



ASLEF Response: Reforming public transport after the pandemic September 2020

1. The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) is the UK's largest train drivers' union representing over 20,000 members in train operating companies and freight companies as well as London Underground and light rail systems.
2. ASLEF drivers, as key workers, continued to work throughout the pandemic, carrying other essential workers as passengers, and moving freight around the country. Our members are proud to be key workers, and are committed to the future of public transport in the wake of the Coronavirus crisis.
3. As a rail union our response primarily focuses on the impacts on, and needs of, the rail system, but we are supportive of a fully-integrated, multi-modal public transport system that works for all our communities so this goal also underpins our policies on other areas.

The use of public transport and the way that people choose to travel, both locally and for longer domestic journeys

4. Before the coronavirus pandemic, there were already a number of growing reasons to encourage the use of public transport. The climate crisis and the levels of traffic congestion in our urban areas made it clear that measures must be taken to increase the number of people choose public transit over private cars. Following the pandemic, it's imperative that momentum is not lost on this campaign.
5. In order to encourage people to use public transit rather than a private car, transit must be efficient, easy and affordable. There are a number of measures that can be taken at levels from local council to transport operating companies to central government which would improve these factors. ASLEF has long advocated for a publicly owned and operated railway, re-regulation of bus services and a 'guiding mind' which would enable integrated, multi-modal transport services.
6. In urban areas, maximum provision of transit, with easy modal transitions, remains the best way to keep people using public transport. In cities there is simply not room for people to drive private cars, so this transit provision must be maintained.
7. Outside cities the modal mix matters too. Where public transit is not feasible, it should be a priority to make modal transitions efficient and affordable. For example, commuters might drive to a railway station which has sufficient parking provision, and then take the train to their work location.
8. Public transport must also be as safe as possible. In order to affect behaviours, both the reality and the perception of safety matter. This should include considerations ranging from how well lit stations and station access points are to the enforcement of social dis-

tancing and face coverings on public transport. In order to facilitate multi-modal journeys, safe access routes for walking and cycling must also be available.

9. With the likely change in commuting patterns, and the expectation that we will begin to see a 'new normal' with people mixing time in communal offices with home working, serious consideration needs to be given to the structure of fares on public transport. Specifically for rail, the union believes this should include reform of both commuter and leisure fares, making rail travel as affordable as possible for everyone. While it remains the case that driving from city to city, or taking an internal flight, is significantly cheaper than taking the train, it will be difficult to persuade passengers of the other benefits of rail travel.

Central and local government transport priorities and finances and funding for transport

10. From a rail perspective the highest government priority from both an environmental and efficiency perspective remains the full electrification of the network. but also for a rolling programme of electrification to complete the network.
11. A rolling programme would be more affordable and efficient than piecemeal separate projects, which each require expertise, resources and supply chains to be set up from scratch each time. With a rolling system, project teams and supply chains could just be rolled across from one section to the next, saving time and money.
12. Electrification is a key part of reducing transport carbon emissions, but electrified rail also brings other benefits including speed (faster acceleration) and lighter weight locomotives which consequently result in less wear and tear of the track infrastructure.
13. Particularly for rail freight, ASLEF has called for a number of 'quick win' electrification schemes (including the branch line to London Gateway Port; Great Western Main Line link to the West Coast Mainline at Acton; Felixstowe to Ipswich branch line; East Coast Mainline link to Leeds and Wakefield; Teesport to Northallerton; Nuneaton to Birmingham Grand Junctions) to be completed as soon as possible. Moving goods by rail using diesel locomotives saves 76% carbon per freight tonne mile compared to road. Moving goods by electrified rail locomotives saves 90% carbon per freight tonne mile, compared to road.
14. The UK Government has declared its agenda for investment to 'level up' the country. In transport terms this should mean increasing investment in public transport infrastructure across all our regions. ASLEF believes that the government was wrong to cancel recent infrastructure projects including the electrification of the Great Western Mainline to Swansea, and the Transpenine route upgrade. Government investment is necessary to deliver these kinds of projects, and the government must be held to account on its pledges.
15. ASLEF is concerned that government figures have suggested looking at the closure of some regional and branch lines, but we know from the long-term consequences of the Beeching cuts that this is the wrong approach. In addition to improvement projects on existing lines, ASLEF believes that the government must make strategic investment in re-opening branch lines and creating new rail lines - such as the proposed 'crossrail for the north' to link up northern cities and towns. The future is in increased capacity and network expansion, not short-sighted closures.

The devolution of transport policy-making responsibilities and powers

16. ASLEF is in favour of a publicly owned and operated rail system, which would see a 'guiding mind' look strategically across the network to ensure efficient delivery of rail services, along with local boards making decisions on branch lines and localised areas of the network. ASLEF believes that this use of local expertise, combined with a strategic vision, is the optimum way to run services that work for everyone.
17. If decision-making is to be devolved to local levels for particular types of service or modes of transport, the union is in favour of this, with the caveat that any devolved power must be fairly funded and resourced. It is important that where local decision making interacts with national decision making this occurs in a collaborative and respectful way, and does not become adversarial with national government withholding power or resources for political purposes.
18. Passengers and communities do not necessarily exist or move around within assigned geographical boundaries, so it is also important that devolved decision making takes into account the full range of stakeholders. In the case of a city this might include commuters from surrounding areas, or in rural areas people travelling between locations, whether or not these routes cross a county or area border.

The resilience of the transport system for future crises

19. Public transport is a societal good and should therefore be funded, at least in part, from the public purse. Infrastructure investment and long-term transport developments rely on government and a strategic vision to be successful. To keep the transport system functioning and ready to respond to any future crises, it is important not to let industries contract.
20. In the case of the rail industry, contraction can happen at speed - with catastrophic individual consequences such as job losses - but expansion takes a long time as safety-critical staff require extensive training, and the delivery of new rolling stock has long lead times.
21. In order for the public transport system to remain sustainable following the coronavirus pandemic, it is important that the system is properly funded and resourced. While passenger numbers remain limited, this may mean additional government investment to keep services running. The union is confident that we will see an increase in passenger numbers over time, when it becomes safe to travel, and with a network that was significantly over capacity this will mean new development is still required.
22. Rail freight was very well utilised during the peak of the Coronavirus pandemic to move goods around the country. In any future crisis this will likely be the case again. The crisis saw additional paths made available for freight services, which meant freight trains could move more quickly around the country. While it is important that passenger services are restored, the government should consider retaining at least some of these freight paths. Freight operators are fully privatised and therefore vulnerable to market fluctuations in a way that passenger operating companies are not. Preventing a contraction of the rail freight industry would mean it remained resilient and ready to step up as required in any future crisis.

The decarbonisation of transport and the capability to meet net zero carbon emissions targets by 2050

23. ASLEF has contributed to the UK Government's Transport Decarbonisation Plan consultation and raised a number of policy areas that should be considered in order to decarbonise. As mentioned above, rail electrification remains the top priority for decarbonising the rail network and the union would like to see a rolling programme of electrification implemented to achieve this.
24. HS2 is also an important element of decarbonising the entire system. The real benefits of HS2 are unlocked the further north it goes, so it is essential that the project is not stopped after phase 1. ASLEF is very firm in our commitment to supporting an HS2 that connects the whole country - right from linking up to HS1 and Heathrow in the South to Scotland in the north. A partially-completed HS2 is not acceptable.
25. Creating additional speed and capacity in the north and on to Scotland will mean that more people across the north are able to commute by public transport, and that rail will become a much more efficient alternative to internal flights. Internal flights are one of the most polluting modes of transport in existence, so this should be a top priority.
26. Rail freight is also an important element of the decarbonisation of transport. As referenced above, even with diesel locomotives, moving goods by rail emits 76% less carbon than the equivalent journey on the road. HGVs also contribute to congestion and serious road traffic accidents, so moving goods onto rail has wide-ranging benefits.
27. HS2 will also lead to benefits for rail freight. Increasing the available capacity of the existing infrastructure by moving high-speed trains onto the new HS2 lines will allow for additional paths that can be used for rail freight as well as passenger services. Increasing capacity for freight will ensure the industry can continue to grow and play its part in the decarbonisation agenda.

Innovation and technological reform within transport

28. ASLEF is supportive of technical developments and modernisation of the rail network and of rolling stock. Where train drivers have worked together with designers and engineers, through the union, we have been able to ensure that new rolling stock is safer and easier to operate. A comfortable driver is a safe driver.
29. For this reason, while the union fully welcomes investment in Hydrogen and Battery technology, we are firmly against seeing these technologies bolted on to old rolling stock if the driving cabs and internal environment are not accordingly made fit for the twenty-first century.
30. The existing practice of 'upgrading' rolling stock by cascading old trains from the South East to other regions hurts investment in innovation. It also harms the drive towards full electrification for the whole country. ASLEF would like to see commitment to implementing new rolling stock wherever possible so that everyone, wherever they are in the country, can access the highest possible quality of rail service.