



MOVING THE VOTE

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT
in the party manifestos for the
2021 Scottish Parliament elections

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SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT IN THE PARTY MANIFESTOS FOR THE 2021 SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS

The transport sector remains the largest source of climate emissions in Scotland, accounting for more than a third of Scotland's emissions. Not only has the proportion of transport emissions grown as other sectors have decarbonised, in absolute terms transport emissions have remained at the same high level for decades.

On 6 May 2021, Scotland will elect a new parliament. All five parties currently represented in the Parliament are all promising to tackle the climate emergency. Given the central role that transport plays in decarbonising Scotland, Transform Scotland has analysed the party manifestos to see how each of these parties are promising to build a sustainable transport system.

We have selected a set of ten criteria that represent a range of transport modes and interventions that we deem to be key to achieving a sustainable transport system:

1. **Active travel provision**
2. **20 minute neighbourhoods**
3. **Zero-emission bus & rail**
4. **Decarbonising ferries**
5. **Anglo-Scottish air-rail substitution**
6. **Long-haul freight by rail**
7. **Investing in digital connectivity**
8. **Investing in road maintenance over building new roads**
9. **Demand management**
10. **Making public transport cheaper than car use**

We have scored each party on these ten criteria using a 'traffic light' system:

-  no proposals or these are actively harmful;
-  proposals but these are vague, insufficient or do not go beyond existing ambitions;
-  a set of proposals that would provide a clear improvement or are particularly ambitious.

Text: Colin Howden & Marie Ferdelman

Design: Ana Soldatenko of Transform Creative

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THEMES IN THE MANIFESTOS

The theme perhaps most prominent across the manifestos is that of 'recovery', albeit with different emphases across the parties, with the Tories more prominently styling this as 'rebuilding' and the Greens most clearly framing this in terms of the climate crisis.

All of the main five parties' manifestos to some extent place their policies in the context of the climate emergency, yet this isn't something that has cut through into the mainstream media's coverage of the election – and certainly not through to the very modest coverage that transport has been given. Perhaps the two most prominent transport news stories has been coverage of the Tories' infrastructure proposals (which contained a long list of new road schemes, but little that would actually cut emissions) and the woefully ill-considered flying visit from the UK Labour leader Keir Starmer to Edinburgh Airport to flag-wave for more subsidies for the aviation industry.

All of the five parties commit to an increase in the share of investment to go into active travel. Three of the parties meet the long-standing demand that 10% of all transport budgets should be invested here (Tories, Greens, Labour) while the Lib Dems call for a doubling of existing levels, and the SNP 10% of the transport capital budget (which, while great, is not the same as 10% of all transport spending). The Greens go far beyond the 10%, saying that they would spend 20%.

Labour, the Lib Dems & the SNP all specify their support for 20-minute neighbourhoods, while the Greens define their support as being for 15-minute neighbourhoods (something that was new to us). The Tories instead say that Local Authorities should be "encouraged to create more low traffic neighbourhoods." None of the manifestos contain much in the way of specifics here, although we are minded to be somewhat more charitable here given that this policy itself remains in need of clarification.

All of the parties contain commitments to decarbonisation of bus, rail and ferry fleets. Not all parties refer to all three modes (e.g. the Tories omit reference to ferries), some cite specific funds they would promote (here the Tories cite specific funds for bus decarbonisation), but most are fairly unspecific. One eye-catching point is the SNP's commitment to decarbonising the "majority" of buses by 2023; this is great, but this will take an urgent, major programme of investment given that there are over 4,000 buses in Scotland and few of these are currently zero-carbon. The Tories make perhaps the clearest commitment to electrification of the Scottish inter-city rail network (and retain their commitment to a new Edinburgh-Perth rail line, a long-standing Transform demand) while the Lib Dems make commitments around alternative fuels for ferries.

It is rather strange that none of the three unionist parties make clear commitment to improving Anglo-Scottish rail links, while the two independence-seeking parties have quite strong positions here, the SNP pressing for faster journey times for Anglo-Scottish rail, including mention of "a high-speed East Coast line" while the Greens promote a Frequent Flier Levy as a replacement for Air Passenger Duty, with revenue used to "subsidise fares for longer distance rail travel from Scotland to England". The Tories do promise further commitments on Anglo-Scottish travel but only after the completion of the Union Connectivity Review; perversely, however, they commit themselves to A1 dualling, in direct conflict with their stance here.

There's very little in the manifestos about freight. Labour and the Lib Dems are the only parties to mention rail freight. The Greens want CalMac to provide freight services to the Continent. The Tories set out their 'free ports' proposals. Disappointingly, the SNP only mention air freight and ports.

Four of the five parties set out proposals for digital connectivity, with only the Greens failing to address this. None of the four specifically frame their digital proposals around its potential to reduce transport demand, and hence climate emissions: this is a strange omission, as this has been one of the few bright sides of the past year's experience of the pandemic.

The parties vary widely on roads policy. The Greens' policy is clearly the best of the five, indicating that they would cease funding capacity-increasing roads projects & instead transfer funds to road maintenance and sustainable transport. Labour's manifesto only talks about road safety, reliability and

maintenance. The Lib Dems support the (unsustainable) status quo, setting out their support for the A9 and A96 dualling projects. The Tories' manifesto is embarrassingly bad, calling for A1 dualling, a three-lane M8, and a Dundee northern bypass – on top of the SNP's existing roads programme; this is while setting out an ambition to "showcase Scotland as a world leader in tackling Climate Change and on environmental delivery." But at least one can get a handle on the Tories' (admittedly grim) list of road schemes: the SNP blankly state that they have a "wide range of proposed road building projects" and bring forward the risible suggestion of a "bridge from Gourrock to Dunoon". Most damaging is the suggestion that all of this is part of "balanced transport policy" in line with reducing car mileage by 20% by 2030. Greenwash can form no part of a 'balanced transport policy' and unlimited new road-building is not commensurate with a proclaimed "Green Transport Revolution".

None of the parties set out proposals for reform of the UK's broken transport pricing policies, which have seen car use become continually cheaper compared to public transport use. All of the parties promote electric vehicles; while EVs are definitely preferable to fossil fuel-powered cars, the lower price of use of EVs compared to fossil cars will make car use cheaper still.

The Greens do at least set out strong support for local road traffic demand management measures, setting out its support for "workplace parking levies, congestion charging and parking charges that disincentivise the use of the most polluting and larger vehicles." So perhaps even policies which pick up the disproportionate impact of SUVs? The Tories, Lib Dems & the SNP completely fail to mention demand management; this makes delivering a 20% cut in road traffic levels by 2030 very unlikely. However, by far the worst here is Labour who, having said that reducing the need for private cars should be a "national focus" then go on to call for abolition of local powers to implement workplace parking levy powers whilst providing no alternative demand management tools to reduce car use.

Four of the parties promote free public transport for young people, but with differing transport mode & age coverage. For the Greens, it's bus, rail and ferry travel for the under-26s; for Labour, it's bus & ferry travel for the under-25s; for the Lib Dems, bus & ferry travel for undefined-age "young people"; and the SNP free bus travel for the under-22s. The Tories make no commitments in this area, although they do call for flexible rail season tickets, something that we have separately called for. Of course, while free public transport for young people would undoubtedly make public transport more attractive for that age group, it will do nothing for the rest of the adult population – and that is the demographic that is most car-reliant. This can only be tackled through a comprehensive overhaul of transport pricing.

Overall, we have deep concerns regarding the credibility of many of the parties' commitments. Some of these will be extremely expensive to implement in financial terms (even if some of them would have wider economic and societal benefits). Whether one wants new roads or new railways, new decarbonised public transport fleets or free public transport, somebody is going to have to pay for these things – and we see nothing in these manifestos that demonstrates that the parties have clearly articulated plans for how this will be delivered. It is certainly true that some of the parties do make commitments to new general taxes (the Greens' proposals for a wealth tax on the very rich being the one to attract most attention), but parties also make spending commitments across a wide range of policy areas. As such, one cannot be clear which of the parties' transport commitments are actually deliverable in financial terms. Only the Greens come forward with new transport pricing policies, suggesting both a Frequent Flyer Levy and support for road pricing & parking levies at the local level. At the other extreme, the Tories' manifesto contains a long wishlist of infrastructure schemes – a lot of which would be massively climate-destructive, but some of which we strongly welcome – but, in a manifesto which contains numerous commitments to tax cuts, it is difficult to be anything but sceptical about the viability of its proposals.

So the polemic around sustainable transport has certainly moved forward. We can only join the SNP in its desire for a 'Green Transport Revolution'. Its manifesto includes many of the policies that are indeed needed for delivering such a transformation, but the credibility of its claims here are not defensible while it continues to promote unlimited new road-building and sets out no credible policies for traffic demand management that will be required to deliver its commitment to cut traffic levels by 20% by 2030. We've seen these targets made and then forgotten about before (see, for example, the 10% cycle modal share target). So whoever wins this election, what we need to see is detailed and specific plans for climate emission reduction from the transport sector, and less empty rhetoric about 'transport revolutions', green or otherwise.

SCOTTISH CONSERVATIVE AND UNIONIST PARTY

The Conservative manifesto commits 10% transport spend to active travel and includes some good policies on rail and bus, but nothing on traffic reduction or demand management. The huge new road-building programme makes it a disaster for climate change. Critically, there is nothing in the Conservative manifesto which sets out how any of this new infrastructure – road or rail – will be paid for. The rest of the manifesto speaks of tax cuts, so it's a 'more of everything' approach but with no credible plan to pay for it.

● ACTIVE TRAVEL PROVISION

There are some strong commitments on active travel and cycling in the manifesto, including 10% of transport budget going to active travel by the end of the Parliament and every Scottish city to have a cycle network designed for commuting.

● 20 MINUTE NEIGHBOURHOODS

The manifesto contains nothing on 20-minute neighbourhoods. However, Local Authorities should be "encouraged to create more low traffic neighbourhoods, bus and bike only roads, school streets and low emission zones where they would be beneficial."

● ZERO-EMISSION BUS & RAIL

There are no specific targets set out for completion of bus and rail decarbonisation. However, it does call for rail electrification, and sets out a multi-year commitment to the existing Scottish Ultra-Low Emission Bus Scheme and there are some good commitments to inter-city rail enhancements.

● DECARBONISING FERRIES

The manifesto includes nothing specific on ferry decarbonisation. Instead, it calls for the scrapping of CMAL & long-term contracts for operators.

● ANGLO-SCOTTISH AIR-RAIL SUBSTITUTION

Nothing on Anglo-Scottish rail, despite saying that "investment in cross-border infrastructure is vital." Instead it says we need to wait for results of the Union Connectivity Review. However, they have not waited before calling for A1 dualling, which is clearly a double standard.

● LONG-HAUL FREIGHT BY RAIL

There's a section on ports in the Conservative manifesto, but zero on rail freight despite this being the most sustainable form of freight.

● INVESTING IN DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

Some good commitments on digital connectivity in the manifesto. Although no framing in transport demand reduction, there is a clear commitment to connecting all homes and businesses to full fibre broadband by 2027.

● INVESTING IN ROAD MAINTENANCE OVER BUILDING NEW ROADS

The manifesto commits to a £200m road maintenance fund for Local Authorities over the course of the next Parliament. This is good, but that will do little to clear the existing £3,000 million road maintenance backlog. Instead the manifesto is embarrassingly bad on roads, calling for A1 dualling, a three-lane M8, and a Dundee northern bypass – on top of the existing roads programme. This stands in marked contrast to the aspiration to “showcase Scotland as a world leader in tackling Climate Change and on environmental delivery.”

● DEMAND MANAGEMENT

The manifesto includes nothing on traffic reduction or demand management – so no evidence that the Tories support the existing 20% traffic reduction target, and we are not going to meet our climate targets through EVs alone.

● MAKING PUBLIC TRANSPORT CHEAPER THAN CAR USE

There is a welcome commitment to rail flexible season tickets. However, with EVs cutting motoring costs, and no measures to make public transport fares more competitive, the Tory manifesto features no price incentives for modal shift to the more sustainable modes.

SCOTTISH GREEN PARTY

The Scottish Green Party manifesto includes a strong framing in the job creation potential of public transport. It also sets out a clear commitment to road traffic reduction and the use of demand management, including an unambiguous pledge to ending traffic-generating road construction.

● ACTIVE TRAVEL PROVISION

Strong section on active travel including a rise in budget from £100m to £320m, and up to 20% of the transport budget over the course of the Parliament; a national walking, wheeling and cycling network, and active highways; and 20mph default speed limits.

● 20 MINUTE NEIGHBOURHOODS

The manifesto promotes '15 minute neighbourhoods' rather than '20 minute neighbourhoods'. This seems rather brave given that policy is really only now being formed around the latter, but nothing like a bit of ambition!

● ZERO-EMISSION BUS & RAIL

Calls for "funded strategy with bus manufacturers and operators to electrify the fleet" but unfortunately contains nothing specific about rail electrification.

● DECARBONISING FERRIES

Ferries get their own section, with the key point being: "Develop a funded long-term green fleet replacement strategy to ensure all services throughout Scotland benefit from reliable, efficient and zero carbon ferries."

● ANGLO-SCOTTISH AIR-RAIL SUBSTITUTION

The manifesto promotes a frequent flier levy as a replacement for air passenger duty, with revenue used to "subsidise fares for longer distance rail travel from Scotland to England".

● LONG-HAUL FREIGHT BY RAIL

Freight is unfortunately largely omitted. There is reference to CalMac providing freight services to the Continent, but the more obvious topic of rail freight replacing road for long hauls is absent.

● INVESTING IN DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

There appears to be nothing about digital connectivity in the manifesto.

● INVESTING IN ROAD MAINTENANCE OVER BUILDING NEW ROADS

The manifesto is very strong on roads and 'fix it first': "We will cease funding road building projects that add capacity to the network and redirect funds toward safety improvements, maintenance of existing infrastructure, public transport, cycling and walking."

● DEMAND MANAGEMENT

The manifesto is strong on demand management: "schemes at the local level, including workplace parking levies, congestion charging and parking charges that disincentivise the use of the most polluting and larger vehicles." But it is not clear why only the local level is included.

● MAKING PUBLIC TRANSPORT CHEAPER THAN CAR USE

For local public transport, the focus for fares is free bus travel for the under-26s and extending that to rail & ferries. That will help, but unlikely to turn around long-term trends in transport prices which favour car use, and which will be worsened by the move to EVs. The demand management proposals would help making public transport more competitive.

SCOTTISH LABOUR PARTY

The Labour manifesto includes some welcome commitments including 10% of the transport budget for active travel and makes lots of promises for lower fares and new public transport. However the manifesto fails to show how any of this would be paid for – and even says it would abolish workplace parking levy.

● ACTIVE TRAVEL PROVISION

The manifesto commits to raising the active travel budget to 10% of the transport budget and building safe cycle routes, including 'active greenways' to connect rural areas. This is a welcome commitment, especially alongside promised reintroduction of targets for active travel mode share.

● 20 MINUTE NEIGHBOURHOODS

There is some good news on 20 minute neighbourhoods as well. Scottish Labour are promising neighbourhoods where "people can access all the services they need within a 20-minute walk" and creating low traffic neighbourhoods in all residential areas.

● ZERO-EMISSION BUS & RAIL

The manifesto includes some reasonable commitments to zero emission bus and rail, if all a bit vague and unspecific. It commits to decarbonising rail services within 15 years, but only to "promote" introduction of low-emission buses. This is all a bit too slow.

● DECARBONISING FERRIES

There's nothing specific on decarbonisation of ferry services in the manifesto, except reference to a "new fleet of ships fit for the future". The focus is instead on ownership of ferry services but there is nothing on how any of this will be paid for.

● ANGLO-SCOTTISH AIR-RAIL SUBSTITUTION

Absolutely nothing on Anglo-Scottish rail in Scottish Labour manifesto, except that the Caledonian Sleeper would be nationalised. Meantime the manifesto commits to funding for the aviation industry contingent on "a commitment ... that any support will be predicated on reducing CO2 emissions". This is wishful thinking: aviation has fought for decades to avoid action to reduce its climate change impacts.

● LONG-HAUL FREIGHT BY RAIL

Rail freight gets a mention in the Labour manifesto, albeit only these nine words: "We will better promote the use of rail freight."

● INVESTING IN DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

The Labour manifesto mentions investing in broadband and expanding 4G and 5G in rural areas in passing but provides no details on how or when this would be implemented.

● INVESTING IN ROAD MAINTENANCE OVER BUILDING NEW ROADS

The Labour manifesto somehow manages to largely omit mentioning Scotland's road-building programme by making vague remarks about road safety and reliability on major routes. It does speak about road maintenance, but again no specifics.

● DEMAND MANAGEMENT

The manifesto calls reducing the need for private cars a "national focus". It then goes on call for abolition of the workplace parking levy powers whilst providing no alternative demand management tools to reduce car use.

● MAKING PUBLIC TRANSPORT CHEAPER THAN CAR USE

The manifesto promises to expand free bus travel to under-25s and to ferry travel, expanding this to all in long-term. However, subsidising electric cars will only make private car journeys cheaper and more attractive for all other age groups in the short- to medium-term. The commitment to making rail journeys between Scottish cities faster than journeys by car would however provide an incentive to switch from car to rail.

SCOTTISH LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

The Scottish Liberal Democrat manifesto contains a welcome pledge to “limit air transport” and good policies on active travel, decarbonisation, and smart ticketing. But it contains nothing on demand management and the support for new roads damages climate credentials. And like other manifestos, it doesn’t include a clear explanation of how new transport spending commitments would be funded.

● ACTIVE TRAVEL PROVISION

There is good support for active travel in the manifesto, including the promise to “double share of budget spent on active travel”, support for the Active Freeway network, support to individuals to buy e-bikes, provision of cycling proficiency for all and mandatory fatal accident inquiry for all pedestrian deaths.

● 20 MINUTE NEIGHBOURHOODS

Positive support for 20-minute neighbourhoods but sadly no detail on how to achieve this.

● ZERO-EMISSION BUS & RAIL

Good commitments to zero emission bus and rail, if all a bit vague and unspecific. Better on decarbonisation of vehicle fleets, with a “legal presumption” that all new public sector fleets be “low carbon”.

● DECARBONISING FERRIES

Pleased to see decarbonisation commitments also included for ferries: “Make sure Scotland gets a good share of the benefits from the UK Government’s plan for alternative fuels for ferries, including by 2022 to start marine vessel trials in Orkney, and work towards hydrogen ports.”

● ANGLO-SCOTTISH AIR-RAIL SUBSTITUTION

Nothing specific about Anglo-Scottish rail, although, charitably, perhaps this is implied by the ‘limiting aviation’ section. Conversely, it calls for reopening for rail lines, although only the Borders extension to Carlisle is mentioned specifically.

● LONG-HAUL FREIGHT BY RAIL

Good to see rail freight getting a mention: “We will continue steps to get more freight onto railways to reduce congestion and pollution.” However, there is no more detail.

● INVESTING IN DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

Positive focus on digital connectivity and recognition of the importance of high-speed internet everywhere in Scotland. But there are no details on when better provision might be achieved.

● INVESTING IN ROAD MAINTENANCE OVER BUILDING NEW ROADS

Disappointing section on road building. There is no mention of new projects but also continued commitment to the A9 and A96 dualling, which is justified with outdated safety improvement justification; however, at least they are not calling for additional road-building.

● DEMAND MANAGEMENT

No mention of demand management in any form or of existing 20% road traffic reduction target. Instead, further support for road-building will only increase car dominance.

● MAKING PUBLIC TRANSPORT CHEAPER THAN CAR USE

The Lib Dems aim to expand free bus travel for young people to ferries and support Scotland-wide integrated transport tickets, which are both welcome commitments. But with EVs cutting car costs and no proposals for making public transport fares competitive, there is no price incentive for switching from car to public transport.

SCOTTISH NATIONAL PARTY

There are some welcome new pledges on active travel spend and bus decarbonisation in the SNP manifesto. It commits to the existing 20% traffic reduction aim, but there is no detail given and nothing on demand management. Together with the commitment to new road-building, this fatally damages the SNP's climate change credentials.

● ACTIVE TRAVEL PROVISION

The manifesto includes some strong commitments on active travel, particularly 10% of transport capital spend for active travel by the end of the next Parliament. This is limited to capital spend though, so not as high as the 10% of the overall transport budget that has been widely called for. The manifesto also includes commitment to a Scotland-wide active travel network and free bikes for children in low-income households.

● 20 MINUTE NEIGHBOURHOODS

There is a welcome commitment to 20 minute neighbourhoods. However, it is pretty unspecific on the how, when, where.

● ZERO-EMISSION BUS & RAIL

The section on zero emission bus and rail is strong, including a new commitment to decarbonising the "majority" of buses by 2023. It also includes rail decarbonisation by 2035, which was an existing commitment. We think this needs to be brought forward to 2030 but would be positive development.

● DECARBONISING FERRIES

Pleased to see decarbonisation commitments also included for ferries: "We will invest in more sustainable ferries, reducing the carbon footprint of our ferry fleet. We are committed to 30% of state-owned ferries being low emission by 2032."

● ANGLO-SCOTTISH AIR-RAIL SUBSTITUTION

A strong commitment in the manifesto towards pressing for faster journey times for Anglo-Scottish rail, including mention of "a high-speed East Coast line" and reinstating Borders Railway to Carlisle.

● LONG-HAUL FREIGHT BY RAIL

There is nothing specific on rail freight in the manifesto. The manifesto does promote “options for direct links to international markets from Scotland’s ports and airports”. So disappointing that the manifesto promotes air freight, but not the most sustainable form of freight for long hauls.

● INVESTING IN DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

There is lots on digital connectivity. Although not obviously framed as a measure to reduce transport demand, there are a number of specific proposals on how to expand high speed internet and mobile phone coverage.

● INVESTING IN ROAD MAINTENANCE OVER BUILDING NEW ROADS

The horrible section on new road-building fatally damages the climate change credentials. It supports the existing road-building programme plus additional road & bridge projects. It is not credible to be claiming a ‘Green Transport Revolution’ and also commit to unlimited new roads. The reference to the 20% target in this context is just greenwash.

● DEMAND MANAGEMENT

There is nothing on road traffic demand management in the SNP manifesto and there is absolutely zero chance of hitting that 20% traffic reduction target without action in this area.

● MAKING PUBLIC TRANSPORT CHEAPER THAN CAR USE

The manifesto commits to free bus travel for the under-22s. However, other than that, there’s very little that would indicate any strong move to make public transport cheaper than car use and all those new EVs are going to make car use cheaper still.

SUMMARY TABLE

CONSERVATIVES	GREENS	LABOUR	LIB DEMS	SNP	
					Active travel provision
					20 minute neighbourhoods
					Zero-emission bus & rail
					Decarbonising ferries
					Anglo-Scottish air-rail substitution
					Long-haul freight by rail
					Investing in digital connectivity
					Roads policy
					Demand management
					Making public transport cheaper than car use

-  no proposals or actively harmful proposals
-  proposals are vague, insufficient or do not go beyond existing ambitions
-  proposals that provide a clear improvement or are particularly ambitious