

It's time we all headed in the same direction

Scottish government policies on transport and environment are at odds with each other, say **Steve Stradling**, and **John Pinkard**, as they examine ways of promoting sustainable travel



PRACTICAL: "high quality, off-road cycling infrastructure in built-up areas can encourage more people to travel by bike"

Transport accounts for 28 per cent of CO₂ emissions in Scotland – and rising – with greenhouse gas emissions from transport expected to increase by 10 per cent in 2022.

Major infrastructure projects put forward for Scotland in the government's strategic transport projects review (STPR) are expected to reduce CO₂ emissions by just 1 per cent.

At the same time, the government's Climate Change Bill proposes cutting Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions by 80 per cent by 2050.

So, the projects put forward through the STPR appear to be at odds with other government objectives – this is fragmented, not joined-up policy making.

One example – the STPR supports major enhancements to Scotland's rail network, but also puts forward a major road-building programme at a time when there is not a well-resourced national strategy for active travel or for increasing bus patronage.

Choosing to undertake a journey and choosing what form of transport to use on that journey generates personal, social, environmental and economic consequences – global warming, pollution, and waste.

There are many possible approaches available to reduce the environmental (and other) impacts generated by motorised transport. For instance, improving the fuel efficiency of vehicles and reducing the fossil carbon content of transport fuel. These are examples of supply-side measures.

Scotland – like many other countries around the world – is grappling with the challenges arising from the travel choices we make. Clearly, if we are to have a positive environmental impact there is an urgent need to minimise the negative consequences of our travel choices. We need to make smarter and more sustainable travel choices, and we need to do so reliably and more often.

Practical opportunities must be in place for people to travel more sustainably, across infrastructure, services and associated facilities.

A busy road with few pedestrian crossings can be a significant barrier to people travelling on foot or by bike. On the other hand, high quality, off-road cycling infrastructure in built-up areas can encourage more people to travel by bike.

New residential developments featuring cul-de-sacs in their street layout are likely to restrict public transport accessibility, increase walking and cycling distances to local services and encourage people to drive more often. Similarly, providing relatively low-frequency bus services in a rural area without installing bus-stop shelters suitable for a long wait is unlikely to encourage high usage.

Therefore, it is necessary to ensure the travel opportunities meet current and anticipated demand and that they are fit for purpose.

Efforts need to be made to inform people about what sustainable travel options are available to them, how to use them, and how doing so might be of benefit to individuals, society and the environment.

It is surprising how often people are not aware of the range of choices available to them; are not sure how to go about using them; or are not aware that they might benefit from making more sustainable travel choices.

Seemingly simple things – like not knowing how to plan a journey by public transport – can often be significant barriers to people using more sustainable modes of transport more often.

Clearly, even when people are aware that there are good opportunities to use travel alternatives to the car, and when they have positive perceptions about those opportunities, they still need to know how and when to use these opportunities.

Promoting the opportunities that exist, providing good and persuasive information, and helping people use these opportunities, is therefore crucial if

we are to achieve more sustainable patterns of travel behaviour.

Many people will need to learn how they can benefit from using sustainable transport more often before they will be motivated to do so. Motivators can be internal: "If I ride my bike more often then I'll lose some weight" or external, for example, discounted public transport tickets.

However, delivering effective sustainable transport outcomes through demand-side measures requires effective planning and adequate resourcing – including a budget commensurate with the scale of the task.

The Scottish government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) recently agreed funding for Smarter Choices, Smarter Places, which involves implementing a range of demonstration projects designed to test out strategies to increase active travel and public transport use and tackle transport emissions.

Policy-makers stand to learn a great deal through this initiative and it is hoped that at least some of the measures will prove so successful that they will be applied on a much wider scale across Scotland.

If Scottish policy-makers grasp the nettle then there is an opportunity to bring about a sea change in how people travel. Doing so is not just common sense, it is also vital to our ongoing efforts to prevent catastrophic climate change.

Steve Stradling is chairman of the Transform Scotland Trust; John Pinkard is director of transport consultancy firm Vipre

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