

Arriva Blog: Lorenzo Visentin, Head of Environment at Arriva Group reflects on the role of active and public transport in decarbonising our planet.

22 Apr 2021



Can we recover from COVID-19 while also building back greener?

Every year on April 22, people across the world do something to mark Earth Day and plan for a better future. As I reflect on the small contribution that individuals can make - and as I think about how we will recover from the effect of the pandemic, we mustn't underestimate the role of public transport in our society.

Restrictions are starting to lift in the UK and in some parts of Europe and as people return to schools, offices and leisure activities, we must be mindful that a car-led recovery from Covid would be at odds with decarbonisation targets.

Public Transport will play a vital role in tackling the climate crisis, reducing emissions and helping European governments reach their targets. Modal shift away from cars and planes and towards cleaner, greener public transport and active travel options will make a significant contribution. For example, one bus carrying 75 people has the potential to take 60 cars off our roads^[1], while a train can remove even more cars over much longer distances. Our cars are stationary for 95 per cent of the time but represent around 55 per cent of total emissions in the UK^[2]. Electric cars will help reduce emissions, but they won't provide the whole answer, especially in congested city centres where a zero-emissions traffic jam is still a traffic jam!

At Arriva, there are a number of strands to our focus. The first, and most basic, is that we must encourage people where possible, to safely get back to using public transport or active travel solutions instead of cars. Getting people out of their cars and walking to the bus stop just one more time each month would result in a billion fewer car journeys, reducing the UK's carbon dioxide emissions by two million tonnes a year.

We must work alongside our European passenger transport authorities on the continuing decarbonisation of our own fleet of vehicles. We are making good progress but transitioning to zero carbon fleets requires huge investment in associated charging and re-fuelling infrastructure and new processes for repair and maintenance of new

technologies. Transport operators need clear and long-term policy objectives to help inform fleet decisions. We continue to explore alternative fuels like hydrogenated vegetable oils (HVO), hydrogen technologies, electric vehicle innovation and a number of hybrid technologies that would work in non-electrified rail infrastructure. Our experience helps us support passenger transport authorities to make informed decisions about capital investment commitments in the future.

We must also work towards decarbonising our supply chain. We recognise the supply chain as critical partners in our decarbonisation journey, providing whole life-cycle improvements.

While Covid has massively impacted public transport as an industry, it has also proved how vital it is in keeping communities connected and supporting economic recovery. Climate action and decarbonisation remains a top priority despite all the challenges of the pandemic – this hasn't gone away and we must treat Covid as a catalyst to build back better and greener. We saw how much pollution dropped in major towns and cities as more space was given over to walking and cycling.

Public transport remains the most sustainable way for transporting large numbers of people between and within urban areas and the global pandemic presents policymakers with an opportunity to support approaches that prioritise public transport alternatives to create more sustainable urban environments.

The key will be to develop truly integrated transport systems and allocate more road space to public transport which will reduce congestion and pollution and support the attractiveness and effectiveness of our public transport options. Operators, transport authorities and governments must work in partnership, across all countries and modes, to turn the dial on modal shift, create truly sustainable transport networks and build a cleaner and greener future.

[1] European Commission Report – Reclaiming City Streets for People.

[2] European Commission, DG MOVE presentation on sustainable mobility (October 2017)

Contact Information

Arriva Group press office

communications@arriva.co.uk

Downloads



Lorenzo Visentin, Arriva Group Head of Environment, Health & Safety

[Download](#)