

# City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement Process Evaluation - Case Study 2 Report: Lessons learned from the Transforming Cities Fund evaluation

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## Executive Summary

### The Transforming Cities Fund evaluation

The Transforming Cities Fund (TCF, also called ‘the Fund’ in this report) is a £2.45 billion capital grant transport fund aimed at driving up productivity through investments in public and sustainable transport infrastructure in some of England’s largest cities and city regions.

18 local areas were allocated TCF funding between 2018 and 2020. The generic term ‘local areas’ is used in this report to describe all 18 localities who were awarded TCF funding. These include Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs), consortia of Local Authorities (LAs), and individual LAs.

The original completion date for all TCF schemes was March 2023. However, many schemes encountered delays, and local programmes were still in delivery at the time this research was undertaken. The Fund is now expected to close in March 2025.

For Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) in receipt of City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements (CRSTS), CRSTS is the successor funding to TCF. The final year of TCF funding (2022/23) to these MCAs was consolidated within each MCA’s CRSTS allocation.

The 18 local areas are undertaking their own impact evaluations of the schemes in their local TCF programmes. In addition to these local evaluations, the Department for Transport (DfT) commissioned a national evaluation to assess the overarching impact of the fund. In late 2019, DfT commissioned the University of the West of England (UWE), Transport for Quality of Life (TfQL) and Sustrans (together called the ‘National Evaluation Consortium’, and hereafter in this report ‘the Consortium’), to carry out the role of national evaluator for TCF.

The Consortium first developed a National Evaluation Framework (NEF), which defined research objectives and questions, data collection requirements and proposed methodologies for analysis. The NEF was broken down into nine discrete work packages (by transport mode / type of data). The Consortium then worked with local areas to obtain pre-intervention data for the evaluation, and is currently working with local areas to obtain post-intervention data. The evaluation remains ongoing and is expected to conclude in 2026.

### Purpose of this process evaluation

This report provides a process evaluation of the national TCF evaluation up to early 2023. It considers the experiences of stakeholders involved in the design and delivery of the evaluation to date, including DfT, the Consortium, and the local areas.

The TCF evaluation will run for several more years. This process evaluation is intended to be a ‘point in time’ review of experiences and lessons learnt from the TCF evaluation to date. It is not intended to be a final review of the completed TCF evaluation process.

The objective of this process evaluation is to identify early lessons from the delivery of the TCF evaluation to date. These lessons could be used to inform the design and delivery of the CRSTS evaluation, as well as other evaluations of similar local transport funds in future.

### Process evaluation methodology

Steer was commissioned to undertake the process evaluation of the national TCF evaluation to date. The project scoping process involved collaborative development of research questions with the DfT. These questions can be found in **Appendix A**.

This research utilised a qualitative approach, consisting of a combination of in-depth, semi-structured interviews to gather depth and nuance. More details on the methodology can be found in **Appendix B**.

### Key findings and lessons learned

Nine key findings and lessons learned from the process evaluation, which emerged from thematic analysis of the interviews, are discussed in Section 4 of this report. In summary, they are:

- 1. Commissioning a national evaluator is a very effective method of evaluating the impact of geographically dispersed local transport investment.** Research participants from DfT, the Consortium, and the local areas noted that the national evaluator role ensured consistency of data inputs into the national evaluation from across the 18 local areas.
- 2. The design of the national evaluation, centred around discrete work packages (each with a lead) and supported by regional relationship coordinators has worked well to date.** The structure of the national evaluation into nine discrete work packages (each with a subject matter lead), supported by regional relationship coordinators who acted as the primary point of contact for local areas, was viewed positively by the local areas.
- 3. Having a named lead contact within each local area, who is responsible for the local evaluation and for providing the local area's inputs into the national evaluation, is a key success factor.** Both Consortium interviewees and local area interviewees found that having a named lead person, responsible for the local area's evaluation and inputs into the national evaluation, made the process much more streamlined on both sides.
- 4. The development of guidance documents and standardised spreadsheet templates by the Consortium, which the local areas could then use to complete evaluation responses, worked well.** Local areas acknowledged the important role the templates fulfilled in ensuring a consistent national evaluation. Local areas were supportive of the approach taken by the national evaluator in designing the templates, including the definitions and guidance on requirements provided with the templates by the Consortium.
- 5. Many local areas relied on the NEF for their own local evaluations to a large extent.** Local areas would, therefore, have benefitted from the NEF being developed more quickly at the start of the evaluation.

6. **Local areas valued the support provided by the Consortium, which proved necessary to support local areas with differing capabilities and evaluation experience.** The evaluation experience and capability of the 18 local areas varied greatly. Newly formed MCAs, and non-MCA local areas who had not previously evaluated similar local transport funds before, needed greater levels of support than established MCAs and non-MCA local areas with experience of evaluating large local transport funds in the past.
7. **The Consortium emphasised their independence from DfT, which helped relationship-building but may have reduced their ability to get local areas to prioritise the evaluation.** Direct intervention from DfT ultimately proved necessary to make some local areas comply with requests from the national evaluator.
8. **The evaluation underestimated the challenge of obtaining commercially sensitive bus patronage data from bus operators.** Obtaining bus patronage data for the evaluation from bus operators proved to be a difficult task for local areas which was, in many cases, outside of their control. The challenge of obtaining this data in a deregulated bus market was not acknowledged in the NEF and guidance.
9. **The community of practice session led by the Consortium was helpful for local areas, but DfT attendance can hinder open collaboration between them.** Some interviewees noted there was limited engagement from the local areas in attendance during the community of practice event. One local area participant felt that, with DfT also in attendance, they did not feel they could discuss their challenges openly as they feared this could be held against them in future rounds of local transport funding.

It is intended that these key lessons learned from the TCF evaluation to date will be used by DfT to inform the design and delivery of the CRSTS evaluation.

### Structure of this report

The structure of the report is as follows:

- **Section 1: Introduction** provides background information about the TCF evaluation, this report, and the research methodology.
- **Section 2: The TCF evaluation** presents the roles and responsibilities, and the timescales of the TCF evaluation to date.
- **Section 3: Findings from the process evaluation** details the research findings from the qualitative research.
- **Section 4: Conclusions and lessons learned** summarises the learnings from the evaluation.

# 1 Introduction

## Overview

### The Transforming Cities Fund

The Transforming Cities Fund (TCF) is a £2.45 billion capital grant transport fund aimed at driving up productivity through investments in public and sustainable transport infrastructure in some of England’s largest cities and city regions.

18 local areas were allocated TCF funding between 2018 and 2020. This report uses the generic term ‘local areas’ to describe all 18 localities that received TCF funding. These include Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs), consortia of Local Authorities (LAs), and individual LAs. Details of the TCF funding allocations are available [on Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

Just under half the TCF (£1.08 billion) was allocated to six Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) on a per capita, devolved basis in 2018. The remaining funding was allocated across two tranches:

- **Tranche 1 (£60 million):** 30 projects from ten shortlisted consortia of Local Authorities (LAs) and individual LAs were awarded funding to improve intra-city connectivity and encourage active and public transport use (2019).
- **Tranche 2 (£1.22 billion):** 12 shortlisted consortia of LAs and individual LAs had the opportunity to bid for funding, working closely with central government officials, and developed plans to deliver change in public and active travel connectivity (2020).

Table 1.1 lists all local areas that received a TCF allocation.

**Table 1.1: Local areas that received a TCF allocation**

Local area	Local area type
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough	MCA
Greater Manchester	MCA
Leicester	Individual LA
Liverpool City Region	MCA
North East	Consortium of LAs*
Norwich	Individual LA
Nottingham and Derby	Consortium of LAs*
Plymouth	Individual LA
Portsmouth & South East Hampshire	Consortium of LAs
Preston	Individual LA
Sheffield City Region	Consortium of LAs*
Southampton	Individual LA
South East Dorset	Consortium of LAs
Stoke-on-Trent	Individual LA
Tees Valley	MCA
West Midlands	MCA
West of England	MCA
West Yorkshire Combined Authority	Consortium of LAs*

*\*Note: The North East, Sheffield City Region (South Yorkshire) and West Yorkshire entered the TCF process as consortia of LAs at the time; they have since gained MCA status. Some of West Yorkshire's funding has also supported projects that are now in the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority. Nottingham and Derby are now part of the East Midlands Mayoral Combined County Authority.*

The original completion date for all TCF schemes was March 2023. However, many schemes encountered delays, and local programmes were still in delivery at the time this research was undertaken. The Fund is now expected to close in March 2025.

For MCAs in receipt of City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements (CRSTS), CRSTS is the successor funding to the TCF. The final year of the TCF payment (2022/23) to these MCAs was consolidated within each MCA's CRSTS allocation.

CRSTS is a £5.7bn programme of consolidated, long-term capital funding to 8 MCAs in England through 5-year settlements from 2022/23 to 2026/27. Details of the CRSTS funding allocations are available [on Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk). CRSTS aims to deliver transformational change through investments in public and sustainable transport infrastructure, targeted at the following objectives:

- driving growth and productivity
- decarbonising transport
- levelling up services and areas.

### **The TCF evaluation**

The 18 local areas are undertaking their own impact evaluations of the schemes in their TCF funding allocations, as a condition of their funding awards.

In addition to these local evaluations, the Department for Transport (DfT) commissioned a national evaluation to assess the overarching impact of the fund. In late 2019, DfT commissioned the University of the West of England (UWE), Transport for Quality of Life (TfQL) and Sustrans (together called the 'National Evaluation Consortium', and hereafter in this report 'the Consortium') to carry out the role of national evaluator for the TCF.

The Consortium first developed a National Evaluation Framework (NEF), which defined research objectives and questions, data collection requirements and proposed methodologies for analysis. The NEF was broken down into nine discrete work packages (by transport mode / type of data). The Consortium then worked with local areas to obtain pre-intervention data for the evaluation, and is currently working with local areas to obtain post-intervention data. The evaluation remains ongoing and is expected to conclude in 2025/26.

Section 2 of this report provides more detail on the TCF evaluation, including a timeline of the key TCF evaluation activities to date.

### **This report**

This report provides a process evaluation of the national TCF evaluation up to early 2023. A process evaluation generates learning on how an intervention or policy was delivered. It includes consideration of what worked well and less well, and why, and what could be improved. The process evaluation considers the experiences of stakeholders involved in the design and delivery of the TCF evaluation to date, including DfT, the Consortium, and the local areas.

The objective of this process evaluation is to identify early lessons from the delivery of the TCF evaluation to date. These lessons could be used to inform the design and delivery of the CRSTS evaluation, as well as other evaluations of similar local transport funds in future.

The report is structured thematically, reflecting the experiences of stakeholders throughout the process, rather than being a chronological account of the process. These themes are introduced at the start of section 3.

The TCF evaluation will run for several more years. This process evaluation is intended to be a 'point in time' review of experiences and lessons learnt from the TCF evaluation to date. It is not intended to be a final review of the completed TCF evaluation process.

## Methodology

Steer was commissioned to undertake this process evaluation on behalf of DfT. This has included developing the methodology, conducting fieldwork and analysis, and summarising the findings in this report. This report is based on in-depth interviews with DfT officials, representatives from the Consortium, and officers from selected local areas.

### Research questions

To deliver this process evaluation, Steer collaborated with DfT during the project scoping process to develop three main research questions, each encompassing sub-questions. The sub-questions can be found in **Appendix A**, while the overarching questions are shown in Table 1.2.

**Table 1.2: Research questions**

Research questions
<b>What has worked well and less well regarding how the TCF evaluation has been set up and designed?</b> For example, how well has the model of evaluation support (DfT-appointed national evaluator supporting LAs to deliver monitoring and evaluation) worked from the perspective of the key stakeholders involved?
<b>What has worked well and less well in the delivery of the TCF evaluation to date?</b> For example, what are the challenges to ensuring comprehensive and timely data collection and how have these been overcome?
<b>What lessons can be learned to inform the design and the delivery of future evaluations,</b> to inform the CRSTS evaluation and more broadly to apply to other similar evaluations?

*Note: In the research questions, ‘the TCF evaluation’ refers to the national TCF evaluation and the role of the national evaluator. This includes the support provided by the national evaluator to local areas to help them with their own local evaluations; but not those local evaluations themselves, which are not a focus of this research.*

This study employed qualitative research methods, consisting of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with one or more participants from DfT, the Consortium, and the local areas. Qualitative research is an appropriate choice where the key focus of the research is to gather depth and nuance.

The interviews enabled all necessary stakeholders to be engaged, whilst also enabling an in-depth understanding of the participants’ experiences and perspectives (which, for example, a written questionnaire may not have uncovered).

In total, 11 interviews were held between December 2022 and March 2023 with a combination of the Consortium, DfT, and local area participants. The approach to sampling participants from local areas was based on targeting local areas with a range of different characteristics, and who appeared to have different levels of challenge with meeting the requirements of the national evaluation.

The findings presented here are intended to demonstrate the range and diversity of the views and experiences of the participants, and to draw out common themes uncovered through the research.

More details on the methodology can be found in **Appendix B – Methodology**.

# 2 The TCF evaluation

This section outlines the TCF evaluation process, to provide context for the research findings presented in the following section. It covers the various steps involved in the evaluation, from the award of the TCF evaluation contract, to the final round of data collection which is expected to take place in 2025.

## Roles, responsibilities, and relationships

DfT commissioned a national TCF evaluation to evaluate the overarching impact of the fund, in addition to the local evaluations being undertaken by the 18 local areas.

DfT is the funder and client for the national TCF evaluation. Further roles, responsibilities and relationships are summarised in Table 2.1 below.

**Table 2.1: Roles and responsibilities for the TCF evaluation**

Role	Fulfilled by	Key roles / responsibilities
Commissioning client	Department for Transport	Commissioning and oversight of the national evaluator role
National evaluator	The Consortium – comprising the University of the West of England (UWE), Transport for Quality of Life (TfQL) and Sustrans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Project Manager</li><li>• Research Director</li><li>• Contract Manager</li><li>• Regional Coordinators</li><li>• Work Package Leads</li></ul>
Local areas	18 localities that received TCF funding, including MCAs, consortia of LAs, and individual LAs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Central evaluation owners</li><li>• TCF programme managers</li><li>• Data owners</li><li>• Contacts from constituent LAs</li><li>• Consultant support</li></ul> <p>Note: the composition of teams involved in the TCF evaluation at the local area level varied in structure, depending on the local area.</p>

To undertake the TCF evaluation, DfT appointed the Consortium in late 2019, comprising the University of the West of England (UWE), Transport for Quality of Life (TfQL) and Sustrans. An early task for the Consortium was to work with local areas to collate information about the local areas’ TCF programmes and monitoring plans to inform the National Evaluation Framework (NEF); and to advise local areas developing their own evaluation plans.

The Consortium team structure includes two leads: a Project Manager and a Research Director. These roles provide day-to-day management and oversight of the national evaluation respectively.

The Consortium team structure also includes work package leads and regional coordinators. Regional coordinators develop relationships with local areas and manage queries from local areas. Work package leads comprise technical specialists for different modes of transport or types of data, who work together with regional coordinators to respond to technical queries from local areas.

The nine work packages are shown in Table 2.2 below.

**Table 2.2: Work packages**

Work package	Type of dataset used
WP1: Schemes and outputs	Local area data
WP2: TCF local area analysis	Secondary dataset
WP3: Headlines	Local area data
WP4: Town and city centre centres	Local area data
WP5a: Light rail	Local area data
WP5b: Buses	Local area data
WP6: Rail	Secondary dataset
WP7: Cycling	Local area data
WP8: TCF locality analysis	Secondary dataset

*Source: Transport for Quality of Life / Sustrans / University of the West of England (2021), Transforming Cities Fund: National Evaluation Framework (Version 3.1, April 2021)*

Local areas' evaluation teams vary in structure. For instance, some have central evaluation teams, or points of contact that manage the TCF evaluation requirements. Relevant data owners for each work package also varied depending on local area structure, resource, and capacity. They typically included staff from constituent LAs; staff from MCAs or Passenger Transport Executives, as applicable; and in some cases, consultants. Local areas also requested data inputs from bus operators to support the TCF evaluation data requirements.

### Timeline of the TCF evaluation process

The timeline of the evaluation process to date is summarised in the timeline in Table 2.3 below.

**Table 2.3: TCF evaluation timeline**

Date	Event
December 2019	DfT awards contract for TCF national evaluation to the UWE, TfQL and Sustrans consortium.
January 2020	Evaluation planning begins.
February/March 2020	First introduction of the Consortium to the 18 local areas.
Throughout 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local areas are required to develop their own local evaluation plans.</li> <li>The Consortium liaise with and meet local areas to explore existing data available within the local areas.</li> </ul>
March 2021	The Consortium build templates and guidance for local areas in relation to baseline data required.
April 2021	The Consortium share the National Evaluation Framework at an online session with local areas.
Throughout 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Consortium request pre-intervention data from local areas.</li> <li>The Consortium respond to queries about data collation from local areas, and create FAQ document.</li> <li>Local authorities collate pre-intervention data throughout 2021 and baseline reporting continues throughout 2022-2023.</li> </ul>
September 2021	Community of Practice knowledge sharing session held.
March 2023	Delivery of all TCF schemes originally intended to be completed.
Throughout 2024	Further liaison with local areas to understand: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What their TCF programme had delivered and if/how this differed from the baseline.</li> <li>What data was still available and/or would need to be supplied for schemes which had emerged since baseline.</li> </ul>
2025	Final round of data collection planned.

Three local areas received their TCF funding later than other authorities (two six months later, and one nine months later), as DfT identified issues with their original funding bids and therefore required further clarification before a funding award could be made to them. In these cases, the TCF delivery timescales for these local areas were compressed, and some local areas had less time to contribute to the early stages of the evaluation.

In addition to the impact evaluation, the Consortium completed a stand-alone case study of the co-development process used to allocate funding to the local areas. This case study report has been published on the Government website as *Hiblin B, Calvert*

*T, Hopkinson L, Van Ry R, Sloman L and Cairns S (2021), [The Co-development Process: National Evaluation Case Study 1, Transforming Cities Fund](#).*

### **Early stages**

Evaluation planning began in January 2020. The Consortium agreed the objectives, logic maps, and outcomes for the evaluation with DfT. They designed research questions to measure the outputs, outcomes, and impacts.

In early 2020, the Consortium started engaging with the 18 local areas who were themselves starting the process of undertaking their own local TCF evaluations.

The Consortium studied the local evaluation plans developed by local areas to understand the range of funded initiatives to be evaluated, and availability of data that was being collected by the local areas. Meetings were also held between the Consortium and local areas to discuss TCF schemes and data availability with the local areas. The Consortium aimed to minimise additional work for the local areas, and therefore where possible drew on existing data.

The set-up phase of the national evaluation in early 2020 was followed by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Interactions between DfT, the Consortium, and the local areas continued to take place through virtual channels.

Throughout mid and late 2020 the Consortium developed the NEF. In addition, the Consortium provided support to local areas in relation to their local evaluations. The regional coordinators from the Consortium each managed a small number of authorities, and provided support as needed to each. This included, for example, reviewing and commenting on draft evaluation plans prepared by the local areas, and answering ad-hoc questions. The level of support provided varied from local area to local area, as some required more help than others or were more inclined to request help, and some experienced MCAs did not require any help. Help was offered to all 18 local areas, and some of them took up the offer as needed.

### **National evaluation development**

The Consortium developed work packages and defined the inputs required for each package. Building upon the understanding of data availability across the local areas, the Consortium built detailed spreadsheet templates and guidance for local areas in relation to the pre-intervention data required for the national evaluation.

A key principle of the NEF was that the evaluation should rely on secondary data wherever possible, to reduce the burden on local areas. In line with this, some work packages therefore focussed on this type of data only; for example, Census household car ownership data. However, five of the nine work packages required data inputs from local areas (see Table 2.2). Ensuring local areas understood the requirements and could position themselves to provide the inputs was therefore a core task for the Consortium.

The Consortium shared the final NEF at an online session with local areas in April 2021. At this session, all local areas received the National Evaluation Framework, the data collation plan, and timescales, and were given the opportunity to ask questions or give comments.

## Data collection

Following the launch of the NEF, the Consortium issued data requests to the local areas for pre-intervention data. This request was structured in relation to the individual work packages, and included detailed spreadsheet templates so that the local areas could collate standardised data. The templates also included definitions and guidance to support the collection of the required data. This included bus patronage data, which local areas had to source from bus operators.

The Consortium provided ongoing support to the local areas during the pre-intervention data collection phase. Regional coordinators managed queries raised by local areas about data collection, who drew in modal expertise from the work package leads as required. The Consortium produced a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document to manage recurring queries from local areas.

In September 2021, the Consortium facilitated a virtual 'Community of Practice' knowledge sharing session with the local areas so they could develop contacts, build consistency in evaluation across different locations, and learn from each other, particularly from authorities which had more evaluation experience.

Pre-intervention data collation and reporting continued throughout 2021. DfT assisted the Consortium in collecting data by sending reminders and requests to local areas, where data inputs had not yet been provided to the Consortium.

2023 was originally intended as the completion date for TCF scheme delivery. However, the timescales of some TCF schemes have been extended, which has therefore impacted the timescales for post-intervention data collection for the TCF evaluation. It is anticipated that final rounds of data collection for the TCF evaluation will take place in 2025. The Fund is now expected to close in March 2025, and the TCF evaluation is expected to conclude in 2026.

## 3 Findings from the process evaluation

The following section discusses the findings of the process evaluation, based on the interviews conducted with the Consortium, DfT, and the local areas. Conclusions and lessons learned for future evaluations are summarised in Section 4.

The interviews were conducted between December 2022 and March 2023. At that point, the national evaluation was at the pre-intervention reporting stage; the Consortium had analysed data and shared findings with DfT, and the Baseline Report was being finalised.

This section considers the findings across the following cross-cutting themes, which were identified through the qualitative analysis of the interviews (see **Appendix B**):

- the role of the national evaluator
- stakeholders and relationships
- resourcing and capacity
- creating understanding and confidence in the evaluation
- data gathering and sharing
- the relationship between the national evaluation and the local evaluations
- the relationship between the TCF and other local transport capital funds
- impacts of delays to the delivery of TCF schemes.

At the start of each section, a summary of key points has been provided.

### The role of the national evaluator

**Summary:** *DfT commissioned the Consortium early, to ensure that the evidence for the national evaluation could be collected while the Fund was being implemented. The Consortium's position as an independent contractor helped their relationship-building with local areas, but may have led to some local areas not prioritising their requests as they would have done with requests from DfT. DfT, the Consortium, and local area participants all noted the importance of the national evaluator role in ensuring consistent inputs from the local areas into the national evaluation.*

### Presence of a national evaluator

DfT interviewees felt that having a national evaluator was necessary to ensure that the impact of the TCF could be effectively evaluated, and lessons learned from its delivery, across the entire fund. This approach was consistent with the design of previous evaluations of local transport funds, such as the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) which also had a national evaluator in addition to local areas' own evaluations.

DfT commissioned the delivery partner for the national evaluation early in the TCF delivery process, to ensure that evidence could be collected while the Fund was being implemented. DfT noted this was one of the lessons from the LSTF evaluation. For further details on the LSTF evaluation, see: *Hiblin B, Taylor I and Sloman L (2016), [What Works? Learning from the Local Sustainable Transport Fund 2011-2015](#), and Sloman L, Cairns S, Goodman A, Hopkin J, Taylor I, Hopkinson L, Ricketts O, Hiblin B and Dillon M (2018), [Impact of the Local Sustainable Transport Fund: Synthesis of Evidence](#).*

DfT interviewees noted that they had learnt from the LSTF evaluation that if a national evaluator comes in near the end of the funding period to try to collate evidence from local areas, that would be too late.

Both DfT and the Consortium considered a degree of independence between DfT and the national evaluator role to be important. The Consortium saw their independence as helping to build relationships with local areas quickly, fostering a sense of partnership with them. For example, the Consortium emphasised in their communications with local areas how good quality local evaluations can help support their case for further local transport funding in the future. Local areas agreed that independence was a key benefit of having a national evaluator.

However, Consortium interviewees noted that a downside of this perceived independence was that local areas did not see them as having the same influence as DfT. This may, in some cases, have led to local areas not prioritising their requests in the same way.

### **National evaluator providing alignment across local areas**

Since the national evaluation is partially reliant on data provided by the local areas, one of the key objectives for the national evaluator was to ensure consistent inputs from the 18 local areas into the national evaluation.

Consortium interviewees noted that in their experience, there had historically been little consistency in similar transport evaluations between local areas, as each area developed its own approach based on local requirements and capabilities. This led to outputs which were considered more difficult to combine into overarching findings, providing more heavily caveated conclusions and lower quality evidence.

DfT sought increased rigour and comprehensiveness in evaluations of local transport funds compared with previous evaluations. The aim of the national TCF evaluation was to measure the overall impact of the Fund across the 18 local areas.

The method for ensuring consistent input data across the national evaluation was two-fold: firstly, understanding the data which local areas had available allowed the Consortium to focus on the existing consistencies across the local areas. Secondly, the Consortium provided definitions, structures, and templates to enable consistent and reliable data collection.

The Consortium designed a standardised approach across the 18 local areas to ensure consistency of outputs, in alignment with DfT's objectives for the evaluation, although they did note that local areas raised some concerns about the standardised templates.

Given the wide variety of types of sustainable transport schemes funded by the TCF, local areas did not always find it easy to make some of their schemes 'fit' the pre-defined templates provided by the Consortium. They did, however, understand the rationale for the templates.

## Stakeholders and relationships

**Summary:** *The relationships between the Consortium and the local areas were critical to the provision of information and data into the national evaluation. These relationships were facilitated by the regional coordinators within the Consortium, which worked well, although high staff turnover in local areas challenged the ability to develop lasting relationships in some cases. DfT largely kept a distance from local areas, but stepped in when local areas fell behind on data provision.*

The relationship between the Consortium and the local areas was critical to the provision of scheme information and monitoring data for the national evaluation. Several Consortium interviewees noted that they had invested significant resources upfront in building relationships with the local areas, in particular through the roles of the regional coordinators, and they saw this as a strength of the evaluation design.

The relationship between DfT and the local areas was more distant. DfT was not seen to be involved on a day-to-day basis by local areas, aside from being the funders and ultimate audience for the outputs to which they were contributing.

Local areas did not generally express strong views on their more distant relationship with DfT, with the Consortium being their primary contact for the national evaluation instead of DfT directly. One local area interviewee, who had worked with DfT officials more directly on previous evaluations, thought this did not make much difference. Another felt that having an external national evaluator was a good approach and worked well as it provided a level of independence from DfT.

While DfT facilitated initial contact, the Consortium was responsible for identifying the contacts in the local areas and developing the relationships with them. Initially, the regional coordinators were responsible for working with the local areas to explore their local programmes and available data. Over time, the modal work package leads then took on a greater role in the data collection phase.

### Variation in local areas' evaluation experience

As the Consortium developed its relationships with the local areas, it became clearer that local areas' evaluation experience, capability and capacity varied significantly, and some therefore required evaluation support from the Consortium. The Consortium and DfT had anticipated this; DfT's brief for the national evaluator role included the provision of targeted evaluation support to local areas.

While not completely predictable, there were notable differences in evaluation capability between established local areas which had experience of similar large local transport funds, and local areas which had not. The former included mainly established MCAs, and LAs who had received large LSTF funding allocations in the past. The latter mainly included recently formed MCAs, and LAs with no LSTF evaluation or similar experience.

These local areas tended to require more assistance and had more questions, as they were less experienced with government evaluation guidelines and best practice including the Magenta Book. The [Magenta Book](#), published by HM Treasury, provides guidance on evaluation in government: its scoping, design, conduct, use and dissemination as well as the capabilities required of government evaluators.

### **Local areas that received funding later**

The three local areas that received funding later than the other local areas also had less evaluation experience and required more support in the data collection phase. Because of their later funding award, their timescales were compressed, putting more pressure on local evaluation delivery.

In the view of the Consortium, the late additions of these local areas six to nine months after the other local areas added complexity to the national evaluation. These local areas missed some of the opportunities to learn from the Consortium in early meetings held between March and December 2020. They also had less time to contribute to the development of the National Evaluation Framework during this time.

### **Impact of staff turnover in local areas on relationships**

High staff turnover in local areas also challenged the ability to develop relationships between the Consortium and some local areas and added to the time required to support the areas, either spending time chasing individuals who were no longer in post, or briefing new members of staff, who often had little handover from their predecessor. The Consortium described this as having exacerbated resource pressures in the early phases of the national evaluation.

Local areas acknowledged the range of challenges themselves. Many participants had limited involvement in monitoring and evaluation previously, and certainly not at the scale of the TCF. For most areas, this was the single largest transport capital funding award they had ever received and evaluated. This capability challenge is discussed later in this section.

The Consortium brought DfT in later in the process to assist where local areas fell behind on data provision. At the request of the Consortium, DfT sent letters to some of the local areas to follow up on data requests. This approach proved to be effective, with much of the missing data delivered to the Consortium following this.

### **The Community of Practice**

Local areas appreciated knowledge sharing session held in September 2021, which was facilitated by the Consortium.

More than one local area mentioned a desire to learn from other local areas on transport evaluation. This was common across both local areas who had evaluation specialists and those which did not. Local areas felt it was important to learn more about what other areas were doing, develop contacts and build consistency across different locations.

Although considered helpful overall by local area interviewees, some noted that there was limited engagement from the local areas in attendance during the community of

practice event in September 2021. Although the Consortium created opportunities for Q&A, there were only limited questions from the local areas. One local area participant felt that, with DfT also in attendance, local areas did not feel they could discuss their challenges openly. They feared that this may be held against them in future funding rounds.

## Resourcing and capacity

**Summary:** *The planning and pre-intervention data collection phases of the national evaluation required more resource from the Consortium than they had anticipated at the outset. The resourcing plan for the evaluation, centred around the regional coordinators and the modal work package leads, led to a large number of team members involved, but was felt by both the Consortium and the local areas to have clear benefits.*

*Local areas noted several resourcing challenges, including a lack of experienced evaluators, long-standing vacant roles, and competing priorities for staff. Local areas which had a central point of contact for the evaluation within their area found it easier to resource and prioritise the evaluation than local areas which did not.*

### Consortium resourcing

The Consortium interviewees stated that the evaluation required more resource from themselves than they had anticipated at the outset. This additional resource was required in both the planning and the pre-intervention data collection phase.

In the planning phase, time was required to define the local schemes and available data. Local areas then required following up and had a large number of queries which needed to be resolved. The Consortium believed this was due to the capacity and evaluation experience in the local areas, which varied significantly.

Interviewees were positive about how the national evaluation was resourced within the consortium, and local areas described it as collaborative, supportive and organised. Solid project management of the national evaluation was also mentioned as a strength. However, the Consortium did note that the amount of resource required nearer the start of the evaluation was greater than they had anticipated.

### *Regional coordinators and work package leads roles*

Reflecting on the resourcing of the national evaluation, Consortium interviewees noted the benefits of breaking up the analysis into individual work packages (each with a subject matter lead), such as ‘cycling’, ‘rail’ and ‘town/city centre cordons’, as it enabled technical specialists within the team to focus on their own areas of expertise.

The Consortium noted that the definition of the work packages was driven primarily by specific types of data, rather than specific research questions or types of schemes. This approach had the advantage of ensuring that each work package was fully discrete and could be delivered on its own, independent of other types of data in other work packages. On the other hand, this approach made it slightly harder to ‘map’ the work packages back onto the research questions for the national evaluation.

Consortium interviewees also discussed the benefits of having a network of regional coordinators who knew the local areas and the local context well and were therefore best able to build relationships with them.

Both the regional coordinators and the work package leads were overseen by two project leads: a project manager and a research director. Each brought different strengths and focus, and provided adequate resource across the evaluation, which was considered as too much for one person to manage.

Regional coordinators developed relationships with the local areas and managed queries from them. They then worked with the work package leads to answer technical questions. Both the Consortium and the local areas considered this approach as an area which worked well. Having work packages led by specialists, utilising skills and knowledge from across the consortium, was useful in ensuring that the data gathered met the requirements of the national evaluation. The work package specialists were also able to answer detailed questions from the local areas.

Senior Consortium participants did note that the breakdown of work across many work package leads and regional coordinators resulted in a large project team, and therefore may have come with some inefficiencies, as well as the above advantages. Consortium interviewees noted they had to strike a balance between providing local areas with access to the expert work package leads directly, and having multiple contacts from the consortium for local areas to deal with.

### **Resourcing and capacity in local areas**

Local area participants noted several challenges they experienced related to the resourcing of their local evaluations and their inputs into the national evaluation. Local areas described a range of different resourcing structures, from having a central evaluation specialist, to someone adding the task on top of their role, or it being shared across a team.

#### *Presence of a central point of contact in a local area*

Whether a local area had a central contact person, who 'owned' their local evaluation and also took responsibility for feeding into the national evaluation, was one of the main success factors described by the Consortium as impacting on the national evaluation. Further, the experience of this individual, and whether it was the focus of their role (as opposed to being in addition to other responsibilities) impacted on the local area's ability to deliver the evaluation. The volume of work required, across meetings, data requests, and follow-up questions, was a large commitment for local areas, so having a dedicated 'owner' proved critical as the evaluation progressed.

Filtering the evaluation requirements through a central contact meant that this individual was then responsible for sourcing the information across individuals or departments who were able to assist. They provided a single conduit through which it was easier for the Consortium to manage the evaluation progress. In at least one local area made up of multiple constituent LAs, the regional coordinator had to find appropriate contacts and source the required information from all LAs themselves, which was resource intensive.

From the Consortium's point of view, where a central contact person with evaluation experience was in post in a local area, the data appeared to be more complete and of a higher quality. In some local areas, the central contact person was an evaluation specialist; in others, it was a more generalist officer who had experience of previous local transport fund evaluations.

Local areas shared the view that having a central evaluation contact was beneficial. Some local areas without a central evaluation contact noted that their participation in the TCF evaluation highlighted the importance of having a central contact, and aimed to appoint one in future. One local area participant noted that they were in the process of recruiting a new monitoring and evaluation lead to act as this central contact in the future, although the post had proved difficult to fill.

#### *Staff vacancies in local areas*

Several local areas had vacant roles, either specific evaluation roles or roles within their broader transport teams, which impacted on their capacity and capability. Local areas mentioned having to reprioritise their local TCF programmes at various stages, depending on other demands at any given time. Some junior posts in local areas had not been filled for several years because of a lack of funding, and where senior staff retired, local areas could not always backfill posts.

DfT participants also identified the general challenge with recruitment in local areas, due to limited resources and competition from the private sector. A small number of local areas commissioned evaluation consultants to support the TCF evaluation, but this was not seen as sustainable in the long term because of the cost.

### **Creating understanding and confidence in the evaluation**

**Summary:** *The initial scoping stage of the evaluation was resource-intensive for all parties, with frequent lengthy meetings between the Consortium and the local areas to understand the schemes in their areas and existing data available.*

*The pre-intervention data collection stage was guided by the NEF, which was developed by the Consortium and presented in detail to the local areas in April 2021. The framework was well received by the local areas, as they could see what they were contributing towards. However, local areas' understanding of the NEF was reduced where staff turnover occurred.*

*Pre-intervention data collection was not seen to be valued by all local areas, though it was key to the national evaluation. In addition, by the time the pre-intervention data collection phase ramped up, some opportunities for baselining had already been missed as not all local areas had understood the need for pre-intervention data collection. The reliance on data provided by local areas limited the extent to which data could be checked for quality and correctness in the national evaluation.*

The Consortium required inputs from the local areas to be able to conduct the national evaluation. This section considers how these requirements and expectations were shared across stakeholders to establish understanding and confidence in the evaluation approach.

## **The evaluation scoping phase**

The evaluation scoping phase was resource intensive for all parties. Lengthy meetings were held between the Consortium and the local areas, to discuss and define the schemes in their local programmes, what and where impacts were expected, identifying possible comparison sites, and the data available. This varied in complexity depending on the size of the local area, the number and sizes of their schemes, and what data they had available.

A particular challenge for both sides was the variety of schemes in the Fund. Both the Consortium and local area interviewees commented on the challenge of keeping the TCF evaluation manageable – defining outputs, outcomes and impacts across the wide variety of schemes in local programmes spanning many modes of transport. One local area interviewee recalled this being an iterative process to get to mutually agreeable requirements, in terms of what was needed versus what was possible.

Local areas appreciated the regular dialogue with the Consortium, whom one local area interviewee described as very available and approachable. However, some local areas felt that the evaluation scoping phase took a long time. As a result, the meetings with the Consortium became less frequent and some of the initial collaborative momentum petered out. One local area participant noted that some of their questions about the national evaluation were still outstanding almost a year after the initial contact from the Consortium.

## **Local areas' input requirements**

The Consortium aimed to minimise additional work for the local areas, and therefore where possible drew on existing secondary data. Some work packages therefore only used pre-existing open data and did not require local areas' inputs. The inputs from local areas were key for other work packages, such as cycling or buses. Getting the local areas to understand the requirements and ready themselves for providing these inputs was a core task.

The meeting between the Consortium and the local areas in April 2021, in which the final NEF was presented, was a key milestone for the national evaluation. From the Consortium's point of view, they provided clear staging posts for when inputs would be required, to manage local areas' time and resources. They believed that the local areas found this session helpful, as they could see what they were contributing towards, and had provided clarity plus the opportunity to comment.

Several of the local area interviewees remembered the presentation, and found having a view of the whole evaluation, including the research questions, at the start of the process helpful. Nevertheless, some local areas felt they did not have a clear understanding of timescales or deadlines as the project progressed.

## **The need for pre-intervention and comparison data**

DfT and the Consortium were clear on the need for pre-intervention and comparison site data collection from the outset. DfT interviewees noted they wanted to increase opportunities for comparison evidence gathering by commissioning the Consortium from the outset.

Using comparison data was therefore a key principle of the NEF, matching intervention and comparison areas of the same type as far as possible. For example, for Work Package 2 (TCF-wide area analysis, which does not rely on local area inputs), the Consortium undertook extensive analysis to define the best possible comparison group to compare TCF funded areas against local areas which did not receive TCF funding.

For work packages which rely on local areas' inputs, obtaining comparison data proved more difficult. Consortium participants noted that pre-intervention data collection and comparison data collection was not seen to be valued by all local areas, though it was key to the national evaluation. This meant that it was not prioritised by all local areas, and that delivery had started on several TCF schemes before pre-intervention data could be recorded.

Several local area participants mentioned that the Consortium placed more emphasis on pre-intervention and comparison site data collection than they had expected. One local area interviewee stated that they had learnt about the importance of pre-intervention data collection for the first time from the Consortium. Another noted they were not familiar with commonly used evaluation terminology (e.g. the difference between 'outputs' and 'outcomes'), and also learnt this from the Consortium.

## Data gathering and sharing

**Summary:** *In the view of the Consortium, the delays and difficulties obtaining data from the local areas were the main challenges with the evaluation to date. Two areas caused specific data collection challenges: bus patronage data (which local areas had to negotiate to obtain from deregulated bus operators), and cycle count data.*

### Data gathering overview

In the Consortium's view, the delays and difficulties getting data from the local areas were the main challenges with the national evaluation to date. Their view was that where local areas struggled with being able to deliver on time, this was due to not being able to prioritise among other activities, sometimes over-promising or over-committing, or having specific issues or challenges with datasets.

Where data was already available and being collected by local areas for other purposes, the data sharing was much more straightforward in the view of all participants. This fulfilled the aim of the evaluation as scoped at the outset, in terms of minimising the need for additional data collection.

The quality of the data provided by the local areas varied by topic, and though most of the data arrived on time and as expected, there were a lot of queries between the Consortium and the local areas. Even where open data was used for work packages, local input was often required for clarifications and confirming details.

There remained some gaps in the pre-intervention data collected at the time of the interviews, including bus patronage information and several cycle counters which had not been installed in time in some local areas.

In a small number of cases, the Consortium decided to abandon their request for a particular input from a local area. However, this only happened where no progress was being made, and the potential for progress was limited. This enabled the Consortium to complete their pre-intervention reporting for the national evaluation.

### **Bus patronage data challenges**

Local area interviewees noted that obtaining bus patronage data for the evaluation from bus operators proved a major challenge for them. The Consortium's guidance to local areas for the bus work package did acknowledge that bus operators may be reticent to share this data as it is typically deemed commercially sensitive, and the Consortium provided some help to local areas in their negotiations with operators.

Nevertheless, the NEF and guidance stated simply that raw patronage data was necessary for the evaluation, and local areas were responsible for sourcing this. Less onerous alternatives, e.g. using only indexed rather than raw patronage data, were not considered sufficient for the evaluation.

Local areas saw the requirement to obtain raw patronage data as a difficult ask which was, in many cases, outside of their control, since the default position in the deregulated bus market outside London is that bus patronage data is commercially sensitive and local areas do not have any powers to compel operators to share it.

Most local areas ultimately succeeded, at least in part, in negotiating access to patronage data from their bus operators. At the time of the interviews, some negotiations were still in progress, and in other areas this data stream was paused because of a lack of engagement. Most local areas named bus patronage as the most difficult data stream.

### **Cycle count data challenges**

A specialist led the cycling work package, who assisted local areas with designing the count sites. A number of local areas described this work package as challenging. Typically, new cycle counters would need to be installed, either at scheme locations or comparison sites.

The main challenge experienced by local areas was that the procurement of cycle counters was slow. There were also issues with locations in terms of not being able to install where they were needed, or that locations had not been confirmed before the deadlines. This led to some gaps in pre-intervention data.

Another specific issue mentioned by one authority was the expected gap between pre- and post-intervention data collection. In some cases, pre-intervention data had been collected a few years before delivery, and delivery was then delayed, increasing the gap. This was further exacerbated by Covid-19 and concerns that pre-pandemic data did not reflect new travel patterns.

In some locations, the unique nature of sites made it difficult to match. In others, parallel funding meant that 'clean' comparison sites which were not subject to intervention were difficult to find. There was also limited understanding of what suitable comparisons would look like in some cases, according to Consortium interviewees, due to limited evaluation experience in some of the local areas.

## Standardisation and templates

Local areas received details for the individual work packages, including spreadsheet templates. The Consortium's aim for these templates was to provide standardisation across the 18 local areas. These templates included definitions and guidance on requirements. Questions then came back from local areas.

In addition to the standardised templates, all areas received bespoke spreadsheets from the Consortium. The Consortium created a template for each work package, and these were then tailored to the local areas (e.g. to cover each cordon or counter which the local area was going to supply data for, or the specific types of bus scheme it was delivering).

While clarity was the aim, the Consortium still received many queries from local areas and they shared an FAQs document following initial comments. There were different interpretations of the requirements, created by the complexity and the breadth of the local programmes in terms of project types, scales and outcomes.

Local area interviewees noted the guidance documents were useful, if lengthy, and clearly set out what was needed.

## Data delivery timescales

Data delivery was a more resource intensive process for the Consortium than anticipated, and it continued longer than expected. The Consortium used a supportive approach with local areas, which they felt usually worked, although DfT intervention was needed to ensure some local areas complied with the Consortium's requests.

Some local area interviewees noted they were unclear on the timelines for delivery. One stated that they were unclear on the expected regularity of providing information, and they did not recall that this information was shared at the time. The issues mentioned previously around resourcing also apply to the delivery of the data. Having the right people involved in the evaluation within the local area, including having a lead point of contact, was seen as an enabler to timely data provision.

## The relationship between the national evaluation and the local evaluations

**Summary:** *Although local areas were responsible for developing their own local evaluation plans, in practice many relied heavily on the Consortium, and some waited for the NEF to be finalised first. The division of responsibility between the national evaluation and the local evaluations was clear to DfT and the Consortium, but not to all local areas.*

All 18 local areas are conducting their own local evaluations as a condition of their TCF funding award. DfT and the Consortium therefore aimed to align the design of the national evaluation with the local evaluations as much as possible, to create efficiencies.

This did not happen fully as intended. Some of the local areas did not have local evaluation plans in place during the early stages of their local programmes, and were

waiting until later in delivery, so there was no local evaluation plan for the Consortium to build on.

The Consortium indicated that some local areas were holding back on developing their local evaluations, either because they were not clear on whether local areas should wait to be instructed, or because they wanted to build on the direction of the national evaluation, and therefore felt it would be better to wait for that to be finalised first.

As a result, some local areas felt unclear of their own responsibilities in the evaluations relative to those of the national evaluator. The division of responsibility between the national evaluation and the local evaluations was clear to DfT and the Consortium, but not to all local areas, some of whom waited largely passively for instructions from the Consortium.

### The relationship between TCF and other local transport capital funds

**Summary:** MCAs were unclear how the overlap between the TCF and the CRSTS should be handled in the TCF evaluation. Several also noted challenges around their local programmes combining multiple funding streams, making it hard to attribute impacts to one fund or another.

For MCAs, the final year's allocation of the TCF was rolled into the first year of the allocation from the CRSTS. At the time the interviews for this process were taking place, DfT was in the process of procuring the role of national CRSTS evaluators.

MCA interviewees were unclear on the implications of the overlap of the TCF and the CRSTS on the evaluation and were awaiting guidance. The Consortium also noted that MCAs were already giving attention to their CRSTS, and that it was dividing the attention of MCA evaluation teams to the TCF evaluation.

One MCA still had a significant TCF delivery programme remaining at the time of the interviews because of delivery delays, and planned to roll the local TCF and CRSTS evaluations together where possible. Another noted there was potential for duplication of effort across the two evaluations in their local area.

A further challenge created by having multiple transport capital funding streams in the same local area is attributing impact to one fund or another. This was mentioned by both the Consortium and the local areas.

One local area participant mentioned that schemes were often connected or phases of the same project, making it difficult to measure each separately, especially when each was at a different stage of delivery. Another local area interviewee noted their dependencies on neighbouring local areas to deliver schemes which meet their TCF schemes at boundaries.

### Impacts of delays to the delivery of TCF schemes

**Summary:** Most local areas' TCF programmes have been significantly delayed. The impacts of these delays on the evaluation were noted by the Consortium and local areas. For example, the local programme of planned schemes for which pre-intervention data was collected may not match the final local programme of schemes

*eventually delivered; and post-intervention data collection is being pushed further into the future.*

In most local areas, the delivery timescales for many schemes within the local TCF programme have slipped. The reasons noted for this have varied: political leadership changes, pressure on budgets, changed travel behaviour resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, or delays getting projects through appraisal stages. As a result, most local areas had delivered significantly less of their local programme at the time of the interviews than they had originally planned.

It was noted by both local area participants and the Consortium that these delays had significant impacts on the evaluation. There was some concern from the Consortium that the projects defined at the start of the evaluation, and for which pre-intervention data has been collected, will not match the projects delivered at the end of the Fund – and therefore the evaluation of impacts may end up being less accurate if the pre-intervention and post-intervention data do not fully ‘match’. It was also noted that post-intervention data collection was being pushed further into the future as a result of the delays.

Consortium interviewees noted that they had underestimated how changeable local areas’ delivery profiles would be, both in terms of changes to the local areas themselves (e.g. reorganisations, newly formed MCAs), and their local programmes and schemes. They noted they had learnt that flexibility must be built into national evaluation plans so they can evolve over time as local programmes change.

## 4 Conclusions and lessons learned

The key findings of this process evaluation of the TCF evaluation to date, and the lessons learned for future evaluations (such as the CRSTS evaluation) are:

**1. Commissioning a national evaluator is a very effective method of evaluating the impact of geographically dispersed local transport investment.**

Commissioning a national TCF evaluation was considered essential by all parties. Participants from DfT, the Consortium, and the local areas noted that the national evaluator role, although not without its challenges, was necessary to ensure consistency of data inputs from across the 18 local areas into the national evaluation. This finding is consistent with lessons learned from previous evaluations, such as the evaluation of the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF). DfT has taken the same approach for the national evaluation of CRSTS. Future national evaluations of local transport funds should follow a similar approach, with a dedicated national evaluator who ensures consistency between the inputs from local areas.

*For further discussion of the relevant research findings, see section 3, sub-section: 'The role of the national evaluator'.*

**2. The design of the national evaluation, centred around discrete work packages (each with a lead) and supported by regional relationship coordinators, has worked well to date.**

The breakdown of the national evaluation into discrete work packages (each with a subject matter lead), such as 'cycling', 'rail' and 'town/city centre cordons', was well understood by the local areas. The Consortium's regional relationship coordinators, who acted as the primary point of contact for local areas, were also viewed positively by the local areas. They played an important role in facilitating the exchange of data between the local areas and the work package leads, as they understood both the national evaluation requirements and the detail of the local areas' schemes.

Having many regional coordinators and work packages did result in a large and resource-intensive evaluation team. However, this breakdown of roles was seen positively overall by both the Consortium and the local areas. Future evaluations could similarly include teams with local knowledge and relationships with local areas, where possible.

*For further discussion of the relevant research findings, see section 3, sub-section: 'Regional coordinators and work package leads roles'.*

**3. Having a named lead contact within each local area, who is responsible for the local evaluation and for providing the local area's inputs into the national evaluation, is a key success factor.**

Both Consortium and local area interviewees found that having a named lead, responsible for the local area's evaluation and inputs into the national evaluation, streamlined the process significantly. Local areas without a clearly identified, responsible lead reported that their inputs into the national evaluation would more easily slip past deadlines, as they lacked clarity on who within the local area was responsible for collating the data and responding to the national evaluator.

DfT and future national evaluators could, therefore, consider requiring a named evaluation lead being identified within each local area from the outset. For example, local areas could be asked to name an evaluation manager and an accountable senior responsible officer as soon as their funding allocation is confirmed.

*For further discussion of the relevant research findings, see section 3, sub-section: 'Presence of a central point of contact in a local area'.*

**4. The development of guidance documents and standardised spreadsheet templates by the national evaluator, which the local areas could then use to complete evaluation responses, worked well.**

The standardised spreadsheet templates developed by the Consortium, as well as the accompanying guidance, were key tools through which consistent pre-intervention data collation for the national evaluation were achieved. Local areas had some questions on the details of these templates (which the Consortium answered) and noted some difficulties applying the templates consistently across a breadth of different types of schemes (bus, rail, cycling etc.).

However, local areas acknowledged the important role the templates fulfilled in ensuring a consistent national evaluation. They were supportive of the approach taken by the national evaluator in designing the templates, including the definitions and guidance provided with the templates by the Consortium.

*For further discussion of the relevant research findings, see section 3, sub-sections: 'National evaluator providing alignment across local areas' and 'Data gathering and sharing'.*

**5. Many local areas relied on the NEF for their own local evaluations to a large extent. Local areas would therefore have benefitted from the NEF being developed more quickly at the start of the evaluation.**

Both the Consortium interviewees and local area interviewees noted that, in practice, many local areas relied heavily on the Consortium for guidance on their local evaluation plans. Some local areas were unsure whether to develop their local evaluation plan in parallel with the NEF, or to wait for that to be finalised first. The division of responsibility between the national evaluation and the local evaluations was clear to DfT and the Consortium, but not to all local areas, some of whom waited largely passively for instructions from the national evaluator.

Given this, local areas felt they would have benefitted from the NEF being developed more quickly at the start of the evaluation. This would have given local areas – especially the less experienced ones – greater confidence to develop their own local evaluation plans more quickly and would have given them more time to plan the collection of pre-intervention and comparison data.

Future evaluations of local transport funds should consider defining the National Evaluation Framework, and sharing this with local areas, as early as practically possible. This could be accompanied with guidance on the benefits for local areas of alignment with the National Evaluation Framework.

*For further discussion of the relevant research findings, see section 3, sub-sections: 'National evaluator providing alignment across local areas', 'Creating understanding and confidence in the evaluation' and 'The relationship between the national evaluation and the local evaluations'.*

**6. Local areas valued the support provided by the national evaluator, which proved necessary to support local areas with differing capabilities and evaluation experience.**

The Consortium's scope of work included not just the delivery of the national evaluation itself, but also the provision of support to local areas with their local evaluations. This support proved necessary, as the evaluation experience and capability of the 18 local areas varied greatly. Some local area participants noted they were entirely new to transport evaluation; they did not initially understand the need for collecting pre-intervention and comparator area data; and/or were not familiar with commonly used evaluation terminology (e.g. the difference between 'outputs' and 'outcomes').

Newly formed MCAs (who often had many staff new to roles), and non-MCA local areas who had not previously evaluated similar local transport funds (e.g. LSTF) before, needed greater levels of support. Established MCAs, and non-MCA local areas with experience of evaluating large local transport funds in the past, needed less support or no support.

Local area interviewees noted they had gained significant experience, both personally and organisationally, as a result of participating in the TCF evaluation and the support provided by the Consortium. Future national evaluations of local transport funds could consider if similar targeted support to local areas might be needed or beneficial, especially if funding is awarded to newly formed MCAs or local areas with little experience of evaluation of local transport funds and schemes.

*For further discussion of the relevant research findings, see section 3, sub-sections: 'Stakeholders and relationships', 'Resourcing and capacity in local areas', and 'The relationship between the national evaluation and the local evaluations'.*

**7. The Consortium emphasised their independence from DfT, which helped relationship building, but may have reduced their ability to get local areas to prioritise the evaluation.**

Both the Consortium and local areas described their working relationships as very positive, even friendly. The Consortium interviewees saw their independence as a benefit in their relationships with the local areas, and local areas reported that the Consortium team members were understanding of their challenges, such as lack of available staff and local political changes.

While such perceived independence from DfT helped to facilitate relationship building with local areas, local areas also perceived the Consortium to have less authority and influence than DfT as a result. This may, in some cases, have led to local areas not prioritising their requests in the same way. Direct intervention from DfT ultimately proved necessary to ensure some local areas complied with requests from the Consortium. In future evaluations, DfT should therefore consider carefully how the role and authority of the national evaluator is communicated to local areas, and when to intervene to get local areas to prioritise the evaluation.

*For further discussion of the relevant research findings, see section 3, sub-section: 'The role of the national evaluator'.*

#### **8. The evaluation underestimated the challenge of obtaining commercially sensitive bus patronage data from bus operators.**

The NEF and guidance stated that bus patronage data was necessary for the evaluation, and local areas were responsible for sourcing this. Local areas saw this as a difficult ask which was outside their control. The default position in the deregulated bus market outside London is that bus patronage data is commercially sensitive and local areas do not have any powers to compel operators to share it. This was not acknowledged in the NEF and guidance, although the Consortium did provide some help to local areas in their negotiations with bus operators to obtain it.

Bus markets in many local areas are currently subject to significant reform, with some MCAs pursuing bus franchising, and others entering into new enhanced partnerships. Future local transport fund evaluations are therefore likely to be faced with more powers and voluntary agreements on bus patronage data sharing than the TCF evaluation did, which could make local transport evaluations easier. However, these powers and agreements will be spread unequally among local areas, which could make consistent evaluation across England harder.

DfT and future national evaluators could, therefore, consider how local areas can be best supported in their evaluation of bus patronage impacts in their areas, depending on the powers available to them and any agreements already in place between them and operators. DfT could also consider taking a larger England-wide leadership role on bus patronage data to assist with consistent national evaluation as well as wider policy making, such as by bringing patronage data into DfT's Bus Open Data Service (BODS), subject to balancing commercial sensitivity concerns. Requirements for bus operators to provide patronage data could also be written into future funding agreements where bus operators are in receipt of grant funding or benefitting from improvements.

*For further discussion of the relevant research findings, see section 3, sub-section: 'Bus patronage data challenges'.*

**9. The community of practice session led by the Consortium was helpful for local areas, but DfT attendance can hinder open collaboration between them.**

To facilitate learning and knowledge sharing as part of the local evaluations, the Consortium facilitated a virtual knowledge sharing event held in September 2021. In doing so, DfT implemented a lesson learned from the LSTF evaluation, which recommended that a community of practice be set up for local areas to share knowledge with one another.

Although considered helpful overall by local area interviewees, some local area interviewees noted that there was limited engagement from the local areas in attendance during the community of practice event. One local area participant felt that, with DfT also in attendance, local areas did not feel they could discuss their challenges openly as they feared this could be held against them in future rounds of local transport funding.

Future evaluations of local transport funds could consider how communities of practice could best be set up to foster open collaboration and dialogue between local areas, such as by organising events with sufficient time for local area presentations, topic sessions, and question and answer sessions, and without a DfT presence. Future evaluations could also consider using an independent third party as a facilitator, who could chair the event and act as a go-between between DfT, the national evaluator, and the local areas.

*For further discussion of the relevant research findings, see section 3, sub-section: 'The Community of Practice'.*

## A Research Questions

Research question	Areas for exploration
What has worked well and less well regarding how the TCF evaluation has been set up and designed? For example, how well has the model of evaluation support (DfT-appointed national evaluator supporting LAs to deliver monitoring and evaluation) worked from the perspective of the key stakeholders involved?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is it useful having a national evaluator? Are there any unintended consequences or unmet needs?</li> <li>• Stakeholder roles – clarity and level of support provided/required. Was this appropriate?</li> <li>• Quality and effectiveness of communications and support to MCAs/LAs.</li> <li>• Timescales for scoping and setting up the evaluation – were these perceived as realistic or challenging?</li> <li>• Is the information collected from MCAs/LAs so far supporting the delivery of the evaluation outcomes as anticipated? For example, in terms of quality of inputs, relevance to research questions, and whether those areas which were more difficult for MCAs to gather data against were proportional in value (comparison of value vs effort expended).</li> </ul>
What has worked well and less well in the delivery of the TCF evaluation to date? For example, what are the challenges to ensuring comprehensive and timely data collection and how have these been overcome?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resourcing and capacity building within MCAs/LAs – how did they set themselves up to deliver the requirements?</li> <li>• Do council structures, processes, or personalities influence outcomes?</li> <li>• Did any decisions about prioritisation need to be taken and if so, how were these managed?</li> <li>• Availability of data – were any particular challenges encountered?</li> <li>• Barriers and enablers of effective data collection and sharing and undertaking monitoring &amp; evaluation more broadly.</li> </ul>
What lessons can be learned to inform the design and the delivery of future evaluations, to inform the CRSTS evaluation and more	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What can be learned from the evaluation planning stage of the process?</li> <li>• What can be learned from the set up and engagement stage of the evaluation?</li> <li>• What can be learned from the data collection stage of the evaluation?</li> </ul>

Research question	Areas for exploration
broadly to apply to other similar evaluations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have any lessons learned so far already been applied to other evaluations? What has been the outcome?</li> <li>• Comparison to other evaluations.</li> <li>• Ease and effectiveness of obtaining counterfactual and pre-intervention data.</li> <li>• Learning from what has been done so far in terms of planning and carrying out data analysis.</li> </ul>

# B Methodology

## Scoping and sampling

An initial scoping phase was undertaken which included meeting with DfT, Stantec and TfQL. This helped shape the research questions and methodology. Additionally, documents were shared by DfT to provide background to TCF and its objectives.

A detailed evaluation plan was developed and agreed with DfT and based on this, a series of interviews have been conducted with the Consortium members, DfT and local areas. The breakdown of the interviews conducted is shown in Table B.1.

**Table B.1: Sample frame**

Organisation	Sample	Interviews
National Evaluation Consortium	Project leads, regional co-ordinators, work package leads	3
DfT	Area leads, project/ policy leads	2
Local areas (MCAs)	8 authorities who received funding	3
Local areas (LAs)	10 authorities who received funding	3

## Interviews

Discussion guides were developed for the interviews. The guide for the Consortium was developed and used first, and learnings from these early discussions used to create adapted guides for DfT and local areas.

Interviews were between 60 and 90 minutes in duration, and were conducted via Teams. The discussions were recorded and transcribed using the in-built Teams functionality. Group interviews also had a note taker present.

To acknowledge the overlap between TCF and CRSTS funding, MCAs who had received both funding streams were interviewed. They were asked to provide detail of their experiences and insights on the shift from TCF to CRSTS funding and related processes.

## Participant engagement

To organise the interviews, DfT provided a letter of introduction to potential participants. The letter introduced the role of Steer and encouraged engagement with the evaluation process. While specific individuals had been contacted for interviews within the Consortium and DfT, initial contacts at local areas were asked to confirm the most relevant staff member(s) for interview.

## **Analysis**

Analysis of the information provided in the interviews was synthesised to draw out key themes across stakeholders, rather than detailing individuals' experiences. Detailed notes produced for each of the interviews were then synthesised using a 'coding' process into a high-level thematic summary.

During the coding process, short excerpts within the notes from each of the interviews were marked with emerging codes, in order to identify common themes and patterns in an inductive manner. An analysis matrix was then developed to collate the marked excerpts, and refine the codes.

The interview transcriptions were then reviewed again to align information shared by participants – alongside associated quotes – to each key theme. The findings from this thematic analysis are summarised into this report.

## **Privacy and anonymisation**

Participants were assured of anonymity in this report. Quotations have not been used. However, it is recognised that, due to the specialised roles involved and the relatively small number of participants, it may be possible to identify someone involved even without their name. This has been avoided wherever possible by avoiding overly specific attribution or detail.



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