

# TACKLING THE GROWTH OF SUVs IN SCOTTISH CITIES

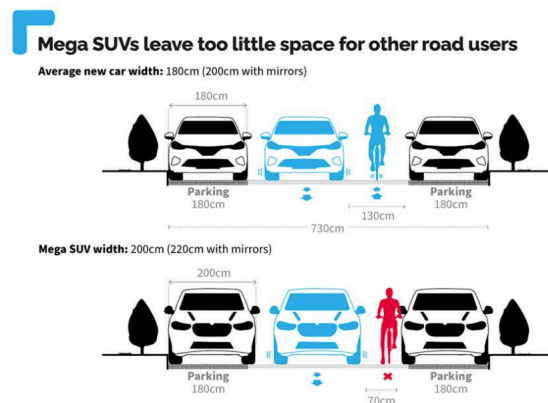
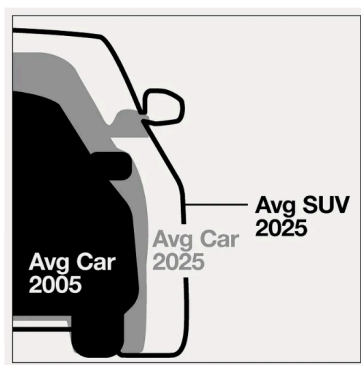
## Briefing notes

### 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><b>Road damage costs:</b> SUVs are significantly <a href="#">heavier</a> than smaller vehicles, leading to more frequent damage to roads, speed bumps and pavements; this raises maintenance costs for councils</p> <p><b>Parking and land use inefficiency:</b> 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><b>Increased operating costs:</b> More fuel, tyres, and materials required for SUVs translates to <a href="#">higher running and embedded costs</a>, which often fall back on consumers and local services (e.g. bin lorries navigating tight spaces)</p> <p><b>Market distortion:</b> 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 <a href="#">expensive vehicle ownership patterns</a></p>	<p><b>Road danger and safety:</b> SUVs are more likely to cause fatal injuries to pedestrians in a collision (<a href="#">8x more likely to kill children</a>) as their size and height reduce driver visibility and increase risk to other vulnerable road users (i.e. older or disabled people)</p> <p><b>Access and inequality:</b> <a href="#">66%</a> 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><b>Impact on non-drivers and small-car users:</b> 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><b>Safety and public space:</b> Larger vehicles make streets more dangerous and intimidating, particularly for children, older people and disabled people using pavements, crossings or mobility aids</p>	<p><b>Offsetting emissions progress:</b> If SUVs were a country, they would rank as the <a href="#">fifth most polluting</a> in the world; the reduction in emissions from new cars entering the fleet has been <a href="#">offset</a> by the trend towards heavier vehicles such as SUVs</p> <p><b>Resource and lifecycle impact:</b> Even electric SUVs require large batteries and <a href="#">materials</a> (e.g. lithium, steel, rubber); production and embedded emissions remain high despite zero tailpipe output</p> <p><b>Air quality:</b> 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><b>[1] Local authority parking charges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Councils can introduce variable charges based on vehicle size, weight or emissions</li> <li>Potential to exempt or reduce costs for smaller, efficient vehicles or car club schemes</li> <li>Precedents in <a href="#">Paris</a>, <a href="#">Lyon</a> and Aachen where differentiated tariffs are based on weight or engine power</li> </ul>	<p><b>[1] Vehicle manufacturing and emissions regulation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Governed at EU level, focuses on fleet average emissions but does not sufficiently penalise weight or size</li> </ul>

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

## 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

