

Scottish party manifesto analysis: Transport and infrastructure

SNP

Key policies:

- £2 nationwide bus fare cap
- Retention of Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) for ferries
- Seasonal ferry fare removal for Northern Isles residents
- Major ferry replacement and governance reform
- Feasibility studies for tram trains and Clyde Metro
- Publicly owned rail: no return of peak fares and new stations/links

Summary and analysis:

The SNP's transport commitments focus on expanding low carbon infrastructure, improving affordability, and strengthening integration across the system. The manifesto highlights continued investment in rail electrification, ferry upgrades, and rural connectivity, alongside support for tram-train development and active travel. It also commits to a nationwide £2 bus fare cap, expanded integrated ticketing and measures to make public transport more accessible and reliable. These align closely with the commitments on electrification, ferries, integrated ticketing, and low carbon travel. However, the feasibility of delivering this programme depends on resolving long standing issues in ferry procurement, securing sufficient capital for major rail upgrades, and ensuring that operators and local authorities have the capacity to implement integrated ticketing at scale.

The manifesto frames transport as central to economic growth, climate goals and reducing household costs, with a focus on shifting journeys from private cars to public and active travel. Yet achieving this shift requires coordinated investment, stable long-term funding and improvements in service reliability, areas where the manifesto provides direction but limited operational detail. Overall, the SNP sets out a broad vision for a more affordable, integrated, and low carbon transport system, but its success will depend on overcoming delivery challenges across infrastructure, procurement, and system coordination.

Scottish Labour

Key policies:

- £350m potholes and road maintenance fund
- Bring local bus services back under public control
- Merge CMAL and CalMac into a single public ferry agency

- Upgrade Scotland's road network, including dualling the A9 by 2035
- Deliver a better rail network, including a fast intercity rail corridor and the Glasgow Airport Rail Link

Summary and analysis:

Labour set out a transport plan focused on reliability, and giving local areas more control, presenting transport as a public service that supports regeneration and access to jobs and services. This points toward a more coordinated public transport system, but the manifesto does not explain how responsibilities across councils, regional transport partnerships, and national bodies would be organised to deliver this. There is a commitment to creating a National Transport Connections Plan, which will identify priority transport projects to help drive economic growth. However, there is a lack of consideration of geographical capacity, need, or pre-existing infrastructure which may impact the plan.

Contrasting the commitment to Net Zero, there is also a notable absence of discussion on low carbon, and/or active travel outwith discussions of rail modernisation and bus reliability. As such, there appears to be lack of throughline on commitments to Net Zero or climate focussed policy commitments within the manifesto and their transport policies.

Reform UK (Scotland)

Key policies:

- End the SNP war on automobiles, fix pot-holes, and abolish ULEZ
- Scrap the Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) and introduce dynamic pricing for large tourist vehicles on ferries
- Modernisation plans for railways and harbours
- Support the Clyde Metro and Glasgow Airport link
- Support and invest in bus corridors in our major cities

Summary and analysis:

Reform UK present a transport plan that focuses mainly on roads, with commitments to invest in road upgrades, reduce costs for drivers, and remove what they describe as unnecessary regulation. The manifesto treats road expansion and maintenance as the main way to improve day-to-day travel, but it does not explain how this approach fits with Scotland's climate targets or with legal duties on air quality. Their proposals to scale back low emission zones and reduce regulatory requirements are framed as easing pressure on drivers, yet the manifesto does not address how this would affect pollution levels in towns and cities that already experience congestion and poor air quality.

The plan places a large share of responsibility on local authorities to maintain and improve roads, but it does not set out how councils, many of which face budget pressures and limited technical capacity, would be supported to deliver this work. Public transport receives relatively little attention, meaning issues such as unreliable

services, gaps in rural provision, and rising fares are left largely unaddressed. Many communities depend on buses and rail for access to work, education, and essential services, but the manifesto provides limited detail on how these needs would be met.

Overall, Reform UK clearly prioritise keeping driving affordable and expanding road-based travel. However, the manifesto gives less detail on how this approach would meet climate and air quality requirements, how councils would be resourced to maintain the network, or how long-term transport needs beyond car travel would be supported.

Scottish Conservatives

Key policies:

- National Pothole Action Fund
- Emergency law to fast-track trunk road upgrades
- National Bridge Restoration Fund
- Cut active travel budget and redirect to road/pavement maintenance
- Ban new Low Emission Zones and review existing schemes
- Abolish car reduction targets and oppose new driver charges
- Small Town and Rural Bus Services Fund

Summary and analysis

The Scottish Conservatives set out a transport agenda centred on improving road infrastructure, reducing congestion, and strengthening rural and island connectivity. Their proposals prioritise upgrading trunk roads, addressing longstanding ferry and interregional transport issues, and responding to concerns about affordability for motorists, particularly around Low Emission Zones. They also emphasise a greater role for private sector investment in services such as ferries and the Caledonian Sleeper, alongside proposals to restrict free travel for asylum seekers and those involved in antisocial behaviour, and a reduction in the active travel budget.

While the manifesto places clear emphasis on road links and rural connections, it provides limited detail on how these plans align with Scotland's climate commitments or how local authorities, many facing budget and capacity pressures, would be supported to deliver and maintain infrastructure. The manifesto also gives less attention to how transport interacts with land use planning and long term system sustainability, leaving questions about how these proposals would shape travel demand and future investment needs.

Scottish Liberal Democrats

Key policies:

- Pass a Ferries Bill to fix ferry services
- Progress major infrastructure projects including dualling the A9 and exploring tunnels for Shetland
- Revamp bus services around passenger needs

- Improve ScotRail with more late-night services, new stations, and a commuter friendly guarantee
- Give councils fair funding to fix more potholes
- Support the switch to electric vehicles
- Introduce Air Departure Tax and a private jet tax

Summary and analysis:

Scottish Liberal Democrats set out a transport programme centred on restoring reliability across Scotland's core networks and improving everyday connectivity. Their commitments include passing a Ferries Bill to address long-standing failures and give island and coastal communities a more dependable service, alongside progress on major road projects such as dualling the A9 and exploring tunnels for Shetland. They also propose revamping bus services around passenger needs, supporting the switch to electric vehicles, and making better use of publicly run ScotRail through more late-night services, new stations, and a commuter friendly guarantee. Their wider approach frames transport as essential infrastructure for economic participation, linking improved connections to opportunities for work, education, and local economic recovery.

Delivering this agenda depends on resolving structural weaknesses in Scotland's transport system, including the condition of local roads, the fragility of ferry provision, and the uneven quality of public transport across regions. The manifesto acknowledges the need for fair funding for councils to fix more potholes, but provides limited detail on how local authorities, already under financial pressure, would build the capacity required to deliver sustained improvements. Similarly, while commitments to major projects and service enhancements are clear, the document offers less clarity on sequencing, long term capital planning, or how competing regional priorities would be balanced. The emphasis on better integration and reliability is strong, but the operational mechanisms, governance arrangements, and pathways needed to secure consistent delivery across Scotland are not fully articulated.

Scottish Greens

Key policies:

- Invest in new stations, new rail routes and better accessibility for all, on an expanded and publicly owned rail network.
- Begin the process to deliver the Clyde Metro scheme in full.
- Demand the full devolution of rail to Scotland from Westminster – including Network Rail.
- Bring all ferry ports running lifeline services into public ownership
- Complete the full electrification of Scotland's rail network
- Upgrade and future-proof trunk roads and rail infrastructure vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, such as the A83.
- Allocate at least 10% of the national transport budget to active travel, and provide multi-year funding grants to delivery organisations.

Summary and analysis:

The Scottish Greens set out a transport agenda focused on reducing car dependency, expanding public transport, and accelerating the shift to low carbon mobility. Their commitments include major investment in rail, expanded and electrified bus services, a national fare cap, and stronger local powers to run municipal bus companies. They also prioritise active travel through increased funding for walking, wheeling, and cycling infrastructure, alongside measures to redesign streets and reduce traffic dominance. Restrictions on new roadbuilding, expanded low emission zones, and shifting freight from road to rail form part of their wider climate driven approach.

Delivering this programme requires substantial institutional and local authority capacity, yet variation in planning, procurement, and delivery capability across councils raises questions about feasibility and consistency. Their ambitions also depend on strong alignment between transport and land use planning, including density, street design, and local accessibility, but the manifesto provides limited detail on how national objectives would be coordinated with local decision making or how regional disparities would be managed. Measures aimed at reducing traffic and shifting behaviour require significant public acceptability and transition support, yet the manifesto does not outline how engagement or mitigation for affected groups would be handled.

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