

## RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

### PRE-BUDGET/FINANCIAL SCRUTINY ON ROADS MAINTENANCE IN SCOTLAND

#### SUBMISSION FROM FRIENDS OF THE EARTH SCOTLAND

- **How have recent spending decisions on roads maintenance affected the quality of Scotland's roads, road users, businesses, public services, and the economy?**
- **If spending on roads maintenance continues at current levels, what could be the likely effects on the above groups?**

In looking at spending decisions, it is worth considering the impacts of our current transport spending - particularly on health and the environment - and particularly the negative consequences of our prioritisation of fossil fuel car infrastructure.

For example, the annual cost to the NHS in Scotland of the health impacts of air pollution have been estimated at £1.1bn at a minimum.<sup>12</sup> This does not cover lost productivity due to sick days from health impacts of air pollution or traffic jams due to congestion. There is also the human cost, and associated financial cost, of traffic accidents. 146 people were killed and 1,589 seriously injured in road accidents in 2017.<sup>3</sup> It is estimated that 2,500 people each year die early due to the health impacts of air pollution.

The 'trunk roads' budget in 2019-2020 was £833m.<sup>4</sup> However, this doesn't include all road costs. New roads often come under infrastructure funding, separate from trunk roads budget. This is worth keeping in mind when assessing the huge costs of new roads, such as the reported £3bn for the dualling of the A9,<sup>5</sup> and the estimated £745m for the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast to these costs, the entire active travel budget for 2019-2020 is £80m/year, the same as it was the year before. This illustrates the stark difference in government priorities, with funding roads, primarily for cars, being given significant preference

<sup>1</sup> [https://foe.scot/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Air-Pollution-in-Scotland-FoES-MSP-briefing\\_0.pdf](https://foe.scot/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Air-Pollution-in-Scotland-FoES-MSP-briefing_0.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/air-quality-impact-pathway-guidance>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/44207/sct01193326941.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-budget-2019-20/pages/12/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.transport.gov.scot/projects/a9-dualling-perth-to-inverness/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-17-01737/>

compared to provisions for walking and cycling.<sup>7</sup> In light of the Government's declaration of a climate emergency, and the significant evidence we have of the huge health impacts we continue to see due to our car-centric transport system, we need to remove cars from the top of the transport pyramid. This process begins by redressing the funding imbalance.

Part of the Government's road funding, set out above, goes on creating new roads, which creates a variety of problems with knock-on consequences in other budget areas, like health. This does not begin to account for the extreme weather conditions coming from climate change, with transport Scotland's biggest emitter of greenhouse gas emissions. Meanwhile, government spending on cycling infrastructure consistently shows a fantastic return on investment for the taxpayer, with physical and mental health benefits and improvements to local economies. A 2012 study into increasing active travel in urban England and Wales found that "*Within 20 years, reductions in the prevalences of type 2 diabetes, dementia, ischaemic heart disease, cerebrovascular disease, and cancer because of increased physical activity would lead to savings of roughly £17 billion (in 2010 prices) for the NHS.*"<sup>8</sup>

Instead of looking at how we can maintain road spending levels, the Government should begin a process of diverting more funds from roads spending to active travel and public transport, year-on-year. However, we also need to call a halt to new major roads spending, which are a false economy as new roads generate more traffic and more congestion.<sup>91011</sup> It is more valuable to ensure that existing roads are well maintained. This includes removing potholes for the safety of all road users, as well as separating cycle lanes from motor traffic. Any new road spending should only be done in cases where a road is absolutely essential, and should come with significant spending on active travel in the immediate vicinity.

- **How could any negative effects of reduced road spending best be addressed?**

The framing of this question illustrates the issues in our approach to road use. The division of funding must mirror the modal split we would like to see, and we must be

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/43939/active-travel-budget-allocation-2018-2019.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22682466>

<sup>9</sup> The Science Is Clear: More Highways Equals More Traffic. Why Are DOTs Still Ignoring It?, *StreetsBlog USA*

<sup>10</sup> What's Up With That: Building Bigger Roads Actually Makes Traffic Worse, *Wired*

<sup>11</sup> "Roadway congestion is partially the outcome of induced transport demand as additional road capacity results in mode shifts, route shifts, redistribution of trips, generation of new trips, and land use changes that create new trips as well as longer trips." [https://transportgeography.org/?page\\_id=186](https://transportgeography.org/?page_id=186)

clear about the negative effects of increased, or consistent, road spending. If we continue spending billions on roads for private cars, we will get more private car use, we will get more congestion, more air pollution and more greenhouse gas emissions.

- **Is the current model of funding and delivering roads maintenance, which is split between Transport Scotland and local authorities, the most economic and efficient option?**

The active travel infrastructure that will drive modal shift - that will make it safer and more enjoyable to walk or cycle to work or education - will be delivered by local authorities. Local authorities need to receive more funding to deliver urban realm improvements and car use restrictions.

- **Programme for Government bus infrastructure funding**

Friends of the Earth Scotland welcomed the recent announcement in the Programme for Government to “*bring forward a step change in investment with over £500 million to improve bus priority infrastructure to tackle the impacts of congestion on bus services and raise bus usage.*”

We would encourage the committee to inquire about the timescales of this much needed investment, and the proposed uses - including the geographic spread. This funding could represent a turning point in how our bus system serves us - improving transport links between cities and towns. It should be focused on the whole of Scotland, not only on city-region areas, some of which currently have bus priority measures, albeit often poorly enforced.

Equally, the committee should not forget that a significant number of bus operators in Scotland are private businesses. Questions should be asked over their role in this expansion and whether, as beneficiaries of improved bus infrastructure and a higher uptake of buses, there is a role for bus operators to contribute towards this expansion. There should also be a conversation about how this funding can be used to support councils who exercise the powers to run their own bus services, which this Committee has given them through the Transport Bill.

This new funding should not lead to more roads, or an expansion of the trunk road network. It should be used to reallocate space within the existing trunk road network, deprioritising private car journeys, and prioritising public transport on motorways. The

Government should not be afraid to start prioritising public transport at the expense of private vehicles.

The Committee should seize this timely opportunity to hold the Government to account on this urgent project.