



Vision 2050 competition – March 2020

By Emily Seabrook

How should the transport system fulfil England's Economic Heartland vision of connecting people and places with opportunities and services by 2050?

In the modern world the time spent between 'A to B' is more than just travel, it is a constituent part of living, with the average daily commute taking an hour. Many negative consequences can arise from inadequately functioning transport systems, however a tailored transport system can provide opportunities, improving physical and mental health and wellbeing, in today's time pressured world.

The London School of Economics has cited that developments in the transport systems along with progress in digital communications, waste and water management are 'essential ingredients' for success in the competitive modern market. Road and rail networks in particular are key to enabling businesses to function and the economy to grow.

Although direct substitution solutions alone may look appealing and are often attractive to politicians, these 'solutions' simply modify the problem. For example replacing diesel vehicles with electric; this measure alone will not reduce congestion instead it will simply create 'green' congestion and the infrastructure changes required could create significant disruption with a high carbon footprint.

A holistic solution is required which allows connectivity between different modes of transport effectively and appropriately utilising these 'add-on' and substitutionary solutions. It is essential to move away from nostalgic and showcase solutions; niche tramways or elaborate painted cycle ways with nowhere to go. Instead there should be a step forward towards more holistic and integrated intelligent solutions utilising new technologies designed to optimise existing land and infrastructure.

A successful transport system would allow the everyday commuter to use different modes of transport seamlessly. There would be a significant shift from single managed systems with a limited interface between rail and road to zone management of multiple transport modes enabling a range of options to be used, be that a single transport mode or a combination, for example road, train and cycle with adequate facilities for this to be done effectively and be environmentally friendly.

Importantly this will require a change in culture and mind-set supported by changes in the law to give more protection and priority for cyclists, runners and walkers. In the workplace this would be reflected by employers being conscious of and providing for practical requirements with an increased emphasis on secure bike storage, showers and lockers for staff. Street furniture investment would enable the whole commute supporting continuous travel across the different transport modes.

For example a rural commuter taking a train into the city, collecting their bike which has been safely left overnight, before cycling into the office, a model successfully implemented in many parts of Holland with secure multi-storey bike parks.

An intelligent infrastructure plan for freight vehicles should sit alongside a holistic system for the everyday commuter. Our inner cities are overrun with too many vans and delivery vehicles; how many of us will have had multiple online deliveries on the same day often for orders paced at the same time! Many small companies make countless local journeys simply because there is no integration. An 'Uber' type approach for commercial traffic with Small electric vehicles being used to move freight in a locality with maximum usage efficiency. This would reduce the need for smaller companies to send partially filled loads on inefficient routes, thus reducing the number of vehicles on the road and maximising the capacity of the network.

Emily Seabrook, graduate civil engineer, Skanska