Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee  
Inquiry into air quality in Scotland  
Written submission from Johnston Orr

Does Scotland have the right policies (Clean Air for Scotland Strategy), support and incentives in place to adequately tackle air pollution?

No. The draft of the emissions reduction strategy overlooks active travel almost entirely (relegated to Policy Outcome 8 and no further funding allocated to it), and relies largely on others to effect change (9.2.10, 9.2.13 for example). It seems unwise to rely on the car industry on emissions, given their proven history of lying and putting corporate profits ahead of health in the recent emissions scandals. And electric cars do nothing to address congestion and obesity. Sitting back and waiting for others to do your job for you doesn't strike me as a very impressive strategy. Even more so when you look at northerly cities such as Montreal, Oslo, and Copenhagen and their approach to carbon-free urban transportation that supports a healthy active lifestyle. I suggest that the solution already exists and is known to deliver significant economic and health benefits as well as reducing emissions to zero - and that solution isn't electric cars.

How does the Scottish policy fit with the UK and EU policy on air quality?

The Scottish policy fits perfectly well with the UK policy which is also car-centric and conservative and makes no real attempt to improve air quality. If the EU policy actually addresses the health of the citizens of the EU, then the Scottish policy doesn’t fit with a genuine attempt to tackle air pollution.

Are the policies sufficiently ambitious?

Not even remotely. They are conservative and are carried out in a begrudging manner, reliant on the car industry renowned for its lies on air pollution. They ignore the link to health and improved economic performance that active travel brings (as proven in numerous studies). In short, they wilfully ignore the low-cost solution that already exists and has been proven to be a success in wealthy and healthy Scandinavia (which has a more extreme climate than Scotland).

Are the policies and delivery mechanisms (support and incentives) being effectively implemented and successful in addressing the issues?

Spending only 1.6% of the transport budget (down from 1.8%) on active travel whilst continuing to increase spending on trunk roads is a major barrier to the successful delivery of air quality objectives. Failing to understand the concepts of induced demand (and traffic evaporation) underlies this.

Whilst there is no need to ring-fence the transport budget, a bare minimum of 10% should be spent on active travel. This requires no new money - only a rebalancing of spending to remove the discrimination against those on lower incomes who are less
likely to own a car. Fairness in transport spending (10%+ on active travel) is therefore democratic and socially progressive.

Is Scotland on target to have a pilot low emission zone (LEZ) in place by 2018 and should there be more than one LEZ pilot?

A sample size of 1 is inadequate. Three LEZs should be implemented, in different cities in different parts of Scotland.

How should the improvement of air quality be prioritised in areas where there have been persistent breaches of NO₂ limit values?

It should be treated as the public health emergency that it is. Private cars with internal combustion engines should immediately be banned to remove the pressing threat to human health, as these are the majority of road users. Their drivers have no right to damage the health of others indiscriminately.

Are there conflicts in policies or barriers to successful delivery of the air quality objectives?

Regulatory capture and lobbying by the car and petrochemical industries is a major barrier to the successful delivery of air quality objectives.

A complete absence of evidence-based policy around transport is a major barrier to the successful delivery of air quality objectives.

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Wilfully ignoring proven solutions that deliver clean air, health and economic benefits because they don’t involve the car is a major barrier to the successful delivery of air quality objectives.

Having Sustrans (a charity!) managing active travel projects is a barrier to the successful delivery of air quality objectives as shared use paths and unsurfaced indirect routes will not encourage people to make everyday journeys under their own power. Only safe high-quality direct and segregated routes for people on foot and people on bikes will encourage people to choose active travel over polluting cars. “Transport” Scotland will remain Cars Scotland until it realises that the issue it should be focusing on is moving people, not moving cars (only). “Transport” Scotland needs to encompass active travel and prioritise it in spending and in policy.