

Response to Devon Climate Emergency – Mobility Theme from Transition Tavistock Travel Action Group, Dec 2019



www.transitiontavistock.org.uk/travel

Note: the structure of this document fits the online questions for the Devon Climate Emergency Task Force call for evidence.

What actions need to be taken on this theme to enable rapid and extensive decarbonisation in Devon ?

1. Develop a compelling, ambitious and inclusive vision for sustainable transport / active travel for Devon residents, businesses and visitors.

Transition Tavistock is a volunteer run community group founded in 2008, which has been active on environmental issues including energy and food. Our more recent focus on travel and transport is the subject of this submission. Our comments come from the perspective of concerned citizens who are not experts, are aware of the importance of cutting greenhouse gas emissions from transport, are trying to understand what changes to travel patterns in our area would help this, and to advocate for such changes.

Despite having helpful contacts with councillors of all 3 levels of local government, and looking at the Joint Local Plan covering West Devon, South Hams and Plymouth, we have no clear picture of what the predicted or desired future patterns of travel are or how agencies are working, individually or together, to bring change in the right direction. Phrases supportive of sustainable travel appear in the Joint Local Plan, eg in SPT2, SPT9, but at a very general level. The Supplementary Planning Document, currently out for consultation (which we will respond to) contains useful specific policies, but does not appear to envisage any overall travel plan the public can understand and influence.

There have been positive developments in the Tavistock area, eg the NCN27 cycle route and pedestrianisation of the market area, but these do not come across as part of an overall move towards low carbon mobility. Further infrastructure improvements, eg restoring the railway or adding a commuter cycle route to Plymouth, seem stuck without funding, while new housing currently being built lacks decent pedestrian routes to shops and schools, and people with disabilities face hazards including absent or uneven pavements. We are not aware of any attempts in recent years to engage residents in shaping a sustainable travel strategy, so public attention tends to focus on protecting car parking, because too many consider this their only travel option.

2. Promote shift from ownership of fossil fuelled vehicles to shared use of electric (or other ultra low emission) vehicles.
 - a. In policy discussion, shift the focus to mobility as a service and away from the assumption of individual car ownership. This is an important cultural change to achieve, even though practical alternatives for rural residents may be some decades away. For more built-up areas, a decrease in car ownership would reduce the amount of land “wasted” on parking, even if the number and length of trips remained the same. Providers of taxi and delivery services should be encouraged to switch to low emission vehicles.
 - b. Facilitate a significant increase in the number of public electric charging points. Tavistock currently has none. While we are optimistic that something will eventually appear at one of the 3 supermarkets and / or on parking controlled by one of the 3 councils, it is not clear to us whether anyone has oversight of the options, or how any decision on the location and power of

any chargepoints will be decided. In our view there should be locations convenient to tourists and people breaking a long journey, and locations convenient to the many residents who cannot access a charging point at home. There should be a choice of rapid charging (where the user is expected to move their vehicle within around 30 minutes) and slower charging (where the vehicle can remain for several hours while the driver is working or using local facilities). Charge points at public sector sites should be accessible to the public, at least outside normal working hours. (We have repeatedly drawn the attention of West Devon BC to the fact that the charge point at their Kilworthy Park office could be listed and made available, and indeed set to generate income, but nothing has changed.)

- c. Facilitate access to accurate and up to date information on the practicalities, costs and benefits of electric vehicle use, both for households and businesses. This is available via national websites (eg Zap-Map, Next Green Car), but these are not widely known, and in our conversations with the public at events we have found that myths persist. Car showrooms do not appear to actively promote their electric ranges in preference to petrol models, or to present their advantage of low running costs, and could be challenged to tackle this inertia. Periodic county wide promotion campaign, with private sector finance but involvement of public and voluntary bodies (eg through pop up Q&A sessions, presence at fairs and shows) could help.
- d. Encourage the use of ultra low emission vehicles for business and public service delivery. This could involve commissioning of fleet cars and hire cars; travel expense policies (eg where companies provide fuel cards they should also provide electric charge cards and reimburse home charging of a company car); preference for courier services and taxis using low emission vehicles. Agencies on the Task Force should lead by example, and signpost good practice models which smaller organisations can easily copy.

3. Increase availability and use of buses

- a. Ensure all towns and major villages get a frequent, regular service covering both day and evening. Tavistock now benefits from a bus to Plymouth every 15 minutes in the daytime, and this appears to have increased usage and passenger satisfaction, despite some drawbacks in the routing. The evening and Sunday services, though still too far apart, have recently improved.
- b. Draw up a planned and integrated network of bus routes connecting key settlements and services. Other bus routes in our area are inadequate and appear to potential users to be disconnected. To get to Exeter involves a change with an unreliable connection time in Okehampton, and it stops in early evening. There is a direct service to Callington in Cornwall, but not to Launceston. Services to even the larger villages are patchy. There is a circular bus around town but it only runs once an hour and in daytime, and there are several large areas of housing it does not reach.
- c. Provide safe and comfortable bus shelters wherever possible, not just in towns. Given Devon's weather, and the need for elderly passengers to sit while waiting, bus stops that just consist of a pole in a hedge discourage use.
- d. Facilitate and incentivise collaboration among bus companies to ensure services are designed around passenger needs rather than profit, timetables link up in a way that aids multi-leg journeys, and ticket offers are scoped to allow use across boundaries. (For example, the Plymouth CityBus "day rider" offer only covers the city boundary, meaning Tavistock residents are unlikely to use it.) Smart ticketing with a single system covering different companies and modes has been found in other areas to increase usage and reduce journey time.
- e. Scale up the availability and promotion of information on buses. We appreciate the work done by Devon CC in producing integrated paper timetables and maps, and recognise that for those with smartphones, online route planners can now work well. However, we think it likely that

many people never even consider going by bus as they are unaware that services exist, or assume the timing would not work for them. Real time information on display boards is available at Tavistock Bus Station (though there is no map showing the routes!). This is useful, but more could be done to show this in other locations with screens, eg health and leisure centres, colleges. Coaching on how to use travel planning apps could be included in life skills sessions with youth and vulnerable groups. Systems for distributing printed material through community outlets (and ensuring it remains up to date) could be better publicized and more widely promoted.

- f. Encourage bus companies to market their services more effectively. We have had limited success when contacting them eg about participation in a public event, despite saying we wanted to promote public transport use. Neither individually nor jointly do they seem to advertise in local media to encourage take up by people who would otherwise drive. We are not aware of any public satisfaction surveys or prior consultation on route changes. No “free sample” or “discount” marketing is used for potential future paying customers. The impression given is that bus customers will turn up and put up with what they get because they have no choice. This is in contrast to bus promotions in some other parts of the UK and Europe.

4. Increase the use of rail as an alternative to cars

- a. We underline the importance of advocacy by all stakeholders for expanded rail services in the peninsula as a core part of the transport network for residents as well as visitors. Delightful though the GWR adverts are, they contribute to the perception that these are “holiday lines”.
- b. At present the many Tavistock residents who want to travel north or east of Exeter by train have the unpalatable choice of getting through Plymouth or Exeter traffic to a busy car park, or spending over an hour for a bus connection. We would like to see our station and rail connection back!
- c. Recognising that trains in Tavistock are not achievable in the short term, we stress that the proposed new station at Okehampton should be easy to get to by car without adding to congestion in the town, have a direct bus from Tavistock (and other directions) and have the train and connecting buses timetabled to allow a full day trip to London. It should also of course have a good cycle and walking connection and secure cycle storage.
- d. We also think it important to preserve the feasibility of the Tavistock to Bere Alston route by safeguarding the infrastructure on the line. Interim use by other modes, eg an electric shuttle service, could help justify this.

5. Make walking easier for all

Note – we use the term “walking” to include powered wheelchairs, as that term is preferred by one of our members who uses one. This section draws on our local experiences. The charity Living Streets has more extensive research evidence and proposed solutions.

- a. Use persuasion and the available statutory powers to get attractive, practical walking routes designed into new estates and retail facilities from the start. Failure to do this is currently a matter of wide public concern in Tavistock. For example, at an estate on the west, currently under construction, residents will have to walk uphill then cross a main road before walking down the hill again on a fairly narrow pavement into town, then cross the road again to reach the nearest schools. The plans provide for a future link to more direct (though not ideal) foot and cycle path, but this seems unlikely to appear until the third phase, some years off. The estate is next to an existing one which does have a direct path, but there is no break proposed in the boundary between them, nor does the layout make one easy to put in. It seems inevitable

that families moving in will mainly opt to have two cars and drive to facilities which are less than a mile away. The increased traffic will affect air quality, discourage cycling, and lead to demand for more car parking in the town. (We tried a mystery shopping exercise with the developer, and found that their sales brochure contains no map of how the estate connects to the local area, and the person in the sales office did not know where the school was, let alone how residents would walk to it. We fear this may be typical of the lack of interest in mobility shown by major house builders.)

- b. Ensure pavements, alleyways and pedestrianised areas have well maintained surfaces without trip hazards. There are many local examples of cracked tarmac, potholes and uneven kerbs. This turns walking from the enjoyable, healthy experience it should be to a stressful experience, and keeps the most vulnerable indoors.
 - c. Map key routes around towns and villages to identify hazards and barriers to walking. This should be done with the involvement of people with disabilities, parents of young children etc. Draw up a list of potential improvements, eg drop kerbs, road crossings, narrow or missing pavements, better sight lines, and proactively seek opportunities to implement them.
 - d. Review online and printed maps of towns and larger villages to check that all walking shortcuts in regular public use are shown, along with designated cycle routes and bridleways. (This is related to, but not confined to, the duty to maintain a rights of way map.) This is a suitable project for parish and town councils to do in collaboration with community groups. The benefit is that people, particularly new residents and visitors, can find the most convenient walking route. We have noticed that several key shortcuts in Tavistock (eg the Down Road / Deer Park one) are not on maps. A good example of this approach is the Severn Ride and Stride Map (from SevernNet), with walking and cycling routes on one side, and bus routes on the other.
 - e. Deal with obstacles on walkways by promoting considerate behaviour, but using enforcement powers where needed. Local examples highlighted to us include poorly placed signboards and overhanging hedges. Those affected, eg because partially sighted or using a wheelchair, find it hard to know who to contact if concerned, and are understandably reluctant to confront the premises owner themselves. A system on the lines of the "Fill that hole" app for potholes, to allow reporting of obstacles on pavements could help map problems and prioritise agency responses.
6. Improve cycling infrastructure and road safety
- a. We are aware that Exeter Cycling Campaign have put in a well-referenced submission arguing the benefits of this and how it might be done in the city. We endorse their recommendation that Devon should implement Department for Transport guidance and create a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). We also support their recommendation that imbalances in the highways evaluation tool (WebTAG - used to quantify scheme benefits) should be corrected, as they seal in hidden biases based on outdated assumptions of what matters. We like their idea of a Cycling and Walking Commissioner, but this should not just be for Exeter, East Devon and Teignbridge. Ideally the remit would be county wide. If that is not practical, partnerships with Plymouth City Council and Torbay Council to have equivalent posts for the south and west of the county should be set up, plus provision for the north. Perceived unfairness in resource allocation and access to decision makers would hinder acceptance of change.
 - b. We support the campaign for a commuter standard cycle track alongside the A386 from Yelverton to Roborough, which is being led by Plymouth Cycling Campaign. The fact that so much voluntary effort has had to be put into getting to the scoping stage, and that despite stakeholder support there is no obvious funding source, exemplifies the way cycling is marginalised as a mode of transport. We value the attractive leisure route from Plymouth to

Yelverton, but note that it had to be justified as tourism and leisure infrastructure, and does not serve the major employment sites (eg at Derriford) which are the destination of many commuters from Tavistock.

- c. Increase provision of secure cycle parking. We welcome the increased use of e-bikes which local residents and cycle shops have told us of. This is helping older people continue, and start, cycling. E-bikes and some standard bikes are now valuable items, so demand for cycle parking facilities, including secure options, is likely to increase. These are also important to cycle tourists (who are much better served in parts of Europe). Storage should not only be in shopping areas, but also at eg bus stations, to encourage car free longer trips. Again, the responsibility for providing such facilities is unclear.
 - d. Design in cycle access to new estates and employment sites from the start. All the points made above about walking access apply, with the additional consideration that the standard should be that a sensible 12 year old can use the cycle routes alone.
 - e. In common with motorists, cyclists are concerned about the condition of the road surface, and also about deterioration on some cycle paths. The way in which repair programmes are prioritised should take account of the life threatening risks cyclists face from potholes.
 - f. Devon's extensive network of rural roads and lanes could be used more confidently by cyclists, replacing car trips, if road safety improved. Even experienced cyclists are reluctant to use many sections. We endorse the priorities set out by the charity Brake in its recent "Step up for road safety" campaign. A particular issue in West Devon is vehicles – including delivery vans - travelling too fast on narrow or winding roads, or failing to observe speed limits in villages. We also hear anecdotal evidence of older drivers, whose families consider them no longer competent to drive, continuing to do so. While this is a national issue, the age profile and nature of the roads in this area adds to the risk.
7. Encourage non-car transport to school
- a. We do not currently have detailed information on local patterns of travel to school, though this is an area we hope to get involved in later. However anecdotal evidence suggests there is scope for change. We commend the Living Streets toolkit, which has actions for councils, schools and families. County wide use of this or a similar tool could be a "quick win" for the Devon Carbon Plan, with measurable results and the chance to engage young people.
8. Reduce the need for travel to access core services
- a. We recognise and support the general move to encourage remote access to public services, although we think it important that people who are unable to or prefer not to be fully digital are able to contact services by phone and to get face to face signposting help at a local venue.
 - b. More could be done to reduce the need for travel to hospital, both for patients and their families. We encourage further shift of outpatient clinics, non-acute care and minor injury treatment to facilities in smaller towns, including Tavistock hospital.
 - c. Where it is necessary for clients to travel to a service venue, both private and public sector providers should, as standard, provide clear advance information on how to get there without a car, and have a layout which privileges access on foot (eg not having to walk needlessly round a boundary to get to the car entrance).

What are the barriers to implementing these actions? How could these barriers be overcome?

1. A barrier to development of a strategic vision for sustainable transport is that leadership and accountability to citizens is fragmented. Policy and implementation is divided between national bodies, all three tiers of local government, and private sector providers. So far as we are aware,

there is no county level forum through which community groups such as ourselves can be informed and involved. It is difficult for individuals with suggestions or complaints about mobility to know who is responsible or how to contact them – whether the issue is pavement obstacles, chargepoints, traffic fumes, cycle parking or bus routes. The statutory planning system has major flaws as identified in the 2018 Raynsford Review, and so fails to deliver on aspirations for sustainable and connected communities. The result is that the public feel cynical about the potential for positive change.

To overcome this, bodies in Devon should advocate for better national systems (as in the Raynsford Review), but also do more within current limits. As a start, councils could seek out, inform and assist community groups engaged in promoting sustainable or active travel, help them network at a county level and partner with them in relevant local activities. We have sympathy with the recommendation Exeter Cycling Campaign made in their response that the Devon CC transport team should have their brief and name refocused on people, movement and low carbon travel. (We have had helpful advice ourselves from the Travel Devon office, but note that the main Council switchboard did not know how to contact them.)

Within the planning process, more attention could be given to mobility. For example, Devon CC highways department, as a statutory consultee, could be more proactive in pointing out weaknesses in walking and cycling routes in new developments, whereas it appears to look only at vehicle flows. Town and parish councils could routinely comment on how well proposed developments are connected to local facilities by sustainable means. District Councils could commit to using relevant codes of good practice such as the Transport for New Homes checklist and the Ramblers Charter for Walking Neighbourhoods. They should then be transparent with the public when national policies prevent them from ensuring such good practice is achieved, building the evidence base for policy change.

More could be done to draw up locality travel plans. Some neighbourhood plans do address this. (Tavistock does not yet have one.) However the scale of transport networks is much larger – no parish is self contained for travel. Within these, it is important to identify and achieve “quick wins” to help people feel positive change is possible and the efforts of volunteers are worthwhile. To achieve fuller benefits, agencies (public and private) will need to commit resources to co-ordination and communication, but these should pay off through the health and wellbeing benefits of sustainable travel.

2. While Devon has many residents who are well able to afford a low emission car, we recognise that there are also many for whom the (current) price differential is a significant barrier. This risks clean travel being seen as elitist. The motor trade could be challenged to address this, eg through discounting of basic spec or second hand models as a trade in for old high emission ones, with promotion targeted at lower income households.

West Devon has a number of homes (both in built up and rural locations) where residents cannot charge at home with current technology, as they park on the road or at a distance from their power supply. This includes some new estates, and of course flats. Solutions (eg roadside retractable posts) exist for some situations, and others will emerge as the market develops, but some stimulus and public investment may be needed. This should include ensuring social and sheltered housing residents can use electric vehicles. Councils should use their planning powers and influence to minimize the problem with future building. (We are disappointed that a block of retirement

apartments currently being built in Tavistock by a major player in the sector will not have any charging facilities.)

3. As identified by the Campaign for Better Transport, the national system of (absence of) bus regulation is a barrier. We hope local authorities will press for increased powers. Where buses are held up by general traffic congestion, reliability suffers and potential travellers turn back to cars – adding to the problem. While the scope for bus priority lanes in much of Devon is limited by geography, they should be used where feasible.

We recognise the low level of public acceptance of buses as a mode of choice, but think this can be shifted through attention to reliability, driver attitude, vehicle cleanliness and facilities at stops. These vary between companies, but we are not aware of any consumer ratings platform – something the sector could start? More effort could also be put into getting non users to try out services, eg through promotional vouchers, or offering charities passes to use as competition prizes. Research could be undertaken into why some of those entitled to concessionary passes either do not claim or do not use them. Bus companies could learn from the rail sector in promoting themselves as a convenient and enjoyable way of getting to attractions and key facilities, and perhaps work with venues to offer discounts for families arriving by bus. Additional bus services around events (eg for Plymouth fireworks) work well, but could be extended.

- 4 & 5. Barriers to improving the experience of walking and cycling include lack of capacity in local authorities, a culture of providing for cars first with other modes as nice to have extras, and a multitude of site specific problems of the nature or ownership of the small pieces of land which may be needed. These are surmountable on the principle of “where there’s a will, there’s a way”.

Are there any wider social, environmental or economic benefits linked to these actions? If so, what are they?

1. Mobility is important to maintaining physical and mental health, reaching employment or running a business, spending through local outlets rather than online, and to a sense of community.

Effective engagement with community groups adds voluntary effort and ideas, local knowledge and new communication channels to those of local authorities, at very little direct cost.

2. Reduced use of petrol and diesel vehicles would improve air quality. The health benefits (and consequent cost savings) of this have been well documented, eg by Public Health England. As south west England currently generates surplus renewable energy, using more of it for transport would reduce the need to export it, thus reducing stress on the national grid, transmission losses and (subject to changes in the energy market) retaining the income locally.

Tavistock already shows up as a gap in provision for any electric vehicle driver considering visiting the area. Unless Devon has equitable provision across the county, and is competitive with other shire counties, it will, as electric vehicles become more common, lose out in attracting tourists and forward looking businesses.

3. Increased bus use by those who would otherwise drive contributes to reduced congestion for other road users and (depending on the vehicle) better air quality. The Campaign for Better Transport has evidenced substantial social benefits of public transport use including reducing loneliness and enabling access to employment. Given the age profile of West Devon, bus services are particularly important in enabling people to access services and maintain social contacts when they are unable

to drive. Without them, it seems likely that many people keep driving when their eyesight or mental co-ordination is no longer at the required standard, posing a safety risk to them and others.

4. Better access to rail services would reduce the congestion and air pollution caused by drivers who enter a city just to get to the station.
5. The benefits of walking to mental and physical health and general wellbeing are well documented, as is the high proportion of car journeys which are under 2 miles. Families who feel they cannot manage without a second car incur significant extra costs. Reducing congestion benefits the economy in multiple ways.
6. The benefits of cycling are as for walking, enhanced by the higher level of physical exertion and longer trip distance possible. Reducing road traffic casualties has quantifiable benefits for public services, the economy, and of course the people at risk.
7. The benefits of walking or cycling to school have been well documented, including physical health, social relationships and achievement. Residents near schools benefit from reduced congestion and pollution.
8. These measures can reduce stress for patients, prioritise car access for those who really need it, and improve public safety by reducing the number of drivers on the roads who are unwell or distracted by worries about a relative.