

My intervention during the Westminster Hall debate on HS2

Sir John Redwood (Wokingham (Con)): Does my hon. Friend agree that covid has completely changed likely travel patterns, and that the big commuting demand will be much reduced? So where is the argument for capacity, which HS2 was supposed to be about?

Mr Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's intervention; he has read my mind—this is a point that I will come to shortly.

Bus travel

I have received answers to my questions on bus services. They reveal that only 2% of the bus fleet is electric on the latest government figures, despite all the active public sector talk of the electric revolution. They also reveal that bus usage remains low, even before the pandemic struck. The latest figures the government has supplied do not chart the fall in use that must have occurred over lockdown.

The fact that overall bus usage outside London was under 11 people per bus prior to covid tells us that bus services have to be heavily subsidised. London is stated to be under 19 people per bus. The figures presented divide passenger miles by bus miles. Buses can carry between 50 and over a hundred passengers depending on whether it is a single or double decker, and what the rules are on standing. The system entails subsidising the least popular services the most, as clearly the more passengers per bus the more fare revenue and the less need for subsidy. Bus companies are reluctant to cut out little used services, as of course they can argue that they need to offer a relatively frequent timetable to persuade people to use a bus. An outbound traveller who needs to get a return bus may wish to return at unpopular times of the day, so they need to run more near empty buses to keep or attract the overall custom.

Buses like trains have a relative advantage at busy times. They are best geared to providing commuter services into and out of job rich areas of towns and cities, and to offer shopping access at busy shopping times. They become very costly providing off peak services for people who may need to get to an evening event or to return at little used times of day or night. In London it should be easier to fill more of the seats on the buses given the density of people along key routes and the difficulty of taking private cars on cramped and inadequate roads.

What should the government and Councils think about how many bus services to subsidise? How should the industry go about constructing more popular timetables in a post pandemic age? It is a pity the government was not able to supply more up to date figures than the year to March 2020. I presume the pattern has change lot since then.

What is the Government doing to arrest people who take money from people seeking to cross the Channel illegally in unsuitable boats?

I have received the following answer to my recent Parliamentary Question:

The Home Office has provided the following answer to your written parliamentary question (41593):

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what further steps her Department plans to take to arrest people who take money from people seeking to cross the Channel illegally in unsuitable boats. (41593)

Tabled on: 03 September 2021

Answer:

Chris Philp:

The Government stands resolute in its commitment to tackle Organised Immigration Crime (OIC). We continue to pursue the Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) who facilitate illegal travel to the UK and who exploit vulnerable migrants, knowingly putting people in life-threatening situations.

We are committed to prosecuting those who profit from dangerous and unnecessary Channel crossings in small boats. We are working with national and international partners in these investigations, and are continuing to improve the intelligence co-operation that underpins them. The multi-agency NCA-led OIC Taskforce is the UK government's response to tackling people smuggling. It has been involved in more than 1000 arrests, both in the UK and overseas, with suspects convicted sentenced to more than 720 years in prison. It takes a whole of route approach, deploying over 150 officers to operate in 17 countries, with Crown Prosecution Service prosecutors placed in key source and transit countries to disrupt OCGs profiting from people smuggling.

We also pursue those involved in the financial flows that support this activity. Using criminal powers in the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, an

individual can be prosecuted for money laundering offences if sufficient evidence is obtainable and CPS agree to charging, or civil powers within the same act permit the action to be taken against the money concerned. Both these approaches are used to undermine the financial flows supporting small boat and wider clandestine smuggling, both in the UK and with foreign partners.

We are working with NCA and social media companies to agree a joint action plan to tackle content advertising illegal OIC services on online platforms, including content relating to small boat crossings.

Additionally, the Government published the New Plan for Immigration containing provisions to establish legislation to deter illegal entry into the UK, thereby breaking the business model of criminal people smuggling networks and protecting the lives of those they endanger. In July 2021, the Government introduced this legislation through the Nationality and Borders Bill.

The Government will continue to work tirelessly to stop the criminal networks facilitating OIC and protect the lives of those they wish to recklessly exploit.

[What is being done to encourage the growing of crops for fuel?](#)

I have received the following answer to my recent Parliamentary Question:

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has provided the following answer to your written parliamentary question (41598):

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what his plans are to encourage growing crops for fuel. (41598)

Tabled on: 03 September 2021

Answer:

Victoria Prentis:

Biofuels used in the transport sector have been supported since 2008 through the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation (RTFO), led by the Department of Transport. The RTFO is a certificate trading scheme which sets targets and provides financial incentives for the supply of sustainable biofuels. To qualify for support under the RTFO biofuels must meet mandatory sustainability criteria, which include measures to prevent deforestation and other negative land use impacts.

This month, the Government introduced E10 (petrol with up to 10% ethanol) as the standard petrol across Great Britain. The introduction of E10 increases the amount of bioethanol blended with petrol sold at forecourts in the UK. Bioethanol production in the UK results in valuable by-products, such as high protein animal feed and stored CO₂ for the food and drink industries, reducing the need to import these products. Increased UK demand due to the introduction of E10 has wider economic benefits in terms of providing support for UK bioethanol producers and farmers in the supply chain.

In the Government's response to the Climate Change Committee's (CCC) annual progress report to Parliament in 2020, we announced that we will publish a new Biomass Strategy in 2022. This will review what amount of sustainable biomass could be available to the UK, including feedstocks grown for transport biofuels. It will assess how this resource could be best used across the economy to help achieve our net zero greenhouse gas emissions target by 2050.

We are clear that we will support farmers to produce high quality crops in a more sustainable way, ensuring that policy supports the conditions where domestic farm businesses can thrive, whether that be production for food or fuel production. Our Agriculture Transition Plan (2020) sets out how we will use public money to reward farmers and land managers for delivering environmentally sustainable outcomes.

The answer was submitted on 13 Sep 2021 at 15:53.

[What proportion of the public service bus fleet is electric](#)

I have received the following answer to my recent Parliamentary Question:

The Department for Transport has provided the following answer to your written parliamentary question (41596):

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what proportion of the public service bus fleet is electric. (41596)

Tabled on: 03 September 2021

Answer:

Rachel Maclean:

As of March 2020, two per cent of buses used by local operators in England were electric.

The latest data on the proportion of buses used by local bus operators is from the Department for Transport Annual bus statistics: year ending March 2020 which was published in October 2020. Information on buses used by bus operators by fuel consumption type, including electric buses, is provided in table (BUS0609b).

The Annual bus statistics: year ending March 2021 are due to be published in Autumn 2021.

The answer was submitted on 13 Sep 2021 at 15:10.