TRANS*form* Scotland

the campaign for sustainable transport

Scottish Parliament Transport, Infrastructure & Climate Change Committee Away Day, 27th & 28th August

Briefing from TRANS*form* Scotland

1. The benefits of sustainable transport

There are many benefits of sustainable transport, but here are five key benefits:

- A healthier, fitter society - walking and cycling are ideal ways in which exercise can be fitted into everyday activity
- A more inclusive transport system - public transport, by definition, is available to everyone, while a third of Scottish households still have no access to a car
- A more productive workforce: greater use of public transport should deliver economic benefits - e.g. the use of travel time productively rather than having to concentrate whilst driving a vehicle, and the reductions in danger and stress that travellers would experience as a result
- Reclaiming space in residential areas - as exemplified by Home Zones and related concepts – a major benefit of this will accrue to children, in the form of e.g. greater independence, the ability to travel to school safely
- The reduced dependence on scarce, finite, and depleting, natural resources – in particular oil – and the reduction of climate change emissions, now widely accepted as the greatest environmental threat that the planet faces.

2. Definitions of sustainability and accessibility

A **sustainable** transport strategy will be one that meets the definition of sustainable development set out almost two decades ago in the Brundtland Report:

> *"Sustainable development seeks to meet the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."*

What is doesn't mean is eking out the same activity, desirable or undesirable.

An **accessible** transport strategy is one that provides access to employment, health and education services, and cultural and leisure facilities.

A sustainable and accessible transport strategy implies ensuring that access to these locations is achieved, as far as possible, through the use of public transport, cycling and walking. What is doesn't mean is just providing for more travel to get to further-distant locations. It certainly doesn't mean just providing more mobility for the already highly mobile.

3. Looming environmental and resource threats

Almost every week sees the publication of some report setting out the impacts of **climate change** on the natural and human environment. There is now widespread acceptance that climate change is real, that it is already having damaging impacts across the planet, and that these impacts will worsen.

The transport sector is one of the main culprits in causing climate change. Almost a quarter of Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions come from the transport sector and this figure, unlike in other sectors, is still growing. Yet despite a now high level of awareness of this issue, there is however little evidence that the Scottish transport sector is taking measures to reduce emissions: car use and road freight levels continue to increase, while vehicle efficiency is failing to improve significantly.

The other major threat that has to be dealt with is that of **oil depletion**. The planet is rapidly approaching - or may even have already passed – 'Peak Oil', when global oil production peaks and thereafter declines for evermore. Yet production is peaking at a time of soaring demand in China, India

and other less developed countries. Britain's own oil reserves have peaked in the last few years and are now in terminal decline.

Peak oil has major implications for the transport sector: 67% of all oil used is for transport, while 98% of transport fuel is oil. Even George W. Bush has asserted that the world is "addicted to oil".

4. Current policy responses

None of the above should be new to anyone: climate change has been widely known about since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, while the phenomenon of Peak Oil has been being predicted – correctly – since the 1950s.[1] What is surprising is how little action is being taken to address these problems.

Lots of money is spent in Scotland on transport, but is it invested wisely? Has government action helped, or made things worse?

Since 1999, we have seen the Scottish Executive put together a **road-building** programme due to cost over £1.5 billion (this is before we add anything up to an extra £3 billion for the proposed Second Forth Road Bridge). This includes driving a second elevated motorway (the urban M74) through our largest city, while supporting the construction of a road project that would have the effect of turning the western green belt of Scotland's third city, Aberdeen, into tin-shed sprawl. We fail to understand how such measures will help us tackle climate change or Peak Oil. Even if this money *has* to be spent on the trunk road network, it is bizarre that priority has gone into expanding the network when it is manifestly clear that even the existing network is not maintained or managed properly.

We do accept that the Executive has increased investment in **public transport** from the scandalously low levels seen in the 1980s and 1990s. However, even here, investment has sometimes been misdirected towards misguided projects such the Edinburgh Airport Rail Link - £650m to facilitate access to the most unsustainable transport mode of all, air travel.

And what about the most sustainable mode of transport - **walking**? Walking is the second most common mode of transport in Scotland after the car. 25% of car trips are less than two miles in length, and hence ideal for shifting to journeys on foot, yet we still await publication of a strategy to prioritise walking as a mode of transport.

5. Better policy responses

Firstly, it shouldn't be assumed that **a "strategic" approach** to transport has to mean mega-infrastructure projects. There is a frankly childish assumption current in Scotland that for something to be "strategic" that it must involve a multi-million pound construction project.[2] Major infrastructure projects – whether road or rail – tend to provide most benefit to those who are already the most mobile. More benefit may well be achieved by the widespread application of small-scale local schemes.[3]

Secondly, we need to see a strengthening of measures to **reduce road traffic levels**. Only absolute reductions in road traffic levels will bring about the widespread benefits of sustainable transport: not only reductions of climate emissions, but the reduction of the social impacts of traffic, and the freeing of road space for wider community use.

Thirdly, policies, plans and programmes need to be clearly focussed on delivering **modal shift** away from the more unsustainable modes and towards the sustainable modes, wherever practicable.

Fourthly, we need to **prioritise accessibility over mobility**. We need to challenge the continuing centralisation of facilities: the closure of local schools, hospitals and shops. Planning policy needs to be given the clear guidance that it is there to ensure that local provision of key services is paramount. Only through this can we break the reliance on private car use for essential trips.

Fifthly, we need to **reduce transport's chronic overdependence on oil**. For passenger travel, this means implementing rail electrification, funding tram schemes, financially supporting bus industry moves into alternative fuels; for freight, this means more support for the fuel-efficient modes such as rail, sea and canal.

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1 The concept of peak oil goes back to the 1950s when the US scientist Hubbert predicted that USA oil production would peak in 1972. He was ridiculed at the time, but his prediction proved correct: US oil production peaked in 1970.

2 For example, if public health is a problem in Scotland (which it is), and if part of that problem is because people aren't taking enough exercise as part of their everyday activity (which they aren't) then transport policy is probably not going to tackle this by throwing money at multi-million infrastructure projects.

3 We are not talking here only of walking or cycling projects, but also measures such as implementation and enforcement of bus priority, certain small-scale but high-return rail enhancements, or marketing and information campaigns.

Lastly, we need to **increase the price of private transport so that it pays for its external costs**. This may not be a popular prescription, but it is imperative: we will not move to a more sustainable transport system unless and until private transport starts to pay for its external costs. Private transport prices are too low.[4] The simple fact is that petrol is *not* expensive: even at £1/litre, its price is a quarter of the retail price of beer. People need to get used to petrol becoming more expensive: fossil fuels are finite, and as they get used up *it is an economic certainly that their price will rise*. In the context of soaring rates of demand from China and India, and with global oil supplies likely to reach their maximum at some point this decade, it should be of no surprise to see British fuel prices go up. The challenge is to reduce reliance on fossil fuels as soon as possible.

6. Conclusion

We need a new mindset to tackle the global environmental and resource threats that the planet faces. The transport sector is one of the main culprits in generating these impacts, and has to take a major share in reducing them. The freight industry has got used to the idea of "just in time transport". In future, if we are to meet the really big challenges ahead, we'll have to get used to a new concept for the 21st Century: "just enough transport". It would be helpful if the Scottish Executive started planning for this now.

APPENDIX:
Some specific recommendations for the Scottish Executive's Strategic Spending Review

A mix of policy measures can and should be used to achieve sustainable transport policy objectives. These include information and persuasion, infrastructure investment and the use of economic incentives. Here we set out three practical ways that the Executive can provide for sustainable transport in its forthcoming Strategic Spending Review.

1. Walking & Cycling: Prioritise active travel modes as a contribution to improving Scottish public health

Discussions of transport policy should not lose sight of the fact that most travel remains local in nature. Half of all transport trips are of less than two miles, and 70% of all trips are less than five miles; even car trips are mainly local, a quarter of car trips are less than two miles, and 56% of car trips are less than five miles. Walking remains the second most common mode of transport (after car use) yet receives almost no consideration in most transport policy discussions.

Walking and cycling have a key role in improving Scottish public health. Scotland has serious public health problems including, but not limited to, obesity; and much research has suggested that this may be more to do with an increase in sedentary lifestyles than calorific consumption. Standard governmental public health advice is that members of the public should take five periods of 30 minutes moderate physical exercise every week: walking and cycling is ideally suited to providing this.

Walking and cycling need to be recognised as modes of transport in their own right, and see a substantial increase in their priority for funding. Following vocal objections to a large threatened cut in funding for Sustrans, the final total cycle spend (excluding unknown trunk road spending) in 2006-7 was estimated as £11.8 million.[5] This equates to less than 1% of the Executive's total annual transport spend – yet walking alone accounts for 28% of all transport journeys in Scotland.[6] The Strategic Spending Review should ensure that substantially greater amounts of resources are ring-fenced for these most sustainable of modes.[7]

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4 The University of Leeds' Institute for Transport Studies report *Surface Transport Costs & Charges*, in what was probably the most comprehensive report of its kind in the UK, reported that "*For the British road sector as a whole, taxes and charges in 1998 covered between one third to a half of their relevant marginal social and environmental costs*" - http://www.its.leeds.ac.uk/projects/STCC/surface_transport.html

5 Du Feu, D. Cycle spending turns a corner, *Transport Quarterly*, September 2006, pages 12-13

6 Based on figures from Scottish Transport Statistics - http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/08/25100154/04484

7 Our *Healthy Transport* briefing sets out why these measures should be high priority in government transport planning at all levels – this is available at http://www.transformscotland.org.uk/info/docs/HealthyTransport.pdf

2. Smarter Choices: Put in place an intensive programme of Smarter Choices

The reduction of congestion problems may often be better tackled through measures that reduce traffic levels, rather than providing new transport infrastructure. Small-scale, local interventions may often provide better cost-effectiveness than expensive transport infrastructure projects. For example, Safe Routes to School projects and Workplace Travel Plans are often able to reduce morning peak-hour congestion in a way that new large-scale road and rail projects cannot.

We welcome the support that has been given to the development of Travel Plans, and look forward to their becoming a requirement for larger employers. Employers should clearly be expected to reduce their external impacts, and we would welcome action to make Travel Plans the norm rather than the exception. However, Smarter Choices interventions (also called 'smart measures') also include:[8]

- School travel plans
- Personalised travel plans
- Public transport information
- Travel awareness campaigns
- Car clubs
- Car sharing schemes
- Teleworking
- Teleconferencing
- Home shopping

The Spending Review should **put in place an intensive Smarter Choices Programme**, to be delivered at local and regional levels. Available research suggests that such measures are very cost-effective in delivering change in travel behaviour.[9] The Smarter Choices Programme would form a key part of the national programme for road traffic reduction.

3. Railways: Get the Scottish Inter-City rail network up to speed

Both the Scottish Executive in *Scotland's Railways* (December 2006) and Network Rail in the *Scotland Route Utilisation Strategy* (March 2007) have aspirations for better services over the Scottish Inter-City network connecting Scotland's six cities. This is reinforced by the mention of improvements specifically to Edinburgh–Aberdeen, Perth-Inverness, Aberdeen–Inverness and E&G services in the High Level Output Specification (HLOS) of July 2007.[10] However, these are said to be 'Tier 3' investments, i.e. they will only be met if there are funds left over from other projects.

There needs to be a **clear commitment on the part of the Scottish Executive/Transport Scotland to the improvement of *all* the Scottish Inter-City routes**, with the infrastructure enhancements to deliver them, as soon as current expenditure commitments have been met. Specifically, this should include the introduction of local services between Dundee and Aberdeen which link with fast services from Glasgow and Edinburgh; a better range of services between Edinburgh and Fife, allowing faster services to the north; hourly frequencies Aberdeen–Inverness and Perth–Inverness, with skip-stop operation on the latter; and infrastructure enhancements to the Edinburgh and Glasgow via Falkirk (E&G) line to allow the re-introduction of express services.

Additional rolling stock will have to be procured in order to provide these services and the Scottish Executive/Transport Scotland should investigate alternative methods of supplying these trains. Direct ownership, as has been used in Sweden, may be a solution to obtaining rolling stock more closely tailored to the needs of the Scottish Inter-City network.

Electrification is the only method by which railways can be divorced from their dependence on oil. As diesel trains have increasingly tried to emulate the performance of electrics, their green credentials have ebbed away.[11] The publication by Transport Scotland of a paper on the electrification of the E&G and diversionary routes, and the intention to pursue this objective through the HLOS,[12] is welcome but it does not go far enough. The Scottish electric network should be extended to Aberdeen, and possibly to Inverness, and any additional power requirements should be from renewable sources. This is the only way in which Scotland's railways can become truly sustainable for the future.

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8 Taken from Jillian Anable presentation at TRANS*form* Scotland 'Facing the Flood' conference, 8th May 2006 – available at http://www.transformscotland.org.uk/conferences/facingtheflood

9 See for example Sally Cairns et al. (2004) *Making Smarter Choices Work* – available at http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_susttravel/documents/divisionhomepage/038507.hcsp

10 http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/uploads/documents/high-level-output-specification-July-2007.pdf

11 "Traction Energy Metrics", Prof. Roger Kemp, June 2007. Available at http://www.rssb.co.uk/pdf/reports/research/T618_traction-energy-metrics_final.pdf

12 http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/uploads/documents/Edinburgh-Glasgow-electrification-GRIP1-Report1.pdf