

**Report to Partnership Meeting 7 February 2025**

**PARTNERSHIP**

**SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT AUDIT**

**Purpose of Report**

To provide Members with a summary of the findings and recommendations of the Audit Scotland report on Sustainable Transport: Reducing Car Use which was published on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2025 with a number of recommendations that are relevant to both Regional Transport Partnerships and Councils.

**Background**

The Scottish Government declared a climate emergency in 2019, committing to a target of net zero emissions by 2045.

Transport is the largest source of emissions in Scotland. Domestic cars make up the largest proportion of the total transport emissions. There has been limited progress in reducing emissions from transport compared to other sectors.

Reducing transport emissions requires individuals to use their car less and choose sustainable travel options like walking, cycling, or getting the bus.

In 2019, 36 billion km were driven by cars in Scotland. The Scottish Government has a target to reduce this by 20 per cent by 2030. The Climate Change Committee reported in 2022 that progress to meeting this target is off track.

Delivering this target will require coordinated action from all parts of the public sector to support individuals in changing how they travel. The Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) draft route map sets out actions to deliver on the target to reduce car use.

Activities centre around four key behaviours:

- Reducing the need to travel
- Living well locally
- Switching modes of travel
- Combining or sharing car journeys.

The Scottish Government will have to work effectively with councils, third sector organisations and individuals to achieve the car reduction target.

The Audit set out to answer the following questions:

- How well do national and local government work together to achieve a reduction in car use?

- Is it clear how much funding the Scottish Government and other national and local bodies are spending on reducing car use and how that is being targeted?
- What progress have the Scottish Government and councils made in reducing car use and what are the challenges?

The report was published on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2025 and is available to download [here](#).

## Key Messages

1. Transport is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Scotland. In 2020, the Scottish Government set an ambitious but very challenging target to reduce car kilometres driven by 20 per cent by 2030. It still does not have a clear plan to achieve this. A lack of leadership has resulted in minimal progress against the demanding policy intention. It is not clear if the Scottish Government remains committed to the target as key documents remain in draft form, there is no costed delivery plan or measurable milestones, and arrangements for monitoring and scrutinising progress are insufficient.
2. Councils have an important role in reducing car use, but some prioritise contributing to the target more than others and they face different challenges in doing so. It is more difficult to deliver change in rural areas with longer distances to travel and an inadequate public transport network. Councils need clearer guidance and direction from the Scottish Government on their role in supporting delivery of the target.
3. Scottish Government and council spending on measures to reduce car use is complex, fragmented and lacks transparency. One-year funding makes it difficult for bodies to plan and deliver longer-term projects. Transport Scotland and councils do not record how much is spent specifically on the target to reduce car use. The Scottish Government spends significant amounts of money on interventions that could reduce car use, such as concessionary bus travel and active travel, but it has not considered how to target funding to have the most impact on car use. Because of uncertainty about funding, councils and others have found the first year of introducing changes to how active travel is delivered difficult.
4. Car use has rebounded since the Covid-19 pandemic with public transport use decreasing in the last decade and active travel rates fluctuating. It is unlikely that the Scottish Government will achieve its target of reducing car kilometres driven by 20 per cent by 2030. It has not said how this will affect its wider ambitions to achieve net zero emissions by 2045. The Scottish Government and councils will find it hard to significantly reduce transport emissions unless they make difficult and potentially unpopular decisions to discourage car use.

## Audit Report Recommendation

### Scottish Government should:

- As soon as possible, clarify its commitment to reducing transport emissions through the car kilometre target and how it aligns with the new carbon budget approach towards climate change policy.
- By the end of 2025 at the latest, publish a realistic delivery plan that sets out how it will work with partners to achieve the restated target. This should include the impact Scottish Government, councils and RTPs are expected to have, clear roles and responsibilities, timescales, costs, and an appropriate monitoring and evaluation plan.

- In 2025, publish guidance for councils on how to reduce car use and the need to travel in their communities. This should be aligned with the national planning framework and include the role that rural councils can play.
- By the end of 2025, review the first full year of the new system for active travel delivery, identify challenges and address them. It should evaluate the impact of the changes and whether they have resulted in more efficient delivery.
- In 2025, start a national conversation with the public about their travel choices using effective behaviour change techniques to educate and encourage people to reduce their car use.

#### Scottish Government and COSLA should:

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

#### Scottish Government, councils and RTPs should:

- From 2025, report annually through the climate change monitoring report, and local and regional transport strategy updates, on how spending in the year has affected the desired outcomes of fewer people using their car and more people travelling via sustainable modes such as active travel and public transport.
- Use the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) process to consult with communities, businesses and the third sector and ensure that efforts to reduce car use are part of a just transition and do not deepen inequalities. The EQIA should clearly capture how bodies have considered and fully involved the needs of different groups as part of their decision-making

#### Councils and RTPs should:

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

### **Next Steps for HITRANS**

HITRANS will reflect on all the Recommendations of the report to understand how we can support delivery of this nationally significant effort to reduce carbon emissions from transport and support deliver of the target of net zero emissions by 2045. Officers have already met with Transport Scotland, CoSLA and SCOTS (The Scottish Collaboration of Transportation Specialists) to discuss how as a sector we respond to the report's recommendations. RTPs are well placed to support delivery in this area and the recent collaborative work with Transport Scotland and partner Councils on the People and Place Programme represents a very good example of how this shared effort can move forward.

Of the recommendations specifically identifying RTP action most are already being met by HITRANS. The recommendation that we should report annually (from 2025) on how spending in the year has affected the desired outcomes of fewer people using their car and more people travelling via sustainable modes such as active travel and public transport will require consideration on how this is covered through our reporting processes to ensure this is achieved.

## **RISK REGISTER**

RTS Delivery

Impact – Positive

Comment – The important role of the RTS is reflected in Audit Scotland’s recommendations.

Policy

Impact - Positive

Financial

Impact – Positive

Comment – A number of recommendations offer opportunity to see the RTP more involved in supporting delivery of sustainable transport in the Highlands and Islands.

Equality

Impact – Positive

## **Recommendation**

1. Members and Advisors are asked to note the report.

**Report by:** Ranald Robertson  
**Designation:** Partnership Director  
**Date:** 30<sup>th</sup> January 2025