Use of (Crossbench) expertise.
With the strict proportional representation on Committees, we are in danger of missing the opportunity to exploit the considerable specialist expertise amongst Peers, especially, but clearly not limited to, Crossbench Peers.
Committes take, in my view and experience, rather limited evidence in preparing for their reports. Whilst witnesses are often very good (well done to the staff who put a lot of effort into finding them) we then prepare reports on the evidence of a small number of people – not the way academic research would be done – leaving us in danger of missing key evidence or opinions.
With my background in engineering, transport and climate change, I have noticed some occasions where Committees have heard evidence that I felt was partial or gave a less than complete picture about something where I have expertise. I am sure others will have had similar experiences. So I would like to suggest that we find a better way to use more of the expertise we have - in addition to our expert witnesses – on relevant Committee enquiries.
Could models be explored where Committees have a ‘balanced’ core membership and recruit/co-opt experts from around the House for particular enquiries? Or could enquiries have an option for an evidence session/discussion session with Peers who have relevant experience? Or might there be an option for Peers with relevant experience to act as specialist reviewers – perhaps in a closed session – of draft reports, then leaving the Committee to make a final decision on its report?
I am sure there are many possible models. I would like to see us making the most effective use of the knowledge and expertise available in the House, and providing opportunities for people to get more involved at the same time.