

Budget 2024

Post-budget briefing

Summary

- 14 years of austerity have led to crashing living standards, crumbling infrastructure, and have brought public services to their knees – all while private profits increased, the wealthiest became wealthier still, and the climate crisis deepened.
- That is the inheritance of the last Conservative Government, from Rishi Sunak, through Liz Truss, Boris Johnson, Theresa May, to David Cameron.
- The Prime Minister has rightly highlighted the need to “fix the foundations” of our economy, and the Government has taken steps in this direction – for example, shifting power towards working people with the Employment Rights Bill, addressing the rail rip-off by bringing Train Operating Companies into public ownership, and giving communities control over their bus services with new franchising powers.
- This budget is the golden opportunity to reverse over a decade of Conservative-led decline and invest in our communities and the services that support them.
- The Chancellor is therefore right to ditch Conservative borrowing rules. This will unlock up to £50bn in additional funding for essential projects.
- TSSA applauds further investment in rail and especially the termination of HS2 at Euston. This must be the start of a broader strategy on renewal of our public transport system, taken forward in the forthcoming Infrastructure Strategy.
- Those with the broadest shoulders should bear the costs. We therefore encourage the Government to think again on measures that negatively impact workers. After 14 years of declining living standards, working people should not suffer further attacks on their income, nor should services face additional cuts.

Invest to get Britain moving

- After 14 years of economic stagnation, the Government is right to emphasise the importance of growth in rebuilding the economy. Connecting the country with a transport system fit for the future is a prerequisite for increasing economic growth and productivity, addressing the climate crisis, and tackling social inequality. It must be at the heart of the Government’s economic plans – and a priority reflected in the budget.
- The Chancellor is therefore right to ditch the previous Conservative Government’s fiscal rules, which have unnecessarily restricted borrowing for long-term investment.
- In opposition, the Labour Party commissioned Maier’s Rail and Urban Transport Review, which recommends a bold long-term vision and ambition for transport infrastructure.
- For that reason, TSSA welcomes news of the HS2 Euston terminus; the Transpennine route upgrade and electrification between York and Manchester via Leeds and Huddersfield; delivery of the East West rail services; upgrades at Bradford Forster Square station; increased capacity at Manchester Victoria; electrification of the Wigan to Bolton line; and the announcement of a Rolling Stock Strategy in the budget documents.
- These are positive first steps and we look forward to scrutinising the plans in the Government’s forthcoming Infrastructure Strategy, announced on Tuesday 29 October, where rail must continue to be a priority – including support for freight.
- TSSA strongly believes that included in these plans should be completion of HS2 in its entirety, ensuring the full economic and environmental benefits are felt nationwide.

- The Government must publish a timetable for consultation on the Infrastructure Strategy and Rolling Stock Strategy. TSSA looks forward to working with Ministers to ensure improving the transport network is at the heart of this agenda.

Invest in transport for all

- To facilitate the modal shift to rail recommended in the Maier review, the Government should ensure the transport system is accessible to all. At current rates of investment, it will take 100 years to make all stations step-free to new-build standards¹. We must increase the rate of investment to ensure that rail travel is an option for everyone.
- For that reason, we urge the government to make these upgrades a priority in its forthcoming Infrastructure Strategy.
- That must include funding to ensure ticket offices stay open and that stations and transport hubs are adequately staffed. This will help to tackle the increased wave of harassment and violence we have seen on the transport network in the previous year; for example, recorded sexual offences, which include rape, indecent exposure, and upskirting, increased from 2,246 last year to 2,475 in the year to March².
- Part of addressing this will also require restoring funding to British Transport Police (BTP) – which the Tories cut by £5 million last year – and providing funding for transport police services in Northern Ireland. We urge the Government to reverse the cut and expand resourcing for BTP across Britain and Northern Ireland.

Those with the broadest shoulders must bear the costs

- After 14 years of austerity combined with a post-covid inflation crisis, we have seen the decline of living standards and the cost of living soar – all while private profits increased and the wealthiest became wealthier still.
- The Chancellor is therefore right to insist that tax rises should not be levied on working people. Those with the broadest shoulders should bear the costs – the very wealthiest and the large corporations who have registered soaring profits.
- For this reason, TSSA welcomes the increase in the minimum wage and investment in the NHS.
- But it is also why the Government should ditch the Conservative's two-child benefit cap, the previous Government's reform of Work Capability Assessment, and the proposed 2% target for cuts to departmental budgets, and reinstate the Winter Fuel Allowance on a universal basis. After 14 years of declining living standards, working people should not suffer further attacks on their income, nor should services face additional cuts.
- Similarly, the Government should think again on raising the bus fare cap from £2 to £3 while freezing fuel duty and maintaining the 5p temporary cut. The increase targets those who need reliable and affordable public transport the most. We also need a modal shift to green forms of transport; promoting private car use whilst discouraging the use of public transport is the wrong priority.
- The new Labour government should rethink the Conservative's policy for rail fares to be based on the previous year's July RPI (All Items) + 1% (2024 - 3.6%+1%).

More information

For more information or to arrange a meeting, please contact TSSA Political Officer, Sam Browse, on browses@tssa.org.uk.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dptac-reference-frame-working-towards-a-fully-accessible-railway/dptac-reference-frame-working-towards-a-fully-accessible-railway#:~:text=At%20current%20annual%20rates%20of,3.75%20billion%20would%20be%20required>.

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/clyg9mmnewwo>