

**Transport governance in  
combined authorities**

Current practice, and ideas for the future

investment commercial **accountability**  
**arrangements** deliver **ambition**  
modernisation growth **strategic** princ

**Transport governance  
in combined authorities**

**knowledge** scrutiny **focus** information  
**re complexity** commitment **resources**  
challenges policy approach levels

## Introduction

### Who this document is for:

This document is drafted to support those involved in strategic, member-led transport governance in (Mayoral) Combined Authorities ((M)CAs), specifically those (M)CAs which previously had integrated transport authorities (ITAs)<sup>1</sup>. It is intended to provide ideas on the modernisation and improvement of member direction, leadership and oversight of those functions.

It focuses on the roles of what we call “transport committees” – boards or committees of members with a responsibility for oversight and decision-making on transport. In the past these bodies may have been known as passenger transport executives (PTEs) or ITA boards.

This research has been developed with the Combined Authorities Governance Network (CAGN) – a network set-up by the Centre for Public Scrutiny that brings together members and officers with an interest and involvement in governance and scrutiny in combined authorities.

### Introduction

For historical reasons, there are diverse institutional arrangements in place with regard to governance across transport in England. This document focuses on arrangements in combined authority areas, which have generally previously been overseen by passenger transport executives (PTEs), accountable to integrated transport authorities (ITAs) and their predecessors.

Combined authorities have real ambition for transport. Transport is seen as an engine for inclusive local growth, and Mayors want to capitalise on the opportunity to knit together this need with other policies around spatial planning, housing, health, employment and the environment. Individual Mayors (such as Andy Street and Andy Burnham) have set out bold plans for the creation of new integrated transport networks. Even in areas which have historically not benefited from ITAs – Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and the West of England – Mayors have made transport (and major capital infrastructure projects on transport) central to their future plans.

As spatial governance has shifted, organisations have come and gone, and remits have altered, transport in England is now governed across six potential tiers operating at different spatial levels.<sup>2</sup> Sub-national reforms to governance arrangements have added further levels of complexity to decision-making and delivery in transport, and over time there has been a trend towards the layering of institutions with some changes in governance coming from outside of transport.

For example, LEPs now play a major role in the allocation of resources for transport investment typically covering combined authority areas, although in some cases there is a mismatch in boundaries or a case of overlapping LEPs. However, LEPs are not statutory bodies, so in practice transport funds allocation is fed through LEPs but responsibility for implementing many the priorities and schemes will fall to the CA.

This document focuses on the six metropolitan areas with a historic responsibility for operational transport in their areas as follows:

- Greater Manchester (GM): Transport for Greater Manchester (formerly GMPTE)
- Liverpool (LCR): Merseytravel
- West Midlands (WM): Travel for the West Midlands (formerly Centro)
- North East / North of Tyne (NT): Nexus

<sup>1</sup> So not, directly, the West of England or Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

<sup>2</sup> Marsden & Docherty, *Governance of UK Transport Infrastructures*, (2019).

- Sheffield (SY): Travel South Yorkshire
- West Yorkshire (WY): Metro

This research focuses on transport governance outside of London due to the unique arrangements and devolved powers and funding of Transport for London. This research does not examine governance systems applying to Transport for the North or in those areas without a pre-existing PTE.

Our hypothesis in carrying out this work is that **these historic duties present modern-day challenges for governance**. In some areas **combined authority governance arrangements have been overlaid on legacy governance systems**. There is potentially tension between the operational responsibilities of these functions and the strategic duties of the CA, and this may influence members' activities, priorities and focus. This paper primarily focuses on councillors' roles in the **management of operational transport as delivered through PTEs**, although we will also look to a degree at councillor oversight of **capital infrastructure planning**. We want to be able to explore **how CAs could use a strong narrative around good governance to be better able to make the case for strategic investment from the Department of Transport**<sup>3</sup>, as well as to consider **what barriers exist** in CA transport policy and delivery that prevent the results that areas like London are able to achieve.

## Method

Our research methodology involved the following stages:

- **Desktop review of transport governance arrangements for the 6 ITAs.** Looking at governance arrangements both pre- and post- the establishment of the relevant CA to understand how governance has evolved;
- **Document analysis.** Looking at minutes and agendas for member meetings as well as schemes and systems around the operation of delegated powers;
- **Group discussion.** At CAGN meetings we facilitated group discussion on transport governance, the issues raised informed the focus of this research;
- **Interviews.** We interviewed CAGN members and transport governance experts on specific aspects based on the desktop research and group discussion.

<sup>3</sup> This paper will not look at the technical detail of the business case review process undertaken to support capital infrastructure investment or the differences in CAs' ability to draw in funding to support such work from Government and elsewhere. Our focus is on the core internal governance systems which might be used as ancillary evidence to support a sense of confidence in the validity of those business cases, and a CAs' ability to oversee delivery.

## Findings

### Complexity and the overall role of members

- Clarity and focus on structures has the potential to feed positively into (M)CAs' calls for increased transport devolution;
- PTE/ITA functions have been integrated into (M)CAs in different ways without much overall thought of strategic alignment to the wider priorities of those bodies;
- A variety of different district powers over operational transport remain;
- The varying role and position of LEPs adds additional complexity.

Overall functions around transport are quite circumscribed by national rules. Without clarity on the role of different (M)CAs in managing different parts of transport governance, delivering sustained benefits will be difficult.

Mayors, where present, are agitating for increased transport powers, and until some of these matters are resolved governance solutions will remain fluid. This provides an opportunity to reset and refine governance – for example, putting in place oversight arrangements to allow (M)CAs to review whether new powers bring about the anticipated improvement in strategic direction and delivery. Putting in place such arrangements – led by members – has the potential to act as a statement of intent, and at a technical level makes calls for increased transport devolution more compelling.

### Integrating (different) transport functions into (M)CAs

The way that (M)CAs have managed to integrate their transport responsibilities into the wider work of the authority has influenced how those responsibilities are managed and overseen. Generally speaking, the member oversight is transacted by a transport committee – a body often consisting of a large number of members, and whose terms of reference are expressed in broad terms.

In many areas, these arrangements reflect those applied before the (M)CA was established. In some cases, different mechanisms were used to incorporate transport functions. For example:

- WY and LCR, with a transport committee whose terms of reference largely reflects members' roles in relation to the former PTE;
- SY, where the PTE was fully integrated within the CA.

These existing challenges have been exacerbated by that fact that (M)CAs are pursuing transport infrastructure (and operational) developments in different ways. Quality partnerships and quality contracts are growing themes in bus operations. The different nature of different rail and light rail arrangements (including the geographic extent of those networks) also has an effect. We cover this in more detail where we talk about geography, below.

### Districts' roles

Complexity is enhanced by little change being made to lower tiers of government. Individual districts retain their own taxi and PHV licensing approach<sup>4</sup>, which may differ across a conurbation, as opposed to London, which has a single citywide approach to taxi and private hire.

<sup>4</sup> Ref – rail franchising, quality contracts

<sup>5</sup> Linton & Bray, *Taxi! Issues and options for city region taxi and private hire vehicle policy*, (2018).

## LEPs

LEPs should provide a strong support to (M)CAs' transport functions – economic drivers identified by LEPs, and LEPs' priorities, should drive and frame the strategic and operational transport matters on which CA councillors focus. But the involvement of LEPs may also make governance more complex.

The degree of alignment varies; where LEP/(M)CA boundaries are not co-terminous, different priorities and strategies across the three relevant LEPs have the potential to produce tension. Even in those places where CA/LEP functions are fully aligned (and where LEPs have been effectively subsumed into the wider (M)CA structures), while the overall impact on (M)CA business has been positive<sup>6</sup>, evidence of that work informing the activity that members undertaken on transport committees is limited. This is a further example of members' absence from the strategic space.

### National complexity (especially on funding)

There is at present a lack of an integrated, national approach on transport spending. To an extent this makes sense because determination of priorities on transport is something which should be inherently local, but it does also mean that the abilities of (M)CAs to raise funding and finance differs – adding to governance complexity. Managing local transport networks is difficult because responsibility is spread across a wide range of different authorities and central Government agencies.

Much transport funding is heavily ringfenced or tied to very specific conditions. It is likely to closely involve LEPs – not a problem where the LEP is an integral part of an (M)CA but potentially more challenging where this is not the case.

Infrastructure investment schemes often cross multiple boundaries and serve, local, regional or even national needs. Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR), for example, could affect local authorities from Newcastle to Liverpool<sup>7</sup>. This scale of investment suggests the scheme needs national input, but there is a need to ensure that the scheme is shaped by local priorities and that any local contributions to funding can be coordinated.

Finally, transport spending by other Government departments and public bodies (especially in health and education) is not aligned to (M)CA spending.

### Different geography

With different geographies come challenges around individual and collective responsibilities for transport – especially when transport networks stretch beyond the area of the combined authority and its constituents. This makes governance difficult; it also makes defining a “system” difficult, given the transport systems may be seen as demanding integrated ticketing.

This is particular the case in investment. Many overlapping agencies and bodies – some with their own democratic mandates, which may compete – are active players, such as NPR.

### Actions and solutions

- Members to map and understand the structural and geographic pressures on transport;
- Members to understand their (M)CA/LEP priorities on strategic transport and:
  - Flag up obviously misalignment in long term plans;
  - Identify areas where Mayors/others are seeking to draw in additional investment, and powers, for transport;
  - Seek to refine their own transport oversight functions to focus on these issues (see the section below on terms of reference).

<sup>6</sup> CfPS, Combined authorities' governance relationships with Local Enterprise Partnerships, (2019).

<sup>7</sup> IPPR North, Northern Powerhouse in Action, (2017).

## Resourcing and visibility

- Remuneration levels vary significantly, and remuneration bears little relationship to the overall role and tasks that members are expected to perform;
- Committees are not especially visible to the public, the key source of political accountability for transport having shifted to the Mayor, but this has not influenced how they work.

### Remuneration and member support arrangements

(M)CAs differ in how responsibility for committee members' remuneration is set. For some, levels are set by constituent authorities – for others by the CA itself. This sometimes reflects the different governance setup of committees themselves, which we cover in more detail in the section below on “terms of reference”.

Levels of remuneration vary significantly and seem to be based on legacy arrangements rather than a sense of transport committees' current or future roles. All remuneration figures below were obtained through public documents, although some proved difficult to find and others are not from the most recent municipal year so amounts may have been updated.

#### GM

##### Transport for Greater Manchester Committee

(Joint decision-making committee of GMCA, 10 constituent authorities and Mayor)

- Remuneration level for Chair: £25,346 - £28,250
- Remuneration level for Vice Chair: £14,125
- Remuneration level for ordinary members: £3,825 - £5,317

##### Three sub-committees

(Capital Projects and Policy, Bus Network and TfGM Services, Metrolink and Rail Networks)

- Remuneration level for Chair: £15,171
- Remuneration level for Deputy Chair: £5,050 - £5,424
- Remuneration level for ordinary members: £3,825 - £5,317

#### LCR

##### Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Transport Committee

(Joint decision-making committee of six constituent authorities)

- Remuneration level for Chair: [data unavailable]
- Remuneration level for Deputy Chair: £9,975
- Remuneration level for ordinary members: £5,675

#### WM

##### West Midlands Transport Delivery Committee

(Joint decision-making committee of seven constituent authorities)

- Remuneration level for Chair: £20,527
- Remuneration level for Deputy Chair: £12,521
- Remuneration level for ordinary members: £4,060

NT

**North East Joint Transport Committee**

(Joint decision-making committee of NECA and NTCA)

- Remuneration level for Chair: £2,000
- Remuneration level for Vice Chair: £1,000
- Remuneration level for ordinary members: £3,290

**Tyne & Wear subcommittee**

SY

**Sheffield City Region Transport Board**

(Joint decision-making committee of four constituent authorities, Mayor, non-constituent authorities, the director general of the SYPTE, a member of the SCR executive team and two LEP board representatives)

*“No remuneration is paid to members of the Mayoral Combined Authority Board, LEP Board or other committees established by the Sheffield City Region. Members are, however, entitled to claim back travel and subsistence costs incurred whilst undertaking duties and responsibilities on behalf of the Sheffield City Region.”*

WY

**West Yorkshire Transport Committee**

(Joint decision-making committee of five constituent authorities)

- Remuneration level for Chair: £24,800
- Remuneration level for Deputy Chair: £9,920
- Remuneration level for ordinary members: £4,500

**Five transport consultation sub-committees**

(Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield)

- Remuneration level for Chair: £1,575
- Remuneration level for ordinary members: £4,500

A sense of the required resourcing (including officer support arrangements) can only be reached once the overall role of members is understood. At the moment, in many areas the resource (officer time, allowances, other support) provided to members on transport governance is substantial. Agendas, in many places, are heavy. Committees are frequent and demanding. This reflects a continuation of the legacy arrangements we discussed above and which we consider further below. It feels unsustainable given the “light touch” governance arrangements to which combined authorities aspire on other business.

There is a clear reluctance to change. There is a convenience to the existing arrangements and the appearance of rigour. As the section below on work programming suggests however, the impact of much member work on transport (in these public forums at least) appears limited.

**Public visibility and the role of the Mayor**

In some areas the presence of the transport committee alongside that of the Mayor causes confusion. The Mayor is certainly the visible, public point of contact on transport in many areas. The committee and its chair would once have been more visible and important, but the development of (M)CA decision-making means that the centre of gravity around decision-making has passed to the Mayor.

**Actions and solutions**

- Review remuneration levels against a refined sense of the roles of transport committees, against other CA boards and functions and against other (M)CAs;
- Develop a clear understanding of the current level of officer support provided and compare to the level provided to other CA boards and committees;
- Consider and agree an overall resource envelope for member-level transport functions, which can be used to direct committees’ terms of reference and working patterns.

**Terms of reference and working patterns for transport committees**

- Terms of reference should be designed so as not to duplicate other operational or strategic functions;
- Members and officers should look at the balance between policy, delivery and scrutiny in member-level transport committees;
- One area where members can make a significant contribution is by taking cross-cutting approaches to transport issues, linking them to wider public service priorities in the area. But a tendency to focus on operational detail works against this;
- Work programming needs to recognise these functions and to focus activity on where members can add most value.

Refinement of transport oversight functions based on overall, strategic priorities will demand changes to terms of reference, and the identification of clearer areas of focus for member bodies. Are they decision-makers directing policy and activity or scrutiny bodies overseeing and holding to account the CA as a strategic planner, and individual operators for their delivery?

From this will derive a sense of who should sit on CA transport committees and how they should go about their day to day work. This is significant, as there is evidence to suggest that members’ level of engagement with the work of their committees is variable, and is likely to depend on the role of these committees being clear – with clear impacts.

In relation to overview and scrutiny in CAs we have identified the need for members to identify a niche, or gap, which they can occupy – this may be an area where a cross-cutting perspective on governance would prove useful, or where extant governance arrangements may seem especially weak.

**Terms of reference and overall roles**

Terms of reference for committees may have been transposed from old pre-CA days into new structures. Expansive terms of references are likely no longer to be fit for purpose – despite the fact that they afford councillors with significant freedom in how they carry out their “watching brief”. There will be specific roles that members can perform which will strengthen and support new governance systems.

Overall, member-level transport committees have a range of connected functions, which include:

- Holding to account local transport operators (possibly alongside the Mayor). This is an important part of the role in GM<sup>8</sup>. Sometimes, this holding to account veers into highly operational areas;

<sup>8</sup> In GM, monthly meetings of the transport committee involve a significant number of local operators. In LCR, meanwhile, only one operator is invited to the committee. In WY, engagement with operators tends to happen at a different level, through a separate rail forum and bus alliance. In WM, operators are invited to attend a delivery committee when issues arise. Whatever the (M)CA, it remains the case that a lot of operator/authority liaison happens behind the scenes.

- Holding to account the (M)CA on behalf of constituent authorities;
- Bringing together the transport plans and policies of constituent authorities at a member level (ie contributing to the development of an integrated transport policy). There is in some quarters an appetite for vertical alignment of transport strategies, which would bring together policy on things like integrated ticketing, bus priority, connecting timetables and so on. This is explored further in the section below on “silo working”;
- Identification of current and future transport needs; contributing to the long-term development of transport policy across the region.

Overall transport committees perform functions relating to **policy, delivery and scrutiny**. Sometimes these roles may end up in conflict. Sometimes they result in duplication, particularly where multiple committee overlap responsibilities on transport.

### Silo working

In the design of new policies, and their delivery, the links between transport and other powers is particularly important. For example, London’s integrated system “works” because the transport strategy (and operations), land use (in the form of the London Plan) and economic development strategies all work in concert.

Progress in this model of integration in (M)CAs has been slower. The question is whether governance (and particularly the role of members) is helping to break down these silos, or whether it is inadvertently supporting them. In terms of funding and duties, there continues to be a dislocation between land planning and transport.

There are a number of ways that cross-cutting working can be encouraged, and steps that committees themselves can undertake to do this:

- Focusing efforts on how land use planning and transport are aligned on sustainability and climate change;
- Reviewing transport plans to ensure more integration with (for example) the LEPs’ strategic economic plan and other sub-regional strategies and policies;
- Identifying opportunities for better co-ordination between local, regional and national strategy, and providing member leadership to take advantage of those opportunities. This may be useful from a funding perspective, and raises the prospect of good governance making a contribution to a more targeted approach to the securing of capital funding;
- Identifying and developing visible, high level links with other public services with a direct interest in transport – some of which may be under the control of constituent authorities and other bodies like the NHS.

### Work programming: a balance between strategic and operational focus

A theme for transport committees, and for member oversight in general, is the tendency to focus on operational matters. Discussion of individual bus routes and transport issues in individual wards – while not dominant everywhere – is a persistent issue. From our wider research we know that this places significant demands on both members and officers, as committee becomes a clearing house for information – and a place to criticise operational delivery by individual providers.

This arises out of the lack of clarity on the role for committees as we discussed elsewhere. Work programmes probably need to recognise better the distinction between policy, delivery and scrutiny we highlighted earlier. There seem to be two possible approaches.

1. Separate the member functions, by having a transport committee made up of executive

constituent authority nominees, alongside a transport scrutiny committee (or an existing scrutiny committee which takes on transport functions). The executive-side committee can focus on policy and planning, directing members’ minds to capital investment and infrastructure. The scrutiny committee can look in more detail at delivery and scrutiny – perhaps by providing a space for targeted intervention in some particularly significant operational matters alongside general overview of delivery performance. This benefits from clarity of role but could serve to compound problems around silo working;

2. Combine the member functions, by having a single transport committee which carries out these functions. For many this is the “status quo”; it reduces risks around duplication<sup>9</sup> but it could also make member-level transport governance unwieldy.

Better clarity on how work programmes are developed could help (M)CAs make the choice of which model to follow. Considering issues like:

- Should clearer criteria be used to place items on the work programme of committees?
- How should officers be involved in providing information to members to support these decisions?
- How can information items, and other matters which do not require specific determination by a formal committee, be dealt with?
- How can members assure themselves that the work they are doing reflects their role (in particular, the assurance that member functions generally are providing for policy direction, support on delivery and scrutiny – possibly not all through the same forum)?

### Actions and solutions

- Understand and act on the information that members need in order to put together the work programme; understand that information is likely to be better shared informally (including, potentially, through member briefing) than through formal committee;
- Make efforts to identify alternative spaces for operational accountability – through public rail and bus forums and through support to Mayoral, and constituent authority, accountability system;
- Set clear expectations about how work programmes will be put together, prioritised and managed;
- Use the “policy/delivery/scrutiny” division to better understand where members’ focus should be directed;
- Consider what structural model is most appropriate for member governance of transport and act accordingly.

<sup>9</sup> GM and WY have separate committees which does seem to result in a degree of duplication around reports and other products sent to committee for discussion and agreement.



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