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Achieving Car Use Reduction in Scotland: Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment

Contents

Title of policy

Achieving Car Use Reduction in Scotland: A Renewed Policy Statement

Summary of aims and expected outcomes of the policy

To restate the commitment of the Scottish Government and COSLA to reduce car use in Scotland. It sets out four key next steps to continue to develop the policy:

- Revising the existing car use reduction target, informed by the advice of the Climate Change Committee and other relevant evidence, to develop a new, longer-term target which will support our 2045 net zero target.

- Undertaking a regulatory check of existing Transport (Scotland) Act 2001 powers for discretionary local road user charging schemes to allow local authorities and/or regional transport partnerships the option to implement these.

- Working with key stakeholders at national, regional, and local level to develop place-based and experience- specific delivery plans to support reduced car use and alternative transport options.

- Driving a national communication and engagement campaign and set out a positive vision around how reducing car use can deliver outcomes for public health, air quality, and the environment.

Summary of evidence

The current transport system drives inequalities by prioritising car ownership at the expense of other transport modes. It is clear that, at present, we live in a society which is motonormative[i] [ii] and increasingly dependent on private car use[iii]. The complexity of travel behaviour, the interdependencies between transport, planning, and environmental systems, and broader economic factors present challenges in achieving a shift away from car dependency[iv].

Transport Habits

Car Use: Those on lower incomes are less likely to have access to cars. Households with annual incomes of less than £10,000 were significantly less likely to have access to any car, with 56% of those in this bracket reporting they had no cars

available for private use, compared with only 4% of households with annual incomes over £50,000[v]. As a result, frequency of car use increases with income.

A lack of reliable transport alternatives means that some people cannot easily access key services that others with a car can. This can push people into poverty as they need to own a car they cannot afford. A lower percentage of disabled people possess a driving licence (56% vs 78%), and a lower percentage have household access to a car (56% vs 80%)[vi]. Lower income households, minority ethnic communities, women, older, and disabled people are less likely to own or use a car, however, the negative effects of car use – air and noise pollution, road danger, community severance, and congestion – fall disproportionately on these same groups[vii viii] . We also know bus is the mode of public transport most used by lower income groups.

Walking: There are similar rates of walking amongst all income groups, with 17% of those with annual household incomes under £10,000 walking for transport 6 to 7 days per week, compared with 20% of those with annual household incomes over £50,000[v]. However, people on lower incomes are more likely to walk to work, with 17% of people in the lowest income bands doing so in 2023, compared to just 6% of the highest income band[v].

Cycling: Those on lower household incomes are less likely to cycle. In 2023, those with annual household incomes under £10,000 2% cycled as a means of transport in the past 7 days, and 3% as a means of keeping fit compared with those with annual household incomes over £50,000, of whom 4% cycled as a means of transport and 6% as a means of keeping fit[ix]. A similar pattern is seen in relation to access to cycles, with 17% of households with annual incomes less than £10,000 having one or more cycles, compared with 60% of households with annual incomes over £50,000[ix].

Public Transport: Those on lower incomes are more likely to use bus than those on higher incomes, with 50% of those with household incomes up to £10,000 per annum having used the bus in the past month, compared with 32% of those with household incomes over £50,000 per annum[ix]. The trend is reversed for train use, with 21% of those in the lowest income bracket having used train in the past month, compared with 40% of those in the highest income bracket[ix].

Health and wellbeing

The negative health impacts of car use, including from poor air quality and road danger are recognised as disproportionately affecting those living in more deprived areas[vii]. General levels of health and wellbeing are also lower in more deprived areas, with higher prevalence of disease such as cardiovascular and respiratory disease[x]. People with these conditions can disproportionately benefit from reduced

exposure to poor air quality as well as from increased opportunities for physical activity through active travel. Socio-economic disadvantage also increases people's risk of social isolation[xi] [xii], and this can be compounded by transport poverty[xiii]. Accessible, affordable transport can be important to help overcome this.

Employment

Lack of affordable transport can act as a key barrier to employment, and most importantly as a barrier to accessing good-quality employment. There can be additional challenges for those whose work involves non-standard working hours (i.e. standard public transport services may not be provided during anti-social hours and walking/cycling may be perceived to be unsafe during hours of darkness, or times of day when few other people are travelling). 'In-work' or working poverty is of particular concern in tackling poverty and the availability of affordable transport to work can be a key part of overcoming this[xiv].

Qualitative evidence from consultation feedback

Consultation responses cited benefits to those on lower incomes as a result of improvements to active travel and public transport infrastructure and services, as well as benefits from concessionary or reduced fares and improved access to cycles. It was also cited that improved access to alternatives, including online access could reduce the reliance on private cars, thereby 'reducing the costs of forced car ownership'. Benefits of improved access to social and employment opportunities for those who could not afford cars were also cited, as were health benefits from reduced air and noise pollution and reduced road danger; improved local services and amenities as a result of investment in 20 minute neighbourhoods.

Consultation feedback also cited potential negative impacts, however these were largely impacts that would result from car use being prohibited, such as the cost of public transport, or isolation of those for whom a non-car alternative was not available. The route map does not contain any interventions that will prevent car use amongst those who have no alternatives, instead it includes a range of interventions to support those who are able to reduce their car use to do so.

Potential barriers to engaging with the support offered in the route map were however identified, including the fact that those on lower incomes may work in jobs with a lower degree of flexibility, which may mean they are less able to benefit from home working or flexible hours. Barriers to use of online services and lack of secure storage for cycles were also highlighted.

Mitigations proposed in consultation included support with the cost of public transport; increased public transport services to ensure that those who work non-standard hours are provided for; increased provision of secure cycle storage; further support to access cycles; reduced-cost internet connectivity; increased promotion of

existing support for sustainable travel; and targeting of future car use disincentives at those in higher income groups, e.g. through targeting of more expensive models of vehicle.

Summary of assessment findings

Those on lower incomes are less likely to have access to or use a car or cycle and less likely to use a train. They are as likely as those on higher incomes to walk and more likely to use a bus. Those living in more deprived areas are likely to have poorer levels of health and wellbeing and more likely to suffer from the adverse health impacts of car use, including air and noise pollution, which can compound pre-existing ill health, as well as from injury due to road danger. Opportunities for physical activity through safe and accessible active travel are particularly important for those with poor underlying health and wellbeing. Affordable transport is also essential to facilitate access to employment, including to better quality employment, as well as to enable social interaction and avoid loneliness and isolation which are more prevalent in deprived areas.

For those that do drive, financial penalties and costs of car use, e.g. fuel duty, will inevitably have a disproportionate effect on people living on low incomes, thus increasing the negative aspects of living in a car dependent society[vii]. Those on lower incomes will therefore benefit from measures to reduce car use in Scotland if they enable them to rely less on personal cars.

The renewed policy statement for achieving car use reduction will be of particular benefit to those on lower incomes / those living in more deprived areas as they are less likely to use cars, but disproportionately suffer the negative impacts of others' car use. Those on lower incomes will benefit from accessing services without the need to travel; improved local environments to enable access to key goods and services locally; greater access to and increased road space for use of alternative modes such as walking, cycling and bus; and facilitation of car sharing when active travel and public transport are less feasible.

Sign off

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Endnotes

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