



**Sustainable
Development Commission
Scotland**

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Patrick Harvie MSP
Convenor
Transport, Infrastructure & Climate Change Committee
Scottish Parliament
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15th June 2009

Dear Patrick

Updated information on the Sustainable Development Commission Scotland's Analysis of the Strategic Transport Projects Review

At our appearance before your Committee on the 5th May 2009, we outlined the findings in our Second Assessment of the Scottish Government's performance on sustainable development: We also talked through the initial stages of our review of the Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR).

I am writing to update you on progress of the latter.

Since our appearance we have met with both the Transport Directorate and Transport Scotland to discuss this issue. The meetings have also been useful for gaining a clearer understanding of how the STPR was developed, and of its wider links with the National Transport Strategy (NTS) and transport policy.

The discussions concerning how the Scottish Government takes sustainable development into account in transport policy and delivery are still at an early stage and as such I am unable to provide final conclusions to your Committee before the summer recess.

However, I would like to outline the issues that we are discussing with Government which relate to the STPR, wider transport policy and sustainable development, to help your Committee gain a clearer understanding of our work and progress.

The first issue relates to how the 29 projects and interventions identified within the STPR were finalised; in particular how emissions reductions were considered as a part of this. The Government projects that CO₂ emissions from road transport could grow by between 7 and 22 per cent by 2022. We are concerned that despite being one of three strategic outcomes of the NTS, interventions set out within the STPR will only take 1% off this emissions growth, although we can acknowledge that the STPR needs to be considered in the wider context of transport policies and measures.

To get a clearer picture of how Transport Scotland used the three strategic priorities to assess potential projects and interventions, we are working with Transport Scotland to "walk through" a number of examples in the STPR, so that we can better understand how these priorities were used in project review and decision making.

We will also be looking at Government proposals in its Climate Change Delivery Plan, to help us get a clearer picture of the type of transport policy interventions that Government is considering to reduce emissions.

The second issue relates to how the STPR fits alongside national and local planning. Increasing volumes of traffic, particularly for road transport, are influenced by a number of factors, one of which is local planning. If road traffic demand increases *as a consequence of* the cumulative impact of planning decisions fuelling transport growth, then we are keen to find out how Government wishes to use planning to tackle this issue. Without action at a local or regional level, it seems clear that Transport Scotland will have little choice but to respond to growing transport demands, through development of strategic projects and interventions. We are interested in how the Scottish Government deals with this tension, through the Scottish Planning Policy, Single Outcome Agreements and other policy levers.

The third issue relates to the second, as well as to wider transport policy. The National Transport Strategy contained a commitment to maintain the Government's aspirational target to stabilise road traffic volumes at 2001 levels by 2011. We are looking at how this target is being used to inform transport policy delivery, and how Government is seeking to take a more sophisticated approach to managing road traffic levels. Particularly relevant here is how Government seeks to integrate targets on climate change into its work managing emissions, congestions and encouraging modal shift.

As a part of this we also are discussing with Government whether a hierarchy similar to that used in waste policy should be used for transport policy. The hierarchy set out in the STPR has three levels:

- a. Simply maintaining and safely operating existing assets
- b. Maintaining existing assets and promoting measures to make better use of existing capacity
- c. Undertaking (a) and (b) along with targeted infrastructure investments.

Our view is that a sustainable transport hierarchy should also include action to reduce transport demand. This hierarchy is as follows:

1. Demand Reduction
2. Modal shift to more sustainable and space efficient modes
3. Efficiency improvements of existing modes
4. Capacity increases for motorised transport.

The fourth issue is how the Government intends to use its Carbon Account for Transport (previously referred to as the carbon balance sheet). This will provide a statement on emissions data from the transport sector and will assist Government in being able to review progress toward its Strategic Objective to reduce emissions from transport.

It is our view that the Carbon Account for Transport should work alongside emission reduction budgets that will be drawn up under the powers from the Climate Change Act. These balance sheets should then function equivalent to a standard financial balance sheet, starting with a set figure (the contribution transport will make to emission reductions) and then accounting for how this figure will be met and how emission reductions (e.g. through a modal shift) will be balanced against expected emission increases (e.g. through provision of new infrastructure which increases capacity, or because of ongoing growth in transport levels).

The fifth issue is to get more clarity from Government on how it might consider, and possibly take forward more wide ranging initiatives that are not currently set out within the STPR. Significant modal shift is particularly dependent on major changes in Scotland's rail infrastructure, but many of these interventions were outside of the direct scope of the STPR. We are in discussion with Government about how it plans to consider such options as part of overall transport policy delivery.

Given the extent of issues under consideration, we expect this work to take us through the summer period, and we are expecting that we will be able to publish final advice to the Scottish Government in autumn 2009. We will of course notify your committee at this point of any work that we provide for Government.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Maf Smith', with a stylized, cursive script.

Maf Smith
Director