

5 WAYS THE GOVERNMENT'S NEW PLANNING BILL COULD ENABLE GREENER TRANSPORT

Members' Policy Briefing

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Introduction

In 2015, the Scottish Government kick-started a Review of Planning, which set out to deliver a "wide programme of improvements to strengthen and simplify the planning system, and to ensure planning better serves Scotland's communities and economy". This includes a new Planning Bill, introduced in December 2017, which aims to shift the planning system's operation "from that of a regulator" to "proactively supporting quality placemaking".

On the face of it, these are excellent aims. We need a planning system that nurtures our places, environment and communities. When it comes to placemaking, ensuring the planning system enables sustainable travel should be a priority – especially taking into account Scotland's new Climate Plan, which sets out a challenging target to deliver 37% emissions reduction from transport by 2032. The independent review of planning published in 2016, 'Empowering planning to deliver great places', also recognised the need for more join up, suggesting that the National Transport Strategy, climate change programme and housing strategy all needed to be integrated into our national level spatial planning.

However, so far the provisions that have come forward in the Bill have failed to harness these opportunities, and there are major concerns amongst NGOs and community groups that, at the moment at least, the proposed Bill is not fit for purpose to ensure the planning system delivers low carbon, resilient places and empowers communities.

This briefing sets out 5 ways that the Planning Bill could be improved to ensure the planning system delivers on its 'quality placemaking' ambitions in relation to transport:

1. Ensure the National Planning Framework is compatible with the Climate Change Plan

The Bill misses an opportunity to ensure that the planning system delivers low carbon places. Detailed policies for meeting Scotland's statutory climate targets are laid out in Climate Plans and there is a need to ensure that the NPF is evaluated against the Climate Plan for compatibility. The planning system plays a major role in how Scotland addresses the challenge of climate change and progresses towards statutory targets. The potential for the planning system to contribute to climate action extends far beyond housing, to low carbon infrastructure, or encouraging uptake of innovative technologies such as electric vehicle charging. The extent to which we harness these opportunities will be pivotal to how quickly Scotland transitions to a low carbon economy (or alternatively is locked into high carbon pathways), and how we ensure that transition is integrated with wider social, economic and environmental goals.

2. Require local authorities to reduce emissions from transport through Local Development Plans

The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 puts a duty on public bodies to support sustainability, but this has not been put into practice through more specific duties when developing local plans and deciding planning

applications. Measures that could support this would include making climate mitigation (or potentially even specifically reduced transport emissions) a legal priority for Local Development Plans. This would ensure that serious consideration is given to how sustainable transport can be built into local spatial plans and policies. For example, the Scottish Government has a vision that 10% of journeys will be by bike in 2020, requiring a leap from only 1.4% in 2014. A key barrier is the provision of quality cycling infrastructure. Policies to support cycling could include minimum requirements for the percentage of people living close to an active travel route. Adults living within a half-mile of a bike path are 20% more likely to cycle. Planning authorities should be thinking systematically about these issues when drafting plans.

3. Encourage 'healthy commute' checks of proposed housing developments

A major area of focus of the planning review has been new housing. Whilst there may be a legitimate need for new, particularly affordable housing, there must also be a focus on the type and quality of housing required to meet Scotland's needs, in a forward thinking way. Scottish residents travel on average 20 miles every day. Most transport policies focus on changing vehicle and fuel types, ignoring costs, emissions and other disadvantages for wellbeing of longer travel distances. Homes, even if built to high standards, cannot be 'zero carbon' if they are built where people need to commute long-distances by car. The planning system should ensure homes are built near to where people work and shop, linked to public and active travel networks. The Bill could support this by requiring lifecycle emissions assessments for new housing development, including forecasted travel patterns. Councils should reject proposals where their impact on walking and cycling will not be positive.

4. Ensure public and active travel networks are prioritised by the Infrastructure Levy

The Planning Bill paves the way (no pun intended) for the introduction of an Infrastructure Levy, to raise funds for services and amenities which enable land to be developed, for example expanding a school or transport infrastructure. The proposed levy is welcome, but we need to think now about how infrastructure is defined, and broaden our horizons from thinking about 'enabling' transport infrastructure largely in terms of building or improving roads. New housing developments should be required to link into healthy, low carbon commute and recreation options. Explicitly defining transport infrastructure in the Planning Bill as including public transport and active travel networks would help ensure that these opportunities were maximised, and could also help achieve active travel targets, an area which is typically underfunded.

5. Set out a statutory purpose for the planning system

The need to achieve sustainable development is more urgent than ever. This has been recognised internationally through the development of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Scottish Government has been an enthusiastic supporter of the SDGs, but the opportunity hasn't been taken to further these ambitions through this Bill. The duties in current Planning legislation for development plans and the National Planning Framework to contribute to sustainable development were welcome when introduced, but should now be strengthened so that achieving sustainable development is an overarching purpose of the planning system.

The Planning Bill is currently at Stage 1 and evidence is being considered by the Local Government and Communities Committee. More information is available here: <http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/106768.aspx>

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Scotland's alliance for sustainable transport

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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 Scottish charity (SC041516).

The logo for Transform Scotland, featuring the word "transform" in a bold, lowercase sans-serif font, with "scotland" in a smaller, lowercase sans-serif font directly below it. The letters "o" and "r" in "transform" are stylized with a circular arrow graphic. The logo is set against a dark blue background with a faint, large-scale graphic of a stylized figure or shape composed of parallel lines.

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