

Opinion

BLOG

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Roger Blake MRTPI is director of infrastructure and networks for Railfuture



Don't wait for fresh policy to press for sustainable transport to new homes

Railfuture is not waiting for a redrafted National Planning Policy Framework "to ensure that new homes are built near sustainable transport only" (*The Planner's* April news report 'Delivering sustainable transport to new homes').

In London, we funded an independent report to make the case for a station reopening and were instrumental in directing section 106 funds from Stratford City to reopening Lea Bridge station.

In Hampshire, the planned 6,000-home garden village of Welborne has a site earmarked for a new station in its section 106 agreement largely because local Railfuture campaigners had been articulating the case.

In East Sussex, the decades-advocated Wealden Line extension would, as a solely transport project, serve no new populations. However, over the lifetime of districts' next local plans, the equivalent of the two market towns which it would connect will need to be accommodated. Agglomeration rather than dispersal of that housing growth offers the chance to serve it by that new rail link.

In North Devon, the Railfuture-affiliated ACE Rail campaign for a new Bideford-Barnstaple rail link and Tarka line upgrade to Exeter

is driven in part by the need for a sustainable transport intervention to support the capacity and connectivity requirements of new as well as established populations.

In West Oxfordshire, the Railfuture-affiliated Witney Oxford Transport Group is a participant in the examination of the area action plan for Salt Cross Garden Village. The county administration has set aside funds to support the case for a new Windrush Line, building

on work already commissioned by the group, part-funded by Railfuture, establishing a viable rail route and the significant contribution to the rail line's costs through the Land Value Capture financing model pioneered by E-Rail.

These are just five examples of pragmatic transport to deliver sustainable transport to new homes. The knowledge, intelligence and skills required are at least as much in the 'human factors' arena as in the technical – and less straightforward to define or prescribe. There's no rule-book for this way of working; it becomes intuitive. Even as planning professionals, we still have personal choices, so here's one – as practitioners, are we prepared to make waves, or content just to tread water?

"AS PRACTITIONERS, ARE WE PREPARED TO MAKE WAVES, OR CONTENT JUST TO TREAD WATER?"

BLOG

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Neal Allcock is a partner in Birmingham



Will London-style devolution work elsewhere in the UK?

The levelling-up white paper proposes a new framework for devolution for England. Unlike previous devolution deals, this sets a deal for "every area of England that wants one", underpinned by four principles: effective leadership, sensible geography, flexibility, and accountability. So will the extended planning powers of London-style devolution work elsewhere in the UK?

Being based in the Midlands, I will be interested to see how this expands on the 2015 'devolution deal' that created a metro mayor. Andy Street has been in post since 2017. Viewed through a lens of development, his tenure can generally be regarded as a success as he regularly champions the region and has the ear of government ministers – although his role as MD of John Lewis failed to prevent closure of its central Birmingham store.

However, his powers are relatively limited. If they were expanded to have sway in planning decisions, we might see that he is not afraid to make a populist political statement – for example, regarding the allocated Eastern Green in Coventry. If his scope were to include a greater geographical area – for example, more rural

green belt authorities within the West Midlands housing market area – would this successfully serve the quite different needs of 'shire' districts, compared with nearly three million people whom he currently represents in the metropolitan county area?

On this basis, I don't believe an expansion of the current West Midlands mayor area would be a success. I cannot envisage how rural South Staffordshire could be a

'sensible geography' with urban Birmingham or Coventry. Conversely, there could be a move towards a single tier of local governance whereby county cities (such as Nottingham, Derby, Leicester and Worcester) are reintegrated with their historic shire counties and hinterlands. There are familiar ties

with communities surrounding these shire 'hub' cities that would more likely fit the bill of sensible geography. A mayor would also help raise issues that often get lost in the bureaucracy of the two-tier system of local governance, by creating a single, accountable institution.

Turning back to the West Midlands and the proposals for more powers for the mayor, the answer is not 'London-style' powers at this time.

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