

TRANSFORM SCOTLAND

WRITTEN SUBMISSION

1. About Transform Scotland

1.1 Transform Scotland is the national sustainable transport alliance. We campaign for a more sensible transport system, one less dependent on unsustainable modes such as the car, the plane and road freight, and more reliant on sustainable modes like walking, cycling, public transport, and freight by rail or sea. We are a membership organisation bringing together rail, bus and shipping operators; local authorities; national environment and conservation organisations; local environment and transport campaign groups; and individual supporters.

2 Scope of our response

2.1 Given the scope of our organisation's interests, our evidence is restricted to commenting on to what extent the Scottish Budget contributes to improving performance on the following National Indicators:

- Increase the proportion of journeys to work made by public or active transport
- Reduce traffic congestion
- Reduce Scotland's carbon footprint.

3 Comments on consistency between draft budget and relevant National Indicators

3.1 Increase the proportion of journeys to work made by public or active transport

- As the Scottish Government itself reports, there has been no progress on this National Indicator: the modal share for the sustainable transport modes for 2012 remains below that seen in 2006.ⁱ
- In recent years' Scottish Budgets, expenditure on the sustainable transport modes (walk, cycle, bus, rail, ferry) has remained largely unchanged. At the same time, there has been a vast increase (almost 40%) in expenditure on new road-building: the 'Motorways and Trunk Roads' line increased from £498.9m in 2008-09 to a budgeted figure of £690.4m for 2013-14.

- Given the current administration’s emphasis on spending on new roads and failure to prioritise investment in sustainable transport, it is unsurprising that the modal share of these modes is not significantly increasing (and in the case of buses, the largest public transport mode, decreasing).

3.2 Reduce traffic congestion

- The Scottish Government again reports no progress on this Indicator.ⁱⁱ
- For the same reasons as cited above — that the balance of expenditure has been moved into new roads rather than providing alternatives to road use — we are unsurprised at the lack of progress here.
- We imagine that the Scottish Government will argue that its programme of new road-building will reduce traffic congestion levels: however, we consider that this suggestion is deeply misguided and its impacts counter-productive. There has been a long-standing consensus in the professional transport literature that the construction of new road capacity in and around congested urban areas will, as a rule, generate new, higher levels of traffic and as a result render any road congestion relief as transitory and short-lived. Indeed, that was the specific finding of the Scottish Government’s own modelling for the M74 Northern Extension project and early reports have suggested that this is coming to fruition as forecast. We fully expect the congestion relief impacts from the second Forth road bridge and/or Aberdeen western bypass projects to be similarly transitory in nature. More fundamentally, projects of this sort are counter-productive as they encourage and lock in car dependency and, as a result of their excessive cost, crowd out investment in sustainable transport alternatives (as can be seen from the trend in recent years’ Scottish Budgets).

3.3 Reduce Scotland’s carbon footprint

- Here the Scottish Government reports that performance is worsening.ⁱⁱⁱ It is well known that the Government has missed its first two annual targets under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.
- Transport is a significant contributor to climate emissions, being the second-largest sector for emissions.
- Again, for the reasons cited above — that the balance of expenditure has been moved into new roads rather than providing alternatives to road use — we are unsurprised at the lack of progress here.

3.4 Summary comments on performance against National Indicators

3.4.1 We welcome the ICI Committee’s decision to measure the spending priorities within the Scottish Budget against the National Indicators in the National Performance Framework. We would hope that the Committee

will make specific recommendation in its report that in future years' Budgets that expenditure decisions be explained as to how they will contribute to the National Indicators.

3.4.2 As indicated by our comments above, we cannot currently identify a linkage between the Scottish Government's expenditure priorities and the achieving progress on the National Indicators that we have highlighted above. Indeed, we believe that the current administration's focus for expenditure is counter-productive as regards moving the trends seen in these Indicators in the right direction.

3.4.3 Furthermore, we are unaware of any changes to Scottish Government spending priorities in order to meet adverse trends in the above Indicators. For example, we would have expected the failure of the Scottish Government to meet its first two annual targets under the Climate Change Scotland (Act) 2009 to lead it to rebalance expenditure in favour of measures that would reduce climate emissions from the transport sector (the second largest source of emissions). However, there is little indication of this in its spending decisions set out in its Draft Budget for 2014-15.

4 Other issues in relation to the draft budget which are pertinent to the Committee's remit

4.1 The Committee should again recommend that the Scottish Government provide clarity regarding expenditure on active travel

4.1.1 The Committee will have heard in detail from cycle interest groups regarding the opaqueness of the Scottish Government's expenditure plans for active travel investment. Transform Scotland has for many years in its own Budget submissions called for greater clarity on the treatment of this issue and we welcome the ICI Committee's recommendations along these lines in its report on last year's Budget.^{iv}

4.1.2 This year's Budget provides no advance on this situation. We neither know nor care whether this vagueness is due to administrative failure or as a result of a deliberate policy of obfuscation. What we do know is that this failure has led to an almost complete breakdown in trust from ourselves and our member organisations in the figures presented by the Government to Parliament. We are unable to understand why the Government can present reasonably transparent information on expenditure on roads, railways, buses, ferries, etc. but refuses to make similarly clear information available on expenditure on walking and cycling.

4.2 We would hope that the Committee would again make specific recommendations on this issue.

4.3 General comments regarding expenditure priorities that would assist sustainable transport and the Scottish economy

4.3.1 We believe that the Scottish Government's expenditure plans should focus public expenditure on assisting investment by small-scale, local, Scottish companies and public bodies:

- Making road maintenance the focus of the Government's roads policy would have a greater impact in supporting Scottish companies and public bodies. Tackling the road maintenance backlog rather building new roads would (i) Provide employment for the Scottish construction industry and local authorities' Direct Labour Organisations; (ii) Support Scottish local authority finances rather than the profits of foreign construction companies; (iii) Spread investment across Scotland; (iv) Would not generate new road traffic and hence would make a contribution to reducing climate emissions; and (v) Would benefit pedestrians, cyclists and bus users as well as private vehicle users.
- Increased investment in active travel infrastructure would benefit Scottish suppliers as such investment (e.g. paths for cyclists and walkers) is typically built by small civil engineering contractors and local authorities, with the materials used often sourced locally. This would not only boost local economies and support local jobs but would also improve health and save emissions. We would draw the Committee's attention to the evidence submitted by Sustrans Scotland to the ICI Committee in its consideration of Scottish Budget 2012-13.^v This lists the variety of Scottish organisations (civil engineering contractors, stewardship/maintenance contractors, Direct Labour Organisations and other suppliers) spread across all of Scotland supported by Sustrans' work in creating active travel infrastructure. Given the scale of the annual transport budget (c. £2 billion), there should be ample opportunity to increase investment in active travel from its current level (c. £20m p.a.) to around £40m p.a. in line with the call by Stop Climate Chaos Scotland, of which we are a member.
- Establishing Scotland as a centre of excellence in sustainable technology for public transport. Scotland doesn't make cars — but we do make buses. Scotland has Britain's largest bus manufacturer in Falkirk-based Alexander Dennis Limited, and also features two of the world's largest public transport operators in FirstGroup and Stagecoach. The Scottish Government's Low Carbon Vehicles (LCVs) policy should build on this home-grown experience and take the lead in developing sustainable automotive technology for all forms of public transport: buses, trams, trains and ferries. In order to give a specific boost to the uptake of low-carbon bus technology, the Government should put in place a programme to upgrade the whole of Scotland's bus fleet (over 4,000 buses) to low-carbon technology through a significant expansion of the Scottish Greener Bus Fund (which has so far provided for fewer than 100 low-carbon buses).

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References

- i <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Performance/scotPerforms/indicator/transport>
- ii <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Performance/scotPerforms/indicator/congestion>
- iii <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Performance/scotPerforms/indicator/carbon>
- iv See para 140 of <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/57606.aspx>.
- v Available at http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_InfrastructureandCapitalInvestmentCommittee/General%20Documents/Written_evidence_from_Sustrans.pdf.

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