

The Herald



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SNP needs to alter transport policy priorities

THE reply from Transport Scotland in your report about the cost of traffic congestion in Scottish cities beggars belief: namely, that trunk road expenditure was increased by £167 million in 2016/17 ("Sitting in traffic costs £2.4bn", The Herald, February 20). It could have added that the draft 2017/18 budget adds a further £146m increase.

Can the Scottish Government be unaware that continually expanding the trunk road network means more traffic, which in turn means more cars and lorries leaving and entering cities - thus increasing city congestion rather than reducing it? Of course, trunk roads do need money, not least for maintenance, but what inner-city congestion needs is cash for car restraint and to improve conditions for walking, cycling and public transport.

For long-distance travel, why is the Scottish Government not dualling the Inverness to Glasgow/Edinburgh rail line before dualling the entire A9 road, even its quietest sections, thus attracting traffic from rail to road and ending up in the congested cities? A9 safety issues have already been superbly tackled by average speed cameras, with the reputation of the A9 changed from one of Scotland's worst trunk roads to one of its safest. According to the police there has been "the biggest change in driver behaviour for decades", with deaths down 43 per cent and serious injuries 63 per cent.

Sadly, the transport priorities of the Scottish Government's draft 2017/18 budget could not be clearer. For every man, woman and child in Scotland, £150 will be spent on trunk roads - and just £7 on walking and cycling, a shocking disparity.

There is still time for a change of heart. Cycling and walking investment is so low that it could be raised by five per cent through a shift of just £20m from the planned £146m increase in trunk road spending.

When Derek Mackay was Transport Minister he said he would "make the strongest case for additional funding to be allocated to cycling". Now that he is Finance Secretary and controls the purse strings, will he live up to his own words? Or will the Green MSPs make this a condition of supporting the budget? We will find out this week.

Dave du Feu,
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*NB
This should read 50%, not 5%.
The letter was wrongly edited
by the newspaper