

The path to net zero in transport

Yesterday the UK government published its 220 page document on how it wishes to transform the way we and our goods get about. At its heart was a contradiction. The early paragraphs promise us "it's not about stopping people doing things: it's about doing the same things differently. We will still drive on improved roads, but only in zero emission cars". The vision is of keeping the flexibility of personal road transport with that still be the dominant way of getting about. There will also be new planes to offer good value flights with carbon free fuels so no need to rein in the holidays abroad.

Whoever wrote that bit did not bother to order a rewrite of the rest of the document. A bit further on we are told the opposite. "We must make public transport, cycling and walking the natural first choice for all who can take it". We are offered a world of car sharing, car clubs and much less car use, alongside a target that "half of all journeys in towns and cities" are to be walking or cycling by 2030. The plan confirms their wish to end all new diesel and petrol van and car sales from 2030, all fossil fuel lighter HGVs from 2035 and the rest from 2040.

In some areas under direct government control the plan lacks the same crusading energy. We are only offered a net zero railway by 2050, even though it is already heavily electrified. There will still be diesel trains in 2039. We are promised a railfreight growth target which could relieve our main roads and help a great deal in many ways, but there is no agreed one in this document from the government and the railway, currently effectively nationalised. There is no date yet decided for the phase out of fossil fuel buses, with non fossil fuel fleets still at the demonstration city and project stage.

We are told that "We will continue to support demand for zero emissions vehicles through a a (sic) package of financial and non financial incentives". Given the millions of vehicles they want replaced that could prove very costly.

I am all in favour of more freight going by rail. That requires work on smaller track bypasses and extensions, new sidings and branch lines into industrial parks, and new depots. I am all in favour of new electric cars and vans once they are seen by more of the public as better than the diesel and petrol versions and are attractively priced by the market so they fly off the shelves. More work is needed on this strategy, with more reassurance about what its aims are. Transport is crucial to our lives, central to our food and goods supply, crucial to services provided to us and vital for many of our jobs. People will want to know the change planned does not make these things worse for us.

My speech during the debate on English Votes for English Laws

England deserves better. England expects better. It is a sad occasion that this Government should wish to dismiss the only modest devolution ever offered to England, with nothing to put in its place. They leave instead Labour's lopsided and unfair devolution, a devolution proposed and forced through a previous Parliament, on a large majority, by a Labour party that said it would settle the constitution and unite the country behind the Union once and for all. It did nothing of the sort.

Surely this Government can now see that if they carry on, as Labour did, appeasing the forces that would pull the Union asunder, they will not bring the Union together but give those forces greater strength and a better platform. Instead of Scottish electors welcoming their devolved powers and deciding to continue in the traditional mould of two United Kingdom parties contesting power, they chose a party that wishes to pull the Union apart. Some of them chose that party because they thought the Government would give in to it, and so get a better deal for Scotland; and some of them chose that party because they genuinely wanted to pull the Union apart, although they were, of course, in a minority.

The Government and I treasure our United Kingdom. We wish this Union to work for everyone, but it has to be a fair Union. It will not be held together better by appeasing the SNP or by appeasing the EU over Northern Ireland. We above all in this House should be speaking up for all the millions of Unionists in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and throughout England and Wales, who expect better and expect fairness.

One of the crucial values that our United Kingdom shares is that idea of fairness. How is it fair to have these totally different categories of MP, with different powers, different responsibilities and different opportunities to influence how they are governed in their parts of the United Kingdom? Why is it that England, the home of many more millions of Unionists and more loyal to our country than anyone else in our Union, is the one part of the Union that gets no justice and no fairness from this Government or their predecessors?

Labour introduced policies that sought to break the Union in the name of keeping the Union. I want this Government to mend the Union, and that means standing behind all those people throughout the United Kingdom who believe in the Union, and to stop appeasing those who would pull it apart.

My votes yesterday

During a busy day in the Commons I voted against the SI requiring mandatory vaccination for anyone involved with a Care Home, and with the government on overseas aid. There was no vote taken on the English laws issue as the entire Opposition supported the government.

Who speaks for England

Yesterday in the debate on English votes for English laws I asked the Leader of the House who in the government speaks for England. When the Union government consults the devolved governments of Scotland, Wales and NI over an important issue who do they turn to for an English view?

There was no clear answer. The Minister seemed to think devolution of power to Councils and grand Mayors for city regions in England was the way to go. This is just a variant of the EU wish to balkanise and break up England into Euro regions. Labour's lop sided devolution gave most to Scotland and nothing to England. the government needs to think again. England deserves a voice. I will post my Commons speech this morning.

Shinfield lunch

It was good to join the Shinfield Conservatives branch for a garden lunch on Sunday at the Elm Tree in Beech Hill. The roast beef Sunday lunch was great, with members enjoying getting out and seeing each other again after lockdown. There was much discussion of how to handle the virus from here, as well as talk about the football final.