

The Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee

Green recovery

Submission From [Cycling Scotland]

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The Committee would particularly welcome views on the following questions–

Do the principles of sustainable development (as set out in the annex), and those for a resilient recovery, as proposed by the UK Committee on Climate Change, provide a comprehensive framework for guiding an effective green recovery in Scotland?

We welcome the principles of the UK Committee on Climate Change. In particular, we welcome their recommendation for investment in infrastructure and strengthening schemes to support active travel modes. Such activity is required to deliver an effective green recovery in Scotland.

What are the key barriers to delivering a green recovery (within your sector and / or community)?

A significant challenge/barrier is the continued prioritisation of road building and motorised transport. The majority of car journeys in Scotland are under 5km, and it is these short journeys that offer opportunities for modal shift to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Such prioritisation is in opposition to the Sustainable Transport Hierarchy. The Scottish Infrastructure Commission, in their interim report, outlined a recommendation that for road infrastructure, there should be a presumption in favour of investment to future proof existing road infrastructure and to make it safer, resilient and more reliable, rather than increase road capacity¹. We support this recommendation and feel that this needs to be considered, with regards to decisions to meet climate change targets. Limiting investment in expanding road capacity is crucial for climate change, air pollution, road safety, health and social inclusion objectives and is required if desired levels of modal shift to active travel and public transport are to be achieved. If this is not done, carbon and greenhouse gas emissions will continue to be locked into the transport system and infrastructure decision-making.

What key policies, actions and immediate priorities are needed to deliver a green recovery (within your sector and / or community)?

¹ Scottish Infrastructure Commission (2020) Phase 1: Key findings report. A blueprint for Scotland https://infrastructurecommission.scot/storage/238/ExecutiveSummary_160120.pdf

To achieve modal shift to cycling and active travel, there is a need to create coherent networks of safe, easy to access segregated cycling infrastructure. This includes cohesive, comprehensive, and seamless networks of on-road segregated routes in towns and cities and linking communities in rural areas with off-road paths. The focus should be on shorter distance journeys but with longer distances (generally up to 10 miles) in more rural areas.

The Sustainable Transport Hierarchy has to play a defining role in major planning decisions otherwise land use planning decisions undermine sustainable transport objectives.

Increasing access to bikes is key to addressing inequality and reducing transport poverty, essential elements to secure a successful and just transition to net-zero. Action to deliver increased access to bikes and safe accessible storage should be prioritised in this regard.

How should the 2021/22 Budget support a green and sustainable recovery and avoid locking in carbon; and what funding is needed in the ECCLR portfolio to deliver a green and sustainable recovery?

As recommended by the Scottish Infrastructure Commission and others, transport budgetary decisions should prioritise active and sustainable transport, rather than continue to prioritise expanding existing road capacity. Existing road capacity should be future proofed, rather than increasing capacity further.

General response

There is a need to focus on improving safety for people cycling and travelling actively. Safety concerns is one of the main barriers to people cycling and needs to be addressed if required levels of modal shift are to be achieved to meet climate change targets and ensure a green recovery. Improvements in safety can be achieved by delivering on the actions outlined above.

Going forward, in response to the current Covid-19 pandemic, there is a need to ensure that transport infrastructure decision-making and spending takes into account the need to support physical distancing for active travel and public transport, both now and in response to future pandemics. This includes space allocation decisions and ensuring sufficient footway and cycle path width. This is critical to ensure people can continue to travel actively to facilitate and support a green recovery to meet climate change targets. The temporary measures taken by many Scottish local authorities to encourage cycling and active travel during the lockdown period are an important first step, and these should be made permanent and further expanded, where possible.

There had been a significant reduction in car journeys during the lockdown period, which has led to significant improvements in air quality and greenhouse gas emissions. Positively, there has been a significant increase in the number of people cycling; however, there has also been a corresponding decrease in the number of people using public transport, which has an important role to play in decarbonising transport and delivering the Sustainable Transport Hierarchy. As we move forward in the transition out of lockdown, it is important that the gains in improved air quality and increased levels of cycling are not reversed by a return to pre-pandemic or even higher levels of motorised transport. Such action is essential to ensure a green recovery. Cycling and active travel has a key role in achieving an effective green recovery and transition to net-zero emissions and can help to address the overwhelming challenges of the climate emergency.