



Transport labour market and skills consultation – UTG response

Background

The Urban Transport Group (UTG) represents the seven largest city region strategic transport bodies in England, which, between them, serve over twenty million people in Greater Manchester (Transport for Greater Manchester), London (Transport for London), the Liverpool City Region (Merseytravel), Tyne and Wear (Nexus), the Sheffield City Region (South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive), the West Midlands (Transport for West Midlands) and West Yorkshire (West Yorkshire Combined Authority).

We also have the following associate members: Tees Valley Combined Authority, Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, West of England Combined Authority, Nottingham City Council, Translink (Northern Ireland), Transport for Wales and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority.

Our members plan, procure, provide and promote public transport in Britain's largest city regions, with the aim of delivering integrated transport networks accessible to all.

Response

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the *Transport labour market and skills* call for ideas and evidence.

It is important that we address the labour and skills issues in the transport sector to enable it to play its full role in achieving net zero carbon emission targets and in levelling up, delivering places that are fairer, happier, healthier and more prosperous.

We need to enhance diversity in the transport sector so that the workforce better reflects the people it serves. Alongside this, we need inclusive workplace cultures, where people can speak up and bring their authentic experiences and 'whole selves' to work. This will help transport to deliver products and services that work for everyone.

In order for city region transport authorities to develop the capacity and capability needed to deliver transport systems that can achieve the goals outlined above, long term revenue funding is needed. Without long term revenue funding certainty, resource, knowledge and capability risk being lost, particularly from the public sector, undermining the ability of transport to play its role in thriving regional economies.

Question 1 – In your view, what skills does the transport sector need in the future?

There is a need for additional transport planners and engineers to deliver the transport infrastructure we need. We need to focus on the skills that will be needed for delivering a decarbonised transport system by 2050, in line with UK targets for achieving net zero carbon emissions.

Transport planning will need to move away from the traditional predict and provide approach, to a strategic one which recognises the need to make rapid and deep reductions to carbon emissions, with an increasing focus on public transport and active travel. We will also need to train mechanics and other professions to deal with zero emission vehicles as they are taken up into fleets in the coming decades.

As digital technologies become increasingly ubiquitous within the transport sector, digital skills are evermore essential to make the most of the opportunities on offer. However, it is an area where transport authorities often lack capacities and capabilities. Skills that will increasingly be needed include the ability to handle and analyse the large volumes of data that could be generated by technologies such as connected and autonomous vehicles and to translate these insights into improvements on the ground. The Local Government Association has previously said that these kinds of tasks are ‘likely to become a key function of local highway authorities in the near future.’

There have been widely reported shortages of bus drivers, in part exacerbated by competition from the HGV sector - which may offer higher salaries – as well as by reduced numbers of driving tests able to be taken during the Covid-19 pandemic. Bus drivers are an aging workforce, and it is important to attract people to these roles to ensure services are not undermined.

There are wider challenges in attracting talent to the public sector, particularly when competing with private sector employers who can often offer higher salaries and benefits.

Question 2 – How, in your view, can current qualification and training routes be made more accessible for those who want to pursue a career in the transport sector?

There needs to be a range of qualification and training routes in the transport sector, from apprenticeships through to degrees. At present there are gaps in the existing apprenticeship standards, particularly around traffic management and the bus sector. We also need to ensure that training reflects the current challenges facing the transport sector, in particular the need to deliver decarbonised transport systems in the coming decades.



Improved training and development opportunities for those already in the transport sector could help to improve retention, so we don't lose talent. This is particularly important in the public sector, where employers are competing for talent with private sector employers, who can often offer higher salaries and benefits.

Question 3 – What, in your view, are effective ways to attract young people and career changers into a career in the transport sector?

We need to do more to showcase and promote the range of opportunities and diversity of careers within the transport sector. Often people think about the more obvious jobs in the transport sector, e.g. drivers, maintenance etc., but there are a huge variety of roles available in the transport sector and different pathways to entry.

To attract a wider field of candidates, there is a need to highlight that the sector is as much about people and connecting them to opportunities as it is about vehicles and infrastructure.

We also need to recognise that young people are increasingly driven by the desire to have a positive impact in the world and that careers in transport offer the potential to transform people's lives, their health and to deliver a greener future.

Question 4 – What, in your view, are the barriers to further increasing diversity, inclusion and social mobility in the transport sector?

In order to attract more diverse talent to the transport sector, we need to address negative perceptions of the transport industry and the lack of profile for the breadth of opportunities within the sector.

White males are over-represented in the transport sector meaning that it may not look and feel like an attractive option for diverse candidates, perpetuating the imbalance.

Technical barriers can also limit the attractiveness of the transport sector to those from diverse backgrounds. For example, chartership and other high levels of technical requirements for roles may limit who can apply for a role, where people might be able to train on the job for a specific role if they have transferable skills.

The lack of inclusive culture for people entering the transport workforce may impact on both recruitment and retention in the transport sector. For example, marginalised groups experiencing micro aggressions or other discriminatory behaviour in the workplace. There are also challenges around facilities which may not meet the needs of everyone, including appropriate toilet and changing facilities for all genders, religious or cultural facilities and accessibility. Furthermore, not all workplaces offer the flexibility to accommodate the needs of people with caring responsibilities. These issues need to be addressed in order to increase diversity, inclusion and social mobility in the transport sector.

Question 5 – How, in your view, can barriers to diversity, inclusion and social mobility in the transport sector be reduced?

In order to reduce the barriers to diversity, inclusion and social mobility in the transport sector we need to elevate the voices of marginalised people within the sector, to hear the barriers they face in their careers and identify ways to support them and reduce these barriers. This will also help to make the sector more attractive to diverse talent, because there will be visible role models from a range of backgrounds and experiences.

Creating communities of support within the workplace through can help to support those from a range of backgrounds and experience, for example, staff network groups. Staff in the transport sector could also be encouraged to engage in wider professional networks, for example, Women in Transport, and other similar organisations.

Addressing gender, ethnicity and disability pay gaps is essential to supporting diversity and inclusion in the transport sector. Where pay gaps are identified, a plan should be put in place to close these.

We need to create career paths in the transport sector that work for all kinds of people so that the progression and development opportunities are available to those from a range of backgrounds. This could include part time roles, job sharing and support for returning to the transport sector or changing careers.

Any other comments?

Historically, skills initiatives from central government have focused on large transport bodies, the likes of Network Rail, Highways England, HS2 etc., which already have significant institutional capacity to develop the skills, diversity and inclusion agendas. This is understandable as they are large employers with substantial labour and skills requirements. But it means that smaller organisations such as transport and local authorities sometimes miss out on support and attention from central government initiatives.

Initiatives have often focused on STEM careers in transport, which are challenging areas to address. But that has come at the expense of demonstrating the breadth of roles in the transport sector and showcasing some of the 'softer', policy type roles.