

News release

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Minimal progress on reducing car use

A lack of leadership has meant the Scottish Government has made minimal progress towards its challenging climate change goal of reducing car use.

In 2020, the Scottish Government said it wanted to reduce car kilometres driven by 20 per cent by 2030 as part of its efforts to cut greenhouse gas emissions. However, the government has yet to produce a delivery plan for achieving the target, which it is unlikely to meet.

Since 2020, car traffic has increased to near pre-pandemic levels, public transport use has reduced, and there has been no significant change in how much people walk and cycle.

Spending by councils and the Scottish Government on reducing car use is complex, fragmented and lacks transparency. Ministers have spent significant sums on concessionary bus travel and active travel but have not considered how best to target funding to reduce car use.

Councils have a key role in reducing car use, but some have prioritised the 20 per cent target more than others. Rural councils face bigger obstacles to delivering change due to geography and poorer public transport networks. Councils need clearer guidance and direction from the Scottish Government on their role in helping deliver the target.

Stephen Boyle, Auditor General for Scotland, said:

“The Scottish Government set an ambitious and very challenging target to reduce car use by 20 per cent by 2030. But there has been a lack of leadership around delivering this goal.

“It’s now unlikely the government will achieve its ambition, so it needs to be clear how this will affect its wider ambitions to achieve net zero emissions by 2045.”

Ruth MacLeod, a member of the Accounts Commission, said:

"All parts of government need to act to deliver the 2030 car use reduction target. Councils need to set out to what extent they will contribute and how they will measure their progress.

“But they also need clearer guidance and direction from the Scottish Government to agree their role in reducing car use in their area.”

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Notes to Editor:

- 1.** In 2019, the Scottish Government declared a climate emergency and went on to set challenging new emission reduction targets, including a target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045. It also announced interim targets, including a 75 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 (based on 1990 levels) but the Scottish Parliament voted to remove the interim target in November 2024. The Climate Change Committee (CCC) advised at the time that achieving the 2030 interim target would be extremely challenging.
- 2.** Domestic transport is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Scotland, accounting for 28 per cent of all emissions. Emissions from cars make up the largest share of all domestic transport emissions.
- 3.** 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, not all of which are within their control (see Exhibit 8).
- 4.** Audit Scotland has prepared this report for the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 are available at www.audit.scot
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