

ROADS DEBATE

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Promised Road Infrastructure Across Scotland

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Briefing from Transform Scotland

Key Points.

- Transport is Scotland's largest source of climate change emissions. Scotland has failed for thirty years to make any progress in cutting climate emissions from transport.
- It has been for decades unequivocally established that new road-building will generate additional traffic, and, resulting from this, increased climate emissions.
- The Scottish Government's capital expenditure plans have for the past decade strongly favoured new road-building over investment in sustainable transport, and continue to prioritise road-building.
- We welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to reduce road traffic levels by 20% by 2030 as part of its Climate Change Plan update. Delivering on this commitment will require the "urgent action" demanded by the Parliament's Committees in their response to the Climate Plan.¹ Prioritising new road-building is in direct opposition to the course of action recommended by the Parliament's Committees.
- We congratulate the Scottish Government on its decision to review the A96 dualling on climate change grounds. However, we consider that this decision does not go far enough to correct Scotland's transport investment plans in the direction of sustainable transport and reduced emissions.
- Scotland has just hosted COP26 where it was acknowledged that all countries — including Scotland — need to do more to cut climate emissions. So it is disgraceful that the first act of the Scottish Parliament on transport following COP26 is to debate increased high-carbon road-building.

1. Transport is Scotland's largest source of climate emissions.

There has also been absolutely no progress in emission reduction from the transport sector over the past 30 years, with the result that transport is now the largest overall source of emissions (36%). Other sectors have had to bear a greater burden in reducing emissions as a direct consequence of the failure to decarbonise the transport sector.

2. New roads generate new traffic, and hence higher emissions.

The investment decisions of successive administrations have caused this problem. Transport Scotland itself reports *"Motorway emissions have increased substantially since 1990, with the 2018 level 81% above that of the 1990 baseline. This increase in motorway emissions since 1990 has coincided with a substantial increase in the length of Scotland's motorway network. Between 1990 and 2017, Scotland's motorway network increased in length from 312km to 645km. Motorway vehicle kilometres rose from 3242 million in 1990 to 8518 million in 2018."*²

The link between the provision of additional road capacity and increased road traffic levels has been long and comprehensively established. But despite road traffic being our biggest problem in transport, Transport Scotland's priority for new capital expenditure is still overwhelmingly directed to the provision of increased road capacity. This will inevitably further increase road traffic levels, and, in tandem, worsen Scotland's prospects of meeting its climate change obligations.

3. Existing SG capex plans already strongly favour high-carbon roads over sustainable transport investment.

The Scottish Government's transport capital expenditure priorities have strongly favoured high-carbon roads over sustainable transport. Between 2011 and 2021, the Government spent £4 billion on new roads.

Despite the Climate Plan and the traffic reduction commitment, the Government's capital expenditure priorities remain skewed in favour of high-carbon transport. The committed transport spend in the *Infrastructure Investment Plan* is as follows: £2.38 billion low-carbon transport against £6.96 billion high-carbon transport.³ Meanwhile, Transport Scotland's 16 ongoing or planned road projects represent a total spend of £7 billion — not including likely cost increases or several uncosted and proposed projects.⁴

The Government's current spending priorities: (i) lock in greenhouse gas emissions by generating more car traffic; (ii) increases climate risk by destruction of carbon sinks such as woodlands, high carbon soils and wetlands; (iii) reduces resilience from climate impacts like flooding and; (iv) are damaging to equalities, health, biodiversity, landscapes and productive land.

We welcome the decision by the Scottish Government to review the A96 dualling project on climate change grounds. In this, it was following the advice of advice received from the Infrastructure Commission for Scotland, Just Transition Commission, UK Climate Change Committee and others:

- The **Infrastructure Commission for Scotland** called in January 2020 for "a presumption in favour of investment to future proof existing road infrastructure and to make it safer, resilient and more reliable rather than increase road capacity."
- The **UK Committee on Climate Change** called in May 2020 for governments to "avoid locking-in higher emissions or increased vulnerability to climate change in the longer-term".
- The **Just Transition Commission** recommended in July 2020 that "[t]he opportunity to re-prioritise any existing transport spend, currently earmarked for increasing road capacity, and redirect it toward investments in low-carbon transport initiatives should be actively pursued."
- The **Scottish Parliament's Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee (Session 5)** recommended in November 2020 that "transport budgets and fiscal incentives are targeted at reducing demand for travel by car and encouraging the use of active and sustainable modes, e.g. prioritising investment in active and sustainable travel infrastructure rather than additional road capacity."

However, it is our view that in light of our urgent climate change imperatives, the A96 decision *does not go far enough*. We instead require an urgent moratorium and review of *all* road-building projects to establish their compatibility with the overarching objective of climate emission reduction.



¹ See <https://www.parliament.scot/newsandmediacentre/117216.aspx>

² Transport Scotland (2020) 'Carbon Account for Transport No. 12: 2020 Edition', page 12. Available at <<https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/carbon-account-for-transport-no-12-2020-edition/>>.

³ See <https://transform.scot/blog/2021/02/04/infrastructure-investment-plan-disastrous-for-climate-change-sustainable-transport/>

⁴ See <https://transform.scot/blog/2021/08/10/roads-to-ruin-new-report-finds-climate-wrecking-roads-programme-due-to-double-in-size/>

Scotland's alliance for sustainable transport

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We campaign for walking, cycling and public transport to be the easiest and most affordable options for everyone. Our diverse membership brings together public, private and third sector organisations from across Scotland. We are a registered Scottish charity (SC041516).