

# On the Move: Transport for Thriving Communities

Shaping Stoke-on-Trent's Local Transport Plan 2026-40



# Foreword

We need your help to build a transport system that actually works for the people of Stoke-on-Trent.

Right now, our transport system is not working as it should. It's not working for workers, families, students, small businesses. When buses don't show up at the right time, when roads are full of potholes when services don't go to the places people need them to; it's a system that's rigged against ordinary people trying to get by.

We've heard the stories: parents who can't get their kids to school on time, shift workers left with no way to get home, residents who feel cut off and isolated. We've seen what happens when transport doesn't connect people to jobs, to education, to healthcare, to each other. It drives inequality, it holds back growth, and it undermines the promise of our city.

But it doesn't have to be this way.

This prospectus sets out a bold, practical plan to fix our transport system. It's built around a core belief: everyone deserves access to safe, reliable, affordable, and green transport. Not just those with a car in the driveway. Not just those lucky enough to live near a good route. Everyone.

That means better buses that actually go where people need them, when they need them. It means fixing our roads and pavements. It means making it safe and easy to walk, cycle, or use a wheelchair. It means making greener travel the most convenient option - and giving people a real choice.

**This plan focuses on six priorities:**

1. Public Transport That Works for Working People
2. Fix the Roads, Smooth Your Journey
3. End the Gridlock, Clean Up our Air
4. Build Streets for People, Not Just Cars
5. Make the Green Option the Easy Option
6. Rebuild Rail for the Many

At its heart is the idea that we need a real alternative to the car. Because the truth is, if you don't have reliable public transport, you don't have access to opportunity. And in a city where car ownership is below the national average, that matters.

We also know we can't do this alone. Real change takes all of us: residents, workers, community groups, businesses, transport providers, and neighbours across Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire Moorlands, and beyond. We're ready to work with everyone. But we're not here to protect the old way of doing things - we're here to change it.

## That's where you come in.

As we prepare the city's new Local Transport Plan, your voice matters. Your ideas, your frustrations, your hopes - they will shape this work. And your input will help us make the strongest possible case to national government: that Stoke-on-Trent must be at the centre of the UK's future transport strategy.

So take a look. Speak up. Share your thoughts. Because a better future is possible - but only if we build it together.

## Let's get to work.

Councillor Gordon-McCusker –  
Cabinet Member for Transport,  
Infrastructure and Regeneration

Councillor Jane Ashworth OBE –  
Leader of the City Council and Cabinet Member for  
Strategy, Economic Development, Culture and Sport



# A Rolling Start

Potteries' lives tend to be lived locally. Most of us work, study and enjoy ourselves within North Staffordshire's boundaries. The purpose of this consultation process is to identify the best ways to create an affordable and integrated transport system which allows people to get around our conurbation with relative ease and in comfort. So, we propose to improve all forms of transport – from the cycleways through to improving the roads and making it easier to power-up electric vehicles.

Our ambition is to see a Stoke-on-Trent which is easy to efficiently get around, and where travel to and from the city is smooth and straight-forward. We also want to see a transport system which does less harm to the environment and contributes to the UK's Net Zero ambitions.

## The scale of the issue within Stoke-on-Trent

We are a busy city. Every day, over 2.3 million vehicle miles are driven on our roads. Over 32,000 residents of neighbouring districts, mainly Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire Moorlands, Stafford and Cheshire residents come into the city to work. Many more come to study at the University and FE college. Royal Stoke University Hospital serves more than three million people and receives 150,000 A&E visits a year and with other local health services generates journeys into and across the city. At the same time, over 28,000 city residents travel to work outside the city boundary. Robust transport links between the city and Newcastle-under-Lyme are critical for supporting Keele University and the hospital's regional role, while the Staffordshire Moorlands' proximity underscores the need for sustainable travel options that reduce rural isolation. Stafford's strategic role as a key administrative and economic centre for the county makes enhanced connectivity with Stoke-on-Trent crucial for fostering mutual growth and regional collaboration.

Despite this heft, and despite the car ownership level in the city being below the national average<sup>2</sup>, our public transport system does not make these journeys easy. In some neighbourhoods it is not possible to get a bus home from the city centre after 5pm; in other places, buses do not run early or late enough to satisfy many shift patterns. We know many people in the council's frontline workforce that must rely on private transport to get to work. Of course, the more disadvantaged a neighbourhood, the fewer the cars per household and the more important public transport becomes.

<sup>1</sup> Royal Stoke | University Hospitals of North Midlands

<sup>2</sup> Car or van availability - Office for National Statistics

Central to our vision is a bus, rail and active travel system so good that it is a realistic and viable alternative to travel by car. We want to see a bus service that crisscrosses the city, on good roads – at the right times, at the right price and going to the right places. These priorities come from common sense and recent conversations with residents, transport groups and business representatives. They all tell us that travel around the city and North Staffordshire should be our priority, and they tell us that our current transport system needs improving to improve journey time reliability, reduce the network's environmental impact, to support new developments and should prioritise moving people over goods.

At the same time, we recognise the value of sustainable travel to the environment and the value of active travel to individual health and wellbeing. We want to make our city a safe and pleasant place to cycle and walk, especially by improving our blueways and greenways.

The improvement journey will need to be future proofed too: alert to the changes expected in the city. As the national government drives a decade of growth, there will be new housing developments, new business sites and support for innovation and growth, less red tape and greater policy stability, increased living standards and investment in green infrastructure which will need to be integrated into the transport networks. Because the city's population endures a lower skill level than the national average, we expect a considerable uptick in training opportunities; because of our higher rates of under-employment than our neighbours, we expect inward investment to make good use of the newly available workforce.

As things stand, we are distant from our vision. It will take time, investment and cross-sector collaborations to bring our transport system up to scratch. The city council alone will not sort out these problems, not even when working alongside the neighbouring District Councils and the County Council. We recognise that working with all the interested parties is key to achieving sustainable change.

We invite all the key players in the public transport sector to work with us to find opportunities to align strategies and operations; share information; avoid conflict and misunderstandings, and, importantly begin to share a vision. The city council already has strong relationships with government and local neighbours, regional agencies, network operators, user and interest groups. The depth and strength of collaborations vary from formal inter-authority shared service partnerships, and long-term contractual arrangements, to regular information sharing with partners.



## Funding the improvements

Public investment and subsidy are needed to create and then maintain a viable transport system.

Currently, this subsidy and investment is haphazard and comes from multiple sources. For example, road maintenance is funded by both councils and central government, but the level of government funding changes from year to year. It is similar with cycleways, where investment from government is managed through occasional opportunities to competitively bid for government grants. Recent investment in our bus services came from a one-off grant from Government.

It will be easier to plan our transport system when the Government enacts its promised reforms and changes the way cities are funded: higher rates of more predictable and reliable funding coupled with greater local discretion will let the city plan and deliver what is best for the city.

The cost of each of the priorities suggested in this prospectus varies. Each priority includes a cost estimate of the type of work under consideration. This is included to give readers an idea of the levels of investment we need to see a high performing transport system in the city.



# Better transport will enable the city to benefit from the Government's missions...

A good transport plan is more than just a plan to make movement easier. It is also an education and skills plan, an equalities plan, an employment plan, an environmental plan and a health plan. In the long run, good transport policies will contribute greatly to our city making the most of the opportunities presented to North Staffordshire under the new Government Five Missions to create a better and more equal Britain.

## Government mission: break down barriers to opportunity

A good-enough transport system will reduce inequalities in the city and contribute to the improved wellbeing of residents who become able to get to work, college and health services, or who can get out to see their friends and family. In particular, it will make life better and easier for residents in the more deprived and isolated parts of the city.

The 2021 study, 'Connecting communities: improving transport to get 'left behind' neighbourhoods back on track<sup>3</sup> affirms the social impacts of poor connectivity in deprived neighbourhoods where there is likely to be a higher dependence on public transport but declining provision. For example: journeys to hospital from the UK's deprived areas take 34% longer; 24% of those households who are out of work and live in more deprived neighbourhoods are without access to a car.

Due to our particular industrial heritage, Stoke-on-Trent has an extensive network of blueways and greenways that offer active connections between our communities. These offer safe, accessible and health-giving walking and cycling options. Wider take up of such active travel will contribute to increasing active lifestyles and reducing health inequalities.

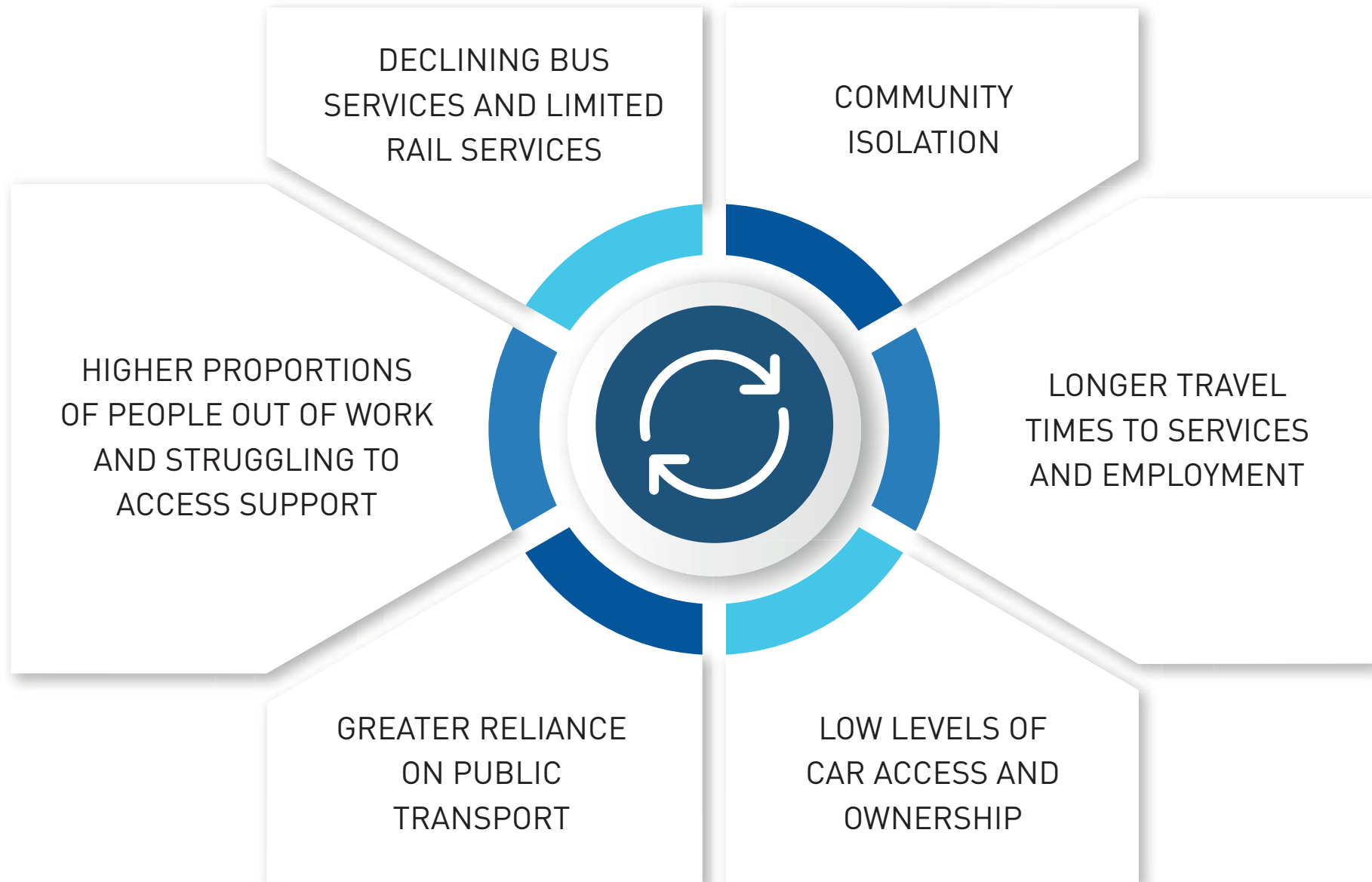
Like many post-industrial cities, the residents of Stoke-on-Trent experience persistent inequality by a multitude of measures and these are shown in Table 1.

Measure	National data	City data	+/-
<b>Working Age Population in employment</b>	UK level 75%	78.5%	+3.5%
<b>Aged 16-17 and NEET</b>	UK avg. 10.4%	16.5%	+6.1%
<b>Key Stage 4 score (2021/22)</b>	50.9	43.2	-7.7 points
<b>Adults with Level 3 qualifications or higher</b>	England avg. 61.5%	50%	-11.5%
<b>Students going to University</b>	England avg. 44%	38%	-6%
<b>Healthy Life Expectancy – Men (Years)</b>	England avg. 61.1	55.9	-5.2 years
<b>Healthy Life Expectancy – Women (Years)</b>	England avg. 63.9	55.1	-8.8 years
<b>Gross Weekly Pay</b>	UK avg. £642.20	£552.00	-£90.20
<b>Long term sick / economically inactive</b>	UK avg. 25.4%	39.6%	-14.2%
<b>Physical Inactivity</b>	England avg. 22.3%	27.5%	-5.2%

Table 1: Inequalities between Stoke-on-Trent and the national average

<sup>3</sup> Connecting communities: improving transport to get 'left behind' neighbourhoods back on track - APPG for Left Behind Neighbourhoods

This vicious cycle of community isolation shows the reinforcing factors disconnecting communities, correlating, causing and creating poor connectivity in 'left behind' neighbourhoods.





# Government mission: Kickstart economic growth

Stoke-on-Trent's access to major strategic routes like the M6, A50 and West Coast Mainline railway makes it a key corridor for UK freight, distribution hubs, industry and employment, bringing local economic benefits and a burden of extra through traffic. Effective transport infrastructure that connects Stoke-on-Trent with nearby areas, particularly Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands, is vital for driving regional growth and maximising the area's strategic geographic advantage. It comes as no surprise then that Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce (the collective voice of 1000+ local businesses), is explicit of the geographic competitive advantage of the area and the role that transport plays as a key enabler for business, calling for improved transport infrastructure, reduced congestion, and enhanced public transport to facilitate smoother movement of people and goods as well as accessible and affordable public transport to get people to and from work. These views were repeatedly reinforced at our Transport Forum in May 2024 attended by businesses, regulators, transport operators and others, with 73% of attendees agreeing that investment should be targeted at development to regenerate the city and 75% agreeing that priority should focus on adding capacity to our existing roads, reinforcing local connectivity as a key priority.

We will work with residents and employers and the colleges, as well as with the transport operators, to provide a convenient and sensible service which supports business growth.

Residents, including those living in the pockets of high unemployment across the city would benefit from a better transport system that allows them to get to work or to training more easily.

There were no direct services to the employment area of Trentham Lakes, from Bentilee and Longton areas, despite the close proximity of Longton to this area. A new bus service is being piloted to fill this service gap so that residents from the south east of the city can benefit from easy and rapid access to this growing employment area.

Another area of the city which has benefitted from enhancements to early morning services is Longton to Meir Park, which is another key employment zone. We must make getting around the city easier.

In 2018, 18.5% of unemployed people in England either turned down a job or decided not to apply for a job due to transport-related problems<sup>5</sup>.

We need to upskill residents to improve and maintain our transport network - especially in the fields of artificial intelligence; traffic management; green technologies; frontline technical skills in road, pavement and other asset maintenance professions.

<sup>4</sup> Business Manifesto 2024 - Flipbook - Page 1

<sup>5</sup> Difficulties in job searching due to problems with transport - The Health Foundation

# Government mission: Make Britain a clean energy superpower

The UK is committed to reaching net zero by 2050, In 2021, the UK transport industry accounted for 26% of the UK's carbon emissions, so transport must decarbonise. As the responsible steward for the transport network and its assets, the council recognise its ethical duty to lead the way and build the foundations for our people and businesses to lead more sustainable lifestyles. This plan commits to reducing our consumption of fossil fuels. We will do this by:

- Accelerating our own fleet transition to alternative fuels.
- Collaborating with the city's key employers and institutions to align and accelerate the change.
- Facilitating a service so good that leaving the car at home, or not having a car and taking the bus or train are realistic choices.
- Working with the colleges to train mechanics in green vehicle maintenance
- Increasing the viability of walking and cycling to work and college or university
- Delivering a network of publicly accessible EV charging infrastructure across the city

# Government mission: Take back our streets

Helping residents to choose public transport over private cars requires more than just making sure the buses and trains run on time. Safety is paramount.

Residents and visitors need confidence that they are safe when making their way to a train station, bus stop or station, when waiting for, or whilst on the bus or train. Because they are bustling, crowded places, transport interchanges and the surrounding area often attract anti-social behaviour and opportunistic crime. We will ensure key locations on the public transport networks have monitored CCTV at selected stops feeding into our citywide CCTV hub.

The council has joined together with Staffordshire Police to invest in four Transport Safety Officers who, since July 2024, have patrolled across the City's bus network, on board services and at bus stops, including the bus network, including Hanley Bus Station and Longton Interchange. They provide a reassuring uniformed presence to deter and prevent anti-social behaviour and provide general reassurance for passengers. These officers have accredited powers to issue fixed penalty notices, obtain personal details and proactively deal with nuisance behaviour. Penalty notices are issued for behaviour such as littering, flyposting and vandalism.

# Government mission: Build an NHS fit for the future

It is our intention to make sure bus services run at times NHS workers need – and when patients need to get to our major hospitals.

We cannot dictate individual travel choices, nor specific schedules or routes to commercial bus companies, but with more government subsidy we can promote more subsidised bus routes for the benefit of many NHS workers and their patients. We cannot currently control bus fares but this would change if a case for local bus franchising is made out.

Neither can we force people to be physically active, but we can make it easier through embedding active travel infrastructure into new developments and by promoting active travel – walking and cycling – we will increase levels of physical activity and so reduce the burden on the NHS. Wellbeing studies estimate that every adult who starts to become more active creates a social wellbeing value of between £1,200 and £2,500 every year, for 11-16-year-olds this social value is even greater (1.6 times more than adults) valued at between £1,920 and £4,000 a year avoiding health conditions that place a real financial burden on the NHS.

As large employers in the city, we will develop our staff travel policies and patient/customer transport choices with this in mind.



A good transport system is not just about getting around the city. Better transport is a foundation stone in regenerating our city. Transport impacts on all these key concerns.



# Proposed Transport Priorities

These suggested priorities follow talks with transport network operators, special interest groups, network users and partner agencies. We welcome your feedback.



## Priority One

### **Public Transport That Works for Working People**

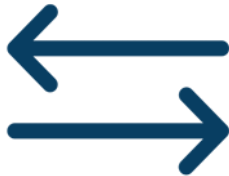
Reliable, affordable buses that get you where you need to go - on time and without breaking the bank.



## Priority Two

### **Fix the Roads, Smooth Your Journey**

Resurfacing our streets and repairing pavements so everyone can travel comfortably - whether you drive, walk, or cycle.



## Priority Three

### **End the Gridlock, Clean Up our Air**

Tackling congestion so we waste less time in traffic and breathe easier in every part of the city.



## Priority Four

### **Build Streets for People, Not Just Cars**

Making it safe and easy for kids to walk to school, for older people to get around, and for everyone to choose cleaner and healthier travel.



## Priority Five

### **Make the Green Option the Easy Option**

Investing in electric vehicles, green initiatives and low-carbon choices that work for every budget and every household.



## Priority Six

### **Rebuild Rail for the Many**

Better stations, more frequent trains, and new connections that open up jobs, education, and opportunity for all.

## Our suggested priorities

Over the next few pages, we will tell you about some improvements that could be made, who benefits, what they would deliver, what the challenges are and how much they might cost.



# Priority One : Public Transport That Works for Working People

Our consultations led to these key concerns about bus travel in the city:

- Bus services do not adequately cover the city by reliably going to the right places, at the right time at the right price.
- The link between buses and trains is not maximised.
- The roads are in poor condition and traffic congestion is often localised and unpredictable: the road network is hyper-vulnerable to incidents on the A50, A500, and M6.
- The shift to alternatively fuelled buses should be more actively encouraged.
- Bus journeys need to be more reliable.

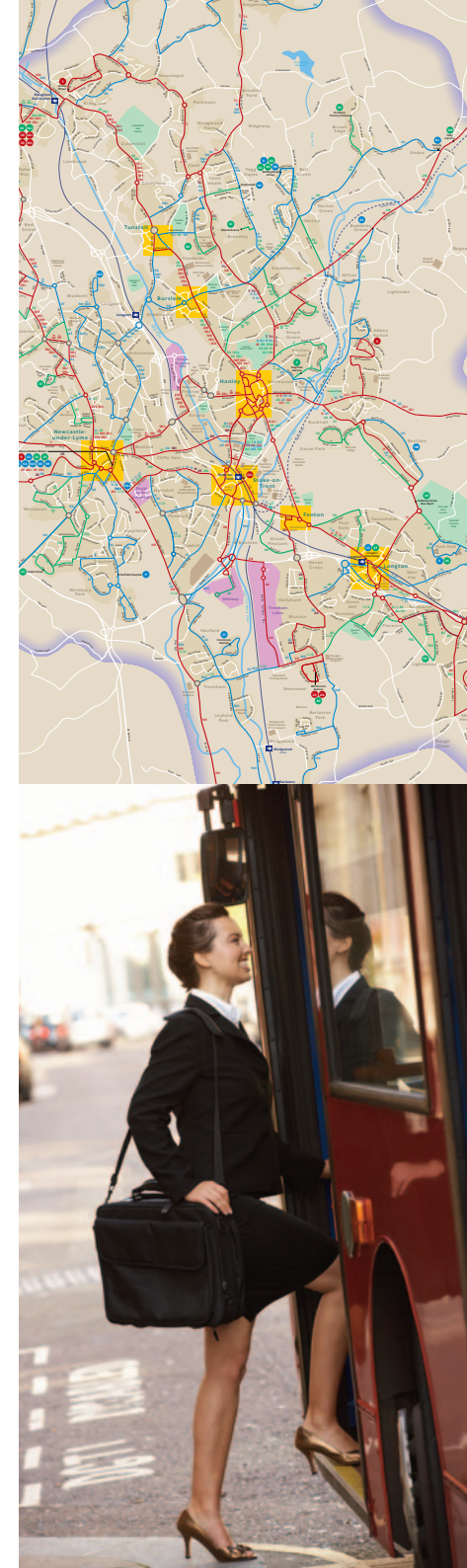
We see improving the bus service as our priority. A recognised way to do this is by creating a system known as Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). BRT can become the backbone of our public transport network for the foreseeable future.

The thinking behind a Bus Rapid Transit is simple: people will use buses if they are faster, reliable, frequent, run at the right times and are clean and welcoming. Over the last year, the council's investment in partnerships with operators demonstrate this is a reasonable assumption – the case studies below show that a good quality service will attract more passengers.

The key to effective Bus Rapid Transit is an enhanced road management system which privileges bus services so passengers move quickly across the city, with minimal delay. With a BRT, road priorities must change giving buses priority at some junctions, extended green light phases at other junctions and design changes to change to secure bus priority.

We prefer the Bus Rapid Transit to a tram system because it is more realistic, easier, better value, and more flexible to adapt to local travel demands. It is quicker and less disruptive to establish Bus Rapid Transit routes than it is to lay tram tracks. Even so, it is important to note that some of the features of a tram system can be built into a BRT. These include: good quality shelter at stops; running on clean energy and modern ticketing machines. We want to negotiate a single range of tickets usable on all operators' services, and quicker tap-on-tap-off Transport for London system. As there can't be direct services to and from everywhere, we will ensure good interchange times and facilities, at an attractive price with information at every journey stage.

With a Bus Rapid Transit, routes, schedules, and passenger capacity can change as needs demand. The Bus Rapid Transit system does not rule out a tram or light rail system in the future, instead it provides a viable, cost-effective improvement pathway.



Work can start now to create pilot routes and we have a realistic chance of introducing features of a Bus Rapid Transit routes across the city by 2026. The creation of Bus Rapid Transit routes for buses only could take a decade or more to carefully consider and deliver. Such corridors may not prove necessary.

The exact routes and facilities would be subject to public consultation and viability studies to make sure the routes connect our communities with key destinations, linking transport modes across North Staffordshire, recognising our high commuter exchanges with Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands residents and businesses.

It is particularly important to ensure safe and easy access for disabled people: we will directly consult with disabled passengers to co-produce answers to the barriers they face.

In some parts of the country, local authorities have acquired the power to franchise bus networks. We propose to keep an open mind on the best way for our bus services to operate. As and when the legal framework for bus management changes -possibly in the context of a devolution settlement for the city and Staffordshire, we will work with neighbouring councils to find the best system for North Staffordshire as our bus services serve communities, particularly in Newcastle and Staffordshire Moorlands ignoring council boundaries. We will continue to work with bus operators to argue the case with regulators and government for investment in the city's public transport sector and services.

## Why a Bus Rapid Transit is the right option

### **The advantages**

- This is a tried and tested idea. The system works in parts of Greater Manchester and other areas – see the case study below.
- We do not need to dig up the roads to lay tram rails even though the system has many features of a tram system.
- Many people have no access to private transport or cannot drive: The Bus Rapid Transit reduces inequality in access to efficient transport and supports local travel
- A few people on a bus is a much more efficient use of road space – and that helps everyone, and reduces wear and tear on the roads
- The system can be fairly easily adapted to grow new or change routes.
- A bus or train with a reasonable number of passengers produces fewer emissions per person than a car, more so if the bus is fueled by clean energy
- There is a health benefit to using public transport: it often involves a linked walk to the bus stop.
- Evidence suggests that proximity to transit routes is a location factor that improves the local economy as businesses and workers benefit from the connectivity<sup>6 7 8</sup>

## The challenges

There will be some traffic disturbance as changes are made to the road system. During the startup phase of the Bus Rapid Transit, congestion might increase for other vehicles until established travel habits change.

## The cost of Bus and Travel Improvements

We will continue to seek out funding to make even more practical improvements and we will consider the attractiveness of bus franchising options if made easier and affordable. We will also continue to seek out ways to make bus and travel more affordable and attractive for residents. Bus Rapid Transit schemes require significant upfront investment that councils can't usually afford. UK BRT costs range from £3.2-£7.6m per km due to design, lane segregation choices and supportive infrastructure such as park and ride facilities and integration with other networks.

- Leigh-Salford-Manchester BRT - £122m (22 km)
- Sheffield-Rotherham BRT - £29m (9km)
- Bristol MetroBus - £230m (50km)
- Cambridgeshire Guided Busway £192m (25km)
- Luton-Dunstable Busway £99m (13km)

## Case Studies

### Case Study 1: Lived experience of the current bus services

A member of our care staff tells us that they rely on the bus services and it can be challenging to get to work for early mornings shifts and late nights when going home saying that for the young people they support, getting them to education in the morning or appointments may have limited or no bus services running during the time for their scheduled appointment or education time making it difficult to rely on buses. For example, areas like Tunstall, Burslem and Longton have limited bus services and sometimes the buses not coming at the scheduled time.

### Case Study 2: Learning from recent experience: lower fares increase bus usage

The Affordable Fares Scheme is a £7.4m scheme running from July 2023 to March 2025. The scheme reduced the cost to the passenger of a day ticket from £6.20 to £3.50. It also raised the 'young person's' fare age from 16 to 18 and introduced a shared ticketing validation system between five operators. This made cashless payments easier. By November 2024, the number of passenger journeys has increased by c.2.5m. This validated the long held, commonsensical assumption that lower fares attract more fare paying passengers. As the investment period tapers to an end, some fares have increased. The result of this rise in fares is not yet known. We expect some passengers will remain bus users while others will resort to using other modes of transport. We expect a net growth in passenger journeys to be the result of the scheme.

### **Case Study 3: Learning from recent experience: enhanced bus routes make life easier**

The city council subsidised 28 new or extended bus routes as part of the 46 total BSIP funded service enhancements to under-served parts of the city, to fill some gaps in bus provision in the mornings, evenings and over the weekend to support shift workers and the local economy. This is being paid for with a £5.7m investment from a Bus Service Improvement Plan funding pot as the city council's budget is unable to fund this independently. Our partners were First, D&G and Stanton's of Stoke. Whilst the route subsidy trials are still underway, some routes show signs that they may be commercially sustainable when the subsidy period ends in March 2026.

### **Case Study 4: The Leigh-Atherton-Tyldesley-Manchester corridor**

Previously plagued by poor public transport, the corridor now benefits from the Leigh to Manchester Guided Busway, part of Greater Manchester's £122 million Bus Priority Package. This initiative, operational since April 2016, offers a high-frequency, reliable bus service. The system was developed as a response to critical transport issues like congestion, overcrowded railways, and limited access to key facilities. The busway also tackles socio-economic challenges by improving connectivity to healthcare, employment, and educational sites, enhancing local economic opportunities, and supporting deprived communities.

### **Case Study 5: Improving Connectivity and Accessibility**

Our BSIP funding is allowing us to go some way to removing barriers to transport, these are some examples:

- Through our Bus Service Improvement Plan Funding as of Spring 2025 we have secured 46 new contracted service enhancements, including early morning, evenings and weekend services. These services provide improved routes for students, commuters and shift workers to access education and work across the area, including Newcastle and Kidsgrove.
- To support improved access to buses for our more vulnerable and less mobile residents, we have upgraded over 190 bus stops to create accessible boarding platforms.
- The main capital project through BSIP is Etruria Valley Link Road, which will improve connectivity for residents in the city's north with a dedicated bus route across a new bridge, providing a connection from Burslem and Middleport with Etruria Valley. There are three services to be introduced in 2025, linking communities each side of the bridge and key destinations including the employment zone at Etruria Valley, so that when the bridge is completed one service will cater for all requirements. Such initiatives also benefit our neighbours; as a growing commuter town, Alsager's residents rely on seamless connections to Stoke-on-Trent for work and leisure, highlighting the need for targeted investment in integrated bus and rail services.
- To provide the passenger with confidence that their bus service is on its way, 100 new displays will be installed at key locations, and an additional 25 displays are being refurbished across the area.

<sup>6</sup> AASHTO Journal - Study: Bus Rapid Transit can Improve Property Values

<sup>7</sup> Locations-Close-To-Public-Transit-Boost-Residential-Commercial-Real-Estate-Values-press-release.pdf

<sup>8</sup> Public Transportation Boosts Property Values

# Priority Two: Fix the Roads, Smooth Your Journey

Poorly maintained roads – roads littered with potholes and other defects, are a safety hazard and source of frustration and cost to drivers and cyclists. Everyone hates potholes.

Filling in potholes is an unavoidable duty that the Council takes seriously even though it is the most expensive and unsustainable approach to road maintenance. We patch potholes and then we patch again because the council cannot afford to renew whole carriageways before they crack open.

Between 2020 and 2024 the council spent £50.1m in highways maintenance and resilience using Department for Transport grants and City Council funding.

Today, the City Council's recorded backlog of known defects is 3,749. This is only a portion of the latent demand. As of June 2024, backlog in repairs and maintenance was estimated to be £68m.

## The case for 'invest to save' in road maintenance

Significant strategic investment in highway maintenance and resilience would tip the balance towards preventative action and so generate real road improvements. Prevention is better value—in the medium and long term. The condition of many roads in the city are beyond the prevention point, and more invasive and expensive repair is the only option. More investment in road and pavement maintenance – before they crack open -would make existing roads safer, more pleasant to travel on, more fuel efficient and better able to withstand extreme weather conditions and heavy traffic loads.

A programme of long-term investment at least the next ten years would halve the number of repairs that are needed and put the network in a steady state, allowing us to maintain and improve the road condition proactively.

Keeping the roads in good order is especially important if we are to see more people cycling, which is viable if the conditions are right. Cycling or walking on a blueway or a greenway is more pleasant than on the highway, but some on-road cycling and walking will always be needed. Both cyclists and walkers are extremely vulnerable and need protecting from the impacts of poor roads and pavements.

Preventative drain cleansing is important to road maintenance. This service has fallen behind in the last few years as government-imposed cuts have shrunk the budget. A targeted drain maintenance programme would make road flooding less likely, keeping key transport routes operational in the worst weather.



## AI on for the future

We are piloting artificial intelligence systems that can build and maintain a profile of the highway condition. AI can detect and classify defects for repair scheduling. Repairs are then scheduled against a prioritisation schema which balances danger, severity of defect with volume of road usage. As the bus service in the city improves, keeping roads in good order will become even more important: heavy vehicles cause more damage than cars and heavier vehicles risk more serious injury to pedestrians and cyclists.

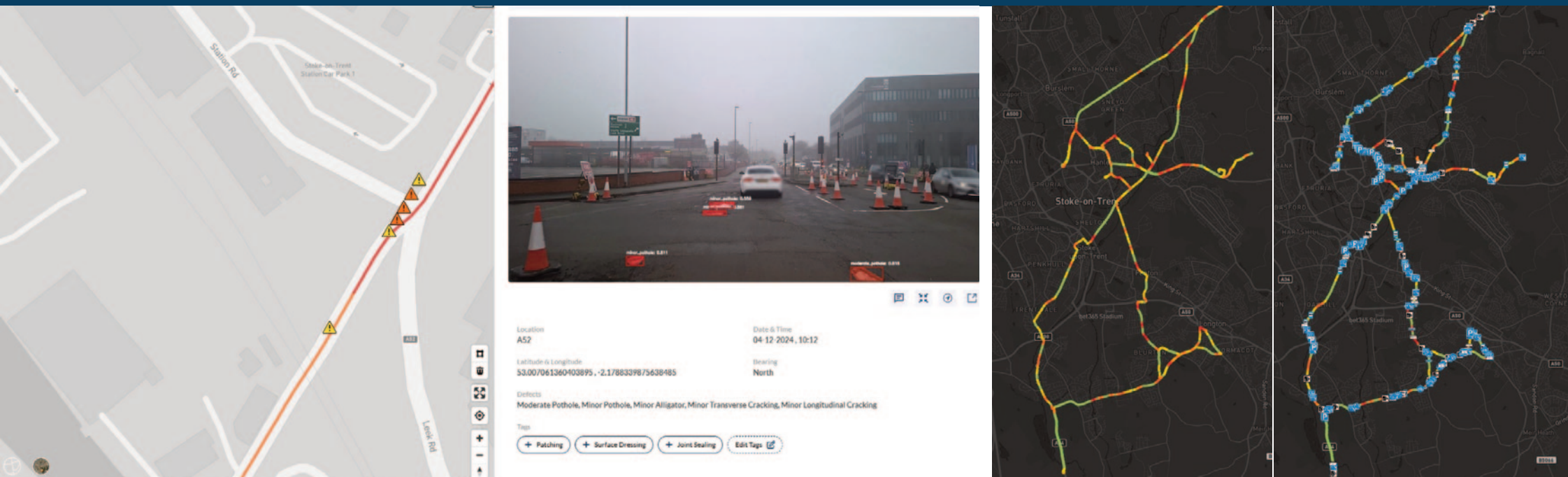
## The cost of Road and Pavement Maintenance

The backlog in reactive works is estimated to be £68m and growing. To move to a well-managed preventative maintenance routine within this prospectus's life would cost £225m (£100 million additional investment).

£1m would typically pay for a kilometre of carriageway reconstruction, two kilometres of pavement reconstruction or four kilometres of carriageway preventative treatments.

### Case study 6:

Net Zero ambitions are pushing the market in sustainable materials promising opportunities to reduce the environmental impact of highways maintenance works through innovative materials and practices without compromising performance.



# Priority Three: End the Gridlock, Clean Up our Air

A programme of road improvements will make journeys across the city smoother, quicker and relieve persistent bottlenecks, complimenting major road junctions and improvements on the A34, A50, A500 and M6 corridors, that will not only benefit Stoke-on-Trent but also ensure smoother transport flows for county-wide services and employment. . Less standing traffic will reduce harmful emissions and make the road a safer place for drivers, pedestrians and cyclists. The current ageing network was built to serve lower traffic volumes than the current demand, with little resilience to cope with unexpected incidents.

The improvements we have in mind include targeted road widening, improved signage, better lane markings and road space reassignment to higher priority traffic.

Building more roads alone will not always fix traffic jams as more route capacity attracts more people to that route. This reduces the net benefit. And, more traffic can negatively impact on neighbourhoods, with greater noise and environmental damage.

To avoid retrospective intervention in the future, we expect developers to fully mitigate the network impact from their proposed development at the planning stage.

## The cost of Highway Capacity Improvements

Highway capacity improvement costs scale with the level of intervention. Road space re-assignment and uses of technology are comparatively less costly than major re-engineering works, which are also costly to design and can only happen when extra funds are available.

To demonstrate the cost of this work, an estimated £40m investment is needed to reduce the problems in these areas:

- Davenport Street, Burslem,
- A53 Cobridge Road / Etruria Road, Waterloo Road (Northbound) to Burslem,
- Potteries Way (south of Hanley),
- A52 Leek Road from Joiner's Square to Limekiln junction, A52 Bucknall Road/A5008 Bucknall New Road Corridor, A5272 Dividy Road,
- A52 Werrington Road,
- A50 Victoria Road, King Street, Weston Road and the A50 Uttoxeter Road and
- A50 congestion towards the A500, A34 Stone Road (Trent Vale).

### **Case Study 7: Innovation can increase capacity without major works**

The road network would have capacity for all the people that want to use it, the main challenge is that people tend to all use it at the same time; and most in their own vehicle! For many years, across England in some 60%+ of car and van journeys, the driver is the only person in the vehicle!<sup>9</sup> Would we still have a congestion problem if more drivers took public transport instead? This shows that it is how we use and occupy the network that affects its capacity, not always its physical size.

In 2024 and 2025, as part of the City Council's Bus Service Improvement Plan, targeted red routes and traffic signal bus priority measures will make journey times more reliable, reducing congestion and illegal parking, keeping routes freer flowing.

To increase capacity on the main routes, we are strengthening our roadworks regulations by introducing a lane rental scheme to complement the existing street permitting scheme forcing utilities to work outside peak demand hours on main roads.

To keep more traffic moving, we are also introducing agile technology such as intelligent traffic lights and crossings that will react to the presenting traffic rather than programmed phases.

### **Case Study 8: Joiners' Square Junction – safer and less congested**

This junction suffered from long delays, congestion and poor air quality, particularly at peak times. The merge lane on Leek Road (north east bound) made it difficult for vehicles exiting the junction and caused vehicles to queue across the roundabout, blocking vehicles on the Lichfield Street and Leek Road approaches.

The improvement works to the junction increased the junction capacity, provided an additional lane on Leek Road (north-east bound) exit to improve merging, reduce congestion and improve safety. The works also relocated the controlled pedestrian crossing closer to the junction, realigned the roundabout arms to reduce approach speed and improve safety. The enhanced landscape works also create a prominent navigation feature. The work was part of a £8.7m Local Growth Fund to tackle congestion, the local economic benefits were valued to be more than double the investment. Compared to before, the works have improved how traffic flows through the junction.

<sup>9</sup> UK: single occupant car journeys in England 2002-2018 | Statista

# Priority Four: Build Streets for People, Not Just Cars

We plan to make it easier, safer and more pleasant to walk and cycle around the city. We want to do this because many journeys are viable this way and being active is good for the mind and body and active travel does not harm the environment. Active travel is part of our ambition to get more traffic off the roads and make life better for all.

The fear factor that comes with cycling along a busy road is off-putting to people who otherwise would be open to getting on their bike. So, we are especially keen to promote the greenways and blueways as travel routes and want to expand them to cover as much of the city as possible. It is likely that major roads will require segregated cycle lanes to provide direct links to key destinations, complimenting blueways and greenways. Secure cycle parking at start and destination is required for cycling route improvements to be attractive.

We are auditing the walking and cycling routes around the city to identify those that need extending or need improving due to wear and tear over the years. We use nationally recognised methods, such as the Propensity to Cycle toolkit, as well as hearing the views of residents to judge where people might cycle if there is an improved infrastructure. The results will form a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). This is due to be released for public consultation in Summer 2025.

Another audit will confirm where pedestrians need better crossing opportunities. We have been made aware by many disabled residents that more dropped kerbs in convenient locations are needed and this consideration will be incorporated into the pedestrian audit. Both audits will consider a wide range of ways to improve personal security for people walking and cycling.

## The cost of a better experience for pedestrians and cyclists

The costings for improving life for active travelers can vary from the relatively affordable minor alteration through to very expensive, wholesale change. For example, changing how much green time there is at a pedestrian crossing has no capital cost.

More substantial interventions like two-way segregated cycleways can cost c.£1-1.5m per kilometre; lighter segregation with bollards can reduce this to c.£0.75m per km. The lightest virtual segregation by reallocation road space with lines and signs can reduce this further to less than £100k per km. A £1m investment would fund 200 pairs of tactile dropped kerbs supporting a more active lifestyle for more vulnerable pedestrians and wheelchair users.



### Case Study 9: School Streets - Road Safety and Active Travel

There are ongoing conversations with schools about creating safer walking routes to schools. We are piloting six "School Streets" across the city in the next year using Active Travel Funds and training our young people to cycle safely through the Bikeability scheme that will reduce air pollution, accidents and encouraging more young people to be physically active. We expect demand for more safer routes to school to follow.





# Priority Five: Make the Green Option the Easy Option

The UK is committed to reducing emissions and becoming net zero by 2050 and government plans to reinstate the 2030 ban the sale of petrol and diesel cars, and sale of new hybrid vehicles from 2035.<sup>10</sup>

We will play our part in this though taking measures, from greening the council's own fleet though to promoting active travel.

Whilst many older vehicles are now being replaced by less polluting ones, further reductions in traffic related air pollution could not be more urgent: The proximity of traffic and congestion to homes is a major reason why the city's air quality management area was declared. High concentrations of vehicle emissions in the air are harmful to human health and respiratory systems. The previous government issued a ministerial direction requiring action to tackle pollution at specific locations, in both the city and neighbouring borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Improving air quality fully supports the transformation of the city and produces a better quality of life for those who live, work and visit our city and contributes to making Stoke on Trent an attractive location for businesses.

We will encourage people to reduce our city's transport-based emissions by moving away from fossil fuel to clean power.

We can't help with the cost of residents' green vehicles, but we can make running an alternatively fuelled car more attractive by investing in charging points and subsidising cable gullying.

The lack of a comprehensive network of charge points is a barrier to the uptake of zero emission vehicles, especially for the 30% of households without a driveway.

There is no single solution as shown by our case studies.

The proposals to create realistic, viable alternatives to car travel include improving cycling and walking routes and, critically, improving the bus service. These important issues are considered elsewhere in this prospectus. The city council will work with energy providers, transport operators, local taxi businesses to make fleet decarbonisation a more attractive prospect. We will work with partners to find cost effective ways to green our city's fleet of buses, vans, lorries and cars.

<sup>10</sup> Hybrid vehicles evade reinstated 2030 ban on sale of new diesel and petrol vehicles | RAC Drive

## The cost of a promoting greener travel

A strategy for promoting greener could include several measures

- Subsidies for E-Bikes - £1m (2000 bikes – £500 subsidy each)
- Investment in strategic infrastructure for public transport charging - £10M+
- Subsidies for Buses - £2m (4 double deck or 5 single deck buses)
- Subsidies for EV taxis and minibuses - £1m (14 purpose built hackney carriages or 25 9-seater minibuses)
- Secure bike storage facilities - £5-20k each depending on size and type

### Case Study 10: Council Energy and Fleet Initiatives

The City Council is transitioning towards a net zero fleet and currently has 57 vehicles alternatively fuelled, 13 fully electric vehicles and 44 hybrid vehicles.

Together they are calculated to be avoiding putting c.115 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions each year into the environment when compared to their fossil fuel equivalents, contributing to net zero and improved air quality.

We get electricity from the grid which still produces emission. As more renewable energy comes onto the grid, emissions will reduce. As the council increases its own direct generation of renewable energy and storage facilities it will provide a secure and much lower carbon outcome for vehicles charged from our energy.

Today, we generate 12.5MWe (enough to typically power 12,500 homes) of renewable energy via the energy recovery facility and solar energy sites. We intend to triple this with plans for c.7MWe of additional solar at key buildings and c.20MWe from solar farming in the city enabling the substantial transition to EV fleet. Future energy recovery facilities could see power generation capacity increase to c.25M. We potentially supporting the wider public transport network.

This generating capacity can and will further provide the ability to enable deployment of EV charging hubs with significant charging capacity and with very low carbon power decoupled from fossil fuel prices and global supply chain uncertainties. This generating capacity will also be capable of supporting production of green hydrogen and full decarbonisation of the council's fleet and transport over time.

### **Case Study 11: Supporting the switch to EV**

The average cost of installing an electric car charger today is c.£1,000. The cost of a pavement cable gully channel installation for safe on-street charging is around £1500. We are looking to part subsidise the pavement cable gully channel installation from our Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund as well as offering interest-free payments for the remainder. We propose to install c.100 on-street charging sockets for public use. A further £2.79m capital funding is secured to deliver 2,000 more over the next 3-4 years in high density residential areas for residents and businesses without off-street parking.

### **Case Study 12: Expanding Public Charging Facilities**

The City Council is in a partnership with Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stafford councils to install 30 EV chargers on car parks for use by taxis, private hire vehicles and the public. Eighteen EV chargers are now available on the City Centre's Cultural Quarter Car Park and Smithfield Car Park. We intend to add 174 more.

These charging opportunities need to be supported by council and business investment in faster, opportunity charging at, for example, petrol stations, and destination charging e.g. work, car parks.

Reducing emissions by encouraging green-vehicles is only one of the steps we propose in our ambition to contribute to the net zero ambition.

### **Case Study 13: Reducing Street Lighting Energy**

This year we will complete the upgrading all our street lights from to low energy LEDs. So far, we've avoided £19.1m in energy costs and each year will avoid another £3.5m. we have avoided 12,611 tonnes of carbon emissions and will reduce related carbon emissions by c.2,342 tonnes annually.

# Priority Six: Rebuild Rail for the Many

Improved rail could transform local travel, making it easier and cleaner to get around North Staffordshire, or for quick connections to major stations for onward travel.

The city is well situated on the national rail network, providing good connectivity to major destinations such as Manchester, Birmingham and London. East-west connectivity is more limited with lower frequencies and longer travel times.

Previous focus has been on improved connections to Crewe due to HS2, which now terminates at Birmingham. Alternative proposals for a “Staffordshire Connector” and “Cheshire Connector” have been made by Manchester and West Midlands Combined Authorities which if supported by government could offer similar local benefits as HS2 promised. Whilst this proposal remains just a proposal, our priority is the Handsacre connection so that high speed trains can easily transition between the HS2 line and the West Coast Main Line, giving the city the near improved journey times to London originally promised.

Improvements to local rail travel are a priority too. The city’s workforce mainly live and work in Stoke and Staffordshire and just beyond, so making rail a truly viable option would help the environment and provide relief for our road network.

There are three stations within the city boundaries at Stoke, Longport and Longton, with four more just over the boundary at Kidsgrove, Alsager, Blythe Bridge and Stone. This is an under-used resource for cross-conurbation travel. But only Stoke and Kidsgrove have better than an hourly service, so it is inconvenient for every day travel. Large parts of our conurbation have no easy access to a rail station. Some services have been cut – the Crewe-Stoke-Birmingham service now terminates at Stafford, others have been extended with services direct to Nottingham.

We will look to connect more people to existing rail stations through closer integration of bus and rail services, improving the public realm around key stations, promoting rail travel for local communities, supporting community partners to make stations more welcoming. Our longer-term aspiration is to have several more local stations built in North Staffordshire and that all local stations have at least two trains per hour and some achieving ‘turn up and go’ frequency, to make it the preferred option for commuters and general travel. Although Meir Station did not progress beyond the final business case stage under the previous Government’s Restoring Your Railway fund, we will continue to engage with partners to explore feasibility and assess the case for potential new stations at Etruria, Meir, and in the south of the conurbation

We support line electrification allowing increased frequencies across North Staffordshire for new routes and the future proofing of existing routes and will work with rail operators and contractors to prove any business case. For instance, electrification of the local lines would support quick and efficient half hourly services, and open potential for services currently constrained to the West Coast Main Line.



We also continue to work with train operating companies and regulators to bring new and more frequent services to the city, and to challenge any proposals that may harm our city's rail connectivity.

Confidence in an enjoyable rail experience is about the whole journey from doorstep to destination conveniently and safely. Working with train and bus operators, we can improve that experience by aligning onward bus travel, sorting digital cross-mode ticketing and improving the active travel experience to and from stations with through public realm and highway design and bike storage.

## The cost of a rail improvements

Local railway stations would have to be Network Rail funded and could cost between £15-20m each. Interchange hubs for convenient switching between bus, coach, cycle or parking could cost up to £5m each, depending on the needs specification.

The costs of complementary investment to enhance the rail journey experience are covered under the other five priorities.

### Case Study 15: Transforming Cities Fund

The Transforming Cities Fund works around Stoke-on-Trent Rail Station on College Road and Station Road is creating wholesale change with a safer infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists. This is part of a £29m change in the area around the station to create and a more attractive corridor and welcome to the city for rail users.





# The benefits to transport network users of our proposals

	Priority One: Public Transport That Works for Working People	Priority Two: Fix the Roads, Smooth Your Journey	Priority Three: End the Gridlock, Clean Up our Air	Priority Four: Build Streets for People, Not Just Cars	Priority Five: Make the Green Option the Easy Option	Priority Six: Rebuild Rail for the Many
Bus providers	✓✓	✓	✓✓		✓✓	
Cyclists	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓		✓
E-cycling	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓
Elder Citizens	✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Emergency Services	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓		
Goods Transporters	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓		✓✓
Motorcyclists	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓
Pedestrians		✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓
Private Motorists		✓	✓✓	✓	✓	
Rail users	✓✓	✓		✓		✓✓
Taxi trade		✓	✓✓		✓✓	✓✓
Visually impaired	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓✓
Wheelchair users	✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓	

# Strategic Fit with Government's Five Missions

	Priority One: Public Transport That Works for Working People	Priority Two: Fix the Roads, Smooth Your Journey	Priority Three: End the Gridlock, Clean Up our Air	Priority Four: Build Streets for People, Not Just Cars	Priority Five: Make the Green Option the Easy Option	Priority Six: Rebuild Rail for the Many
...break down barriers to opportunity	✓✓		✓✓	✓✓		✓✓
...kickstart economic growth	✓✓		✓✓		✓✓	✓✓
...make Britain a clean energy superpower	✓✓			✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
...take back our streets	✓	✓		✓✓		
...build an NHS fit for the future	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓

# Strategic Fit with the “Our City, Our Wellbeing” Priorities

	Priority One: Public Transport That Works for Working People	Priority Two: Fix the Roads, Smooth Your Journey	Priority Three: End the Gridlock, Clean Up our Air	Priority Four: Build Streets for People, Not Just Cars	Priority Five: Make the Green Option the Easy Option	Priority Six: Rebuild Rail for the Many
Healthier	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Wealthier	✓✓		✓✓			
Safer		✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	
Greener	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Cleaner	✓✓	✓✓		✓✓	✓✓	
Fairer	✓✓		✓✓	✓✓		✓✓
Skilled	✓✓	✓✓			✓✓	



## Ways to Feedback

We need your feedback so we've made it easy to do in a few short steps, you can:

- Complete our online questionnaire at [www.stoke.gov.uk/transportprospectus](http://www.stoke.gov.uk/transportprospectus)
- Email us at [publictransport@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:publictransport@stoke.gov.uk) with any detailed feedback or suggestions
- You can WhatsApp us on this number: 07557 849 575
- You can write to us at: Transport Prospectus Feedback Stoke-on-Trent City Council, c/o Transport Planning, Floor 3, Civic Centre Glebe Street, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 1HG
- We will also be running a number of in-person and online sessions that will be advertised through targeted channels.

