

To: Fiona Hyslop MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Transport

8 January 2025

Dear Cabinet Secretary

Active Travel (AT) funding, 2025/2026

As you are aware, transport is Scotland's highest emitting sector, and the disparity with other sectors has been growing.¹ This has to be tackled forcefully if Scotland is to have any hope of meeting its commitments on climate, notably the 20% reduction in car-km by 2030 announced in the [2018-2032 Climate Change Plan Update](#)². It is particularly disappointing that the finalised [Route Map](#)³ to 2030 has still not been published.

However, we do welcome Transport Scotland's recent publication of commissioned research [Traffic Demand Management Options](#)⁴, from AECOM consultancy, and urge immediate action to adopt and implement its recommendations. It is disappointing that the government's initial [response](#)⁵ offers no more than continuing discussions, and leaves any early actions up to local government and the UK government.

Scottish Government moves towards traffic reduction have so far focused⁶ almost exclusively on the 'carrots' of improved active and sustainable travel. We do greatly welcome these concomitant policies, which are essential alongside TDM - and apart from their climate benefits they of course also bring substantial public health and other desirable benefits.

However, AT policies have suffered during 2024/25, and we therefore urge the Scottish Government to make the following improvements to its current proposals on AT funding.

Action 1: Draft 25/26 budget ... AT funding total

In the above context, and given the transport hierarchy, we were astonished that the 2024 in-year funding cuts in the transport *revenue* budget were *solely in AT!* And this was followed by severe [cuts in AT capital](#)⁷, causing many problems for local authorities such as Edinburgh, who had geared up staffing and planning for AT infrastructure projects.

In total, the Scottish Government invested [£155m in active travel in 2024/25](#)⁸ (under 4% of the transport budget), compared to the [£220m \(5.6%\) in the original 24/25 budget](#)⁹, and the [£320m or 10% originally promised](#)¹⁰ by the Scottish Government for 24/25. The [draft 25/26 budget](#) (£179m, 4.6%) only partially reinstates this cut to the original 24/25 budget.

We urge raising AT funding to £220m in the 25/26 draft budget, as in the original 24/25 budget, and with a clear stated intention to reach the full 10% of the transport total.

Action 2: Draft 25/26 budget ... Bus Infrastructure Fund

We are very puzzled that a £10m *Bus Infrastructure Fund* has been added to the AT budget line, which has now been renamed Active & Sustainable. This leads to a clear lack of transparency, [appearing to exaggerate active-travel funds](#)¹¹ and, indeed, we have already seen some government politicians referring to this budget line total as 'Active Travel.'

Interestingly, some bus campaigners have suggested this is a way of disguising the fact that the bus infrastructure funding has been cut back from the £500m promised in the [Climate Change Plan Update](#) (over a few years) to just £10m this year.

The Bus Infrastructure Fund could have been included in many other ways, for example..

- in Table 8.03 Concessionary Fares and Bus Services (with the title amended)
- in Table 8.04 in the Low Carbon (Transport) Programmes line
- in Table 8.04 in a Bus Support line of its own.

We urge, for transparency, that the AT budget line remains solely AT, and that the Bus Infrastructure Fund is moved to a more appropriate budget line. This is a zero-cost proposal.

Action 3: Allow council bids for multi-year AT projects

During 24/25 the government drastically changed how AT funding is allocated to councils and other bodies.

There is no doubt that this 'Transformation' change (especially when combined with the severe in-year AT capital and revenue cuts) caused massive problems and waste of officer time in local authorities such as Edinburgh, who had geared up staffing and planning to be able to use substantially increased government AT funding to maximum effect.

Nonetheless, we appreciate the reasons for the change in processes, including increased transparency, and we trust things will go much more smoothly in 25/26 with the changeover now largely complete.

However, it is extremely concerning that a new rule has been introduced whereby councils can only bid for Tier 2 funding one year at a time. As you know, the kind of transformative project which creates significant networks or major links can not be completed in a single year - for example, Edinburgh's wonderful [Roseburn to Canal project](#)¹² which you recently opened.

We urge a change in the rules, such that Councils can make multi-year bids for Tier 2 cash.

Thank you for your attention, and we look forward to hearing from you on these matters

Yours sincerely

Dave du Feu

for Spokes

- 1 <https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Progress-in-reducing-emissions-in-Scotland-2023-Report-to-Parliament.pdf>
- 2 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/securing-green-recovery-path-net-zero-update-climate-change-plan-20182032/>
- 3 <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/a-route-map-to-achieve-a-20-per-cent-reduction-in-car-kilometres-by-2030/>
- 4 <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/travel-demand-management-options-study/>
- 5 <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/context-and-scottish-government-policy-position-on-car-demand-management-and-transport-demand-management-research/>
- 6 <https://netzeronation.scot/take-action/travel-less-car>
- 7 <http://www.spokes.org.uk/2024/12/2024-2025-what-for-active-travel/>
- 8 <https://www.transport.gov.scot/progress-update/bulletin-november-2024-active-travel-transformation/>
- 9 <http://www.spokes.org.uk/2023/12/scotgov-budget-24-25-not-what-transport-needs/>
- 10 <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/53417/cycling-framework-for-active-travel-a-plan-for-everyday-cycling.pdf>
- 11 <http://www.spokes.org.uk/2024/12/scotgov-draft-budget-25-26-active-travel-cuts-disguised/>
- 12 <http://www.spokes.org.uk/2024/12/roseburn-to-almost-canal-opens/>