

Audit Scotland report: Sustainable Transport

Date of meeting 13 June 2025

Date of report 28 April 2025

Report by Chief Executive

1. Object of report

To advise the committee on the issue of an Audit Scotland report titled '*Sustainable Transport*' and outline the key messages and implications for SPT contained therein. Members are advised that the full report was emailed separately, and was also the subject of a report to the Strategy & Programmes Committee in March 2025.

2. Background to report

Member may recall the last Audit & Standards meeting of 21 February 2025, where the committee requested a report be brought to the next meeting outlining the key issues contained within the Audit Scotland report, and SPT's response if relevant.

The Audit Scotland report can be found at:

<https://audit.scot/publications/sustainable-transport>

3. Outline of key messages and recommendations from the Report:

The report outlines the following key messages:

1 Transport is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Scotland. In 2020, the Scottish Government set an ambitious but very challenging target to reduce car kilometres driven by 20 per cent by 2030. It does not have a clear plan to achieve this. It states a lack of leadership has resulted in minimal progress against the demanding policy intention. It is not clear if the Scottish Government remains committed to the target as key documents remain in draft form, there is no costed delivery plan or measurable milestones, and arrangements for monitoring and scrutinising progress are insufficient.

2 Councils have an important role in reducing car use, but some prioritise contributing to the target more than others and they face different challenges in doing so. It is more difficult to deliver change in rural areas with longer distances to travel and an inadequate public transport network. Councils need clearer guidance and direction from the Scottish Government on their role in supporting delivery of the target.

3 Scottish Government and council spending on measures to reduce car use is complex, fragmented and lacks transparency. One-year funding makes it difficult for bodies to plan and deliver longer-term projects. Transport Scotland and councils do not record how much is spent specifically on the target to reduce car use. The Scottish Government spends significant amounts of money on interventions that could reduce car use, such as

concessionary bus travel and active travel, but it has not considered how to target funding to have the most impact on car use. Because of uncertainty about funding, councils and others have found the first year of introducing changes to how active travel is delivered difficult.

4 Car use has rebounded since the Covid-19 pandemic with public transport use decreasing in the last decade and active travel rates fluctuating. It is unlikely that the Scottish Government will achieve its target of reducing car kilometres driven by 20 per cent by 2030. It has not said how this will affect its wider ambitions to achieve net zero emissions by 2045. The Scottish Government and councils will find it hard to significantly reduce transport emissions unless they make difficult and potentially unpopular decisions to discourage car use.

The report makes the following recommendations for the Scottish Government should:

- As soon as possible, clarify its commitment to reducing transport emissions through the car kilometre target and how it aligns with the new carbon budget approach towards its climate change policy.
- By the end of 2025, at the latest, publish a realistic delivery plan that sets out how it will work with partners to achieve the restated target. This should include the impact Scottish Government, councils, and Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) are expected to have, clear roles and responsibilities, timescales, costs, and an appropriate monitoring and evaluation plan.
- In 2025, publish guidance for councils on how to reduce car use and the need to travel in their communities. This should be aligned with the national planning framework and include the role that rural councils can play.
- By the end of 2025, review the first full year of the new system for active travel delivery, identify challenges and address them. It should evaluate the impact of the changes and whether they have resulted in more efficient delivery.
- In 2025, start a national conversation with the public about their travel choices using effective behaviour change techniques to educate and encourage people to reduce their car use.

The report makes the following recommendations for the Scottish Government and CoSLA:

- By the end of the 2024/25 financial year, confirm the joint governance and collective accountability arrangements for delivering, overseeing, and scrutinising progress towards the 20 per cent car kilometre target. These arrangements should include clear roles and responsibilities and have membership from across the Scottish Government, councils and RTPs.

The report makes the following recommendations for the Scottish Government, Councils and RTP's :

- From 2025, report annually through the climate change monitoring report, and local and regional transport strategy updates, on how spending in the year has affected the desired outcomes of fewer people using their car and more people travelling via sustainable modes such as active travel and public transport.

- Use the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) process to consult with communities, businesses and the third sector to ensure that efforts to reduce car use are part of a just transition and do not deepen inequalities. The EQIA should clearly capture how bodies have fully involved different groups and considered their needs as part of their decision-making.

The report also makes the following recommendations for Councils and RTP's:

- As part of their Local Transport Strategies and Regional Transport Strategies, set out to what extent they will contribute to the 20 per cent car kilometre target. This should include measurable key performance indicators, costs, and timescales.
- Regularly share good practise and learning, including their detailed analysis of how to achieve the target in their local area.

4. Committee action

The Committee is asked to note the contents of this report and the Audit Scotland report titled '*Sustainable Transport*'.

5. Consequences

Policy consequences	<i>None directly although there may be consequences as recommendations are implemented.</i>
Legal consequences	<i>None.</i>
Financial consequences	<i>None directly although potential consequences as recommendations are implemented.</i>
Personnel consequences	<i>None.</i>
Equalities consequences	<i>None directly although potential consequences as recommendations are implemented.</i>
Risk consequences	<i>None directly although potential consequences as recommendations are implemented.</i>
Climate Change, Adaptation & Carbon consequences	<i>None directly although potential consequences as recommendations are implemented.</i>

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