

# Roundtable meeting on Infrastructure & Levelling Up with Gill Furniss MP, Shadow Minister for Roads

Tuesday 25th April 2023

## Introduction

The group met with Gill Furniss MP, Shadow Minister for Roads, for a dynamic discussion on Infrastructure and Levelling Up and how investment in transport across the UK can grow the economy and boost workforce participation. Gill Furniss emphasised that what Levelling Up means to one person can be entirely different to someone else. For some, Levelling Up is about improving incomes but to do this, the UK needs a boost in private and public funding of infrastructure. This discussion covered a range of topics, including the role of local transport and cycle routes in Levelling Up and the importance of local leadership and autonomy.



## Key takeaways

- Transport is crucial to the levelling up agenda. £1 of investment in transport can lead to £16 of benefit in terms of economic activity, workforce participation and spending in the local area.
- Transport is not just about roads, electric cars and charging hubs. It also encompasses bus, train and cycle routes, all of which are important to connecting rural areas to city hubs and getting local people to school and work.
- According to Gov.UK, 71% of car journeys in the UK are under 5 miles. Yet, if we are going to successfully develop active transport routes such as cycle paths, we need a national planning policy framework to meet economic, social and environmental objectives and overcome planning paralysis. We cannot continue down the current road, in which cycle routes are blocked by housing developments and vice versa.
- Alongside a national planning policy framework, long-term political cooperation is crucial. Parties need to work together to develop plans that last longer than a term of four to five years.

- The reliability of local transport is poor, and the north of England sees large disparities in the frequency of local bus routes when compared to the south.
- Levelling Up is also about ensuring that we don't just funnel money from the south to the north. We want cities like Liverpool, Norwich and Manchester to be as successful as London in terms of scaling.
- A key tenet of the Levelling Up agenda will be to match public investment with stimuli for private investment.

## Issues raised

- Councils are asking for the power to spend funding on things that they know the community needs on the ground, yet at the same time, we have seen huge cuts to council budgets over the last decade.
- The government should be doing more to encourage people to walk and cycle as a form of active travel if people are physically and practically able to do so.

We would like to thank the members of our Advisory Board for their contributions and continuing support.

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Gagan Mohindra MP is the Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Regeneration & Levelling Up

To get involved, please contact  
[secretariat@appgregenlevellingup.org.uk](mailto:secretariat@appgregenlevellingup.org.uk)



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