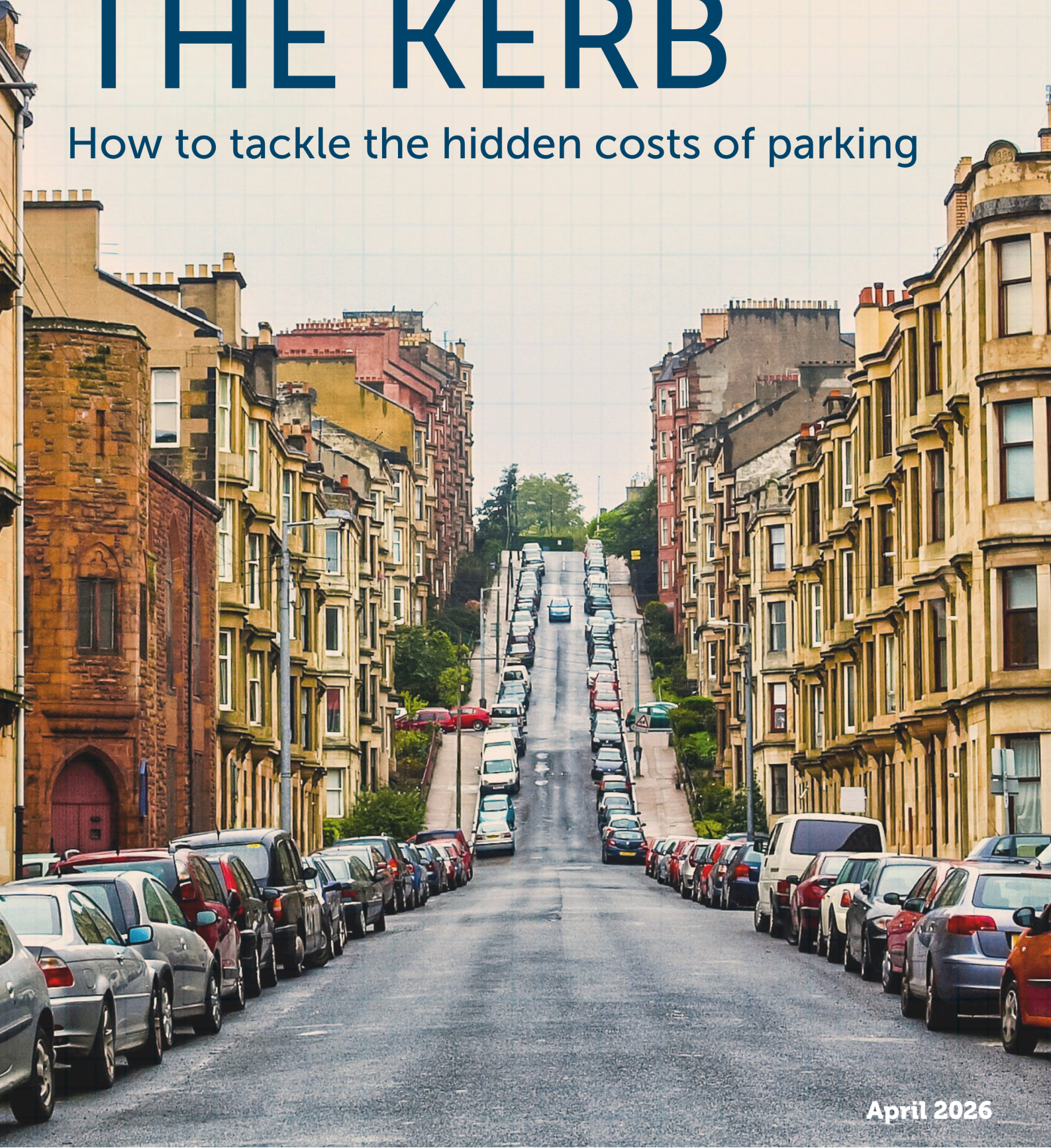


AHEAD OF THE KERB

How to tackle the hidden costs of parking



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Foreword

“

Parking is a frequently overlooked component of transport strategy, yet its wider impacts on our cities, our health, and our daily lives are routinely underestimated. In Scottish cities, it is still too often treated through the lens of convenience – where to park, how much it costs, whether there is enough of it – rather than as a core policy lever shaping public space, health outcomes and transport choices.

This report has been developed following engagement with officers and officials across Scotland’s city councils, who are dealing on the ground with the pressures this creates. We heard about the challenges of managing limited kerbspace, balancing competing demands, and addressing the knock-on health and equity impacts of parking policy. We also surveyed members of the public on how streets are changing, particularly in relation to safety, visibility and the everyday experience of shared space.

A critical and emerging challenge facing cities is the rise of larger and heavier vehicles, particularly Sports Utility Vehicles (SUVs), often designed for off-road conditions but increasingly dominant in urban areas. This trend is intensifying existing pressures on streets that are already under strain, and raising important questions about safety, road maintenance and fair use of space.

Here, we set out how parking and transport policy can be used more effectively at local and national level to respond to these challenges. As larger vehicles reshape our streets, there is an urgent need to ensure parking policy keeps pace to protect safety, fairness and public health.”



Laura Hyde-White
Report author

“

Parking policy is critical to ensuring our cities prioritise people over vehicles. We have seen strong examples of progress, from pavement parking bans to emissions-based permits, but there is more to do. While approaches vary, there is a clear appetite among officers to use parking policy more strategically, but also a recognition that it is often constrained by legacy systems and political sensitivity.”



Sue Flack
Parking policy expert

1

P Pay here
at machine
Display ticket

Introduction

Why parking matters

Evening Charge Applies
There is a flat fee
of £2.00 for parking
between
6pm and 8pm
(Monday to Saturday)
When paying for
parking please monitor
the display to check the
expiry time you require
before pressing the
green button

Parking is a frequently overlooked component of transport strategy, yet its wider impacts on our cities, our health, and our daily lives are routinely underestimated. As an often politically charged subject, debate around parking tends to default to questions of convenience: where to park, how much it costs, whether there is enough of it. What gets lost in these conversations are the consequences of how parking is provided and priced – for public health, housing affordability, the climate, and the quality of shared urban space.

This report sets out the case for parking reform. It argues that current parking policy in Scotland imposes avoidable costs on public health, the environment, and housing affordability, while reinforcing patterns of car dependency that make those costs harder to reduce over time. Parking policy is not a peripheral concern. It is a significant and underused lever for creating healthier, fairer, and more liveable cities, and it needs to be treated as such.

Because parking challenges are most problematic in urban areas, and most amenable to reform where alternatives to the private car already exist, this report focuses on Scotland's cities (namely Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dundee).

The chapters that follow examine current parking policy across those cities, assess the pressures created by larger vehicles on urban streets, and draw on examples of effective reform from across the UK and Europe, before setting out proposals for action at national and local government level.

**“
Current parking policy
imposes avoidable costs
on public health, the
environment, and
housing affordability.”**

2



The parking problem

The hidden costs of parking

2

The parking problem

Abundant parking does not solve a transport problem; it creates one. Every space generates demand, spreads destinations further apart, and makes the alternatives - walking, cycling, and public transport - less viable.

Scotland has [2.6 million cars](#) on its roads, and its built environment has been shaped, through planning decisions accumulated over decades, to accommodate them. The result is a transport system that entrenches car use, and an environment that has proven resistant to change even where political will exists.

The sections below set out the [hidden costs](#) of parking and make the case that parking is not a neutral amenity but a significant policy lever for health, environment and equality outcomes.

Scotland has

2.6 million

cars on its roads.

A growing health concern

The relationship between parking provision and [public health](#) is well established, if rarely foregrounded in policy debate. Abundant, cheap parking increases car use and suppresses walking, cycling, and public transport. The [health consequences](#) are significant, with lower levels of active travel associated with higher rates of obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and some cancers.

Beyond physical inactivity, car-centric street design creates more direct safety hazards. Parked cars narrow sight-lines, obscure pedestrians, and push cyclists into moving traffic, raising the risk of serious injury or death. Space allocated to stationary vehicles also displaces pavements, cycle lanes, and other features which protect more vulnerable road users.

The [traffic](#) that parking generates, including from searching for parking space and idling, also degrades local air quality. Prolonged exposure to these emissions is linked to respiratory illness, cardiovascular disease, and reduced life expectancy – and this burden falls disproportionately on children, older people, and lower-income residents living closest to busier roads.

Environmental costs

The land dedicated to parking carries a substantial environmental cost. To accommodate Scotland's 2.6 million cars, the equivalent of over 8,500 football pitches of land has been sealed under concrete, tarmac, or paving, much of it in urban areas where space is most scarce and the case for greenery is most pressing. These impermeable surfaces prevent natural drainage, channelling rainfall rapidly into drainage systems and increasing flood risk, a growing concern across Scotland. These same surfaces absorb and retain heat, driving up urban temperatures through the [heat island effect](#).

Relying on one of the most [carbon-intensive](#) production materials, the construction and maintenance of car parks and paved surfaces generates significant emissions. Meanwhile, the dispersed, low-density development patterns that plentiful parking enables make communities harder and more expensive to serve by public transport or active travel, locking in higher transport emissions for years to come.

A question of fairness

The distribution of parking's costs and benefits raises important questions of equity. Free or subsidised parking represents a transfer of value to car owners, who are on average [wealthier](#) than those without access to a car, while the associated costs, including congestion, poor air quality, road danger, and reduced housing supply, fall across the population as a whole.

Around [one in four Scots](#) have no access to a car, a proportion that rises sharply among women, older people, and lower-income households. For this group, car-first infrastructure constrains where they can travel, which jobs they can reach, and which services are within range.

Mandatory parking provision in residential developments also adds significantly to [construction costs](#), passed on to buyers and renters regardless of whether they own a car. In the context of a housing affordability crisis, this is a subsidy that needs scrutiny.

Ultimately, public streets are a shared resource maintained at public expense, yet in most Scottish cities their dominant use is the storage of private vehicles. Research consistently finds that [repurposing parking](#) for seating, greenery, and active travel infrastructure increases footfall, benefits local businesses, and improves wellbeing.

1 in 4 Scots
have no access to a car.



Temporary pedestrianisation of Union Street, Dundee.

3

P Permit holders only HR
Mon - Fri
Noon - 2 pm

The SUV challenge

How big cars amplify parking concerns

3

The SUV challenge

SUVs, or sports utility vehicles, are larger and heavier than standard cars and are an emerging problem for city streets. Their popularity is [booming](#): in 2010, one in ten new cars was an SUV, and by 2023 it was nearly one in two.

This trend, sometimes called '[carspreading](#)', is more than a question of emissions. SUVs take up more space, increase road damage, create unfair costs, and make streets less safe for pedestrians and cyclists. SUVs are:

- Unsafe
- Unfair
- Environmentally damaging
- Costly for taxpayers



SUV on Leith Walk, Edinburgh.

SUV use is:

Unsafe

Larger vehicles pose a clear risk to vulnerable road users. Elevated height and longer front ends reduce driver visibility which increases danger – the [odds of fatality](#) when hit by an SUV are 44% higher for adults and 82% higher for children compared to standard passenger cars. Heavier vehicles also generate more tyre and brake wear, releasing harmful particulate matter that worsens urban air quality and poses additional [health risks](#), particularly for children, older people, and those with respiratory conditions.

Unfair

SUVs disproportionately serve higher-income households, while 66% of Scotland's lowest-income households [do not own a car](#). Yet the risks and costs of SUV dominance (road danger, pollution, congestion) are borne by all residents, including those who do not drive. Heavy marketing of oversized vehicles also reduces demand for smaller, more affordable, and efficient cars, which will inevitably limit consumer choice and lock households into costly ownership patterns.

Environmentally damaging

If SUVs were a country, their CO₂ emissions would [rank fifth](#) in the world, and even electric SUVs have a [high environmental footprint](#) due to resource-intensive battery and vehicle production, including lithium, cobalt, steel, and rubber. The rapid growth in SUV ownership has [eclipsed](#) much of the emissions savings from cleaner vehicles and electrification.

Costly for taxpayers

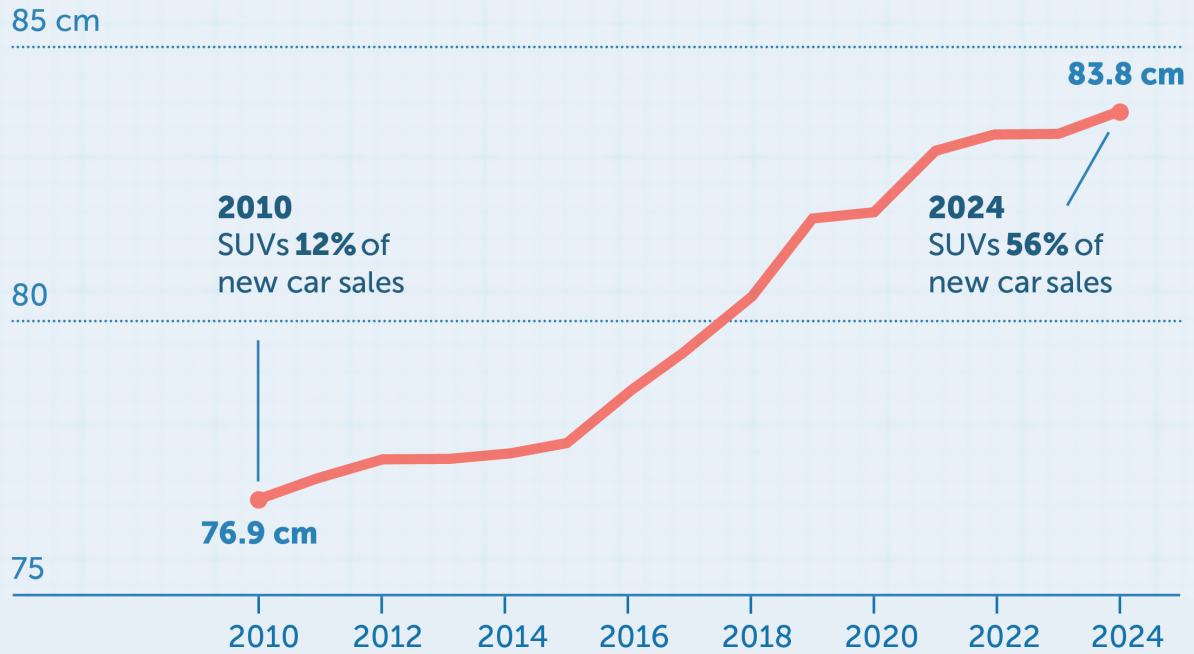
SUVs are highly inefficient in dense urban environments. They occupy more kerbside and parking space, reducing room for active travel or public amenities. Their greater axle weight accelerates road, pavement, and speed bump damage - roughly [16 times more damage](#) than a standard car if twice as heavy - raising maintenance costs for councils. Their size also complicates essential services, including waste collection and emergency vehicle access.

SUVs are
82% more
fatal to children
than standard cars.



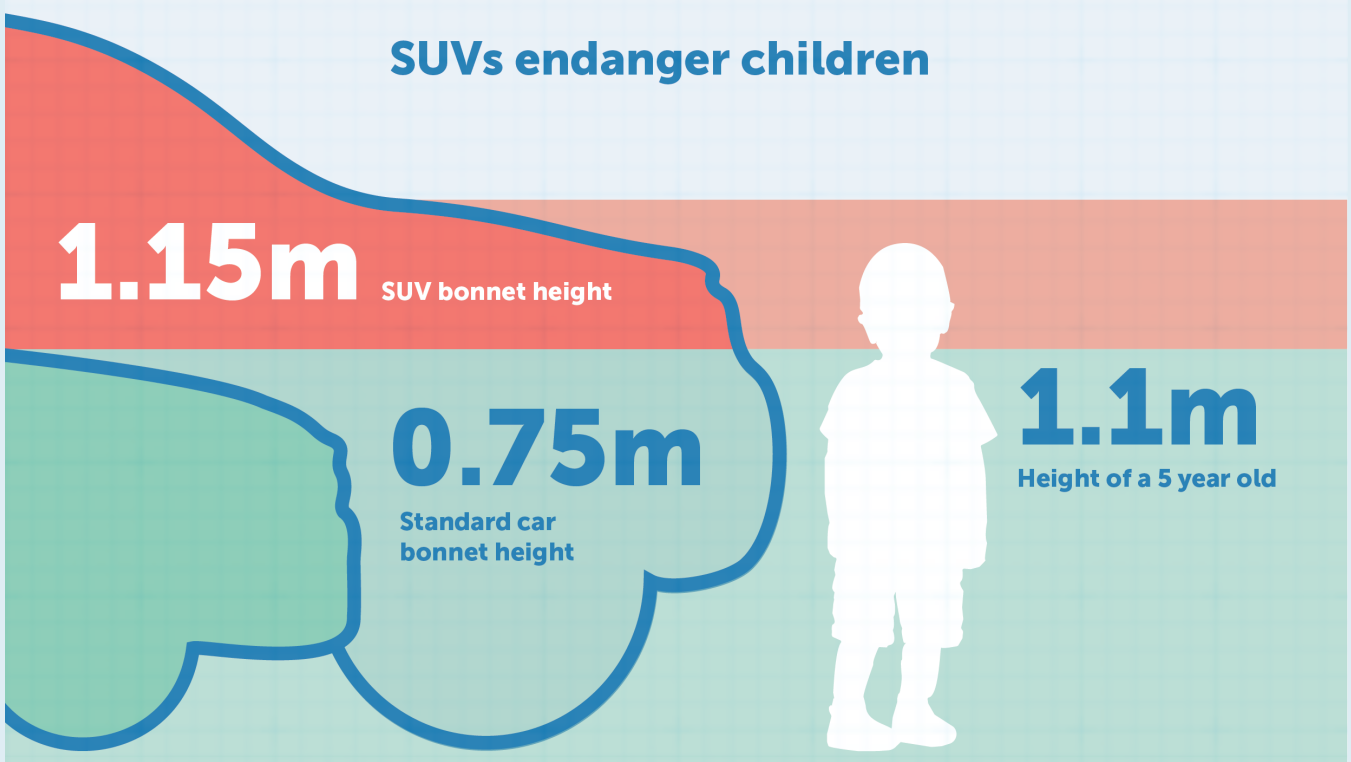
SUVs on the school run.

Average bonnet heights are rising



SUVs now dominate the UK car market, with average vehicle height growing year on year. Source: [Transport & Environment](#).

SUVs endanger children



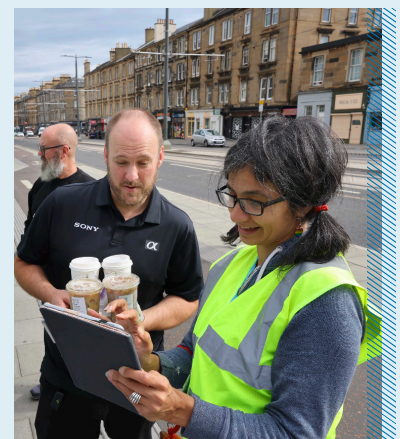
Higher bonneted SUVs and pickups reduce driver sight-lines and increase collision severity compared with lower standard cars, creating a greater risk to pedestrians — especially children who can be completely hidden in front blind spots and struck at more dangerous points on the body. (Standard car modelled on VW Golf; SUV modelled on Land Rover Defender.)

What is the public opinion on big cars?

The rise of larger, heavier cars is not going unnoticed. Recent [UK polling](#) shows strong public awareness of the trend and a clear appetite for policy action to address its impacts, with a majority of UK car owners agreeing that more "SUVs will make parking more difficult" and that these cars are "not necessary in towns and cities".



'Carspreading' public engagement in Leith.



Public attitudes to big cars | Edinburgh

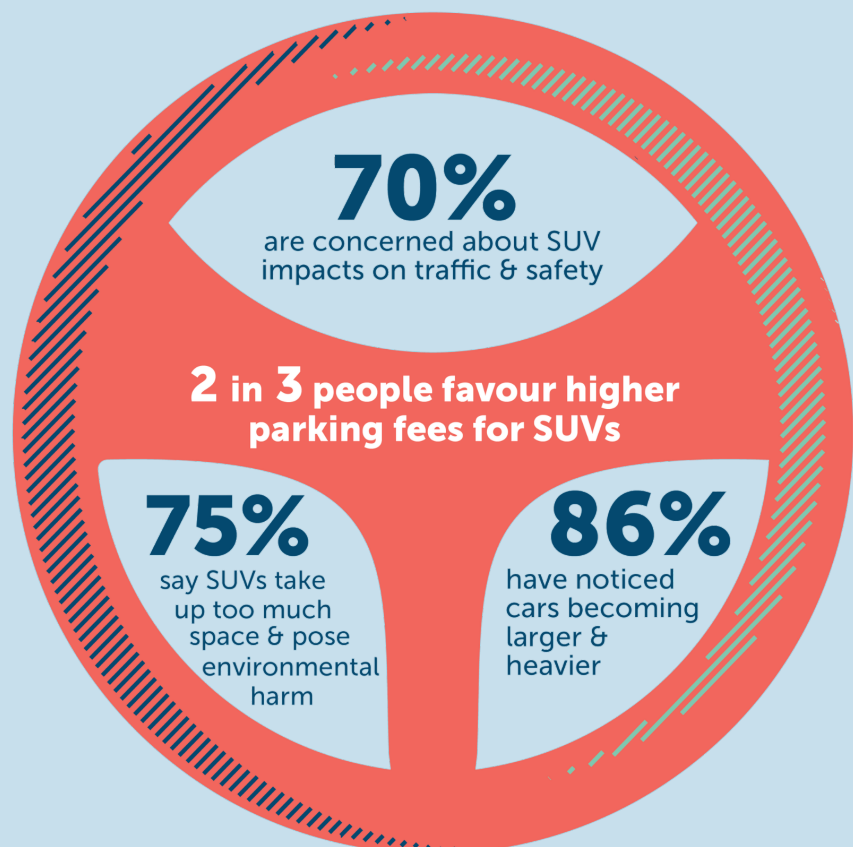
In September 2025, we surveyed local residents on Leith Walk in Edinburgh about the trend toward larger, heavier vehicles in the city and their impacts on urban life. We found:

Awareness

Residents are aware of SUV growth, with 86% reporting that they have noticed cars becoming larger and heavier. Locals recognise several negative impacts: 3 in 4 say SUVs take up too much parking space and pose an environmental harm, 60% note road damage, 55% are concerned about their impacts on child safety. Many also agree that “free” parking is effectively subsidised: half of respondents said council or taxpayers pay for it, 20% said costs are passed to customers, 15% said business or property owners, and only 15% considered it truly free.

Public sentiment

SUV ownership is often seen as a status symbol (62%) or for extra space and comfort. Meanwhile, 7 in 10 respondents reported being concerned about the impact of SUVs on urban traffic and safety. Open-ended feedback described SUVs as ‘menacing’, ‘domineering’, and ‘environmentally harmful’, with several noting that the lack of smaller-car alternatives forces people to buy SUVs.



Action & policy preferences

There is strong local support for interventions. 65% favour higher parking fees for large SUVs, whilst some preferred higher road taxes instead). Suggested uses of revenue from such measures included: fixing potholes (57%), better public transport (54%), safer roads (40%), and more green spaces (35%).



The opportunity

Five examples of good parking policy

4

The opportunity

The examples in this section show how reforming parking - through pricing, regulation and better use of space - can tackle car dependency, rebalance transport costs, and support healthier, more sustainable cities.

Drawing on a mix of well established and emerging initiatives from across the UK and Europe, these case studies demonstrate what works in practice, from protecting pavements to charging fairly for the space and damage vehicles impose.

The following case studies highlight how parking policy can be a powerful and low-cost lever for change, and what Scottish cities can learn as they modernise their own approaches:

Five examples of best practice

4.1 Pavement parking ban | Scotland

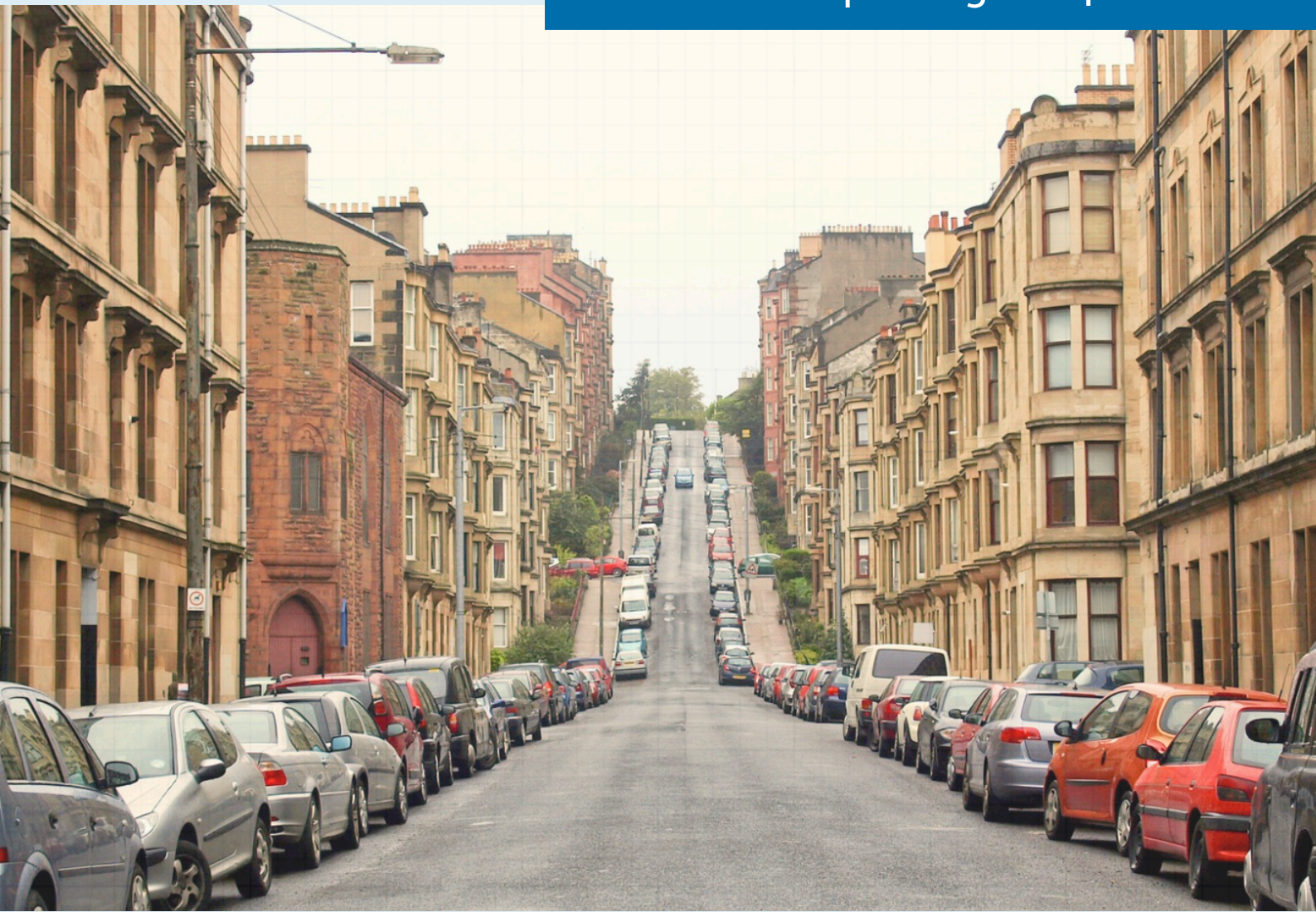
4.2 Kerbside management | Lambeth, England

4.3 Parking charges by vehicle footprint | Aachen, Germany

4.4 Parking charges by weight | France

4.5 Workplace parking levy | Nottingham, England

4.1 Pavement parking ban | Scotland



“We brought the pavement parking ban in to provide a safe and accessible environment for everyone, especially those with sight impairments, mobility issues or pushing buggies.”

— Cllr Stephen Jenkinson,
City of Edinburgh Council
transport convener

Pavement parking ban | Scotland

In 2019, the Transport (Scotland) Act introduced the statutory framework for a national ban on pavement parking, double parking and parking at dropped kerbs to make it easier for local authorities to ensure pavements and roads are safer and more accessible to all. The [prohibitions](#) were *'aimed at promoting, supporting and advancing the rights of pedestrians to ensure that our pavements and roads are accessible for all'*.

Following public consultations and secondary legislation, by December 2023 all local authorities in Scotland held the tools needed to enforce the ban; parking attendants were granted the powers to issue £100 Penalty Charge Notices (PCN) to offending vehicles. However, 12 months into having the powers to tackle pavement parking, [only one in four](#) councils were enforcing the ban.

The City of Edinburgh Council was the first to roll out enforcement in January 2024, issuing [over 8,000 PCNs](#) in the first year. A downward trend in fines since then suggests that the ban is working, encouraging drivers to rethink their behaviour. In 2024-2025, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee also introduced the ban.



Lesson: This is a blueprint for progressive, people-first parking policy. Where enforcement has been implemented, the ban is clearly changing driver behaviour and keeping pavements safe. Too many local authorities remain on the sidelines, leaving pedestrians and vulnerable road users at risk and increasing costs from pavement damage caused by vehicles, while reinforcing the mistaken message that cars take priority over people.

4.2 Kerbside management | Lambeth, England



“Our kerbside space is one of the largest public assets we own, and we’re using it to help more people walk and cycle and make access to public space more equitable.”

– Cllr Rezina Chowdhury,
Cabinet Member for
Sustainable Lambeth and
Clean Air

Kerbside management | Lambeth, England

In January 2023, Lambeth Council launched its [Kerbside Strategy](#) - the first of its kind in the UK - which set out the local authority's plans to transform 25% of its kerbside to non-car parking uses. The strategy aims to rebalance the existing situation where 94% of Lambeth kerbside is used for car parking, much of it free or relatively cheap, and legally does not contravene [parking regulations](#) as it does not increase revenue.

In a borough where most residents don't own a car, the strategy makes better use of public space to support walking and cycling, as well as cleaner air and climate resilience. Its introduction has led to the creation of social and green spaces in spots previously taken up with parked cars, reflecting the principle that pavements are for walking and wheeling, while kerbside can serve multiple purposes. Changes are introduced gradually with community consultation, ensuring residents support any changes to their streets.

By 2025, over 64km of kerbside had been transformed, including new protected cycle lanes, bike hangars, EV charging bays, [parklets](#) and urban green spaces. The approach has been popular with residents and stakeholders, and as there are no additional parking charges, it avoids affordability issues and can be tailored to meet accessibility needs.



Lesson: Lambeth shows that strategic kerbside management can rebalance public space in dense urban areas, support sustainable transport options, and improve the accessibility of streets. Scottish cities could follow this model, reallocating kerbside to walking, cycling, and other sustainable uses, alongside pricing reforms to discourage the use and ownership of private vehicles.

4.3 Parking charges by vehicle footprint | Aachen, Germany



“The costs will be based on the economic value of parking spaces in public areas and the construction and maintenance costs of parking facilities.”

— *City of Aachen Council*

Parking charges by vehicle footprint | Aachen, Germany

Prompted by a legal, federal-level change in Germany which recognised the value of land, the city of Aachen reformed their parking system for residents based on space occupied by vehicles. Previously, the city had charged €30/year to cover admin costs. Since [May 2025](#), parking costs capture (i) the value of the land, (ii) the construction cost of the parking space, and (iii) the annual maintenance costs. A fee of €30 euros is charged for each square meter occupied.

In practice, parking charges are calculated using the following formula, meaning larger cars pay more:

$$\text{Parking cost} = L \times W \times \text{€}30 + \text{€}15 \text{ (admin fee)}$$

Where:

L = vehicle length (m)

W = vehicle width (m)

The result is that a small smart car now pays approximately €150/year, whilst a larger van pays around €300/year.

For privacy reasons, the council is unable to access the country's database of vehicle characteristics. However, in residents' permit applications, they are asked to provide the necessary details (i.e. vehicle length and width) from their registration certificate.

Lesson: Aachen shows that charging for resident parking based on the space a vehicle occupies can distribute costs more equitably, ease pressure from large vehicles, and recognise the true value of public land. Scottish cities could explore similar models to tie fees to vehicle footprint, promote smaller cars, and help cover road and pavement maintenance. Support from the national government - through guidance or legislation - would help ensure local authorities implement such schemes consistently and fairly.

4.4 Parking charges by weight | France



“These vehicles consume more resources, generate more pollution... We can't have grand speeches without any action.”

— *Pierre Hurmic, Mayor of Bordeaux*

Parking charges by weight | France

[Paris](#) operates a tiered parking tariff based on vehicle weight, tripling hourly fees for heavier cars such as SUVs. The charges, introduced in 2024, apply to non-residents and cover combustion and hybrid vehicles over 1.6 tonnes, and electric vehicles over two tonnes, with rates rising up to €18/hour in central zones. Approved by public vote, the measure aims to discourage oversized vehicles and reclaim urban space, regardless of fuel type.

Vehicle weights are identified on registration certificates and parking payment apps and parking meter operators now receive the national database of registration certificates (SIV) on a daily basis. If the charge is not paid, the penalty is a doubling of the charge.

In light of a wider package of mobility measures, Paris' intervention affects visitors only, not residents (although residents are considered visitors if parking beyond a 1km radius from their address). However, in May 2025, [Bordeaux](#) followed in Paris' footsteps and introduced a 30% surcharge for all eligible drivers, residents and visitors alike. Vehicles over 1.6 tonnes (1.9 tonnes for electric/hybrids) now pay more to park, as part of the city's push to cut emissions and reduce road damage.

Reports say the new parking rates have reduced the number of SUVs using surface parking in Paris by [two thirds](#). The Paris Council has also formally [requested](#) that the national French government prohibit the use of SUVs in urban environments.

Lesson: French cities are proving that weight-based parking charges can manage oversized vehicles, reduce road damage, and reclaim urban space. The approach is gaining momentum in the UK, with Cardiff taking the lead on higher charges based on vehicle weight. In Scottish cities, similar measures could complement local parking strategies, especially in dense areas. Government support at a national level would speed up implementation and ensure consistency across cities, rather than leaving progressive councils isolated.

Pricing by weight

Weight-based pricing is the preferred method for addressing oversized vehicles in the UK. The [Transport for Quality of Life SUV Toolkit \(2025\)](#) highlights that weight data is the most reliable and widely available metric, and also serves as the best proxy for overall vehicle size and correlates strongly with fuel consumption. This allows a single surcharge to capture multiple harms. While alternatives like height, length, or footprint target specific issues, the options appraisal shows that their limited data availability makes weight the most practical choice for city parking policies.

4.5 Workplace parking levy | Nottingham, England



“The first of its kind in Europe, the scheme has raised almost £90 million, which has been re-invested into sustainable transport across the city. It has also allowed us to secure inward investment of over £1 billion in transport.”

— *Nottingham City Council*

Workplace parking levy | Nottingham, England

Nottingham City Council introduced a Workplace Parking Levy (WPL) in 2012, charging employers and educational institutions for each liable workplace parking space under the England and Wales Transport Act 2000. Revenue, typically [£8-10million per year](#), is ring-fenced for local transport improvements, primarily Nottingham's award-winning tram network.

The WPL is levied on employers and, for equity reasons, small employers with 10 or fewer parking spaces, hospitals, and Blue Badge spaces are exempt. For major employers, typically 50% of the levy is passed on to employees, with the remainder covered by employers. The scheme incentivises employers to rationalise parking, often repurposing surplus spaces for student housing or teaching facilities (including the redevelopment of university car parks), while also encouraging commuters to shift to public transport, walking and cycling.

To support businesses, Nottingham created the [Workplace Travel Service](#), which provides free advice, grants, and guidance on travel planning, parking management, and sustainable transport improvements. Over ten years, 450 companies have benefited.

An argument against WPL is that it is self-defeating: if mode shift occurs, then revenues will go down. But this has not happened in Nottingham. Revenue has increased in all years (except during pandemic lockdowns), as when some employees shift to other forms of transport, others tend to take their place, due to economic growth or through latent demand for scarce workplace parking. Factors such as political stability and strong employer engagement have helped Nottingham deliver WPL, and the scheme shows the levy can work effectively where viable alternatives exist. Rural areas or sites without sufficient alternatives would be less suitable.

Lesson: Scottish cities can progress a well-designed Workplace Parking Levy, learning from Nottingham's example: clearly communicating benefits, ring-fencing funding for sustainable transport, implementing it where viable alternatives exist, and by supporting employers through a dedicated service offering advice, grants, and travel planning support.

4.6 Complimentary policy measures



Alongside flagship reforms, complementary measures are critical to shaping parking demand and supporting a shift away from car dependency.

Complementary policy measures

Permits based on emissions

Cities such as [Edinburgh](#), [Islington](#), and [Glasgow](#) charge more for parking permits the more a vehicle pollutes. For example, Glasgow's system has a £220 difference between the lowest- and highest-emission cars, with additional permits costing extra, encouraging households to own fewer and cleaner vehicles.

Permit limits

As done in [Edinburgh](#) and [Newcastle](#), it is possible to cap the number of residential parking permits per household (typically to two), which helps contain demand for on-street spaces and discourages households from owning multiple cars. [Research](#) shows that restricting permit availability reduces car ownership and encourages the use of alternative modes.

Removal of parking minimums

Some local authorities reduce car dependency by removing requirements for new developments to provide minimum parking. London boroughs like [Waltham Forest](#) and [Hackney](#) use car free or car capped standards and Controlled Parking Zones which prevent residents from obtaining on-street permits - freeing space for walking, cycling, greenery, and play while discouraging unnecessary car ownership.

Levies on out-of-town parking spaces

A levy on out-of-town parking offer the potential to deter car-dependent development, provide a comparative advantage to high street retail, and fund sustainable transport investment. It was floated as part of the UK Government's 1998 integrated transport proposals; this considered, but ultimately excluded, out-of-town retail from the Workplace Parking Levy powers subsequently provided to English Local Authorities. However, other countries, such as Australia, have successfully implemented per-space parking levies on commercial property, and Scotland could seek to amend the 2019 Scottish transport act to provide the necessary legislative framework.

Large Vehicle Levy

Beyond parking policy, a [Large Vehicle Levy](#) can reduce SUV-use nationwide. This would charge higher annual costs for larger, heavier cars based on their weight, reflecting their greater impact on road safety, emissions, and infrastructure. The policy would encourage households to choose smaller, more efficient vehicles and help shift the market away from high-impact models.

5

Parking in Scottish cities

A policy snapshot

Parking in Scottish cities

Analysis by parking policy expert Sue Flack

This policy analysis compares the parking policies and operations of four Scottish cities - Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, and Glasgow - the largest urban areas in Scotland and therefore priority targets for sustainable transport interventions. Information has been obtained from published material (see appendix), with efforts made to ensure it is up to date and accurate. The cities are assessed against four metric areas: principles and vision, permit parking, short-stay parking, and Workplace Parking Levy (WPL), using a version of the [Possible Parking Action Plan Tool](#).

The analysis focuses on how parking policies and operations can support social and environmental objectives, including reducing car dependency, encouraging active and public transport, and linking parking management to climate and air quality goals.

5.1 Aberdeen



Aberdeen is the third largest city in Scotland with an estimated 231,780 population within the Aberdeen City Council area and an estimated 500,000 people across Aberdeen City and Shire. It is widely recognised as the energy capital of Europe and this is the basis for considerable projected economic and population growth.

There is a local commitment to work with partners to deliver a just transition to Net Zero and a plan to make Aberdeen a Net Zero city by 2045. The draft Local Transport Strategy (LTS) reflects this policy.

Policy snapshot

Metric area	Key metrics	Rating	Notes
Principles and vision	Up to date policy framework with links to wider objectives? Sustainable transport hierarchy?	Good	New Local Transport Strategy due in 2026 with a sustainable transport hierarchy, informed by AECOM's Strategic Car Parking Review. Although there is ambition for parking policy contribution, there are patchy policy and delivery proposals, and the strategy has taken a long time to produce.
Permit parking	Programme of additions, extensions and progressive pricing policies?	Good	Permit pricing has had a sharp increase in recent years, with annual permits costing £220 in the city centre, £165 for outer city centre and £110 in peripheral areas. Permits are limited to one per property in the city centre zone, whilst second cars cost more in outer zones. This demonstrates a successful use of parking policy to encourage less car ownership. Policy exists to extend CPZs which currently cover most of the wider city centre. There is currently no carbon/air quality link in current permit parking policies (such as higher charges for SUVs or more polluting vehicles).
Short-stay parking	Restriction (including by price) in city centre and elsewhere?	Requires improvement	At least £4 for 1 hour in city centre on-street and most car parks. However, 2024 saw the introduction of evening parking for £1 and some free parking at weekends to boost city centre footfall. Leisure trips to the city centre remain to be perceived as cheaper by car than by bus (3 hours city centre parking costs £4.80 compared with a £5.55 bus day ticket).
Workplace parking levy	Feasibility work carried out?	Requires improvement	A high percentage of the population are driving to work, presenting an opportunity for WPL. However, no feasibility work has been carried out and a levy has not been prioritised by politicians.

Commentary

Aberdeen has some successful examples of development and use of parking policies for environmental objectives. The forthcoming LTS includes progressive parking policies but also lacks some relatively easy wins, but is backed up by recent data in the Strategic Parking Review. A good example is the maximum of one residential permit in the city centre and charging more for a second car outside the city centre, which would be even better if permit policy were also linked to improving air quality by differentially charging for vehicles with higher emissions.

Like most cities, Aberdeen city centre parking charges do not encourage use of buses instead of cars. Whilst this can be complex and difficult, a true sustainable transport policy would include a financial incentive to use buses for city centre trips. This would, of course, involve partnership arrangements with bus companies and possibly also with private sector parking operators.

5.2 Dundee



Dundee is Scotland's fourth biggest city with an estimated population of 149,480 (2024). It has a diversified economy based around universities (with a high proportion of students), a good quality cultural offer and tourism, and has maintained a relatively stable population over the last few years. It has published an aim to become net zero by 2045, and the City Council itself has become a leader in the promotion and adoption of electric vehicles.

Policy snapshot

Metric area	Key metrics	Rating	Notes
Principles and vision	Up to date policy framework with links to wider objectives? Sustainable transport hierarchy?	Good in parts	Shows ambition in Sustainable Transport Delivery Plan, assuming hierarchy. Although, no complementary parking policy. Working to the principle of no net increase in parking in the city centre, a key component of the 2006 parking strategy.
Permit parking	Programme of additions, extensions and progressive pricing policies?	Moderate	Permit costs vary from £22 to £130 per year in the city centre. There are 3 CPZs, which is limited compared to other cities. There is currently no carbon/air quality link in current permit parking policies (such as higher charges for SUVs or more polluting vehicles).
Short-stay parking	Restriction (including by price) in city centre and elsewhere?	Moderate	Likely still perceived as cheaper by car for shopping and leisure trips to the city centre (£4.70 for 3 hours city centre parking compared to £4.65 bus day ticket).
Workplace parking levy	Feasibility work carried out?	Requires improvement	Despite a focus on demand management, no feasibility work has been carried out and a levy has not been prioritised by politicians.

Commentary

Dundee has an ambitious Sustainable Transport Delivery Plan but has not linked this with progressive parking policies, such as charging extra for permits for SUVs or trying to ensure that city centre parking is not perceived as cheaper than buses. There are individual examples of good practice, such as no net increase in parking in the city centre and the Bell Street Green Transport Hub which has reallocated some parking to a cycle centre, electric vehicle charging and associated uses. Although Dundee has significant plans for improving public and active transport, this should also be complemented by further restriction and differential charging for parking in the city centre and elsewhere.

Dundee now has an opportunity to develop a progressive parking strategy to match their ambitions for sustainable transport. This should include:

- A review of CPZs, including consideration of emissions-based charging
- Review of city centre parking charges, working with private sector operators if possible
- Consideration of WPL and potential for working with larger employers on parking and transport issues

5.3 Edinburgh



Edinburgh is the capital city and the second largest city in Scotland, with an estimated population of 530,680 (2024) in the City Council area and approximately 900,000 in the wider metropolitan area. It has a healthy economy, growing three times faster than the rest of Scotland, focusing on culture, government, the public sector and tourism. The City Council has an ambitious target of net zero by 2030.

Policy snapshot

Metric area	Key metrics	Rating	Notes
Principles and vision	Up to date policy framework with links to wider objectives? Sustainable transport hierarchy?	Good	Ambitious City Mobility Plan includes sustainable transport hierarchy and associated parking delivery plan.
Permit parking	Programme of additions, extensions and progressive pricing policies?	Good	From April 2025, permit prices are determined by parking zone (Central, Peripheral, Extended or Priority), vehicle CO2 emissions and whether first or second permit for the household. A high emission car in the City Centre could be charged £900 per year and there is an ongoing review of whole city permit parking. A charge based on emissions exists, and the Council is currently considering charging based on weight/size.
Short-stay parking	Restriction (including by price) in city centre and elsewhere?	Good	High costs for car parking in the city centre to encourage public/active transport, and in recognition of the need for turnover of parking spaces in central Edinburgh (3 hours city centre parking costs £24.60 compared with a £6.00 bus day ticket).
Workplace parking levy	Feasibility work carried out?	Moderate	Some feasibility work has been conducted, but WPL is not being progressed and is not prioritised by politicians.

Commentary

Edinburgh is a leader in developing progressive parking policies and in operations related to them. The City's Mobility Plan is exemplary in terms of the integration of parking with other transport policies. Relatively high city centre parking prices complement bus and active travel improvement projects to encourage sustainable choices. A high proportion of the residential areas of the city are covered by CPZs and charging policies for resident permits reward fewer, cleaner vehicles.

Edinburgh has not progressed initial Workplace Parking Levy proposals despite working closely with the Scottish Government on developing the legal background for implementing and operating WPL. This is unfortunate as Edinburgh could become an important exemplar for WPL. If progress on WPL is not a political priority, Edinburgh could instead look at voluntary partnerships with major employers with the aim of reducing car commuting.

Edinburgh's projected economic, tourism and population growth means that continued investment and innovation will be required in transport to maintain an effective and well-functioning city. This has to include continued careful progress on managing parking throughout the city. The forthcoming George Street pedestrianisation project, as and when it is taken forward to completion, will be a significant challenge to both safeguard the economic health of the city and improve the city centre environment.

5.4 Glasgow



Glasgow is the largest city in Scotland and the third largest in the UK, with an estimated population of 650,300 in the Glasgow City Council area (2024) and 1.2m in Greater Glasgow (2025). The population has been increasing in recent years and economic growth has been strong compared to the rest of Scotland. The city economy is diversified including financial services, digital, creative, advanced manufacturing and tourism. The city has an 'aspiration' for net zero by 2030, as well as a 30% car km reduction target.

Policy snapshot

Metric area	Key metrics	Rating	Notes
Principles and vision	Up to date policy framework with links to wider objectives? Sustainable transport hierarchy?	Good	Clear parking policies in Local Transport Strategy and Spatial Delivery Framework taking account of sustainable transport hierarchy.
Permit parking	Programme of additions, extensions and progressive pricing policies?	Good	Permit prices range from £80 to £220 per year, depending on location, with 2025/6 prices based on vehicle emissions and number of permits for each address. A programme of extensions/additions linked to active travel infrastructure is forthcoming.
Short-stay parking	Restriction (including by price) in city centre and elsewhere?	Moderate	Attempts to change behaviour and encourage public and active transport exist, with city centre parking costs exceeding public transport costs (3 hours city centre parking costs £10.50 compared to £5.90 bus day ticket).
Workplace parking levy	Feasibility work carried out?	Moderate	Feasibility work carried out but decided not to progress in August 2025. However, investigation into congestion charging as an alternative option exists.

Commentary

Glasgow is a leader in developing progressive parking policies and in the operations related to them. Parking policies are integrated in transport plans and significant progress has been made on, for example, charging more for permits for higher emission cars. This progress needs to be speeded up in the future if Glasgow is to meet challenging emissions and car reduction targets.

After carrying out a feasibility study, Glasgow decided in August 2025 not to progress Workplace Parking Levy, but to continue to investigate a congestion charge and possibly tolls for the Clyde Tunnel. This could have a greater impact on car use reduction and air quality than WPL, but of course may not actually happen.

However this decision should not stop progress on voluntary partnership working with large employers on parking, including what sustainable transport improvements could be made to encourage commuters to leave the car at home.

Key takeaways

All four major Scottish cities have elements of good practice in parking policy, though only Edinburgh and Glasgow currently have comprehensive, integrated strategies. Aberdeen is proposing a new Local Transport Strategy in Autumn 2026, which could include an integrated parking approach, and Dundee has an opportunity to develop parking policies aligned with its Sustainable Transport Delivery Plan.

Edinburgh and Glasgow lead the way on limiting residents' permits and implementing emission-based charges. Edinburgh has the strongest pricing and short-stay policies in the city centre. However, in most cities, short-stay parking pricing is not linked to bus fares, reinforcing the perception that driving is cheaper for shopping or leisure trips. Progress on Workplace Parking Levies is limited, although voluntary partnerships with large employers e.g. NHS remains a potential route to influence commuting patterns.

Areas for further work

Aberdeen and Dundee should develop comprehensive, integrated parking strategies, potentially building on the recent Aberdeen model but with stronger recommendations. Opportunities exist to explore joint strategies with private sector parking operators to reduce undercutting and encourage sustainable transport choices, taking account of legal and competition considerations.

Parking strategies should also be linked to bus service improvements and active travel plans to address the perception that driving is always cheaper, with destination-based pricing particularly relevant in city centres. Kerbside management strategies similar to those pioneered by some London Boroughs, such as Lambeth with a target of 25% of kerbside for people rather than cars, could support ambitious car-reduction goals.

While the Workplace Parking Levy is not currently a political priority, engagement with large employers such as hospitals, universities, and other public and private sector organisations could explore ways to better manage parking demand and provide alternative travel options, for example by adjusting bus services to meet commuter needs.

6

A photograph of a row of cars parked in a lot, viewed from the side. The cars are in various colors, including red, blue, and black. The image has a grid overlay. The text '6' is in the top left corner, and 'Conclusions & recommendations' is at the bottom.

Conclusions & recommendations

Scotland's streets have been shaped over decades around the private car, locking in patterns of dependency that are now difficult to reverse. Cheap, widely available parking compounds this problem: it effectively subsidises driving, undermines public investment in sustainable transport, and diminishes public transport's ability to compete.

Parking policy must be embedded within, rather than separated, sustainable transport strategy. Scotland's own pavement parking ban demonstrates that well-designed regulatory intervention can shift behaviour at scale. Evidence from across the UK and Europe reinforces this: kerbside management in Lambeth, weight-based charges in Paris and Bordeaux, and space-based pricing in Aachen all show that strategic parking reform can reclaim public space, promote active travel, and distribute the costs of car use more equitably.

Scottish cities now face a further, urgent challenge. The rapid growth in oversized vehicles has intensified parking pressure, consumed more kerbspace, accelerated road and pavement deterioration, and poses greater danger to pedestrians and cyclists. Scotland must get ahead of this trend. Interventions at a local and national level, following the lead given by Edinburgh's ban on SUV advertising, will be key to ensuring we have people-first, rather than car-first, cities in the years to come.

This report concludes that parking policy cannot be treated in a vacuum. When connected to broader sustainable transport measures – pricing, kerbside management, public engagement, and regulation – parking becomes a critical lever to cut traffic, improve street safety, and create fairer, healthier spaces for everyone. The recommendations below translate this evidence into actionable steps for Local Authorities and the Scottish Government.

“ Strategic parking reform can reclaim public space, promote active travel, and distribute the costs of car use more equitably.”

Recommendations

At a local level, we recommend that Local Authorities:

1 Enforce the pavement parking ban

This is a particular problem for disabled people, parents with pushchairs and young people who are forced to walk on the road. Those Local Authorities who have so far failed to implement the ban should now do so, to protect pedestrians and prevent damage that drivers cause to pavements.

2 Adopt standalone parking plans

All 32 Local Authorities should develop dedicated parking plans setting out how parking will be managed across their areas – linking restrictions, pricing, and permits to national objectives such as modal shift.

3 Engage major employers on workplace parking

Proactive collaboration between Local Authorities and large trip-generators (e.g. universities, hospitals, other major employers) should be taken forward in order to identify opportunities to reduce car commuting and promote healthier alternatives.

4 Implement kerbside management strategies

Local Authorities should build upon the [Lambeth model](#) to rebalance kerbspace to prioritise shared uses (e.g. cycle parking, delivery bays, and community space).

5 Introduce weight-based parking charges

Parking plans for Scotland's cities should apply higher fees for heavier vehicles, starting with residential permits, following the precedent set by Glasgow and Edinburgh's CO₂ permit schemes to shift behaviour toward smaller, cleaner cars.

6 Ban SUV advertising

Prohibit SUV advertising on all council-owned sites, taking the [City of Edinburgh Council's ban](#) as a model.

Recommendations



At a national level, we recommend that the Scottish Government:

1

Equip Local Authorities to make the case for reform

The Scottish Government should provide guidance and research-based materials to help councils communicate the benefits of revised parking policies – including the hidden costs for public space, health, equity, and public finances.

2

Advocate for a levy on bigger cars

Scottish Ministers should actively press the UK Government to introduce a flat, progressive [Large Vehicle Levy](#) on vehicles above 1,600 kg (2,000 kg for EVs), applied through Vehicle Excise Duty. This would reflect the disproportionate impact of large vehicles on our streets.

3

Explore the feasibility of banning SUVs in city centres

Restricting the unnecessary use of the largest private vehicles in cities, often built for off-road conditions, would reduce road damage, free up public space, and improve street safety.

7

Appendix

Appendix

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the help of Local Authority officers and officials, practitioners and academics who agreed to be interviewed for this report under conditions of anonymity.

This work was kindly supported by the Foundation for Integrated Transport.



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Infographics by Nadia Zentner and report design by Ana Soldatenko of Transform Creative.

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Transform Scotland is the national alliance for sustainable transport, bringing together organisations from the private, public and voluntary sectors.

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