

Commission on Future UK Travel Demand and Climate Change

Cars and planes are mostly dependent on fossil fuels so they pose big Climate Change challenges. In comparison, rail transport (heavy, light, ultra-light) uses energy and land more efficiently and can more easily use renewable electricity.

The Transport Group of the High Wycombe Society here considers travel mostly about 5 miles around the town centre, plus links to London and other parts of the UK. There are three airports nearby (Heathrow, Gatwick and Luton).

1. **Geography** – Chiltern Hills, River Wye, AONB, key connections,
2. **History** - Domesday Book, mills, railways, Beeching, road building, population growth, congestion and climate change.
3. **Some possible developments to reduce CO₂ emissions;**
 - a) **Reopening disused rail link** – High Wycombe/Bourne End (5miles)
 - b) **Traffic lights & roundabouts for smoother traffic flow.**
 - c) **Car sharing**, to reduce impact on roads, parking, pollution and Climate Change...

1. Geography.

High Wycombe (HW) is 35 miles north west of London. It grew up in a deep valley running E/W across the Chiltern Hills, alongside the small river Wye and the old London /Oxford road (part of today's A40). Large areas of the Chilterns AONB are close to much of the town. The High Street and historic town centre are in the river valley, but today most of the town (population 133,204 urban plus rural) has been built on the surrounding hills, producing many roads with steep gradients, which consume much fuel and discourage cycling. Maidenhead and the Great West Main Line (soon also Crossrail) are in the Thames Valley 9 miles south along the Wye Valley, via Bourne End. Oxford is 25 miles to the west. Airports: Heathrow is 18 miles, Gatwick 57 miles and Luton 40 miles. Good rail services are available to London, Birmingham and Oxford; connections to Aylesbury will improve with east-west rail, which will also add routes to Milton Keynes, Bedford and eventually Cambridge; all other connections are by road. Particularly to the Thames Valley employment area and LHR airport,

2. History:

Long industrial history and railways:

Industry was powered by water mills (driven by the River Wye) for more than 800 years. The Domesday Book, published in 1086 and ordered by William the Conqueror, recorded 3 of the mills. In the course of the next 800 years

about 30 more mills were built along a short length of the river near HW (e.g. flour mills, saw mills and paper mills). They formed the basis of the successful industry which led Brunel to develop HW's first railway opened in 1854. The track ran along the Wye valley via Bourne End to join his great West Main Line at Maidenhead. The 5 miles between HW and Bourne End was closed in 1970, following many rail closures after the 1966 Beeching Report. A second rail link had been opened in 1905, following the shorter E/W route to London that required a tunnel near Beaconsfield. This is the track now used by Chiltern Railways.

Road building:

The arrival of motorised traffic at the end of the 19th century made it necessary to increase the capacity and strength of roads, including the A40 in HW town centre, where huge congestion developed. In 1965 the M40 was built a mile south of the High St, and in 1969 the Abbey Way by-pass 100m south of High St, but the relief was short lived. The town centre was pedestrianised in 1998. Today heavy congestion is widespread across the District. There has been much population growth but no corresponding new infrastructure. Climate Change also demands urgent measures to reduce carbon emissions.

3. Some possible future developments to reduce CO₂ emissions

a) Reopening of 5 miles of disused rail link HW/Bourne End (HBL)

This could provide lower energy transport than today's cars between HW and the busy Thames Valley at Maidenhead giving access to CrossRail and the planned western access rail link to Heathrow.

In 1994, the track was surveyed voluntarily by Christopher Wallis, a leading engineer who lived locally and who had played a key role in rescuing the Settle/ Carlisle railway. In 1994 a few short lengths of the HBL track had been built over, and simple reinstatements were feasible. The Transport Group campaigned for the track to be protected. This was granted for a short while but since then more of it has been built on and re-instatement is still feasible, but more expensive. Privately funded professional studies have confirmed this feasibility. Perhaps the pressures of Climate Change, new housing, and congestion will now justify the costs of reinstatement. *Weak planning protection of routes where development or changes in population would suggest re-opening, is an area that warrants investigation on a national basis.*

b) Changes to Traffic lights and roundabouts to aid smooth traffic flow and save energy. A member of the Transport Group has made an exhaustive study of a large number of these in HW, and accordingly has recommended that several of the lights be removed and replaced with a roundabout.

c) Car sharing - to reduce the number of journeys and so minimise the impact on road space, parking spaces, pollution and climate change. Busy destinations, such as stations, town centres, industrial estates etc. often require car transport for door-to-door journeys. Modern telecommunications and computers make it possible to maintain easy contact with relevant sharing

vehicles, and to receive and process journey information to identify convenient sharing. This matching of journey requests is usually easier during the busy periods. The shared vehicles may be part of a dedicated car-sharing workforce, or they may be volunteers from among staff of other businesses. Several different arrangements have been developed. The sharing could often involve sharing with strangers in a strange car, so it is important the booking procedure provides records of the vehicle, the people in it, and its continual whereabouts. Also there needs to be regulations directed at ensuring the shared vehicles are kept mechanically in good order and clean, and that the drivers are competent and responsible.

The measures reviewed in 3a – c above could reduce the road transport CO₂ emissions and the land take for roads and parking in the HW area, but these changes would likely be small compared with the emissions and land take associated with the three international airports (Heathrow, Gatwick and Luton) within 20 or 50 miles of High Wycombe.

A new synthetic material suitable for building aircraft is said to be much lighter than the aluminium now used but the air travel emissions would still be considerable. If future travel demand is to make a contribution to reducing climate change a new kind of international agreement to reduce air travel will be essential.