

# SUSTRANS SCOTLAND'S ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEW NATIONAL TRANSPORT STRATEGY

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Transform Scotland Members' Briefing

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## **1. Sustrans Scotland's role in the development of the new National Transport Strategy**

The process to develop Scotland's new National Transport Strategy (NTS) reflects a changed landscape in Scotland.

A new strategy has not just been prompted by the ten years since the last NTS. Transport in Scotland is changing. Technology has changed, the evidence base has changed, and government priorities (in transport and across other sectors) have changed.

Refreshed in 2016 after a decade, the development of a new NTS is intended to lead Scotland's transport direction for the next twenty years. As part of the development of the new strategy, numerous stakeholder groups have been convened by Transport Scotland to take in the wider expertise on transport. Sustrans Scotland, as a key delivery partner of the government's active travel strategy and budget, have been keenly involved to give our perspective on what Scotland needs.

At a high level, three functional groups have been established to consider Research and Evidence, Strategy and Transport Roles and Responsibilities. I have been part of this latter group to consider options for the future delivery of transport functions and the most effective level of government to do this.

This group has convened a wide range of key stakeholders including the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs), The Society of Chief Officers in Transportation in Scotland (SCOTS), representatives of the planning sector and others.

During the development of this NTS, the government announced the doubling of the active travel budget to £80 million per year. It is noticeable how this has focussed attention on walking and cycling and shown people that change is here.

Our aim is to provide a recommendation for how we organise transport in the future. With so many stakeholders present, there have been sharp elbows and strong, sometimes divergent views on current arrangements, not least the role of the third sector, and on what system would best serve Scotland in the future. Debate has been respectful and the Transport Scotland team and their consultants have worked hard to generate proposals to suit the majority.

While nobody believes the current governance system works perfectly, there remains an inherent caution in the face of radical proposals for change. The future governance of transport will remain a topic that divides opinion, however the group is heading towards a consensus view on options that would suit Scotland in the future. This will be evolution rather than revolution.

To secure future transport governance that emphasises walking, cycling and public transport, Transform Scotland and its members will need to take an active role in scrutinising the draft strategy when it is released, particularly around governance.

I also sit on the NTS Review Board chaired by the Minister for Transport and the Islands, Mr Humza Yousaf. This group takes in the bigger picture as the new strategy is developed. I have been genuinely delighted to

be asked to participate, more evidence of the change ongoing in transport strategy. Debate around this table has been fresh, energetic and positive, always willing to look anew at transport's impacts, effects and the future. I feel empowered to speak with confidence about the role and potential of walking and cycling.

It is notable that Mr Yousaf has been focussed on how this strategy works not just today but to guide the next twenty years. Openness to new ideas, such as consideration of gross added value for economic assessment, has been refreshing. For Scotland to meet its priorities, we need to be aware of the wider impacts of transport, both positive impacts like health and economic growth, and the potential negative effects like air quality or sedentary lifestyles.

My colleague Alex Quayle, Senior Policy Officer at Sustrans Scotland, has been part of the Delivering Safe and Resilient Transport working group. This is one of 4 thematic groups, the others being Greener and Healthier, Enabling Economic Growth and Tackling Inequalities, convening to generate policy ideas. [Editor's note: Transform Scotland is represented on the Greener and Healthier thematic group and on the review's Partnership Group by our director Colin Howden.]

One of the key improvements in the 2016 NTS refresh was the introduction of the sustainable transport hierarchy to inform environmental issues associated with transport. The idea is that we should be promoting journeys by foot and by bike first, followed by public transport, taxis and only then by private car. This isn't just an issue of sustainability, however, and we have strongly advocated for this to prompt transport planning for vulnerable users such as pedestrians and cyclists.

The importance of making better use of existing infrastructure has been key to the working group's policy development. Sustrans Scotland are keen to see walking play a greater role in network resilience, more revenue for maintenance of active travel infrastructure and reductions in traffic in urban areas.

And with Scotland so heavily reliant on its bus network, especially in rural areas, there have been discussions about how we can ensure a consistent, reliable and safe service, throughout occasionally challenging conditions, and reverse the decline in bus patronage.

At the time of writing, the stakeholder groups are finalising policy recommendations to propose for scrutiny. The process has ensured a wide representation of stakeholders, and we anticipate several progressive recommendations for policy to complement government priorities that will make a difference to people's everyday journeys.

We look forward to the conclusion of the NTS and a strategy that better integrates and prioritises active travel. In tandem, Transport Scotland have started preliminary work on the second Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR), the government's shopping list of potential transport infrastructure projects for the next decade. The first STPR delivered the Queensferry Crossing.

One of the first tests of the new NTS will be the outputs of this STPR. The NTS intends to deliver a strategy to tackle the challenges of the next twenty years. Top of the list is undoubtedly the growing physical inactivity and public health crisis.

The government is intent on making Scotland an active nation, and it is my expectation that the coming years see the delivery of strong strategies and projects that deliver Scotland's wider needs and well as a transport system that works for everyone.

## 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).