



Introduction

Transport is indispensable. Getting there, getting back; to work, to school, to the shops, to play. Transport permeates our everyday, and it will profoundly influence our future. And having a careful, thoughtful, forward-looking management of our transport provision is critical to the environmental sustainability of society, and the planet itself.

Transport was among the original areas of cooperation identified in 1999 by the inaugural Summit of the British-Irish Council (created by the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement) as an area with great potential for cooperation and benefit across these islands. Now, in 2025, the eight Member Administrations of the British-Irish Council continue to face common challenges in Transport, and continue to learn from each other.

The BIC Transport Work Sector is chaired by the Northern Ireland Executive. Ministerial meetings take place every three years. At the last meeting, in 2021, Ministers agreed a forward work plan, focussed on four key themes:

- **Modal Shift**
- **Decarbonisation of public transport vehicles**
- **Decarbonisation of the freight fleet**

- **Facilitating opportunities for collaborations between the BIC Administrations and work sectors/ through planned joint visits and events.**

This summary review sets out how the Transport Work Sector has worked together over the period from 2021 to 2024. Transport is above all characterised by complexity and interdependence between many interacting elements. The decarbonisation agendas and modal shift agenda are very intertwined. We are trying to move beyond a world of conventionally powered motor vehicles, as we strive to stop emitting greenhouse gas emissions harmful to our atmosphere, and noxious gases and particulate matter harmful to humans. Moreover, widespread traffic congestion produces significantly more emissions than free-flowing traffic. So, we need fewer cars, less gridlock, and a healthier environment.

Accordingly, the Work Sector looked at how Administrations endeavour to reduce the number of private car vehicles on roads and produced a paper on Reducing Private Car Use. The group produced a survey paper on efforts in the BIC8 towards achieving Modal Shift, complementing a reduction in private car use. This shift to public transport, cycling, and walking will play a major part in reducing emissions in

the transport sector. And to help assess those benefits, a BIC paper on the Carbon Savings Impact of switching to more sustainable modes of transport was developed.

The group also highlighted the need to achieve modern and clean transport systems and infrastructure to help achieve the decarbonisation and broader green transition goals of the British-Irish Council's Member Administrations. In this vein, the Work Sector undertook focused study visits on decarbonisation

of public transport and held a dedicated information exchange seminar on the Decarbonisation of Freight.

This work, and the Transport Ministerial meetings, have facilitated the nurturing of harmonious connections and relationships across these islands on our shared journey to Net Zero in the Transport Sector. The BIC Transport Work Sector continues to be a valuable forum for sharing ideas and experience and allows us all to benefit from learning of established and emerging good practice.

Modal Shift

A high proportion of car journeys are in the range of 5 to 15 miles. It is feasible and reasonable to suggest that active and sustainable transport should be the first choice for travel within this range, with walking and cycling for shorter journeys (up to three km for walking, five km for cycling), and public transport or car-sharing for longer (ten km and over), or more routine journeys.

The Transport Work Sector has endeavoured to develop understanding of the issues involved in the task of reducing the number of such 5 to 15 mile car journeys, and produced a study paper surveying modal shift situation across these islands.

The Isle of Man Government and the Government of Guernsey led on this BIC work to identify the key challenges, barriers, and potential solutions and levers in the Modal Shift area.

One point of exploration was how best to promote the benefits of e-cycles as a potentially powerful

alternative option for shorter journeys. E-cycles offer a viable substitute to the motor vehicle for many, including those less able to cycle longer distances or to ascend inclines without powered assistance. Modern e-cycles can have a range in the region of 60-80 miles before requiring a recharge, can easily cope with hills and are enjoyable for the user. Their use also contributes to a healthier lifestyle and in practical terms, they are often quicker for a door-to-door journey than a motor vehicle on the same journey.

Administrations are now prioritising modal shift through encouraging and incentivising walking and cycling in transport policy, utilising a variety of initiatives. There is considerable investment in greenways and cycle lanes along with subsidised cycle purchases, pop-up cycle lanes, new safety initiatives and more. There are also efforts to increase and improve the space for walking and cycling by extending pavements and pedestrianising streets.

Work Sector Visit to Guernsey to view EV infrastructure



In April 2022, the work sector visited Guernsey to view developments in relation to provision of modal shift infrastructure. The visit focused on viewing of developments

in electric vehicle charging infrastructure, and visited a number of sites which showcased innovative approaches.



Decarbonisation of Public Transport vehicles

During the Covid-19 pandemic, at the outset of this reporting period in 2021, the BIC Member Administrations had seen a significant reduction in the use of public transport. Nevertheless, the importance of public transport in ensuring the delivery of essential services, and supporting the economy, remained evident. As efforts intensify to encourage a modal shift to more sustainable modes of transport, public transport, as a more efficient method of moving large numbers of people reliably, will play a critically important role in the decarbonisation of all transport. Therefore, there is a need to prioritise low emission, comfortable,

coherent public transport to encourage the use of these systems.

In June 2023, as part of their focus on the decarbonisation of public transport, the BIC Transport work sector travelled to Derry/Londonderry to visit the award winning multi-modal transport hub in the heart of the city. This hub is designed with bus stands, railway platforms, cycle and electric vehicle charging points all adjacent, attracting people to choose greener, active travel options. Officials also visited the Translink EV Charging and Hydrogen Refuelling Depot in Belfast.



The BIC Transport work sector also engaged in extensive information exchange to better understand the barriers which are slowing, and the levers available to adopt, new and emerging technologies in public transport. This focus included consideration of issues such as range of service, topography, inter-urban links and urban centres, so as get a clearer picture of whether certain technologies and policies are better suited to differing service provisions and requirements. For example, in some administrations, certain restrictions have impacted bus fleet replacement programmes, such as vehicle size limitations due to road width and a lack of available suitable electric vehicles on the market.

Although new buses are at the highest European environmental standard, buses are still associated with carbon emissions. Therefore, the benefits of alternative powering such as Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil fuel to reduce net carbon emissions, and possible additional performance benefits, is being explored. Other opportunities to

share lessons learned and best practice across administrations included a review of the findings from the first all-electric bus town. This initiative aims to set the gold standard in environmentally friendly public transport with the adoption of hydrogen buses powered by green hydrogen. In addition, there were opportunities to share information on the benefits and challenges associated with decarbonisation of the rail network through electrification.

This work aimed to identify the benefits, risks and challenges associated with the introduction of low and zero emission technologies in the public transport fleet and supporting infrastructure required. As part of this, the learning and experiences across Member Administrations were important elements of the discussions, including how hydrogen fuel cell technologies in transport decarbonisation have potential to bring benefits to the economy and environment.

Reduction in Private Car Use and Journeys

It is important to identify which measures to reduce private car use have been most effective, encompassing a study of both push and pull measures; 'pull' incentives that encourage favour transport modes other than cars, and 'push' measures that disincentivise using cars. With the Scottish Government as lead administration, BIC members prepared a survey paper across the administration to investigate which measures to reduce private car use have been most effective.

Reducing car use is becoming a more prominent issue for Member Administrations. Most have targets to reduce miles travelled by car, or policies in place to incentivise the public to make more sustainable travel choices. All have recognised that investment and improvement in public transport is required to support this transition, with various schemes in place to either make public transport more affordable or increasing frequency of services.

It is promising to see that those in rural settings are being considered in policy decisions as the option to choose other forms of transport are often not widely available. For example, the Government

of Ireland's Climate Action Plan is aiming for 70% of people in rural Ireland to have access to buses that provide at least 3 trips to the nearby town daily by 2030.

There is a need for public planning to have a prominent role in efforts to reduce car use. Input is needed not just from transport bodies but from administrations as a whole across a range of stakeholders. Moreover, introducing complementary measures to disincentivise car use can be problematic politically. However, these measures will most likely be required in order to significantly shift behaviour.

Policy is active in multiple areas – for example, pricing, infrastructure provision, road design, overall public domain planning, electric charging, greenway development, health, comfort and convenience, personal safety, public transport availability and frequency as well as pricing and proximity, private car parking regulation and pricing, and road use stipulations. Currently, policies are at an early stage and therefore, there is not enough evidence to definitively say which interventions are working best. All members support further collaboration on this topic.



North West Transport Hub – Derry/Londonderry



Decarbonisation of the freight fleet

BIC administrations rely heavily on Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) to distribute freight by road. Therefore, decarbonisation of freight fleets will be an important element in any pathway to net zero. In 2023, the Work Sector had a dedicated meeting to exchange information on work being undertaken across all Member Administrations on the decarbonisation of freight, and to hear from external expertise. As of 2023, the development of zero carbon HGV technologies was at an early stage. Manufacturers are developing battery-electric options, considered suitable for smaller vehicles, but electric vehicles will not be a single solution for the phasing out of diesel and petrol engines in freight.

Significant investment is being made in the development of alternative fuels to contribute to decarbonisation and enhance the environmental performance; electricity, hydrogen, liquid or gaseous biofuels derived from biomass, synthetic and paraffinic fuel, natural gas, including biomethane in gaseous form liquefied form

(liquefied natural gas (LNG)) and liquefied petroleum gas. Development of hydrogen fuel and vehicle technology particularly for the bus market has been moving at pace.

Further work is required to increase awareness and to identify place and sector-based solutions. In addition, coherent and coordinated refuelling capacity and approaches that integrate with approaches in mainland Europe will be required to support the transition to alternative fuels in the freight sector.

The Transport work sector considers that it will be beneficial to continue to share information on technology options being explored across administrations. In particular, it will be useful and desirable to share information on suitability of fuel for vehicle and journey type and to consider requirements for refuelling infrastructure that will support an efficient and integrated network in the future.

Visit to Transport Research Arena conference, Dublin



In April 2024, Transport Work Sector officials visited Dublin to attend the Transport Research Arena (TRA) Conference in the RDS Hall, Dublin, as guests of the Department of Transport.

This international conference and trade fair convenes researchers, policymakers and industry representatives from across the transport sector to consider current ideas and trends in transport, and how research and innovation can reshape transport and mobility systems.

The group heard about mobility trends across Europe and learned from expert

practitioners' sharing of best practices of policies and performance.

Officials were also given a working demonstration and tour of Iarnród Éireann (Irish Rail) state-of-the-art new National Train Control Centre at Heuston Station in Dublin.

