



walk wheel cycle vote

Climate

How we travel in Scotland generates huge amounts of carbon emissions and threatens our climate. Switching to active forms of travel for short everyday journeys can be a way for people to cut their carbon footprints but our government needs to create the safe, attractive and accessible space needed to encourage people to make this positive change.

The climate is a concern for most voters

The vast majority of people (84%) in Scotland are concerned about climate change. An Ipsos/Mori survey¹ in 2020 found that within this figure, 38% are very concerned. Young people are especially concerned (97%) - they see their future clouded by the threat of climatic and ecological catastrophe. In another study² from 2020, 79% of respondents agreed that climate change is an “immediate and urgent problem.”



Tackling climate change is a global problem; every country needs to act and help each other, and every individual needs to play a role in cutting climate emissions.

Changing how we get from A to B is one of the ways we all know can make a difference to the health of the planet. Its easy to understand that shifting from using a petrol or diesel powered vehicle to active travel (whether on its own combined with public transport) can help us cut our own personal carbon footprint. It can also cut air pollution – a significant problem in Scotland’s cities.

Scotland is a relatively rural country, but there is still huge scope for people to leave the car at home and take more everyday short journeys by walking, wheeling or cycling. Over half (54%) of journeys in Scotland under 5km and a quarter of journeys under 1km are done by car³. A single occupancy car journey generates on average 171g of CO₂ per km travelled⁴, while buses generate 104g per passenger km and taking a train is 41g per passenger km.

Switching a 4-mile (6km) commute from driving to cycling could save half a tonne of CO₂ a year – that’s 6% of the average person’s carbon footprint⁵.

Fortunately, the will to change is there: three quarters of people (74%) said they would be able and willing to reduce the amount they personally travel by car² and, furthermore, a recent survey found that 45% of people expect to walk more and 29% expect to cycle more than they did before the pandemic⁶.

Scotland has pledged to act

In April 2019 Nicola Sturgeon declared a climate emergency in Scotland⁷ and since then many local authorities have followed suit. In order to contribute to global efforts Scotland has a legally-binding target to cut greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2045.

Transport is the sector with the highest annual emissions in Scotland, accounting for 36% of Scotland’s total emissions⁸. The largest source of transport emission is from cars (40%), with light goods vehicles and heavy goods vehicles combined producing a quarter, or 12.5% each⁹.



Since 1990, the baseline year for calculating climate emissions, other sectors have cut emissions whereas transport has remained unchanged. This is a result of 30 years of missed opportunities from successive governments to set effective policies.

At the end of 2020 the Scottish Government set an eye-catching new target to reduce car kilometres by 20% by 2030 in order to address the “overreliance on cars”¹⁰. This is the first ever “modal shift” target in the UK and is a positive move, although details of how the government will achieve this are only expected later in 2021.



Making the shift possible

Scotland’s roads and road policies are not designed to meet climate change targets. They must both change if people are to be genuinely enabled to use active means of transport as the obvious, convenient and attractive choice, compared with defaulting to the car.

Our pavements and public spaces need to be completely redesigned to make walking and wheeling safe and enjoyable. And cyclists need their own space, not shared with either pedestrians or heavy traffic: a Cycling Scotland survey¹¹ found that 81% would be motivated to cycle if there were more cycle lanes, traffic free routes & off-road cycle paths. The main barrier to cycling in Scotland is “not feeling safe on the roads” (68% of respondents). That will mean reallocating road space away from cars, even electric ones to make space for more sustainable modes.

What needs to change?

To make sure everyone has the potential to reduce their carbon footprint by walking, wheeling or cycling, we’re asking all candidates for the Holyrood election to sign up to three pledges:



- **Accessibility:** Ensure that our streets, paths and footways are accessible to everyone, whether on foot or using any form of mobility aid; by putting accessibility at the heart of our street design, we will create places everyone can use and enjoy.
- **Infrastructure:** Create a long-term programme to rebuild our villages, towns and cities around walking, wheeling and cycling, with active travel infrastructure everyone can use - the initial goal should be that every child who wants to can walk, wheel or cycle to their school.
- **Investment:** Provide the sustained, long-term investment needed to start this transformation of 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.

¹ Looking for footnotes? See <http://walkwheelcyclevote.scot/why/healthier/climate-briefing-bibliography/> for all the documents and research cited here.