Friends of the Earth Scotland Policy Briefing Paper

Submission to Christie Commission

25 March 2011

Introduction

Spending cuts are dominating politics, and it is critical that Government spending, including on public services, delivers efficiently and effectively. Alongside this, in June 2009, the Scottish Parliament unanimously passed the Climate Change (Scotland) Act requiring emissions reductions of 42% by 2020. While recognising that the implementation of this will cost money, investment in the right places could also improve public health, stimulate the economy and reduce poverty. Below we set out examples of such spending, largely taken from our report '42% Better'.[i]

1. Improving the energy efficiency of Scotland's homes

Improving insulation and energy performance offers clear social and health benefits as well as economic and environmental. Research in the UK and New Zealand has shown that tackling fuel poverty through improving insulation and providing efficient heating reduces the number of children and working adults taking time off for illness by 15% and 25% respectively[ii]. An evaluation of the Warm Front programme in the UK found that interventions to provide people with dry, warm homes and no worries about fuel bills halved the incidence of anxiety and depression ("common mental disorder")[iii]. On the basis of this evaluation it can be suggested that eliminating fuel poverty in Scotland would prevent 180,000 cases of common mental disorder each year, as well as directly reducing material poverty.

Improving the energy efficiency of our homes is also good for employment. The proposed new coal plant at Hunterston would employ 160 people in the long term. Including construction jobs it might create 25 jobs per terawatt hour (TWh) of electricity generated. Energy conservation would generate 370 jobs per TWh, including indirect effects[iv]. Implementing the Scottish Energy Efficiency Action Plan has been estimated to generate over 10,000 direct jobs for ten years[v]. It is disappointing therefore that the Scottish Government severely cut the energy efficiency and sustainable housing programmes in this years budget.[vi]

- ***Recommendation: Investment in home energy efficiency and renewable domestic heating should be prioritised for increased expenditure by the Scottish Government and local authorities***

2. Improving how we travel

Increasing the share of journeys undertaken by walking, cycling and public transport to 50% (the same as in the Netherlands) could cut obesity rates in Scotland in half, with massive savings to the National Health Service in Scotland, which already spends around £170million a year tackling obesity or health problems – such as heart disease - caused as a direct result. Improving cycling rates alone to Dutch levels could save up to 1,600 lives a year as a result of the net health benefits of greater physical activity[vii].

Improving public transport would also be good for jobs. A £140 million bus scrappage scheme could safeguard up to 4500 jobs within the bus industry, at plants such as Alexander Dennis' Bus Body Group in Falkirk. As well as reduced greenhouse gas

emissions, modern buses have significantly lower particulate pollution. Buses are a significant contributor to particulate pollution in our major cites, which is estimated to cause some 2000 deaths a year in Scotland. Lower polluting, more reliable buses would be a particular benefit for poorer inhabitants of Scotland's cities, the vast majority of whom do not own cars.

- ***Recommendation: Investment in active travel and public transport should be prioritised by the Scottish Government and local authorities***

3. Cutting obesity through improved diets

Increased physical activity can contribute significantly to improved health and reduced obesity, as suggested above. But the other side of the equation is diet. Diets high in meat, fats and sugar, and low in fruit and vegetables are both unhealthy, and environmentally unsustainable. Reducing meat consumption to levels that can be sustained through grass-fed domestic production would have both environmental and social benefits, reflected in the longer term in substantial reductions in required levels of health-care spending. In addition much could be done to improve the quality of food provided by schools and hospitals. East Ayrshire's schools programme offers a good example in this regard, as do school meals in Rome.[viii]

* ***Recommendation: Climate cross-compliance should be maximized in agricultural support expenditure, and supported with procurement and educational policy to improve diets.***

4. Saving money from unnecessary capital projects

The Scottish Government is planning to spend £2 billion on a second Forth road-bridge. This will require in the region of £583 million from the next two budgets alone[ix]. This is despite the fact that studies have shown that the existing Forth road-bridge can be repaired for a fraction of the cost - £122 million[x]. At a time of such spending constraints, we believe it is irresponsible to spend so much on an unnecessary bridge. Other road-construction projects, while delivering small benefits in increased construction activity, run counter to policy on climate change and health, and should be reviewed.

* ***Recommendation: Expenditure on road and bridge construction should be frozen, pending a full review.***

Conclusion

Ambitious action on climate change can deliver multiple benefits. This is particularly the case for energy efficiency, transport and food. At a time of budget constraints, Scotland needs to focus spending on services and programmes which deliver multiple benefits to the economy, society and the environment.

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i http://www.foe-scotland.org.uk/42percent-report

ii Somerville et al., Housing and health: does installing heating in their homes improve the health of children with asthma? http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11114752; Howden-Chapman et al., Effect of insulating existing houses on health inequality: cluster randomised study in the community. http://www.bmj.com/content/334/7591/460.full.

iii Green & Gilbertson, Warm Front, better health – health impact evaluation of the Warm Front scheme. http://www.apho.org.uk/resource/view.aspx?RID=53281

iv Wuppertal Institute, Germany. http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_13931-544-1-30.pdf

v Association for the Conservation of Energy (2009), Warm Homes, Green Jobs. http://www.ukace.org/publications/ACE%20Research%20%282009-10%29%20-%20Warm%20Homes,%20Green%20Jobs%20%5Bbriefing%5D.pdf

vi http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/eet/documents/ClimateChange-RPP-webversion.pdf

vii Transform Scotland Trust, Towards a Healthier Economy, http://www.transformscotland.org.uk/GetFile.aspx?ItemId=108

viii See http://www.sustainable-scotland.net/conference2008/documents/RobinGourlay.pdf and http://www.docstoc.com/docs/54413182/Roberta-Sonnino-C-Creative-Public-Procurement-Lessons-from-Italy--green-food

ix For - 2010/11, 2011/12, and 2012/13 - the Forth Crossing proposals require £613m, 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16 - £1,179m and post 2016 - £196m (http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/research/briefings-10/SB10-05.pdf).

x A study by W A Fairhurst and Partners found that replacement of the main cables is possible at a cost of £91-122 million.