



Investment

As part of our campaign for inclusive streets, Walk, Wheel, Cycle, Vote are asking all candidates for the Holyrood election to sign up to three pledges to improve our streets, on accessibility, infrastructure, and investment. This briefing outlines the background to our ask on investment:

We're calling on candidates to support the sustained, long-term investment needed to start transforming Scotland into a country that enables active travel everywhere – starting from 10% of the transport budget and rising to 20% over the course of the parliament.

Why inclusive streets and active travel?

At the moment, the way our towns and cities are designed puts many people off active travel, especially women, ethnic minorities, older people and disabled people: they just don't feel safe doing so^{1,2}. This is despite the fact that many people want to walk, wheel and cycle more, and think that doing so would make their neighbourhoods nicer places to live^{3,4}.



Why is more investment needed?

Although there's been lots of positive noises made on active travel in Scotland over the past decade, there hasn't been the money to match. Since 1999, the cost of driving has fallen 24% whilst the cost of public transport has risen 35-78%⁵. Despite recent increases, total investment in active travel has amounted to less than the cost of many individual road schemes, such as the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route or M74 completion⁵. As a result, driving has increased, bus use has fallen and active travel remains low. To quote the Scottish Parliamentary Information Centre, "you get what you pay for"⁵. No wonder Scotland isn't making any progress on reducing carbon emissions from transport⁶.

To date, transport investment in Scotland has been heavily skewed towards making it easier to travel *between* towns and cities (by road, and sometimes rail), whilst travelling *within* them remains difficult – with patchy and expensive public transport and lack of safe provision for active travel⁷. This means that access to opportunities and activities – like jobs, education, healthcare and even socialising – is challenging for many, particularly people on lower incomes, disabled people, and older people⁸⁻¹⁰.

Yet active travel consistently comes out top of lists of good-value public investments^{4,11}. The UK Department for Transport has estimated that society gains on average at least £6 worth of benefits for every £1 spent on cycling infrastructure, though individual studies have suggested it may be even higher¹¹. In comparison, most road-building schemes struggle to achieve half these returns⁴.



More inclusive streets have local economic benefits too^{11,12}. Improvements for walking, cycling and the public realm in high streets have been shown to increase retail sales by up to 30%¹³, and no wonder – a review of studies by the Department for Transport found that people who walk and bike to their local shops visit more often and spend more overall¹⁴. People linger longer in pleasant places less dominated by cars: Dundee's Union Street has boomed since

being pedestrianised¹⁵, and moving away from car-centric design to active travel, green spaces and 20-minute neighbourhoods were among the top recommendations for the post-Covid recovery from the High Street Taskforce led by retailer Bill Grimsey¹⁶.

Public spending on infrastructure tends to lock in habits for decades into the future¹⁷. Building roads tends to increase traffic rather than reduce it, a phenomenon known as 'induced demand' – making driving seem easier and more convenient results in people choosing the car more often¹⁸. For instance, there's evidence this happened with the Queensferry crossing⁵. Conversely, investing in safe and appealing active travel infrastructure – such as more walkable places, and cycle lanes separate from vehicle traffic – can dramatically increase the number of people choosing to walk, wheel and cycle for everyday journeys^{4,19,2-21}. That's why government spending priorities need to be consistent with the kind of places we want to live in over the years to come.

What are the 'best buys' for active travel investment?



Evidence shows that the most effective ways of ensuring everyone can walk, wheel, or cycle for everyday journeys are^{12, 22-25}:

- reducing unnecessary car journeys, especially in city & town centres
- reallocating road space away from cars in favour of spaces for people and active travel infrastructure
- streets that invite everyone to walk, with greenery, seating, and wide and level pavements
- planning regulations to encourage compact towns and cities with '20-minute neighbourhoods'
- speed restrictions and other traffic calming on residential streets
- a network of direct protected cycling routes free from motorised traffic, including at junctions.

Investment in better integration between active travel and public transport is also beneficial, especially in more rural areas and those with the potential to benefit from cycle tourism²⁶. This includes protected routes to and from transport hubs; plentiful space on trains and buses for cycles of all sorts (including trikes, handcycles, and cargo bikes) and mobility aids; and secure storage facilities²⁷.

Why 20 percent?

In Scotland, we currently spend around 3% of the transport budget on active travel, and that proportion has decreased in recent years despite an overall uplift in transport spending⁴. Walking and wheeling are especially badly off, as ring-fenced funding for active travel typically prioritises cycling²⁸.

To make a difference, funding needs to be not just sufficient but sustained over the long-term and linked to best-practice accessible design guidance²⁷. It also needs to increase fast, if we're to tackle the climate crisis with the urgency it deserves: global heating may already be progressing faster than many worst-case predictions, with the risk that we trigger irreversible feedback loops²⁹⁻³¹.

Our ask for 10% of the transport budget, rising to 20% over the course of the parliament, may seem ambitious – but the Association of Directors of Public Health proposed the 10% sum more than 10 years ago³², and Ireland has already committed to 20%³³. Internationally, active travel uptake closely matches levels of investment³⁴ – and Scotland has a lot of catching up to do with our European neighbours.

What needs to change?



To break the cycle of growing gridlock we must start to undo the changes we have made that have allowed our towns and cities to become dominated by traffic. Forty years of investment in motoring cannot be undone overnight. But by starting from the needs of children, the elderly, and disabled people we can create places where everyone has the choice to get about under their own steam. This in turn will make it easier for those who need to use a motor vehicle to drive. The result will be a Scotland that is healthier, wealthier – and, above all, happier.

Looking for footnotes? See <http://walkwheelcyclevote.scot/how/investment-briefing-bibliography/> for all the documents and research cited here.