

The Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation (CIHT) is a charity, learned society and membership body, with over 10,000 members across 12 UK regions and a number of international groups. CIHT represents and qualifies professionals who plan, design, build, manage, maintain and operate transport and infrastructure.

### **CIHT Autumn Spending Review 2024 Comments**

The highway network will need to be at the centre of a high growth, high productivity and low carbon economy that is at the heart of the new government's vision for the UK. This ambition is shared by all parts of the sector but its achievement has been held back by fragmented, stop-start funding, mixed messages around transport decarbonisation and failure to invest in skills and competency at all levels.

People need an effective transport network to support their economic activity and social wellbeing. Getting transport right is not simply a matter of the overall amount of funding. CIHT believes that investment in highways and transportation infrastructure needs to be reprioritised and made certain. Doing so would enable significant wider benefits, including productivity, health, social inclusion and decarbonisation and build a resilient transport network fit for the future.

Investment in the maintenance of our existing highways and infrastructure is a key priority to ensure the continued and efficient use of our transport network. Incrementally adapting our infrastructure and proactively carrying out maintenance is essential to achieve extreme weather resilience and meet our decarbonisation goals. Fixing potholes is the tip of the iceberg.

A safe and reliable transport network requires a reallocation and reprioritisation of funding and investment to support a genuine move to net zero while delivering on economic, social and environmental aims. This spending review needs to set out how the government will pay for all future mobility and transport needs, while working to reduce carbon and achieve the transition to net zero.

Most transport journeys begin and end on the local network, and any highway investment must include a focus on the vital role played by local roads.

Sustainable transport has many benefits beyond immediate travel, including the positive impact on people's health and reducing health and social care costs. This includes: exercise from active travel better air quality from replacing car journeys with walking or cycling, economic benefits from relieved congestion and improved public health from enabling people to lead longer, healthier and more independent lives.

### **Recommendations for the spending review**

The CIHT has the following specific recommendations for the Autumn Spending Review 2024 :

- A minimum five-year commitment to funding for local roads maintenance and renewal (a local roads investment strategy). This will enable local highway authorities to secure longer-term procurement, address decarbonisation, deliver more innovation, improve maintenance interventions and make transport networks more resilient.
- Set up a dedicated fund to support and accelerate delivery of highways projects to mitigate the effects of Climate Change in vulnerable areas.
- Ensure local authorities have the funds to share and implement best practice in road safety so they can meet road safety targets which can help build a safer network and drive down costs associated with dealing with the consequences of traffic incidents

- Invest in ensuring individuals can afford and access educational opportunities to sustain and build an appropriately skilled and motivated workforce
- The recent CIHT report “Creating a Public Realm for All<sup>1</sup>” noted that it is essential that those designing and changing the public realm are aware of issues faced by disabled people to avoid wasting public money on schemes that need to be altered later as they have excluded part of the community. The CIHT recommend that the government fund disability equality awareness training for all local authority personnel who are designing and changing the public realm to maximise the benefits of existing funding. This training should be incentivised by making some of the funding for transport schemes only available to local authorities that have trained staff.
- Provide consistent funding to reshape the required infrastructure and services to promote walking, cycling and public transport.
- Ensure investment decisions respond to and accommodate the diverse societal needs in terms of people’s characteristics, circumstances, resources, aspirations and geographical requirements.
- Build on the positive shift to increased bus travel as a result of subsidised bus fares.
- Work with CIHT and other stakeholders to explore how to fill the gap in road tax income caused by the transition to electric vehicles.
- Investigate mobility pricing such as a pay-per-mile scheme to help reduce congestion and meet environmental targets.

### **CIHT - Bus Centre of Excellence**

In February 2023, the Chartered Institution of Highways & Transportation (CIHT) was successful in securing funding from the Department for Transport (DfT) totalling £814,511<sup>2</sup> for Bus Centre of Excellence (BCoE) to 31 March 2025 to deliver the following:

- Set up BCoE using transport consultants initially and then appointing full-time staff with support from CIHT senior management and office services.
- Create a website for the BCoE  
<https://www.buscentreofexcellence.org.uk/>
- Create a communications campaign to attract interest and start to develop the ongoing elements of the Centre of Excellence. This included management and posting of web content, events, virtual learning material, best practice and case studies.
- Link the draft BCoE website to the CIHT website
- Provide training content (BCoE members have access to 5 free CIHT Learn courses and heavily discounted access to bundles of up to 15 modules)
- Provide networking meetings (Franchising Network, BCoE Advisory Group, BCoE stakeholder group, the Local Authority Forum, the Demand responsive transport forum and Bus Safety Knowledge Sharing and Incident forum have been established)
- Provide an annual conference “Quality Bus”
- Provide a one-year trial CIHT membership to 175 BCoE members

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<sup>1</sup> [www.ciht.org.uk/publicrealm](http://www.ciht.org.uk/publicrealm)

<sup>2</sup> The actual amount paid to CIHT in grant was £745,067 as £69,444 was paid directly to consultants to set up BCoE

The Bus Centre of Excellence supports the government's aspirations in the following main ways:

- Support bus franchising: Franchising is an area where local authorities often lack expertise. BCoE can assist by providing guidance on managing a franchised network, understanding an authority's obligations, and upskilling new and existing bus professionals in technical, commercial, operational, marketing, and customer care skills necessary to deliver franchising. Additionally, BCoE is forming a dedicated support network for local authorities outside London considering or implementing franchised regimes, enabling them to share experiences and best practices. BCoE excels at sharing best practices and can facilitate staff secondments to authorities already operating franchising regimes for on-the-job learning.
- While franchising is one approach to improving bus services, BCoE also supports a variety of other options, including Enhanced Partnerships and Qualifying Agreements, suitable for both rural and urban areas.
- Promote inclusive transport: Buses are often the only accessible public transport for the less well-off, young people, the elderly, and people with disabilities. BCoE supports these groups by helping to provide sustainable and affordable travel options for employment, hospital appointments, and education. There is a high correlation between social deprivation and transport exclusion. Improving the bus network will provide transport opportunities for those in deprived areas, breaking this link. BCoE offers training opportunities to bus professionals and shares best practices between local authorities and operators to maximise the efficient use of limited public funds.
- Crack down on antisocial behaviour: BCoE will host a conference in November 2024 on tackling antisocial behaviour and violence against women and girls at bus stations, bus stops, and on buses. Antisocial behaviour on the bus network creates service disruption and unreliability, threatening the existence of bus services in some areas. This issue needs to be addressed as a priority. BCoE is uniquely positioned to facilitate discussions and disseminate best practices among all stakeholders involved in tackling antisocial behaviour.
- Promote the decarbonisation of buses: BCoE supports the Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) scheme through seminars, e-learning and a new ZEBRA drop-in surgery where local authorities and operators can ask anything around zero emission buses.

BCoE has a close working relationship with the DfT. DfT representatives sit on the BCoE Project Board, and the BCoE Advisory Board, both of which meet quarterly. There are bi-weekly meetings between BCoE, DfT and Arup share knowledge of work and activities that the parties are involved in. BCoE provides benefit to the DfT in the following ways:

- BCoE supports the DfT's strategic objectives of improving transport for the user and reducing environmental impacts.
- BCoE supports the DfT when publishing guidance and consultations with webinars or training events or focus groups to provide richer feedback from the industry and ensure better understanding of the issues
- The DfT can use the BCoE website to upload content which may not be suitable for the DfT website, e.g. non-gov.uk suitable material such as pdfs of documents or templates/guides/teaching material
- The DfT can use the BCoE forum to test ideas at early stages of development and gather sector intelligence
- The DfT can use the networking meetings to get direct feedback from a range of stakeholders

Significant public funding is allocated to buses. This includes funding associated with Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIPs) - initially £1 billion, but this has been increased as part of the Network North plan with an additional £1 billion for BSIPs, as well as other funding such as City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) and Local Transport Fund which can be used to fund bus infrastructure schemes. This is in addition to ongoing public funding that supports the bus sector e.g. Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) c.£260m/year, concessionary bus travel c.£1 billion/year, local authority bus service support (c.£0.7 billion/year) and funding to support the uptake of zero emission buses. BCoE is uniquely placed to support Local Authorities develop and deliver their Bus Service Improvement Plans and other bus related initiatives through sharing best practice and know-how from across England, which will help to deliver better value for money from wider public funding.

BCoE has added value to the Bus Sector and others by:

- Facilitating sharing of case studies and problem solving between bus service operators and local authorities in a neutral, independent and safe environment, thereby improving the service to passengers by sharing of best practice. BCoE is the only pan industry body which is publicly funded and therefore holds a unique, impartial, position in the bus industry. Other membership organisations, such as the Confederation for Passenger Transport are naturally influenced by their funders in their approach to policy.
- Providing a “Matchmaking” service to be able connect with industry experts, user groups etc and have questions answered.
- Providing Sub-national Transport Bodies access to best practice and guidance without having to create it themselves. This then enables them to share this information directly with their constituent local authorities.
- Allowing DfT to disseminate information on central DfT initiatives with training / explanation.
- Provided people working in the industry free learning and training opportunities, continual professional development (CPD) and career development.
- Providing passenger representative and interest groups a central focal point to provide information / guidance to for dissemination for example accessibility issues, transport poverty.
- Providing those considering careers in the sector, useful information about how the sector works, the type of jobs and innovation and demystifying the sector
- Providing a wider industry one-stop-shop to ask for advice, identifying speakers for events etc.

The Bus Centre of Excellence (BCoE) will require £394,078 to continue until March 2026 and £1,208,021 to continue until March 2028. This would equate to £56,297 top sliced from each of the 7 Sub-national transport bodies or £4,988 from each of the 79 English local Transport Authorities for the year 2025/6.

In 2023/4 the DfT spent circa £1.2 billion pounds a year supporting buses in England, however this figure does not include the funding of bus schemes through capital schemes such as the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements, the Local Transport Fund and Government support for Local Authority spend on concessions and supported bus services, so the amount required to fund the Bus Centre of Excellence is around 0.03% of this total amount. Therefore, any increase in efficiency above 0.03% would make funding BCoE positive in value for money terms.

The economies of scale provided by BCoE make it the most efficient model to deliver the capability improvements needed to facilitate effective bus service improvements. Without BCoE each local authority would need to arrange its own training (for sometimes only a handful of people) and ensure an officer actively looks for good practice which would improve services.

The content provided by BCoE, i.e. blogs, case studies and webinars is provided by bus professionals on a free of charge basis. This is one of the reasons why the funding required to continue BCoE is so small as people are giving their time and expertise for free. If local authorities had to pay for this material individually, it would cost a lot more than to fund BCoE.

If BCoE is not funded beyond March 2025, then all the key benefits of sharing best practice and knowledge sharing will be lost. The networks which have been created via BCoE are unlikely to continue in its absence as somebody would need to take forward the coordination functions - with other work priorities and the costs involved this is unlikely to happen. In particular:

- The amount invested on setting up BCoE would be wasted if it were not continued and much of the good practice captured from the BSIP programme would not be collected and disseminated to all areas and stakeholders without the knowledge sharing provided by BCoE
- Innovation and initiatives would happen in isolation, with frequent duplication and repetition of work and research that had been carried out elsewhere.
- Knowledge sharing of key issues such as franchising and decarbonisation may take longer.
- DfT would have to respond directly to all questions and enquiries about initiatives.
- Gaps in knowledge would increase as the aging workforce retires as BCoE acts as a repository of information for new generations of bus practitioners.
- The ongoing difficulties in recruitment will continue without dedicated support.
- The skills gaps between larger and small transport authorities would increase.
- There would be no sector specific free training and learning.
- There would be no central voice for the sector on capability building.

The risks associated with not funding BCoE beyond March 2025 are:

- Reputational risk for the UK government in breaking the commitment to a long-term programme of activities given in the National Bus Strategy which said, “*We will use part of the £25m fund for supporting LTAs to establish England’s first Bus Centre of Excellence (BCoE), enabling the delivery of a long-term programme of activities and support.*”
- Capability and capacity have been identified by various studies, such as the Campaign for Better Transport’s July 2021 report<sup>3</sup> on National Bus Strategy: Capacity and Capability, as being key risks to local authorities making bus service improvements. Without economies of scale and the support provided by BCoE this issue will only worsen and delivery of bus service improvements less likely to happen.
- Roll out of franchising would be made more difficult with no knowledge sharing and lessons learnt from the early adopters

We therefore submit a request for Bus Centre of Excellence (BCoE) Funding beyond March 2025 to help local authorities achieve one of the 5 strategic DfT priorities of improving bus services and growing usage across the country.

**Ends**

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<sup>3</sup> <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/658060a2e305f0001342e249/national-bus-strategy-capacity-and-capability.pdf>