

TACKLING THE GROWTH OF SUVS IN SCOTTISH CITIES

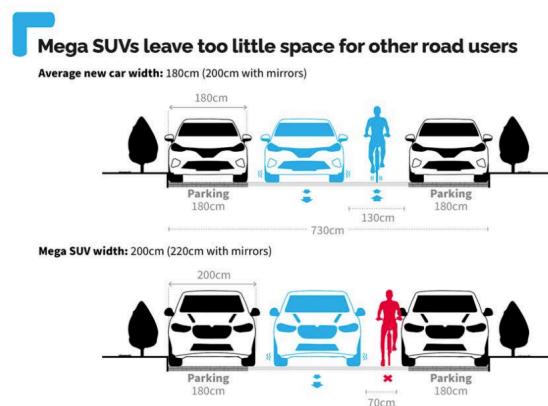
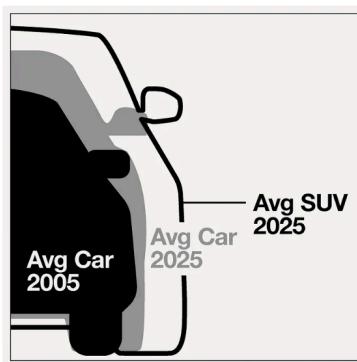
Briefing notes

1. Key points

- 1.1. Tackling SUV growth is a matter of fairness, efficiency and urban liveability, not just emissions
- 1.2. Heavier, larger vehicles impose disproportionate costs on our cities and their residents – from reducing space to increasing danger to driving up road maintenance bills
- 1.3. Local authorities have tools available, especially parking policy, to reduce the growing uptake of SUVs
- 1.4. Supporting alternatives and disincentivising oversized vehicles makes cities safer, cleaner and more accessible for everyone

2. Background

- 2.1. SUVs (sports utility vehicles) are significantly larger and heavier than standard cars, often unnecessarily so in urban environments
- 2.2. There is a growing [trend](#) in their use – every tenth new vehicle in 2010 was an SUV compared to nearly every second new vehicle in 2023
- 2.3. The shift includes both petrol/diesel and electric SUVs; so challenges go beyond tailpipe emissions
- 2.4. SUVs require more space, cause more road damage, are a greater danger to more vulnerable road users, and are less suited to dense city layouts
- 2.5. If SUVs were a country, they would rank as the [fifth most polluting](#) in the world
- 2.6. Over 1m vehicles sold each year in the UK are now [too large to fit standard parking spaces](#), creating challenges for kerbside management and accessibility



Source: [Clean Cities, Transport & Environment](#)

3. Why act?

Economy	Equality & poverty	Environment & climate
<p>Road damage costs: SUVs are significantly heavier than smaller vehicles, leading to more frequent damage to roads, speed bumps and pavements; this raises maintenance costs for councils</p> <p>Parking and land use inefficiency: Larger vehicles take up more space in already-constrained urban environments; this reduces the supply of parking and increases opportunity costs for better public realm use</p> <p>Increased operating costs: More fuel, tyres, and materials required for SUVs translates to higher running and embedded costs, which often fall back on consumers and local services (e.g. bin lorries navigating tight spaces)</p> <p>Market distortion: The heavy marketing of SUVs by manufacturers has distorted customer expectations, reducing demand for smaller, more affordable and efficient models; this limits consumer choice and locks in expensive vehicle ownership patterns</p>	<p>Road danger and safety: SUVs are more likely to cause fatal injuries to pedestrians in a collision (8x more likely to kill children) as their size and height reduce driver visibility and increase risk to other vulnerable road users (i.e. older or disabled people)</p> <p>Access and inequality: 66% of the lowest-income households in Scotland do not have access to a car; city road space disproportionately serves higher-income, car-owning residents (especially SUV users)</p> <p>Impact on non-drivers and small-car users: Oversized vehicles reduce visibility and crowd out smaller, affordable cars; lower-income and non-driving households lose out in both safety and space</p> <p>Safety and public space: Larger vehicles make streets more dangerous and intimidating, particularly for children, older people and disabled people using pavements, crossings or mobility aids</p>	<p>Offsetting emissions progress: If SUVs were a country, they would rank as the fifth most polluting in the world; the reduction in emissions from new cars entering the fleet has been offset by the trend towards heavier vehicles such as SUVs</p> <p>Resource and lifecycle impact: Even electric SUVs require large batteries and materials (e.g. lithium, steel, rubber); production and embedded emissions remain high despite zero tailpipe output</p> <p>Air quality: Heavier vehicles generate more non-exhaust emissions through tyre and brake wear; this undermines urban air quality and disproportionately affects those in high-density areas</p>

4. Policy levers available

Within Scottish powers	Outside devolved powers
<p>[1] Local authority parking charges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Councils can introduce variable charges based on vehicle size, weight or emissions Potential to exempt or reduce costs for smaller, efficient vehicles or car club schemes Precedents in Paris, Lyon and Aachen where differentiated tariffs are based on weight or engine power 	<p>[1] Vehicle manufacturing and emissions regulation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governed at EU level, focuses on fleet average emissions but does not sufficiently penalise weight or size

<p>[2] Street design and public realm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reallocate space away from oversized private vehicles toward walking, cycling, and public space • Restrict large vehicle access in central or residential zones 	<p>[2] Vehicle Excise Duty (VED)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently insufficiently progressive; reforms could include weight- or size-based bands
<p>[3] Planning and development policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement low traffic zones or car-free developments • Limit provision of off-street parking for oversized vehicles in new developments 	<p>[3] Advertising regulation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National-level opportunity to regulate SUV advertising, particularly for urban contexts or high-emission models (see e.g. Edinburgh banning SUV advertising)

5. Policy recommendations

- 5.1. Assist local authorities to develop and deliver SUV-specific **parking reform**
- 5.2. Advocate for **UK-wide fiscal reform** i.e. make the case for VED reform that includes weight-based or urban-use criteria

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