



Scottish Association
for Public Transport



BRIEFING:

Government needs to deliver sustainable investment in transport

Parliamentary Debate: Scottish Government's Response to the Pre-Budget Report -
Wednesday 3rd December 2008, 14:30

1. Summary

1.1 The Scottish Government's statement of 26th November ('Pre Budget Report') said, amongst other things, that it intended to bring forward investment in transport infrastructure in response to the current economic conditions. In order to deliver sustainable investment in transport, our organisations believe that the Government should bring forward plans for:

- Electrification of the Scottish inter-city rail network
- Investment in the most sustainable modes of transport – walking and cycling.

2. Background

2.1 Scotland faces major challenges in tackling the nation's transport crisis, and it is imperative that the Scottish Government now places its focus on delivering healthy, low carbon transport.

2.2 Clearly, the Government's plans must tackle climate change. We welcome the challenging targets outlined in the Scottish Climate Change Bill, but these have no prospect of being met unless robust action is taken to reduce levels of road and air traffic.

2.3 Similarly, the plans must outline measures to reduce transport's over-dependence on fossil fuels. The oil strike at the Grangemouth oil refinery in April 2008 demonstrated just how exposed the Scottish transport sector is to security of oil supplies. It is imperative that the Government prepares for a post-oil Scotland, not one increasingly dependent on foreign supplies of oil or unsustainable biofuels.

2.4 We also need to see transport make a major contribution in tackling the obesity crisis. For public health and quality of life reasons, the 'zero carbon transport' modes – walking and cycling - should be given strategic priority, not be treated as an afterthought.

2.5 We urge the Government to ensure that its planned investment is spent on sustainable modes of transport, which would help deliver on public health and climate change agendas as well as contributing to the stimulation of local economies. In this briefing, we set out two key areas where the Government should bring forward sustainable investment in transport.

3. Electrification of the Scottish inter-city rail network

3.1 With the Scottish Government's commitment to ambitious carbon reduction targets in the forthcoming Climate Change Bill, and the need to plan for an economy dealing with the impacts of oil depletion,

1 <<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2008/11/26155845>>

there is an opportunity to strengthen Scotland's public transport infrastructure with a package of measures to prepare for the necessary shift from private transport.

- 3.2 We want to see the electrification of the Scottish inter-city rail network to link all Scottish cities by modern, efficient train services to match the best in Europe. Rail travel provides substantial productivity benefits that are not afforded by trunk roads, and provide massive safety benefits as railways are 27 times safer than car travel.

4. Investment in the most sustainable modes of transport – walking and cycling

- 4.1 We want to see a national strategic programme of investment in active travel. Walking and cycling can make a major contribution towards tackling the country's obesity crisis. The Danes and the Dutch have cycle journey shares of 20-25%, which puts Scotland's 1% to shame. It is surely not accidental that these countries also feature obesity levels less than half of Scotland's. With around 99% of Scotland's transport budget devoted to motorised transport, it is perhaps unsurprising that rates of walking and cycling remain so low, and levels of obesity so high.
- 4.2 The Eddington Report for the UK government,² which looked at the links between transport and economic growth within the context of sustainable development, highlighted how the greatest Benefit-Cost Ratio for all transport projects was found in small scale walking and cycling projects. Such projects also had very high welfare returns and benefitted the environment by promoting a modal shift from motorised forms of transport.
- 4.3 In the current economic situation, we suggest that investment in walking and cycling projects would provide opportunities for labour-intensive construction work throughout the whole country, with the widest possible benefit. By contrast, trunk road development would only take place in a few specific areas of the country. Walking and cycling projects are small scale and therefore have the advantage of being able to commence in a short timeframe, whilst the infrastructure provided will encourage local and active travel, stimulating local economies and communities.
- 4.4 It should also be remembered that one third of Scottish households do not have access to a car, and that children in the lowest socio-economic groups are not only more likely to suffer from air pollution from traffic, but also are four times more likely to be killed as pedestrians than children in the highest socio-economic groups. Therefore, investment in active travel will help the most disadvantaged groups as well as those suffering the highest health inequalities.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The Scottish Government will have to invest wisely if it is to deliver on these major challenges. A 'business-as-usual' approach of subsidising road use through more road-building would only make matters worse. It would be unrealistic to ignore the impacts of long-term rises in oil and carbon prices on the economic case for transport investment.
- 5.2 At present, the level of spending within Scotland's transport budget dedicated to non-motorised modes is not sufficient to effect any significant modal shift to walking and cycling. Likewise, it is crucial that there is an efficient public transport system in place to encourage motorists to choose to leave their cars at home and enable longer journeys to be undertaken by bus or train.
- 5.3 We firmly believe that the current economic recession offers an opportunity to the government to help effect a change to healthy, low carbon transport with wide-ranging benefits to the whole population and to the environment. We therefore call upon the Scottish Government to bring forward investment in sustainable transport as an urgent priority.

² HMSO (2006): *The Eddington Transport Study*