

Will new parliament make smarter choices?

Calum McCallum reports on next month's Holyrood elections

It's now just a month until the Holyrood elections (5 May). The parties' election campaigns are well underway and we should see their manifestos appear within the week.

We're holding a transport hustings in Edinburgh on the evening of Tuesday 5 April (in cooperation with Capital Rail Action Group and others). We will have representation from all of the five main parties, and are especially pleased that George Hazel has agreed to chair the event. Full details are available on [our website](#).

In the run-up to the elections, we've been mainly working through the Stop Climate Chaos Scotland (SCCS) coalition. (Amongst other things, we helped write [its election manifesto](#); this includes some strong demands on sustainable transport.) SCCS

wants as many people as possible to take part in the [Climate Day Election Debate](#) on the evening of Wednesday 13 April. Significant numbers of participants will help to show political parties that people across Scotland care about climate change and want to see them act on this during the next Parliament. SCCS are also keen for people to show their support for action on climate change via [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Separate to our work with SCCS, we spoke to all of the parties directly on a range of issues. Amongst other things, we pushed them to include in their manifestos a commitment to deliver a national sustainable transport smartcard. We even went as far as [designing one that the SNP might want to implement](#) should they get re-elected.

Fuel duty cut no answer to UK oil dependence

Colin Howden

The decision by UK Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne to cut fuel duty was hardly unexpected. In the face of concerted campaigns from the tabloid press and all the political parties (except the Greens), it was inevitable that something was going to give. The Chancellor was at least clever enough to fund the cuts in fuel duty by increased taxation on the oil industry (with North Sea oil industry [scheduled to make £24bn in profit in 2011-12](#), it would seem they can afford it).

Cutting fuel duty was of course the wrong thing to do. As we put it in [our press response](#), "In the face of depleting global oil reserves, Osborne's attempts to prop up cheap car use will be about as effective as Canute's efforts to hold back the tides." With fuel prices due to continue their rise as oil becomes more scarce, the only useful response is to reduce society's dependence on fossil fuels. Regrettably there was nothing in the Coalition's Budget which will help the sustainable modes compete with private motor transport.

One can only hope that more politicians will have the backbone to take the decisions which will reduce society's oil dependence — rather than jumping on the next populist cheap fuel bandwagon. Iain Macwhirter certainly struck a hopeful note in his [28 March Sunday Herald article](#):

"[I]t might be that economic necessity will finally force us out of our cars and onto public transport. I remain ever more confident that we are at a turning point in the history of personal transport. Our love affair with the motor vehicle is fading fast as we see our wealth disappearing into the petrol tanks. The cost of stop-start town driving is simply becoming prohibitive. Which makes this a unique opportunity to reshape our cities and explore buses, trams and micro-transportation."



Energy crunch

John Webster suggests some sustainable responses to climate change and peak oil

Climate disasters?

Carnarvon, Australia: More than a year's rainfall in 24 hours.

The Amazon: Extreme drought hits the Amazon and causes upsurge in forest fires.

Russia: "We have never in our history faced such weather conditions in the past" (President Medvedev).

Worldwide: More national extreme heat records broken in a single year since records began.

No, not scenes from the latest Hollywood disaster movie, just some of the events reported for 2010. Add the floods in Queensland, Australia, described by one observer as being "of biblical proportions", and we see that 2011 has got off to a bad start.

Surely even the most ardent climate denier must be having second thoughts and realising that the only scientific explanation for this changing climate is our addiction to the fossil fuels which are changing the composition of our atmosphere at an unprecedented rate? The UK Met Office recently reported that global warming is undeniable and that greenhouse gases provided a "glaringly obvious explanation", so why do we see so little serious discussion of the issues at government level and in the national press?

Sustainable responses

Hence our call to the Scottish Government to grasp the nettle and start making inroads on reducing our greenhouse gas emissions by adopting sustainable transport policies — however unpopular they may be in the short term. In practice this means spending less on roads and more on people-friendly modes of transport such as investment in cycle networks in our cities, the greening of our public transport by moving to electric or hydrogen powered buses and developing tram networks. Dare we say

it: even the introduction of road pricing to our major cities to shift people out of cars into public transport or walking and cycling. Without aiming to be alarmist about climate change, it does look as if time is running out and that all countries need to get their acts together while there is still time to manage the extent of global warming. If 2010 was the result of a 1°C rise in average global temperature, what will 4°C look like?

Reducing oil dependence

The recent hikes in oil prices once again led to calls for the Government to come to the help of the motorist and to reduce fuel tax. Yet, for many years now, forward-looking oil analysts have been predicting the arrival of peak oil when demand exceeds supply (of cheap oil) leading to massive price increases and a serious impact on the UK balance of payments as a consequence. Rather than calling for tax reductions, this is the time when UK commuters should look to reducing their dependence on imported oil, using their car less and using more sustainable, and generally cheaper, forms of transport.

Friends of the Earth recently summarised the situation rather well:

"There is plenty that the Government can do to make fuel price shocks easier on all of us:

(1) Improve the alternatives to driving — most car journeys are short. We need walking, cycling and public transport to be easier;

(2) Encourage greener motoring — improve the incentives that make people want to switch to cleaner, smarter cars that use less fuel;



Opinion piece

(3) Stand up to the motoring lobby — Ministers must stop pandering to these groups and make it clear that petrol prices will continue to rise. If the Government adopted these measures, it would be good for the economy — and the planet."

The Campaign for Better Transport also had some things to say as regards the call for some form of fuel price stabiliser that the road lobby seem to think will solve all sorts of problems: *"This Government (and the previous Labour Government) has hung its climate change reduction strategy on market forces. They're anticipating major investment in cleaner cars, fuelled by rising oil prices. Fiddling about with the price of oil delays and ultimately derails any marginal progress towards greener vehicles, because when oil is cheap, there's no incentive to buy more efficient cars. No incentive, no carbon reduction strategy. It (sadly) is just that simple."*

The challenge of Peak Oil

Peak Oil is now predicted by a growing number of analysts to occur between now and 2015. Adapting to the decline in oil supply will inevitably involve major changes in our transport and lifestyles. We don't have to suffer, but it's vital for all of us to be well informed about what we face, and what will be required to adapt our transport system to the new world of oil decline. Only a few years ago, the threats from climate change had very low public consciousness — we now need to do the same for the challenge of Peak Oil.

RAIL PROGRESS

Paul Tetlaw reports. His full report is [available online](#).

Inter-urban rail



Photo: ScotRail

The Airdrie-Bathgate Rail Link is now complete and open, while the Edinburgh-Glasgow Improvement Programme appears on track.

Rural railways



Photo: Andy Kirkham

Work on the Borders Railway continues, but only limited progress elsewhere.

Anglo-Scottish links



Photo: Virgin Trains

Improvements planned on all routes. East Coast about to launch improved new timetable, Virgin reporting gains from air travel.

No cuts in evidence for destructive road schemes

ForthRight Alliance chair Lawrence Marshall on the proposed Second Forth Road Bridge

First Minister Alex Salmond has proclaimed the proposed new road crossing of the Forth as "Scotland's bridge of recovery".

Even reduced in cost from £2.3 to £1.6 billion, there are many, many ways in which such public monies could otherwise be spent. This is still a figure which, according to Shelter Scotland, would allow the construction 54,261 new homes with the capacity to house up to 173,913 people.

Given that Audit Scotland have recently reported that £2.25 billion is required to repair Scotland's trunk and local roads, this new estimate of the cost of the bridge would allow 71% of all such roads to be brought up to an acceptable standard.

Moreover, such expenditure would provide employment and income to benefit communities across the length and breadth of Scotland — with local firms being far more involved than will ever be the case with a consortium selected to build a bridge whose members are rather spread across the length and breadth of the world.

If Mr Salmond truly wishes to spend for recovery — an honourable choice in and of itself — then he's backed the wrong horse. Rather than spend a minimum of £1.6 billion on a bridge we don't need, he should instead prioritise spending on homes, roads, schools and hospitals — for the benefit of the many, not the few.

Road Sense's Sheona Warnock reports on their recent court case against the proposed Aberdeen western bypass

The remit for the Public Local Inquiry held in 2009 was restricted, meaning that evidence regarding the need for the road could not be presented.

Whilst we had always hoped that our evidence presented to the PLI would convince the Reporters and the Minister of the obvious failings of the scheme, I think that we always knew that it was likely that the Scottish Government would opt to go ahead with it for political reasons. We believe the whole process has been a sham. Objectors' rights of public participation in European and Community law have been wholly disregarded, the public inquiry was nothing more than window-dressing, and successive Scottish Ministers have designed and delivered a process which would always have a positive outcome for them. Our only option was to challenge the lawfulness of the Scottish Ministers' decision to grant approval for the proposed new road.

The appeal took place last month. It focused on the restricted remit of the PLI, and the failure to comply with rights of public participation. Mr & Mrs Fraser of Netherley also appealed, their case focused on the breach of their human rights. We are confident that we presented a strong case, and look forward to a ruling that will allow the bottomless pot of money that seems to have been set aside for this carbon-busting, unfit-for-purpose new road to be better spent on measures that will actually solve the traffic and transport problems of the North-East, or which will protect public services.



Image courtesy of Shelter Scotland

Campaign successes in Scottish Budget

The start of the year saw a significant campaign success with the reinstatement in the Scottish Budget of the Freight Facilities Grants. We worked closely with the Rail Freight Group is helping persuade the Parliament that the Government should retain the Grants, which had been cancelled in the draft budget, and which had proved, over 35 years, to be successful in getting freight transferred from road to rail and sea. The reinstatement of the Grants has been followed by applications for £20m in grant funding, ten times that available in the current year's budget.



The success on FFGs followed securing the Cycling, Walking and Safer Streets (CWSS) fund as a ringfenced budget — one of the few that remain. There had been considerable concern amongst active travel NGOs that its loss would have seriously damaged the prospects for meeting targets for walking, cycling, and public health.

The other part involves working with two local authorities to develop innovative schemes that place strong emphasis on efficient ways of managing pool car use for business travel and can also be accessed by local users. Carplus will be actively developing the programme through to 2012, and are currently advertising for staff to be based in Dundee and Mallaig.

Car club expansion programme launched

We are pleased to see that Carplus have been commissioned to deliver the 'Delivering Car Clubs in Scotland' programme.

The programme follows directly from the Transform Scotland Trust report of the same name, published in September 2010.

Under this initiative, Carplus will offer advice, technical assistance and grants to community organisations and local

Climate policy delays action on Smarter Choices

Following the passage of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act in 2009, the Government has now put in place the Public Engagement Strategy and Public Bodies Climate Duties guidance. It has also finalised the Report on Proposals and Policies (RPP). This document sets out a range of measures which, should they be implemented, would allow the government to meet its legal obligations under the climate change act.

It's clear that the RPP will have to be revised. Amongst other things, the transport 'Policies' (the measures which the Government is committed to deliver) rely heavily on emissions savings from



biofuels — despite the emerging evidence that they generate more emissions than they save.

Unfortunately, the transport 'Proposals' (the measures which the Government may choose to deliver should it need to find extra emissions saving) remain

horribly unambitious. The final version of the RPP delayed action on measures such as travel planning, eco-driving, car clubs, and speed limit enforcement — in spite of the fact that, according to the Government's own figures, these would have not only reduced emissions but would also save money.

NEWS IN BRIEF...

Fair Fares Now

We've signed up to the Campaign for Better Transport campaign 'Fair Fares Now'. The campaign is concerned that with rail fares already the highest in Europe, and with substantial increases due over the next four years, people are being priced off the railways. The campaign's Charter calls for rail fares that are cheaper, fairer and simpler.

The campaign is keen for other organisations to join the campaign — so please consider signing up.

Save Our Buses

We're also helping CBT with their 'Save Our Buses' campaign. This campaign is monitoring to what extent national spending cuts are leading to bus services being harmed at the local level.

We've yet to spot much evidence of bus service cuts in Scotland — which is very welcome news. However, it's unclear whether this may simply be a result of public spending cuts hitting in England first.

If you are aware of any proposals for bus service cuts then please let us know and we will pass on the information to CBT.

New members

We're pleased to announce two new members for Transform Scotland. Following our successful joint lobby on Freight Facilities Grants earlier this year, we're pleased to welcome the **Rail Freight Group** as members. RFG has over 150 member companies, including customers, logistics providers, suppliers, terminal operators, ports and freight train operating companies.

We've also been joined by the **East Dunbartonshire's Cycle Coop**, a new and successful cycle initiative based in Bishopbriggs.



For more information on upcoming events and how you can get involved in campaigning for sustainable transport in Scotland please visit our website: www.transformscotland.org.uk