

Climate Change and Road Transport

Scottish Green Party debate - Thursday 26th October 2006 (9.15am)
Briefing from Friends of the Earth Scotland and TRANSform Scotland



1. Introduction

Friends of the Earth Scotland & TRANSform Scotland welcome this further opportunity to debate the issue of climate change and road transport. While welcoming the recent publication of the Scottish Executive's Climate Change Programme, **we do not accept that the Executive's practice in transport and climate change is either responsible or serious.**

The transport sector is one of the main contributors to climate change. Yet despite a now high level of awareness of this issue, there is little evidence that the Scottish transport sector is taking measures to reduce emissions: car use and road freight levels continue to increase, air travel growth is uncontrolled, while vehicle efficiency is failing to make significant improvement.

The Scottish Executive has fallen far short on the action needed to reduce transport's impact on the environment. From throwing subsidies at airline companies to bulldozing through new motorways, the Executive's performance remains poor. With transport the fastest-growing source of climate emissions, the Executive is going to have to get a grip - and fast.

2. The Scottish Executive's recent record on transport and climate change

A sustainable transport policy requires more than just spending more money on public transport. While an important part of sustainable transport, it would be entirely naïve to believe that infrastructure investment in public transport alone can deliver the step-change in transport that we require. But rather than back strong action to back up its climate change programme ambitions, the Executive's recent record on tackling climate emissions from the transport sector has been abysmal. It has:

2.1 Threatened to go back on promises to reduce traffic levels - Road Traffic Stabilisation Target:

In its recent National Transport Strategy consultation, the Executive threatened to ditch its road traffic stabilisation target only four years after setting itself the target. The report of the Scottish Parliament's 2005 climate change inquiry concluded that not only should the Executive keep the target but that it should set out interim targets as milestones along the road to the 2021 target. The Executive's subsequent attempts to ditch the target gives the clear message that it has no intention of tackling climate change emissions from the road transport sector.

2.2 Failed to support local authority action to reduce traffic levels - Edinburgh congestion charge and FETA road charges:

The Executive has claimed that it supports local authority action in implementing road user charging, yet the Scottish Ministers went into hiding when the City of Edinburgh Council brought forward its plans for a referendum in early 2005, and earlier this year threw out the proposal of the Forth Estuary Transportation Authority (FETA) for road charges on the Forth Road Bridge. The Executive's failure to take a lead has killed off action on this front for the time being - despite the ongoing success of similar schemes in London and Stockholm.

2.3 Forced through urban motorway-building - Glasgow's M74:

The Executive has pressed ahead with urban motorway-building in Glasgow despite being comprehensively trounced in the independent Public Local Inquiry by JAM74 and Friends of the Earth Scotland. The inquiry concluded that the new motorway would be bad for the environment,

bad for social justice and bad for the economy. Friends of the Earth Scotland were forced to take the Executive to the Court of Session in an attempt to reverse the Executive's atrocious decision, but were forced to withdraw the case.

2.4 Carved up the green belt for developers - Aberdeen western bypass:

The Executive has failed to consider non-road alternatives to a project that will effectively destroy the western green belt of Scotland's third city, whilst doing little or nothing to improve conditions for commuting in/out of the city at peak hours. The Executive's comprehensive mismanagement of the process has brought forward widespread threats of legal action from local residents.

2.5 Subsidised short-haul aviation - Air Route Development Fund:

The Executive has introduced subsidies to airlines for new air routes, despite air transport being the most climate-damaging mode of transport. The subsidies do not even make any sense in narrow economic terms as the air transport industry operates as an economic drain on the Scottish economy, flying out more cash than it brings in.

3. Need for action on climate change in the National Transport Strategy

The publication on 20/04/06 of the National Transport Strategy consultation document was met with strong objections on the finding that the Executive was looking to drop the 'road traffic stabilisation target' set in 2002 (returning traffic levels to 2001 levels by 2021).

Road traffic reduction is *the* most vital component of a sustainable transport policy. *A transport strategy that is not founded on reducing road traffic levels is not, nor should claim to be, a sustainable transport strategy.*

Too much traffic divides communities and degrades the environment, in rural as well as urban areas. In simple terms, less traffic means fewer air pollution deaths, less congestion costs, less community severance, and less impact on the natural environment. Critically, there appears to be little or no chance of hitting climate change emission targets without reducing road traffic levels.

The Scottish Executive needs to give a clear lead that it wants transport policy to reduce road traffic levels, and not try to provide for endless traffic growth. It is imperative that the traffic target is retained and – rather than abandoned – *strengthened* by the addition of, firstly, interim targets and, secondly, an action plan to deliver on these targets. This approach gained the support of the Scottish Parliament Climate Change Inquiry in 2005.

Any weakening of the existing target will give the clear message that the Scottish Executive has no intention of tackling climate change emissions from the transport sector. At the launch of the Executive's Climate Change Programme earlier this year, Environment Minister Ross Finnie stated that transport is one of the three key sectors where emission reduction must happen. With emissions in transport still on the increase, the weakening of action in the transport sector would fatally damage the integrity of the Executive's Climate Change Programme.

4. About Friends of the Earth Scotland & TRANSform Scotland

Friends of the Earth Scotland is an independent member of the Friends of the Earth International network. We undertake research, advocacy and community development activities throughout Scotland in pursuit of environmental justice and sustainability.

TRANSform Scotland is the national sustainable transport alliance, campaigning for a more sustainable and more socially-just transport system. Our membership includes bus, rail and shipping operators, local authorities, national environment and conservation groups, consultancies and local transport campaigns.

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