fight against congestion. Given this, the centre is clearly trying to alter the set of incentives they face so that they might dare to be radical on this agenda. So a new Transport Innovation Fund has been set up which can "support local packages which combine road pricing, mode shifts and better bus services".³ In addition models where local authorities have more control over bus services – through 'Quality Contracts' – look set to be made easier.⁴

So the plates are shifting. The Government is trying to think about how appropriate governance and accountability at the right levels – as local as possible – can in fact help produce better public services, more cost effectively delivered. This New Localist approach – whatever the terminology they actually use – is to be warmly welcomed. But as the papers presented here suggest, the Government could go much further still. We hope that these papers – and our final report in due course – will help thinking progress further along these avenues.

Dan Corry

Director, New Local Government Network

¹Department for Transport (2004) *The Future of Rail*, London: TSO, 15 July

²Department for Transport (2004) *The Future of Transport*, London: TSO, 20 July

³*The Future of Transport*, op. cit., para 3.31

⁴See also Department for Transport (2004) *Quality Contract Schemes for Bus Services: consultation document*, London: DfT, 1 July

Chapter 1 The challenges of Transport policy

David Begg

The whole concept of new localism has to be right for local transport. Whitehall can provide the policy framework, the tools for the job and some of funding to pay for it. But in transport more than in almost any other policy area, local politicians, local people and local communities are better placed to agree their own priorities and the delivery of them. Whitehall can't decide what's best for those living in a National Park, a socially excluded area and a big city. There is no one size fits all in transport. Traffic conditions vary, geography plays a part, lifestyles differ.

But does this approach work in practice? Unfortunately, when it comes to transport policy in particular, there are quite a few examples of where it doesn't. Evidence shows that as soon as Whitehall loosens the purse strings and the policy grip, local political realities take over and transport becomes the policy Cinderella.

The Commission for Integrated Transport (CfIT) recently carried out its own survey of local authority officers and councillors to see how the single capital pot was working out for transport. The general answer was "not well". A whopping 62% of respondents said money was being siphoned off, mainly to prop up education and social services budgets. Another CfIT report showed that 9% of total transport allocation was not being spent by authorities. It might not sound like much, but across the country this adds up to millions of pounds.

Left to their own devices some local – and national – politicians take a short termist political gain game. We have all seen it. When the ruling party tries to act responsibly and bring in a new pedestrianised area or a stretch of bus priority lane, all the others go running for the votes pandering to the motorist and the shopkeeper. All parties do it. They curse it when they are in power and they take full advantage when they are not. The longer term interests of the community and the voter are sacrificed at the altar of the cheap shot. No wonder so few people turn out to vote at local elections.

So can new localism actually be too local? I can point you to examples of self-interest by local authorities that have the voters in despair.

Let's take a look at just one example. A 'big city' has an overheated economy with cars piling off the motorway onto the link road to the city each morning. Congestion is diabolical. A solution is at hand - a major park and ride site beside the motorway to attract much of the traffic. Commuters would glide smoothly and quickly to the centre of the city on a dedicated bus lane. Less congestion, less time, less hassle, less pollution.

How is it working? Well, actually, years on and nothing has yet been agreed. The problem is simple and tragic. The land for the park and ride site belongs to the neighbouring local council and they don't want their area turned into a car park. The result: urban sprawl has stretched out to the unitary authority's boundaries.

So what is the solution? We know that the current structure of local government is not working in transport terms. People's daily journey to work often involves travelling through more than one transport authority. It is extremely difficult to get joined up transport in these circumstances. The experience of trying to implement Park and Ride bus schemes is just one example.

Too small an area creates other problems too. Let's examine congestion charging for a moment. Two towns 25 miles apart are being crippled by traffic congestion. On the face of it congestion charging looks like it might be worth pursuing. But human nature gets in the way. Authority A knows that as soon as it announces it is going to look at charging, Authority B

will state publicly that it will guarantee it will never come in there. The result: property and development blight at city A and boom time at city B.

Is a bigger tier of government, for example regional government with transport and planning powers, the right way to go? They would certainly have the benefit of covering larger areas eliminating boundary problems. But let's look at the North West as an example. How much synergy do the cities of Liverpool and Manchester really have with the Lake District? With such different needs to be catered for, would a regional approach be able to be sufficiently sensitive?

So if we are going to accept new localism as the way forward, we need to be sure that local authorities can be trusted to deliver since there is only limited evidence of it happening now. Worse still, the Department for Transport is waving the big stick at many of them and threatening to tighten up its targets or cut off funding to the most recalcitrant.

How then are we going to build the confidence that is so necessary to deliver new localism? What are the golden tests that are going to be needed? Let us take a look at a selection.

For example, by all means set tough targets for town centre traffic speeds in congested areas. Faster speeds are good news for car drivers and public transport users alike. To deliver them means a commitment to radical action.

And why not get political buy-in from all local parties to the transport agenda. Putting in and taking out bus lanes every couple of years depending on who is in power delivers nothing. Have a city-wide debate, agree a plan and move it forward. Local transport is regarded as the most important issue locally according to a CfIT survey⁵ and is too important to be a political football.

We need proof that more local authorities can get on with their neighbours and deliver common sense solutions that offer the greatest good for the greatest number – irrespective of what borough they happen to be in. We do not need to wait for structural change for councils to foster stronger links with each other and work for the greater good of transport users on all their regional journeys and not just the bit that runs through their own boundaries.

A few binding commitments on transport spending would not go amiss either. That is the attraction of Scotland's new concept of Joint Boards – bodies which have the power to set a budget that is binding on the constituent local authorities. Their structure is similar to Police Authorities in that they can precept council tax to fund their services. This power is something that the 1968 Transport Act did not put at the disposal of English Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs) who would love the opportunity to claim this money for transport.

Joint boards also have another power which PTEs would benefit immensely from - jurisdiction over both public transport and roads alike. Joint Boards cover a number of local authorities in a travel to work area and are therefore able to integrate transport planning, land use planning and economic development policies across the region, in order to achieve the best returns from public investment and to avoid the zero sum game of intra-regional competition for resources.

What is in no doubt is that the structure of government must change if we are to deliver sustainable communities and provide vital transport services for the public.

⁵Commission for Integrated Transport (2001) *The CfIT Report 2001: Public Attitudes to Transport in England*, London: CfIT

Chapter 2 The opportunities and threats of a more local perspective

Stephen Joseph

The media and political debate about transport tends to focus on the national transport network and on big schemes – the railways (especially the big projects like the West Coast Main Line and Crossrail), motorways, airports, the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, for example. Local transport is seen as the unglamorous end of the business; except when things go wrong or can be presented as anti-motorist (like traffic restraint schemes or speed cameras) it gets no press attention.

But local transport matters. Most journeys are very local – a third of all journeys are under a mile, and half of all car journeys are under five miles. Even on the railways, local journeys predominate. Virtually all movement starts and ends on local networks, and most traffic on supposedly national or strategic networks is local. Local authorities manage 95% of roads, fund 15% of bus services outside London (and 100% in London), fund and co-ordinate various local rail and tram operations, and these and other local decisions are a major influence on the demand for movement by individuals and businesses.

More importantly, good local transport is integral to (and taken for granted by) many other areas of public policy. Access to education, healthcare, employment, police/justice services, shopping and the like requires good local transport networks. New developments and new communities need good access by public as well as private transport. The problems caused by national transport trends are played out at local level, and have to be dealt with by local authorities – increased congestion as motoring costs fall in real terms, increasing costs of public transport as fares rise and congestion hits bus services, road maintenance problems, increased traffic from new car-based developments and decentralisation of public services are just some examples. For local councils and councillors, these translate into sometimes virulent arguments about parking provision and charges, speeding traffic, poor public transport and road works.

The current framework for local transport was set by the 1998 Integrated Transport White Paper⁶ and the Transport Act 2000⁷ following it. Local authorities have to prepare a local transport plan, running for five years, with annual progress reports. These plans have to include a number of elements, including a bus strategy, and there are various powers that local authorities can in theory exercise if they wish over buses (through Quality Partnerships and Quality Contracts) and also charging for road use or for workplace parking spaces. However, none of these have so far been used, apart from the celebrated examples of charging in London and Durham. The plans themselves however have been widely welcomed and are regarded by local councils as an exercise in good governance and policy-making.

However the Local Transport Plans (LTPs) are narrower than originally envisaged; at one time they were to look at all transport operating in the locality, however financed. In practice they have focused on bids and spending for local transport funding, having been excluded - Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs) apart - from dealing with rail and trunk roads. They have become an instrument of Whitehall control rather than an expression of local autonomy and vigour – their view as a “burden” underlined by the fact that councils ranked ‘excellent’ in their Comprehensive Performance Assessment don’t have to prepare a LTP.

That said, the problems for local transport lie less with the LTP system itself than with the context within which it operates. Pressure from motoring groups, media and opposition parties, especially the fuel tax protests of September 2000, has led the Government away from the approach underlying the 1998 White Paper and towards rather more pro-car policies, with the abandonment of the fuel duty escalator and a move back towards road building. The performance problems and

⁶Department for Environment, Transport & the Regions (1998) *A New Deal for Transport: better for everyone*, London: DETR

⁷Department for Transport (2000) *Transport Act 2000*, London: TSO

escalating costs on the railways has also led to the abandonment of various rail development schemes, and question marks over light rail projects. Underlying cost pressures in the bus industry are leading to route withdrawals and fare rises in some areas, while motoring costs are projected to fall by 20-30% 2000-2010.

This environment makes it difficult for local authorities to do anything that might tackle traffic problems seriously. Any real improvements to local public transport will involve giving priority to buses or trams over other traffic. Parking controls or increased parking charges are highly controversial. Councils do not feel inclined to go for any more radical traffic restraint if the Government is not going to support them.

This lack of government leadership or support is just one of the problems local authorities face on transport. There are several others:

- **Local authority powers are limited.** For example:
 - Councils have limited powers to improve bus services in a deregulated framework. Operators would like to see more bus priority, but as noted already there is no real incentive for most local authorities to take the sometimes hard decisions necessary to improve bus operating conditions – they get no direct share in any revenue gained by operators (though operators will invest where councils give them priority over other traffic).
 - Rail services are outside any formal local authority control and influence, except in PTE areas.
 - New development adds to pressures on local transport networks but councils have few powers to get developers to contribute to improvements (Section 106 agreements can't really assist in the case of large new developments, though Cambridgeshire is doing its best to pool S106 contributions, and may even result in perverse incentives for greenfield development)
- **Local authority funding for transport is limited and there are no national standards for provision.**

The Department for Transport (DfT) gives out capital funding for transport using the LTP annual progress reports, but revenue funding is given by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) as part of general local authority grants and indicative spending. And it is revenue funding that is often most needed by councils, especially for bus subsidy or for staff to work on programmes such as travel plans that are actually more cost-effective than large capital schemes. Even within the ODPM allocations, there is no transport Standard Spending Assessment – there is only one for road maintenance. Buses and other transport services are lumped with “other” non-statutory services like libraries and museums. On top of this, there are no minimum standards set by central government for transport, unlike with education or social services. All this makes them vulnerable to cuts when discretionary funding is short, and even the DfT transport capital funding can be and is diverted to other local authority services where government and electoral pressures are stronger.

- **Local authority structures fragment transport decisions.**

The various waves of local government reorganisation and reforms have created several problems. Some councils are simply too small to tackle transport problems, for example because they only cover a fraction of a conurbation or travel-to-work area. Failure to co-operate, or indeed open warfare between neighbouring councils, is not

uncommon (For example there was a long-running row between Bristol and South Gloucestershire over the route of a proposed Bristol tram) and often leads to complete inaction. Small councils sometimes face problems in attracting good skilled transport staff. Where there are two-tier council structures, the problem is different. In the metropolitan areas, the Passenger Transport Authorities and PTEs are successful in many ways, but it is the districts who control highways, making it difficult to arrange bus priority or even to have common rules for bus lanes across the conurbations. Counties have no detailed planning powers (and under the new planning bill will have less) and lack the PTE public transport powers and funding (the non-metropolitan districts even licence taxis).

- These problems are made much worse by the **lack of a clear regional or sub-regional framework.**

Local transport plans are supposed to have regard to Regional Transport Strategies (RTSs) prepared by the Regional Assemblies. However, these assemblies, as joint committees of local authorities – albeit with added “stakeholders” – have no incentive or in some cases enough staff to think strategically or set priorities. They have after all no budgets or even indicative spending limits from the Government. Instead, the RTS too often ends up as horsetrading between councillors along the lines of “If you support my pet transport scheme, I’ll support yours” and unaffordable, unprioritised, unjustified and environmentally destructive wish-lists of schemes are produced - often more as lobbying tools aiming to get money from central government or at least to shift the blame for inaction to the centre than with any real expectation that the schemes will be delivered. And that is just with transport directly – the wider consequence of the lack of such a framework is that transport strategies and decisions are divorced from planning and economic development decisions.

Councils and assemblies, and the Regional Development Agencies too, react to fear of competition for development from neighbouring areas and authorities, and there is a “race to the bottom” where councils compete to offer more greenfield car-based development or more and cheaper parking than their neighbours. This is unsustainable development in every way, creating congestion and social exclusion as well as environmental damage and also undermining existing urban areas and any real regeneration that might happen there. Minimum parking standards for new developments, supposedly set in RTSs / Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs), fall foul of these pressures. Below the regional level, there is a clear gap, yet no powers to fill it. In some cases, authorities have filled it themselves, or history has played a part – the Tees Valley authorities co-operate on transport planning, a South Hampshire transport partnership has been formed and Nottingham and Nottinghamshire produce a joint LTP, for example – but the Government has few formal powers to compel co-operation, even if it wanted to (It has shown few signs of using informal pressure to promote co-operation). In some cases, regional structures are clearly flawed – for example, the unitary councils in the Avon area have no representatives on the South West Regional Assembly’s transport group.

- Another problem, in transport as elsewhere in local government, is the **lack of autonomy.**

Councils find themselves facing separate pots of government money, with targets and indicators attached, to fund separate programmes and initiatives - economic regeneration, planning, neighbourhood renewal and environment. Councils also find themselves dealing with transport impacts from a range of non-transport policies and programmes – new hospitals, school reforms and magistrate court reorganisation for example – which the sponsoring government Department has not considered. The powers to charge for road use and workplace parking do offer in theory a route to some financial autonomy, but there is no guarantee of genuine additionality and, as noted already, the disincentives to exercise them are strong.

- Added to all of this is a **lack of integration**. Integrated transport has become a slogan, but it has a number of meanings, as Alan Wenban-Smith has described. In ascending order, he suggests:
 1. Integration between transport modes, for example through ticketing and interchange – competition rules have too often stopped sensible integration of this sort
 2. Integration between transport planning and land use planning, building transport infrastructure to follow new development
 3. Integrating land use planning with transport - planning development where it places transport networks under least strain
 4. Integrating management of demand on transport networks – internalising external costs
 5. Integrating locational choices, land use and transport planning with demand management across all modes – linking transport to other policy areas.

Failure to integrate transport in these ways has huge consequences for local authorities and for the shape of our cities and patterns of development. The result of policy change in recent years is that we have in fact slipped back to level 2, without exploiting much of level 1.

The result of all these problems together is that, too often, there is poor delivery of transport on the ground, poor transport planning and a set of other policies and funding streams creating more transport problems. This is not by any means general – there are notable successes in making local transport work, in rural as well as urban areas, and historic cities and national parks tend to be better at it because some control of traffic is economically as well as environmentally clearly in the general interest. But too often and particularly in deprived areas, the problems overwhelm any transport initiatives and the poorest in society, as well as the wider environment and economy, lose out.

This contrasts with European experience. It is commonplace in the UK transport debate to contrast poor transport in the UK, especially public transport, with much better and cheaper European provision. Clearly in some cases distance and the holiday spirit can exaggerate, but there is solid evidence (for example in Commission for Integrated Transport reports⁸) that European countries do experience better provision in public transport, better integration between transport and planning of land use and economic development, and hence reduced reliance on the car (the UK has lower levels of car ownership than many other European countries of similar economic strength, but our car mileage per head per year is among the highest in Europe and our public transport use and cycling is among the lowest).

Such evidence is notably true in rural areas. Research for Transport 2000 examined rural transport in Greater Copenhagen, Friesland in the Netherlands and North Rhine-Westphalia, and compared provision with the UK.⁹ It was clear that the European regions had much better provision, especially of rural public transport, including:

- “cheek-to-cheek” bus and rail integration with integrated timetabling and ticketing
- widespread use of flexible public transport (taxibuses, door-to-door transport, shared taxis) but as an integral part of a full public transport network running from early morning to late at night, seven days a week, not as stand-alone services (for example, taxis meeting buses on request from the bus driver; train-taxi services; taxis or taxibuses franchised to provide an on-demand service, sometimes to replace buses at evenings or weekends)
- integrated fares and ticketing, so that one ticket can take you from door to door
- high quality information about transport networks
- integration of cycling with public transport.

⁸For further information, visit www.cfit.gov.uk

⁹Sloman, L (ed) (2003) *Rural Transport Futures*, London: Transport 2000

Higher public spending on transport was clearly a factor in this provision, but it was only one factor. What seems to make the difference is that in other European countries there are **strong local and regional authorities** with clear powers and duties and a level of accountability to co-ordinate public transport and to provide services.

This creates two types of benefits compared to the UK.

First, there are network benefits: integrated ticketing and timetabling, providing door-to-door services on one ticket, with clear minimum standards based on population size and density, giving users some idea of what they can expect to get. It should be stressed that such benefits can provide better value for money – local transport in the UK is bought and provided by many disparate agencies, with special transport services to enable access to education, health and social services or for disabled people, whereas the kind of high quality mainstream transport in these European case studies can replace some of the need for this specialist transport.

Second, these are in turn part of wider packages and benefits. For example, good public transport and cycle networks are in European practice linked to high quality street design and urban development to provide urban areas that people choose to live and invest in. They also form part of car-free tourism packages in some Austrian resorts or the Hoge Veluwe National Park in the Netherlands which offer travel passes or free local buses, demand-responsive taxis at night, cycle networks and bike rental, all as part of a visitor package deal to reduce traffic impacts in environmentally sensitive areas.

Both of these types of benefits are undervalued (or in some cases ignored) in UK transport planning and appraisal, but they go some way to making real the link between good local transport and other public policy outlined above.

It might be said that the UK has been as good as anywhere else in experimenting with flexible public transport. There have for example been urban and rural bus challenges and Rural Transport Partnership funding of innovative transport services and these have created very good and high quality transport services. Implicit in these schemes, however, has been the idea that local authorities will take up and spread good practice developed in the projects funded. This is not a realistic expectation in the absence of a large-scale public transport network which includes flexible transport and which has continuing secure funding and co-ordination from strong local or regional transport authorities (this point is amplified in research by Peter Headicar for South West Transport Roundtable).

Ways Forward

Where do we go from here, and how can we head in a direction that gives us at least some of the European outcomes and wider benefits? There is, in fact, a range of solutions available, and existing devolved administrations show some of the way forward for England. Scotland has more transport powers devolved than Wales, but both are moving in similar directions: towards regional partnerships of local authorities, with backstop powers to compel authorities to co-operate with each other within these partnerships. These partnerships will plan and fund transport within their regions, but with funding and oversight from Cardiff or Edinburgh. In London, the Mayor controls strategic roads, buses and the Underground (as dictated by the Public Private Partnership) and distributes local transport funding to the boroughs.

All of these offer some ideas for ways forward. In thinking about local transport in the rest of England, some principles come from this and from the analysis of the problems above.

First, we need to apply subsidiarity. There are some things that only Whitehall can do, and it should concentrate in setting **clear national and regional frameworks**, and avoid micromanaging. Localism has its limits; a free-for-all will produce precisely the “race to the bottom” already described, and the weakest communities fare worst. The frameworks need to:

- link transport planning with land use planning and economic development
- integrate transport into other policy areas to maximise access to key facilities
- allow for consistent pricing signals
- create clear responsibilities and budgets that enable delivery and give powers to make trade-offs
- require public involvement, transparency and accountability, including strong official transport user bodies

They also need to encourage rather than discourage co-operation between authorities.

Second, we need **greater devolution of transport powers and funding** within these frameworks. Transport authorities need to be free to use all local transport funding freely and to deal with local transport problems as they see fit.

There are essentially two paths for creating such frameworks and devolution in England, and I want to explore and outline both of them.

The first is through **directly elected regional assemblies**. The Government’s proposals for these currently include very little devolution of transport powers – local transport plan funding and some rail grants may be devolved, but that is it. We need to be much bolder. Regional assemblies powers and duties should include:

- **Establishing a transport policy framework**, which would take account of the duty to promote sustainable development, to ensure regional government prioritises more environmentally friendly transport options. The strategy should support the regional social, economic and planning roles. It must then have the power to act, and to invest, to ensure implementation. Regional government should also have a duty to consult and involve the public in transport strategies and decision-making. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill already requires the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) to promote sustainable development, but in transport terms this needs to translate into targets on traffic levels. Integrating transport planning with the wider regional strategy should ensure that regional economic development strategies and regional spatial strategy are co-ordinated with regional transport strategies, actively reduce the need to travel and promote sustainable development. Assemblies should be empowered to work with local government to establish and implement a policy framework for a range of issues, including road charging/congestion charging; parking; and concessionary fares. These powers would contribute to the wider economic and environmental aims of regional government.
- **A major role in rail services and investment**. Every other European country – even France - has seen devolution of powers and funding for regional and local rail services to regional authorities or groups of authorities, and the Rail Review, announced by the Government in January, specifically includes devolution as an option. There are many ways this might be done: by giving franchise powers over certain types of rail services (the German authorities have powers over rail services within 50km), by allowing regions to fund extra services on top of the existing franchise, or by extending the system used with PTEs and the Scottish Executive who co-franchise services with the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA). Rail planning will need to be exercised with the SRA, which could retain overall control of the timetable and planning/funding for inter-city and freight services, but this has not proved to be a problem in other countries.

- **Control over roads.** The devolved governments in Scotland and Wales have been given control of all roads in their area, and the Greater London Authority controls all strategic roads in London except the small sections of motorway. Regional assemblies are apparently to get no such powers, even though motorway and trunkroad traffic is mostly regional in nature (only 7% of traffic on the M1 in the East Midlands is travelling to/from south of Leicester and north of Chesterfield). The work of the Highways Agency is a prime candidate for transfer to regional government. Some basic national standards – of road management and maintenance, for example - might be needed, but extending the detrunking already being implemented would give assemblies real choices in transport spending.

To implement their transport strategies, regional assemblies should have the power or duty to create **regional transport authorities** (RTAs) answerable to the assembly. These would have powers and funding to plan and co-franchise rail services in the regions and to set and enforce minimum standards for public transport provision, minimum parking charges and maximum parking standards. Parking charges and also levels of parking in new developments are key ways to tackle congestion and traffic, and regional authorities can discourage local authorities competing for new development by offering plentiful free parking. County transport executives should be established, to implement the RTA's plans and policies; the existing Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs) and new ones with similar powers in other counties. A single regional executive would probably be too big, remote and unresponsive, especially when drawing up local bus strategies – a set of county or city PTEs answerable to the regional transport authority combines regional oversight with local management, and builds on the PTEs and the excellent public transport work done by many county and unitary council transport officers. Some regions already have public transport user forums, supported by the Rail Passenger Committees; these should be created in every region and linked to the Assemblies and their transport authorities.

Assemblies should also have powers to charge for road use and non-residential parking (working with local government), with the funding going to local and regional transport investment. But these charging powers should not be the only source of transport funding for assemblies, which must be able to fund the implementation of their transport strategy and improve investment in public transport. This will require precepting or other tax raising powers to pay for transport investment alongside other regional priorities. Regional government should take over transport grants from central government, including the current grants for rural transport. It will need powers to access capital.

With this range of duties and powers, assemblies would be able to get things done on transport, but would have to consider the wider costs and benefits and link transport planning to economic development and land use planning. As noted above, the superior transport systems and networks in other European countries, and their lower reliance on the car, stem from regional bodies with good planning and funding regimes. With the creation of regional assemblies in England and the transport partnerships in Scotland and Wales, the UK and devolved governments have the chance to do this here too.

However, this will apply only where directly elected regional assemblies are approved in referenda, and it is clear that opinion in many regions in England, including at present the midlands and southern England, is against any regional assembly and indeed does not identify with any region (Cornwall sees itself as having little in common with Bristol, for example). A plan B is therefore necessary to address the problems I outlined earlier. Features and options for this alternative can be outlined as follows:

- **Joint local authority working and partnerships:** the Government should encourage joint working between authorities. The models include the PTEs (which should get some highway powers), the South Hampshire ('Solent') partnership between Hampshire, Southampton and Portsmouth, and the joint LTPs mentioned earlier. This might also involve creating or encouraging formal transport partnerships between counties and district councils in those areas with two-tier authorities. Some existing joint local authority bodies like National Park Authorities could be encouraged to develop more local transport planning and provision.

Such joint working and partnership could be encouraged with sticks and carrots: the Government might take backstop powers to require joint transport planning and funding for areas like Avon or the Thames Valley (or between authorities – for example Cheshire, Merseyside and Greater Manchester) and conversely it might reward authorities working jointly with more powers and funding. This might be done in a non-statutory way, but an extension of this would be to adopt the German ‘verkehrsverbund’ model, where authorities group together to plan and deliver transport services (as is the case with the Munich grouping of the city council and the region of Bavaria).

This could mean **creating a new legal entity** with transport powers – for example, clearer powers to create integrated ticketing systems and to plan public transport networks, as well as over rail services (see below). Groupings of councils could then apply or be designated with this legal status. Issues of accountability arise instantly here, and joint councillor groupings are the minimum necessary for this – public involvement in strategies and service planning is also essential. A more radical position would be to give such legal entities precepting and/or borrowing powers to raise their own funding and/or to act as collectors / recipients and spenders of road charging revenue.

- **Improved regional frameworks and funding:** the Government could give indicative budgets to the regions or sub-regions, to allow trade-offs and priority-setting. Just knowing what the total regional / sub-regional transport pot is would be a start, but a more radical version of this involves putting in all current transport spending in a region or sub-region – Highways Agency and SRA spending as well as local transport – and allowing councils to decide how to allocate funding. This has already been proposed by the Greater Manchester PTE, and the Government is experimenting with this through Regional Transport Boards in the South East and in Yorkshire and the Humber.
- **Minimum standards and transparency:** it is sometimes argued that localism and local autonomy should be balanced against minimum national standards that set out clearly what people have a right to expect – a ‘citizen entitlement’. There have been examples of local authorities cutting bus subsidies and services or abolishing or doubling parking charges as an explicit part of an election platform, and minimum standards would set limits on this. Yet this would interfere with this democratic process.

One solution might be to have nationally set standards and services (and perhaps frame these in terms of accessibility standards for particular facilities like health and education as well as levels of bus services or other more output-driven measures), and require councils to report on their approach to these through transport plans (or maybe accessibility plans), but without compulsion to meet them. Regional public transport user forums, already mentioned, could be strengthened and funded to comment on minimum standards and to tackle and voice user concerns. Councils would then have complete freedom to fall below or exceed such standards, but the decision to provide less or more would be transparent and electorates could then decide if they were happy with this. If however a single council was holding up agreement on a service or provision (for example, an area travel pass) that would benefit a wider area, government could then have the reserve powers to require co-operation.

- **Earned autonomy:** if the Government is really not happy with letting go of powers and funding, then it should at least give local authorities that perform well with clear strategies extra funding and maybe powers, while authorities that do not have a clear strategy or are not consistent with the regional transport strategies could be given less. ‘Extra powers’ might involve more powers over buses and rail or more freedoms to swap capital and revenue funding. More proactive monitoring of LTPs would be an essential part of this process. But this is really minimalist and not in any new localism agenda.

Reform the LTP system make it more strategic and to create closer links between different Government budgets and initiatives – transport, economic development, neighbourhood renewal etc – and also **between transport and land use planning**. Such reforms could involve:

- Good links between the new Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) and local transport plans, and between LTPs and the RSSs. LTPs could be lengthened to 10-15 years and linked to and approved alongside LDFs with a clear requirement to demonstrate how the LTP/LDF strategy will, for example, tackle congestion, ensure reliability and accessibility, meet air quality standards and provide an adequate network of public transport.
 - There could be community transport plans below the LTPs, devolving some transport decisions to very local level or at least planning transport and travel through community involvement such as street audits.
 - Pooling of transport budgets, perhaps through ‘community brokers’ or local authority transport co-ordinators, to ensure that all public sector funding for transport in an area is looked at together (counties like Devon and Cheshire have been doing this for many years). If this were tied to accessibility, with ‘accessibility grants’ replacing the large number of different transport grants (especially in rural areas) this would assist in the minimum standards framework suggested above.
- **Funding reforms** depend on how far general autonomy is given to councils. If the current system continues, then we need a separate transport assessment, including bus services and other transport along with road maintenance. If more freedom is given, councils must be free to add to revenue through charges on new developments and have more incentives for road user charging, which needs to be genuinely additional.
- **Devolution of rail services:** already raised as an option by the Rail Review and also by the SRA’s recent Community Railways strategy, this could see individual councils or groups of local authorities taking over responsibility for funding and franchising local rail services. This would build on existing community rail partnerships, such as the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership. Some national framework would be needed to ensure network benefits were retained. At the minimum, extra powers and freedoms to fund local rail services are required – for example, councils facing road traffic from Felixstowe should be able to fund rail upgrades to transfer it to rail.
- **Trunk roads:** there could be further detrunking or transfer of control of trunk roads to groups of local authorities providing suitable management, planning and funding regimes were in place.

An evolutionary approach like this would allow some practical benefits to be provided fairly quickly (for example, the Solent partnership has been able to create a Solent travelcard valid on 14 bus operators). It would build up organisations that can provide and co-ordinate transport services and integrate them with other policy-making and delivery, without waiting for larger scale local government change. The wider suggestions of greater devolution and autonomy within clear national and regional frameworks would, if adopted, start to overcome the problems with local transport outlined earlier.

It might be said that none of this is achievable without full-scale bus re-regulation. This is not the place to get into that debate; I only comment, first, that in many rural and some suburban areas, there now few or no commercial bus services – what buses exist are subsidised - and that, as the SRA’s recent Community Railways strategy observed, subsidised buses

and trains are in some places running in competition with each other or at least in a completely unco-ordinated way. Secondly, there are many ways in which some of the European outcomes listed above might be achieved within the current system, for example through the 'quality networks' concept of replanning all commercial and tendered public transport services in an area from scratch. Thirdly, if local transport is to be linked to wider public policy, as I argue, this may require different approaches from both operators and local authorities, and neither London-style tight specifications nor the complete commercial freedom elsewhere may be appropriate. What however is clear from European practice is the need to bring taxis and taxi licensing within the framework of public transport co-ordination. The incentives for operators to provide community transport as part of franchises is an example from the Netherlands that deserves further study, and taxi licensing is essential for this.

Overriding all of this is the debate on road user charging, which has the potential to transform the transport debate and the issues facing local government. Just to give one example: if the Government wants to move towards some kind of national scheme, it will need pathfinders. How about giving councils that agree to be pathfinders enough money to halve council tax for five years? That would change the transport debate radically! More generally, any move towards more widespread charging will require authorities able to collect and spend revenue wisely and in ways that voters and motorists can clearly see as improving things – the evolutionary creation of stronger local and sub-regional joint transport authorities and joint working would be a way towards this. This applies also if, as the recent Barker report¹⁰ and many others have suggested, developer contributions or increased land values are put into an infrastructure fund, since the transport elements of this will need to be properly planned and spent.

In summary, local transport suffers from fragmentation and lack of integration, and also from clear frameworks. It is, I believe, consistent with new localism for government to set clear frameworks and then give councils freedom and powers to work within those and raise revenues to fund good local transport services. Where elected regional assemblies are created, these should be given stronger transport powers than currently envisaged – elsewhere, a more evolutionary approach promoting joint working and pooling of budgets could bring some benefits quickly. Other countries have such frameworks and local freedoms, and their local transport seems to be better than ours.

¹⁰Barker, K (2004) *Review of Housing Supply – Delivering Stability: Securing our Future Housing Needs*, London: HMSO

Chapter 3 A private sector perspective

Phil White

The National Express Group is one of the largest private companies working in public transport today. We have operations in the UK through our trademark fleet of express coaches which proudly carry our name up and down the country's major highways. We are also the largest operator of trains in the UK. We operate both Intercity, Regional and Commuter services including Midland Mainline, Central Trains, c2c and on 1 April 2004 took over the management of all the rail services operating out of Liverpool Street.

The Group also operate Europe's largest urban bus fleet in the West Midlands and in early 2004 entered the London bus market through the acquisition of Connex bus in South London. We also operate public transit buses in the United States and Australia and we also run school buses in North America where we are the third largest operator. We employ 43,000 people - over half of them overseas.

The National Express Group is not just another public transport group. We believe we are quite different and believe this is shown with the range and quality of services that we provide. We are an international business but our focus is local. We operate local businesses which are run by local teams to meet the needs of local customers and communities.

Out of the 43,000 people who work with us, only 50 are based at our London headquarters. The centre determines the overall strategy for the Group providing expertise to our companies where necessary and securing the important element of strict financial control over the whole business. We help local teams integrate sensible best practices into their operations, ensuring we deliver quality services for our customers.

Our local approach to public transport is our passion whether it be double decker buses in Birmingham, trains in Herefordshire, school buses in Kansas city or coaches running out of Victoria coach station. The National Express Group consists of over twenty-five brands. Our local approach underlies our entire business culture. We think local, we act local and we put our focus on local. Our only national brand is National Express itself – our express coaches. We are a devolved business with autonomous local management. Our managers have responsibility, accountability and the power to run their operations to provide a quality product for their customers and quality returns for their stakeholders.

The Group is the largest bus operator in the West Midlands and I believe we are the best quality bus business in the UK. That said, we are human and we don't always get everything right all the time.

Travel West Midlands is the UK's single largest bus network. It has all the day-to-day challenges that come with an operation of this size in a large metropolitan area. 1,800 buses, 5,000 drivers. One million passengers every working day. It's a big business. We have invested substantially in this operation, particularly in quality partnerships, which have delivered good passenger growth and which we believe are the key to continued improvement in bus networks.

Working alongside West Midlands PTE, Centro, and the local councils, we have been successful in introducing new low-floor easy-access buses, buses priority measures, new infrastructure and improved customer information. All this has resulted in patronage growth that has not been seen in the bus industry for nearly 50 years. 66% of our fleet is low-floor easy-access – a figure that will increase to over 70% by the end of 2004.

We believe that the West Midlands model is the right model for the provision of buses services in the UK. Locally run with low fares, high service levels and frequencies, with money ploughed back into the business for major investment. All this at little or no cost to the local taxpayer. Nearly the whole of our bus network in the West Midlands is operated commercially,

requiring no subsidy from the local authorities.

But we never stand still.

Take Coventry, for example, who for some time felt that they were not being served well by both ourselves and Centro. They felt they were the poor relations of the West Midlands family and were not getting value for money out of their bus network. They simply felt that our bus services were not sufficient to meet their needs and in fact wanted to rectify this by pushing for a 'quality contract'.

So what did we do? Well, we listened to our stakeholders in Coventry and worked with them to change things. In December 2002 we introduced a new local livery for the city's bus fleet, with a new local brand, 'Travel Coventry', using the colours of the local football team and reflecting the spires of Coventry Cathedral in the logo. This wasn't just a paint job, we invested in new fleet, new technology, smartcards, and new customer information.

We have since taken this a step further. Together with Centro and Coventry City Council we drew up a Concordat - a formal partnership agreement - setting the strategy for public transport over the next five years. The result is a better service for passengers and a new relationship with the local authority. But we haven't stopped there, and we are currently carrying out a full joint review of the entire Coventry network to see if we can make things even better.

This shows how devolution and localism works and just what can be achieved by the public and private sectors working so well together in such a positive environment. We have worked closely with our colleagues in the West Midlands. We don't always agree on everything – there's plenty of healthy debate.

One issue we have yet to resolve is how the private sector can achieve successful investment in road infrastructure which can help make our bus services more reliable. All of our customer surveys tell us that reliability and punctuality are the major factors sought by our passengers. Believe it or not, fare levels come well down the list.

Travel West Midlands committed some £30m in 1999 to help local councils improve the road infrastructure for bus operations. To date, and some four years later, we have spent just £2m. Bus priorities, bus lanes, guided bus ways are all hard decisions for elected members. But without these, bus travel will continue to have a negative image of the transport of last resort.

As the current operator of the ScotRail train franchise, we have worked with a devolved government to deliver better rail services for customers. ScotRail is not just a railway line, it is a national railway. It operates 2,000 trains a day over a complex geography, over 300 stations, 3,400 staff, providing sub-urban, inter-urban and rural services north of the border as well as the Caledonian Sleeper. We see the daily challenges that the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive and the local authorities have to face, and recognise the balance that needs to be achieved between local, regional and national bodies involved in the planning and operation of transport.

The key to getting it right is making responsibilities clear and providing clarity between the decision maker and the ultimate provider of funds.

We operate a devolved management structure. Devolved management brings lots of benefits but local management need to understand the priorities of the parent company and the aspirations of its shareholders. This understanding is not achieved overnight. The model has to be tried and constantly retested. At National Express we have made localism work because we operate simple 'golden' rules in the relationship between the Board and local management. Sticking to these rules is essential for success.

- Both sides have to trust and respect each other – good relationships are key. There must be no surprises. Each party has to be frank and open.
- Issues must not be swept under the carpet. They have to be outed immediately and must not be allowed to fester.
- Figures have to be delivered on time, every time – whether three year plan budgets or monthly reports – bad news always travels slowly.
- Localism cannot be achieved without strict discipline within the business. Issues can't be fudged.
- And finally, responsibilities have to be clearly defined between local management and the corporate centre. Although we give power to the local companies, there are certain aspects of the Group that must be managed centrally – cash management, capital investment and the balance sheet. Here the centre has to be strong and somewhat autocratic. There is no room for negotiation on some of these issues.

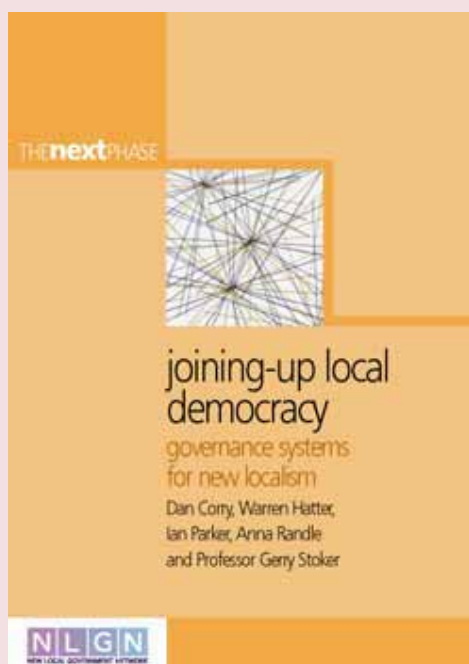
Although these rules for successful localism are applied in the circumstances of a company listed on the London Stock Exchange, they can be flexed to suit the circumstances of many relationships; for example, between central and local government; public/private partnerships and the various relationships at local level – such as those between PTEs and local councils.

At the end of the day it is all down to trust, discipline and hard work – and good working relationships.

To summarise:

- Local transport is all about local people;
- For local transport to succeed there has got to be local delivery;
- Local partnerships are essential to make public transport more attractive;
- Everyone involved must clearly understand the rules and their roles and responsibilities;
- The centre – whether central government or a corporate HQ in a PLC has a major role to play. This cannot be ignored.

The National Express model for localism in transport does really work. The results speak for themselves. The best deals are where everybody wins. In our case our customers, our employees, our stakeholders and both central and local government as well as National Express itself.



Joining-Up Local Democracy: Governance systems for new localism

Dan Corry, Warren Hatter, Ian Parker, Anna Randle and Professor Gerry Stoker

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Since NLGN published its call for a refashioning of the relationship between central and local government in the UK, the phrase 'New Localism' has captured the imagination of policy makers and practitioners alike – with civil servants and politicians across the main parties increasingly keen to reveal their decentralising rhetoric.

Joining-Up Local Democracy: governance systems for new localism takes the debate back to basics and considers both the main principles on which sound local governance should be built and the criteria by which to best judge its performance. Proposals for the introduction of local directly elected bodies in health, the police and elsewhere are also assessed, as is the case for

increasing the power of councils to join up services. In concluding, the authors argue that our increasingly complex society demands a pluralist approach to local governance with a strong but by no means exclusive role for local government.

'This is a debate that is long overdue. What is most needed now is greater imagination about what is possible, and greater rigour in thinking through the implications. This pamphlet – by some of the people most directly involved in recent arguments about 'New Localism' – is therefore extremely welcome. It helps to give shape to the arguments and usefully focuses in particular on what should be the unique selling point of local government – its ability to see things in the round. NLGN should be congratulated for leading the debate once again.'

Geoff Mulgan, Head of Policy, Prime Minister's Office

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NLGN has been a key protagonist in debates about the way we deliver our public services and govern ourselves. Advocating 'New Localism', we have long stated that decision-making should be as close to the user as possible, that the 'joining-up' agenda happens more easily at such levels and that clear accountability, efficiency and engagement are much more likely to be achieved when this is the case. But we have also been clear that in almost all services there will be significant roles for different tiers of governance.

The primary question has to be whether major changes to our centralised state would lead to better outcomes for citizens. What opportunities and challenges would be presented by moves to decentralise decision-making across a range of policy areas, namely transport, education, anti-social behaviour and housing? ***New Localism in Action: Transport*** focuses both on the key issues affecting UK transport policy and on the implications of moves to devolve decision-making and bring in regional tiers.

This e-pamphlet is the first in a series based on papers given at an ongoing NLGN seminar programme: New Localism in Action. The series aims to pin down the main implications of New Localism across a range of key public services delivered locally.

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