

Geoff Inskip

Thank you for that. Good morning everybody and can I welcome everybody again to Birmingham and also to the West Midlands, for those of you who I didn't welcome yesterday. And I just want to talk about a few issues which are certainly affecting us here and I'm sure affect all of our cities around wherever you are. And, certainly, some of these issues are things that we talk a great deal about within my role as vice-president of UITP. And those are around global economy and competition, around globalisation and the challenges we have in relation to congestion, rising fuel prices and carbon and pollution. And then I want to turn to respond a little bit to a couple of things that Brian said.

And the first thing, really, to really get our minds around, is the fact, the matter that success in all of our national economies relies on our cities – and their infrastructure. And of course our priority now is undoubtedly around jobs, regeneration and boosting our competitiveness. And that's, everywhere you go, that is the big agenda for us all at the moment. With this economic recession that we're in, we need to ensure that we actually make sure that the right investment is taking place in the right areas to ensure that we do boost jobs and regeneration. And, you know, one of the things we have looked at, we researched the history of recessions. And what we found was that those countries that came out of a recession the fastest, more quickly than others, are those that actually invested in their infrastructure during the recession.

And I think there is a big lesson there for us all, and for governments, too. And that is why, so now we here believe, it is important, especially at this time of austerity, that we continue to invest in our transport infrastructure, if we aim to speed up job creation and foster our competitive markets within the EU. And I know our colleague from the US will be explaining later today that they too decided very much to keep investing in transport infrastructure. And in fact I think all the sessions today were aimed at highlighting the need to align economic and transport activities and programs. So certainly I feel sure that we all here today recognize the importance of transport as an economic driver for growth, job creation and also importantly supporting social inclusion and fairness. And that can be delivered through high-quality, integrated transport networks.

On urbanization, we face big challenges. In Birmingham and in Coventry, two of our West Midland cities, here we have continued urban growth. So we have got population growth coming into our cities. And of course that puts a strain on our transport networks. And so the real question there for our cities is very much around... Not so much around just public transport, but actually about mobility management. And I think this is the topic that we will now return to. But certainly the recent conference we had, the UITP conference we had in relation to this mobility management was very well attended. And it pinpointed the need to think much wider than just public transport and to think very much about how we want to live and work in our cities in the future. And I think that is one of the biggest debates for us all: to actually have a vision for what we want our cities to look like in the future and then think about how public transport can help us achieve those aims.

Now in terms of budgets, we all know that public transport authorities across the UK and Europe continue to face budgetary challenges. Everybody in this room would like

to do a great deal more than we are currently doing with public transport, but we know there is a limited amount we can do with the budgets we have. And therefore we have a responsibility. A responsibility to ensure that we're doing the right things and getting "the biggest bang for the buck we spend". And we also need to take greater responsibility for locally raising financing and funding and applying that funding towards local investment. And certainly here, in the West Midlands, we're looking at tax incremental financing, whereby increases in business rates, which are generated by the investment in public transport infrastructure, is then used to actually pay for that public transport investment. And I think that's very important for us that we use these innovative financing techniques and that central Government gives us the ability to devolve responsibility to our cities to get on and make that investment.

There is a lot of talk as well around congestion and fuel prices. And of course congestion continues to be a restraint on our growth. And whilst fuel prices continue to rise, car ownership also is rising. And with the West Midlands being at the heart of the road network in the UK, we have been investing in manage motorways to help reduce that congestion, to keep our motorways moving. And that is about using the hard shoulder to ensure that we can have an extra lane to keep the traffic moving through the West Midlands. And it is a very successful project for us. And, of course, increasing fuel prices are also pushing more passengers onto our railways, where we are seeing a sustained 6% growth each year. And that is in spite of the recession. And we are rapidly, rapidly running out of rail capacity. Brian mentioned about the congestion he had coming into Birmingham this morning, and he had to take a diversion route through [INAUDIBLE 53:55].

Well, this is about our railways here, which are absolutely cram full. We know we are going to be running out of space by 2020. We have a high-speed rail project on the books now, which should be proceeding as fast as it can. But even if it proceeds at pace and gets built by 2026, we know we've got a gap between where we are going to be in 2026 and where we physically we will be in terms of capacity in 2020. So we are going to have 5 years of great excitement, I can tell you, here in the West Midlands about how we solve that gap! And that is why we are talking now to Government about making sure we put the right investment in the West Midlands over the next 5 or 6 years.

On carbon and pollution, we have all got plans, I'm sure, for cleaning our cities. And here we're implementing in Birmingham a statutory quality partnership which will put in place an agreement with the bus operators, actually, over emission standards. And yesterday Councillor Huxtable was talking to the National Express about ensuring that we work together to be sure that we get an agreement and improve the emissions in our city. And we're also encouraging green cars. And in fact, just the other day, I drove an electric car around Birmingham to arrive here. And it was a great thing to do. Frankly, I was very impressed with the technology and think, well, great, that's our future, isn't it? But of course, you know, dealing with emissions from cars, and suggesting that electric cars or hybrids are the answer, may not be quite right. Because, as we all know, there is no such thing as *green* congestion. And, if you look at Milan, it is a really great good example, where they brought in a pollution charge. So they started charging people coming into their city and making a pollution charge for that. Now, again, it had an impact to begin with and congestion reduced, emission standards were better, etc. But now, everybody is buying green cars, etc. and they're now suffering from congestion. So now they're thinking about changing their pollution charge to a congestion charge. So I leave that thought with you, as well, in relation to carbon and pollution.

And, of course, you know there is a great big push for public transport either way in my view. There is one scenario which means that fuel prices go up and keep going up and we know fossil fuels are certainly running out and that just puts increased pressure on fuel prices. As fuel prices go up, people want more public transport. And they think they have the right and deserve a good high quality public transport system. If on the other hand something happens remarkably to allow us to have effectively good cars, clean cars, cheap cars, then, we're going to have a congestion problem. And the answer again is more public transport. So I can't a scenario for our cities where we don't need more public transport. And our responsibility within the cities is to ensure we have that debate loud and clear and make sure that we actually achieve those ends.

And now, just turning briefly to a couple of points that Brian was raising as well. In relation to TEN-T and the high speed networks, of course, it is really important that we deliver that core network across Europe. And it is good to see as well that the European Parliament is also looking to put money behind, ensuring that that happens – with equal contributions, I think, for member states as well. And whilst the TEN-T project and high speed network is very important and certainly here in Birmingham... You know, the advantages of a high speed network linking Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham, London and into the continental Europe, are well rehearsed. And we certainly want those big connections. But equally important for us is actually the local connectivity to that high-speed network. In other words, without that local connectivity, you're not going to have a successful high-speed network. And we need a high-speed network which is going to be successful and therefore we want to ensure that we get that local connectivity. Now that is something that we're certainly here we're working, on in the West Midlands, to ensure that happens.

And again, we talked about... Brian talked about congestion, and I'm just going to leave you with that thought around, again. There is no such thing as green congestion. And we do need to ensure that we actually put in place the right public transport levies to ensure that people get the high quality transport networks they deserve. And when we're talking about that high quality transport network, we very much come into talk about the stuff that Bill was talking around in terms of ensuring that we get good information, good ticketing, through ticketing arrangements, etc. which I know is something close to the Parliament's heart as well, in Europe.

And finally, to talk about... a little bit about the initiative that's just come out, the Project Bond Initiative that's come through at the moment, which we very much welcome around innovative financing, methods. And, you know, we actually want to have that discussion, have that conversation, around joint piloting and joint ventures, I think, with EMTA, with UITP, and I am sure the member states can be encouraged to take up some of these initiatives in terms of that Project Bond as well and how that is going to work, in some detail.

And finally, very much welcome, Brian, saying that he would like further engagement with EMTA, with UITP, with PTEG¹ etc. on all these matters. They are matters which are very, very important to our cities and how our cities will grow in the future. Thank you very much.

¹ Passenger Transport Executive Group see www.pteg.net