

TRANSPORT

MACRO ANALYSIS

The Conservatives' manifesto is a much longer document than Labour's will be later this week. Nonetheless the essential pitch can be summarised in two words: tax cuts. There are an estimated £17 billion worth of tax cuts outlined in the manifesto to be implemented over the next parliament. They range from further reductions to national insurance to abolishing stamp duty for young home buyers. The proposals are vaguely costed but Rishi Sunak's main objective is not to demonstrate their feasibility. He seeks to create dividing lines with Labour over tax, often a vote winner for the Conservatives in the past. This time the electoral context is bleak for him and his party. Privately senior Tories are in despair about their prospects and fear the manifesto will not be a game changer.

Steve Richards, Senior Adviser

POLICY ANALYSIS

Whilst there is no dedicated section in the Conservative manifesto for transport, it features as an area of reform that will help grow the economy, and plays a prominent role where the Party is seeking to demonstrate clear dividing lines with the net zero approach set out by Labour, characterised by Rishi Sunak as "unaffordable eco-zealotry".

There is a clear populist signal that if the Conservatives are returned to government, they would avoid creating new costs for households from the transition to net zero, and unequivocally back drivers with a programme of road investment (funded by the scrapping of HS2), rule out road pricing, reverse ULEZ expansion and limit the growth of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods.

Despite a desire to trumpet the success of the UK's domestic automotive industry, electric vehicles barely feature, other than a passing reference to helping people to make the transition by ensuring nationwide charging coverage and a restatement of plans to deliver the Zero Emission Vehicle Mandate. With considerable challenges facing the EV transition in terms of affordability and overcoming barriers to delivering charging infrastructure, many in the sector will have been hoping for a clearer steer than this.

On rail, we can see a clear attempt to position the Conservative policy platform as 'credible' and passenger focussed, contrasting with Labour's "incoherent and ideological nationalisation plan" with a direct threat of union activism driving up costs through "unaffordable and unfair working practices". The manifesto reflects the existing and well-rehearsed Conservative backing for GBR within a mixed market private-public partnership and a wholehearted embrace of Open Access, which has been a long standing ask of the rail industry itself.

The pro-passenger positioning is also evident in the Party's plans for bus services, where there is an eye-catching commitment to extend the £2 fare cap throughout the next Parliament, paid for from reform of the railway of up to £1.5 billion per year. It is easy to see this as a direct challenge to Labour to match this commitment, which will resonate in particular with lower income and younger voters in particular.

Overall, this is by definition a manifesto designed to create campaigning platforms, rather than a prospectus for government. Its value is most useful as a signal of how the Conservatives may choose to operate in Opposition.

To discuss WA's manifesto analysis and what it means for your organisation, please email **Marc Woolfson**, Founding Partner at marcwoolfson@wacomms.co.uk.

HEADLINE POLICY ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Conservative Party Manifesto includes commitments to:

- The delivery of Northern Powerhouse Rail to bring forward more frequent train services, increased capacity and faster journeys.
- The Rail Reform Bill will be brought forward in the first King's Speech, enshrining Great British Railways in legislation.
- The £2 bus fare cap in England will be extended for the entirety of the next Parliament and £1 billion will be spent on new routes across the North and Midlands.

- The delivery of the Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) Mandate and investment in future aviation technology.
- Commitment to stop the rollout of road pricing, reverse London ULEZ expansion and make Low Traffic Neighbourhoods subject to 'local referendums'.
- Ensure charging infrastructure is "truly nationwide", including rapid charging and deliver the ZEV mandate.

WA ADVISORY BOARD ANALYSIS

The Conservative manifesto doubles down on the strategy laid out when HS2 was cut back, with an ambitious list of other rail projects and a lot of money for potholes. Unlike then there's no caveat about projects being viable, but there's also no real timetable for things to happen. The commitment to SAF is good for aviation, and the anti-ULEZ, anti-LTN will appeal to some motorists.

Sir Philip Rutnam, Chair of the Advisory Board, WA Communications, and former Permanent Secretary at the Department for Transport