

Executive debate on Transport

Wednesday 5th November 2003

Briefing from Friends of the Earth Scotland & TRANSform Scotland

Background:

* **Road traffic levels continue to grow.**

Road traffic levels are forecast to grow by 27% over the 20 years to 2021. In Glasgow, road traffic levels are projected to grow by 40% - *yet the main transport project there is the M74 Northern Extension, a six-lane elevated urban motorway.* [Source: Scottish Executive, 2002]

* **Road traffic growth threatens the environment and public health.** Emissions from road transport are responsible for 15% of carbon dioxide emissions. Road transport is the second fastest growing source of carbon dioxide, the main climate changing gas (number one is civil aviation). Toxic emissions from road traffic represent the principal threat to air quality in urban areas. Motor vehicles are responsible for: 63.7% of benzene emissions, 71% of carbon monoxide emissions, 65.9% of lead emissions and 49.5% of nitrogen dioxide emissions [Source: SEPA Air Quality Report 2000].

* **Scottish Executive policy has favoured road-building over public transport.** In the period 1999-2003, over £1 billion was committed to new pollution- and traffic-generating trunk road-building. The Public Transport Fund, between 1999 and its final round in November 2002, committed only £235 million over the same period - despite the fact that 34% of Scottish households (and 59% of Glasgow households) have no access to a car.

* **Public transport users have faced rapid price increases, car users have not.** The overall cost of motoring (including purchase, maintenance, petrol and oil, and tax and insurance) remained constant in real terms for 25 years (1974-1999) while the price of public transport increased by 60-80% in real terms. [Source: UK Transport Ten Year Plan, July

2000: Chart 3c.] Motoring costs have been falling in real terms since 1999/00, when the fuel duty escalator was scrapped [Source: Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT)], making public transport increasingly expensive compared to car use.

* **Scotland has the lowest rate of public support for bus services across Europe.** In Scotland, 29% of bus industry revenue comes from subsidies & grants, compared to 32% for the UK as a whole, compared to as high as 70% in countries such as Austria and Belgium. [Source: CPT]

* **Delivery of new public transport remains painfully slow.** The only railway opening delivered since 1999 is the 0.9 mile Edinburgh Crossrail service. With less than one mile of new services serving new locations opened in four years, and given Scottish Executive aspiration for re-opening about 60 miles of new railway (Borders rail, Larkhall etc.), this would take 240 years at the current rate of progress.

What do we need:

* **Clear guarantees on public transport investment.** The Scottish Executive has stated that, by 2005-06, 70% of transport expenditure will be on public transport. Yet the Scottish Executive needs to provide much greater clarity on the timescales for delivering its promised new public transport schemes. Given the massive cost escalation of roads projects such as the M74 Northern Extension (which increased in projected price from £245 million to £375-500 million in March 2003), there needs to be guarantees that the promised public transport infrastructure will be

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delivered in full if the cost of road building schemes continue to rise. The Executive should set out interim expenditure targets and details of current expenditure plans.

* **Public transport investment needs to be more than just mega-projects.** Current public transport expenditure plans are focused largely on very expensive mega-projects (such as an Edinburgh Airport rail link). Public transport delivery must not lose sight of the need for improvement in basic service quality conditions for public transport use (e.g. timetables, integrated ticketing, safety, physical accessibility, affordable fares).

* **Public transport needs to be accompanied by traffic demand management measures.** Transport policy needs to incorporate the "Polluter Pays Principle." We need to see swift implementation of measures to make users pay for the external costs of motoring - both environmentally and socially - that they inflict on others (pollution, congestion, road crashes, etc.). Economic incentives such as road user charging should be applied in order to reduce these impacts and encourage the shift to sustainable transport alternatives.

* **Investing in walking and cycling are cost-effective measures to reduce peak hour congestion whilst improving public health.** Most journeys are very local: half of all trips are less than 2 miles long, 70% less than 5 miles. Walking and cycling, the healthiest and most sustainable modes of transport, need to have much more emphasis in Executive transport planning if it is serious about tackling national public health problems. Walking remains the second most common journey mode in Scotland yet has been largely ignored by the Executive and the Parliament. Much more effort must be put into programmes of local traffic-reducing "quality of life" measures such as Safe Routes to School, slower speed zones & Home Zones. **The Executive should create an Active Transport Fund to deliver the range of local traffic-reducing schemes that are currently deprived of financial support.**

* **Transport expenditure should have a social inclusion audit.** Transport expenditure programmes should ensure that a fair proportion is spent on the modes of transport used disproportionately used by low income groups: walking and bus use. Both of these modes are largely neglected in current transport expenditure plans. Doing this would help deliver on the Executive stated commitments towards environmental justice.

* **There needs to be a fundamental review of the Executive's civil service staffing on transport.** Wendy Alexander, the then Transport Minister, noted as much at the March 2002 launch of the Transport Delivery Report that delivering public transport in Scotland was difficult because the existing Scottish Executive officials' skill set was "entirely based around road building." It has often been observed that one of the reasons why delivery on road-building appears to be easier to achieve than delivery on sustainable transport is because of the disproportionate amount of Scottish Executive civil servants employed in the Roads Divisions at Victoria Quay compared to those employed in areas charged with delivering sustainable transport. *This situation needs to be urgently over-hauled if the Executive's public transport aspirations have any chance of delivery.*

Rather than creating another arms-length agency such as the proposed 'Transport Scotland' body, and in order to deliver on its 70% public transport spending commitment, the Executive's priority should rather be the reform of its own civil service staffing.

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