

Just Transition Commission Call for Evidence

Cycling Scotland submission June 2020

Question 1 – Does your response relate to a specific sector?

Transport

Question 2 – What do you see as the main economic opportunities and challenges associated with meeting Scotland’s climate change targets?

N/A

Question 3 – What do you think are the wider social (health, community etc.) opportunities and challenges associated with meeting Scotland’s climate change targets?

The interim Commission report highlights in paragraph 1.4 that public concern over the impact of and response to climate change has never been higher. This is an important foundation for action which must be built upon. The overwhelming challenges of the climate emergency are a top priority and must underpin action in this regard.

There are a number of challenges and opportunities associated with meeting Scotland’s climate change targets.

A significant challenge is the continued prioritisation of road building and motorised transport. The majority of car journeys in Scotland are under 5km, and it is these short journeys that are most problematic in terms of greenhouse gas emissions. The Scottish Infrastructure Commission, in their interim report, outlined a recommendation that for road infrastructure, there should be a presumption in favour of investment to future proof existing road infrastructure and to make it safer, resilient and more reliable, rather than increase road capacity¹. We support this recommendation and feel that the Commission need to take it into account, with regards to decisions to meet climate change targets. Limiting investment in expanding road capacity is crucial for climate change, air pollution, road safety, health and social inclusion objectives and is required if desired levels of modal shift to active travel and public transport are to be achieved. If this is not done, carbon and greenhouse gas emissions will continue to be locked into the transport system and infrastructure decision-making.

Paragraph 4.8 of the interim report discusses electric vehicles and raises concerns on the impact they may have with regards to equality and connectivity. In addition to the points raised in the paragraph, we would add that such vehicles still represent vehicular traffic and issues of congestion and air quality, from particulate matter emissions from braking and tyre wear, remain, and which further negatively impact on equality outcomes. Particulate matter emissions are recognised as being dangerous to health at any level and it is widely acknowledged that the negative impacts of poor air quality are more readily experienced in more deprived groups in society and among those with pre-existing health conditions.

¹ Scottish Infrastructure Commission (2020) Phase 1: Key findings report. A blueprint for Scotland https://infrastructurecommission.scot/storage/238/ExecutiveSummary_160120.pdf

Refocusing the transport system on promoting delivery of the Sustainable Transport Hierarchy and prioritising active travel is crucial to meet climate change targets and ensuring a truly fair and just transition for all.

An increased focus on cycling (and active travel) is a critical driver of the National Performance Framework and for delivering on several indicators outlined in the Framework, including to reduce traffic congestion, reduce Scotland's carbon footprint, increase the proportion of journeys to work made by public or active transport, and improve access to local greenspace². This also aligns to commitments outlined in the Programme for Government³; the recent independent review of the Cleaner Air for Scotland Strategy, which calls for a shift to more sustainable modes of transport⁴ to improve air quality in Scotland; and to the climate emergency declared by the Scottish Government.

Going forward, in response to the current Covid-19 pandemic, there is a need to ensure that transport infrastructure decision-making and spending takes into account the need to support physical distancing for active travel and public transport, both now and in response to future pandemics. This includes space allocation decisions and ensuring sufficient footway and cycle path width. This is critical to ensure people can continue to travel actively to facilitate and support a green and just transition to meeting climate change targets. The temporary measures taken by many Scottish local authorities to encourage cycling and active travel during the lockdown period are an important first step, and these should be made permanent and further expanded, where possible.

There has been a significant reduction in car journeys during the lockdown period, which has led to significant improvements in air quality and greenhouse gas emissions. Positively, there has been a significant increase in the number of people cycling; however, there has also been a corresponding decrease in the number of people using public transport, which has an important role to play in decarbonising transport and delivering the Sustainable Transport Hierarchy. As we move forward in the transition out of lockdown, it is important that the gains in improved air quality and increased levels of cycling are not reversed by a return to pre-pandemic or even higher levels of motorised transport.

Question 4 – What would a successful transition to net-zero emissions look like for your community/sector?

A successful transition to net-zero emissions would be centred on delivery of the Sustainable Transport Hierarchy where active travel and public transport are prioritised and active travel is the natural choice for short everyday journeys.

The interim report identifies a need to address existing inequalities in transport. This is essential to achieve a successful transition to net-zero, and also to ensure that future inequalities are minimised/reduced. Paragraph 5.29 of the report states that investment should avoid locking in emissions and inequality. We welcome this and it aligns with the recommendation of the Scottish Infrastructure Commission discussed previously.

² Scottish Government (2016) The National Performance Framework
<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0049/00497339.pdf>

³ Scottish Government (2019) Programme for Government: the Government's Programme for Scotland 2019-2020 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/protecting-scotlands-future-governments-programme-scotland-2019-20/>

⁴ Scottish Government (2019) Cleaner Air for Scotland – An Independent Review
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/cleaner-air-scotland-strategy-independent-review/pages/15/>

A significant challenge is the continued prioritisation in budget spend in expanding road capacity, in opposition to the Sustainable Transport Hierarchy. This embeds increased emissions, entrenches car dependency, increases the road maintenance shortfall, and can further increase transport inequalities. In addition to the negative effects of poor air quality and congestion being more readily experienced in more deprived communities, the present transport system, through continuing to prioritise road development, currently places an unequal burden on those in the most deprived communities, and there is a risk that growth in car ownership further isolates those without access to a car. For example, in urban cities like Dundee and Glasgow, more than 44% of households do not have access to a car⁵. Re-focusing on providing integrated and responsive active travel services and infrastructure instead of building new roads is essential and will contribute significantly to reducing inequality in the transport system in Scotland. More than 60% of car journeys are under five kilometres, and it is these journeys that offer the greatest potential to switch to cycling⁶.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, action should be taken to support sustainable public transport options in the transition out of lockdown and to reassure public transport users, many of whom are from more deprived populations, particularly bus users, that it is safe to use. Prioritised and targeted action which not only protects and enhances the gains which have been made in cycling and active travel, but which also ensures easily accessible and affordable public transport to those who need it is required. Without such action, the present inequalities in the transport system will persist, and a just transition unlikely to be delivered.

Question 5 – What actions do you think the Scottish Government should take to manage the opportunities and challenges referenced above?

To achieve modal shift to cycling and active travel, there is a need to create coherent networks of safe, easy to access segregated cycling infrastructure. This includes cohesive, comprehensive, and seamless networks of on-road segregated routes in towns and cities and linking communities in rural areas with off-road paths. The focus should be on shorter distance journeys but with longer distances (generally up to 10 miles) in more rural areas.

The Sustainable Transport Hierarchy has to play a defining role in major planning decisions otherwise land use planning decisions undermine sustainable transport objectives.

Increasing access to bikes is key to addressing inequality and reducing transport poverty, essential elements to secure a successful and just transition to net-zero. Action to deliver increased access to bikes should be prioritised in this regard.

In addition to the points discussed above in our response, the recommendations of the Scottish Infrastructure Commission, with regards to roads and planning, should be actioned and prioritised. The Infrastructure Commission recommends that guidance should be prepared to support a whole-life approach to infrastructure maintenance and prioritisation, including both costs and resources. This approach should include active travel infrastructure while recognising the maintenance costs are significantly lower. We also welcome the Infrastructure Commission's recommendation that this should include guidance on assessing wider contributions to achieving net-zero and inclusive growth priorities/outcomes. Active travel has a central role to play in delivering on these priorities and should be considered in this regard.

⁵ Cycling Scotland (2019) Annual Cycling Monitoring Report
<https://www.cycling.scot/mediaLibrary/other/english/6353.pdf>

⁶ *ibid*

With regards to air quality and delivery of Low Emission Zones (LEZs), we support the principle of LEZs and acknowledge the contribution they can make to improving air quality and encouraging modal shift. Action should be taken to further support the roll out of LEZs across the country. We note the concern in paragraph 4.9 of the interim report that LEZs may exacerbate existing health inequalities. In this regard, it is important that, alongside LEZs, both local and central government actively promote and facilitate modal shift towards cycling and active travel, which will help to address air pollution and issues of poor air quality.

Question 6 – Are there specific groups or communities that may be, or feel that they may be adversely affected by a transition to a net-zero carbon economy? What steps can be taken to address their concerns?

Action to ensure equality and equity of access to sustainable transport across the population is required. This can be achieved through actioning/delivering many of the points discussed in our response to earlier questions.

There has been an unequal social impact from the Covid-19 lockdown measures. Whilst necessary for whole population health, it has impacted unevenly across society, with the most deprived groups the most negatively impacted, in terms of transport. We note the commitment in the Scottish Government's Transport Transition Plan⁷ to taking forward an equality impact assessment, as part of the transition out of lockdown. This is welcome and required to avoid further social justice imbalances in access and mobility, as society transitions to the 'new normal'. Further, failure to act in this regard would make it significantly more challenging to achieve the net-zero greenhouse gas emissions target, and a just transition, and would also negatively impact on the functioning and mobility of towns and cities across the country.

When discussing a Just Transition, it is important to ensure that any transition is also fair, equal, and sustainable.

Question 7 – Please provide here any other information, evidence, or research you consider relevant to the work of the Commission.

There is a need to focus on improving safety for people cycling and travelling actively. Safety concerns is one of the main barriers to people cycling and needs to be addressed if required levels of modal shift are to be achieved to meet climate change targets. Improvements in safety can be delivered by delivering on the actions outlined above.

⁷ Transport Scotland (2020) Transport Transition Plan <https://www.transport.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/transport-transition-plan/>