



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

**COMMITTEE FOR
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

Sustainable Transport Inquiry

18 March 2010

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Miss McIlveen (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Boylan

Mr W Clarke

Mr Gallagher

Mr Kinahan

Mr McCartney

Mr B Wilson

Witnesses:

Mr Martin Gregg) Advanced Communications and Information Systems

Mr Uel Hoey) Belfast International Airport

Mr John Wright) Belfast Metropolitan Residents Group

Mr Arthur Acheson) Boyd Partnership Chartered Accountants

Mr Aodhan O'Donnell) Consumer Council

Mr Ryan Simpson)

Mr Tom McClelland) CTC and NI Cycling Initiative

Ms Caroline Watson) Energy Saving Trust

Mr Richard Agus) Greenway to Stay

Mr Michael Lorimer) Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee

Mr Gordon Best) Quarry Products Association Northern Ireland

Mr Des McKibbin) Research and Library Service
Mr James Dillon) Sustainable Development Commission
Mr Steven Patterson) Sustrans
Mr Mal McGreevy) Translink
Mr Malachy Campbell) WWF Northern Ireland

The Deputy Chairperson (Miss McIlveen):

Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the Regional Development Committee, I wish to thank you for attending this evidence-engagement event. Unfortunately, the Chairman, Mr Fred Cobain, is unable to attend and therefore sends his apologies.

The Committee has had a long-standing interest in sustainability issues. As far back as the Budget of 2007, members have highlighted that although the Executive have a public service agreement (PSA) target of reducing Northern Ireland's carbon footprint, the Department for Regional Development did not have a direct responsibility for delivering that reduction. That has been a recurring theme in the Committee's responses to the Executive on the Budget processes over the subsequent years.

The Committee's inquiry is aimed at initiating a debate on sustainable transport in Northern Ireland; the Committee specifically wants to explore and clarify the social, environmental and economic aspects of sustainable transport; it wants to identify the policies, attitudes and technologies likely to underpin a move to more sustainable transport in Northern Ireland; and, where possible, make recommendations arising out of those investigations to the Assembly.

We received a tremendous response to our call for written evidence — 24 responses were received from a wide range of organisations, including the transport sector, environmental groups, academics, and voluntary- and community-sector organisations. I wish to thank all those who made written submissions.

Among the key points to emerge from the responses were that the social aspects of sustainable transport are to be found in issues of social equity and inclusion, with particular regard to the distribution of resources, the accessibility of transportation modes, road safety and the ability to

utilise the health benefits of walking and cycling.

The reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and fossil fuel dependency are key environmental issues, and the principal means of tackling them will be reducing the over-dependence on private-car usage in Northern Ireland. That issue is intrinsically linked to an improvement in cycling and pedestrian safety measures to encourage an uptake in non-motorised transportation modes; and town and land planning are named as key policy areas that contribute to the environmental aspects of sustainable transportation. Obesity is identified as a major health concern, which, it is suggested, could be partially addressed by encouraging walking and cycling.

Investment, reward and financial information underline the third subsection: economic aspects of sustainable transport. The responses highlighted sustainability as having considerable potential as a future growth industry in Northern Ireland. It was also suggested that there is a need for investment into research with cost-benefit analysis outcomes, as well as identifying the full external costs of current town and land planning decision making.

Carrot-and-stick options were included as means of promoting sustainable transport-friendly travel choices; some responses highlighted the effectiveness of financial incentives — higher taxation and fees — in inducing people to choose more sustainable modes of transport.

The responses identified attitudes, technologies and existing government policies likely to underpin a move to sustainable transport in Northern Ireland. The responses' focus reflects the awareness of the over-dependence on private-car transport in Northern Ireland. Some responses expressed a need for policies to promote a positive-discrimination approach towards public transport, cycling and walking while making private-car use an unattractive alternative — particularly the predominant single-passenger usage.

The responses also identified the wide range of literature on sustainable transport, including the Stern review and King report, as well as international, European, national and local-level research conducted by academics and scientists; the responses also noted the work of public- and private-sector bodies that have a particular interest in sustainability and sustainable transport.

Among the themes addressed in that literature are global environmental issues, the urban environment, energy consumption, public transportation, health, cycling and road safety.

The need to deliver educational programmes to all members of, and groups in, our society to raise awareness of more individual contributions to the sustainable transport system was a key feature of responses on changing attitudes. Suggestions included the need for employer incentives to reduce individual car transportation; the desirability of promoting opportunity and innovation in that field; increased awareness of our environmental limits; and the link between sustainable transport and healthy living.

Finally, I will address some of the key points on technologies. Many of the responses cited the sustainability aspect of existing transportation schemes, such as dial-a-lift and assisted rural transport schemes as examples of good practice. The responses also mentioned new technologies in operation in other cities in the UK and Europe. The availability of integrated information systems technology was also seen as providing an advance in the customer's experience of public transportation.

The road movement of freight is particularly important in Northern Ireland, and reference was made to double-decker and flexible freight trailer designs as advances that could reduce the volume of freight transportation by road. The development of new and the expansion of existing cycle-path networks, coupled with improved provision of facilities at workplaces, was also highlighted in several responses.

I hope that that provides a flavour of the range and detail of the responses that we received. Thank you for taking the time to attend today, and I look forward to hearing from the working groups during the plenary sessions. Before we start, I invite the Committee Clerk, Róisín Kelly, to take you quickly through some housekeeping arrangements for the remainder of the afternoon.
[Applause.]

The Committee Clerk:

Thank you. I ask that people turn off their mobile phones, particularly during the plenary sessions, as the feedback sessions are being recorded. Your room allocations are included in the papers: working groups 1 and 4 will be in the Long Gallery; working groups 2 and 5 will be in room 152; working groups 3 and 6 are in room 144. One person will be asked to act as rapporteur on the positions and issues agreed by each group for the plenary sessions.

Mr Ryan Simpson (Consumer Council):

Our group discussed the social aspects of sustainable transport and decided on the three most important aspects of social sustainability, which are interlinked: one cannot be put above either of the others. They are: social equity; economic prosperity, but not, perhaps, in the simple form that we understand it; and community involvement. I will come to each of those in more detail.

The group made several points, including the interesting suggestion that public transport should be free for everyone at the point of use. That would create the modal shift that we are all looking for, it would cost less than the present road budget, and it would send a very strong message that public transport was a viable option that people would want to take. That sparked a debate about the other issues, such as how people would gain access to services, for example, access to bus routes and, in particular, the main bus routes on urban corridors; and how people would get to bus stops to use those forms of transport. The same applies to rail services.

An important social aspect is that people are encouraged to drive because of the convenience and kudos of driving a car. Sometimes, the timetabling and accessibility of public transport facilities means that it is not an option, and, therefore, using a car is easier. Once people have paid for a car, they will use it.

To look at some of the investment priorities, it was pointed out last week that the Sydenham bypass will be widened from two lanes to three. Some members of the group felt that that was skewed towards single-occupancy car users. Indeed, a member of our group pointed out that he had never seen a traffic jam on the Sydenham bypass and wondered why we needed to invest more money in it.

When looking at accessible transport, a major part of the equation is social exclusion. When people cannot access transport — either public or private — they cannot access training, schools and employment opportunities; that is social exclusion. There is a wide gamut of opportunities that people with private transport take for granted.

We also looked at the profiling of accessibility; accessing health facilities is a big issue for many people in Northern Ireland. It was pointed out that it disproportionately affects certain

groups, for example, older people, women and people with disabilities, who cannot travel to access the essential services that they need.

We looked at behaviour change and how we could get people to use public transport; it is easy to put strategies in place, but it is difficult to get people to take advantage of them.

There is a mix of urban and rural. When people think of sustainable transport solutions, they think of cities, but we need to look at rural areas. Most people in Northern Ireland live in rural areas, and we must look at how access to essential services through transport is achieved.

At an economic level, we must look at the outcomes that we expect from investment in transport. Is it simply getting from A to B more quickly, is it more economic prosperity, or should we consider the health benefits that sustainable transport provides and the savings that will be made in regional development, in health, employment and learning, and education? Savings can be made from more suitable transport across government.

More community involvement and ownership of public transport and sustainable transport was required to encourage a behaviour change. We thought that the review of public administration and the likelihood of new councils having more control over transport would provide an opportunity. We also thought that we should look at demonstration or pilot projects across Northern Ireland so that local communities would have ownership. We thought that it was important for people to feel that they had ownership of public transport and that it was not something separate or a last resort, as the Minister said, but that it was something that had equal value with private transport.

Finally, we considered examples from other countries — which I am sure the Committee will do — cities such as Basel and Freiburg, which many people know about. Those cities have integrated not just the transport system but how land use is planned. They have zoned residential and commercial business so that the whole system is integrated, not just around transport but around how people work and live their lives. *[Applause.]*

Mr James Dillon (Sustainable Development Commission):

Hello, everyone, I am reporting on behalf of the second group, which considered the social aspect of

transport. Before we got into the three key issues, we agreed that the point needed to be made that we are still dealing with the legacy of transport and planning policies that have always centred on car use and ownership. Traditionally, accessing services through public transport has been something of an afterthought, and that must be taken as the basis on how we move forward.

The three main points that arose out of our discussion were, first, increasing access to transport, to which we thought there were several aspects. Our main point was about allowing people to access the public transport network, and there is a variety of ways of doing that through, for example, developing cycling and walking routes to the public transport network or using dial-a-lift and door-to-door services and community transport.

Another aspect of access to transport was access to information, which involves more than phoning the Translink call centre to find out where one's local bus stop is. People accepted that they may not know whom to phone to find out a safe route to their local bus stop or whether there were other public transport services once they had come to the end of their bus journey. For such people, public transport might be only a small part of their journey from A to B. Information about the whole transport network is vital.

Our final point about access was the accessibility of vehicles and infrastructure. The group recognised that there has been massive investment in public transport, and people have seen the resulting improvements, such as low-floor buses and new bus stations. However, we also recognised that we have some way to go. It is the perception of many people who might not have used public transport in many years that buses still have three or four steps to mount, which puts people off using public transport. The investment has been made, but we need to do more to show people how accessible public transport is.

Our second point was about supporting people to use public transport, including travel training for older people who might not have used public transport for some time and for those who may be unaware that there are services other than Translink or taxis. People should be educated about sustainable public transport and encouraged to use it. That would build confidence and increase people's feeling of safety; they could be confident that a bus would turn up and that they could get to the bus stop. It is a question of looking at the whole journey and of how to get from A to B.

We thought that it was important to make transport more affordable in order to encourage people to use it. Many people have to take a taxi or use a door-to-door service that involves a charge to get to a bus stop, and that involves extra cost. Public transport should be the affordable option.

Our final point concerned reducing the need to travel in the first place, which could be done through future planning. The Titanic Quarter is a good example: its infrastructure is being designed and built, but public transport links to it are being considered at the same time. We must also look at how health and education services can be delivered more locally to avoid the need to travel to access them. *[Applause.]*

Ms Caroline Watson (Energy Saving Trust):

I am Caroline Watson from the Energy Saving Trust; I was in the group that addressed environmental aspects.

The group was asked three questions, the first of which was: which of the three aspects of sustainability should be given the highest priority and why? That was the last question that the group was asked, but we answered it first, because, as you will all know, the three pillars of sustainability are environmental, social and economic, and the group felt that all three are very important. Even though the group was asked to address the environmental aspect, we felt that sustainability cannot be achieved unless all three strands are addressed. By the end of the session, the group concluded that all the solutions that we had come up with to the environmental aspects addressed all three pillars.

The second question asked what the three most important aspects of environmental sustainability were. The group had an in-depth conversation on that question and several different things were mentioned. However, the three that the group settled on were climate-change emissions, air quality and land use and planning issues.

The third question was: which of the three characteristics is the most important? The group did not focus too much on that question because we felt passionate about discussing solutions. We recognised what the three problems were, but we wanted to get down to the nitty-gritty of what could actually be done about them; therefore because we felt that all the problems were very important, we did not settle on an answer. Many of the solutions that the group discussed have

already been reflected in the social aspects group that was just reported on, and there will probably not be too many surprises.

The group thought that it was important for Northern Ireland to have transport climate-change targets that reflected the UK targets for 2020 and 2050 and to ensure that those targets were met. The group decided that the way to deliver reductions in CO2 emissions and address the problems of air quality and land-use planning was to reduce dependency on car use through improving access to public transport; a factor that was addressed in the social aspects report. However, reducing car use would require modal shifts to forms of transport such as walking and cycling. The group felt that focusing on those aspects was vital and that there should be greater investment in them.

The group agreed that technology was an incredibly important solution. Much of the required technology already exists; we do not have to wait 10, 20 or 30 years for it to be created or developed. However, we must ensure that it is accessible. Some of the technologies that were suggested included biofuels, electric cars or electricity to fuel vehicles and fuel cells. Most of the emissions that come from a car — some 80% — are from the fuel that it uses rather than making or delivering it. Changing the fuel on which cars run would make a vast difference to the environment.

The third most important solution in addressing the environmental aspect was the prioritisation of funding. The discussion on that point almost degenerated into one on whether funds were available, and one group member suggested that we should perhaps discuss prioritising where the money goes. A great deal of money is spent on roads to the detriment of public transport, and if funding was reprioritised to public transport, services could be vastly improved. *[Applause.]*

Mr Aodhan O'Donnell (Consumer Council):

I am reporting on behalf of the economic group. The group conducted a very broad discussion on the economic issues faced by sustainable transport, including questioning the question on what was meant by “economic sustainability”.

We returned to the broad issue of what sustainability meant in relation to living within our means, supporting the ability of future generations to live within their means and consuming at a sustainable rate.

Our first point probably answers the last question on prioritising what is most important. The other groups also mentioned the strong interdependence between the social, economic and environmental issues on sustainability; it is difficult to consider one at the expense or absence of the others. All three aspects need to be considered equally.

The group spoke about the context in which the discussions were taking place. Over the past 25 to 50 years there has been a strong change in travel patterns and the choices that have been available to people in how we move around. Other groups said that reducing the need to travel and the distance that we travel is a priority. We recognised the need for ongoing economic investment and support to provide public-transport services in rural and urban areas.

There are several issues that we believe to be important. The first is the cost and affordability of public transport; convenience and choice were also raised. We discussed the cost of running private vehicles compared to public-transport provision and the need to ensure that people are aware of those benefits. The social group spoke of the historic underinvestment in infrastructure, and we concentrated on the importance of priority lanes, such as in Belfast, and the capacity of park-and-ride facilities to support people in making a modal shift from taking the car to using public transport.

A big bugbear for the group was the availability and cost of parking in places such as Belfast. Given the wide availability of parking spaces, people will not move on to buses, trains or other, more sustainable, means of transport. Another issue raised was that of land-use planning: the way in which we organise and plan for people to use their cars less. That is an essential issue that we have to grapple with right across Northern Ireland in order to facilitate people to move away from private-car use on to other, more sustainable, means.

We discussed the need to address our culture of car dependency — three quarters of people here use a car at least three times a week. That will probably be brought up later in discussions on behaviour, but there is a great deal of work to be done. We spoke about the concessionary passes that are available for older people, although I think that they used to be available for young

people. That enabled people to choose to use the car less.

Improving infrastructure and the ability of public transport to move through our towns and cities more conveniently is a priority, although we recognise that provision has improved. We discussed rural coverage and the need to ensure that all forms of community and other transport provision in rural areas tie into the public-transport network so that there is better co-ordination and integration between services.

The final point was an acknowledgement of the fact that there is a regional development strategy and regional transportation strategy; however, we need an overall integrated transport policy. Aviation and air transport play a vital role in connecting us to Great Britain and Europe, although that role may not be fully considered in the regional development and regional transportation strategies. *[Applause.]*

The Deputy Chairperson:

Thank you. Does anyone wish to comment on what they have heard?

Mr Steven Patterson (Sustrans):

I was in the social group, on which James provided excellent feedback. One of the points that we picked up on was social equity. Our number-one desire for the social equity of transport priorities was to do with infrastructure, particularly road space and how it is prioritised. We were also concerned about safety on our roads.

There is limited road space, and there is neither the money, space nor community desire to build many more roads, particularly in urban areas. The question is how our road space is best used. At the moment, we have not decided how we want to use it, and we thought that the best way to create equal social choices was to give active travel and the sustainable travel modes more space on the roads, say with continuous bus lanes. Inevitably, that would be of disadvantage to people who want to drive their cars, but we felt that they would have the choice to use buses or to walk and cycle.

Allocating limited road space is an issue. We thought that infrastructure was crucial to residential space. Cars tend to dominate residential areas, and, as a result, children and young people who want to play or cycle to school are treated unequally. There is an inequality because

they are being prevented from doing those activities. We thought that quality of life, infrastructure and how we deal with the balance between people who want to use roads and pavements and cars using them was a crucial issue, and we think that the balance at the moment is wrong.

Mr Tom McClelland (CTC and NI Cycling Initiative):

I was part of working group 4, the economic group. We discussed externalising the cost of carbon-intensive transport, which, in effect, uses the atmosphere as a sewer. We pondered how such external costs could be internalised. You have already heard the report about how we move to price roads and car-parking properly. Carbon-intensive transport systems externalise their costs, and we would like to see how those costs could be internalised so that better choices could be made.

The Committee Clerk:

Working group 4 discussed policies, and it will now give us some feedback. Each group will have five minutes in which to provide feedback from its working group session. I ask that the rapporteurs state their name and that of the group for which they are providing feedback. After a rapporteur from each group has spoken, the floor will be opened for any additional points of view. The Deputy Chairperson will then make some closing remarks.

Mr Richard Agus (Greenway to Stay Campaign):

Good afternoon. I gather that there are to be two feedback sessions from the policies group, which was divided into two. We had four questions to consider. However, it was pointed out that there is no magic solution to achieving more sustainable transport in Northern Ireland, and it is hard to quantify that in answering those four questions.

Our first question was to identify the three most important policy interventions required to underpin a move to more sustainable transport. Our first suggestion was that a sustainability baron is needed. There are currently too many Departments for us to have proper integration. Much better collaboration is required. The costs and benefits of sustainable transport are spread over many different Departments. Having a sustainability baron would provide the necessary focus and drive.

Our second suggestion was a need for clear targets for a sustainability baron to meet so that clear advice can be given. Public transport is a major part of the solution, but there will be

residual car users who need advice on the most sustainable option, and so on, when choosing cars.

The third most important policy intervention would be a change in policies on road space, car parking and funding to achieve a more balanced and socially inclusive solution.

Our second question was to identify the most important of those three policy interventions, and we concluded that it was a need for integration. Our third question asked what opportunities exist for improving public transport. A sense of urgency is needed in order to achieve change, and there are two opportunities to achieve that change: first, public acceptance of climate change; and, secondly, the recession. People accept that what we are doing now is not working, so they can accept that change will happen. The way in which to improve that is to do it at a local level. We discussed local transport plans that would give ground-up solutions, but the critical point that was raised was that if our current policymakers were to lead on those plans, they would not necessarily be successful.

There are also technological opportunities. It was pointed out that it is possible to access the Internet or a mobile phone and easily find 20 different routes from Belfast to Johannesburg, yet if one tried to find out how to get from Armagh to Stormont using a different range of options, it would prove a struggle.

Our fourth and final question concerned threats to the development of more sustainable transport. One threat identified, to follow on from the last point, is barriers to information. Another threat is the silo mentality in government, and in society in general. That suffocates innovation. Lack of leadership is a threat, as Departments go off in different policy directions and thereby create tensions. A final threat is lack of recognition of the economic benefits of sustainable transport. Only the negative side is reported, but there are real economic benefits to adopting a sustainable transport policy. *[Applause.]*

Mr Uel Hoey (Belfast International Airport):

I am reporting on behalf of the second group that discussed policies. I hope that we dovetail to a certain extent with what has gone before. The first policy that we considered was to support public transport to make it more accessible, both physically and financially, and to have broad policy aims to assist in that respect. We discussed enforcing reduced speed limits on minor roads

to lessen the number of collisions, which would encourage people to use public transport. We also discussed the full door-to-door transportation package, as well as the need to address the use of transport at every level.

We moved on to a discussion on sustainability and the idea of hybrid buses that use less fuel and that make fewer emissions. We also discussed the use of alternative technologies such as hydrogen fuel cell, wind power, electric cars and renewable-energy sources in buses and freight vehicles. That would improve the environmental side of transportation.

In summary, the three main aspects that we considered were: the general integration of transport issues; road safety; and improved technologies. We discussed a fresh approach to land use and transportation plans, and we thought that, historically, decision-makers might have been unfamiliar with those issues. We also thought that there could be better sectoral or departmental collaboration in making decisions. One of our group even suggested that we should close the car park at Stormont for two months to all Members and senior civil servants to see whether that brought about the desired end of increasing the use of public transport.

Mr McCartney:

We would not be here; that is the only thing. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Hoey:

We discussed prioritising strategic infrastructure, the regional transportation strategy and improving gateways. We also discussed prioritising road developments to and from airports and seaports to make access more efficient and to improve their image, which would encourage inward investment and tourism.

We then moved on to a discussion on improving existing policies and thought that investing up front at this stage in transportation development would benefit budgets in the long term. The point was made that a strong city means a strong economy, but that was balanced by the need for any transportation development plans not to be detrimental to the rural economy.

It was noted that the Department for Regional Development and the Assembly are now writing policies and that Roads Service, which had done that formerly, has since assumed the role of an agency. We felt that that facilitated greater joined-up thinking in how transportation

policies might be adopted in future.

Aviation and sea access was discussed in the round, from the general to the particular. The group examined the aspects on the ground in Northern Ireland, and the economic aspects of driving people here for inward investment and tourism as a general point on transportation, before we address the idea of how we move them around on the ground.

In summary, the group examined a full integration of transportation to maximise economic benefit, balanced with social need, personal safety and environmental future-proofing. We also talked briefly about integrating the roles of other Departments such as the Department of Education and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in transportation policies, and we decided that various forms of decision-making should not be carried out in a piecemeal or fragmented fashion. Amsterdam was cited as a good example of a city and region that has got its transportation infrastructure right.

A couple of minor points were made at the conclusion of the session. The idea of incrementing free public transport for young people, as well as for retired people, would push more people towards using public transport in the short term. It was also noted that if 109 cyclists were to use their bicycles regularly, the Health Service would save £1 million per annum. However, cycling figures in and around Belfast city centre have dropped recently. The group decided that some movement should be made to remove obstacles to cycling routes in the city. Finally, it was considered important that the overall quality of life for the community should be considered a central aspect of any transportation policy. *[Applause.]*

Mr Patterson:

I am the director of Sustrans, and I am reporting on behalf of working group 5, which discussed attitudes. The group discussed at length the attitudes of government and of individuals who make transport choices. Within government, we included elected representatives and civil servants, and particularly those who work for Translink and Roads Service who make day-to-day decisions on transport. We decided that the fundamental attitude of government should be to decide what the priorities are and what outcomes are expected from transport investment. The group asked whether government wanted to stick to the status quo, knock some time off long journeys or concentrate on the fact that 65% of journeys taken are less than five miles. The Government should decide where they want to go with their transport plans.

We were asked what the three most important attitudinal changes are to help underpin a move to more sustainable transport. First, the group felt that integrating the economic, social and environmental pillars was a key attitude. Currently, the concept of economic growth is the overriding attitude, and the group felt that a more balanced approach is needed. The group also discussed individuals and the fact that ultimately they will make their own travel choices, but government should take the lead.

The group then discussed what motivates people to change their mode of transport and whether telling them that they are contributing to CO2 emissions, that certain modes of transport are not beneficial to their health or that their car-parking space takes up space from a bus lane is the deciding factor in their doing so. However, the group came to the conclusion that people make travel decisions based on what affects their lifestyle. Therefore, devising and promoting solutions was felt to be a good idea.

Part of the evidence obtained from the sustainable travel towns in England is that people long for information, whether that be on bus timetables or walking speeds. Indeed, there is a perception that to walk from the City Hall in Belfast to the Royal Victoria Hospital takes a long time, when it takes only seven minutes.

We thought that the provision of information on the realities of sustainable travel is important. However, in order to make sustainable travel work, that information needs to be targeted in areas where the infrastructure already exists. Some people thought that there was no point now in trying to persuade, inform or encourage people to travel sustainably, owing to the perception that the right infrastructure does not exist anywhere. We thought that there was a mixed picture. Some places have a good public transport infrastructure, whereas other places, such as rural areas, do not. The focus should be on trying to deliver more sustainable travel through learning from successful pilot projects in England, or even from Northern Ireland. We believe that change needs to happen now and that issues around health and road safety, such as car collisions, need to be addressed immediately.

There was also a perception that people who have a car will drive it, unless the alternative is quicker and more comfortable. Mal McGreevy cited figures for the many people who have stopped using their cars and started taking public transport over the past five years. The number

of people taking the train has increased fantastically, and Metro buses are also being well used. However, that is only because those options suits individuals better. People take the bus or the train because they can do their work during the journey and do not have to pay for car parking when they get into town.

Secondly, we believe that there needs to be an attitudinal change to the way in which infrastructure, such as roads and buses, is used. People cited road safety and their perception of the roads as dangerous as key reasons why they do not travel actively. Therefore, we thought that improving infrastructure is absolutely crucial to addressing that. Again, it is down to the roads engineers and politicians to take braver decisions and prioritise buses, walking and cycling. We do not know how that attitude can be changed, but it is blocking the development of sustainable travel.

We also talked about local lifestyles. That issue again returns to the need for the Government to develop sustainable planning policies that reduce the need for people to travel in the first place by creating the necessary environments for them locally. It is about keeping local libraries open and about building health centres in urban areas so people do not have to drive halfway between Enniskillen and Omagh to get to a hospital, because that inevitably makes sustainable travel much more difficult. We even talked about air miles and food sources and about how those issues relate to the concept of promoting local lifestyles and local services so that people can travel sustainably.

Thirdly, we discussed the provision of information and education, which we have touched on already. We talked about the importance of campaigns and of the media informing people about transport choices, as well as about the forms of transport that we want them to choose.

We were also asked to discuss three other questions. The first was what we thought to be the single most achievable attitudinal change. We believe that the provision of information to the public is the most achievable attitudinal change. It is important that the public be informed of the advantages of more sustainable public transport and of the ease with which they can use that, where it exists.

We were also asked what, in our opinion, is the greatest opportunity to change attitudes in favour of more sustainable public transport. We thought that to have the Government lead the

way provided the greatest opportunity to change attitudes. I think that around 40% of the population are civil servants, so if the Civil Service took the lead by doing away with free car parking in the middle of Belfast and by encouraging its staff to travel more sustainably, that target would be more achievable.

The final question was what, in our opinion, is the biggest threat to changing attitudes. We talked about lethargy among the public. However, we then delved a bit further into that issue. People who are rich enough to afford a car may not want to use it, given that petrol prices have now risen to £1.20 a litre. In addition, we felt that people from socially deprived areas who have a car may be spending 25% of their income on running it.

There was another threat concerning government and the review of public administration, as responsibility for transport might go to councils, and they might not be well informed on the subject. However, I do not think that transport issues will be handed over to councils; that point may be cleared up in the open-mic session. It is a difficult issue. *[Applause.]*

The Committee Clerk:

I am aware that we have run over time, so there will be a very short summing-up session and opportunity to comment as soon as this presentation is finished.

Mr Des McKibbin (Research and Library Service):

Working group 6 discussed technologies that could improve sustainable transport. Our main focus was on fuel technology and on vehicle efficiency and technology. Among the many fuels that are out there are hydrogen fuel cells, biofuels and electricity. There are also hybrid vehicles. However, we felt that each has its limitations. Electrical vehicles can travel only very short distances, and the electricity that runs them is derived from fossil fuels. Biofuels are also unsustainable, as producing them can force up food prices. We came to the conclusion that there needs to be a shift towards producing electricity that does not require the use of fossil fuels. That is the only sustainable way forward.

We also focused on road construction and agreed that improved road surfaces can reduce emissions.

We discussed traffic-management systems. An integrated transport system will help to reduce

CO2 emissions by encouraging people to use public transport as well as their own forms of transport. Integrated ticketing systems were also proposed. The point was made that double-decker buses are more efficient as they carry more passengers, and there are lower emissions per passenger carried.

The group came to the conclusion that technology is not the only answer: people's attitudes and behaviour also need to change. *[Applause.]*

The Deputy Chairperson:

Do delegates have any comments?

Mr Arthur Acheson (Boyd Partnership Chartered Architects):

I would like to see a significant headline emerge from today's event: "Translink Gears up for Free Public Transport". We have a fantastic, adaptable, flexible construction industry that is brilliant at building roads. We can also build railways. We also have a fantastic bus manufacturer; therefore, local industry could help in the development of sustainable transport. Many of the responsibilities for developing a sustainable transport infrastructure fall squarely at the feet of the Department for Regional Development.

Mr Gordon Best (Quarry Products Association Northern Ireland):

I congratulate the Committee for holding this event; it has been enlightening to hear alternative views. As one of three or four representatives from the private sector, I would like to hear more of those views as I missed the consultation on the sustainable transport inquiry.

I am amazed that the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the Institute of Directors (IoD) and the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association (NIIRTA) are not in attendance. If it were possible, I would like to get a list of all the organisations with which the Committee corresponded.

Mr Malachy Campbell (WWF Northern Ireland):

I have a quick point to make on the strategic approach taken. In 2008, Denmark announced a green traffic initiative, on which it is going to spend €20 billion, two thirds of which will be on its railways. Not only is there an argument for spending more money — bearing in mind the fact that budgets are tight and are generally being cut — but there is an argument about how the

budget that is allocated to the Department is being spent. At present, the spend is roughly 80% on roads and 20% on public transport. Delegates may be familiar with the PricewaterhouseCoopers report 'Bridging the Gap: Transforming Public Transport in Northern Ireland', which stated that, per capita, England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland have been investing at least twice as much in public transport as Northern Ireland. Indeed, Scotland has been investing five times as much. Although we could do with extra money, there is the question of how the money allocated to the Department is spent. An 80% spend on roads is sending out completely the wrong message. Ideally, if it were the other way around, and 20% were being spent on roads and 80% on public transport, one might say that that was being a bit aspirational. Surely at least a 50:50 split for the next budget is achievable. It is not just a matter of saying that there is no more cake to go around; it is how the cake is divided up. Do you think that that split is possible? Would the Committee be prepared to argue for that in future spends?

Mr John Wright (Belfast Metropolitan Residents' Group):

I am happy to agree with Malachy. The money has not followed policy as set out in the regional transportation strategy. More and more money has been allocated to roads, and that is why DRD policy is, I would say, not fit for purpose. We have a very high rate of traffic growth and a very high rate of carbon dependency, which is rising, while the carbon consumption in all the other Departments has been going down. Since 1990, DRD's carbon consumption has risen by more than 44%. That is a very serious issue.

We came up with many interesting little solutions in the workshop on technologies. We touched on some interesting solutions, such as taxing fuel, because carbon is the problem and there might be effective ways in which to tax it and speeding. However, to do that requires difficult political decisions to be taken, and we recognise that fact. There may be more opportunities for our politicians to get braver and to know about more and newer technologies. I am optimistic; otherwise, I would not be here. However, our politicians need to step up and realise that their Departments are not fit for purpose at the moment. There is a crisis.

Mr Michael Lorimer (Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee):

Today's event has been interesting. The first sessions were fine because we were all in our comfort zones. We were all in our little groups: the social group; the economic group; and the environmental group. However, when we mixed and we went into policy groups, we started to see tensions among the various stakeholders. We have been talking about changing our travel

behaviour and getting a modal shift: to get people to shift out of their cars. However, we must not forget that many people do not have that choice. As well as changing travel behaviour, we need to extend travel choices to more people. Any sustainable transport strategy or project must examine that issue.

There was consensus on what is preventing change. The culture that exists in our Departments came across clearly. There is the silo mentality of protecting their budgets at all costs, and that is stifling innovation and change. We talked about the dire economic situation and how that should be driving change and encouraging people to work together more. However, it does not seem to be doing that, and everyone in our policy group agreed on that point.

Mr Mal McGreevy (Translink):

I took part in the working group on attitudes. It is easy to criticise government, but we have to change attitudes, including the public attitude. One useful development has been the concept of the carbon footprint, but that is still not fully understood. If we can promote that by generally increasing the awareness of carbon consumption among the public — that may take five or 10 years — that will make it easier for government to take the right decisions.

Mr Best:

I want to reply to Mal, because he did not mention the spend on roads in Northern Ireland in comparison with the rest of these islands. In Northern Ireland, we spend less per capita on roads maintenance and infrastructure — the capital spend — than any other region on these islands. The reason that we are and have been spending on capital projects over the past five years is because of the infrastructure deficit that we have had. We will get to the stage at which we have the roads that we need to make the Northern Ireland economy fit for purpose.

Mr Patterson:

To return to the point about the recession, we are going to face huge public sector cuts, and my attitude is “Never waste a crisis”. It is time to stand back and take a look at what we want from our transport system. We need to examine what outcomes we want, rather than just go through the next five years saying that we will cut spending on road building, Translink and cycle lanes by half. Money will be tight.

Frankly, I cannot agree with the Quarry Products Association representative when he says that

we are spending less on roads than any other part of the UK. I work in a UK-wide company that cannot believe that we are planning to spend £3.1 billion on roads up to 2018. Mr Best has a point about the maintenance of roads, but one could argue that if you live in a house and the roof is leaking, why are you building a conservatory? I took that from the DRD permanent secretary.

We would like to step back and say that an economic cost-benefit analysis needs to be done on each of the options. Roads and big infrastructure generally come in at about 3:1 on a cost-benefit analysis. If one looks at projects such as Sustrans's Safe Routes to Schools or information campaigns that have resulted in modal shift away from car use, economic benefits are coming in at 7:1, 10:1 and 15:1. Therefore, I think that it is time to take a step back and ask what the best use of our limited funds is.

Mr Martin Gregg (Advanced Communication and Information Systems):

The Committee needs to take away from today the fact that this is a big issue that will take a long time to solve. It is bigger than one person; it is bigger than one party; and it is bigger than one Assembly. The Committee needs to be prepared to take the fall and realise that this will be difficult for the public to accept and get on with it.

Mr Acheson:

I do not think that it is any more difficult than suggesting, five or 10 years ago, that one would not now be allowed to smoke in an Irish pub.

The Deputy Chairperson:

Thank you for coming along today, and for sharing your time and obvious expertise with the Committee. I am sure that I speak for all Committee members when I say that it was a very stimulating and productive event for us.

The next step in the inquiry is that the transcripts of the plenary sessions will be circulated to all participants for comment next week. Once those are finalised, they will be fed back into the Committee report. Updates will then be provided on the Committee's inquiry website, which you can access.

Finally, I thank the staff from the Research and Library Service for facilitating the working groups; the Office of the Official Report for logging and providing transcripts; and the catering

staff for their help and support through the day. Thank you all for coming, and I wish you a safe and sustainable journey home.