

SCOTTISH TRANSPORT STUDIES GROUP: MINUTES OF AGM HELD ONLINE AT 1200 ON THURSDAY 1 DECEMBER 2021

Present: Derek Halden, John Yellowlees, Mike Harrison, Graham Atkins, David Connolly, Gordon Hill, Margaret Roy.

1. Welcome and introduction: apologies from Dr Neil Ferguson, Paul White.
2. Minutes and matters arising from 2021 AGM: approval moved by JY, seconded by DC. DH referred to his ongoing struggle in trying to engage with central and local government on the updating of planning standards. There had still been no application for grants, and JY agreed to pursue scope with new contact Eoin Plant-O'Toole at Edinburgh Napier, also with Joan Aitken in her Transaid role. DC saw much scope for promoting realistic alternatives to compulsion if the unhelpful target of a 20% reduction in car kms was to be achieved by 2030. The annual STAR conference had successfully resumed on 2 November.
3. Chair's report: referring to the attached, JY noted with sadness the passing of Sandy Scotland, who had served STSG well as independent examiner over many years.
4. Treasurer's Report: the draft accounts had been available online for a month, and approval was moved by DH seconded by GH. Revenue from publications was slightly up, membership fees down, but with no expense on holding in-person meetings the balance showed a surplus of over £2k. Each issue of STR generated £1k in sales, and there seemed little point in boosting membership if there was nothing to spend the money on.
5. Appointment of Independent Examiner: JY had commended Eric Wishart, who was ex-PWC. DH said it was clear that EW would bring a wealth of experience to the role. His appointment was agreed.
6. Election of new committee: all existing office-holders and committee members had indicated their willingness to be reappointed.
7. AOB: there was none.

Afterwards, former DfT chief scientist David Metz now at the Centre for Transport Studies at University College London gave a presentation "Is Scotland Good to Go with its Transport Decarbonisation Plans?" attended by 17 participants in which he spoke about the impact of digital navigation aids such as satnav in undermining the case for road investments reducing journey-times for business travellers because local journeys were being diverted onto motorways. Satnav data needed to be incorporated into modelling, and account had also to be taken of public anxiety about Smart Motorways without hard shoulders – all of which pointed to a time for change on roads policy.

A comparison between Copenhagen and London showed a possibility that developing opportunities for cycling might merely encourage modal shift from public transport.

Cars offered utility, convenience and a feel-good factor, which was however wearing off in developed countries. However, in the absence of subsidy such alternatives to the car as DRT or MaaS were achieving only slow development in niche modes so could make only a limited contribution to decarbonisation – while there are uncertainties to new technologies and behaviour change is difficult to achieve without the consequences for politics and equity of increasing the cost of carbon-based travel. In Scotland car accounts for 65% of all trips and 68% of journeys to work are by car, with 4% of car journeys accounting for 30% of total distance travelled. With no congestion-charging or parking-restraint proposals, there is an optimism bias in the target 20% reduction of car-km by 2030, and reliance is being placed on the spread of electric vehicles to promote decarbonisation.

The way ahead should lie in regarding the present UK road network as mature and introducing a national scheme of road-user charging for electric vehicles whose income could be shared with local authorities, with funding for public transport and for a scheme to scrap internal combustion ones. In discussion David said that he could see the justification for dualling existing routes as against building new ones and noted the importance of refurbishment options in avoiding the release of embedded carbon. Account should be taken of other emissions such as particulates which came also from EVs. Comparisons with other countries had to take account of obvious differences eg the Netherlands are impact while Switzerland has a long history of integration. The impact of new technologies has to be viewed realistically, and perhaps the most important area for future progress lies in the sharing of data notably from digital navigation aids.

David's book is "Good to Go – Decarbonising Travel after the Pandemic"



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STSG AGM : CHAIR'S REPORT ON THE YEAR

2022 has been characterised by shortages and strikes, and by fluctuations in petrol and diesel prices – though we probably can't easily use these to calibrate fuel price elasticities, due to traffic demand potentially also being affected by 'post-Covid recovery'.

The headline story undoubtedly has been ferry failings, with the Scottish Government's 2014 award of contracts for new ferries to Ferguson Marine escalated to the status of a national scandal - and island communities increasingly cut off by worsening failures among CalMac's ageing fleet.

STPR2 has promised mass transit networks and investment in road and rail, but was criticised for talk of inter-island tunnels being unlikely to be delivered, while the Union Connectivity Review dropped an Irish fixed link in favour of upgrading the A75. An upsurge in fatalities on the A9 prompted calls for acceleration of the dualling since those on single carriageway sections were revealed to have outnumbered those on dualled stretches by 20 to one over the last five years.

Changes to the Highway Code favoured pedestrians and cyclists, and Edinburgh's first cycleway commenced construction. The Scottish Futures Trust allocated a budget to local authorities for development of their Electric Vehicle charging strategies. Low Emission Zones came into existence without as yet any enforcement. Glasgow has a new City Centre Transport Plan. promoting walking and cycling over car use with as one of the key aims is a reduction in car use in the city centre by 30% in the next 10 years.

Buses benefited from free travel for under-22s but bore the continuing impact of driver shortages. Passenger numbers were still not back to pre-CoVid levels, however cuts in services beckoned as pandemic support was running out. McGill's took over FirstGroup's operations in the East of Scotland.

ScotRail returned to public ownership, but was soon afflicted by drivers not working overtime, resulting in an emergency timetable until a pay deal was struck with ASLEF. However, the same offer was rejected by RMT conductors, with strikes until the union agreed to put an improved one to a ballot, and Scotland's railway was also hit by RMT walkouts at Network Rail and by driver action at Anglo-Scottish operators. Lumo showed the potential for modal shift from air to rail, but HS2's benefit for Scotland was reduced by cancellation of the Golborne Link. New stations opened at Reston and Inverness Airport. Scotland's hydrogen train began operation at Bo'ness, and work commenced on electrification of the line linking Edinburgh with the Forth Bridge.

A bid for Prestwick Airport rejected by Scottish Government. Loganair retrenched in the face of FlyBe's revival. Scotland was impacted by Heathrow Airport cutting flights owing to soaring demand and staff shortages.

A new hope was Levelling Up funding. Other potential bright spots for 2023 include commencement of the autonomous bus between Ferrytoll and Edinburgh Park, opening of the Trams to Newhaven and the start of traffic at Highland Spring's new railfreight terminal.

We paid tribute to our long-serving and ever-patient independent examiner Sandy Scotland on his passing, and were grateful to Eric Wishart for stepping into the breach. During 2022 STSG shared an important posting on growing the transport decarbonisation economy and published a further issue of Scottish Transport Review. Your ever-energetic Secretary has also maintained our profile by his participation at events ranging from a visit to Glasgow by the international POLIS group to the recent STAR conference. I am most grateful to Derek, to our treasurer Mike Harrison and to members of the committee for their support throughout the year.