

Audit scope

Sustainable transport

Progress towards reducing car use

ACCOUNTS COMMISSION 

AUDITOR GENERAL 

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Background

The Scottish Government declared a climate emergency in 2019, committing to a target of net zero emissions by 2045.

Transport is the largest source of emissions in Scotland. Domestic cars make up the largest proportion of the total transport emissions. There has been limited progress in reducing emissions from transport compared to other sectors.

Reducing transport emissions requires individuals to use their car less and choose sustainable travel options like walking, cycling, or getting the bus.

In 2019, 36 billion km were driven by cars in Scotland. The Scottish Government has a target to reduce this by 20 per cent by 2030. The [Climate Change Committee](#) reported in 2022 that progress to meeting this target is off track.

Delivering this target will require coordinated action from all parts of the public sector to support individuals in changing how they travel. The Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities

(COSLA) draft route map sets out actions to deliver on the target to reduce car use. Activities centre around four key behaviours:

- Reducing the need to travel
- Living well locally
- Switching modes of travel
- Combining or sharing car journeys.

The Scottish Government will have to work effectively with councils, third sector organisations and individuals to achieve the car reduction target.

Why is this audit important?

Scotland's climate is changing with winters becoming wetter and sea levels rising. The Scottish Government has failed to achieve the annual statutory emission targets in four of the last five years.

The Auditor General and Accounts Commission have identified climate change and environmental sustainability as audit priorities. This audit follows the Accounts Commission's briefing on [Scotland's](#)

[councils' approach to addressing climate change](#) and the Auditor General's report on [How the Scottish Government is set up to deliver on climate change goals](#).

Public bodies need to act now to encourage individuals to reduce their reliance on travelling by car and instead make greater use of public and active travel. This will require significant public and private sector investment.

What will the audit look at?

This audit will consider what progress the Scottish Government and councils are making in delivering the target to reduce car use.

The audit aims to answer the following questions:

- How well do national and local government work together to achieve a reduction in car use?
- Is it clear how much funding the Scottish Government and other national and local bodies are spending on reducing car use and how that is being targeted?
- What progress have the Scottish Government and councils made in reducing car use and what are the challenges?

While the focus of this audit will be on the target to reduce car use, it will also consider how the target aligns with efforts to increase the uptake of electric vehicles. Audit Scotland is considering separate work on the transition to electric vehicles and their charging infrastructure as part of the future work programme.

How will we carry out this audit?

The audit will conduct interviews with officials in the Scottish Government, Transport Scotland, and sample of councils and regional transport partnerships.

The audit will review key documents and assess performance and financial analysis, including reviewing budget information to identify public spending on reducing car use.

What do we want to happen as a result?

The audit will provide an independent assessment on the Scottish Government's and councils' progress towards the target of reducing car use. The audit will make recommendations to help public sector bodies encourage more people to travel less by car.

It aims to provide assurance to the Scottish Parliament, the public and other stakeholders on work to reduce car use. The audit will highlight areas of good practice.

Timetable

The work will be carried out throughout 2024 and the audit report will publish in winter 2024/25. This will allow the Auditor General and Accounts Commission to comment on progress while still being able to influence the actions of public bodies.

Contact

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