**Submission on transport to the Scottish Government Advisory Group on Economic Recovery**

Professor Iain Docherty, University of Stirling
Professor Greg Marsden, University of Leeds
Professor Jillian Anable, University of Leeds

This short note sets out some initial analysis on the impact of transport and mobility on shaping the form of recovery from the COVID-19 crisis drawing on our COVID19 Transport, Travel and Social Adaptation Study.

**Headlines:**

- The climate emergency has not gone away.

- If anything, the unprecedented restrictions on normal life required to achieve the -10% to -25% reductions in carbon emissions experienced during lockdown demonstrate the (daunting) scale of change that will be required to meet our decarbonisation commitments.[1]

- Policy attention has been focused on the public health emergency, and now increasingly the unprecedented economic shock resulting from COVID-19. But the imperative to put in place measures to achieve decarbonisation and meet Paris Accord obligations remains, as do the associated uncomfortable truths, most importantly that electrification of the vehicle fleet is not enough. We need to travel less in future.

- This is undoubtedly a 'policy moment' or point of inflexion representing a rare opportunity to enact radical change that can reset long standing trends and trajectories. As Chris Boardman, the Cycling and Walking Commissioner for the Greater Manchester Combined authority put it, "what we do in the next 20 days will affect what we do in the next 20 years".

- The main danger is that we create the conditions for trends in transport to get worse rather than better, and make it impossible to meet our decarbonisation targets. It will take determined, brave and probably politically unpopular decisions to avoid this, especially given the depth of the economic shock.

Responses to the crisis in terms of travel behaviour have been mixed. On the positive side:

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[1] https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-020-0797-x

- It has been demonstrated through necessity that home working could replace much of the commuting normally undertaken (our research is trying to gain a better understanding on the true extent of this).

- Business travel (much of which was by car and plane) has been successfully replaced by video conferencing.

- There has been an increase in walking and cycling, although much of this has been 'exercise' rather than necessarily serving essential needs such as food shopping. That said, research from Switzerland[2] suggests that during lockdown people's activity spaces have been about 20% the size of that before lockdown and so better served by walking and cycling.

Negatives:

- Car traffic declined significantly less and has bounced back much faster than public transport use (although public transport service levels have been necessarily constrained with only 30%-45% of pre COVID services running to date).

- The (clear and consistent) messages to avoid public transport wherever possible are unprecedented and will have lasting effects on people's confidence to use the network. The potential impacts of this cannot be underestimated.

- The increase in demand for internet shopping has increased van traffic substantially and illustrated the inefficiency and carbon emissions impact of multiple delivery networks in competition with each other in a deregulated environment.

**Influence of transport choices on economic recovery**

In terms of planning for a rapid, fair and green recovery from the crisis, there are a set of critical opportunities and threats apparent that will shape how transport choices frame the recovery. The opportunities are:

- COVID-19 has revealed how our focus on 'efficiency' in the transport network has masked its fragility, especially in terms of its financial robustness. The pandemic has set a new context for resilience planning in which the importance in terms of previously abstract visions such as 'agile resilience' i.e. making the transport network more flexible and able to cope with external shocks, become apparent.

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[2] https://transportfindings.org/article/12903-tracing-the-sars-cov-2-impact-the-first-month-in-switzerland

- More people than ever before have experienced how digital technology can replace physical travel for many purposes, creating the potential to reduce the overall need to travel in line with the decarbonisation imperative.

- There is a greater understanding of the importance of a resilient transport infrastructure in supporting key public services and their workers.

- The Scottish Government's 'Spaces for People' fund for 'pop up' active travel infrastructure has shown that the most significant barriers to the provision of much improved walking and cycling opportunities are not engineering complexity, or the availability of funding but rather the complexity of technical guidance that still puts vehicles first, and (more bluntly) the lack of political will.

- Some people who had not previously considered walking or cycling as meeting a significant element of their mobility needs now do so.

- There is greater understanding through experience of the lockdown of the potential for initiatives such as the '20 minute neighbourhood' to meet essential needs without the need for car travel, which could help recovery of our high streets.

Threats:

- Lack of confidence in public transport will permanently (or at least for the foreseeable future) reduce patronage very substantially. We still do not know enough about the transmission of the virus in public transport vehicles, but evidence from London and New York suggests that mass transit systems may have been a significant transmission vector.

- Any continued reduction of public transport capacity/patronage near current levels will make many services and perhaps whole parts of the network uneconomical to provide. (2m physical distancing suggests a maximum public transport capacity of 10%-25% of pre-COVID-19.) Any reduction in the reach of public transport services will have a significant impact on access to employment, social inclusion and economic recovery.

- The desire for a safe travelling environment will lead to a significant increase in car ownership, use and emissions.

- The potential for emerging new mobility services such as ride sharing and 'Mobility as a Service' to reduce vehicle use over the medium to long term will not materialise because travellers will not be confident that shared vehicles are safe.

- The need to accelerate capital investment programmes as a stimulus to economic recovery risks focusing attention on pre-pandemic 'shovel ready' schemes that predate the current round of Scottish Government transport strategies and are

therefore not strongly focused on emissions reduction. Government will come under significant political pressure to progress as many projects as possible; this should be resisted and rigorous appraisal of which projects aid a sustainable recovery put in place.

- The desire to avoid political controversy – especially the imperative to restrict car use – means that greater investment could lead to 'more of everything' (i.e. greater levels of mobility across the economy as a whole despite individual 'successes' such as increased cycling) which does not address decarbonisation. We have already seen this in the suspension of Low Emission Zones.

**Policy responses**

We are at a critical juncture that will set the demand trajectories for car travel, public transport use, walking, cycling and digital communication for years to come, and probably for the timescale over which we must achieve decarbonisation. We must at all costs resist the temptation of a scattergun 'Get Scotland Moving Again' narrative that encourages the wrong policy responses.

The single most important transport and mobility issue for the recovery is how we manage the demand for travel by car. It is essential that we intervene to manage the likely rebound in demand for car travel, otherwise we will embed trends that will mean we miss our decarbonisation targets and reverse progress made on social inclusion and fair transition. For the avoidance of doubt, allowing increased car travel will not aid economic recovery, and will exacerbate social inequity given the number of people that do not have access to a car. The number of people that will be able to access our cities will be far smaller if we seek to accommodate any shift away from public transport to car than if we regain confidence in using public transport and capitalise on the increased use of active travel. Poverty and inequality remain crucial issues in Scotland, and our most disadvantaged fellow citizens will be disadvantaged further if we focus resources on the car either by design or by default.

Given demand for public transport use may remain significantly suppressed for some time, the single most important intervention for a green recovery is to manage the rebound effect for car travel demand through reducing the need to travel whilst confidence is rebuilt (and a vaccine discovered) and putting in place meaningful alternatives for the duration. This suggests two principal policy responses:

- **Digital inclusion and remote working**: Strongly support (and for those jobs in the public sector under the direct control of government, mandate) continued working from home permanently. (This need not be full time, as even part time working reduces the demand for travel.) To support remote working as above, the immediate strategic investment priority for government should be to accelerate the provision of high speed broadband (fixed and 5G mobile) across all of Scotland. Recent Scottish Government initiatives on digital inclusion and the provision of connected devices to

disadvantaged groups of people should be mainstreamed to all those that can benefit from them.

- **Car restraint**: Demand for travel by car must be actively restrained otherwise the outcome of the crisis will be that the Scottish Government's decarbonisation obligations will become impossible to meet. The policy toolkit for this is well known: reallocation of road space from cars to buses, cyclists and pedestrians, parking restraint, and road pricing.

It is acknowledged that the car restraint measures outlined above will be controversial and politically difficult to implement. They are, however, essential.

Other policy interventions that should be actively considered to aid the green recovery include:

- Consistent reappraisal of the scientific evidence on physical distancing so that increasing the capacity of the public transport network by reducing the 2m rule (maintaining the use of face coverings if necessary) as soon as it is safe to do so is implemented.

- A complete reappraisal of public transport ticketing strategies to support the increase of capacity as above.

- Continued implementation of 'pop-up' space for walking and cycling with these schemes being made permanent segregated facilities via ongoing investment. It is imperative that immediate progress on this is made before the window of opportunity is closed. Above all, this requires a significant acceleration of effort by local authorities across Scotland to put appropriate measures in place as soon as possible.

- Temporary reallocation of road and parking space (including road closures) over the summer period to support the reopening of café, restaurant and other leisure businesses with sufficient outdoor space to enable physical distancing. Before the end of the summer there should be clear criteria for how these will be retained permanently.

- Switching resources from new build projects to road maintenance to eliminate the substantial maintenance backlog (which in itself causes economically costly disruption) whilst at the same time delivering road space reduction to manage demand, especially in cities.

- Accelerating the programme of upgrading the electricity supply grid and the provision of charging points to accommodate the largest possible proportion of electric vehicles in the fleet.

- An E-bike grant purchase scheme.

- Construction of segregated cycling 'super highways' designed to facilitate sustainable commuting up to the range of E-bikes to all of Scotland's major towns and cities.

Policies that are not consistent with a fair and green recovery and should not be pursued:

- Airport expansion and/or reduction in Air Passenger Duty.

- Vehicle scrappage schemes (unless to swap for an E-bike) and subsidies for car Personal Contract Hire schemes as were put in place post 2008 and led to an increase in car use.

- Free or cheaper parking in town and city centres.

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