



PARLIAMENTARY BRIEFING

Scottish Government debate:

Modernising Scotland's Transport Infrastructure

Wednesday 13 November 2013

Key points:

- The Government's own transport indicators demonstrate that its policies have failed to move people on to public transport, failed to reduce congestion, and led to an increase in climate emissions.
- The Government's transport expenditure plans will worsen the ability of public transport and rail freight to compete against car and lorry use on Scotland's key transport corridors.
- As the First Minister said in 2008, "*railways must at least compete with roads*". In order for the Highland Main Line and Aberdeen-Inverness railway line to be able to provide competitive and sustainable alternative to dualled A9 and A96 roads, the Scottish Government should deliver, at the same time, dualling and electrification of these rail routes. Anything less leaves the Scottish Government with a transport investment programme massively skewed in favour of encouraging increased road use.

1 The Government's own indicators demonstrate that it is failing on transport

1.1 'Scotland Performs' features four indicators relevant to transport policy. It shows that the Government is:

- Failing to move people away from cars and on to sustainable transport. The modal share for public transport and active travel (walking & cycling) for 2012 remains below that seen in 2006.¹
- Failing to reduce traffic congestion.² There has been no change in levels of road congestion over the past decade.
- Going backwards on carbon emissions.³ It is well known that the Government has missed its first two annual targets under the *Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009*. Transport is a significant contributor to climate emissions, being the second-largest sector for emissions.
- Making progress only on the indicator relating to road deaths.⁴ But here, improvements in road safety for car users masks a significantly worsening picture for vulnerable road users: the most recent road safety stats showed a 33% increase in pedestrian fatalities and a 29% increase in cycle fatalities.⁵

2 The Government's transport expenditure programme will make things worse

- 2.1 The Government's transport expenditure plans are massively skewed in favour of subsidising road use through a multi-billion pound road-building programme.
- 2.2 In recent years' Scottish Budgets, expenditure on the sustainable transport modes (walk, cycle, bus, rail, ferry) has remained largely unchanged overall. At the same time, there has been a vast increase (almost 40%) in expenditure on new road-building: the 'Motorways and Trunk Roads' line increased from £498.9m in 2008-09 to a budgeted figure of £690.4m for 2013-14.
- 2.3 Given the current administration's emphasis on spending on new roads and reduced priority for investment in sustainable transport, it is unsurprising that the modal share of these modes is not increasing (and in the case of buses, the largest public transport mode, decreasing).

- 2.4 As such, we expect the Scottish Government's future expenditure plans for transport to lead to:
- Higher levels of car use and, as a result, lower levels of use of the sustainable transport modes. It will also lead to a further erosion of the competitive position of rail and sea freight with respect to road haulage.
 - Little or no progress on congestion in urban areas. The last decade saw a considerable expansion of urban road capacity (e.g. the M74 Northern Extension); however, this has not led to reductions in overall levels of traffic congestion. Further road-building in and around urban centres will worsen conditions further.
 - Further failure on the Scottish Government's much-trumpeted climate change targets.

3 The Scottish Government's expenditure priorities for routes north of the Central Belt will further undermine the competitive position of Scotland's railways

- 3.1 Scotland's cities should be connected by a modern and efficient rail network that is competitive with road transport. Unfortunately, this is far from the case. As the Scottish Chambers of Commerce have put it, "*Scotland's railways north of the Central Belt are not fit for purpose.*"⁶
- 3.2 Currently Edinburgh/Glasgow-Inverness and Edinburgh-Perth trains are slower than road travel — *the rail route from Edinburgh to Perth is slower than it was 100 years ago* — and between Edinburgh/Glasgow and Aberdeen/Dundee, trains have no journey time advantage over road.
- 3.3 To transform Scotland's railways, journey times need to be competitive with parallel road routes. In this, **we agree with the First Minister that "railways must at least compete with roads"**.⁷
- 3.4 While there are a number of initiatives to improve railways in the Central Belt, **no similar ambition is being shown for rail routes to the north of Scotland**. The Scottish Government is planning a range of modest improvements to rail services to and from Aberdeen and Inverness — but the timescale for implementation stretches as far away as 2030. Yet road expenditure of no less than £3bn on A9 dualling by 2025 and another £3bn on A96 dualling by 2030 is now proposed. These massive public investments would of course generate increased car and lorry traffic, and undermine rail's ability to compete — unless train journey times are dramatically improved.
- 3.5 The Perth-Inverness 'Highland Main Line' railway has just celebrated its 150th anniversary — and there is much that the Victorians would still recognise. Two-thirds of this key 118-mile route is just single track — limiting capacity, slowing journey times and undermining reliability — and the line is still not electrified. Rail journey times to Inverness are poor compared to road.
- 3.6 In its 2009 'Strategic Transport Projects Review' (STPR), the Scottish Government failed to address the A9 and Highland Main Line upgrades jointly in an integrated cross-modal analysis. A correct process should have evaluated a range of road/rail package options to best meet policy objectives for the economy, environment and road safety.
- 3.7 Given the ambition to dual the A9, for rail to compete on this corridor a 'game changer' is required. That means creating a fit-for-purpose electrified and double-tracked railway — transforming rail's capacity and capability for passengers and freight. **If dualling is good enough for road, it's good enough for rail too.**

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References:

- 1 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Performance/scotPerforms/indicator/transport>
- 2 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Performance/scotPerforms/indicator/congestion>
- 3 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Performance/scotPerforms/indicator/carbon>
- 4 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Performance/scotPerforms/indicator/roaddeaths>
- 5 <http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/node/13627>
- 6 Scottish Chambers of Commerce response to 'Rail 2014' consultation.
- 7 As quoted in The Herald on 5 August 2008.