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SCOTLAND'S TRANSPORT THINK TANK

A scenic view of a coastal town with a large ferry boat in the water. The ferry boat is white with a red stripe and has the name 'Caledonian MacBrayne' written on its side. The town is built on a hillside overlooking the water, with a large stone building visible. The sky is overcast with grey clouds. The foreground is filled with green foliage.

Scottish Parliament Elections 2021 Rebuilding Better with a Democratic Mandate for the Future of Transport

What Should be Included in the 2021 Manifestos of Political Parties contesting the Scottish Parliament Elections?

The Scottish political parties are all currently writing what they hope will be their new job descriptions from 2021. There can be a tendency for manifestos to list ideas that lobby groups suggest which politicians think may chime with the public. In this paper we take a different approach. We think the political parties should describe the principles of a new social contract for transport.

The huge challenges of climate change, growing inequity in society and increasingly difficult economic conditions run through all of the practical proposals presented in this paper. Perhaps above all the business models for transport need to change so that success is measured in terms of the delivery of better transport, carbon neutral or negative access to opportunity, rather than current metrics like numbers cycling or volumes of passengers and freight.

STSG does not lobby for any particular project or policy, but as Scotland's transport think tank seeks to reach the parts of the transport debate that might otherwise be missed. Below are our "Necessary Nine" suggestions for all party manifestos.

The ideas were developed at a STSG virtual round table on 24th November 2020 involving people with interests across Scottish transport from government officials, the railways, academia and consultancy.

This paper is being sent to all political parties in Scotland contesting the election and as in 2016 we will issue a checklist prior to the election showing which of our suggestions have been included in the manifestos.

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STSG was set up in 1984 by a group of transport operators and academics to provide greater clarity in the Scottish transport debate. STSG cuts across the narrow interests that divide the transport sector by mode and sector and its stated purpose is to "promote the importance of transport for the Scottish economy and society".

As Scotland's leading transport think tank STSG prepares papers and organises events to share knowledge and understanding of topical issues. Debates are organised around core themes and published through Scottish Transport Review.

STSG supporters come from every part of Scottish transport and the Committee seeks to ensure that all perspectives are recognised and reflected in balanced publications. This publication is based on an online debate and a round table within STSG to help inform the 2016 Scottish Parliament manifestos.

STSG is a charity registered in Scotland SCO14720.

1. Fairer Stakes in Scottish Transport with a Better Balance between Payer and Beneficiaries

Small targeted charges could help more people and businesses in Scotland to invest in a green recovery including more public transport free at the point of use

Scandinavian approaches to charges and tolls on roads have far more in common with Scottish needs than the much quoted transport policy approaches in densely populated countries like the Netherlands and England. Norway has successfully applied road charges in its main cities for 30 years helping to grow the transport economy and distribute wealth more fairly.

Fuel taxes in Scotland charge all motorists the same per

Commitment 1 – Use road tolls to pay for transport improvements that improve accessibility for all. This will include many more transport services free at the point of delivery

mile for their travel whether they are travelling in Sutherland or central Edinburgh and this needs to change to recognise Scotland's diversity as one of its key assets.

In places, and for journeys, where current travel patterns are not socially optimal additional charges are needed to create incentives for cleaner, greener transport. Lower charges for cleaner vehicles could help to increase the proportion of Battery Electric Vehicles in Scotland (currently less than 2% of new car sales in Scotland compared with over 80% in Norway).

Small tolls on some peak tourist routes could act as a tourist tax. For example, a small charge at Tongue could pay for the services like more free facilities to support the continued growth of the North Coast 500 as a popular tourist route.

There is also a need for a fairer approach in applying fuel duty in Scotland, already recognised by pilots of differential rates of rural fuel duty. At a time when technology has been creating greener cars, people have

been buying larger more fuel efficient cars, partly due to road safety fears.

The spatial inequities of the current system are particularly acute for remote areas. As electric cars increasingly replace petrol and diesel cars the system of charges on car users will need to change in any case.

If there are insufficient incentives for cleaner fairer travel then this must be urgently changed. Such change can be managed incrementally with increased rebates for some fuel users and additional charges for others. Eligibility for these rebates could be managed through supplements and charges paid as part of car insurance policies, just like the lower car insurance many Scottish drivers pay for driving in safer places and avoiding riskier times of day when travelling.

There are many options to design equitable approaches where the Scottish Government administer new charging schemes in partnership with UK government, just like the Bus Service Operators Grant (Fuel Duty Rebate) scheme which has been administered for bus operators for many years. The detailed design of the approaches will require planning and consultation but the commitment to progress enabling legislation to deliver fairer road charges is overdue .

Commitment 2 – Tackle the inequity in road use taxes and charges with new supplements and rebates based on where and when people drive. To enable these approaches secure the devolution of vehicle and fuel taxes from the UK Treasury to Scotland

2. Transport Passes as the New Normal

Responding to the pandemic of 2020 will require new investment priorities in transport. In the new normal, purchases of annual bus passes, car club membership, and bike/electric bike hire membership could become as normal as buying road vehicle licenses or television licences.

Such approaches to annual season passes have long delivered higher levels of investment in public transport in many European countries. It is socially normal for residents of Vienna or Munich to buy an annual public transport pass. Over time residents of cities like these have started to view residents and visitors who do not hold travel passes as being unusual or anti-social for not investing in the public transport network, even if they are rarely able to use public transport themselves. By investing in local public transport, residents keep the air clean, and the streets clear of road congestion for everyone whether or not they travel by public transport.

In Scotland, rather than just old and young people being holders of bus passes everyone should have some sort of bus or rail pass with different pricing for different age groups, and for urban and rural dwellers. Well planned designs of tariffs for annual passes able to command strong public support could raise up to a £bn per year making transformational investment for the post pandemic public transport recovery.

Passes such as these are not yet on sale in Scotland and tariffs have not yet been designed to be suitable for all. Once these passes are available, they can be promoted as part of a new more social approach to transport that all Scots can get behind. The passes should not use new or complex technology, like some other transport tickets, but should use open technologies with low transaction costs including contactless bank cards, and barcode tickets (printed or mobile phone).

Commitment 3 – Introduce new transport passes for buses, car clubs and bike hire

3. Pedestrian Safety Matters

The long term decline in road casualties since the 1980s has been stalling over the last decade and other countries are now performing much better than Scotland. The pedestrian casualty record in Scotland is of particular concern with cars now killing more pedestrians than people in cars.

Analysis of hospital admissions data suggests that Scottish road casualty statistics perhaps count less than half of pedestrian casualties. Pedestrian safety should be counted, not just in numbers but in terms of road danger reduction.

Norway with its far better road safety record than Scotland, has a fatal accident inquiry for every road death and a similar policy for Scotland could help to investigate the causes of death and take remedial action.

Current laws also protect the strongest rather than the vulnerable. Socially responsible car and cycle users hold insurance to protect everyone in the event of an accident but the design of these insurance schemes could be far more social.

Commitment 4 – Hold a fatal accident inquiry for every road death, re-introduce the road accident prevention units in all Scottish Councils that proved to be so successful for 20 years and reform liability laws to align them with transport policy

4. Modernising Transport Commissioning

Scottish Government buys a lot of transport, not just the direct investment in road, bus, rail, walking and cycling infrastructure, but indirectly through the investment made by the NHS, Education Sector, and other areas of public policy.

Every aspect of commissioning needs reform. Rail franchising is broken, bus partnerships, contracts and potential franchises are trapped in lengthy bureaucratic delays, and all infrastructure, particularly walking and cycling investment benchmarks poorly against other countries on the cost and value for money of delivery. Commissioning of roads, provision of car parks for health and education facilities, and much of the transport budget of non-transport Scottish Government procurement is usually undertaken with little regard for transport policy.

Too much transport investment responds to travel demand, rather than shaping travel choices, and as a result those that demand the most get the most. This skews investment so that public funding widens the gap between rich and poor. The 2019 Transport Act merely tinkered at the edges and urgent reform is still needed.

A single London style Transport Commissioner's office may not be quite right for Scotland given the diversity of Scotland's society and economy and the need to build local trust. However at all levels the transport commissioning function needs to be separated from the delivery function, including for Transport Scotland and the NHS, to ensure policy goals are not just stated, but also delivered.

Nobody can defend many current transport commissioning decisions, such as for CALMAC ferry commissioning so new approaches are needed that are better able to debate evidence and be informed by specialists

Commitment 5 – Separate transport commissioning and transport delivery functions so that what government promises and what government delivers can be more accountable

5. Data and Algorithms must be Managed more Socially

Weak regulation of data has already created shocks in our democracy. In the wake of Cambridge Analytica and other data scandals, no competent manifesto in the fast growing data economy of 2020 should omit clear commitments on social goals to protect Scotland's people. The Scottish Futures Forum at the Scottish Parliament recently suggested a 'kitemark' scheme for algorithms which is one potential way of introducing stronger social standards to new technology. The design of these new approaches to protect travellers in Scotland from inappropriate use of technology is urgent and overdue.

Tech giants rely on personal travel data, almost more than any other category of data, to create value within their businesses. STSG's review of the 2016 election manifestos showed they were generally very weak on commitments relating to transport data. In the absence of strong manifesto commitments during the last Parliament the Scottish Government has not been well placed to develop its dialogue with the tech giants to secure the growing needs for social protection for Scottish citizens. The progress made since 2016 has therefore largely spun out from UK regulatory action.

Changes made to data regulation do not yet provide a clear social stake in the way data is managed and used. Sat nav companies still send cars on unsuitable routes, and freight industry routing schemes are not universally adopted causing social harm (including bridge bashing) with little or no accountability for the harm caused. Clearer accountability for the accuracy and use of data is needed.

Commitment 6 – Control anti-social uses of travel data and algorithms with new data quality certification mechanisms

6. Access to Healthcare is about more than Free Parking

The pandemic revealed how many staff and patients of NHS services were reliant on public transport and taxi services to get to appointments and work. However, NHS services are not free at the point of delivery for those that need to pay high costs to get to hospital.

It is time to put an end to the inequitable practice in the NHS of subsidising car travel to hospital by the provision of free parking spaces, but not subsidising public transport to hospital with subsidies equivalent to the benefits for car users.

In some locations hospital car park charges for people with a choice of public transport could help to fund essential transport improvements. The Edinburgh Royal Infirmary for example should have a socially designed approach to charging for car parking managed through the commissioning of the hospital by the NHS and helping to fund key bus and tram improvements.

Commitment 7 – End the discrimination against public transport by the NHS

7. Accessible Places

The Covid pandemic has reinforced the benefits of people being able to access more services locally. Some authorities are suggesting 15 or 20 minute neighbourhoods where people living in cities should be able to walk to a range of essential local services such as grocers, GPs and post offices within defined time thresholds. A more equitable and balanced approach to accessibility improvements is needed, rather than crude thresholds that benefit mainly people in wealthy city suburbs. All people in Scotland have a right to expect to see walk and public transport times fall for their journeys to reach essential services, both in rural and urban areas.

Using the travel times from each neighbourhood to essential services in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation target investment at those locations seeing a decline in access so that they can catch up to narrow the accessibility gap in Scotland. To support this investment programme, refresh the SIMD accessibility domain annually.

Commitment 8 – Introduce a levelling up fund for walking and public transport journey times to essential services

8. Repurpose, Repair and Refurbish Transport Assets before Building New

Despite much rhetoric about sustainability, the default investment approach for much transport seems to be to new build. New capital investment also has many more funding and tax incentives than reuse and repair.

The Scottish Government’s recent review (Higgins review) on the economic recovery in Scotland suggested that social, environmental and human capital needed to be far higher priorities in the future. UN climate change ambassador Mark Carney has called the investment opportunities in sustainability the greatest commercial opportunity for the next 30 years.

Smarter travel approaches are as much about investment in social, human and environmental capital as in faster cheaper travel as better informed, more collaborative people and organisations create wealth in new

ways. Viewing the operation of transport systems as an opportunity to invest in sustainable transport means doing more practical projects like Scotrail’s “adopt a station” programme to investing in people and places to support stronger, cleaner, greener, healthier communities. Industrial heritage can often be more an opportunity for renewal and restoration than a cost, including for freight links delivered in partnership with industry.

Commitment 9 – Rethink transport investment for the renewable economy of the future, not the consumption patterns past