

Dare I say something? Speaking up in the transport sector and beyond



By Glenn Lyons, 1 October 2025

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On 25 September the 20th event in the PTRC Fireside Chat series took place. You can find recordings of all the events in the series on [YouTube](#). We started the series in April 2020 when the world was being rocked by a pandemic. It was a time of disruption, fear, loss and uncertainty; but also a time of resilience, adaptation and hope. There were dynamics of change for a possibly better future ahead. Anyone tempted to think there would be a return to normal after the pandemic was, however, in for a rude awakening. We've now got plenty going on, within and beyond the transport sector, to exercise our minds.

With that in mind, for the 20th event we turned our attention to the topic of **whether and when we should dare to say something when we are concerned about matters affecting ourselves or others.**

At the time of writing this, hundreds of generals in the US military were summoned to listen to a rambling and disturbing [speech](#) from Donald Trump on 30 September. The generals sat in silence. "And if you don't like what I'm saying, you can leave the room. Of course, there goes your rank, there goes your future, but you just feel nice and loose, OK, because we're all on the same team". In such a setting, no-one dared to say anything.

This writeup of our Fireside Chat is provided in the interests of helping others reflect upon their own views, challenges and opportunities when it comes to daring to say something. I would also encourage you to consider watching the [recording](#) of the event and hear directly from the people involved. Any misrepresentation in the text that follows here is my own.

Insights on a page

I hope you'll find value in reading the whole document and/or watching the recording, but if you're really in a hurry, here is your 'grab and go' set of insights:

1. Your senses heighten and your amygdala in your brain starts catastrophising about repercussions as you contemplate daring to say something.
2. You are not alone in wrestling with whether or not to speak out on issues that matter to you, and choosing not to speak out doesn't mean you don't care.
3. Silence can sometimes be golden, but it can also be complicit on issues that really matter.
4. We are living through a time when speaking up for what we consider important seems of heightened significance.
5. Reasons for daring to say something can include self-respect, support of others, justice-oriented, being a voice for others, and purpose driven.
6. Reasons for not daring to say something can include fear of judgement, risk of being wrong, dislike of confrontation, lack of confidence, and fear of repercussions.
7. Daring to say something comes in multiple forms and can be synchronous (in the moment) or asynchronous (later after time to process).
8. Daring to say something can come at a personal cost but the cost may be worth it if you are able to feel true to your values.
9. Give yourself grace when you choose not to speak up and take care of your mental health.
10. Just because someone appears outwardly confidence in daring to say something does not mean they are not struggling to do so and having their energy drained.
11. Try to make sure you contribute to a culture around you that enables others to speak up, a culture where constructive challenge is welcome and expected.
12. Speaking up well is a skill that is developed - it can take practice and support and constructive feedback from others.
13. Speaking up well includes conveying articulately your points with clear rationale in a way your audience can be receptive to.
14. Listening well matters too and recognising that we may not appreciate the complex makeup and circumstances of others.
15. Change for the better comes when we do speak up and support others in doing so.

Setting the scene

You can feel it inside - something doesn't sit well. But dare you say something as you think the worst about the possible consequences of doing so? Have you read a LinkedIn post about an emotive or controversial topic and internally nodded and felt 'me too' but felt unable to give a 'love', 'like', or 'support' to the post, let alone add a comment or repost? Have you joined or considered joining a peaceful public protest and risking arrest?

'Daring' means 'adventurous' or 'audaciously bold' – willing to take risks that might seem dangerous, frightening or unconventional to others. You might know that feeling when you're being daring: your senses heighten, the amygdala in your brain starts catastrophising about the possible repercussions of going through with your dare.

Here are some issues that might stir something inside of you wanting to speak up, to dare to say something:

- Genocide
- The rise of fascism
- The push back on valuing diversity, equity and inclusion
- A politician saying 'Net Stupid Zero'
- Taxing the rich
- The primacy of economic growth
- Expanding airport capacity in a climate emergency
- Building new roads
- Robotaxis for a better future
- Low traffic neighbourhoods
- The questionable authenticity of your organisation's stated values
- Being asked to work on a project you don't believe in
- The behaviour of someone else in a meeting

Have you dared to say something on any of these topics or others besides? Or have you chosen to remain silent? Silence is golden, it is sometimes said. Yet it is also said that to be silent is to be complicit on issues that really matter.

In the weeks leading up to this Fireside Chat, its topic seemed to become more relevant than ever:

- A right-wing activist was assassinated in the USA for daring to say things.
- A late-night talk show was suspended indefinitely when its host dared to say something about the assassination. It was then reinstated a few days later, following a 'Cancel Disney' movement protesting against the parent company.
- The President of the United States signalled an intention to designate what he calls 'ANTIFA' – which seems to be those against fascism – as a terrorist organisation.
- Here in the UK, some 800 people were arrested mainly, it seems, for peacefully holding cardboard signs upon which was the name of a proscribed terrorist organisation.
- Further public protests in London tested the distinction between free speech and hate speech.

This may seem a far cry from issues of direct relevance to transport professionals, but as well as being professionals we are also humans with wider values, beliefs and concerns.

The focus of the fireside chat discussion was not primarily one of exploring the contemporary issues people may be feeling strongly about. Rather, it was concerned with the matter of daring to say something about such issues.

Hearing from our Audience

In a break with Fireside Chat tradition, we introduced a series of questions at different points during this Fireside Chat for our audience, which were answered live. The responses below are verbatim and anonymous.

Being reprimanded for daring to say something

Around two thirds of our audience could recall a time when they had been reprimanded for daring to say something. Brief recollections included the following:

- I was told afterwards to never take them on in the Boardroom
- Told off later for raising questions about working hours in a public meeting with senior leadership team
- "Don't rock the boat" was the instruction
- I was ignored by my line manager and felt a shift in the way I was treated
- Complained about the behaviour of a politician and told to ignore it
- I raised something at work that I thought could have huge repercussions. I was told that it is what it is and made to feel like a silly little girl
- Referred to as a "trouble maker" by a senior member of my employer for calling out/in some behaviours. I didn't mind. I consider it good trouble I made
- "You need to learn what hill you want to die on"
- Me: "Excuse me. Please could you move your car off the pavement. It's stopping kids safely getting to school". Them: "F*ck off!"

Explaining why we do or don't speak up

We asked our audience whether they generally saw themselves as being inclined to dare to say something, notwithstanding how context-specific daring to say something can be. I wonder if you can relate yourself to some of the reasons below?

Reasons given for daring to say something included:

- It would eat me up inside if I didn't say something
- Strong support from managers, peers, friends
- Want to see fairness and think things won't change if I don't say something
- Because I'm generally open as a person and care a lot about some things. Also, I sometimes feel that I am reflecting the views of others who may be afraid to speak up
- I'm now 47. I'm purpose driven. It's why I'm here. I've got experience of how to word things and frame them to land it well. Don't always manage it though!
- I think we are in unusual times and we need to actually say something
- I "outed" myself by writing about a subject publicly. Was delighted when there wasn't too much comeback. It's still scary thought. After all, the consequences if I don't are far worse.
- I can't not say something, it feels ridiculous to get on with day to day life when there are preventable tragedies happening
- Often I don't feel I have anything to lose, but everything to gain because things will be done better

Meanwhile, reasons given for not daring to say something included:

- I do not say something sometimes when I feel my view is not yet fully formed. But I at least try to ask questions so can get to my view
- Fear of judgement, have I misunderstood something? Lack of confidence
- I don't do well with confrontation. Also worried, it would put me at a disadvantage if leadership don't agree with me
- Repercussions for future career/promotion/pay increase
- The nature of our work is changing and developing all the time and publishing concrete thoughts feels scarily permanent. What if I'm wrong?
- Inner critic holding you back
- Care too much about what people think
- Imposter syndrome
- Because most things are shades of grey and not simply black and white
- Introvert tendencies mean I really want to say things, but don't
- Fear of conflict and negative reactions
- I'm not convinced I have something important to say of my own accord. However, I do try to comment and support others when I agree with their perspectives
- Civil service code has both integrity and impartiality, sometimes hard to know where to land – will I get in trouble with political decision makers / open myself to criticism?
- Fear or knowledge it will be used as an excuse to get rid of you
- You don't feel you have the experience or responsibility to speak out
- I find it difficult to say something online, it seems really scary. It is easier to say something in my work environment
- I don't want to exacerbate increasingly highly polarised debates
- "Dare" is not quite right. I want to hear all views, whereas speaking upon as a leader might inhibit team members

Dared to say something on transport

We dared our audience to say something relating to the transport sector. Maybe they have already dared, but here are some of the answers that are in people's minds around us:

- WHY ARE WE STILL MOSTLY ACTING AS A DISCIPLINE LIKE THERE ISN'T A CLIMATE EMERGENCY!!!!!! Are you part of the problem or part of the solution?
- Political leaders in our patch "don't believe" in the scientific fact of climate change, requiring us to change language / policy despite the massive need for action
- Why are we planning more airport capacity in a climate emergency?
- We need to be more honest about how damaging cars are in general and murderous to children SUVs can be
- The transport sector is stagnant. Still too much focus on quantitative analysis, not enough on delivering against climate/housing emergencies
- Too many consultants take public money to promote schemes they know in their heart will never happen
- Those of us working with developer clients are selling our souls to the devil
- Sometimes road build is the right solution
- TAG appraisal is fundamentally flawed
- Electric vehicles just a means to cleanse middle class environmental anxiety but do nothing to solve real issues

Dared to say something relating to society

Casting the net wider than only transport, what did our audience dare to say? Here are some responses:

- As a white middle class female I feel deeply unsettled, upset and uncomfortable about the rise in far right and racist action happening across the country, including in my local community
- As a young person, I'm angered and disappointed with the direction the country and world are going in
- Really worried that people listen to Trump and his views and that will spread to the world – like Farage in the UK. It's moving to a world of hate views
- Not recognising or speaking up about a genocide is horrendous
- I hope that the future is brighter than what we are experiencing right now
- Our journalistic and lobbying realities are hobbling our democracy and society
- We need to change EVERYTHING. But it will be worth it (even if I'll need a new job)
- Most people want to see a better world, but don't understand the evidence to work out what are the best actions to take to achieve that
- I have to believe that most people are still good decent people, some who have been misled
- I feel less alone reading these comments

Takeaways from the Fireside Chat

This is some of what our audience took from the experience of the Fireside Chat itself – which is to follow in this writeup:

- Really informative and glad to hear that so many others are struggling / active in this space
- I'm feeling encouraged, and emboldened, and that's really helpful. Plus inspired to listen better: apart from anything else, I'm in bigger company than I thought
- The first one of these I have been to, and I enjoyed it, much more than I thought I might. Nice to hear from some eminent individuals sharing their vulnerabilities
- All or nearly all of the comments have reflected a left-leaning view (which I share) – we are indeed mostly a self-selecting audience. I wonder what we would hear from our right-leaning colleagues
- Challenge doesn't mean conflict. We should all be open to other views
- Nuance and questions are important in engaging people, speaking up and listening carefully need to go together
- We're all human, try your best to do what is right
- Most people are vulnerable in some way, so speaking up for vulnerable groups really matters whether you are in that group or not
- To work harder to help others to speak up and take care to make sure my actions and behaviours don't prevent others from doing so
- Check my team know it's OK to challenge; having been without a voice for first 15 years of my career, keep speaking up; take strength from knowing others are too
- Speaking out comes with practice, so that it no longer feels like or labelled as speaking out. So it's time to practice. Safely
- All panellists are balancing their values with nuanced ways of speaking out and compassionate approaches to others. Great to see.

- Get bystander training
- To recognise that there are many reasons and potential consequences that may stop people from speaking out
- To give myself grace when I didn't have the courage or capacity to speak up

Hearing from our Panel members



Azzees Minott

Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer of 2-3 Degrees

"I'm going to start off introduction in a way I've never done so before" Azzees began, in the spirit of the topic: "I'm a Christian, I'm a wife, I'm a sister and a daughter, I'm a person of colour, I represent both the Caribbean in my background from St Lucia in Jamaica, but also Africa in terms of our long-term history, I'm a chief operating officer and co-founder of a company called 2-3 Degrees". Her company helps young people learn practical life skills.

She indicated she would never normally dare to introduce herself so fully in professional settings, mindful of others' perceptions and how she might be judged – and indeed mindful of the apparent norm of holding your tongue. She is mindful of the genuine and real consequences of daring to say something. In the rich background and experience that Azzees's embodies, she recalled the encouragement she had received from a politician she worked for – "she was like, talk about your experience, talk about why this is important, and why this is important for young people". Azzees also recalled her time working as Chair of the Greens of Colour group in the Green Party: "I got burnt out. **I got burnt out in terms of speaking up and talking out and advocating and representing** – so much so that I've stepped away from politics completely". She is on her own personal journey when it comes to being more open with those around her and recognises the importance of context when choosing whether and how to speak up. She is also mindful of trying to **"be the type of leader that allows people to talk about what they want to talk about"**.



James Gleave

Director at Mobility Lab and Board Member of the Transport Planning Society

James followed the lead from Azzees and introduced himself in a rounded way, referring to his professional roles but also to being a middle-aged man, religiously agnostic, a husband, and a brother to three sisters and step sisters. He doesn't have any children, "but I do have a couple of little fur babies who do call me daddy".

James noted how our experiences can shape the values important to us and in turn how it can be **"very difficult to set those values separate to the work that we do"**. He pointed out that outward confidence seen by someone speaking up doesn't mean they are not internally challenged and do not bear the scars of speaking up. **Life experience offers us continuous opportunity to clarify and hone**

our values, he explains. He gave an example of his time as a town councillor when someone had accused him of 'being on the take' – "and then he asked me how much it would cost to change my opinion".

He drew a distinction between professional skills than can be taught in a classroom, and **the personal skills associated with 'speaking up well'**. He also highlighted the need to recognise that difference of perspective is to be expected between people and to be wary of prejudging a person according to what they say, without knowing more about them.

Comments from James prompted me to think about **the two-stage nature of daring to say something: weighing up whether to, and then working out how to.**



Rachel Aldred

Director of the Active Travel Academy, University of Westminster

Rachel too reflected on her different identities and roles as part of her introduction. She noted **the pressures we can all be under in our day-to-day existence that set a context for coming to terms with the wider issues we may have strong feelings about.** As a university professor, not everyone would appreciate her own background (building upon the point from James

above): "I grew up as an undiagnosed autistic girl. I struggled a lot with school, with university, with social situations. I dropped out of the first degree I tried to do". This is partly why she supports and advocates for others, including her own students – **recognising how we can affect the journeys of those around us.**

Rachel touched upon the disparate examples we are exposed to on LinkedIn when it comes to daring to say something. She went on to note how LinkedIn can tend to be a place where people talk more about successes than failures. She noted her own general avoidance of social media use and recalled an example of where she was live tweeting at an event and became the focus of the public ire of others – "at this point I thought this is just not worth doing, I'd wanted to get off Twitter for a while particularly, but **social media for me just has started to feel too unpleasant and too unsafe**". She went on to emphasise that "there are many ways to speak up and there are many ways to be an ally, there are many ways to be an active bystander".



Adil J Chaudhrey

Director at AJC Advisory Ltd

Adil too began by familiarising us with some of the dimensions of his identity beyond only describing his work history: "I'm a Londoner, a British-born Muslim, Pakistani heritage". As part of his work history he has done a lot of recruitment and been proud of focusing on diversity when building up teams. He's not been scared to speak up, "but I have to say that **the outcomes from me speaking up have been pretty variable**". He has known that for him,

not speaking up would leave him struggling to deal with things, “and I suppose that’s kind of, you know, my personality trait”.

With this in mind, Adil pointed to two things he is really struggling with in society at the moment and which are affecting his mental health: the Israeli genocide of Palestinians, and the rise of far-right narratives and what could be considered hate speech in relation to the role of Muslims in British society and the treatment of immigrants. For Adil, in such matters, **silence is complicit**.

Away from such big societal issues and into the work environment, he is conscious of **the risk of “an onward cycling of just allowing the status quo to be maintained” if we do not dare to say something in the interest of seeking improvement**. He notes that speaking up is, nevertheless in part, reliant on one’s organisational culture being open to such challenge.



Nicola Blaney

Head of Strategic Transport Planning, Transport Scotland

Nicola holds a senior civil service position but in her introduction was open about her own nervousness about being in the spotlight on the panel – **“I’ll be honest, I almost let my anxious lizard brain get the better of me and I thought about telling Glenn that I wasn’t available today”**.

Nicola proceeded to give three reasons why she felt compelled to accept the invitation to be on the panel: (1) she’s fairly well known for speaking her mind; (2) she’s very passionate about doing that in the right way; and (3) she wants to foster working environments “where constructive challenge is welcomed and people feel safe to do that, even if that means that I need to admit that I’m wrong about something”. She believes in **creating “a culture where speaking up is not just accepted but that’s actually expected”**.

Nicola has been on a journey of her own to arrive at this set of convictions and sense of enablement – she has experienced feeling ignored herself in the past. Her current employer, and the environment she is part of and enables, gives her a sense of love for what she does. She is clearly passionate about constructive challenge. Nicola highlights that how one speaks up can be very important – for instance something in writing can sometimes be inadequate or ambiguous and may better be addressed verbally with others. She concluded her opening remarks with reference to silence: “I think it’s always very important for us to remember that our silence speaks too, especially if you’re like me in public service: **what we don’t say can just as much shape the outcomes as what we do say**”.

Continuing the conversation

Giving ourselves grace

Speaking up can come at a cost, and it is a personal choice of whether to do so and can depend upon where you’re at in life and the context that exists. Azees reflected on situations where you don’t speak up, but later on reflection wish you had. It is important to be able to give ourselves the grace then, she points out, to recognise that in the moment

things weren't clicking into place to speak up, but **not speaking up in the moment doesn't mean you don't care**. It is also possible to follow-up after the moment – for example by contacting a person who did speak up that you didn't support in the moment: “maybe message that person and say ‘I’m really sorry I didn’t speak up – I recognise that that might have been an awkward situation for you – but I see you or I recognise that situation probably wasn’t great’”.

Sometimes you just know that it is right to speak up in the moment – Azzees gives an example: “we had a client, we were on a call, and they said something that was really rude and offensive to a staff member of mine and I had to speak to them about it because the cost in that instance of me not speaking up and my team member not feeling like I have their back or feeling like they were left out and almost like that would have affected them but also their trust in me as a leader and their support, and that was something I couldn’t afford to lose”.

She went on to highlight that there are different ways to speak up or dare to say something and **we cannot all be in a position to act in the way we might see others do**.

James went on to highlight how **“you may not necessarily be aware of what the personal cost might be” from daring to say something**, “you might not become fully aware of what the personal cost, what kind of strain it’s going to put on your mental health, what it’s going to put on your relationships with colleagues, with family and friends”. Nevertheless, this may not be a reason for choosing not to speak up, particularly if you know deep inside that it is the right thing to do. Conversely, as he points out, if you are someone who speaks out (regularly) this may be putting a lot of pressure on you and it is important to recognise that **you should consider when you need to step away from daring to say something for your own wellbeing and resilience**. We will each have a different level of resilience.

Developing the competency to speak up

There was understandable appetite from our audience for thoughts on **how to get better at speaking up, how to practice**. I noted myself how I will sometimes sense check with my wife before it goes live a ‘dare to say something’ post I’ve written for LinkedIn, as I value and trust her judgement and it gives me an important vote of confidence.

As Rachel noted, **we cannot necessarily practice saying something before the moment comes to do so**. This can be challenging in situations where immediate reaction is called for such as being an active bystander. She went on **bystander training** which she found very helpful “because one of the things that I struggle with for those heat of the moment things is that I have delayed processing speeds and often it takes me a while to figure out what’s happening in an interaction and so I get quite nervous about reacting and doing the wrong thing”.

She feels that for more senior individuals there is a greater responsibility to speak up, because it can be more difficult for more junior people.

Adil highlighted that **a key part of speaking up well is “how well you articulate why you’re saying what you are” and being able to convey importance and value**. He adds “if you’ve got those ideas formulated well in your head then your rationale for speaking up becomes clear both for yourself but also for those who are receiving what you’re saying”.

It really boils down to **being able to dare to say something in a way that is constructive.**

Nicola aims in her own teams to **encourage a culture where it is OK to address “things that don’t always go great” as part of creating a safe environment that enables people to voice constructive challenge with each other.** So, does that mean others around her feel about to challenge as a result? Nicola gave a lovely example of where she had found a situation staff were put in (an ‘improv’ (role play) session at the staff conference) made her uncomfortable but her staff when she told them said the opposite – “we were doing some reflections as a team on what was good...and pretty much every single person in the team said ‘nah, you’re wrong Nic, you’re wrong, we all liked it’, ... I was so proud and so pleased that the team felt comfortable enough to say ‘nah, you’re wrong, don’t agree with you’”.

Closing remarks

As ever, time flew by in the session and we arrived at a chance for some further closing remarks from our panel.

Rachel had needed to depart a little early and had wanted to make the point that there are a limited number of fronts you can fight on, without risk of burnout. **Take care of your own mental health.**

Azzees reflected on the moment of silence she had experienced while the audience was gathering its thoughts and responding to the questions posed to it. “That moment of silence reminded me of how I think society should behave, not always so quick to respond to agree, or to like, or to share or anything – just to watch and to listen”. She added **“sometimes we just need to allow people to speak without commentary”.**

She challenged use of the phrase “white, male, pale and stale” because it goes against an effort to be more inclusive, against making people feel seen, heard and able to have a space. **Avoid language that others someone else.**

She drew attention an earlier point from James about the importance of appreciating that those who speak up and perhaps who do so regularly and sound confident, may well not be finding it easy to do so: **“just because you see someone appearing as confident it doesn’t mean to say that their voice isn’t quivering, it’s not mustering a lot of their energy to do so”.**

Lastly, Azzees emphasised that **a real cost of not speaking up as adults and professionals can be the consequences for young people** (and in turn for the future of professions). She pointed to decline in apprenticeship completions and the fall in young people staying in work for longer than two years. “We have nearly a million young people not in education, training or employment, and this is directly because the cultures that we’ve accepted don’t align with their values and they’re not willing to put up with it”. Speak up for yourself, speak up for others: **“if not you then who, and if not now then when?”.**

Adil emphasised that “if you’re from a minority community, it’s really important you do speak up when you see things that you see as wrong or that could be affecting you because **it’s really the only way we’re going to get the majority to maybe understand or appreciate their unconscious biases”.** At the same time he pointed out the importance

of the majority being willing to dare to say something in support of a minority where it feels right to do so.

He noted the criticality of organisations working to create a culture and to provide the support that enables people to dare to say something.

Building upon what Adil had said, James offered encouragement to **“speak out if you kind of feel something is fundamentally wrong, because otherwise change never happens”**. However, where people feel unable to say something, there are other ways of showing support for a cause or for change, for example by giving to charity or volunteering.

James drew attention also to **the flip-side of speaking out – listening as well**.

Nicola provided an important reminder that “when we’re working in transport, our decisions, our work, shapes communities, our economy and the environment and will do for generations”. **There can be important moments in our work as transport professionals where if we see something we feel is wrong and let it pass, it can have lasting effects – “that silence can lead to complicity”**. She also suggested that staying silent could, over time, erode our sense of purpose. “It’s a call for courage – and courage doesn’t always mean whistleblowing, it can sometimes mean just asking a simple awkward question”.

Our session ended with a touching point from Shania at PTRC who was working with me on this Fireside Chat: “A special shout out to my dad because I think more or less my whole life he’s always brought my sister and I up to speak on things, even towards him if there’s things that we don’t like”. Kudos to Shania’s dad. And to Shania, our wonderful panel, and to our audience. May you all continue to lend your voice and ear to helping making the world a better place.