

Parliamentary Briefing: Transport Priorities

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Introduction

Climate change is the biggest threat we face, if we are to prevent dangerous climate change we must focus on sectors with the biggest climate impact. Transport is the largest source of CO₂ emissions after power generation and continues to rise year on year. Between 1990 and 2006 emissions from road transport alone have risen by 11.4%¹; continued increases in emissions from this sector undermines collective efforts to tackle climate change and threatens targets proposed in the Climate Change Bill. As Scotland's Transport Strategy states; "the growth of road traffic levels is unsustainable in the longer term – it is already resulting in a range of problems that affect our economy, our environment and our quality of life"²

The Scottish Government Strategic Transport Projects Review commits Scotland to an increasing emissions burden from the transport sector. The 29 projects will result in a 9% rise in transport emissions by 2020 at a time when the Scotland needs to deliver at least a 3% cut each year, as promised in the SNP manifesto, and deliver the Government commitment to an 80% cut in emissions by 2050.

Within the transport system, aviation is a particularly significant and rapidly-growing source of greenhouse gas emissions, and urgent action is required to put it on a more sustainable path. It is one of the fastest-growing sources of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK. Between 1990 and 2006, Scottish CO₂ emissions from aviation have risen by approximately 185%; they are currently growing by an average of 4% a year.

Transport solutions for a low carbon Scotland

1. Aviation

Include international aviation and shipping in the Scottish Climate Change Bill. The Scottish Climate Change Bill needs to account for all the emissions Scotland is responsible for producing and address all sectors fairly, excluding any would be unjust and would not achieve the intention of the legislation. However, although the Cabinet Secretary pointed out that, "Scotland benefits greatly from international trade and travel" and therefore "it is right to take responsibility for the Scottish share of these emissions"³ as it is currently drafted the Bill gives Ministers the powers to include aviation later. The Bill must be amended to include these emissions from the very start.

As a nation, we could do more to promote tourism within Scotland, encourage people to holiday at home and reduce demand for flights outside the country. This would not just be of benefit in terms of emissions reduction, but of benefit to Scotland's economy and heritage as well. Scotland has policy levers to promote and encourage use of other methods of transport such as train links to the major cities

¹ See

http://www.airquality.co.uk/archive/reports/cat07/0809291432_DA_GHGI_report_2006_main_text_Issue_1r.pdf

² See <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/157751/0042649.pdf>

³ See <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2008/10/27131648>

across the UK and Europe. By using Scotland's planning powers to rule out future runway expansion and airport infrastructure, the Scottish Government can play a key role in curbing the growth in demand to more sustainable levels.

2. Public transport

Increase investment in Scotland's railways. Trains emit approximately 50g CO₂ per km, compared with the average car emissions of 165g CO₂ per km. Electrification of the network would increase this efficiency, further reducing emissions. The railway can offer a real alternative to car travel. For example, the Highland Rail Partnership found that for a £55 million investment the journey time from Inverness to Edinburgh/Glasgow could be reduced by 45 minutes, bringing it down to 2hrs 30. This offers a far more sustainable alternative to upgrading the entire A9 and for a fraction of the price.

3. Roads

National road charging. Private transport options do not include the real external costs that they create, and without action to ensure that this is addressed, it will be very difficult for Scotland to have sustainable transport. As such, WWF Scotland supports the introduction of a national road pricing scheme in Scotland, whether this is introduced in the rest of the UK or not. However, we believe that the central objective of such a scheme must be to reduce climate change emissions from transport, with other objectives, such as reducing congestion, being secondary to this. Without placing emissions reductions at the heart of such a scheme, the Scottish Government could in fact end up encouraging even more traffic on to the road as drivers move onto smaller, more rural roads freeing up space for more drivers to fill the gap and again cause congestion.

We must not rely, as the Government's consultation on a renewable energy framework appeared to do, on biofuels to make a significant impact in road emissions. The Government's own assessment of how to achieve an 80% reduction in emissions chose to exclude biofuels from the analysis because 'there are currently a number of questions around their global sustainability impacts'⁴. Instead the Scottish Government should strive to capitalise on the Scottish R&D potential around electric vehicles. Scotland has the potential to make a significant contribution to a young and potentially huge sector that could have a transformative impact on our transport emissions.

4. Active Travel

Prioritise healthy, sustainable transport options. The majority of car journeys in Scotland are less than five miles long, with 23% being less than two miles. The Scottish Government should promote both walking and cycling, by creating new, and improving already existing, pathway networks, so that they are more readily accessible, safer and better integrated. Walking and cycling should be encouraged within travel plans and the Scottish Government should state its commitment to getting the nation back onto self-propelled transport modes. In order that the full economic value of active travel is recognised the Scottish Government's transport appraisal system should be amended to include the direct economic benefits resulting from improved health due to increased cycling and walking⁵.

We must plan now for a low carbon transport sector in Scotland and avoid decisions that lock us into a high carbon infrastructure.

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⁴ See <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/245862/0069408.pdf> for the full report.

⁵ See <http://www.transformscotland.org.uk/GetFile.aspx?ItemId=108> for a report from Transform Scotland setting out the economic value of active travel.