

Fare-Free London

These are the main aims of the Fare-Free London campaign, set up on Saturday 10 February at a meeting at the Waterloo Action Centre.

Free public transport opens the city to all. It is provided as a public service, just like health, education and public parks, and is supported by public investment. It is central to a vision of London as a city where people, their health and the lives they live, come first.

Free public transport is socially just, supporting the lowest-income households that are least likely to have a car. It is better transport, underpinned by substantial investment, with a secure, properly-rewarded workforce. It is one of the drastic, demonstrative actions needed to tackle climate change globally and air pollution locally.

Public transport is already free in many smaller cities, including Luxemburg, Tallinn (Estonia), Montpellier and Dunkerque (France) and Albuquerque and Kansas City (USA). London can be the first big global city to follow their example.

We call on the Mayor and the Greater London Authority (GLA) to provide free public transport in London. The first step is to research ways to implement it.

We call on national government to support free public transport in London, and around the country. The local government finance rules need to be changed, so that local authorities can raise money for it.

Purpose

Free public transport supports social justice. A system based on public transport and active travel (walking, cycling and so on) supports Londoners' physical and mental health.

Free public transport, introduced together as part of an integrated transport policy (see "How is it done?", below), would help rapidly to cut the number of private cars, vans and HGVs on the roads – and so cut greenhouse gas emissions, and the air pollution that kills thousands of Londoners each year.

London is falling behind its own weak climate targets, and even further behind targets worked out by climate scientists. The transport sector has made the least progress in cutting fossil fuel use over the last twenty years. Free public transport would start to reverse this dangerous trend.

Free public transport cuts across the dangerous populist rhetoric that tackling climate change costs ordinary people money. It shows that the opposite is true: measures to deal with climate change and air pollution can also make life better.

How is it done?

Transport for London (TfL) already provides free transport for over-60s, under-10s and many teenagers, and other discounts. Extending these schemes, using the Oyster card, would present few practical problems.

To reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution, free public transport will be most effective if implemented as part of an integrated approach that also includes:

- Providing transport as a public service, not a commodity sold for profit, and expanding services, starting by reversing bus service cuts. Investing heavily in public transport and active travel, which will provide many thousands of new jobs.
- Making public transport Londoners' first choice for getting around: making it enjoyable. Better transport or free transport is a false choice: we can have both. This means investing in

safety and staffing; developing a plan to make all transport fully accessible to disabled people and those with prams and buggies; and making full use of the river Thames as a key to London's transport system.

- Supporting a stable workforce with fair pay and conditions, and union organisation. This is the key to a good service. The unions, supported by transport and disability campaign groups, showed this recently, by their success in ditching plans to close rail ticket offices.
- Reversing decades of national and local government support and subsidies for motor traffic, at the public's expense. This could include smart road charging (currently under discussion at the GLA); smart emissions-based parking charges; repurposing the Silvertown Tunnel for non-motor traffic; and expansion of school streets and other measures to reclaim street space for communities.
- Linking free public transport to cheap or free train travel in the south east, provided by publicly owned companies.
- Reorganising and investing in the health service and other public services to make them more accessible and reduce the need for car travel.
- Implementing planning policies and incentives to enable people to lead healthy and fulfilling lives without having to own a car.

How would it be paid for?

Revenue from fares comprises a much higher share of income for TfL than for most big-city transport systems. TfL also receives revenue from business rates retention, other operating income e.g. the congestion charge, and central government grants.

TfL policy is to reduce the share of revenue from fares. We agree with this, but call for a much more ambitious reduction, with a target of zero.

There is a wide range of options for funding free public transport, set out in detail in our campaign briefing. These include:

- Revenue raised by local government, including land value capture (e.g. the Community Infrastructure Levy used to fund the Elizabeth Line); and road use and parking charges.
- Revenue raised by local government that, in the UK, would require a change in local government funding rules, e.g. a payroll tax (used to fund public transport in Paris).
- Revenue raised by central government, e.g. increased fuel duty to restore value lost during the 13-year freeze; and a review of road projects to ensure compatibility with climate and other policies, following the Welsh government's example, with funds diverted to public transport. Wealth taxes and measures against corporate tax evasion could raise much larger sums for public services, including transport.

London and national policy

We favour free public transport nationally, based on public need. We will work together with all to achieve it. We welcome cooperation with other campaign groups.

Politicians try to divide voters by claiming that London has an outsize share of national resources. In particular, the government has used negotiations with the Mayor's office to try to force a heavier burden on passengers (with higher fares) and staff (by constraining pay increases and undermining pension conditions). We reject this divisive politics.

- Comments and feedback welcome. For more detail, see our campaign briefing.