

Business Plan

2024/25



Urban Transport Group Business Plan 2024/25

The Urban Transport Group is the UK's network of transport authorities.

Our vision is for city-regions, their towns and surrounding areas to be green, fair, healthy and prosperous places, with public transport and active travel options that provide access and opportunity for all.

Our mission is to help our members to create transport networks which:

- are **sustainably funded and affordable**
- deliver **social value**
- are **green and resilient**
- are **trusted**

We do this by:

- **making the case** for public transport through **purposeful policy**
- providing **thought leadership** by developing and maintaining a network of **strong sector relationships**
- **advocating for public transport** to support wider economic and social outcomes
- being the **Professional Network** for people who work in the public transport sector

Our Governance

The Urban Transport Group Director reports to a Board which is made up of a Director representing each of our Founding Members. The Board oversees the work of the Urban Transport Group.

Each Board member also leads on one or more of the topics that the Urban Transport Group covers as defined by our Professional Network.

The staff of the Urban Transport Group work closely with the Board and our Professional Network. We communicate to our internal and external stakeholders through newsletters and via our website and social media as well as various stakeholder events including our annual Parliamentary Reception.

Organisational update

The Urban Transport Group has appointed a new Director following the departure of the previous Director after 20 years of service. The new Director has refreshed the vision and purpose of the Urban Transport Group, which focusses on producing productive policy, developing strong sector relationships, advocating for public transport and having a thriving Professional Network.

The year ahead

The year ahead presents opportunities for the Urban Transport Group to grow and develop, building on our mission to advocate for public transport and its benefits on behalf of our members.

In the coming year, there will be a General Election likely followed by a Spending Review. These two events provide an opportunity to promote productive and purposeful policy interventions, advocating the value of public transport. It is important that as we continue to recover from the pandemic, we promote public transport as an investment - one which helps to support economic growth and create great places and strong communities across our member areas.

The year ahead will also see a further expansion of devolution across England, with new Mayoral and County Combined Authorities established as well as new Trailblazer settlements and Level 4 devolution agreements coming into place.

Devolution has the potential to significantly improve public transport across our member areas, bringing decision-making closer to local communities. Over the past year, there has been a commitment to provide longer-term capital budgets for our member areas, as well as progress on long-term departmental style settlements and the development of a Level 4 devolution framework – a stepping stone to Trailblazer deals. However, there remains a lack of clarity over long-term revenue funding, especially for bus services, as well as appropriate guidance for local areas to develop their transport strategy. The Urban Transport Group will continue to press Government on these topics.

The coming year has the potential to see a significant change in how the country tackles the climate crisis. We are seeing the effects of climate change on a more regular basis, with what were once regarded as ‘extreme’ weather events happening with greater regularity. Transport is one of the country’s largest contributors to carbon emissions. The Urban Transport Group will continue to push investment in public transport as a mechanism to help create a greener, cleaner economy.

Making the case through purposeful policy

Where we are

Our influential policy work is changing the transport landscape for the better. It is guided by our core mission to help our members create sustainably funded, affordable transport networks that are green, trusted and deliver social value.

In the past year we have completed a review and restructure of our policy processes, including improved scoping and tracking of work, greater internal and external partner engagement, and more accurate pricing. We have also refreshed the look and feel of our policy reports and briefings to enhance clarity and readability.

These new processes have sharpened our focus on ensuring all our policy work is purposeful, adds value and is well timed, targeted, and pitched at the right level.

In the context of an upcoming General Election, we have been focused on producing useful policy work that can feed into manifestos and aid understanding of how proposals may work in practice.

Over the year, we have responded strategically to consultations and fiscal events, including the King's Speech, the Spring and Autumn Budgets and Select Committee inquiries.

'Inside Track', launched at our Parliamentary Reception in March 2024, is our latest publication. It provides a unique analysis of transport trends over the past decade and what they mean for our cities and networks. This will become an annual 'temperature check' of the state of transport.

Exclusively for our members, we also launched our regular Members' Policy Horizon Scan updates, to ensure our network is informed of relevant developments across transport and related policy areas.

We actively explore opportunities to work in partnership with external organisations to enhance our capacity, reach and influence. Last year, we completed our first externally funded commission in partnership with the Local Government Association. The report looked at practical improvements to the Bus Services Act 2017 to further empower local areas to deliver better bus services. It is part of our growing 'A Smoother Ride' series, which is shifting the dial on how bus services are provided and funded.

In a further new venture intended to place UTG at the heart of transport policy making, we are providing the Secretariat for the independent Rail and Urban Transport Review, led by former Siemens CEO, Juergen Maier and guided by a panel of industry experts. We also provide transport policy advice to the UK Mayors.

Where we want to be

Through our productive policy work we will continue to make the case for public transport and the powers and sustainable funding our members need to deliver affordable, integrated, green, and trusted networks that deliver social value.

In this General Election year and beyond, we want to be the first port of call for trusted, insightful, and practical transport policy advice for a new Government, the shadow team, civil servants and other stakeholders. Our new policy processes are helping us to focus our outputs on those that would be most useful and impactful.

We will publish an overview of our policy asks ahead of party conference season or the General Election (whichever comes first). We will ensure that we are well placed to feed into the likely Spending Review that will follow the General Election and continue to respond to consultations and inquiries where we can add value.

Our work in the coming year will assist our members to keep ahead of policy developments, make the case for the transport policy measures they need and equip them with tools to make the best use of transport data to inform policy making. We will produce the next edition of 'Inside Track', seek to update our unique Metropolitan Bus Model and consider next steps for relaunching our sector leading Data Hub platform.

We will further strengthen our focus on developing partnerships to support our policy work, including identification of potential external funding streams to enhance our capacity, reach and influence.

Our Secretariat support for the Rail and Urban Transport Review is expected to conclude and we will continue to provide ongoing advice to the growing group of UK Mayors on transport matters.

How we will get there

In 2024/25, we will:

- complete reports already in development on sustainably funded transport, decarbonisation of bus fleets and making better use of data.
- develop policy work on the topics of trust; active travel; bus subsidy; devolution; and future trends.
- seek external funding for at least one piece of policy work.
- continue to circulate our regular 'Members' Policy Horizon Scan' briefings.
- update our unique Metropolitan Bus Model and set out next steps for our member-only Data Hub.
- publish our annual 'Inside Track' report.
- strategically respond to fiscal events and relevant consultations and inquiries.
- provide timely, trusted policy advice to our members, Government, the shadow team, civil servants and other stakeholders.
- continue to support the Rail and Urban Transport Review and UK Mayors.

Thought leadership and strong relationships

Where we are

We believe strong partnerships are vital to achieve the best transport outcomes for our places. As well as working with our members, we collaborate with a range of organisations (across the public, private, charitable, and academic sectors) to provide strong, united leadership on the most challenging issues facing transport.

Over the last year, we have strengthened our relationships within Government, particularly with various modal and cross-modal teams in the Department for Transport. We have begun developing stronger relationships with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and relevant advisors across Government departments. Strong relationships have also been developed across the political spectrum, with UTG providing advice to influence manifesto development and support innovative thinking on how to solve the most pressing transport policy challenges for an incoming Government.

Extensive work has taken place to further develop relationships with our associate members across the UK nations. We have sought to re-energise and engage our Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish associate members more actively in our Professional Network, UTG events, policy development and consultation responses.

Since Summer 2023, we have established a central role as the key advisor on transport policy matters for the UK Mayors group, which brings together all areas with directly elected Mayors in England. Through this work we have engaged in supporting and shaping the production of the Level 4 devolution deal transport offer; briefed UK Mayors, CEOs and Policy leads on emerging transport policy issues; and met regularly with the UK Mayors and DfT's English Devolution team on implementing Level 4 and Trailblazer deals.

Over the last year we have actively developed relationships with transport organisations (membership, charitable and pressure groups), including Confederation of Passenger Transport UK, Campaign for Better Transport and Transport Action Network. We have also regularly engaged with key public sector organisations, such as Sub National Transport Bodies, the Local Government Association and National Infrastructure Commission, as well as private sector representatives, including private operators and consultants.

We are the Secretariat for the refreshed City Regions Transport All Party Parliamentary Group, which is a dedicated cross-party forum to promote discussion and engagement on transport issues facing city regions. The group provides an opportunity for Parliamentarians from across our member areas and the whole country to engage on the latest developments in the sector, and to receive updates and briefings from UTG, our member transport authorities, sector leaders and other stakeholders. The group currently has over twenty members across both the House of Commons and Lords.

As an active member of UITP (the International Association of Public Transport), we are establishing international relationships, promoting our members' approaches beyond our own borders, and learning from our international partners.

Where we want to be

By further fostering and expanding our strong relationships, we will firmly position UTG as the thought leader in the transport sector. We want to be the first port of call for purposeful public transport policy for decision-makers, organisations, civil servants, political party representatives, local government officers and others.

The development of our cross governmental relationships in the lead up to and following a General Election and likely Spending Review will be crucial to achieving this goal. It will ensure that the opportunities and challenges faced by our members are clearly recognised and addressed in the relevant Government teams.

We will work to embed these varied relationships through the wider membership, particularly through our Professional Networks and the Board.

To strengthen our membership, policy and local government reach, we will look to expand our membership, identifying areas facing similar issues and opportunities as those of our existing members.

How we will get there

In 2024/25, we will:

- refine UTG's membership offer and strengthen relationships between officers across our areas.
- define and explore opportunities for partnerships with the most relevant organisations and bodies.
- further develop relationships with DHLUC teams ahead of and following the General Election.
- work closely with DfT teams in the run up to and following the General Election to ensure UTG and our members' voices are strongly represented in any policy or funding reform discussions.
- provide specialist advice to the UK Mayors in the development of their first devolution report.
- develop and deliver a programme of meetings for the City Regions Transport APPG to further boost UTG's profile and recognise our members' work.
- develop and deliver a programme of effective engagement and relationship building for the political party conference season in 2024.

Advocating for public transport

Where we are

We use our collective voice to champion public transport and active travel through a variety of different communications channels and events.

Over the past year, we have used our influence and brand to: gain media coverage for our policy work; secure three Metro Mayors on our Urban Transport *Next* podcast series; and provide oral evidence to the Transport Select Committee.

Website visitor numbers and engagement on our social media channels (LinkedIn and X) continue to grow, with significant spikes of activity around key policy reports and events.

As part of our refreshed Professional Network offering, we have established a new Public Affairs group that is already adding value as we further develop and expand our advocacy work with key political and industry stakeholders. This group will complement the work of the existing Heads of Communications group.

We gained increased exposure at the Autumn Party Conferences, partnering with Centre for Cities and the Northern Powerhouse Partnership across a number of fringe and reception events. These events brought together Metro Mayors, shadow transport Ministers, transport commissioners and other influential transport industry figures for engaging debates about the future of transport.

We continued to play an active role in key transport sector events, partnering on conferences such as the UK Light Rail Conference, the Northern Transport Summit, Interchange 2024, the Local Transport Summit and the Smart Transport Conference. We raised the profile of our Director, securing speaking and chairing opportunities at the events above (plus many more), as well as appearances on podcasts such as Calling All Stations and Lunch with Leon. Our Director also contributed thought leadership on transport through his regular column in Passenger Transport magazine.

We hosted our most successful Parliamentary Reception to date, with a full-capacity event that included keynote speeches from a Transport Minister and the Shadow Transport Secretary.

We tightened up our organisational narrative to better reflect the work that we, and our members, do.

Where we want to be

We want to see the influence of our communications and advocacy work continue to grow in 2024/25.

We want to become the 'go to' organisation for transport views and analysis in the eyes of journalists and to secure more national media coverage for our work.

We want to further raise the profile of our Urban Transport *Next* events (seeking to attract more listeners and viewers), as well as potentially generating income through sponsorship of the series.

We want to greatly improve the way we communicate with our different stakeholders and simplify how we organise and manage our stakeholder relationships through the use of new Stakeholder Management Software.

Subject to the timing of a General Election, we will seek to have an influential presence at the Autumn Party Conferences through a variety of events. We will also continue to sponsor and partner on key industry events to increase our profile and raise our collective voice advocating for public transport.

We want to continue to provide the best networking opportunities for our members with the wider transport industry and political decision makers and will once again host an invite-only Parliamentary Reception.

We want to ensure our Public Affairs and Heads of Communications groups play an integral role in expanding our advocacy work.

How we will get there

In 2024/25, we will:

- foster stronger relationships with national transport journalists, seeking to secure individual meetings with four key journalists, and to brief journalists in advance of our major policy work.
- plan a programme of Urban Transport *Next* events (including one high profile event per quarter) and produce a sponsorship brochure to attract a sponsor for the podcast series.
- start using Stakeholder Management Software to better manage our stakeholder relationships.
- implement a coordinated plan for stakeholder communications around our major pieces of policy work.
- seek to enter partnerships with influential peer organisations on our Party Conference activity.
- host a Parliamentary Reception in February or March 2025.
- continue to develop, sponsor and support various industry events with our members and partners.
- host the first joint meeting between the Public Affairs and Heads of Communications groups to ensure the goals of the two groups are aligned.
- launch new videos on 'About UTG' and on our broader learning offer to our members.

Professional Network

Where we are

One of the great strengths of the Urban Transport Group is its people – the staff from its member transport authorities who together form the ‘Professional Network’ of the organisation.

We have refreshed the Professional Network, streamlined the number of groups, and organised them under five themes, each led by a UTG Board member (or Board members) who will oversee the remit of their groups. Each group also has a new Chair, drawn from within our members, to further encourage a sense of ownership and accountability for the groups. We have also developed new guidelines to assist in the running of the groups.

The re-launch of the Professional Network was accompanied by an update and refresh of the Professional Network sections of the UTG website.

As part of our Professional Network offer, we are also delivering a network-wide programme of events (in addition to regular group meetings), to share expertise, intelligence and good practice.

We have also devised plans for expanding the current Leadership Programme as part of a broader learning offer to our members. The offer will be for a senior leadership programme and a mid-level management programme.

Where we want to be

The Professional Network has, and will continue to, shape and influence the future of urban transport in our city regions. It is integral to the success of the Urban Transport Group.

The refreshed Professional Network groups will focus on supporting the delivery of UTG’s mission and overall vision. Groups will convene around key topics and, with the leadership of Board members and Chairs, will take a more strategic approach and focus on producing outcomes (as agreed by each individual group).

The proposed broader learning offer will seek to deliver a senior leadership programme each year, and subject to a successful pilot programme, work towards the delivery of a mid-level manager course.

How we will get there

In 2024/25, we will:

- convene four meetings per group (one per quarter).
- schedule group meetings in advance to ensure intended regularity is achieved.

- schedule a mixture of in-person and virtual meetings for groups, with at least one in-person meeting for each group per year.
- ensure each Board lead acts as champion for their group, attending meetings regularly and ensuring the group has good representation from the UTG membership.
- ensure each group has three key individuals with collective responsibility for the group's success (Board Lead, UTG Staff lead and Group Chair).
- host four 'network-wide' events.
- conduct regular member surveys to ensure we continue to meet their needs and address their priorities.
- develop UTG's broader learning offer to support networking and learning throughout the Professional Network and provide increased value for members.
- support graduates of our leaning programmes and seek to set up an alumni network.



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