

**Public Audit Committee**

**Wednesday, 23 April 2025**

**12th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)**

## **Sustainable transport: reducing car use**

### **Introduction**

1. At its meeting today, the Public Audit Committee will take evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Director General Net Zero, Transport Scotland and COSLA on the joint Auditor General for Scotland (AGS) and Accounts Commission report, [Sustainable Transport: reducing car use](#), which was published on 30 January 2025. A copy of the report can be found at **Annexe A**.
2. The Committee previously heard evidence from the AGS and the Accounts Commission on the report at its [meeting on 26 February 2025](#). The Committee received [follow up correspondence from the AGS](#) and this can be found at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee will decide any further action it wishes to take following the evidence session today.

**Clerks to the Committee**

**April 2025**

# Sustainable transport

Reducing car use



ACCOUNTS COMMISSION 

AUDITOR GENERAL 

Prepared by Audit Scotland  
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## Accessibility

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# Key messages

- 1** Transport is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Scotland. In 2020, the Scottish Government set an ambitious but very challenging target to reduce car kilometres driven by 20 per cent by 2030. It still does not have a clear plan to achieve this. A lack of leadership has resulted in minimal progress against the demanding policy intention. It is not clear if the Scottish Government remains committed to the target as key documents remain in draft form, there is no costed delivery plan or measurable milestones, and arrangements for monitoring and scrutinising progress are insufficient.
- 2** Councils have an important role in reducing car use, but some prioritise contributing to the target more than others and they face different challenges in doing so. It is more difficult to deliver change in rural areas with longer distances to travel and an inadequate public transport network. Councils need clearer guidance and direction from the Scottish Government on their role in supporting delivery of the target.
- 3** Scottish Government and council spending on measures to reduce car use is complex, fragmented and lacks transparency. One-year funding makes it difficult for bodies to plan and deliver longer-term projects. Transport Scotland and councils do not record how much is spent specifically on the target to reduce car use. The Scottish Government spends significant amounts of money on interventions that could reduce car use, such as concessionary bus travel and active travel, but it has not

considered how to target funding to have the most impact on car use. Because of uncertainty about funding, councils and others have found the first year of introducing changes to how active travel is delivered difficult.

- 4 Car use has rebounded since the Covid-19 pandemic with public transport use decreasing in the last decade and active travel rates fluctuating. It is unlikely that the Scottish Government will achieve its target of reducing car kilometres driven by 20 per cent by 2030. It has not said how this will affect its wider ambitions to achieve net zero emissions by 2045. The Scottish Government and councils will find it hard to significantly reduce transport emissions unless they make difficult and potentially unpopular decisions to discourage car use.
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# Recommendations

## **The Scottish Government should:**

- As soon as possible, clarify its commitment to reducing transport emissions through the car kilometre target and how it aligns with the new carbon budget approach towards its climate change policy.
- By the end of 2025, at the latest, publish a realistic delivery plan that sets out how it will work with partners to achieve the restated target. This should include the impact Scottish Government, councils and Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) are expected to have, clear roles and responsibilities, timescales, costs, and an appropriate monitoring and evaluation plan.
- In 2025, publish guidance for councils on how to reduce car use and the need to travel in their communities. This should be aligned with the national planning framework and include the role that rural councils can play.
- By the end of 2025, review the first full year of the new system for active travel delivery, identify challenges and address them. It should evaluate the impact of the changes and whether they have resulted in more efficient delivery.
- In 2025, start a national conversation with the public about their travel choices using effective behaviour change techniques to educate and encourage people to reduce their car use.

## **The Scottish Government and COSLA should:**

- By the end of the 2024/25 financial year, confirm the joint governance and collective accountability arrangements for delivering, overseeing and scrutinising progress towards the 20 per cent car kilometre target. These arrangements should include clear roles and responsibilities and have membership from across the Scottish Government, councils and RTPs.

## **The Scottish Government, councils and RTPs should:**

- From 2025, report annually through the climate change monitoring report, and local and regional transport strategy updates, on how spending in the year has affected the desired outcomes of fewer people using their car and more people travelling via sustainable modes such as active travel and public transport.

- Use the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) process to consult with communities, businesses and the third sector to ensure that efforts to reduce car use are part of a just transition and do not deepen inequalities. The EQIA should clearly capture how bodies have fully involved different groups and considered their needs as part of their decision-making.

### **Councils and RTPs should:**

- As part of their Local Transport Strategies and Regional Transport Strategies, set out to what extent they will contribute to the 20 per cent car kilometre target. This should include measurable key performance indicators, costs and timescales.
- Regularly share good practise and learning, including their detailed analysis of how to achieve the target in their local area.



# Background

## Domestic transport is Scotland's largest source of greenhouse gas emissions

**1.** In 2019, the Scottish Government declared a climate emergency and went on to set challenging new emission reduction targets, including a target of **net zero** greenhouse gas emissions by 2045. It also announced interim targets, including a 75 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 (based on 1990 levels). The **Climate Change Committee** (CCC) advised at the time that achieving the 2030 interim target would be extremely challenging.<sup>1</sup>

**2.** Reducing emissions from transport is crucial to achieving net zero targets. Domestic transport is the largest source of emissions in Scotland, accounting for 28 per cent of all emissions ([Exhibit 1, page 8](#)). Domestic transport emissions are reducing at a slower rate than emissions from most other sectors. Emissions from cars make up the largest share of all domestic transport emissions.

**3.** Reducing transport emissions will be achieved through encouraging wider behavioural changes, such as persuading more people to use public transport and **active travel**, reducing the need to travel, and technological advances such as increasing the uptake of electric vehicles.

**4.** The Scottish Government's [update to its 2018 Climate Change Plan](#) includes policies to achieve the new emission reduction targets. This includes a target to reduce car kilometres driven by 20 per cent by 2030, compared with 2019 levels. Transport Scotland and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)'s draft [routemap](#) sets out the four key behaviours to achieve the target to reduce car use:

- reducing the need to travel
- choosing local destinations
- switching modes of transports
- combining or sharing car trips.



### Net zero

The process where emissions are cut to as close to zero as possible with any remaining emissions re-absorbed from the atmosphere.

### Climate Change Committee

An independent body which advises the UK and Scottish governments on emissions targets and reports on progress.

### Active travel

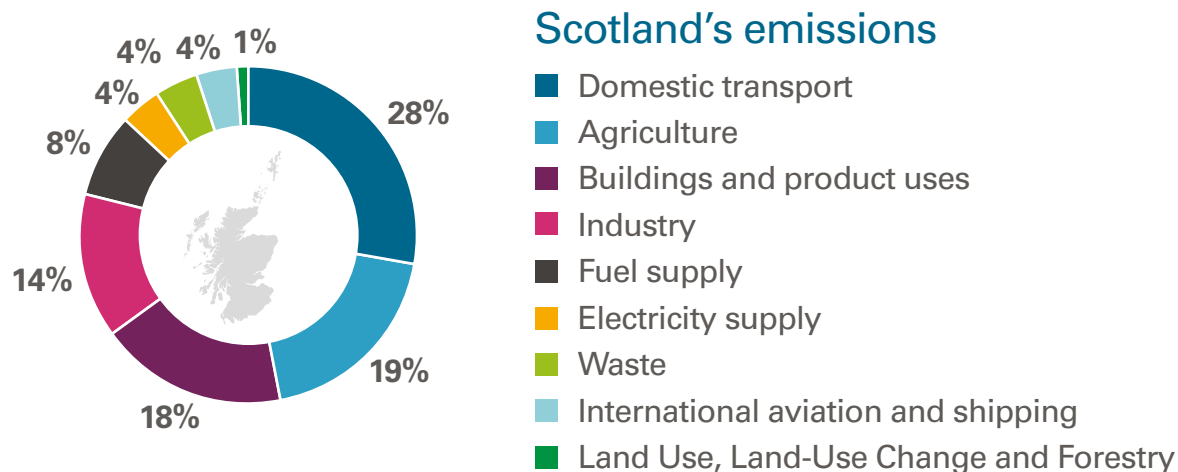
Involves travelling in a way that includes some level of activity – most often walking, cycling or wheeling a wheelchair.



## Exhibit 1.

### Greenhouse gas emissions by sector in 2022

Domestic transport makes up the largest share of Scotland's emissions.



Note: Buildings and product uses includes emissions from combustion on residential, public sector and commercial sites, including from air conditioning and refrigeration.

Source: Scottish Greenhouse Gas Statistics 2022, Scottish Government

**5.** The Scottish Government set the target to reduce **car kilometres** driven and is responsible for the overall Climate Change Plan. It has delegated responsibility for delivering this target to **Transport Scotland**. Councils, other Scottish Government directorates and **RTPs** deliver many of the interventions that aim to reduce car use.

**6.** The routemap does not expect every area in Scotland to reduce car kilometres travelled by 20 per cent by 2030, nor does it expect every individual to reduce their personal mileage by the same amount.



#### Calculating car kilometres

The Department for Transport uses automatic and manual traffic counters on key roads to calculate the number of kilometres driven nationally and locally. The calculations rely on some assumptions to extend the count data nationally.



#### Transport Scotland

Transport Scotland is the Scottish Government's national transport agency. On behalf of Scottish ministers, it is responsible for developing and delivering the Scottish Government's national transport policy, including policy relating to bus, rail and active travel, and managing transport infrastructure.



#### Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs)

There are seven RTPs across Scotland. They bring together councils and other key regional stakeholders to take a strategic approach to transport in their region. They have a statutory duty to produce a regional transport strategy (RTS). Some RTPs also deliver public transport in their area.

## **The Scottish Government has regularly failed to achieve its emission reduction targets, and has dropped its commitment to reduce emissions by 75 per cent by 2030**

**7.** The Scottish Government has missed its annual emission reduction targets in eight of the last 12 years. The CCC said in March 2024 that the target to reduce emissions by 75 per cent by 2030 is not credible.<sup>2</sup>

**8.** The Scottish Parliament passed legislation in November 2024 that removed the target to reduce emissions by 75 per cent by 2030, although it remains committed to achieving net zero by 2045. The Scottish Government will develop five-year carbon budgets instead. This has delayed its next Climate Change Plan update, which was due by March 2025. The Scottish Government has not outlined how the change will affect its commitment to the car kilometre target.

### **About the audit**

**9.** This report has been prepared on behalf of the Auditor General for Scotland (AGS) and the Accounts Commission. It is part of a wider programme of climate change audits being carried out by Audit Scotland on behalf of the AGS and the Accounts Commission. It follows 2023 audit work assessing the [Scottish Government's governance and risk management arrangements for climate change](#) and the 2024 report on [decarbonising heat in buildings](#). The role of public audit in, and our and our approach to, supporting the public sector in delivering climate change ambitions is set out in [Auditing climate change: Our strategy](#).

**10.** This audit considers the progress that the Scottish Government and councils are making towards the target to reduce car use. The audit looks at:

- the strategic, governance and leadership arrangements that are in place nationally and locally to meet the target
- the delivery arrangements for interventions which encourage people to switch from car use to more sustainable forms of transport and reduce the need to travel
- progress made to date in delivering the target to reduce car use.

**11.** Our findings and recommendations are based on evidence gathered through reviewing documents, analysing data and interviews with the Scottish Government, Transport Scotland, RTPs, and councils. We also spoke with key stakeholders, including the CCC, COSLA, third sector delivery partners and the Improvement Service.

**12.** We adopted a case study approach to scrutinise the work of councils. Our case study councils are Glasgow City Council, Aberdeenshire Council and Dumfries and Galloway Council. The audit also assessed the work of the Tayside and Central Scotland Transport Partnership (Tactran) in delivering sustainable transport.

**13.** Although electric vehicles contribute to reducing transport emissions, this audit will focus on Scottish Government and councils' activities to reduce car use. Audit Scotland is considering separate work on the transition to electric vehicles and the charging network as part of its future work programme.

# 1. An ambitious target

## The Scottish Government set an ambitious, but very challenging, target to reduce car kilometres driven by 20 per cent by 2030

**14.** The Scottish Government's car kilometre target was developed to help reduce emissions by 75 per cent by 2030. The Scottish Government wanted to set an ambitious target on car use to show leadership, but for several reasons it is unlikely that it could achieve it by 2030:

- The Scottish Government introduced the car kilometre target during the Covid-19 pandemic when levels of car traffic had decreased significantly. Before this, car traffic had been increasing every year since 2010. To achieve the target, car traffic levels will need to decrease by 7.3 billion kilometres to 29.3 billion compared to a 2019 baseline. The last time car traffic levels were at this level was in 1994.
- Demand management measures are crucial to reducing car use ([paragraphs 83–86](#)), but the Scottish Government and councils do not have the powers to introduce all schemes. For example, the Scottish Government does not have powers over fuel duty and vehicle excise duty, and it is unclear how it will deliver the target within its existing powers. Councils are not able to enforce local charging options. It will take time to acquire and introduce all the necessary powers and for them to start reducing car use.
- Transport Scotland consulted on the draft routemap but not on the target before it was introduced. Earlier engagement would have allowed stakeholders, particularly those from rural areas, to explain the challenges of contributing to the national target and to present alternatives.
- The target was not accompanied by dedicated funding or a clear delivery plan with milestones to measure progress against ([Part 2](#)).
- Modelling commissioned by Transport Scotland to understand how to meet the emissions targets only considered a 20 per cent reduction, based on its assessment of the transport sector. It is possible that with a different choice of measures, for example increasing electric vehicle take-up, that the Scottish Government could have adopted a different car use reduction target.

**15.** Several stakeholders welcomed the Scottish Government's commitment to tackling car dependency, recognising that it was a policy-based target aimed at galvanising action. The CCC said the ambitious

target went beyond the actions of other governments across the UK<sup>3</sup> but has consistently recommended that the Scottish Government produce a clear delivery plan.

## The Scottish Government recognises that the current transport system drives inequalities

**16.** The Scottish Government and COSLA recognise that the current transport system drives inequalities. It prioritises car ownership at the expense of other transport modes. A lack of reliable transport alternatives means that some people cannot easily access key services that others with a car can. This potentially pushes people into poverty as they need to own a car they cannot afford. People on lower incomes, those from an ethnic minority group, women and elderly people are less likely to own a car.

**17.** The Just Transition Commission (JTC) cautions that policies to limit car use without a clear, considered, cross-governmental plan could deepen inequalities. For example, limiting car use could make travelling harder for people with a disability who rely on mobility cars. This is recognised in the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) for the Climate Change Plan update (CCPu) which recommends individual policies must consider the impact on protected characteristics. The draft routemap explains how those with a protected characteristic are less likely to own a car and should benefit from the car kilometre target through increasing access to services, improving places and improving air quality.

## Scottish Government and council policies broadly align with the target, but ministers and councillors need to manage competing priorities

### National transport strategies align with reducing car use

**18.** Transport Scotland's [National Transport Strategy 2](#) (NTS2) introduces the:

- **sustainable investment hierarchy** which prioritises reducing the need to travel unsustainably and maintaining existing assets over building new, and
- **sustainable travel hierarchy** which prioritises active and sustainable modes of transport over the private vehicle.

The NTS2 expects public bodies to follow these hierarchies when making decisions about transport investment.

**19.** Following the publication of the NTS2, Transport Scotland published other transport strategies such as the [Active Travel Framework](#), the [Cycling Framework for Active travel](#), and the [Fair Fares Review](#).

**20.** The [Strategic Transport Project Review 2](#) (STPR2) is a plan for transport investment over the next 20 years to help deliver the vision of the NTS2. Most of the recommendations will positively contribute to the Scottish Government's priority of tackling climate change by reducing emissions. Some, such as strengthening access to Stranraer and the ports at Cairnryan and improvements to the A83, will not. The projects are unfunded and two years later the STPR2 delivery plan has not been published.

### Transport is connected to many government priorities and change will need to happen across government

**21.** Key Scottish Government strategies contain common actions that should reduce car use even if all do not explicitly reference the target. For example:

- [NHS Scotland's Climate Emergency and Sustainability Strategy 2022-2026](#) outlines activities that explicitly contribute to the car kilometre target.
- The [National Planning Framework 4](#) outlines policies that could reduce car use through supporting **20-minute neighbourhoods**. In April 2024, the Scottish Government published planning guidance on local living to support the framework.<sup>4</sup>
- The [Digital Strategy for Scotland](#) also does not explicitly reference the car kilometre target but contains several projects that could reduce the need to travel, including delivering broadband coverage for all.

**22.** The interconnectedness of transport means that many parts of the Scottish Government will need to contribute to the delivery of the car kilometre target. The Auditor General's 2023 [report](#) highlights how challenges remain in integrating climate change into wider decision-making across the Scottish Government. We have not seen a substantial cross-government commitment towards delivering the target, instead the responsibility for it lies with Transport Scotland.

### Local strategies support national strategies and promote reducing car use

**23.** Case study councils' strategies broadly align with national strategies and efforts to reduce car use. Apart from transport strategies, key local strategies tend not to mention the car kilometre target directly, but most contain actions that should indirectly reduce car travel. However, most are unfunded. They include:

- **Regional transport strategies (RTS)** – Developed by RTPs, they reflect the ambitions of the NTS2 and tend to explicitly reference the car kilometre target.



#### 20-minute neighbourhoods

This is a concept to support local living. It encourages planners to develop neighbourhoods where most residents' needs can be accessed within a 20-minute walk, wheel or cycle from home.

- **Local Development Plans (LDPs)** – the National Planning Framework 4 and the ambition to enable local living heavily influences councils' LDPs.
- **Economic strategies** – key local economic strategies contain fewer references to discouraging car use.
- **Active travel strategies** – strategies aimed at increasing the uptake of active travel in their local areas.

### Ministers and councillors need to balance competing priorities when making strategic decisions

**24.** Climate change is one of many competing priorities that Scottish Government ministers and local councillors need to balance. The Auditor General reported in [September 2023](#) and [November 2024](#) that it is not clear how the Scottish Government prioritises its infrastructure spending or its reform. We found a similar lack of clarity in councils:

- The Scottish Government's [Infrastructure Investment Plan](#) sets out £26 billion of capital spending over a five-year period. There are capital projects that could increase the amount of car kilometres driven, for example, upgrades to the A9 and A82 and projects which would encourage a reduction in car use such as investment in bus priority measures and support for active freeways (active travel infrastructure on key routes between towns).<sup>5</sup>
- The [2024/25 Programme for Government](#) repeats that achieving net zero by 2045 is a key priority for the Scottish Government. However, budgetary pressures led to the Scottish Government announcing over £500 million worth of budget reductions for 2024/25 in September 2024. This included reinstating peak fares for trains ([Case study 1, page 15](#)) and reducing the active and sustainable travel budget by £23.7 million.
- Some councils' and RTPs' local strategies contain actions that may be contradictory to reducing car use but provide important safety improvements or economic benefits. For example, SWestrans' RTS outlines an ambition to deliver road enhancements, including securing funding for the A75 and A77.



## Case study 1.

### Pilot to remove ScotRail peak fares

#### **The Scottish Government announced that the 12-month pilot to remove peak fares did not attract enough passengers to rail, and due to funding pressures, peak fares were reinstated**

The Scottish Government allocated up to £40 million to subsidise the temporary removal of ScotRail peak fares between October 2023 and September 2024. One of the pilot's aims was to encourage a modal shift from private car to rail travel.

An evaluation report explains that the pilot made rail a more viable transport option and reduced the costs of travelling during the cost-of-living crisis.

Transport Scotland analysis suggests that the pilot led to an increase in the demand for rail travel of 6.8 per cent. This represents around 4 million extra rail journeys over nine months, of which two million were journeys that commuters would have previously travelled by car.

The evaluation considers the value for money of the intervention and estimates it would give a benefit of between £1 and £1.25 of value for every £1 spent.

The Scottish Government decided that the costs of subsidising the removal of peak fares does not represent value for money in the current challenging financial environment. The evaluation report does not outline the impact of reinstating peak fares will have on car use or acknowledge that it can take time to sustain positive behavioural changes, such as encouraging modal shift from car to rail use.

Source: Transport Scotland<sup>6</sup>



#### **A lack of collaborative leadership has resulted in minimal action**

**25.** The Scottish Government has regularly delayed taking important decisions to deliver the car kilometre target:

- The CCPu said the Scottish Government would publish a routemap to achieving the car kilometre target in 2021.<sup>7</sup> The Scottish Government published its draft routemap in January 2022.
- It planned to publish the final routemap in October 2022. Publication has been delayed several times.

- Independent research on **demand management** was completed in January 2023. Transport Scotland delayed publication several times before publishing it in December 2024.<sup>8</sup>
- The CCC has consistently, over the last three years, called on the Scottish Government to produce a clear delivery plan explaining how the car kilometre target will be achieved.

**26.** Internal Transport Scotland performance reports indicate that these delays were due to transport ministers not approving publication of the routemap and research. Since the Scottish Government introduced the target for reducing car use, there have been:

- three cabinet secretaries with responsibility for transport
- six ministers with ministerial responsibility for transport.

Officials say that these changes, along with the ending of the **Bute House Agreement** in April 2024, a change in First Minister in May 2024 and UK general election in July 2024, have all impacted the schedule for gaining ministerial approval.

**27.** There is a team working hard towards delivering the target within Transport Scotland, but we have not seen the leadership needed from the Scottish Government to make sustained progress. Recent policy decisions suggest that the Scottish Government has deprioritised the target in the face of growing financial pressures, for example the peak fares reversal ([Case study 1, page 15](#)) and reducing funding for active travel. There is limited evidence of working across government to deliver the target, for example through a joint governance board. The Scottish Government needs to consider whether this target remains a priority and, if so, clearly restate its commitment to it.

**28.** Some councils explain that they do not believe the target is achievable and getting agreement to implement policies which actively discourage car use is politically difficult. COSLA is engaging further with its member councils on the revised routemap which is further delaying publication. All parts of government will need to act to deliver the target and reduce transport carbon emissions.



### Demand management

Measures to reduce the attractiveness of driving such as road reallocation, parking charges and charging drivers for entering an area or for the amount they drive. The intention is to make the cost of driving, in terms of either time or money, more than that of the alternatives ([Exhibit 8, page 37](#)).



### Bute House Agreement (BHA)

In August 2021, the SNP and the Scottish Greens agreed a power-sharing agreement and a shared policy programme. This enabled the SNP to form a government that would be supported by the Scottish Greens on areas included in the agreement. The BHA ended in April 2024.

## Action on the car kilometre target requires stronger leadership and clearer governance arrangements

**29.** The Auditor General's 2023 report on [the Scottish Government's governance and risk management arrangements for climate change](#) identified weaknesses in how it is set up to achieve net zero goals. The Scottish Government is now improving its climate change governance arrangements to provide oversight of programmes for which the Director-General Net Zero is responsible for.

**30.** The Scottish Government and COSLA have yet to establish a joint governance group to oversee progress on the car kilometre target. Stakeholders explain that it is difficult to establish governance arrangements for the target without a final routemap ([paragraph 25](#)). They are in the process of establishing a joint governance group to strengthen the way national and local government work together on climate change.

**31.** Various Scottish Government **governance** groups oversee aspects of achieving the target, but there is no dedicated governance board:

- **Global Climate Emergency Programme Board** – A senior Scottish Government body that oversees all climate change policy.
- **Transport Scotland's NTS2 Delivery Board** – The board is accountable for delivering the NTS2, including the priority to take climate action.
- **Transport Scotland's Climate Change Board** – The board responsible for all relevant transport climate change policies and action. This board reports into the Global Climate Emergency Programme Board.

**32.** These boards receive regular performance information, which focuses on whether key documents have been published. They do not consider progress or the impact of interventions within the routemap. Nor do they regularly review a risk register or receive a financial oversight report on the costs of delivering the car kilometre target.



### Governance

Governance is fundamental to ensuring organisations are well managed and that programmes of work are delivered effectively. It supports planning, policy and financial decision-making, and helps identify and address risks. Regular monitoring of performance and resources to ensure policies and projects are delivered within agreed timescales and budgets is a critical part of good governance.

## **There are weaknesses in councils' oversight arrangements for the car kilometre target**

**33.** The case study councils have committees that monitor transport activity, such as the local transport strategy or active travel investment. But no case study council has a specific group that is regularly assessing efforts to reduce car use at a local level. The level of reporting and quality of information to councillors on spending, performance and evaluations varies and often focus on individual projects. RTPs tend to be better at monitoring this spending.

## **Councils and delivery partners are not clear about who is responsible for delivering parts of the car kilometre target**

**34.** Councils and delivery partners say that it is not clear who is responsible for delivering the car kilometre target. Many elements of delivering the required reduction in car use are outside the control of Transport Scotland:

- Several interventions in the routemap are delivered by other directorates within the Scottish Government. Other directorates in the Scottish Government or councils will also decide where to locate services such as hospitals and schools which will affect the extent to which people need to travel.
- Councils and RTPs work with Transport Scotland to deliver on the routemap, for example building active travel infrastructure and supporting local bus networks. But they have their own local priorities which may not always align with the national agenda.
- Many bus and coach operators are privately owned and make decisions about which of their bus routes are commercially viable.
- The UK Government sets fuel duty and vehicle excise duty, which influence the cost of driving. These could be used differently to discourage excessive driving.

## **Councils want more guidance from the Scottish Government on reducing car use in their communities**

**35.** Councils have requested further guidance and support from the Scottish Government on reducing car use, particularly on introducing demand management measures and achieving the target in rural areas. Transport Scotland has developed a resource pack for councils which it plans to publish alongside the delayed final routemap.

## 2. Delivering the target

### The draft routemap for achieving a 20 per cent reduction in car kilometres does not provide a clear plan on how partners will achieve the target

**36.** Transport Scotland and COSLA's [draft routemap](#) sets out interventions to encourage a national shift in travel behaviours; away from private car use and towards sustainable and active travel.

**37.** The routemap does not specify targets for individual councils, it is for them to decide their own approach and targets. Transport Scotland does not know how much each council will contribute to the target and there is no duty on councils to achieve any reduction. It is therefore not possible to see how the national target of 20 per cent will be achieved.

**38.** The routemap contains 32 interventions aimed at encouraging the four sustainable travel behaviours. These interventions vary in scale from £4.85 billion to maintain and enhance the rail network to a £300,000 eco-schools Scotland programme. Many:

- do not have funding allocated to them, for example, the Bus Partnership Fund
- are not new areas of spending, for example; the Scottish Government announced the £600 million investment in superfast broadband in 2016
- address several policy objectives, such as the intervention to deliver the National Planning Framework.

### The routemap lacks key delivery information

**39.** The current routemap lacks key information to deliver the car kilometres target. There is no information on:

- the likely or estimated impact of each intervention on reducing car use and over what timeframe this impact will be realised
- the costs of delivering individual interventions
- which body is responsible for delivering each intervention
- milestones for measuring progress towards delivering the interventions
- the timescales for delivering the interventions.

**40.** This makes it impossible to understand which interventions will have the most impact on the target or deliver the best value for money. It also makes monitoring and scrutinising progress difficult as it is not clear whether an intervention is off track or who is responsible if it is. The CCC<sup>9</sup> and the Institute for Public Policy Research<sup>10</sup> have also reported on the lack of a clear delivery plan for the target.

## **Transport Scotland consulted widely on its draft routemap, but stakeholders want more engagement on action to reduce car use**

**41.** Transport Scotland consulted widely on the draft routemap, receiving over 650 responses. It also carried out an EQIA on it. Respondents expressed concerns that the car kilometre target could negatively affect people who rely on cars, particularly people with disabilities and those living in rural areas. It is not yet clear how these concerns will be addressed in the final routemap. It is important that the impact of the routemap on equalities is monitored and EQIAs are completed for individual interventions as they are progressed.

**42.** Research shows that the public want more engagement and clearer information on transport's contribution to climate change and on the car reduction target:

- A 2024 report prepared for the Net Zero, Energy and Transport committee in the Scottish Parliament found that the public want more engagement and clearer messaging on how to reduce emissions, this includes transport.<sup>11</sup>
- Research on the public's perception of the target, showed that most people support it when they understand more. But participants want more clear, honest and concise information on the target and how it will be delivered from government.<sup>12</sup>

**43.** The draft routemap commits to holding a national conversation on sustainable transport, but this has not happened yet. The Scottish Government has run an online marketing campaign, '[Let's do Net Zero](#)'. But the lack of progress towards the car kilometre target means much more is needed to encourage the public to adopt more sustainable transport behaviours.

## **Councils vary in how they prioritise measures to reduce car use and the challenges they face in doing so differ**

**44.** Some councils have their own targets, for example, Glasgow and Edinburgh plan to reduce car kilometres driven by 30 per cent by 2030. Other councils, usually the more rural ones with longer travel distances and fewer public transport options, struggle to see how they can contribute meaningfully to the target and focus on other priorities. In the case study councils, we did not see the target or the impact on car use considered in wider decision-making.

### **Some councils and RTPs have commissioned work to understand their role in reducing car use.**

**45.** Glasgow City Council, Nestrans<sup>13</sup> and Tactran have completed detailed analysis that set out the impact various interventions will have on reducing car use in their area. These describe the local context, and the type of journeys made in the area as well as modelling the likely impact of proposed measures. This detailed analyses has informed local strategies and priorities. It also ensures that councillors and others making decisions have more information to allow them to prioritise their spending.

### **The Scottish Government and councils do not record how much they are spending on achieving the target**

**46.** The Scottish Government and councils cannot say how much they are spending on reducing car use. They say this is because many of the interventions in the routemap cover several priorities, and specific spending on the target cannot be extracted from overall spending.

**47.** The Scottish Government, mostly through Transport Scotland, is spending significant sums on activities that should contribute to the target, such as on active travel and public transport. Reducing car use is not the primary objective of this spending and Transport Scotland does not collate this information to give an overall figure spent on the target. Councils similarly do not record spending on the car kilometres reduction target although they are spending on active travel and public transport.

**48.** As a result, the Scottish Government and councils cannot say whether spending in these areas represents good value for money in terms of achieving the target. It will have wider benefits, however, on matters such as health or the economy. For this report, we will consider spending on key areas that contribute to the target such as active travel and public transport.

### **The Scottish Government has underspent on its budget for active travel and sustainable transport for the last four years**

**49.** In the 2021 BHA, the Scottish Government committed to allocating at least £320 million or ten per cent of its transport budget to active travel by 2024/25. Following the end of the BHA, the 2024/25 Programme for Government no longer included this commitment.<sup>14</sup> In 2024/25, the budget allocated to supporting active travel was £220 million<sup>15</sup> or six per cent of the total transport budget.

**50.** Despite having had this commitment, Transport Scotland is unable to provide actual spend information on active travel. It says this is due to differences in the way that budgets and accounts present spending information. Instead, it considers active travel together with the support for sustainable transport; this includes some support for electric vehicles and fuel-efficient driving.

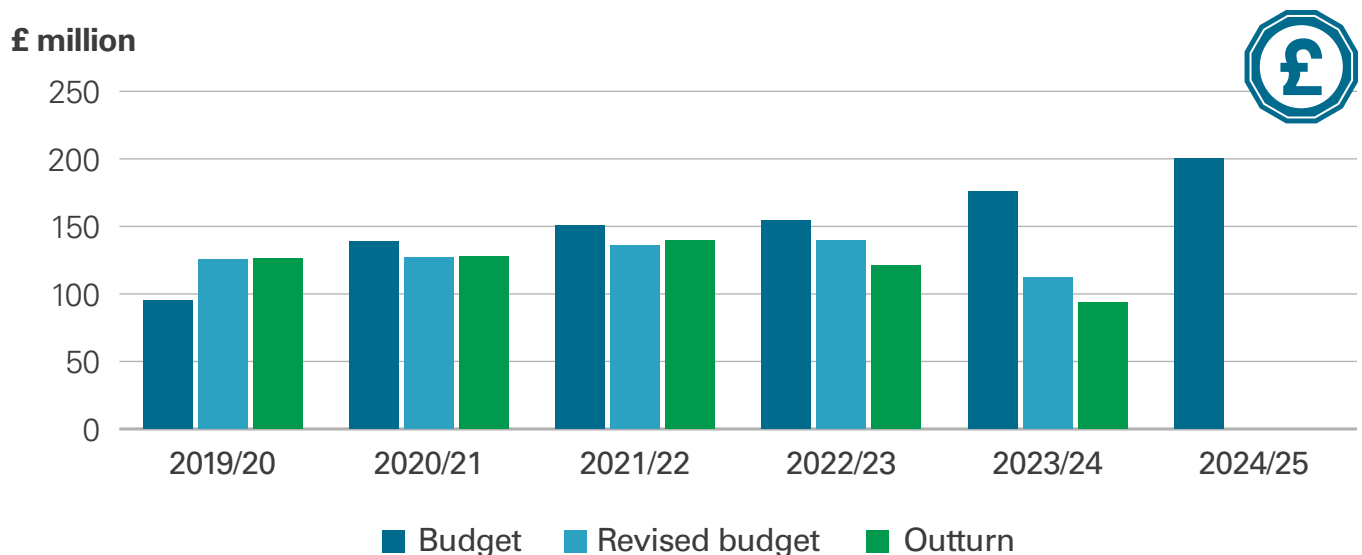


**51. Exhibit 2** shows that since 2020/21, spending on these two areas has been significantly below the amount budgeted. The reasons for these underspends were: delays in confirming funding for 2023/24, a requirement to spend all funding by the end of the financial year, and challenges councils faced in delivering the infrastructure projects, such as planning or access to land.

## Exhibit 2.

### Support for active travel and support for sustainable transport budget allocation and actual spend since 2019/20

Although budget allocations for active travel and sustainable transport have increased since 2019/20, the actual amounts spent have reduced.



Note: Support for sustainable transport includes elements of spend on electric vehicles and reduced emission driving which will not support the car reduction target. Transport Scotland cannot provide outturn spend for the support for active travel budget line due to the way figures are presented in different reports. This does not include the cycling, walking and safer routes funding which is given to councils.

Source: Scottish Government budget analysis and Transport Scotland outturn spending information

### The delivery of active travel infrastructure was complex, fragmented and not appropriately monitored

**52.** Transport Scotland previously provided funding to several organisations to administer various grants that encouraged active travel. These grants, which catered for different groups and different modes of transport, were paid to various delivery partners and had different grant conditions. The main delivery partners were:

- Sustrans (£105.6 million spent in 2023/24) – Places for Everyone programme, the National Cycling Network, behaviour change, co-design and strategic partnerships.
- Paths for All (£13.8 million spent in 2023/24) – Smarter Choices, Smarter Places programme and the Ian Findlay Path Fund.
- Cycling Scotland (£8.6 million spent in 2023/24) – Increasing access to cycle training, bikes, cycle parking and storage, and monitoring of cycling.

**53.** Transport Scotland also funded active travel components within its rail, ferry and trunk road directorates and councils received £33.8 million in 2023/24 for cycling, walking and safer routes. This complex funding system is not transparent.

**54.** The [2023/24 annual audit of Transport Scotland](#) found that it needs to improve its processes for paying grants. The auditors found that there was a consistent lack of evidence provided for grant expenditure claims. This does not meet the conditions set out in the grant letters.

## **Transport Scotland recorded active travel funding as spent but it was held in a delivery partner's accounts**

**55.** At the end of March 2023, Sustrans had accrued £72.5 million of unspent Places for Everyone funding in its accounts. This had accumulated since 2017/18 because Sustrans had claimed the full grant award each year and carried forward any unspent funding. Transport Scotland agreed with this approach despite it not complying with the grant conditions. Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government recorded this money as spent on active travel, but the funding had not yet reached projects or delivered any benefits. This is not transparent.

**56.** Over the course of 2023/24, in agreement with Transport Scotland, Sustrans used the £72.5 million to pay for projects instead of claiming further grant payments. In April 2024, it claimed and received a further £10 million. However, Transport Scotland did not check any documentary evidence that the £82.5 million had been spent on projects before authorising payments.

**57.** Sustrans and Transport Scotland say that the practice was adopted because of the rapid increase in active travel funding in 2018. Large active travel infrastructure projects ([Case study 2, page 24](#)) take several years to complete but active travel funding must be spent within a single year. Sustrans agreed with Transport Scotland that it could carry over any unspent funding into future financial years to support councils to deliver multi-year projects. Sustrans say this provided councils with confidence to commit to projects and did not disrupt the pipeline of projects.

## Case study 2.

### Glasgow South City Way cycle network

#### An evaluation of the South City Way cycle network shows the rates of active travel increasing



Glasgow City Council built a three-kilometre cycle network from the southside of Glasgow to the city centre. The project cost £7.9 million and was funded through Sustrans' Places for Everyone programme and council funding. The network officially opened in July 2024.

Sustrans and Glasgow City Council published an evaluation report on the South City Way cycle network that showed the project has successfully achieved many of its intended outcomes:

- People have made around 3.9 million journeys on the cycle network over the last three years, increasing the active travel rates by 12 per cent.
- At the last count, during the construction of phase 5, there was a 29 per cent reduction in the number of vehicles along the route and a 20 per cent drop in speed.
- Fewer cars on the route have led to a 53 per cent decrease in carbon dioxide levels across certain parts.
- The number of shoppers who think the area along the route is good for retail has increased by 12 percentage points since the project was completed.

The evaluation identifies key lessons from the project, including how parts of the project initially caused challenges for people with a visual impairment to travel. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the project took over six years to complete and was constructed over separate phases. This meant that different officers were leading the project at different times. They had different approaches to storing, collecting and analysing data which led to difficulties accessing some information.

Source: Sustrans<sup>16</sup>

**58.** Funding was unspent because of delays to projects. The grant conditions specify that this unspent money should have been returned to the Scottish Government. As Transport Scotland cannot hold reserves it would have lost the funding for that year which would have risked active travel infrastructure projects not being delivered.

**59.** The [Auditor General reported in September 2023](#) that capital funding has reduced in recent years and difficult decisions about priorities are needed. In autumn 2022, the Scottish Government published cost-saving measures and an emergency budget to balance the budget in light of high inflation and public sector pay rises. This included a reduction of

£270 million in capital spending. It is difficult for ministers to make these decisions if capital budgets are held by third parties and the available capital budget is not clear.

## **Transport Scotland is changing how active travel funding is delivered, but it has been a difficult first year**

**60.** Transport Scotland recognised the complexity of active travel delivery and that it was no longer fit for purpose. Active travel infrastructure was not delivered quickly or efficiently enough, and what has been delivered has been fragmented. It also found that most councils lack the capacity and capability to deliver at the scale required. Because of this, following a pilot in 2023/24, Transport Scotland has made significant changes to how active travel funding is delivered from 2024/25 onwards.

### **Active travel infrastructure funding will be administered by Transport Scotland and delivered by councils**

**61.** The Active Travel Investment Fund delivered by Transport Scotland will replace Sustrans' Places for Everyone programme by December 2025. From 2024/25:

- £35 million was paid direct to councils to replace the annual £23.9 million cycling, walking and safer routes. This is a slight increase in funding to councils as in 2023/24 they received a further £9.9 million from Transport Scotland's active travel funding.
- £10 million was awarded to more complex infrastructure projects which were ready to be delivered this year. Councils, RTPs and national parks bid for funding from Transport Scotland and may meet some of the project costs.

**62.** As this is the first year of the new arrangements it is not yet clear if they will reduce the burden on councils while giving assurance to Transport Scotland on spending. For the funding councils receive directly, they will need to provide an annual programme to Transport Scotland in June, followed by a mid-year report in October and a year-end report the following April. The level of detail required in these reports is quite high and focused on project delivery rather than outcomes achieved.

### **Funding for behaviour change will be delivered by RTPs**

**63.** In 2024/25, the £19 million People and Place programme will replace:

- the three Smarter Choices, Smarter Places behaviour change funds delivered by Paths for All (£12 million in 2023/24)
- the access to bikes, cycle parking and storage schemes delivered by Cycling Scotland (£6.4 million in 2023/24).

A further £9.2 million will be available for community projects, direct award to councils and the bikeability scheme. These schemes are designed

to encourage a change in behaviours away from driving to using more sustainable modes of transport.

**64.** Transport Scotland hopes that the changes will simplify funding for behaviour change and allow RTPs to better meet their local needs. It should also reduce the need for councils to bid for funding from delivery partners. However, we heard concerns about capacity and resources within RTPs to deliver this increased role.

### **Late allocation of funding and a lack of certainty has made it a difficult first year**

**65.** Most stakeholders have welcomed the changes to active travel funding and think that they will make it more transparent and efficient. However, many have found the first year difficult:

- Some councils received less direct funding in 2024/25 than in 2023/24, due to the different allocation methodology agreed with COSLA. Transport Scotland intends to increase the funding to all councils over time.
- RTPs told us they were informed that they would receive behaviour change funding in early 2024 and that the model for the funding changed several times before it was announced.
- The changes do not address the challenge of one-year funding. Bid funding for 2024/25 was confirmed in October 2024 but must be spent before the end of the financial year. This risks projects being unable to spend the funding before the end of March 2025. Glasgow City Council expect that they will find it difficult to get any spending approved and procured in time.

### **A lack of bus services is affecting travel decisions**

**66.** Detailed analysis by Tactran and Nestrans ([paragraph 84](#)) shows that most of the car kilometres driven are longer distance journeys that would not be easily replaced by active travel. Transport Scotland estimates that to achieve a 20 per cent reduction in car kilometres by 2030, public transport capacity would need to increase by 222 per cent.<sup>17</sup> Many communities and stakeholders say a lack of reliable and affordable public transport is the biggest barrier to reducing car use.

**67.** In recent years, several factors have increased the cost of running buses, such as driver shortages and fuel price increases, while passenger numbers have not recovered from the pandemic. As a result, bus operators have cancelled services. The Scottish transport statistics show that, nationally, bus traffic levels decreased by 22 per cent between 2012 and 2022, from 610 million kilometres to 473 million kilometres. Over the same period, the number of buses fell by 30 per cent from 4,600 to 3,200.

**68.** Rural areas tend to have fewer public transport services than urban areas. In 2020, less than 50 per cent of people living in rural areas could access a GP within 15 minutes using public transport, while 92 per cent of

people in the rest of Scotland could ([data visualisation](#)). In some places in Aberdeenshire, for instance, travelling to a retail centre by public transport takes 37 minutes longer than by car. The biggest difference in Glasgow is 15 minutes. People who do not have a car in these areas are at a significant disadvantage.

## Significant funding is provided to support bus and rail services but none is dedicated to encouraging a shift from private car use to public transport

**69.** The Scottish Government, through Transport Scotland, provides significant funding to public transport ([Exhibit 3, page 28](#)), but it is not dedicated to encouraging a shift away from private car use. In 2022/23, around 27 per cent of bus operator's income (£204 million) was from national and local government and 35 per cent (£266 million) came from concessionary travel fares:<sup>18</sup>

- **Concessionary travel** for people aged 60 and over, and people with a disability has been in place since 2006. It has many objectives, including encouraging a shift from private car use, increasing access to services and reducing social isolation. Community bus operators have told us that they are not able to offer concessionary fares. This affects the viability of services that could provide an alternative to fixed bus networks.
- **The young person's bus pass** for those aged under 22 was introduced in 2022 and is included in the routemap for reducing car kilometres ([Case study 4, page 35](#)). Young people have told us that free travel is only helpful if there is a bus available.
- Transport Scotland administers the **network support grant for bus operators**. This pays the operator 14.4 pence per kilometre. It has been in place since 2010, and its key aim is to keep fares reasonably priced and maintain commercial routes. During the pandemic, there was further support for buses.
- Transport Scotland spends over £1 billion annually on rail, including on the **ScotRail franchise** which operates the rail network across Scotland.
- **Councils** can choose to support bus services within their area, the extent to which they do varies depending on local priorities.

**70.** While Transport Scotland has evaluated the young person's bus pass, it has not analysed the overall impact that funding for bus and rail has on private car use. None of the conditions it places on the funding to bus operators relates to reducing car use or providing a minimal level of service.

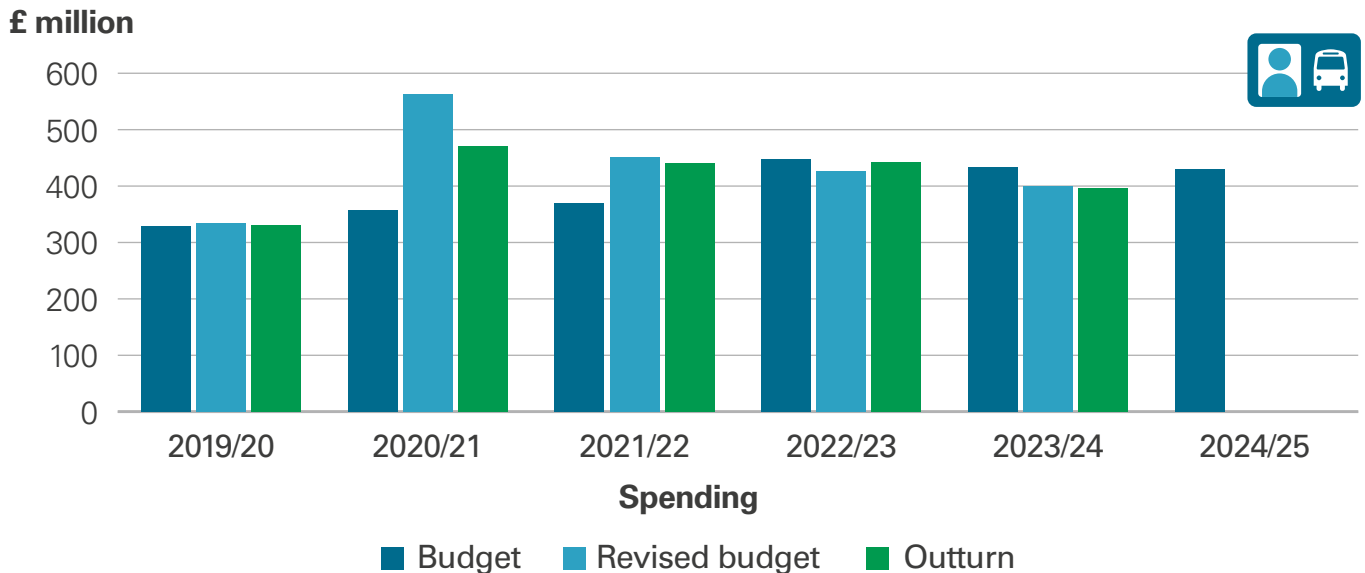


Our **data visualisation** shows local travel time differences.

## Exhibit 3.

### Scottish Government budget allocations and outturn spend for supporting bus services and concessionary travel

Budget allocations for concessionary travel have increased by 46 per cent following the introduction of free bus travel for under-22s while bus operator grants peaked during the pandemic.



Note: Outturn figures are demand led and depend on distance travelled by operators or journeys taken by concessions.

Source: Scottish Budget and Transport Scotland actual spend figures

### Funding that would prioritise road space for buses and improve public transport journey times has been paused because of budget constraints

**71.** In 2019, the Scottish Government committed £500 million in long-term funding to deliver infrastructure, such as bus lanes and bus gates, through the Bus Partnership Fund (BPF). The aim was to improve bus journey times by giving buses priority over other road traffic.

**72.** By the end of 2023, only £26.9 million had been allocated to delivery partners. Transport Scotland said that the pandemic delayed work and that, initially, there were few projects ready to develop. The BPF also funded business cases and feasibility studies to develop these projects, and there is now a pipeline of suitable works. ([Case study 3, page 29](#))

**73.** In December 2023, the then Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition confirmed in a letter to the Net Zero and Transport Committee, that due to budgetary constraints, there were no plans to continue funding the BPF in 2024/25. Without certainty of funding, planned projects have been affected, including:



- the Aberdeen Rapid Transit (ART) which has found alternative funding through the city region deal
- five projects in Glasgow City Council which have been paused while alternative funding is sought.

It has also affected work on the bus partnerships between councils, RTPs and bus operators that were established to deliver BPF funding.

## Case study 3. Aberdeen bus gates

### Measures to prioritise bus travel in Aberdeen city centre have faced strong opposition but have resulted in bus journey time improvements.

Aberdeen City Council introduced three additional bus gates to the city centre in 2023. The aim of the gates was to establish a priority route for buses that would reduce the non-essential traffic travelling through the city centre. This would reduce bus journey times, improve punctuality, and provide an improved environment for pedestrians and cyclists.

The Scottish Government's BPF provided £10 million to improve the road infrastructure (South College Street) which facilitated the installation of the bus gates. Since opening in 2023, the three bus gates have generated fines amounting to around £1.6 million. The council must spend this additional income on measures that progress its Local Transport Strategy.

Bus operators have reported improvements:

- Stagecoach has increased passenger numbers by five per cent and reduced the journey time into the city by ten per cent.
- First Bus reports a 16.5 per cent increase in passenger numbers on routes using the bus gates and a three per cent improvement in punctuality.

These improvements led operators to provide free bus travel on weekends in January 2024. Some businesses claim, however, that the bus gates have reduced footfall in the city. Aberdeen City Council disputes this and points to other factors such as a general decline in town centres across the country and the loss of large department stores.

In July 2024, the council temporarily modified one of the bus gates. This was to allow access to some businesses during a significant city centre redevelopment project. There had been opposition to the introduction of the measures including a campaign by a local paper which resulted in a petition signed by over 10,000 people.

Source: Audit Scotland



# 3. Progress towards the target

## It is unlikely that the Scottish Government will reduce car kilometres by 20 per cent by 2030

**74.** Car traffic levels were increasing before the Scottish Government introduced the car kilometre target. Car kilometres increased from 33.6 billion in 2013 to 36.7 billion in 2019. Although people drove less during the pandemic, car traffic levels quickly rebounded when restrictions were lifted. In 2023, 35.4 billion car kilometres were driven. This is 3.6 per cent lower than in 2019 but 6 billion kilometres higher than the number needed to meet the target ([Exhibit 4](#)).



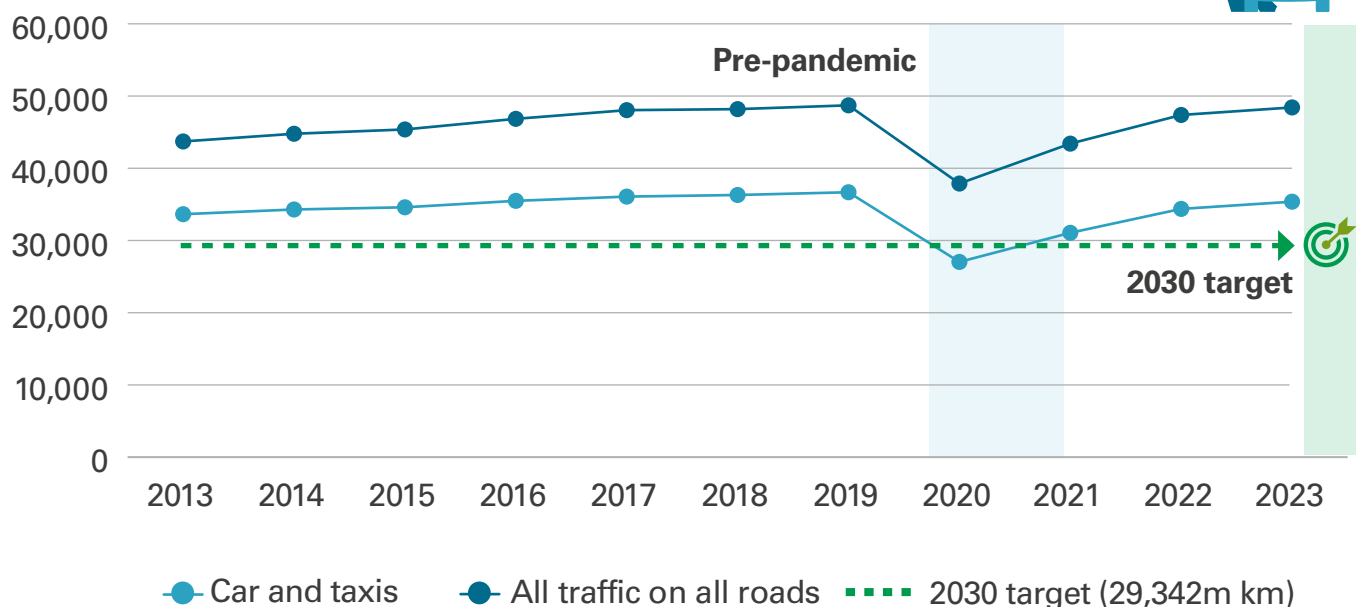
Our **data visualisation** shows car traffic at a council level.

### Exhibit 4.

#### Car traffic levels on all Scotland's roads

Car traffic levels are increasing to pre-pandemic levels.

#### Vehicle kilometres (million)



Note: Data from 2013 to 2022 is from Transport Scotland's Scottish Transport Statistics. Data from 2023 is from the UK Government's Road Traffic Statistics.

Source: Scottish Government and UK Government

**75.** The Scottish Government reports that the target to reduce car kilometres by 20 per cent by 2030 is now off track. It says that this is because the current policy package is not sufficient to achieve the car kilometre reduction target. The CCC said in March 2024 that car traffic levels in Scotland are rebounding from Covid-19 levels at a higher rate than in other parts of the UK.

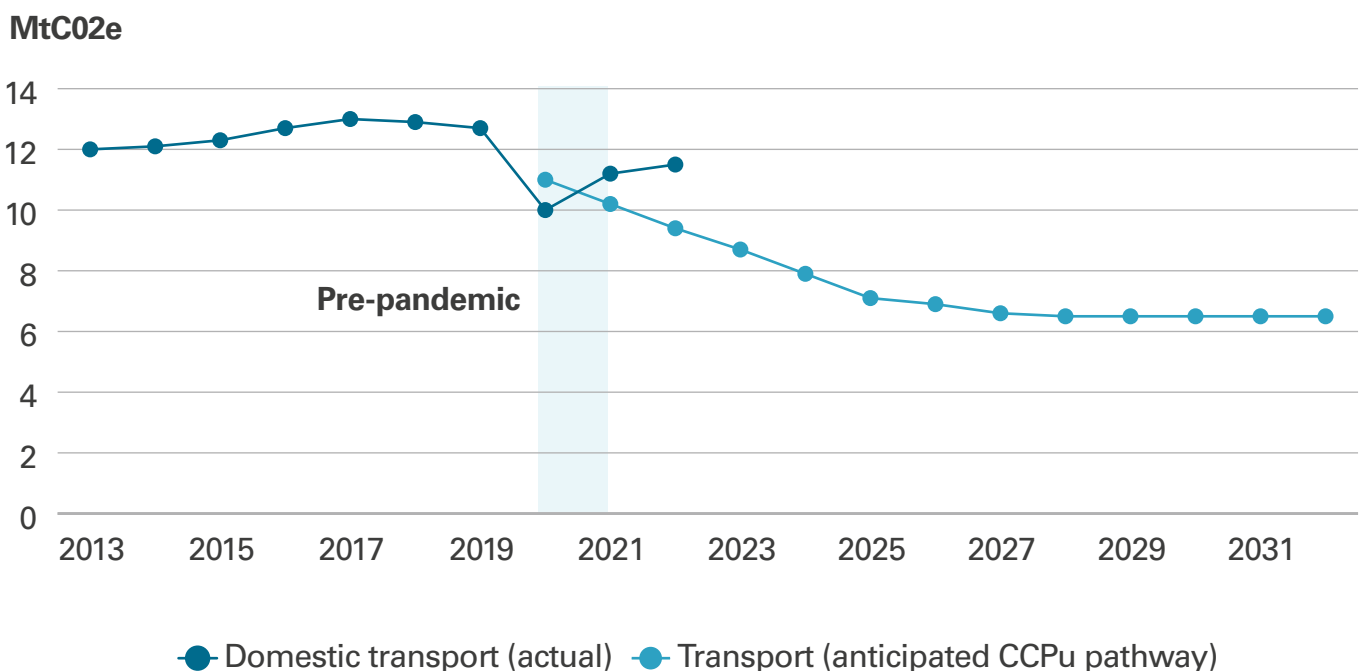
## Emissions from transport are increasing following the pandemic

**76.** Emissions from domestic transport increased by four per cent between 2012 and 2019 ([Exhibit 5](#)). Lockdown restrictions led to a significant reduction in the level of emissions from transport, decreasing to 10 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (MtCO<sub>2</sub>e) in 2020. When these restrictions were lifted, emissions rebounded. In 2022, 11.5 MtCO<sub>2</sub>e was emitted; this is lower than in 2019, when the figure was 12.7 MtCO<sub>2</sub>e.

### Exhibit 5.

#### Emissions from the domestic transport sector

The Scottish Government has only met its emission reduction estimates for domestic transport once in the last three years.



Note. The Transport (anticipated CCPu pathway) will also include emissions from international aviation and shipping.

Source: Scottish Greenhouse Gas Statistics 2022, Scottish Government

**77.** The CCC 2023 report explains that to meet the transport sector's contribution to the CCPu, the annual rate of emission reductions in the transport sector will need to be almost four times higher from 2021 to 2030 than it was from 2012 to 2021.<sup>19</sup>

## There is no evidence of a significant shift to other modes of transport

### The percentage of people travelling by active modes of transport has fluctuated over the last ten years

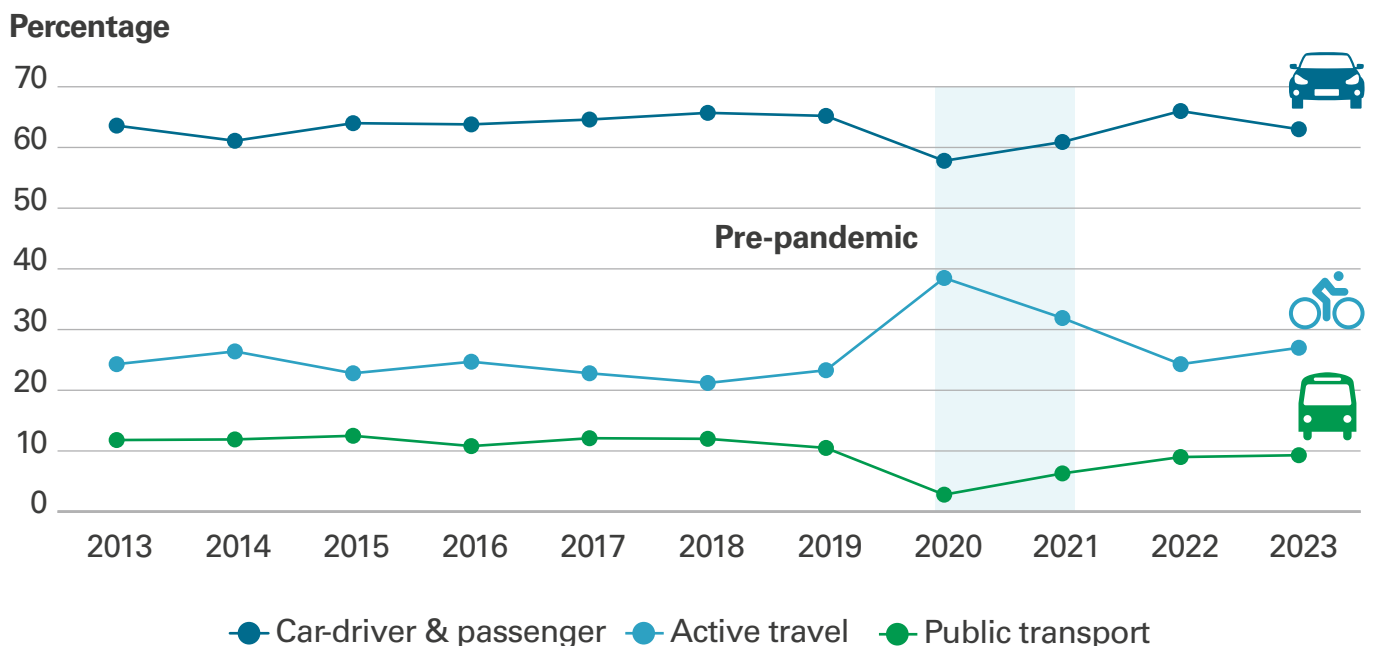
**78.** Although more people walked and cycled during the pandemic, those changes were not permanent with active travel rates fluctuating over the last ten years. There is no evidence of a significant and sustained modal shift away from private car use to more active forms of transport ([Exhibit 6](#)):

- Over the last ten years, the percentage of walking journeys has increased slightly from 23 per cent in 2013 to 25 per cent in 2023. The percentage of school children walking to school has fallen over the last ten years.<sup>20</sup>
- Cycling rates have largely remained unchanged over the last ten years. Cycling is slightly more popular for shorter journeys and the percentage of pupils cycling to school has increased from three per cent in 2013 to five per cent in 2023.

## Exhibit 6.

### Percentage of journeys by main mode of travel

There is no evidence of a significant and sustained shift away from car use to walking and cycling or public transport.



Note: In 2020 and 2021, because of Covid-19 the Scottish Household Survey was undertaken remotely. It returned to face-to-face interviews in 2022. This may affect comparisons with the pandemic years.

Source: Transport and Travel in Scotland 2023, Transport Scotland

## Public transport use is failing to recover to pre-pandemic levels

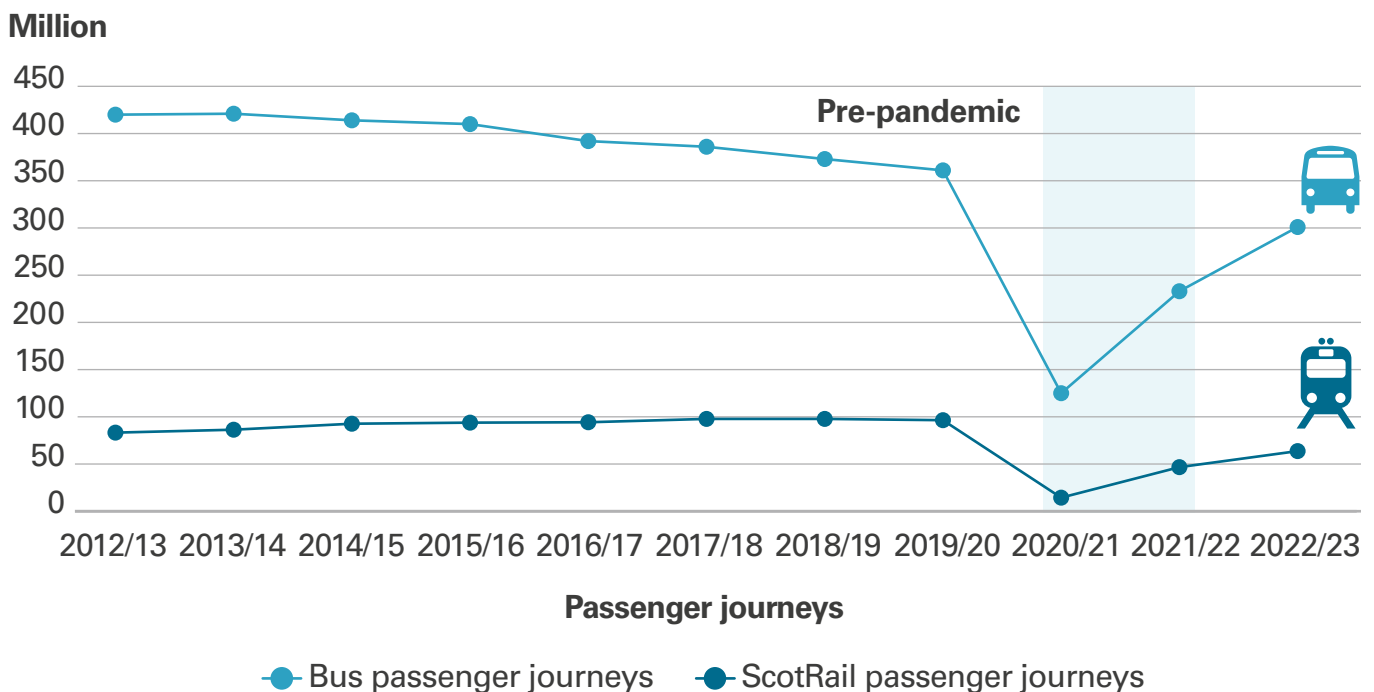
**79.** During the Covid-19 pandemic significantly fewer people used public transport. Passenger numbers have not returned to pre-pandemic levels, as working patterns have changed since 2019 ([Exhibit 7](#)).

- In 2022/23, there were 64 million ScotRail passenger journeys, an increase of 36 per cent on the previous year. The number of ScotRail passenger journeys is still 34 per cent lower than in 2019/20. The Scottish Government attempted to increase ScotRail passenger numbers through a pilot that removed off-peak train fares.
- The number of people travelling by bus has fallen over the last ten years. The pandemic significantly affected bus passenger journeys, reducing them to 125 million in 2020/21. The number of bus passenger journeys increased to 301 million in 2022/23. This is still below the 361 million bus journeys travelled before the pandemic, partly because more people are now working from home.

## Exhibit 7.

### Public transport passenger journeys

Bus and rail passenger journeys have not returned to pre-pandemic levels.



Source: Scottish Transport Statistics 2023, Transport Scotland

## The Scottish Government does not report on progress of the routemap interventions

**80.** The routemap has no clear milestones that allows the government and others to effectively monitor progress, and the Scottish Government does not report on progress of routemap interventions. Progress on delivering individual routemap interventions has been mixed. For example:

- There was a delay in rolling out the low emission zones across Scotland's cities, but these are now in place and being enforced.
- 96 per cent of properties in Scotland can now access fixed superfast broadband (defined as speeds above 30 Mb/s) with reporting focused on number of premises connected.<sup>[21](#)</sup>
- In 2023, there were 557 car club vehicles and almost 38,000 car club members in Scotland. Car clubs allow users to access a vehicle without owning one. Each member reduced their annual car mileage by 156 miles after joining a car club.<sup>[22](#)</sup>

## Evaluation of projects varies and is not collated

**81.** Transport Scotland, delivery partners and councils may complete evaluations on individual projects as part of the grant reporting requirements or to assess their value for money. For example:

- When it announced the end of the peak fare removal pilot in August 2024, the Scottish Government published an evaluation report showing that the scheme had increased awareness of rail travel but had limited impact on reducing overall car journeys. [\(Case study 1, page 15\)](#)
- The Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme Year 1 evaluation report [\(Case study 4, page 35\)](#) shows that an increasing number of young people are now travelling by bus rather than by car.
- Monitoring of Glasgow's South City Way [\(Case study 2, page 24\)](#) identified an increase in the number of people using active travel modes along the route.

## Case study 4.

### Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme

#### The Scottish Government is providing free bus travel to those aged under 22 to encourage more sustainable travel behaviours



In 2022, the Scottish Government provided free bus travel to young people aged under 22. This scheme was included as an intervention in the routemap. One of its aims is to encourage behaviour change in young people before they can learn to drive. It also intends to improve access to employment or education for young people.

Transport Scotland evaluated the scheme after a year and found that 59 per cent of young people have signed up to receive free bus travel.<sup>23</sup> Take-up varies widely between council areas, with some people not applying because of the limited bus service where they live and others because of the challenging application process. The Auditor General and Accounts Commission reported on [tackling digital exclusion](#) in Scotland in 2024.

The year-one evaluation found:

- some evidence that the scheme is increasing the number of young people using the bus, opening up opportunities to them
- some limited evidence that the scheme is encouraging a modal shift away from car use
- that it is too early to tell whether it is reducing the number of young people learning to drive.

Source: Audit Scotland

**82.** The various evaluation reports are completed depending on individual project agreements and are not collated to provide an overview of how public transport and active travel activities contribute to the overarching goal of reducing car use.

#### Evidence shows that without demand management the car kilometres target will not be achieved

**83.** The Scottish Government and COSLA commit in their routemap to exploring measures to discourage car use and develop a car demand management framework ([Exhibit 8, page 37](#)). Transport Scotland commissioned modelling as part of the development of this framework.



**84.** Detailed analysis for Glasgow, Nestrans and Tactran shows that they will not achieve the 20 per cent car kilometre reduction target without measures to discourage car use:

- Glasgow City Council's modelling report shows that successfully implementing its transport strategy will reduce car use by 16 per cent against its target of 30 per cent. It expects that the modelling exercise underestimated the shift from car use to active travel.
- Tactran's analysis shows that longer trips should be targeted. It showed that, even with high levels of funding and political will, without demand management, the maximum reduction in car kilometres that might be achieved is 9.5 per cent. This is lower than the estimated growth in traffic to 2030. To achieve the target, action outwith RTP partners is needed.
- Modelling undertaken on behalf of Nestrans showed that journeys of over 20 kilometres made up a quarter of the trips in the region but resulted in almost two-thirds of the kilometres driven.<sup>24</sup> The report found that, over the long term, active travel improvements would have the potential to reduce car kilometres by three per cent, bus improvements by one per cent, car sharing by 2.5 per cent, increased parking charges by five per cent and road pricing by ten per cent.

**85.** Research commissioned by Transport Scotland on demand management sets out potential revenue that could be raised from local and national road charging and the potential risks of schemes.<sup>25</sup> It also considers the potential reduction in car kilometres driven and the environmental, economic and equality impacts. It found that:

- A national 'pay as you drive' charge of 10 pence per kilometre with discounts to those living in rural areas and people with a disability, provides the best opportunity for reducing car use. This could result in a 26 per cent reduction in car kilometres and raise £2.3 billion annually in 2030. The Scottish Government does not currently have the powers to introduce national charging.
- An area-based scheme that charges drivers around £15 per day for travelling into large urban areas (Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Dundee and Glasgow) could reduce car kilometres by 25 per cent and raise £1.3 billion annually in 2030. This would be dependent on the cities implementing the scheme at the same time.
- Local charging options would be easier and quicker to introduce because of the powers councils hold through the Transport (Scotland) 2019 Act.
- Demand management has the potential to raise significant levels of revenue, which existing legislation states should be used to support the objectives of the local transport strategy. Any new legislation on national schemes would need to consider how the money raised is spent.

## Exhibit 8.

### Demand management tools

There are several ways of discouraging car use, with varying costs to drivers. The Scottish Government and councils need to decide which are the most effective for their area or the country.



#### Road space reallocation

Removing space for cars and replacing with cycle lanes or green spaces. This makes the space more attractive, and can increase drive times, making driving less appealing.



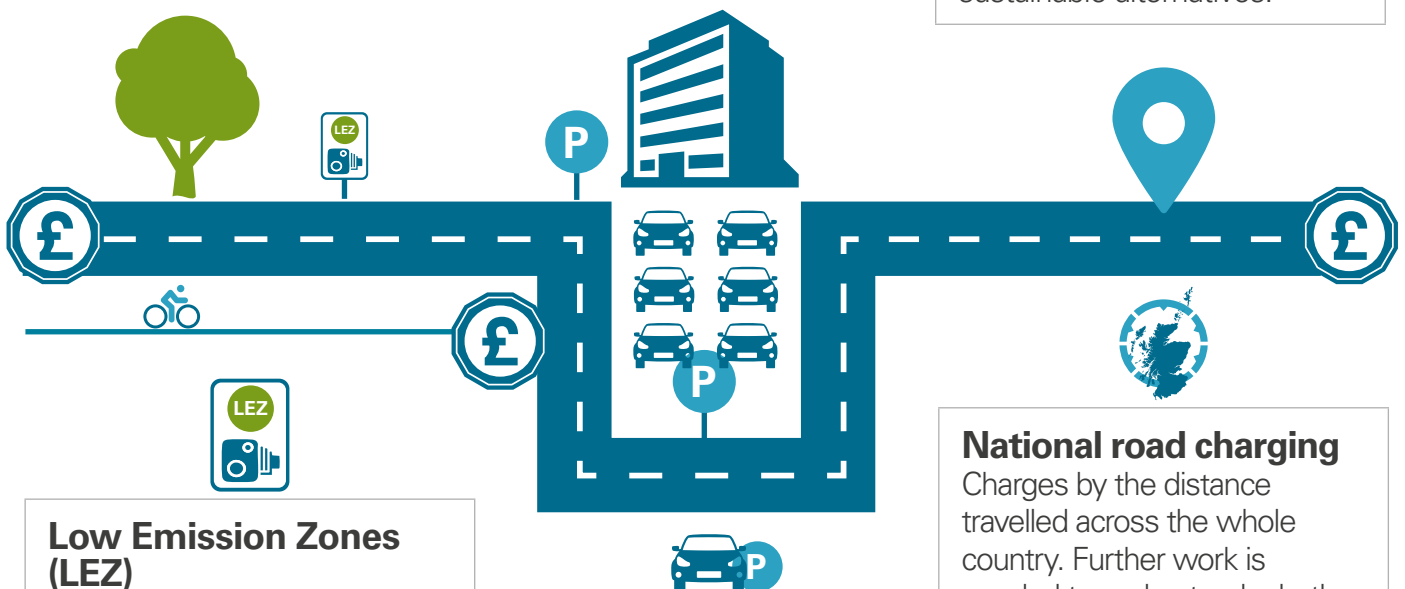
#### Workplace parking license

A discretionary power that councils can introduce to discourage employers from providing free car parking.



#### Local charges

Drivers are charged for either passing through a cordon or driving in a local area. Councils have the powers to introduce charges but not yet to enforce them. Income could be ring-fenced for improvements to sustainable alternatives.



#### Low Emission Zones (LEZ)

Charges for higher polluting vehicles entering city centres. Designed to improve air quality.

#### Parking charges

Charging drivers to park their car increases the cost of driving and can make other choices more appealing.



#### National road charging

Charges by the distance travelled across the whole country. Further work is needed to understand whether Scottish Government has the powers to introduce this.



#### Vehicle and excise duty

Changing these taxes to account more for distance travelled. This is reserved to the UK Parliament and outwith the Scottish Government's control.

**86.** Internal performance reports show that in early 2024, Transport Scotland was waiting for ministerial approval to publish the independent research on demand management. It published the research in December 2024, two and a half years after it was commissioned. It is unlikely that any option will be implemented in time to achieve the 2030 target due to the need to amend regulations or introduce new legislation.

**Any demand management interventions will need to carefully consider accessibility and equality**

**87.** The demand management option study shows that two of the four proposed interventions could have a minor negative impact on equality and accessibility. All the interventions need to have mitigating measures in place to protect certain groups. Scottish Government and councils will have to carefully consider how to implement schemes to discourage car use without negatively affecting people who cannot give up their cars or cannot afford additional charges.

**Demand management options are potentially unpopular and have faced significant opposition**

**88.** Councils and the Scottish Government report strong opposition to measures to reduce car use, whether that is road reallocation or local low emission zones. One example is the Aberdeen bus gates. [\(Case study 3, page 29\)](#) Residents are concerned about the impact on local economies and people reliant on their cars. Often there are campaigns on social media and in newspapers focused on preventing or reversing interventions.

**89.** Our case study councils told us that no council wants to be the first to introduce interventions that are unpopular with some people, and they would like more guidance and leadership from the Scottish Government.

**90.** All councils can introduce workplace parking licensing, but only Glasgow City Council is considering it. The City of Edinburgh Council decided against implementing it for the time being due to concerns about the impact on local businesses and low-income workers.

**91.** Strong local and national leadership is needed to progress schemes that face significant opposition. Politicians need to be supported with the data and evidence of the benefits of these schemes, for example the improvements that car-free areas brings to public spaces, or the positive impact on local businesses when town centres are improved. They need to work with their communities using this information to build support for measures that reduce car use, and ultimately make the decisions that are right for the whole community.

## The Scottish Government and councils face several challenges in delivering a reduction in kilometres driven

**92.** The challenges of reducing car use are wide-ranging and significant. One single organisation cannot address all the challenges of reducing car use. Instead, national and local government and others in the private and third sectors need to work together effectively to address the following:

- **Equalities:** Many different groups report relying on their private vehicles. People with disabilities may not be able to use public or active transport, people with visual impairments can find some active travel infrastructure restrictive, and women report safety concerns about using other modes of transport especially at night. Fully involving a wide range of people with varying needs in all aspects of policy, including at an early project design stage, can help make sure the transport system works for everyone.
- **Powers held:** Fuel duty and vehicle excise duty could be changed so that people who drove more paid more of these taxes. This could address demand management without additional charges for users. This is a decision reserved to the UK Government. Increasing collaboration between all levels of government can help ensure greater coordination on climate change policy, particularly in areas that attract significant opposition.
- **Rural:** The geography of rural and island areas presents specific challenges when switching from car travel. Longer distances to access services means that active travel is not always suitable. There are also fewer train journeys in rural areas, and bus services are being significantly reduced.
- **Data quality:** There are challenges in securing timely and reliable data to assess the impact of sustainable transport activities. High quality and reliable datasets will allow the government and councils to make more evidence-based decisions.
- **One-year funding:** Sustainable transport projects often require multi-year funding. This enables effective long-term planning ([paragraph 57](#)) which can help achieve better value for money.
- **Budgets:** The Scottish Government reported in its 2024/25 Programme for Government that it is pausing all non-essential spending. This will affect many of the projects designed to reduce car use.
- **Political instability:** Activities to encourage radical behaviour change away from car use requires long-term and cross-party political support. This requires all political leaders to make potentially unpopular decisions and stick to them.
- **Resources and skills:** Councils, particularly smaller ones, struggle with finding the skilled resources required to deliver projects that will reduce car use. Helping to upskill workers to address climate change will mean that all parts of Scotland can contribute to challenging targets.

# Endnotes

- 1 Letter: [Lord Deben, Climate Change Committee to Roseanna Cunningham MSP](#), Climate Change Committee, 2020.
- 2 [Progress in reducing emissions in Scotland](#), Climate Change Committee – 2023 Report to Parliament, 2024.
- 3 [Progress in reducing emissions in Scotland](#), Climate Change Committee – 2021 Report to Parliament, 2021.
- 4 [Local living and 20-minute neighbourhoods: planning guidance](#), Scottish Government, 2024.
- 5 The Auditor General's 2023 report on [Investing in Scotland's infrastructure](#) explains the challenges of fully understanding where the government is investing funding and how individual projects contribute to net zero goals.
- 6 [ScotRail peak fares removal pilot Final Evaluation Report: An analysis of the Fair Fares Review Pathfinder project](#), Transport Scotland, 2024.
- 7 [Securing a green recovery on a path to net zero: climate change plan 2018–2032 - update](#), Scottish Government, 2020.
- 8 [Travel demand Management options study](#), Transport Scotland, 2024.
- 9 [Progress in reducing emissions in Scotland](#), Climate Change Committee – 2023 Report to Parliament, 2024.
- 10 [Wheels of Change: Promoting Fair and Green Transport in Rural Scotland](#), Institute for Public Policy Research, 2024.
- 11 [Scottish Parliament People's Panel reviewing the Climate Change \(Scotland\) Act 2009](#), Scottish Parliament, 2024.
- 12 [Reducing car kilometres 20% by 2030: public perceptions, Climate X Change](#), 2021.
- 13 The RTP covering Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire.
- 14 [Programme for Government 2024/25 - Serving Scotland](#), Scottish Government, September 2024.
- 15 Including Cycling, walking and safer routes funding for councils.
- 16 [Glasgow South City Way: Follow Up Monitoring Report](#), Sustrans, 2024.
- 17 [Fair Fares Review: Case for change](#), Transport Scotland, 2024.
- 18 [Scottish Transport Statistics 2023](#), Transport Scotland, 2024
- 19 [Progress in reducing emissions in Scotland](#), Climate Change Committee – 2023 Report to Parliament, 2024
- 20 Sustrans' Hands Up Survey.
- 21 [Ofcom Connected Nations](#), UK report, 2024.
- 22 [Annual car club report – Scotland](#), CoMoUK, 2023.
- 23 [Summary report – Year 1 evaluation – Young Persons' Free Bus Travel Scheme](#), Transport Scotland, 2023.
- 24 [Reducing Car-km and Carbon Emissions: Options for the Nestrans Region](#), Jacobs, 2023
- 25 [Travel demand Management options study](#), Transport Scotland, 2024.

# Sustainable transport

Reducing car use



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13 March 2025

Richard Leonard MSP  
Convener  
Public Audit Committee  
Scottish Parliament

By email

Dear Convener

## Sustainable Transport – Reducing car use

On 26 February 2025, I provided evidence to the Committee on the audit of [Sustainable transport – reducing car use](#). During the meeting, Committee members requested further information, which I have responded to below. Specifically:

### Electric vehicles performance audit

The Accounts Commission and I are currently considering our programme of work. As part of this we are considering a potential audit of electric vehicles and the scope and timing of this.

### Greenhouse gas emission statistics

Mr Beattie asked for clarification of the statistics used in Exhibit 1. This showed that the category 'domestic transport' has the highest share of greenhouse emissions in Scotland, 28 per cent in 2022.

These statistics come from the territorial emission section (section B) of the [Scottish Greenhouse Gas Statistics](#) that are published annually by the Scottish Government. In this context, the category 'domestic transport' is defined to include emissions from transport activity taking place within Scotland's territorial boundary, (i.e., 'domestic' as opposed to 'international'). The category excludes greenhouse gas emissions from 'international aviation and shipping', which are separate category in the report.

The 2022 statistics do not break down emission by vehicle type, but this was included in the 2021 statistics (see [Table 5](#)). We have reported the 2021 statistics as an appendix to this letter.

### Aberdeen city bus gates

Case study 3 in the report sets out measures by Aberdeen city council to prioritise bus travel within the city centre. The committee asked about whether analysis had been carried out by the council on the impact on footfall in the city centre following the introduction of the bus gates.

Aberdeen City Council considered a report on the bus gates at its July 2024 meeting. [Page 83 of the papers](#) for that meeting set out the Springboard Survey the council had undertaken. It found that there had been a decrease in footfall of 4.6 per cent when comparing the period of 27



August 2023 to 22 April 2024, following the introduction of the bus gates, against the exact same period the year before.

I trust that this information is helpful to your consideration of the report.

Yours sincerely

**Stephen Boyle**  
**Auditor General for Scotland**

## Appendix – Domestic transport greenhouse gas statistics, 2021

Mode of transport	Emissions MtCO <sub>2</sub> e	Percentage
Cars	4.7	41%
Light duty trucks	1.8	15%
Heavy duty trucks and buses	2.2	19%
Railways	0.1	1%
Domestic aviation and aviation bunkers	0.6	5%
Domestic shipping and fishing	1.7	14%
International shipping fuel bunkers	0.3	3%
Other	0.2	2%

Note – the inclusion of international aviation bunkers and international shipping fuel bunkers relates to bunker fuel emissions at the UK level allocated to Scotland on the basis of Scottish share in port and airport activity. This is different to the overall emissions from international aviation and shipping.