

COMMITTEE DEBATE

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Tuesday 9 March 2021, 2.00pm

## Briefing from Transform Scotland

### Key Points

- We welcome the joint Committees' inquiry report on the Climate Change Plan, and its emphasis on the need for "urgent action".<sup>1</sup>
- In particular, we welcome the RECC Committee's recommendation that additional measures will be needed to "disincentivise private car use and achieve the necessary shift towards more sustainable transport modes".
- However, the Committees' report failed to tackle the 'elephant in the room': the Scottish Government's massive bias towards high-carbon infrastructure in the transport sector, despite this being the largest sector for emissions and the sector in which no progress has been made at emission reduction.

### 1. Welcome for RECC support for demand management

In December 2020, the Scottish Government made the welcome commitment to reduce all road traffic mileage by 20% by 2030 as part of the Climate Change Plan update. This represents a welcome and long-overdue return to road traffic reduction as a headline national policy objective. Scottish Government climate policy for transport has in recent years been overwhelmingly focussed on electric vehicles so this represents a major policy switch. This also represents the first clear commitment by a UK administration to road traffic reduction since the Westminster Road Traffic Reduction Acts of the 1990s.

We led written and oral evidence to the Scottish Parliament on the climate plan in January 2021, making the case that the target, while welcome, will be unachievable without new road traffic demand management measures being introduced (road pricing & other measures).<sup>2</sup> Therefore we were pleased that the Parliament's March 2021 committee report on the climate plan noted our recommendation that "measures to make car travel less attractive (taxation, charges, reallocation of road space)" will be required, and recommended that additional measures will be needed to "disincentivise private car use and achieve the necessary shift towards more sustainable transport modes".

### 2. 'Elephant in the room' remains high-carbon infrastructure plans

In order to make deep cuts in climate emissions, it is imperative that government stops making things worse.

Unfortunately, we have a situation where the Scottish Government's capital expenditure priorities are grotesquely skewed in favour of high-carbon transport.

The committed transport spend in the recent *Infrastructure Investment Plan* is as follows:<sup>3</sup>

- **£2.38 billion low-carbon transport**
- **£6.96 billion high-carbon transport**

The Government's current spending priorities: (i) locks 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) impacts negatively upon equalities, health, biodiversity, landscapes and productive land.

The Plan should bring forward an urgent moratorium and review of all road-building projects in line with the 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.”<sup>4</sup>
- 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”.<sup>5</sup>
- 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.”<sup>6</sup>
- The **Scottish Parliament’s Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee** 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.”<sup>7</sup>

We ourselves, alongside other national charities, Paths for All, RSPB Scotland, Sustrans Scotland, & WWF Scotland, in November 2020 wrote to Scottish Ministers to express “deep concern” at the transport spending priorities set out in the Scottish Government’s draft Infrastructure Investment Plan, and called upon the Ministers to review its capital expenditure priorities. Yet despite this range of advice, we are yet to see any evidence of movement away from high-carbon transport infrastructure from the Scottish Ministers. Without such a move, we are not convinced that the Scottish Government’s climate change plans are either coherent or believable.

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

2 See <https://transform.scot/blog/2021/01/27/20-traffic-reduction-target-will-be-missed-without-demand-management/>

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

4 Infrastructure Commission for Scotland (2020) ‘Phase 1: Key findings report’, page 108 Available at <<https://infrastructurecommission.scot/page/key-findings-report>>.

5 ‘Take urgent action on six key principles for a resilient recovery’, 6 May 2020. Available at <<https://www.theccc.org.uk/2020/05/06/take-urgent-action-on-six-key-principles-for-a-resilient-recovery/>>.

6 Just Transition Commission (2020) ‘Just Transition Commission: advice on a green recovery’, page 18. Available at <<https://www.gov.scot/publications/transition-commission-advice-green-recovery/>>.

7 Scottish Parliament Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee (2020) ‘Green Recovery Inquiry - Report’, page 34. Available at <<https://sp-bpr-en-prod-cdnep.azureedge.net/published/ECCLR/2020/11/8/Green-Recovery-Inquiry---Report/ECCLRS0520R12.pdf>>.

## Scotland’s alliance for sustainable transport

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scotland

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).