

CITY REGION DEALS

Committee Debate 'City Regions: Deal or No Deal?', Tuesday 27 March 2018, 14:00

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Transform Scotland parliamentary briefing

1. Key points

- City Region Deals (CRDs) have the potential to improve sustainable transport in Scotland's cities, but must be more transparent and should improve their public engagement.
- All projects should be subject to a detailed equality and sustainability assessment, both of which should be publicly available.
- All CRDs should be subject to a review process, as is the case with the Glasgow CRD.
- The transport component of CRDs should prioritise transport investment in reliable, convenient and affordable public transport, walking and cycling projects in Scotland's cities.

2. CRDs must be more transparent and should improve their public engagement

Despite the clear potential that CRDs offer, there remains a huge degree of uncertainty regarding the process for project selection and what real impact the Deals will have for local economies. There remains little information on how CRDs are agreed, how increased local funding will be unlocked, or how private investment will be encouraged. It is also unclear how much economic autonomy will really be delivered for local authorities, and which level of government (i.e. UK/Scottish Government, local authorities) have the final say on where investment is prioritised. It appears that local residents and businesses have not been sufficiently informed or involved in the development of CRDs. The Deals remain shrouded in secrecy (often on questionable grounds of being sensitive or confidential), at least until they are agreed. Indeed, even after agreement of Deals, information remains vague and non-specific in many cases. We were pleased to see the LGC Committee echo our concerns regarding the opaque project selection process of the CRDs. Efforts should be taken to make the CRD process more transparent, and to improve consultation with communities and businesses.

3. All projects should be subject to an equality and sustainability assessment

We fully agree with the LGC Committee that all projects should be subject to a comprehensive equality and sustainability assessment, both of which should be publicly available. These points were raised in our written and oral evidence to the LGC Committee in 2017. Whilst the criteria for project selection are not known, it is clear that factors such as carbon emissions, congestion alleviation, equalities and air quality have not been given due consideration when selecting transport projects. Indeed, if this process had been carried out, it is likely that public transport, walking and cycling projects would have been prioritised ahead of the road-building schemes that are prevalent in some of the CRDs. It is however vital that any sustainability audit does not repeat the discredited methodology for carbon accounting used in the Scottish Budget (which,

amongst other things, claims that the operation of Scotland's rail services are carbon-generating, when they instead lead to the reduction of road traffic).

4. All CRDs should be subject to a review process

All CRDs should be subject to a review process to ensure that local authorities have the opportunity to revise investment projects if necessary. The Glasgow CRD is already subject to a 'Gateway Review' process, which will allow opportunity for investments to be re-assessed. The UK and Scottish Governments should now commit to offering the same review process for all future CRDs. This would allow for a re-evaluation of the investment priorities following an equalities and sustainability assessment.

5. The transport component of CRDs should prioritise transport investment in reliable, convenient and affordable public transport, walking and cycling infrastructure

From the CRDs agreed so far, it appears that transport projects have largely focused on road building. For example, the LGC Committee's report points out that the Edinburgh CRD saw the Sheriffhall Roundabout project receive significant investment, whilst the Levenmouth Rail Link – a project which would deliver significant benefits in Fife and beyond – was not selected. This raises serious questions about the criteria used for project selection (see above). At a time when the Scottish Government is failing to meet its targets on congestion, modal shift and air quality, the CRDs represent a unique opportunity to address these issues by investing in affordable, convenient and reliable public transport, walking and cycling infrastructure.

About Transform Scotland

We are Scotland's alliance for sustainable transport. We campaign for walking, cycling and public transport to be the easiest and most affordable options for everyone. Our diverse membership brings together public, private and third sector organisations from across Scotland. We are a registered charity, politically independent and strictly science-based. We are a registered Scottish charity (SC041516).

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