

Transport and environmental justice

29 May 2007



Friends of
the Earth
Scotland

1. Introduction

Friends of the Earth Scotland welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Executive's transport strategy ahead of the Executive debate this week. In particular we welcome the commitment set out in the SNP manifesto to tackle congestion through investment in railways, additional park and ride schemes and innovative solutions such as increased home working. However, we believe that if congestion and pollution are to be tackled, demand management measures need to be considered as part of a broader package of investment in cycling, walking and public transport.

2. The context – polluting, congested and unjust transport

2.1 Climate Emissions

In 2003 transport accounted for 17 percent of all Scottish greenhouse gas emissions¹. This is a 6 per cent increase on 1990 and therefore represents the fastest-growing source of climate emissions². If we are to meet climate change emissions reduction targets, the transport sector must play a key role.

2.2 Congestion

The Eddington Review recognised the cost of congestion to England alone by 2025 to be around £22 billion per annum if left unchecked³. The problem is also important to Scotland: in 2004 Transport Scotland calculated that 7.9 million hours were wasted through traffic congestion on Scotland's Trunk roads⁴. In areas comparable with 2003, this represents a 4.6 per cent increase⁵.

2.3 Unjust

Nearly four fifths of the UK's poorest ten per cent of households don't have a car. This compares to just one twenty-fifth of the richest ten per cent⁶. Any transport policy which fails to take account of these households risks further marginalising them. In addition, a Leeds University study found that motorists pay only a third to a half of the external costs they impose on society.⁷

3. Scottish Executive Priorities

3.1 Commitment to a climate change bill

We warmly welcome the Executive's commitment to a climate change bill with annual 3 per cent emissions reduction targets. These targets should be kept under review, and tightened if current scientific advice warrants it. We also welcome the proposed assessment of the climate change impact of major infrastructure projects, which we trust will be independently audited. We await with interest details of any proposed 'carbon offsetting' scheme, which will require independent verification to ensure that overall emissions - including those from air travel - do not exceed agreed annual emissions budgets.

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3.2 Commitment to reduce congestion

We welcome the SNP manifesto commitment to reduce congestion. In particular we welcome the encouragement for flexible working and park and ride schemes.

3.3 Commitment to improve public transport

We welcome the SNP commitment to invest in our railways, in particular the emphasis on greater capacity and shorter journey times. However, we believe completing the Edinburgh Tram scheme, which was approved by the previous parliament, is vital to provide world-class public transport in our capital city.

4. Friends of the Earth proposals

4.1 Certification of biofuels

We cautiously welcome the SNP manifesto commitment to 100 per cent biofuel use in public sector vehicles and 30 per cent in private vehicles by 2020. However we have serious concerns over the real environmental impact of some biofuels, particularly those sourced from palm oil plantations on former rainforest land. Scotland should only use biofuels that are certified as coming from sustainable sources.

4.2 Existing speed limits should be enforced

We welcome the SNP commitment to a safer and cleaner transport strategy. As a contribution to achieving this we suggest the Executive examines measures to enforce existing speed limits. In addition to the safety benefits, research suggests this could also deliver carbon savings of between 2.8 and 5.4 per cent⁸, helping deliver safer, greener travel.

4.3 The need for demand management

Many studies, including the Eddington Review and the Leeds University study, suggest that the most effective way to reduce both congestion and climate emissions is through demand management along with investment in a package of alternatives. For this reason we are very disappointed that the SNP does not support road user charging and intends to remove tolls from the Forth and Tay bridges altogether, rather than implementing 'smart tolls' which would help to address congestion and pollution. We hope that any local transport authority wishing to progress congestion charging will receive backing from the Executive. If the Executive does not progress national road charging, it should as a minimum agree to road traffic reduction targets along with an associated action plan.

5. Conclusion

We welcome many aspects of SNP transport policy, including the commitment to invest in public transport and to assess the climate impact of major infrastructure projects. However, investment in public transport must extend to completing Edinburgh's tram network.

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¹ Scottish Executive (2006) *Changing our ways, Scotland's Climate Change Programme*, p29, also online at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/03/30091039/0>

² Ibid, p16

³ HM Treasury (2006) *The Eddington Study*, p6, online at: http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/39A/41/eddington_execsum11206.pdf

⁴ Transport Scotland (2004) *Congestion on Scottish Trunk Roads*, section 2 page 1, also online at: <http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/defaultpage1221cde0.aspx?pageID=268&rlID=792&pubID=46>

⁵ Ibid, 'Appendix - Comparison of 2003 and 2004 Values'

⁶ Office of National Statistics (2002) *Family Spending Survey 2000-1*

⁷ University of Leeds Institute of Transport Studies (2001) *Surface Transport Costs and Charges: Great Britain 1998*, online at: http://www.its.leeds.ac.uk/projects/STCC/surface_transport.html

⁸ UK Energy Research Centre (UKERC), 'Limiting Speed' (2006)