

# Reducing car use - a long road ahead?

Ashleigh Madjitey, Audit Manager



# Who are Audit Scotland?

Audit Scotland provides the Auditor General and the Accounts Commission with the services they need.

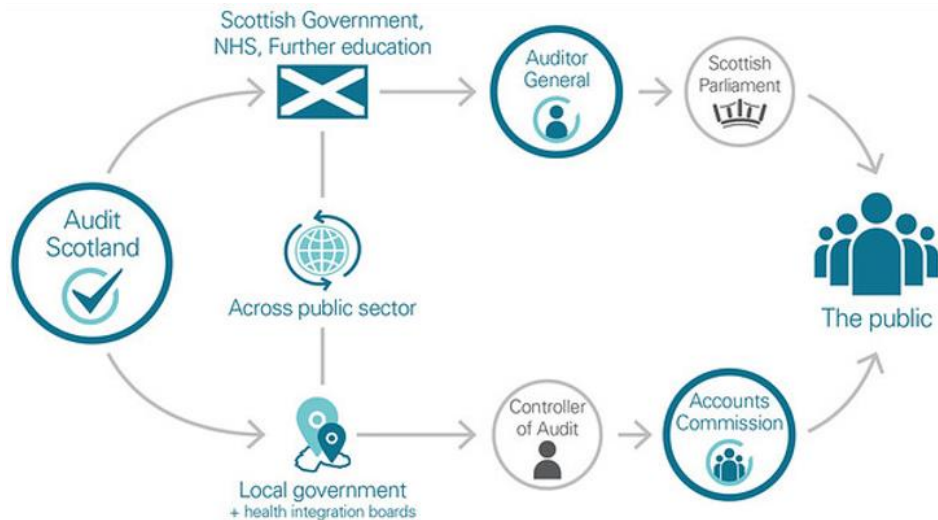
We give independent assurance to the people of Scotland that public money is spent properly, efficiently and effectively.

We audit nearly 300 organisations including:

- Central government,
- NHS boards,
- Councils
- Further education colleges

We support public scrutiny that is fair, equal and open, and that leads to better financial management and value for money.

Performance audit looks at the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of public spending



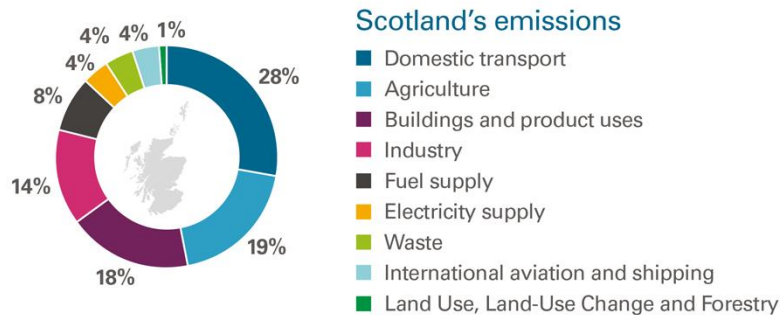
The overall aim of the audit was to answer the question:

**What progress are the Scottish Government and councils making towards the target of reducing car use?**

It did this by answering three questions:

- How well do national and local government work together to achieve a reduction in car use?
- Is it clear how the Scottish Government and other national and local bodies are spending on reducing car use and how is it being targeted?
- What progress has the Scottish Government, Transport Scotland, regional transport partnerships and councils made in reducing car use and what are the challenges?

- Reducing emissions from Transport is essential if Scotland is to meet its net zero commitments.
- Transport largest source of emissions and reducing at a slower rate than from other sectors.
- Cars make up the largest share of domestic transport emissions.
- Scottish Government and COSLA target to reduce car use by 20 per cent by 2030 was included in its Climate Change Plan update in 2020.
- In April 2025, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport confirmed this target would be changed although the commitment to reduce car use remains.



Note: Buildings and product uses includes emissions from combustion on residential, public sector and commercial sites, including from air conditioning and refrigeration.

Source: Scottish Greenhouse Gas Statistics 2022, Scottish Government

- The Scottish Government set a very ambitious target, but it still does not have a clear plan to achieve it.
- A lack of leadership at all levels has resulted in minimal progress against the demanding policy intention.
- It is not clear if the Scottish Government remains committed to the target
- There is no costed delivery plan, measurable milestones and arrangements for monitoring and scrutinising progress are insufficient.







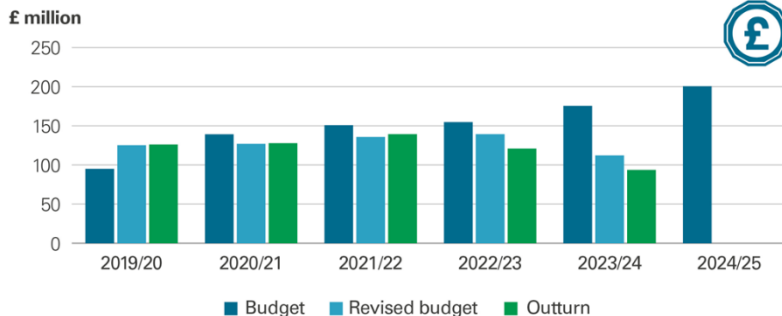
- Our audit had three councils and a regional transport partnership as case studies.
- There is variation between councils as they face different opportunities and challenges
- It is more difficult to deliver change in areas with longer distances and an inadequate public transport network.
- They asked for clearer guidance and direction from the Scottish Government

- Complex, fragmented and lacks transparency.
- Scottish Government and councils do not record how much they spend on the target.
- Significant amounts are spent on public transport and active travel but Scottish Government has not considered where to target spending to have the most impact.
- One-year funding is a barrier.
- Transport Scotland have changed how it administers active travel funding for 2024/25.

## Exhibit 2.

### Support for active travel and support for sustainable transport budget allocation and actual spend since 2019/20

Although budget allocations for active travel and sustainable transport have increased since 2019/20, the actual amounts spent have reduced.



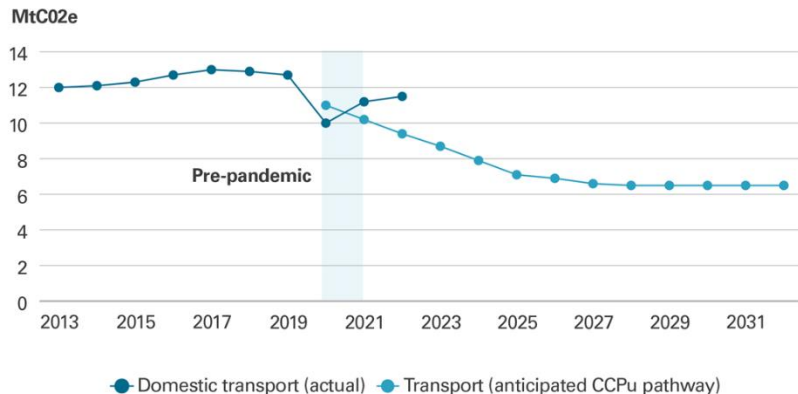
Note: Support for sustainable transport includes elements of spend on electric vehicles and reduced emission driving which will not support the car reduction target. Transport Scotland cannot provide outturn spend for the support for active travel budget line due to the way figures are presented in different reports. This does not include the cycling, walking and safer routes funding which is given to councils.

Source: Scottish Government budget analysis and Transport Scotland outturn spending information

# Findings - Progress towards the target

## Exhibit 5. Emissions from the domestic transport sector

The Scottish Government has only met its emission reduction estimates for domestic transport once in the last three years.



Note. The Transport (anticipated CCPu pathway) will also include emissions from international aviation and shipping.

Source: Scottish Greenhouse Gas Statistics 2022, Scottish Government

- Car use is rebounding after the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Public transport use reducing whilst active travel rates fluctuating.
- It is unlikely the Scottish Government will reduce car kilometres driven by 20 per cent by 2030.
- This represents a major risk to delivering on net zero.
- The Scottish Government and councils will find it hard to significantly reduce transport emissions without potentially unpopular decisions to discourage car use.



The **Scottish Government** should:

- Clarify its commitment to the target as soon as possible.
- Publish a realistic delivery plan
- Publish guidance for councils on how to reduce car use.
- Review the new system for active travel funding
- Start a national conversation with the public about their travel choices.
- With **COSLA** confirm the joint governance arrangements for the target

“

All parts of government need to act to deliver the 2030 car use reduction target. Councils need to set out to what extent they will contribute and how they will measure their progress.

”

**Ruth MacLeod**

Member of the  
Accounts Commission

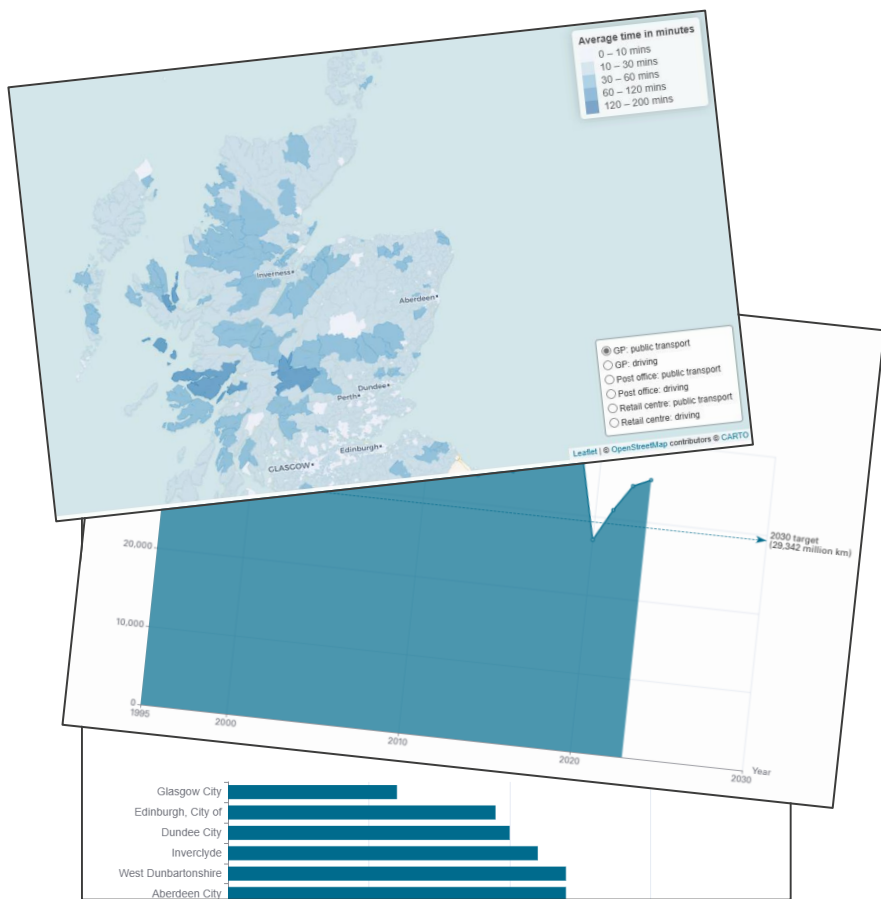


The **Scottish Government, councils and RTPs** should:

- Report annually on spending which has the desired outcomes of people using their cars less or travelling by sustainable modes.
- Use the EQIA process to consult with communities, businesses and third sector to ensure measures to reduce car use do not deepen inequalities

**Councils and RTPs** should:

- Set out the extent they will contribute to the target
- Share good practice and learning.



Our data output allows you to:

- Measure journey time between car use and public transport from your local area.
- Identify car use at a national and council level over time.
- Assess car ownership levels in your council area.



[amadjitey@audit-scotland.gov.uk](mailto:amadjitey@audit-scotland.gov.uk)

Sustainable transport | Audit  
Scotland