

# Better. Connected

## Public Transport in Northern Ireland

**Over the next decade, public transport will play a vital role for people, planet, and prosperity in Northern Ireland.**

As a cross-cutting public service, public transport is a key enabler to the social, economic, and environmental wellbeing of Northern Ireland and plays a vital role in delivering the goals within the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 in order to reduce emissions to meet the legislative requirement to achieve Net Zero by 2050 and the Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland.

However, Government spending per head on public transport in Northern Ireland over the last decade has only been around 35% of the UK average; this situation is likely to get worse as other devolved regions in the UK continue to increase investment in public transport in line with their own Climate Change legislation.

### Social, Economic and Environmental Outcomes of Public Transport in Northern Ireland

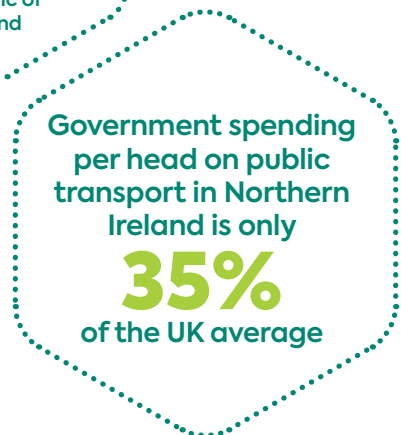
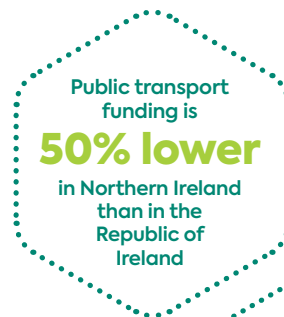
Transport emits 20% of Northern Ireland's total greenhouse gas emissions, an increase of 22% since 1990; the biggest contributor is private cars. Poor air quality is also the biggest environmental risk to public health in the UK and contributes to 800 deaths a year in Northern Ireland.

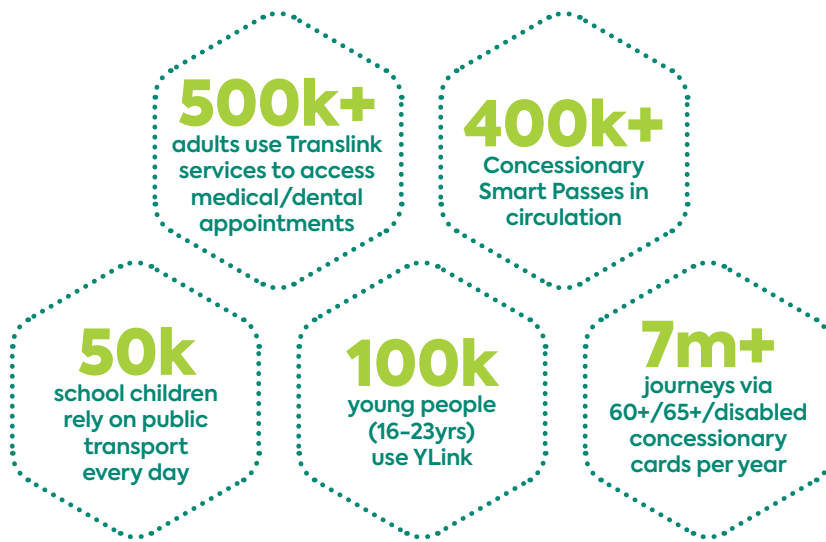
The Climate Change targets for the transport sector can only be achieved with a modal shift to public transport and active travel. Modal shift will also support a Just Transition by giving people low-cost greener travel solutions.

Decarbonisation of public transport will support Green Growth through investment in innovation, skills, and R&D in electric and hydrogen technologies.

### Translink has ambitious plans to deliver these Outcomes through:

- Investing in frequency, reliability, and reducing journey times across the network
- Decarbonising our bus and rail fleet using innovative electric and hydrogen technologies
- Upgrading rail infrastructure to maintain and renew the rail network
- Enhancing inter-city rail connections between Derry~Londonderry – Belfast – Dublin
- Improving accessibility for all
- Rolling out integrated contactless ticketing
- Improving bus infrastructure through priority measures and park and rides
- Modernising passenger facilities, including Belfast Grand Central Station

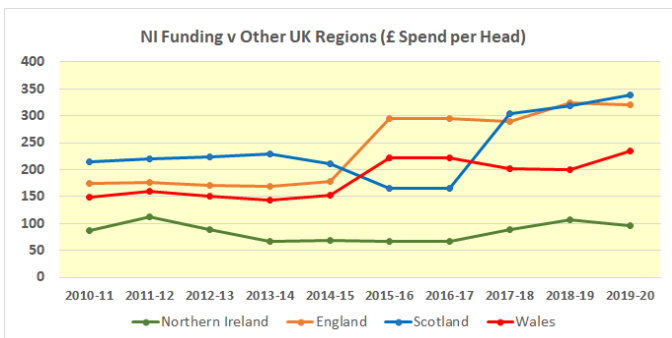




Public transport is central to the daily lives of many individuals and families, as well as to economic activity and to the social well-being of the general population.

### Investment in Public Transport is essential

Per-head spending on public transport in Northern Ireland over the last decade has been only 35% of the UK average (Table 1 below). The Independent Fiscal Commission report also shows expenditure on transport below the UK average while overall public spending here is 20% above the UK average.



### Expenditure per capita on public transport across the UK

- Public transport funding is also 50% lower in Northern Ireland than in the Republic of Ireland (based on 2019 subsidy per passenger figures)

- The budgetary picture during the 2022/23 financial year has been stark for Translink with Public Service Obligation funding representing less than 10% of the total DfI revenue budget which has driven Translink’s cash reserves to an all-time low, which is simply not sustainable.
- Translink has been pro-active in improving its financial position through revenue growth and cost efficiencies of over £20m in 2022/23. The recent fare increases averaging around 7% will also help to grow revenues, however no public transport network can deliver financial sustainability on its own and agreeing an appropriate budget allocation for 2023/24 is crucial to maintain and develop the public transport network in Northern Ireland.
- There is an urgent need to address the imbalance in funding between public transport and roads in Northern Ireland. This has been highlighted many times since the Northern Ireland Audit Office report in 2015, and yet little progress has been made. If the status quo continues, there will be major cuts required to bus and train services across the network. Notably, this would have a significant impact on the NI Railways network, with route closures, and on socially necessary services on the rural Ulsterbus network. In addition, Glider and Metro services in Belfast and Derry~Londonderry would also be impacted.

### Conclusion

Passenger growth has been strong, at around 90% of pre-pandemic levels and there is now an urgent need to address 2023/24 Public Service Obligation funding allocation, as well as putting the public transport network on to a sustainable long-term footing so that it can play its vital role for people, planet, and prosperity in Northern Ireland.

The Translink ‘Better. Connected’ strategy for the next decade details the vital actions required to transform public transport in Northern Ireland, with a clear focus on continuous improvement, climate action, customer focus and connecting communities.