



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Public Audit Committee

**Wednesday 23 April 2025**

**Session 6**



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**PUBLIC AUDIT COMMITTEE**  
**12<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2025, Session 6**

**CONVENER**

\*Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (LD)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)

\*Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)

\*Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Fiona Brown (Transport Scotland)

Fiona Hyslop (Cabinet Secretary for Transport)

Alison Irvine (Transport Scotland)

Councillor Gail Macgregor (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

Robert Nicol (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Katrina Venters

**LOCATION**

The Sir Alexander Fleming Room (CR3)



## Scottish Parliament Public Audit Committee

*Wednesday 23 April 2025*

*[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]*

### Decision on Taking Business in Private

**The Convener (Richard Leonard):** Good morning. I welcome everyone to the 12th meeting in 2025 of the Public Audit Committee.

Agenda item 1 is a decision on whether to take agenda items 3, 4, and 5 in private. Are we agreed to take those items in private?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## “Sustainable transport: Reducing car use”

09:30

**The Convener:** Agenda item 2, which is the main item on our agenda this morning, is further consideration of the report “Sustainable transport: Reducing car use”, which was produced jointly by the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission.

Before we get to that, though, I declare an interest as the convener of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers—RMT—Scottish parliamentary group.

I welcome our witnesses. We are very pleased to be joined by Fiona Hyslop, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport. Alongside the cabinet secretary are Alison Irvine, the chief executive of Transport Scotland; Fiona Brown, the interim director of transport strategy and analysis at Transport Scotland; and Heather Cowan, the head of climate change and just transition for Transport Scotland. We are also very pleased to welcome Councillor Gail Macgregor, who is the leader of Dumfries and Galloway Council and environment and economy spokesperson for the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. It is in that capacity that she joins us today. Alongside Councillor Macgregor is Robert Nicol, the chief officer for environment and economy at COSLA.

We have a number of questions to put to you but, before we get to those, I invite the cabinet secretary to make a short opening statement.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop):** Car use in Scotland is currently contributing significantly to carbon emissions, and that must change. In 2022, car use accounted for 39 per cent of all transport emissions in Scotland, and for 12.4 per cent of total Scottish emissions. However, Scotland is a rural and sparsely populated country, so we will always need vehicles—including cars—to enable people, goods and services to get around, to and from Scotland and beyond. Therein lies our challenge but also an opportunity for safer, fairer and healthier communities.

We need to encourage more people out of their cars, to use public transport where they can and to switch to zero-emission vehicles. That requires investment that also benefits those without access to a car, not least so that people see the alternatives to car travel as affordable and sustainable.

The Scottish Government remains committed to reducing car use, and we are working with COSLA and the regional transport partnerships to take

forward recommendations from Audit Scotland's report. National Government cannot do that alone and, later this spring, we will publish a renewed policy statement with COSLA on car use reduction. The evidence shows that reducing car use also means reducing demand. Local authorities have powers in areas such as parking and planning to develop schemes locally. However, so far, only a few have shown interest in doing so.

As I advised Parliament on 6 March, we intend to review the target of 20 per cent by 2030, informed by the forthcoming Scotland-specific carbon budget advice from the United Kingdom Climate Change Committee. UK Climate Change Committee advice outlines that improvements to make buses and active travel more attractive, affordable and accessible will allow 7 per cent of car demand to be switched to public transport and active travel by 2035, and that there is potential for the UK Government to go a further 3 per cent on modal shift, through things such as reducing congestion.

When we set the 20 per cent target, it was ambitious, but that level of reduction will now not likely be required. However, even with the switch to electric vehicles, there is still a need for car use reduction, due to the emissions reduction benefit as well as the wider societal benefits. We therefore continue to invest to provide alternatives to travelling by car. In 2025-26, we will invest £263 million in sustainable travel measures, including putting more zero-emission buses on Scotland's roads, helping local authorities leverage more private investment for electric vehicle charging and creating more safer and improved routes for walking and cycling.

Last month, I joined Xplore Dundee to welcome 12 new electric buses that had been partly funded by our Scottish zero-emission bus challenge fund, in which every pound that has been invested has attracted a further £3.20 in private sector investment. Scotland's zero-emission bus fleet comprises 800-plus electric buses, while more than 200 million free bus journeys have been made by under-22s, helping them to choose to travel more sustainably from a young age.

In 2023-24, Scottish Government investment delivered more than 115km of new and improved active travel infrastructure, with much of that providing safer routes to school for children, benefiting their wellbeing and helping to protect them from the risk of harm and vehicle accidents. Last month, I joined young people in Milngavie to see how it is safer for children to walk, wheel, cycle or scoot to nursery and primary school. That is healthier and helps to make children happier, which is an important factor. Cutting car journeys and reducing emissions allow us to not only

address the climate emergency but improve the health and wellbeing of people and communities and make communities safer for people to live in.

That is the context for our evidence to the committee.

**The Convener:** Thank you, cabinet secretary. I will look at the context. When the target was set in 2020, a climate emergency had been declared by the then First Minister and we were expecting radical action. I am reminded that the target was set during the lockdown, when there was a massive drop in car use and, of course, public transport use, because of the restrictions that were in place. There was a real sense that we did not want to go back to the old world and that we had a chance to do something different. That is not what has happened, is it?

**Fiona Hyslop:** No, it is not. That has been a challenge for society across many areas. When the target was set, I was Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture, and I was clear that it was an opportunity to try to make a change. However, society has changed, and it is difficult to interpret a lot of the transport data, because of the change in people's work patterns. Virtual and home working has affected how many times people travel. We also know from rail and bus services that, increasingly, weekends are busier, because people are working from home during the week and they want to enjoy their leisure time at the weekends.

Generally, fewer people are travelling, because of the wider societal impacts, but I do not think that the step change that many people would have liked has happened. Although car use is down by 3.6 per cent in comparison to 2019 levels, there has not been the complete change that many people had hoped for. That is not specific to Scotland; it is the case across the world.

**The Convener:** Do you accept the findings and recommendations of the report that we are considering?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Yes, we do, and, as normal, we will respond formally to Audit Scotland. We received the report in advance of the Climate Change Committee's Scotland-specific advice on a number of areas, including car use reduction. We expect that in May and we will have to respond rapidly to it because, as you will be aware, the Scottish Government will produce its climate change report and plan on the back of that advice.

It is fair to say that it will be a challenge to work with local government on that. In the political space, you will know that, if we dictate what local government needs to do by law and in legislative requirements, we get pushback that we are not allowing local authorities to have the space to

make their own decisions as independent bodies. At the same time, we are often asked to provide greater guidance and advice. We work in partnership with local government and, in this instance, when we were progressing towards a route map, our local government partners on the environment and economy board did not think that those plans were sufficiently strong enough for them to support, for understandable reasons, so we had to rethink what we were doing. I think that we have reached a far more sensible position.

On governance, I should explain that Gail Macgregor—I hope that you will bring her in shortly, because I do not want to be speaking for her—and I co-chair the national transport strategy governance board, which involves the Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland, or SCOTS. We also have experts from local authorities, which have transport expertise, and from regional transport partnerships who can advise us.

We have decided to have governance in relation to car use reduction. There is a working group to work out an agreement on a policy statement, so that we have joint agreement on we want to do, and a delivery plan, or plans. The reason why I say “plans” is that one concern was that a one-size-fits-all approach will not suit Scotland. We all know that, realistically, there is a big difference between car use reduction in cities and in rural areas, and that it is about taking people with us. The feedback is that we need something that is more reflective of different communities, which is what we are developing. I therefore suspect that we will have different plans for different parts of the country. The regional transport partnerships, which are made up of councils from the relevant areas, will be part of that.

The big challenge is that we have to take people with us on this, so that approach is a better and more realistic way of doing things. We will have more realistic targets, and we will review the targets. We will not be able to deliver a 20 per cent reduction in car kilometres. I read the *Official Report* of the meeting when the committee discussed the issue previously, and I noted that Mr Simpson raised the issue of why we use kilometres. That is to do with measurement issues, but my reaction on coming into this brief was that, if we are trying to take people with us, using kilometres in a country that uses miles does not connect. It is car use reduction that we are interested in. I say to Mr Simpson that I had thought of that previously, but I am glad that he agrees with me.

That is our challenge in relation to climate change. If we are to make sure that the climate deniers do not get their place, and that we deliver what we want to achieve, we have to take people

with us. We are therefore reappraising what we are doing. That is reasonable, as the draft route map was produced in early February 2022, which was just before the council elections. There has been a lot of time since that initial route map was produced, and we have a new cohort of councillors and membership of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

That was quite a lengthy answer, but it gives the committee an overview of where we have been and where we have got to.

**The Convener:** I will bring in Gail Macgregor in a second. Before I do that, however, I will take you back to my question, which was: do you accept the recommendations and findings of the report? Your answer was yes. I note that the number 1 key message in this report is nothing to do with global trends and where things are and what other people are doing.

The Scottish Government set a target of a 20 per cent reduction in car use by 2030. The Scottish Government declared a climate emergency. In that context, the very first page of the report by Audit Scotland and the Accounts Commission states that the Scottish Government

“does not have a clear plan”

and that there is a

“lack of leadership”

and

“no costed delivery plan or measurable milestones”.

That is a pretty scathing indictment of the Government, is it not? Do you accept that?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I accept the recommendations of the report. That is what we do, and we take action on them. We can maybe question the rationale in the thinking.

**The Convener:** You do not accept the findings; you simply accept the recommendations.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I think that you asked whether we accept the report, and the report has recommendations on the job of Government. The Public Audit Committee does this all the time; its role is to look at what Audit Scotland is recommending. We are taking forward the recommendations in the report.

On the findings, I can question a number of issues. For example, there was consultation when the climate plan was produced in December 2020 that included that ambitious target. That ambitious target is the challenge. We had ambitious targets to try to reach.

On leadership, I have explained that there have been changes in leadership not only at Government level but at local government level.

There has been a change in the cohort of councillors during the period.

Did we have a plan? Yes. We had the draft route map that was produced in February 2022. There was extensive consultation and involvement, including of the leadership of Transport Scotland, the relevant ministers and the relevant COSLA and local council representatives at that time, during that period for delivery.

All the things that can and could be done—such as developing guidance and the toolbox and all the things that we would expect as part of that—have been worked on and developed. However, the key issue is about getting approval for what is a bold and ambitious target to deliver on. Are we doing things to help deliver it? Yes. Have we provided leadership? Yes, we have.

Almost half, if not more, of the general public across Scotland have free access to buses through the most generous concession system. Are we ensuring that there is resource and funding in the budget to help with active travel and bus priorities in these difficult times? Yes, we are. The Government has done a variety of things to provide leadership.

09:45

To boil down to the specific issue of the ambitious target of reducing car kilometres, there were challenges in providing an agreed route map and delivery at all levels. The central issue is that the Government cannot do this on its own. I am not blaming local government at all—it has a place and perspective and is absolutely key to delivery. However, if local government is not comfortable with what is put in front of it, we have to respond to that.

Has that caused a delay with regard to the plan, the route map and so on? Yes, it has. Would we have a different route map if we are trying to achieve a 20 per cent reduction, whether that is in miles, kilometres or use, compared to what we would do to achieve what the Climate Change Committee has advised the UK Government? We are still awaiting the advice to Scotland but, if that changes, of course our route map and delivery plan will change.

We are still committed to car use reduction, even though the vast majority of emissions reductions will be met by other means. Also, as you know, we do not have control over some of the issues that are in the report. Some of the major issues are about motoring taxation, such as road tax and fuel duty. On that specific point, from the start, I have actively engaged with transport ministers in the previous Conservative Government and now the Labour Government. I am also seeking agreement with Welsh and

Northern Irish ministers. We have discussed the issue at the British-Irish Council, because some of the issues will need a four-nation approach to have the best effect. I am very keen for that approach to help in this area, but it has to be done collectively.

There has by no means been an absence of activity, but has there been agreement? That is the core issue in the report: has there been collective agreement on a way forward? We have not been able to achieve that, despite how positively received the draft route map was in January 2022.

**The Convener:** The report that was published in January this year by the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission for Scotland says of the Scottish Government that there has been

“a lack of leadership”,

which has

“resulted in minimal progress against the demanding policy intention.”

I invite Gail Macgregor to tell us whether COSLA accepts the findings and recommendations of the report.

**Councillor Gail Macgregor (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities):** I will not repeat what the cabinet secretary has said. We accept that there have been delays and that we have not done as much as we should have done. The findings in the report are probably fairly accurate and give us a good bunch of recommendations that we now need to act upon.

On the point about leadership, as the cabinet secretary said, we had a draft route map. I came into this role in June 2022, which was just after that was published, and picked up the reins. The cabinet secretary has been brilliant in her role since she came into it. However, when Fiona Hyslop came into the post she was the third transport secretary since 2022. There are many factors that have caused a bit of a delay along the way.

My economy and environment board has been very good at scrutinising the draft route map. It understands that a lot of the route map is politically sensitive and it is there to represent its communities. It was right that we took the route map back to the board on three occasions to make sure that it was absolutely satisfied that every part of Scotland and every local authority was going to be able to do what they need to do to meet the targets that we all have to meet in different and holistic ways, depending on the authority. Most recently, the final finding from council leaders was that we have to consider the remote, island and rural areas as well. The cities will do the heavy



lifting, but we cannot impose in more rural areas what is expected of some city regions.

We accept the report's findings. We know that we are behind, and there have been many factors relating to that. However, what is key now is to look forward and ensure that our route map is as it should be. We are looking at a more phased approach now, so we will probably not be delivering as ambitiously as we originally intended. However, the report is a reality check that we have to deliver it. As we look through the renewed policy statement, we will be able to see what we are going to do, where we are going to do it, how we are going to do it, how it will be paid for and who will do it. That is what we must focus on now. Yes, we accept the findings.

**The Convener:** Thank you for that answer. You said that you had been in post from 2022 onwards. I do not know whether Mr Nicol was around in 2020—

**Robert Nicol (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities):** Yes, I was.

**The Convener:** You were—good. Perhaps you can answer the question that we have, then. Was COSLA involved in the setting of the 20 per cent car use reduction target in 2020?

**Robert Nicol:** Yes, we had conversations with Transport Scotland. I have colleagues here who can speak more knowledgeably than I can, but the original 20 per cent cut was very much linked to the original 2030 decarbonisation target. It was a measure of what you had to take out of transport to get to the 2030 target. It was steep because the 2030 target was a steep reduction, and you could not have one without the other. That was the original intention of having the 20 per cent reduction. It equated to the types of reduction in road usage that you needed to meet the 2030 target.

That is why we originally developed the draft route map, which we agreed with the Scottish Government in 2021, I believe. Obviously, there has been a timeline since then. I hope that that answers your question.

**The Convener:** Yes—thank you very much. That is helpful. We will bring in the Transport Scotland representatives shortly.

Before I bring in Graham Simpson, I want to ask you about one area in the report. We have had exchanges about this before, cabinet secretary—it is about the peak fares experiment pilot. In case study 1 in the report, the Auditor General and the Accounts Commission specifically make the point that the evaluation conducted by Transport Scotland of the removal of the pilot on peak fares on the railways suggested that no consideration

was given to the impact on car use of the removal of that pilot. Why on earth would that be?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I am not sure that I necessarily agree with that point, because it was considered and it was part of the evaluation. I reiterate that I wanted the peak fare reduction pilot to be a success, and it was extended not just once but twice.

You will be familiar with the fact that we reckon there was an increase in rail demand at that point of 6.8 per cent. That represented around 4 million extra rail journeys over nine months, of which 2 million were journeys that would previously have been made by a private car. That is in the context of around 5 billion private car journeys annually, and it represents a reduction of less than 0.1 per cent of car-based carbon emissions.

Part of the assessment and the evaluation was to ask people whether they would have previously travelled by car, to identify whether there was a modal shift. That was one of the key points. In fact, if you go back to the original launch of the pilot, you will see that modal shift was clearly set out as one of the main aims. The interesting thing is that since the pilot ended, rail use has increased.

The pilot attracted people to rail to try to reduce their costs, which is why I wrote to every MSP identifying flexipass use and season tickets. We have seen almost a doubling, in fact, of the number of sales of flexipasses and season tickets. Price does have a part to play, but it is a fact that we have had an increase in rail patronage even after the pilot ended.

Was modal shift part of the original intention of the pilot? Yes. Did the pilot achieve the shift that we wanted or desired? Unfortunately, and regrettably, no. However, patronage of rail has increased. We want to encourage more people to use rail, and it is good that more people are using rail.

**The Convener:** In the evaluation report, you say that car use was measured and the car kilometre metric was used.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I am not sure. I might ask my officials about the car kilometre metric but car use—

**The Convener:** But that is the target, is it not? That is what the 20 per cent target is based on.

**Fiona Hyslop:** The issue is whether we would have spent time during the research asking people how long their car journey would have been had they not taken the train. I am not sure that we would have gone into that detail when asking people whether they would have used their cars previously. It comes back to the point that we are trying to reduce car use.

On how car use is measured, the Department for Transport measures it. That is how we get our data. The underlying data is measured in car kilometres, and that is how we measure the global aspect year on year. However, I do not think that we asked individuals how long their car journey was and that might be the point of Audit Scotland's criticism.

We did measure car kilometres and we can give you the evidence of the difference between those measurements because that is part of the Department for Transport's global assessment of car kilometres. I do not know whether my officials have anything more to add on that, or whether I am correct in what I am saying about the research.

**The Convener:** Before they come in, maybe you could also answer this question. I do not want to labour a technical point, but is your measurement of car use now different from the car kilometre metric? Maybe Alison Irvine can answer that.

**Fiona Hyslop:** There are two things. How do we take people with us? We need to get people to look at reducing their car use. Longer journeys contribute more to car kilometres. I would be better bringing in my officials to speak to the analysis of the data, but that is measured by agreed metrics that are used in Department for Transport assessments. Remember, I gave you the figure of 3.6 per cent reduction to date and that figure comes from using those data metrics. The issue then is that we cannot distil our individual policies on DFT metrics, if that makes sense. Does anyone want to help me on this?

**Alison Irvine (Transport Scotland):** The overarching message that I have taken from the Audit Scotland points on the peak fares pilot and various other aspects of what we are doing is that it is not satisfied with the way in which we measure how particular policies impact on car kilometres. That is a complicated thing to do, and I am happy to talk more about it if you want me to, but I was not intending to do that now.

In the peak fares pilot evaluation, which is the subject of the specific question that you asked, we have measured the impact on carbon emissions. As the cabinet secretary has said, as part of the surveys, we asked people whether their rail trip replaced a car trip, and we used that assessment to estimate the reduction in emissions and translated it into what it would mean for demand for car use.

It is about the specific points. As we evaluate all our projects, we will look to improve where it is possible to do that, with the multitude of data that we have.

**The Convener:** Thank you. That is a helpful clarification.

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** Good morning, everyone. I will not go around all the witnesses, because there are quite a few of you. I will start with you, cabinet secretary. I gave you a double thumbs up earlier when you said that you accepted that we should use miles rather than kilometres. Can you just confirm that?

**Fiona Hyslop:** My understanding is that, when it comes to the overall measurement, the Department for Transport always uses kilometres, because that is an international metric, but the issue that we have here is how we connect with people and take them with us. I genuinely believe that we need to make the target more realisable and understandable. I would prefer to talk about a 20 per cent reduction in car use generally. That will still be measured in kilometres, but we can talk about miles if people relate more to that and what it means.

We could also interpret that as saying that, if someone was commuting by car five days a week, Monday to Friday, and they voluntarily decided, as part of a behavioural change, to travel by train one day a week, we could look at that as a 20 per cent reduction in their car use for commuting. The issue is partly about how we take people with us and communicate what they can do individually, and that is where carrots and sticks come in. People have to want to volunteer to do that.

Lots of different things can be done on an individual basis. For example, a family that owns several cars taking the decision to reduce its car ownership can help with behavioural change. Lots of things can also be done with councils, which are already doing a lot of activity, particularly in cities.

I talk about a 20 per cent reduction in car use, because language matters, and I think that that will help us to take people with us in our action.

10:00

**Graham Simpson:** I agree. I labour the point that we use miles, not kilometres, in this country, but every witness so far has talked in kilometres. If I ask you how far you travel from Linlithgow to Edinburgh, you will give me a figure in miles, not kilometres, because that is the way that people talk.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I agree, but, unfortunately, the Department for Transport, which helps with our data measurements, used kilometres under the UK Conservative Government and still uses them under the new UK Labour Government.

**Graham Simpson:** I accept that, but it is wrong, so we should not.

**Fiona Hyslop:** That might be a committee recommendation.

**Graham Simpson:** You do not have to be wrong. Transport Scotland can get it right by using miles in all its documentation. That is what it should do. Anyway, that is not why we are here, but I will take that as a small victory.

How did we come up with the 20 per cent figure? I know that Mr Nicol kind of answered that, but, from the Government's point of view, how was that figure arrived at?

**Fiona Hyslop:** As you are aware, I became the Minister for Transport in June 2023, so I am looking back at what happened. As you know, that target was first set out in the climate change plan update in December 2020, and it had to be aligned with our commitment to evidence-based policy making. An extensive period of evidence appraisal took place prior to a public commitment being made on car use.

The evidence that informed the adoption of the target included the Scottish TIMES model, independent modelling on decarbonising the Scottish transport sector, published academic material, international evidence and the UK Climate Change Committee's evidence on the requirements for a modal shift. The UK Climate Change Committee forecast that a 10 per cent shift away from car use was needed to meet the UK's net zero ambitions at that time, but work by Professor Jillian Anable from the University of Leeds institute for transport studies suggested that a reduction in car use of between 20 per cent and 60 per cent would be required. All those different pieces of evidence formed the evidence base that informed the target, which was very ambitious and required transformational change.

As the convener pointed out, at that time—December 2020—we were in the pandemic period, when there had been quite a change, so it was probably not unreasonable to think that the world could change and that we could meet the target, even though it was ambitious. People might have different views, but that was the context in which the target was first set, and it was subject to a 12-week consultation thereafter. I, too, wanted to ensure that I was aware of the origins of the target, which I have set out.

**Graham Simpson:** The target was always challenging, was it not? Some people might say that it was unrealistic.

**Fiona Hyslop:** People have different views on it. Such change was always ambitious. When the target was set, people might have thought that there would be more substantial change in car use, because car use had dropped off a cliff, for different reasons. I understand why people would have thought that. In addition, as the convener said, in the context of the climate change

emergency, there was a substantial call on everyone to take action.

At that time, we did not have the zero-emission vehicle mandate or the vehicle emissions trading scheme, and it is fair to say that there was probably less realisation of how much change there would be. It is interesting that the advice that the UK Government received in, I think, February was that a substantial reduction—an 86 per cent reduction, I think—is expected because of the electrification of cars, trucks and lorries by 2040. I will correct my figures if I have not got that absolutely correct.

In that context and at that time, the target was probably not seen as being as unrealistic as it might have been seen in subsequent years.

**Graham Simpson:** Okay, but the Auditor General says, in paragraph 14 of his report:

“To achieve the target, car traffic levels will need to decrease by 7.3 billion kilometres”

—he has fallen into the kilometres trap there—

“to 29.3 billion compared to a 2019 baseline. The last time car traffic levels were at this level was in 1994.”

That spells out just how tough it is—not just for you, but for councils—does it not?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Yes, and we should remember that two councils have set targets of a 30 per cent reduction rather than a 20 per cent reduction.

We have seen substantial change in some parts of the country. For example, in the city of London, there are measures in place that have been controversial, but which have been successful in reducing car use. I think that London has managed to achieve a reduction of about 19 per cent. That is the type of activity that would be required across Scotland, and, as I said, there is a difference between doing things in a city and doing things in rural areas.

**Graham Simpson:** Yes. Does Gail Macgregor want to come in?

**Councillor Macgregor:** Yes. I am sorry—we are used to pressing the microphone buttons at Dumfries and Galloway Council, but here it is done for me, which is great.

Yes, it is challenging. As the cabinet secretary said, we have two city areas, or councils, that are desperate for the regulatory review and are very keen to go that wee bit further than other areas are likely to go.

As I said earlier, one of the challenges that we face in producing the route map is that we need to look at remote and rural areas, as well as semi-urban areas, in a different context. How we get a delivery plan through that route map needs to be considered in conjunction with councils finding a

holistic way for their own individual regions. We have not yet determined whether that will be delivered locally or through the transport partnerships, or on a south of Scotland basis, for instance, where we could perhaps have cross-border interactions.

Things such as integrated ticketing are very challenging for rural areas in particular. We are currently going through a bus review and all our contracts are up for renegotiation. We have about 12 or 13 different providers across the region, all of which charge separately. Until we can get integrated ticketing and equality of service in the bus infrastructure, it will be a challenge, in particular for rural areas, to achieve anywhere near the 20 per cent target.

However, as I said, we hope that the urban and city regions will punch above their weight, and there may need to be a bit of an offset. I think that we will reach a level of 20 per cent Scotland wide, but some areas will go higher. We need to get a much better public transport infrastructure in place.

**Graham Simpson:** I think that you mentioned that two cities are looking for a regulatory framework.

**Councillor Macgregor:** A review.

**Graham Simpson:** A review. Is that Edinburgh and Glasgow?

**Councillor Macgregor:** Yes, it is Edinburgh and Glasgow, but Dundee, Aberdeen City and Inverness are also looking at that.

**Graham Simpson:** What is it that they want?

**Councillor Macgregor:** I will ask Robert Nicol to speak about that.

**Robert Nicol:** Transport Scotland officials will be able to speak about this, too. Basically, those councils want there to be a regulatory framework so that they can start to plan for demand reduction in their areas. We may not see things happen on the same scale as we have seen in London, but there are ideas for how to reduce car usage in large city areas.

Edinburgh and Glasgow have made clear to COSLA, in our committees, that they are keen to make plans and that they need a framework within which to work, because the law that we currently have does not offer them everything that they might need. We are working with Transport Scotland on that aspect.

**Graham Simpson:** Can you be more specific and say what it is that they are actually looking for? What do they want to do that they cannot do now?

**Robert Nicol:** I do not want to put words in their mouth, because those plans are theirs. My understanding is that they want to develop plans to reduce car use in the city, which could potentially involve—these plans are theirs, not ours—looking at a charge to enter a local authority area. At this moment in time, however, those are simply things that they want to develop.

**Graham Simpson:** Does Transport Scotland have any more information on that?

**Alison Irvine:** Your original question was about car kilometres, and you referred back to 1994—

**Graham Simpson:** My question to Mr Nicol was: what are those two cities looking to do?

**Alison Irvine:** When we set the target in 2020, we were always clear that it was a national target and that, for the various types of measures that would be needed in order to reduce car kilometres, the greatest potential would be in our biggest cities. At the time, we were considering in the round the use of measures such as planning, 20-minute neighbourhoods, parking charges and road space reallocation as tools to disincentivise car use and make places better to live in by creating better spaces in them.

The proposals from the likes of Glasgow and Edinburgh councils, through their mobility plans, are their concepts of how they want to transform the transport arrangements in their cities. Those plans contain several options across the spectrum of transport policy and infrastructure development that will help to reduce car kilometres.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Perhaps I can help by telling you what the City of Edinburgh Council and Glasgow City Council have said about the matter. In its city mobility plan, the City of Edinburgh Council says that it has committed to using

“a range of demand management tools, such as timing windows and access restrictions, to manage these vehicle movements.”

It notes that

“Demand management tools are widely used across the city, for example, through the imposition of parking restrictions and the operation of bus lanes.”

The council has indicated that

“One of the tools that could be explored to support demand management is a ‘pay as you drive’ scheme”

to reduce the number of cars in the city and to generate revenue

“to improve sustainable travel modes.”

That does not mean that the council is going to do that, but it wants to have the powers to do it. It has checked the legislation and regulations that have existed since 2001.

In Glasgow City Council's city government budget proposals for 2024 to 2027, it is noted that

"A project team will also be formed to progress business cases to utilise current and upcoming powers from the Scottish Government that have the potential to generate additional revenue for the city, including but not limited to the Transient Visitor Levy, Congestion Charging and the Workplace Parking Levy."

Those powers already exist—the transient visitor levy already exists, for example, but the council needs to decide how to use it.

It is a situation in which local authorities—obviously, Glasgow and Edinburgh are the biggest cities in Scotland—can decide what they want to do and see whether they already have sufficient powers to do what they want to do.

**Graham Simpson:** That is useful. Some of that could come within the bracket of hammering the motorist, if I could put it that way. As Gail Macgregor pointed out earlier, the introduction of many of those measures in any city is potentially controversial. That is what makes it difficult to introduce them.

To go back to what you said earlier, cabinet secretary, and to what you said in the chamber in March, have you now dropped the 20 per cent target?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I think that we will need to drop the target, or change it—"change" is probably the appropriate word. As I said in my opening remarks, we still want to support car use reduction. That is still an important part of what we want to do, but the figure of 20 per cent is not realistic and will need to be changed. Therefore, we will take the advice that we are expecting to receive in May from the Climate Change Committee—I have told you what the CCC has already said to the UK Government—and that will steer us.

That will not change our focus and drive to make a difference in policy terms and to work with local government, but it will make the target more realistic and therefore more achievable. We are in a different situation from the one that we were in in December 2020; we have had different experiences and demands. We can still make the difference that is needed to achieve our climate change targets. As I have set out, we are still committed to doing that and to achieving net zero by 2045. The climate change plan that will be developed following the advice in May will help us to deliver that.

**Graham Simpson:** I agree that the target is unachievable, so we should get rid of it. Do you think that there should be a target at all—that you should put a figure on it—or should you simply say, "It is our ambition to encourage people to use their cars less"? Is it not enough to say that and

then to introduce measures that might achieve it, such as improving public transport?

10:15

**Fiona Hyslop:** We are improving public transport. That is what Edinburgh and Glasgow councils want to do, which is why they are taking iterative steps. They will do things only when they know that they have the public transport that will help to support those changes.

I think that Mr Simpson has been in Parliament long enough, as have other committee members, to know that if we do not have a target, it will be demanded that we have one. In addition, targets are useful in evidencing progress. Audit Scotland would not be able to measure how good, bad or indifferent we have been if we did not have targets.

I think that you ask a genuine question—I am not trying to diminish it. I am just saying that having something that we know that we are trying to achieve is more realistic. We can also see how it fits in with the wider climate change agenda, which is why the advice that we expect to receive in May from the UK Climate Change Committee will be helpful; it will set the context for where we are now and what we have to do.

Across a lot of policy areas, we get attacked if we have targets that we do not reach, and then we get attacked for not having targets where we have not set them because we want to take people with us on the policy. Such is life and the challenges of Government and politics, as you know.

**Graham Simpson:** Yes—and you know that I always try to be helpful.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Sometimes.

**Graham Simpson:** Sometimes? All the time. *[Laughter.]*

Governments have targets, and they are there to be shot down, are they not?

Speaking of public transport, Transport Scotland came up with a very interesting figure: it said that public transport capacity would need to increase by 222 per cent in order to achieve the 2030 target. You may say that you are making progress, but you are nowhere near 222 per cent. There needs to be quite a radical shift to public transport, does there not?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Separately from the context in which you put that question, I think that we do need to improve and change things, and there is a constant drive for improvement. However, you should not diminish the changes that we are making and have made already. For example, when it comes to rail traffic, 75 per cent of passenger journeys are on electrified lines. The

electrification of the East Kilbride line is coming, and we have completed the electrification of the Barrhead line.

We are also seeing the latest iteration of the vehicle emissions trading scheme—on 7 April, the UK Government issued its response to the UK-wide consultation on that. A load of different things are happening that are resulting in a shift to electric transportation. As I mentioned, there is the increasing electrification of our bus system.

However, we are talking about how people travel, and giving them alternatives. It is interesting to see the data in the report, including data from the Glasgow south city way, where we are seeing significant changes in commuting times and in how people are using the new provision there to cycle, with investment support from the Scottish Government.

Do we need to see quite a change? Yes. Are we taking steps to bring about that change? Yes. Do we need to do more? Yes. That is the whole point—we want to drive forward that agenda. However, it is not without its challenges. In particular, to reflect on Councillor Macgregor's point, if we look at the geography of Scotland, we see that there are big challenges in rural areas. That is one of the reasons why we think that, if there is going to be a continuing reliance on cars, we need to invest in advance of demand. We have worked with local authorities on funding and support for electric vehicle charging, such that we have match funding from the private sector, which is good. However, in our budget that has just been approved, we have funding for rural and island EV charging in particular, because we might not get the same market uptake there as we might do elsewhere.

**Graham Simpson:** There are some final points from me. You mentioned the south city way, which is a good example of how things should be done. That is in Glasgow, of course—I have used it. You mentioned the electrification of the East Kilbride line; I am very much looking forward to being able to use the train again when the line reopens on, I think, 18 May.

I come to my final question. Gail Macgregor mentioned integrated ticketing, which we have spoken about many times. Where are we with that? My frustration has been that it is taking far too long.

**Fiona Hyslop:** As we have discussed, integrated ticketing is not necessarily about concrete ticketing—it will be more about the digital platform that is used, and the device. We have our advisory board and we have recommendations. Part of that involves taking along a lot of private sector operators; Gail Macgregor talked about the bus sector, which is privatised. We are trying to

get everyone in the room. We are getting advice from representatives of all the different sectors, but regulations will probably be needed.

Alison Irvine might want to reflect on what will be required in that regard. However, we are making progress. Integrated ticketing is already operating on a regional basis in many parts of the country.

**Alison Irvine:** We all agree that an integrated ticketing system will make public transport more attractive for users, which is what we want to do to get more people on to public transport. As the cabinet secretary set out, we are making progress on that. The complexities come in when we start to look at the governance around the way in which our public transport system is owned and operated and, similarly, the fare structure and how fares are integrated across the different modes.

I totally accept your challenge—the process is taking too long—but I counter that by pointing out that it is a complicated situation and that we are working through the various steps. Is integrated ticketing what we are aiming for? Absolutely.

**Graham Simpson:** Put me on the smart ticketing board and I will give you a hand.

**Fiona Hyslop:** We believe in using experts.

**The Convener:** Yes—and you can rest assured that everything will be in miles, not kilometres.

I would like to reflect on the answers that you have given to Graham Simpson. Back on 26 February, when the Auditor General was sat in the seat that you are sitting in this morning, he said:

“The rate of change suggests that we are moving away from delivering the target rather than moving closer to it.”—*[Official Report, Public Audit Committee, 26 February 2025; c 3.]*

Do you also disagree with his conclusion as far as that is concerned?

**Fiona Hyslop:** We are making changes—

**The Convener:** But are we moving closer to the target or further away from it?

**Fiona Hyslop:** A 3.6 per cent reduction in car use since 2019 is still a reduction in car use.

**The Convener:** So you disagree with the Auditor General's conclusion.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I am not here to disagree with the Auditor General's comments; I am not here to contradict what he said in any way. However, as far as his comment about moving away from delivering the target is concerned, I read that—I might have been incorrect in doing so—as being more about the policy intention as opposed to the practical data, but I might have misread the way in which the report was produced.

**The Convener:** Well, he was talking about the rate of change, was he not? You have analysts here, whom you can bring in at any time to answer any of the committee's questions, if that would help you to defend your position and give you some evidence to support your views.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Our evidence is the increase in public transport use.

**The Convener:** But more people are also using cars. That is the point, is it not? The balance between public transport use and car use is not moving in the direction of an increased modal shift from the car on to public transport. That is the whole thrust of the report.

**Alison Irvine:** I will offer a few reflections, if I may. The fact that how and why people travel has changed significantly since the Covid pandemic has impacted our public transport systems more than it has impacted our road systems. We are seeing those different types of behaviour manifest themselves in a slower rate of return of passengers to our rail and bus services relative to our road services.

On the general point that the Auditor General was making, I think that he was pointing to the challenge of the stickiness associated with changing people's behaviours with regard to transport across the piece. From a statistical perspective—I might bring in Fiona Brown or Heather Cowan on this—we continue to see that people are travelling less than they used to, which gives us some degree of comfort. Our challenge now is to persuade people to travel less by car and more by public transport and by active modes.

**The Convener:** Thank you. In the interests of time, we will move on to questions from Colin Beattie.

**Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** Cabinet secretary, can I start with a wee moan?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Do you have to?

**Colin Beattie:** I think that you would agree that it is important for us to have absolute clarity on the figures that we are looking at. Exhibit 1, on page 8 of the Auditor General's report, refers to "Domestic transport". When I read that, I immediately leapt to the conclusion that it meant cars. Of course, it does not—it refers to the territorial area of Scotland being domestic as opposed to international, although some of the categories listed in that chart are also domestic.

It was not until we queried that and got a breakdown that we found out that, while cars are, in fact, still a significant proportion of it, there are also trucks, buses and railways, and goodness knows what else. That could be clearer, because I think that a lot of people would jump, as I did, to

thinking that domestic transport means just cars, when it clearly does not.

That is not a question—it is just an observation to think about.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Do you want to say anything on that, Alison?

**Alison Irvine:** I can take that point away, but I can clarify now why there is that degree of separation. Effectively, we have more powers, levers and control to influence domestic transport, whereas we have less influence on the international aspects such as aviation and shipping, simply because of which powers rest with the Scottish Government. That is why we make the distinction. However, I will take your point away and see if we can come up with another phrase or term that would help to make it a bit more obvious.

**Colin Beattie:** I am not querying what the category is made up of—the issue is how evident that is to people who are reading such reports to enable them to understand what it means.

I move on to active travel and public transport, broadly speaking. An important point is that climate change goals and targets are generally long term, because of their very nature. It must be difficult for the Scottish Government to balance competing priorities in making budget decisions, and to balance short-term financial pressures with the ability to project forward and budget for the future. How are you currently doing that?

**Fiona Hyslop:** This last year is probably the one in which I have had the fullest involvement, as the cabinet secretary, in the preparation of budgets, although I had to manage decisions on some of the budgets that we had to deal with during the emergency measures in the previous financial year.

Transport is a large budget, but a lot of that has, understandably, to be spent on safety issues. We have £1.5 billion for rail, a lot of which has to be spent on the services that we provide under control period 7, with Network Rail providing the infrastructure and ScotRail providing the services. Rail and road safety is absolutely imperative for us, as one would expect from the Government.

One challenge that we have had, which is reflected in the report, concerns short-termism in budgets, in particular with capital spend, where we have applications and so on to go through. I am sure that the committee is well rehearsed on the point that one-year budgets are extremely difficult. It is a challenge for us to provide multiyear funding for active travel, and for bus priority routes and bus infrastructure, which is another good example. We are putting sustainable travel and bus infrastructure funding together, because local

authorities can make some sensible decisions around combining active travel and bus planning. If they are going to do something to a route, they can do it once, rather than twice, so that gives them better flexibility. Nonetheless, that multiyear funding is a challenge.

With regard to discretionary spend, I assume that the committee looked at some of the challenges last year, in particular where there were in-year changes to the Scottish Government's budget. A lot of that came from the UK Government at the time and was outwith our control. That meant that we had to adjust our spend, and it was easier to adjust what was seen as uncommitted spend that had not been legally contracted. Unfortunately—I feel very strongly about this—that meant that there were big challenges for our active travel and bus funding, because that spend was not already contractually committed.

Climate change challenges, by their very nature, mean that we will have to do things that we have not done previously, and do more of them, including on active travel and bus. I welcome anything that the committee can do to help in that regard. As the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, I am very keen to try to embed climate change funding as part of our budget funding more generally. The new carbon budgeting, and other aspects that are coming in, will—I hope—reinforce that position, but it is a challenge.

10:30

**Colin Beattie:** Looking at the Auditor General's report, there appears to be a shortage of data on outcomes from some of the investments that are being made. How do you manage to inform the budget when the outcomes from what has already been spent are not clear?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I am thinking about how to explain this.

The active travel funding has changed, which is reflected in the report. More of the funding now goes to local authorities, in particular at tier 1 through the active travel infrastructure fund, which is the bedrock of the active travel delivery system. There is also tier 2 funding. In March, we published the "Active Travel Infrastructure Investment Report 2023-24" on what was produced when. Your concern about data on the active travel side in particular will be reflected in that report, so we can send it to you. It was produced subsequently to the publication of the Auditor General's report.

With regard to the impact, it has been interesting to see what is happening with the south city way. We are already seeing data coming from the Edinburgh routes, and from other areas; we

will capture more data as things progress. People have to have the confidence to use those routes more—just because we build something, that does not mean that immediately, on day 1, we will get people using it. The usage builds up over time, although it is very encouraging to see the information on the Glasgow south city way, as has been mentioned.

There has already been more data coming through since the Auditor General's report was published. I can send the active travel report that I mentioned to the committee. We will continue to get that data, because I agree with you—it is easier for me to argue for funding if I have the evidence of the change. That is important.

We also see that in Aberdeen, which was a good example that you used with regard to the increase in patronage by bus users, although Aberdeen is obviously facing challenges in respect of differing interpretations as to the impacts. We want to show evidence that more people are more prepared to use public transport.

There is also the idea of how we measure accessibility and reliability. For the major shift that we have talked about, reliability will make a difference. Again, the changes that we are trying to make in that respect include providing more flexibility. In some areas, especially those that do not have the same frequency of bus services that the cities have, whether people are able to know when the next bus is coming will make a difference as to whether they use the service. We are making part of the bus infrastructure funding that we are providing available for that type of use, for example.

**Councillor Macgregor:** Can I come in?

**Colin Beattie:** Yes, of course.

**Councillor Macgregor:** We are making really good progress in the area that you highlight. The cabinet secretary and I sit on a climate change oversight group with two other cabinet secretaries and a minister—that is about pulling together the whole climate change agenda, because there are so many parts to it.

Over and above that, we now have the Scottish Climate Intelligence Service, which is a joint venture between the University of Edinburgh, COSLA, the Scottish Government and other partners. It is still very much in its infancy, but it was set up to collect data from 32 local authorities across the climate change portfolio, and transport will obviously feed into that. We are hopeful that once that service is fully up and running and is being populated regularly with all the things that are happening in local government areas, we will begin to see the data filtering through. It will come through in real time, and we will be able to see the impacts at the front line and on communities.



To go back to the politically sensitive question, active travel is often quite contentious in communities, and we are required to sell that story to them and to bring them with us, rather than imposing it on them. We absolutely need surety of funding—of course I would say that—and we need multiyear funding and better planning, but we also need projects that bring our communities with us. That behavioural shift will be much more powerful and, through the Scottish Climate Intelligence Service, we will, as I said, begin to see some of that data.

**Colin Beattie:** To pick up on what you say about the data, one of the recurring themes in evidence to the committee in the past has been that the data is not always consistent. It is not always produced by councils in the same way, and so compatibility becomes a problem and you do not get the results that you want. Are you satisfied that there will be consistency in the data?

**Councillor Macgregor:** I will let Robert Nicol speak to that, because he has done a power of work behind the scenes.

**Robert Nicol:** I believe so. The Scottish Climate Intelligence Service is operating a single platform, and all councils will be uploading data to that. That provides for consistency to allow councils to plan and take decisions locally, and to understand the broader picture. It is work in progress, but the aim is to provide a consistent picture to enable us all to analyse the data and do something with it.

**Colin Beattie:** The Auditor General's report identifies a number of shortfalls in the active travel grant funding. What lessons have been learned from that about how to handle that issue, and what measures are in place to identify those issues?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I ask Alison Irvine to come in on that.

**Alison Irvine:** As you have indicated, and as was outlined in the Auditor General's report and in Transport Scotland's accounts, which use similar language, the Transport Scotland finance team identified in March 2023 that reserves were being held by Sustrans for various reasons, and that that was not acceptable. Subsequently, steps were taken to ensure that that money was drawn down and spent in line with the grant funding intentions.

At the end of March 2024, Audit Scotland raised with us concerns about the evidence that we held around transparency and alignment with grant funding. I cannot remember exactly what the Auditor General's report says but, essentially, it indicates that Transport Scotland has no evidence to support the payment of the funding. That is not strictly true, although I can understand why the report said that. Over the year since then, we have taken monthly reporting from Sustrans. It has the

invoices and receipts and so on that support the payment of the funding.

We recognise that the situation is not quite right and we have taken steps to improve it. We have brought in enhanced training for our policy team so that they know how grants should be managed. The change in the way in which active travel is delivered, which largely takes Sustrans out of the context, means that we now also have more direct engagement with the local authorities that are delivering the schemes. Again, that should improve our management of grants and so on.

**Colin Beattie:** The only thing that I would say in response to that is that the Auditor General's report says, at paragraph 56:

"Transport Scotland did not check any documentary evidence that the £82.5 million had been spent on projects before authorising payments."

That does not support your statement that there was documentation. Obviously, the Auditor General did not see that documentation.

**Alison Irvine:** The documentation—the invoices and so on—sat with Sustrans, and we were having monthly meetings with Sustrans and getting monthly reporting. I am not saying that there is no room for improvement in how we manage that, but I want you to take away two things. One is that we were monitoring the situation, just not as well as we should have done, and the other is that there was no fraud. No misappropriation of funds was identified that would lead to any kind of action needing to be taken in the accounts. We continue to learn the lessons and improve the way in which we oversee the grant management, with regard to the points that Audit Scotland has raised.

**Colin Beattie:** The Auditor General does not refer to any potential fraud or irregularities. However, I would have thought that, if he had been aware that there was some documentation to back up what was said about the spending, he would not have been quite so stark in what he said.

**Alison Irvine:** That is perhaps something that you can put to the team. I am trying to give you a degree of reassurance that this was not something that Transport Scotland was doing blind. We were having monthly monitoring meetings with Sustrans as the projects were taken forward, and we were satisfied that the money was spent appropriately.

**Colin Beattie:** Coming back to the Auditor General, surely, when the audit was taking place, questions would have been asked and someone would have been able to answer them. There is no evidence of that in the report.

**Alison Irvine:** I am sure that those conversations were taking place. Nonetheless, there is room for improvement, and we are taking

steps to improve the way in which we manage the grants.

**Colin Beattie:** Okay. We will rely on your assurance that you are improving things.

Cabinet secretary, you mentioned the problems with one-year funding for active travel and public transport schemes. How are you planning to address the challenge of providing reassurance to partners who are working with you on what are long-term, multiyear projects? Given the one-year funding model, how can you reassure them that those projects are secure?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I think that that is an eternal challenge not just for this area of policy, but right across Government. When it comes to capital funding, we are looking forward to receiving the UK Government's multiyear capital assessment over the summer, which will be helpful more generally.

I will give the example of the funding for bus priority measures, which I am very supportive of. I have explained why that was one of the funds that we had to pause. I deliberately use the word "pause". Why did we have to do that? When I came into post, I was struck by how long it had taken some local authorities to develop their plans to spend that money. That is not a criticism—I understand that there are planning issues when it comes to activities such as prioritising bus lanes. That funding then had to be paused. However, with regard to the funding that has been allocated to that this year, because the schemes that had been prepared are ready to go, we will be able to progress those. Last year was a very difficult year, but we have tried to bridge that.

That is why the partnership with local government is really important. We know that we are all heading in the same direction when it comes to what we want to achieve. There are schemes that are ready to go because the preparation has been done. It is important that the funding for active travel, in particular, goes directly to local government, because that allows local authorities to build experience and expertise that are transferable. However, until such time as we can provide the certainty of multiyear funding across Government, that area will be a challenge, because a lot of the funding is for new infrastructure.

Once an active travel network has been built, it can be built on further. Local authorities and local communities have a great deal of ambition and enthusiasm in that regard. I visited Clackmannanshire, where work is being done to connect towns. I also visited Milngavie, where a lot of the traditional routes are to Glasgow. People forget that active travel can help people to travel within communities that do not have established

bus or train routes. Active travel infrastructure is reconnecting communities, which is good from a societal point of view.

Active travel funding has a big impact on those communities in which it is spent, but we want to provide a bit more certainty. Although I am not able to provide more certainty with regard to multiyear funding at the moment, the move to a common platform and the changes that have been made in relation to the new tier 1 and tier 2 funding for active travel will allow local authorities to plan a bit better. Councillor Macgregor might want to reflect on that.

**Colin Beattie:** I have one last question. The report made a number of recommendations about how to improve monitoring and evaluation of spending on reducing car use. What have you put in place to support those recommendations?

**Alison Irvine:** You touched on monitoring in your first question. You asked how we use monitoring to provide evidence to support the investment. I also reflect on Mr Leonard's comments on the points that Audit Scotland made throughout its report on how we track progress against a target such as the car use reduction target.

At the moment, we have what I would describe as a top-down monitoring regime, which monitors progress on all the priorities and outcomes that we have set out in the national transport strategy. That is published on an annual basis, and the most recent report was published in December 2024. Using the various statistics and data that we have available, it sets out how we see ourselves making progress from a national transport strategy perspective, and it is supported by a three-yearly report to Parliament that evaluates how we are delivering against the strategy and how that needs to change.

10:45

There is also the monitoring and evaluation of individual projects, a number of which are referenced in the Auditor General's report. For example, it talks about the under-22s bus pass, and we have already talked about the peak rail fares pilot. Something that we can do is to improve the transparency of our monitoring to start to use—forgive me for saying this, Mr Simpson—the car kilometre reduction statistic in our evaluation work. We will look to do that in order to continually improve transparency.

Fiona, I do not know whether you have anything to add.

**Fiona Brown (Transport Scotland):** I just want to say a bit more about the challenges that we face because of the multiple impacts that transport

interventions have. For example, one challenge is being able to say that a specific intervention has reduced car kilometres. We talked about that a bit when we discussed the rail peak fares pilot. The fact is that our interventions have multiple outcomes and they have interactions with one other, too. Transport behaviour is very complex and is linked to all the activity that is happening in the economy.

It is something that we are always trying to improve on. Some things are more straightforward and we can say that they are having a specific impact on, say, emissions reduction or affordability, but many of our interventions have multiple outcomes, which makes drawing a tangential link challenging. However, as Alison Irvine said, we are continually trying to improve on what we are doing.

**Colin Beattie:** Thank you.

**The Convener:** As two committee members still have questions to put to you, we will try to speed things up slightly. I invite Stuart McMillan to put his questions.

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** Good morning, panel. My first question is about Network Rail. The cabinet secretary touched on the amount of investment that is going into rail in Scotland—I think that she mentioned £1.5 billion. Would it be advantageous for Network Rail to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament to make rail travel a bit cheaper, potentially, and to have a better sense of organisational operation when it comes to rail delivery?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Yes. I do think that rail should be fully devolved to the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government. As you will be aware, the UK Government is currently considering rail reform legislation for Great Britain, and I have been keeping the relevant committee—the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee—apprised of my engagement in that respect. I have been very pleased to have engaged a number of times on the issue with the new Secretary of State for Transport, Heidi Alexander.

As this is perhaps somewhat separate from what is in the audit report, to be fair, I will try to keep my comments brief, convener, but we are seeing some challenges in what could be put forward for England and Wales, which might reflect what we are operationally trying to do in Scotland under the current devolved powers by having as much integration between track and train as possible. However, what we are able to do in that respect is limited by our legal powers and locus, and if there is vertical integration in the UK, that will give us an issue unless it is properly addressed.

That said, we are constructively engaging with the UK Government to identify within its proposals a Scottish solution that would help us ensure that we had such integration. Currently, there is an alliance or co-operation agreement between Network Rail—although it is a reserved body, it is funded by us for what it provides through an agreement under CP7—and ScotRail management to get as much integration as possible.

This is a big issue, but I am sorry, convener—

**The Convener:** You certainly do not have to go into it in a lot of detail.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I will leave it there, then.

**Stuart McMillan:** Thank you for that.

Paragraph 67 of the report touches on bus patronage, and exhibit 7 on page 33 is quite helpful in that regard. Would it be beneficial to have an increased level of funding for transport partnerships in order to try to maintain some bus services in communities?

A moment ago, you talked about rail, which is often thought about in terms of its ability to take people into cities, but it is also hugely important in terms of inter-town transport. For example, in Gourock, in my constituency, someone who stays in the Midton part of the town and wants to go to the town centre has to get a bus to the very end of Gourock in order to get another bus back in.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Would I like more funding for the transport budget? Yes. Would I like to use that funding for bus services? Yes. However, there are obviously competing demands.

I think that 74 per cent of public transport journeys are made by bus—is that correct?

**Alison Irvine:** Yes.

**Fiona Hyslop:** That is worth bearing in mind in relation to the funding that I have just talked about for rail, because the number of journeys that are made by bus is extensive. However, as you are aware, the bus system was privatised in the 1980s and there are different operating models in use. There are powers that allow other models to be used. For example, Highland Council is pursuing a more local authority-run approach, Edinburgh uses a different model to operate Lothian Buses, and the Strathclyde Partnership for Transport is investigating franchising. The 2019 act provides for that and the associated regulations are there to help changes be delivered.

You talked about reducing costs or providing more services. With regard to encouraging more people to use cars less and use public transport more, I think that bus transport is our main solution. However, there is a challenge in terms of funding. We invest a lot in bus through our

concessionary travel schemes, we have supported bus services with the network support grant, and we are continuing to support the underlying aspects—that goes back to the pandemic challenges, as well. The biggest challenge for us is to do with how we can better use funding for bus services to provide that certainty of delivery for the good people of Gourock and elsewhere. We do not have the immediate solution to that, but it is the biggest challenge that we face.

**Stuart McMillan:** My constituency has an increasing older population and Inverclyde is at the lower end of car usage and ownership. Another point concerns the topography of Inverclyde. Access to local bus transport is hugely important to get people from the outer parts of Inverclyde into the town centres to work, shop and the like. In my community, bus transport is hugely important but, like elsewhere, we have seen a reduction in bus services. That is a challenge that we face.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Gail Macgregor might want to comment on that. There is an issue about community bus transport, but there are also issues about mobility as a service. There are some interesting projects around the country in that regard, such as the work that is being done in East Lothian around hospital visits.

Another challenge concerns responsive access and how we can ensure that bus services take into account our current usage as opposed to historical uses. In certain areas, the routes were determined to serve a previous industrial need, but people are now using buses for different purposes. We need to think about how to ensure that services are responsive in that regard.

**Councillor Macgregor:** Bus prioritisation and identifying where the need is are absolutely pivotal issues. All councils are involved in regional economic partnerships, with transport sitting as one of the top three priorities. A lot of work goes on regionally to identify where the need is and to ensure the sustainability of the services that serve that need. The challenge that we have is that there is just not enough funding to put on the bus routes that would be required to serve all our communities, so we have to prioritise, but that creates gaps that can lead to inequalities. Putting additional funding into that area would be correct, but there would still need to be prioritisation as we cannot deliver for all—we have to be honest about that, particularly in rural areas.

Community transport is a big issue, particularly in rural areas. How can we boost that offering? Another big issue relates to school bus contracts, because those buses are taken out of commercial service for, sometimes, two hours per day. We need to manage the entire jigsaw of transport needs across local authorities. SWestrans,

Sustrans and other transport organisations also have demands of us, and the funding for that is often quite complex.

Additional funding would absolutely be welcomed, but it would need to be used to prioritise sustainable routes that our communities need. Let us be honest—some of those are lifeline bus routes that are needed for hospital visits and suchlike.

**Stuart McMillan:** The report touches on the work across the Government and the work between the Government and local authorities. Once again, I will use my constituency as an example—I also gave this example during our meeting with the Auditor General. In Inverkip, following a planning process, a piece of land on which there used to be a power station will now be used for housing. The site is equidistant between Inverkip railway station and Wemyss Bay railway station, and the only way for people to get to those stations when the houses are built will be by car. There is not a great deal of parking space at Inverkip station, but there is plenty at Wemyss Bay station.

The issue of planning has come up in various fora over a number of years. For example, a few years ago, I went to a community council meeting at which, when questions regarding access and transport were posed, an individual who was then a councillor said, “It’s not up to the council to fix the trunk road; it’s up to the Scottish Government.” Surely a holistic approach is needed when any planning application is approved, so that all issues can be fully considered, as opposed to people saying, “Let’s just build some houses, and somebody else can try to fix the problems with access and transport.”

**Fiona Hyslop:** That might be a question for Gail Macgregor.

**Councillor Macgregor:** I was going to mention that issue earlier, because the planning process, which needs to be an enabling service, must take into consideration the whole streetscape, connectivity, whether there will need to be new bus stops or a new bus route and whether cycling and walking routes will be provided. Those issues must be considered in the round.

We can certainly take that point away and put it to our planning performance group, because it is pivotal. We need such developments, but we also need people to be able to get to other places from those developments. In all your constituencies, there will be new developments that can be quite isolated when they are completed—they might not even be near a shop. In relation to planning, the need to ensure that people have connectivity and that there is consideration of infrastructure repairs and maintenance is at the forefront of a lot of the

work that we are doing with the planning performance group.

**Fiona Hyslop:** In national planning framework 4, there is a focus on environmental sustainability, and the door is open for good decisions to be made by local authorities. There should be more proactive use of section 75 agreements in order to meet local transport needs and ensure integrated transport planning, because people expect to have active bus routes to locations. I do not want to make a particular criticism of the local authority in the case that Stuart McMillan mentioned, but those considerations must be front and centre. That is why partnership working is really important.

I refer the committee to a previous report by the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. When I was its deputy convener, that committee produced a very good report on local authorities being delivery partners in relation to net zero. The report covered issues relating to planning and other areas, because there needs to be partnership. However, partnerships need work; they cannot be taken for granted. That is why Gail Macgregor and I are working on improving the governance, as recommended in the report.

There is also the matter of the governance arrangements in relation to the work on climate change, which involves the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, the Acting Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Energy, Gail Macgregor and key members from local government. Car use reduction is just one aspect of the whole picture, but the holistic picture, which is what I hope we are giving you through this evidence, is that we are absolutely focused on that and are trying to improve it with our partners.

11:00

**Stuart McMillan:** I could go on, but I will move on to the matter of EV charging points. Once again, I will use Inverclyde as an example. Graham Simpson chaired a tenement maintenance working group in the previous session of Parliament, and a variety of issues were raised in that group. On the issue of tenements and built-up areas, I look at my area and think that there are people who will want to purchase an electric car and will then need access to EV charging points. Charging a vehicle is a bit easier for someone who has a house with a driveway; it is a lot more challenging for people who live in tenements and in built-up areas. I am keen to find out what further activity has been considered to help with that.

**Fiona Hyslop:** That is a very important matter. With regard to the Scottish Collaboration of Transport Specialists, we are working with Transport Scotland colleagues, and I will bring

them in if they want to add anything. There are different products available, so we are trying to identify the best products and the planning processes to streamline the approach in order that local authorities can share that experience. There is an issue with regard to home charging and the different costs of that, and some issues are reserved. I want to reassure you that we need solutions not just for driveways but for other areas, too.

More commercial approaches have also developed. For example, in East Lothian I have seen that they have converted defunct telecoms cabinets in on-street parking areas where there are no driveways. There is quite a lot going on in that regard. The Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee regularly takes an interest in and reports on that.

**Councillor Macgregor:** I do not have a huge amount to add on tenements. Councils are working together to deliver EV charging points. For example, the three Ayrshires have bunched together to deliver a programme, and another programme involving seven or eight local authorities, with the City of Edinburgh Council as the lead, is about to come to fruition. The issue is about identifying where we need the charging points. Going back to the planning message and the use of section 75 agreements, we now expect some developers, as a point of principle, to put in EV charging points in new developments. We cannot force developers to do that, but it is about going through the regulatory review process and looking at planning legislation. The installation of charging points is something that we need to do and that we need to encourage.

There is a lot of really good work going on, but overcoming the issue in tenements and built-up areas is going to be a challenge. If we can install good local authority charging areas in car parks and public car parks, that will help to ease the situation. We also hope that technology will improve and make it easier to put charging points in built-up areas.

**Fiona Hyslop:** We have more charging points per head of population than any other part of the UK outside the south-east of England, and we have more rapid chargers. I go back to the point about the geography of Scotland and the fact that the funding that has been provided for local authority consortiums has also been supplemented by rural and island EV funding.

**Stuart McMillan:** I will go back to the previous question and the cross-Government and cross-portfolio nature of working. Is there any activity, through education and the likes of Skills Development Scotland, to train people to install EV charging points?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Yes. Indeed, in this year's budget, there is £400,000 for that. We are working with an organisation—I am not sure whether it is the Energy Saving Trust—to fund the colleges. It goes back to Colin Beattie's point, because that provision will also be needed for trucks and heavy duty vehicles. We are funding colleges in that respect; in fact, I have visited Borders College to see its work to train up car technicians to deal with not only traditional internal combustion engine—ICE—vehicles, but EVs, too. The project is good and has been well received.

Moreover, the additional funding that we have provided for the coming year will be for reskilling and upskilling, too. Part of our draft just transition plan for transport, which is currently out for consultation, is about how we ensure that the workforce is skilled up and ready to move into the EV space.

**Stuart McMillan:** Finally, on working with industry and the likes of the motor trade, many people would like to buy an electric car, but they are expensive. I know that technology is always being worked on, but there are still challenges with some aspects of the battery tech; indeed, I have heard some negative stories about the batteries. Is the Scottish Government committed to engaging with the industry on that matter? As we know from the report, reducing car usage is one thing, but the transition from traditional to electric vehicles will be really important in helping to reduce car emissions.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Just to keep the focus in this session on the report, I should say that it is clear that we have to reduce car use—full stop—whether we are talking about EVs or otherwise. Obviously, we do not want to disincentivise people from using EVs. We want to encourage that sort of thing, which is the point of your question.

As for promoting such moves, I was speaking only yesterday at a net zero event at Dynamic Earth that involved industry, and that issue was part of the discussion. We want people to switch to EVs, but we also want to reduce car use in general, because that will help to alleviate congestion and will lead to people using public transport more, as it will be more affordable, reliable and accessible.

It is that combined picture that we are working on, but on your specific question about whether we are working with industry, the answer is yes.

**Stuart McMillan:** Thank you.

**The Convener:** I ask the deputy convener, Jamie Greene, to put some final questions to you.

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (LD):** I just want to check timings, convener. How long can I

go on for? I have tonnes of questions, but I do not want to go over time.

**The Convener:** I do not know whether the cabinet secretary has a train to catch.

**Jamie Greene:** I know that she has a sore throat.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I am suffering a bit.

**Jamie Greene:** I know that, so I will try to spread my questions across the panel. I do have quite a lot of ground to cover, though, and I am afraid that you are first up, cabinet secretary.

I want to take you right back to the beginning of the session, when the convener asked whether you accept not just the report's recommendations but its content and findings. Turning to paragraph 1 on page 3, which sets out the first of the key messages, I think that the first two sentences are fair in talking about transport as a source of greenhouse gas emissions and the "ambitious" nature of the target in the first place. Just for the record, is there anything else in that paragraph that you agree with? That was very unclear from your first answer. Do you agree with the rest of that paragraph?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I hear what you are saying. With regard to the reference to the "lack of leadership", I recognise that there is a challenge there, and I recognise, as the report does, that there have been changes in leadership. The delay that has been talked about is understandable at both local government and national levels. As this has been progressing, we have had different First Ministers, and, at certain key points—for example, when we were about to produce the route map and take it to local government—we had a change in First Minister. I think that that is an important point. As we know, there have been changes in transport minister, too.

Coming into this post, I have tried very hard to provide a bit of stability across the transport portfolio, but there have been delays. When we eventually took forward what we thought was going to be the route map, there had been a change of perspective—and perhaps a change of membership, too—by the time that we got to the local leadership in COSLA's environment and economy board. I recognise that.

**Jamie Greene:** I understand that things have been challenging, and I am not particularly asking you to get into direct conflict with the Auditor General, but he has stated in black and white at the opening of this report, which is the subject of today's session, some very clear criticisms of the Scottish Government. I guess that that is what we are looking at.

Obviously, the target is going to be revised. I do not want to say that it is going to be ditched—

indeed, you can use whatever language you prefer—but, clearly, the 20 per cent target will no longer exist at some point this year. What are the reasons for changing it? I guess that this is a bit of a multiple-choice question. Is the target being changed because you were not going to meet it and it is therefore easier for it not to exist, which would make for a better news story? Is it because the target was the wrong one in the first place? Is it because the metrics that were being used were incorrect or not appropriate? Is it because you do not need to meet the target, because you are going to hit other emissions reduction targets instead? Or is it none of the above?

**Fiona Hyslop:** It is a combination of a number of those things. Obviously, I do not want to retrofit a decision that was made in 2020, but we are dealing with the elements of it in the here and now. I think that the target is unachievable, and I think that it is going to be unnecessary. I want to have a bit of realism and pragmatism around the issue, and I want to take people with us. That is why we will see a change.

**Jamie Greene:** That is a helpful tone. What do you mean by unnecessary?

**Fiona Hyslop:** We have not got our advice yet, but our reading of the climate change advice that was given to the UK Government in February leads us to think that the level of car use reduction that is indicated by the target will not be needed in order to meet the emissions reductions that we need. That is probably the core issue. We still want and need to reduce car use—that has a variety of impacts—but, as I said at the beginning, I want to be clear that the vehicle emissions trading scheme and the switch to EVs will probably do far more to reduce emissions than was anticipated in December 2020. That is what leads me to say that the target is not only unachievable but unnecessary.

That does not mean that we do not need to reduce car use. We still do, but we should do it in a different way.

**Jamie Greene:** That raises an interesting point that the committee has explored before. If the target is solely about the number of miles or kilometres that people drive but not what they are driving in, it is meaningless. If everyone drove an environmentally friendly electric or carbon-neutral vehicle—I acknowledge that that is not necessarily always possible—the number of kilometres or miles driven would not marry up to the emissions targets. Surely, the ambition should be to get people out of combustion-engine vehicles and into cleaner, greener and safer vehicles.

**Fiona Hyslop:** It is a both/and situation. We have always had a policy of encouraging more people to use EVs, but there are also wider issues

around trying to tackle congestion, encouraging people to have more active, healthier lifestyles and tackling the issue of particulates that are produced by tyres, brakes and so on, regardless of which vehicle is used.

**Jamie Greene:** I will let you take a break from answering questions, cabinet secretary, as I know that you are finding it tough to speak because you are not well. I will direct my next questions to Transport Scotland.

While I am talking about the target, I want to pick up on some of the statistics, as data is obviously important. In her opening statement, the cabinet secretary talked about 2022 data. The first question is, why is there no data for 2023 or 2024? Is that in production? Also, did the cabinet secretary say that car use or domestic transport accounted for 39 per cent of all transport emissions, and was it cars or domestic transport that accounted for 12.4 per cent of all emissions? Colin Beattie picked up on that point earlier, and I want to be clear on what the numbers are.

**Alison Irvine:** Transport accounts for 39 per cent of all Scotland's emissions. What was your first question? I have written down "data".

**Jamie Greene:** Why is there no data for 2023 or 2024?

**Alison Irvine:** There is a lag between our obtaining the data and the publication of the emissions figures because of the process of cleaning and processing the data. The latest version of our transport statistics gives you 2023 data. However, it takes time to process the emissions that are associated with the statistics, which is why the emissions statistics are for 2022. More positively, those figures are regularly and annually updated as they make their way through the system.

**Jamie Greene:** On the second part of my question, you have just clarified that 39 per cent of all emissions are transport related, but what percentage of that 39 per cent is caused by domestic, personal-use cars?

**Alison Irvine:** I will ask my colleagues to come in on that.

**Fiona Brown:** Cars create 12.4 per cent of all emissions in Scotland. That is another way of thinking about it. We will get you the exact figure for the proportion of transport-related emissions that are caused by cars.

**Jamie Greene:** That says to me that the bigger issue is other forms of transport, which are emitting more. What is being done to reduce those emissions?

**Fiona Brown:** Cars create 39 per cent of transport emissions.

**Alison Irvine:** That is the largest share of the largest sector.

**Jamie Greene:** Apologies for going on about this, but I do not want anyone to be confused. To be clear, you are saying that, of all Scotland's emissions, 39 per cent are transport related and that, of the transport-related emissions, 39 per cent—coincidentally—are caused by domestic cars.

**Alison Irvine:** It is about that order of magnitude, yes.

**Jamie Greene:** And what percentage of that 39 per cent concerns combustion engines, which are bad for the environment?

**Alison Irvine:** Oh, this feels like a transport quiz—

**Jamie Greene:** It absolutely is.

**Alison Irvine:** —that I am about to fail miserably. We would need to get you a figure for the number of EVs that make up the fleet.

**The Convener:** Yes. Thank you.

11:15

**Jamie Greene:** Everyone wants to know what progress has been made on the issue, whether the public money that has been invested in meeting the policy objective relates to the target, and whether the target is appropriate and necessary relative to the scale of the problem. That is what I am getting at in all of this.

Let us move on to the issue of how we deliver the reduction in mileage, or just usage in general, and the role that other forms of government, particularly local government, can play in that. Has there been any conflict in that regard? Earlier, I got a sense that there might have been some conflict in terms of the Government's overall national ambition versus the delivery on the ground, much of which is under the control of councils, which have to use their budgets to deliver.

**Councillor Macgregor:** It is fair to say that there was a bit of a tension, certainly towards the end of last year, when we were trying to agree a draft route map. However, through conversations between officials and at a political level, those tensions have dissipated and I think that we are very much on the same page now. There will be a staged delivery through the route map and, once we get our new policy statement agreed on the findings of the Climate Change Committee and have agreed our targets, we will be in a much better space than we were in. As you say, the national policy vision relies on the practical delivery at the coalface, and I think that the tensions are just not there in the way that they were.

That said, some rural authorities are really concerned about their ability to deliver. That is why we need to ensure that, when we get to the delivery stage, it is done either on a regional basis or on a local authority basis. We need direction from national Government to be co-produced with us in order to get the delivery right and ensure that we have bespoke models for different parts of Scotland.

**Jamie Greene:** Glasgow and Edinburgh are the two most inhabited council areas and are also, I presume, the source of a great deal of the emissions. Is focusing on those cities the correct approach, or is it the case that everyone has to carry their share of the burden? I suspect that the approach that Glasgow and Edinburgh want to take will be different from the approach that places such as the Borders, Aberdeen, the Highlands and Inverclyde want to take. Everyone has different needs in those various demographic environments. How do we marry that up?

**Councillor Macgregor:** That is the beauty of local government. We have two local authorities that are keen to move at pace because they are able to, and other local authorities are going to have to go at a slightly slower pace. Of course, within rural authorities, there will be large towns where progress will be made, and that is absolutely appropriate. However, if some local authorities have plans and want to implement them ahead of other local authorities, that would be helpful. That is what we want to do, and that has been the subject of discussions with the Government.

**Jamie Greene:** Do you mean the discussions about the regulatory environment that the councils will operate in?

**Councillor Macgregor:** Yes.

**Jamie Greene:** I have a wider question. Why are the councils that want more powers to implement more car reduction measures not using the measures that were afforded to them in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019?

**Robert Nicol:** I do not believe that the 2019 act specifies anything around demand reduction. It contains elements relating to low-emission zones. As was mentioned earlier, under previous legislation, there are regulations around how councils in Scotland can process provisions relating to road charging, but—I do not want to put words into the mouths of Transport Scotland or the cabinet secretary—the regulatory review is intended to effectively update that legislation for the here and now.

We spoke earlier about the desire of two of our members—Glasgow City Council and City of Edinburgh Council—to develop plans that would be right for their areas. That is not to say that other



councils might not be interested, but we have clearly got two members that are keen to progress their plans. I hope that that answers your question.

**Jamie Greene:** That is helpful. However, the crux of my question is that Glasgow and Edinburgh have already introduced low-emission zones—I appreciate that they were controversial, and I hope that they are serving their intended purpose—but other measures were afforded to local authorities in the 2019 act. Some of us sat around the table and progressed that legislation—or, indeed, opposed bits of it—so I know that things such as the workplace parking levy and the ability to create boundaries around towns for congestion or pay-as-you-go charges were not introduced. It seems to me that the only measures that local authorities want to be introduced are enhancement of the low-emission zones or another form of pay-as-you-go scheme. What has happened over the past six years that has prevented local authorities from doing that? Why are they going back to the Government and asking for more powers?

**Fiona Hyslop:** The Transport (Scotland) Act 2001 probably provides more powers than the other acts. The City of Edinburgh Council was very interested in the workplace levy, but it then decided that it was not. Tools need to be available to local government, so that it can decide what to use.

It is fair to say that the politically combative atmosphere sometimes means that common desires to tackle climate change can be compromised, because the decisions can be seen to be too difficult for people to make at particular points in an electoral cycle. What has been interesting about the low-emission zones is that they have produced positive results in air quality, particularly from a public health point of view. You can see that from the Dundee studies. Four local authorities, all with different political make-ups, came together and shared their different experiences.

That is a good example of the common understanding that, for public health reasons, we need to tackle the issue of emissions in our city centres. Those local authorities have collectively done that in their own cities, and they have more flexibilities within that. That common purpose and cross-party approach to tackling a difficult issue is a good example of what can be done.

**Jamie Greene:** How do we balance that with the risk of people perceiving those measures as plugging big holes in council finances, albeit with the right intention? Environmental intentions would be seen as laudable and would garner cross-party support. However, is there a concern that, if the perception is that the money raised from those so-called punitive measures is not ring fenced and is

not reinvested in active or sustainable travel or in other improvements to roads or public services, the additional measures that big cities are asking for will raise huge amounts of money that will go into the black hole of local government?

**Fiona Hyslop:** That is the perception, not the reality. In law, there is a requirement, particularly for low-emission zones, for that funding to go back into improvements in transport and to tackle those central issues. To be fair, that is exactly what the law said was required, and it is also the case in relation to a local authority introducing workplace parking charges. It would have to put that money back into transport, and I am very keen that that happens.

I use the word “punitive”, but I do not intend it to be something that would prevent things from happening. From talking to leadership in the City of Edinburgh Council—there is a Labour leadership and different transport authorities—I know that the previous convener was keen that we see the issue as being about how we invest better in public transport. If there are ways and means for local authorities to invest in public transport so that people have more reliable, affordable and accessible access to public transport, that is a way forward for the different measures that they may want to introduce. I went over the Edinburgh city mobility plan at the time—I do not want to speak for the council, so I am using its words.

My constituency interest is West Lothian, and we have a representative of Midlothian here. For members who represent areas outside cities, that is where the regional transport partnerships come in, because they bring together the cities with the surrounding council areas that have people who commute into the cities. The regional transport partnerships have a critical role to play, because individual councils may want to drive things forward but they also have to work with their surrounding councils.

**Jamie Greene:** That brings me to my last area of questioning. As national and local government move forward with their ambitions to reduce emissions, improve people’s health and improve active travel, how do we ensure that that is not done at the expense of people who have no other choice? We all know that public transport is not universally accessible and that the service has been reducing in many areas, particularly in small towns, rural areas and island communities, where it is incredibly difficult to get around by public transport. I think that we have to accept that. There are a number of groups of people who will be directly affected by additional measures to reduce car usage, particularly the disabled, public sector workers, people who work in the night-time economy and small businesses—people who have no choice. Those people have very valid concerns

about what has been happening over the past few years, and they might be concerned about what they have heard this morning about further measures that might be introduced. How do we alleviate those concerns? How do we say to them that we have to drive forward the net zero ambition but not at the expense of the economy or people's personal lives?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I will give you some examples. There are low-emission zones exemptions for blue badge holders. We have been very aware of some of the tensions in that regard, because some people need to use cars. On your point about rural and island communities, the lack of public transport availability means that more people rely on cars, so we are looking at policy measures to help with that. For example, in those areas, the approach might not be to reduce car usage but to switch to EVs. Again, I am pleased to say that we are going to be able to reintroduce our EV loans, but we are specifically restricting those to people on a reduced income and people in rural and island communities.

Those are two very practical examples to address exactly what you are saying, which is that we will have to be responsive to individual needs, that there will be more challenges and that car use reduction might not be as applicable or as achievable in rural or island areas as it is elsewhere. There will therefore need to be a greater shift to EV use and support in those areas, which is why we have the EV charging fund for rural and island areas and the specifically targeted loans to help people who want to make that shift.

**Jamie Greene:** That is very helpful. What engagement have you had with the new UK Government about potential capital funding for transport infrastructure projects in Scotland? What has the response been to any requests?

**Fiona Hyslop:** In my very first meeting with the first Secretary of State for Scotland, I raised issues around the work on the A75 and capital infrastructure and in relation to the wider issues around growth deals, particularly the Borders railway aspect. In meetings with the second secretary of state, I also raised the first of those issues. Both issues have since been resolved.

My main concern is what would happen with regard to the Barnett formula in relation to investment if there were greater use of private funding for certain projects. I would be very concerned if that had a knock-on impact on Barnett consequential for transport. In my liaison with the UK Government, I also met with one of the transport ministers at the British-Irish Council in Belfast about two weeks ago. I am trying to have regular meetings with all the ministers at different times, including Lord Hendy, the minister

for rail, and the future of roads minister—I think that that is her title; it is a very interesting title.

**Jamie Greene:** The future of roads. Okay. Fix the pot-holes—that is the future.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I think that that is her title—I do not want to mis-title her. We have engagement, but, by and large, the funding for transport will come from the budget that we currently hold in devolved areas.

**The Convener:** Just for the record, I think that there has been only one Secretary of State for Scotland since the election but two Secretaries of State for Transport.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Oh, I am sorry. Did I get that wrong? I am not feeling 100 per cent today, as you might have gathered. My apologies, convener.

**The Convener:** We have also been debating whether the sale of Scottish Bus Group took place in the 1980s or the 1990s. I think that it was the 1990s when the bus companies were sold off, but we can check that in due course.

Thank you very much indeed for giving us a very full evidence session with some very co-operative and helpful answers to our questions. We look forward to seeing delivery plans, measurable milestones and the monitoring arrangements set out in a transparent form, so that we can understand what progress is being made. As a committee, we are always very keen to get data and analysis and a transparent view of how decisions have been made and what the governance arrangements are, so I have no doubt that we will follow those up.

I thank the Transport Scotland representatives, Heather Cowan, Fiona Brown and Alison Irvine, and the COSLA representatives, Gail Macgregor and Robert Nicol. Cabinet secretary, thanks to you for shouldering most of the burden of the answers that were called for this morning. Thank you very much indeed for your time and your input.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Thank you, convener.

**The Convener:** I will now move the meeting into private session.

11:30

*Meeting continued in private until 12:31.*

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