

# STUCK IN TRAFFIC

Meeting the Programme for  
Government Commitments  
on Sustainable Transport

September 2022

# INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Government can hardly be accused of ignoring climate change. In 2019 Nicola Sturgeon declared a 'climate emergency' and COP26 in November 2021 in Glasgow meant that the climate crisis received a large amount of attention in Scotland during those weeks. Beyond recognising the urgency of the climate crisis, the Scottish Government has committed to a broad range of interventions to reduce climate emissions. And with transport remaining the largest GHG emitting sector in Scotland,<sup>1</sup> there are a number of commitments that have been made that aim to significantly reduce these emissions.

However, setting the right targets is not enough. Following through on commitments and taking the actions necessary to reach those targets is essential to effectively address the climate crisis. This week the Scottish Government will publish its Programme for Government for 2022/23, which we would expect to include commitments on sustainable transport. But rather than just looking at what is being promised, we have decided to take a look back at Programmes for Government from the last three years since the climate emergency declaration, and consider how much progress has been made against these commitments.

We have selected a set of ten transport commitments from the Programmes for Government from 2019-20,<sup>2</sup> 2020-21<sup>3</sup> and 2021-22<sup>4</sup> to review progress on the implementation of these commitments. There are of course a far larger number of commitments in these PfGs but we have decided to focus on commitments to specific actions or targets rather than commitments that promise to 'explore' or 'investigate' options. We have also chosen to focus on the larger programmes that have the potential to produce modal shift on a larger scale. There are a number of commitments within these PfGs to initiatives that we welcome but that target relatively small groups of people and therefore will have a more limited impact on the transport system, which we are not including in this analysis. However, this should not be taken as indication of our lack of support for these measures. Some other major transport commitments from previous PfGs, such as bringing Scotrail into public ownership, are not included either. While this commitment was met, we do not expect that public ownership of Scotrail in itself will have an impact on climate emissions from the sector.

# PFG SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT COMMITMENTS

## KEY:



**Progress good**  
and/or target likely  
to be reached



**Progress slow**  
and/or risk of  
missing target



**No progress**  
and/or target is  
unlikely to be  
reached



**Increase the Active Travel Budget**



**Decarbonise Bus Fleets**



**Under 22s Free Bus Travel**



**Bus Priority Infrastructure Investment**



**Bus Priority on Glasgow Motorways**



**Decarbonise Rail Services by 2035**



**Low Emission Ferries**



**Fair Fares Review**



**Car Traffic Reduction**



**Phase Out of ICE Vehicles**



## INCREASE THE ACTIVE TRAVEL BUDGET

### Programme for Government 2021-22:

“Ensure that at least £320 million or 10% of the total transport budget goes on active travel by 2024-25”

### Progress

The Scottish budget<sup>5</sup> and the capital spending review<sup>6</sup> both indicate a rising proportion of the transport budget being spent on active travel. The major increase in ‘Support for Sustainable Active Travel’ in Capital Spending Review does not come until 2024/25, so it remains to be seen whether this commitment will be met but the trajectory is certainly moving in the right direction.

### Comment

So far the Scottish Government appears to plan to deliver what it has committed to, although it will take a few years before the major funding increase happens. There may also be questions further down the line of whether the funding can be effectively spent on high-quality infrastructure given long lead-in times and potential for nimby-opposition to schemes. But with the planned level of funding we are well on our way to being one of the leaders in Europe on per capita active travel spend.

## DECARBONISE BUS FLEETS

### Programme for Government 2021-22:

“remove the majority of diesel buses from public transport by the end of 2023”

### Progress

Scotland has approximately 3,700 licensed buses.<sup>7</sup> A response from Transport Scotland indicated that they do not hold information of the Scottish fleet make up. However, we understand that there are approximately 280 zero-emission buses operating in Scotland now and funding for another 325 has been awarded, so this should take the total number to just over 600 by the end of 2023. Approximately 16% of the Scottish bus fleet can be expected to be decarbonised by the end of 2023.

### Comment

With only approximately 16 months left to remove the majority of diesel buses from public service, it is unlikely that this target will be reached. The target was very ambitious when it was announced, so it is not particularly surprising that it will likely not be reached. However, the fact that the Scottish Government does not even appear to collect data on this target is rather unexpected.





## UNDER 22S FREE BUS TRAVEL

### Programme for Government 2021-22:

“provide nationwide free bus travel for Scotland’s young people aged under 22 from 31st January 2022”

### Progress

As announced the Young Persons’ Free Bus Travel Scheme launched on 31st January 2022. All young people between 5 and 21 years old are eligible for a card that allows them free bus travel across Scotland.<sup>8</sup>

### Comment

The Scottish Government has delivered what it promised and on schedule. However, there have been sustained problems with the application process, which is unnecessarily complex and prevents many young people from taking advantage of the card. There has also not been a national information campaign about the new entitlement, so uptake has depended on how actively local authorities, schools and parents have encouraged young people to apply. So while free bus travel for young people has been delivered, we are giving this commitment an amber rating, as the lack of information and complex application system have unnecessarily restricted access.

## BUS PRIORITY INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

### Programme for Government 2019-20:

“invest over £500 million in improved bus priority infrastructure to tackle the impacts of congestion on bus services and raise bus usage”

### Progress

The first round of funding from the Bus Partnership Fund was allocated in June 2021<sup>9</sup> for appraisals, business cases and ‘quick win’ interventions, with a second tranche being allocated in 2022. The total amount that has been allocated thus far is £25.8 million, just over 5% of the available funding.

### Comment

The first funding from the Bus Partnership Fund was allocated nearly two years after the Fund was announced in the Programme for Government. With the exception of the ‘quick wins’ the funding that has been allocated so far has only been for developing appraisals and businesses cases, with no money being allocated yet for substantive infrastructure. The covid-19 pandemic will likely have played a role in this but with bus travel already having been in decline and further suffering from the impacts of the pandemic, building bus priority measures should be treated with more urgency.





## BUS PRIORITY ON GLASGOW MOTORWAYS

### Programme for Government 2019-20:

“beginning plans to reallocate road space on parts of the motorway network around Glasgow to high-occupancy vehicles such as buses”

### Progress

Despite this commitment being announced in 2019 there have been no major developments so far. STPR2 Phase 1 recommended that reallocation of road space on the M8, M77 and M80 be pursued and referenced a report on this that was being produced by Transport Scotland.<sup>10</sup>

### Comment

Despite the urgent need for support for the bus sector, particularly after the covid-19 pandemic there appears to have been no progress on this commitment in the past 3 years.

## DECARBONISE RAIL SERVICES BY 2035

### Programme for Government 2019-22:

“reduce emissions from Scotland’s railways to zero by 2035”

### Progress

Transport Scotland’s map showing the plans for decarbonisation of routes continues to change but the completion date remains 2035.<sup>11</sup> In August of this year Transport Scotland and Scotrail set out plans on the government portal to procure the replacement train fleet that will be required for decarbonisation.

### Comment

Good progress is being made but the 2035 date to complete all this work and introduce a new train fleet must be seen as ambitious and there may be some slippage over time. It will be important to harmonise the replacement of rolling stock with the progress of electrification. This appears to be happening and probably explains the shifting timescales and priorities of the different elements of the work.





## LOW EMISSION FERRIES

### Programme for Government 2021-22:

"We will ensure that 30% of state owned ferries are low emission by 2032"

### Progress

The share of low emission ferries was at 8% in 2021, which aligned with the expected proportion of low-carbon ferries according to the Climate Change Plan Monitoring Report.<sup>12</sup>

### Comment

CalMac are already operating three diesel-electric hybrid ferries. The two ferries that are currently under construction by Ferguson Marine are also considered to be low emission ferries, as they use LNG fuel. However, while LNG does improve air quality it leads to higher methane emissions, which are a highly damaging greenhouse gas.<sup>13</sup> So while the programme is on track by the government's own measures, we would question whether it will indeed deliver the necessary reductions in climate emissions.

## FAIR FARES REVIEW

### Programme for Government 2021-22:

"commission a Fair Fares Review to ensure a sustainable and integrated approach to transport fares"



### Progress

The Scottish Government announced a Fair Fares Review in the PfG one year ago but so far there has not been any action to follow through on this commitment.

### Comment

The complete lack of progress on a Fair Fares Review is of great concern. It follows a long period of promises regarding integrated ticketing with very little progress on the issue. But with bus fares rising well above inflation for decades and the cost of living crisis making transport unaffordable for increasing numbers of Scots a review of transport pricing and structuring is essential and urgent.



## CAR TRAFFIC REDUCTION

### Programme for Government 2021-22:

“achieve a 20% reduction in car kilometres driven by 2030”

#### Progress

In January 2022 the Scottish Government published a route map for reaching the target, initially announced in the Climate Change Plan update 2020. This route map relies heavily on other already existing targets and commitments (some of which are included in this table) and commits to producing a demand management framework by 2025.<sup>14</sup>

#### Comment

While the route map is an important step towards implementing interventions that will deliver the promised traffic reduction it is still unclear when many of the interventions will be implemented and how effective they will be at delivering the target. Car kms have increased to pre-Covid levels and the historical trend has been upwards. Achieving this target will require reversing this trend and reducing car travel to a level last recorded in 1994.<sup>15</sup> Whether the proposed interventions will deliver this reduction and in the required time is highly questionable.

## PHASE OUT OF ICE VEHICLES

### Programme for Government 2019-20:

“creating conditions to phase out the need for all new petrol and diesel vehicles in Scotland’s public sector fleet by 2030”

#### Progress

This commitment was strengthened in the 2021-22 PfG, widening the phase out to all new cars.

#### Comment

The phase out of ICE vehicles still stands and aligns with the UK commitment for a phase out.<sup>16</sup> While it remains too early to say with certainty that this commitment will be delivered, there is currently no reason to believe that it might not be.





# MORE PROMISES THAN ACTION

The Scottish Government is certainly making progress on its commitments in some areas but it is notable that the commitments that we have given a 'green light' to are those that do not require any implementation at this point and simply remain on track by virtue of the Scottish Government not having retracted the commitment. Where specific action by the Scottish Government is required now, it becomes more complicated.

There are a number of infrastructure projects where we believe more action should have already been taken, given how urgently change is required and when the commitment was made. This particularly affects bus priority interventions. In other cases there has been progress but not necessarily enough to give the confidence that the target will be reached by the given date, such as in the cases of bus and rail decarbonisation and traffic reduction. Some of these targets may still be reached but that will require significant political will and prioritisation of these projects.

One mode of transport that is conspicuously missing from this list of PfG commitments is aviation. The Scottish Climate Change Plan does include a target to decarbonise internal flights in Scotland by 2040<sup>17</sup> but there are no shorter term commitments included in any PfG from the last few years that try to address emissions from the most polluting form of transport.

While we have highlighted commitments from previous PfGs here, making promises followed by no or insufficient action to deliver on them is a problem that we observe with commitments made in other policy documents and plans as well. Whether it is the Climate Change Plan or STPR2,<sup>18</sup> the Scottish Government has a track record of promising ambitious interventions and targets and then delays or drops these without taking any or only half-hearted action. Some examples of this include the target to reach a 10% cycling mode share, which was quietly dropped, or the pavement parking ban, which still has not been implemented. With regard to infrastructure projects there are many other examples, there is no evident progress on the Clyde Metro project, while high-speed cross-border rail investment has stalled.<sup>19</sup> Not all of these lie within the sole responsibility of the Scottish Government but both of the infrastructure examples mentioned are identified as strategic projects in STPR2 and should be considered a high priority by the Scottish Government.

Changing travel behaviours is difficult and infrastructure projects can be extremely complex and difficult to deliver but the challenges that we are facing in the transport sector require urgent action. Climate change and the cost of living crisis require a transition to a low carbon, affordable transport system that does not force people into expensive and polluting car dependency but provides viable alternatives. The Scottish Government says it supports many of the interventions necessary to get there and we expect that these will be reiterated this week when the new Programme for Government is announced. Maybe there will even be some additional new commitments on transport. But what Scotland truly needs is not another programme of promises but a programme of action.

# ENDNOTES

- 1** <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/scottish-transport-statistics-2021/chapter-13-environment/>
- 2** <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2019/09/protecting-scotlands-future-governments-programme-scotland-2019-20/documents/governments-programme-scotland-2019-20/governments-programme-scotland-2019-20/govscot%3Adocument/governments-programme-scotland-2019-20.pdf>
- 3** <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2020/09/protecting-scotland-renewing-scotland-governments-programme-scotland-2020-2021/documents/protecting-scotland-renewing-scotland/protecting-scotland-renewing-scotland/govscot%3Adocument/protecting-scotland-renewing-scotland.pdf>
- 4** <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2021/09/fairer-greener-scotland-programme-government-2021-22/documents/fairer-greener-scotland-programme-government-2021-22/fairer-greener-scotland-programme-government-2021-22/govscot%3Adocument/fairer-greener-scotland-programme-government-2021-22.pdf>
- 5** <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/corporate-report/2021/12/scottish-budget-2022-23/documents/scottish-budget-2022-23/scottish-budget-2022-23/govscot%3Adocument/scottish-budget-2022-23.pdf>
- 6** <https://www.gov.scot/publications/investing-jobs-capital-spending-review-2021-22-2025-26/documents/>
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- 8** <https://www.transport.gov.scot/concessionary-travel/young-persons-free-bus-travel-scheme/>
- 9** <https://www.transport.gov.scot/news/up-to-236-million-to-improve-bus-services/>
- 10** <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/49062/str2-phase-1-ast-project-10-bus-priority-3-feb-2021.pdf>
- 11** <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/47906/rail-services-decarbonisation-action-plan.pdf>
- 12** <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/progress-report/2021/05/climate-change-plan-monitoring-reports-2021-compendium/documents/climate-change-plan-monitoring-reports-2021-compendium/climate-change-plan-monitoring-reports-2021-compendium/govscot%3Adocument/climate-change-plan-monitoring-reports-2021-compendium.pdf>
- 13** <https://www.transportenvironment.org/discover/lng-remains-deadend-decarbonising-maritime-transport/>
- 14** <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/a-route-map-to-achieve-a-20-per-cent-reduction-in-car-kilometres-by-2030/>
- 15** <https://spice-spotlight.scot/2020/12/16/back-to-the-future-reducing-car-travel-in-scotland/>
- 16** <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-takes-historic-step-towards-net-zero-with-end-of-sale-of-new-petrol-and-diesel-cars-by-2030>
- 17** <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2020/12/securing-green-recovery-path-net-zero-update-climate-change-plan-20182032/documents/update-climate-change-plan-2018-2032-securing-green-recovery-path-net-zero/update-climate-change-plan-2018-2032-securing-green-recovery-path-net-zero/govscot%3Adocument/update-climate-change-plan-2018-2032-securing-green-recovery-path-net-zero.pdf>
- 18** <https://www.transport.gov.scot/our-approach/strategy/strategic-transport-projects-review-2/>
- 19** <https://transform.scot/blog/2021/10/26/from-plane-to-train-achieving-modal-shift-in-anglo-scottish-travel/>

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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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