



Science and Technology Committee and Transport Committee

Oral evidence: COP26, HC 681

Wednesday 20 October 2021

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Members present:

Science and Technology Committee: Greg Clark (Chair); Mark Logan; Rebecca Long Bailey; Graham Stringer.

Transport Committee: Ruth Cadbury; Robert Langan; Huw Merriman; Grahame Morris; Gavin Newlands.

Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee: Darren Jones.

International Development Committee: Chris Law.

Questions 1 - 56

Witnesses

I: Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP, COP26 President-Designate; Peter Hill, Chief Executive Officer, COP26 Unit; Wasim Mir, Chief Operating Officer, COP26 Unit; and Lee McDonough, Director General, Net Zero Strategy and International, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial strategy.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Alok Sharma MP, Peter Hill, Wasim Mir and Lee McDonough.

Q1 Chair: This is a joint meeting of the House of Commons Science and Technology and Transport Committees. We had hoped to meet in September, but the COP President-Designate was understandably occupied in travelling. He can spare only an hour with us today, but we have concluded that that is better than nothing and we are grateful for his attendance.

Given the constraints on our time, although this is a joint meeting of two Committees, Hugh Merriman, Chair of the Transport Committee, and I have agreed that I will chair the hour's proceeding rather than interrupt it.

We are joined in our Committees by two guests from other Committees. We have Darren Jones MP, Chair of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, and Chris Law MP, a member of the International Development Committee. Thank you and welcome.

Perhaps I may kick off with a question to the President-Designate. It is very close to the kick off of the COP. What would a good deal look like?

Alok Sharma: I think that we have set that out in our overall objectives of COP. We want to get to a point where we are able to say with credibility that we are keeping 1.5 degrees within reach, ensuring that there is a plan for ambition in the upcoming decade. As part of that, we have been seeking emission reduction commitments and for the developed nations to come forward with their finance commitments. We have had discussions on the outstanding issue of the Paris rulebook.

I think that in all of those we have made progress, but there is more work to be done, particularly on the negotiations, which will take centre stage during COP itself.

Q2 Chair: How confident are you that we will get to a deal to limit warming to 1.5 degrees?

Alok Sharma: When we started, less than 30% of the global economy was covered by a net zero target. We are now at 80%, so a significant number of countries have come forward with net zero commitments. In terms of NDCs, all the G7 now have ambitious emission reduction targets aligned with net zero by 2050. We made a big push on coal financing. All the G7 plus South Korea and China, where I was in September, have recently announced that they will be ending international coal financing as well.

Overall, coming out of Paris, the temperature curve had effectively been bent below 4 degrees. What we have seen in a report that has just come out from the IEA is that the trajectory is towards 2 degrees. Therefore, progress has been made, but clearly there is more to do, and we are still



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waiting from some of the large emitters to come forward with their 2030 emission reduction plans.

Q3 **Chair:** Can you give us some examples of those large emitters?

Alok Sharma: If I refer to the G20 countries that have come forward, by a process of deduction you can tell. We have had all the G7; we have had Argentina and, more recently, South Africa as well. All the others committed. I was in Naples at the climate and energy ministerial meeting. In the communiqué that came out of that, all the G20 committed to come forward with ambitious, enhanced NDCs before COP26. The ball is in their court and that is the big ask that we have of all of them.

Q4 **Chair:** How confident are you that the ball will be returned and you will be able to land a deal that limits warming to 1.5 degrees?

Alok Sharma: I think that we will see more NDCs coming forward, but our job is to build consensus and encourage others to come forward. A significant number of countries have come forward with more enhanced NDCs. By the end of July, a subset of 70 countries had ambitious NDCs and long-term strategies or net zero targets. If you take just those countries together, they represent a reduction in emissions of 26% by 2030 as part of that subset. It shows that it is possible; countries are able to make the commitment, but we need all of them to come forward.

Q5 **Chair:** With two weeks to go, what are the biggest obstacles to getting the deal that you want to achieve?

Alok Sharma: In terms of emission reductions, first we need to see those NDCs coming forward. Secondly, you will know that back in 2009 a commitment was given by developed nations to mobilise \$100 billion per year from 2020 for each year up to 2025. That was not delivered in 2019. We know from OECD figures that it was under \$80 billion. I have been working with colleagues internationally in Germany and Canada to make sure we get these commitments coming forward. I think I can say we are within touching distance of the target of \$100 billion. There is a delivery plan we are working on and I hope we can set that out before COP26.

The Paris rulebook issues have been outstanding for six years now. We had a discussion in London where we met physically about 50 Governments; we had a pre-COP in Milan. We have started to move forward and are beginning to see some landing grounds, but I do not want to exaggerate by saying it will be a slam dunk. It will be very, very difficult.

Q6 **Chair:** Do you characterise this as an orderly progression, ticking off the issues one by one, or will it be brinksmanship in Glasgow?

Alok Sharma: This is a negotiation. I would describe it as multidimensional chess. We need to make sure that all of this comes together. In the two weeks in Glasgow a lot of negotiations will go on and



people will have to find consensus and compromise. That is the job of the presidency. I do not know whether Peter wants to add anything to that.

Chair: Before we do that, I will turn to my colleague Huw Merriman. I should say that you are accompanied by your officials. Lee McDonough is director general of net zero strategy and international at the Business Department; Wasim Mir, on the line from Glasgow, is chief operating officer of the COP26 unit; and Peter Hill is chief executive officer of the COP26 unit. Welcome to you as well.

Q7 Huw Merriman: Minister, how will you use COP26 not just to reach agreement but to get delivery in the years ahead? I refer to the 1.5 degree temperature limit and the concern from Climate Action Tracker that 20 of the 37 countries it has assessed have either highly insufficient or critically insufficient plans to meet that target. How can you use COP26 to make sure they do not just commit but they have plans in place to deliver once everyone goes home?

Alok Sharma: Countries are putting together long-term strategies. The UK published its long-term strategy earlier this week. That sets out the parameters of how countries will move forward. I go back to the point about the report put out by the UN in September, which looked at the NDCs and the commitments made by the end of July. Seventy countries have shown ambition in their near-term emission reduction targets and their net zero and long-term strategies. Collectively, they are looking at a reduction of 26%.

We need to ensure that the next decade is one of ambition and we continue to drive forward, and obviously we have our presidency year as well. One of the important points is the commitments that countries make; the other is the actions that follow and how you track those. That is why as part of the closing of the discussion of the Paris rulebook the transparency framework will be so important. We have been having discussions on that in London and Milan and also virtually between negotiators and Ministers. I believe that to land that will be quite critical because it provides underpinning for the Paris agreement.

Q8 Huw Merriman: How confident are you that we will get a commitment from all the G20 to net zero in law? I think we are now at only 13 out of 20, which is great progress, but obviously there are seven more to go.

Alok Sharma: I would go back to what I said earlier. We want every country to come forward with this, and I would point to the progress we have made. When we started this process and took on the role of the presidency, less than 30% of the global economy was covered by a net-zero target. We are now at 80%. You have seen that recent commitments have been made by Russia and the UAE—the first country in the Gulf. A lot of progress has been made. We are not sitting here just accepting that; we are continuing to push all countries so that they come forward.

Q9 Huw Merriman: Finally—perhaps this sets the scene for the transport



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flavour—how realistic will we be in telling the world’s population that there will be some cost to them in delivering net zero? A good example would be the roll-out of zero emission vehicles in this country. That is a welcome commitment in this document, but ultimately it will lead to a reduction in fuel duty and excise duty to the tune of £35 billion. There is no talk about what will replace that. Will we use COP26 to level with the people that it will come at some cost to them as well?

Alok Sharma: My job has been to build consensus among almost 200 countries. I do not believe anyone is suggesting that there is not a cost associated with going to net zero. The Committee on Climate Change has been making its own projections over past years.

First, I believe the issue here—the OBR set it out very well in its fiscal risks report in July—is that not acting now on climate change will cost you a lot more in the future.

Secondly, there is an economic opportunity. Yesterday we held a global investment summit in London and an extra £10 billion-worth of new inward investment was pledged at the conference. I can tell you from all the conversations I have had with businesses around the world that they recognise going green is a big investment opportunity, and they can see that it matches the bottom line. You have to put this in the context of what it would cost if we did not take the action now, and what it also means in jobs, prosperity and healthier lives for all of us if we clean up the environment.

Q10 **Darren Jones:** it has been reported that President Putin is not coming to COP26, but Russia is the fourth largest emitter in the world and its NDC has been categorised as critically insufficient. How will this impact the deal that you would like to achieve at COP26?

Alok Sharma: I had the opportunity to travel to Russia a few months ago and had quite constructive discussions. Recently, I spoke to Ruslan Edelgeriyev, the climate envoy. Obviously, Russia will send a delegation. We want all world leaders to come, but what will also be critical is what happens during those two weeks and how the individual delegations interact.

In the past few days Russia has announced a net zero commitment, which I think is a move forward, but it would not surprise you to know that in the conversations I have been having I have raised the issue of the NDC. That is the case for every country.

The G20 really matters here because it represents 80% of global emissions. If all those countries were on a pathway to 1.5 degrees or net zero by 2050, we would be looking at limiting global warming to 1.7 degrees. Those are just the actions of the G20 and that is why what they do matters so much.

Q11 **Darren Jones:** This is the third time you have been asked this question today, so I am hoping that I might get a very specific answer. Of the G20



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nations who are committing to net zero, we have heard that so far only 13 have signed up. Have you asked your officials and climate diplomats to require those countries to put those net zero targets into law, or are you happy with them just saying that they will get there at some point?

Alok Sharma: I think the starting point is to make the commitment in the first place. The second piece of this is how that is reflected in your own NDC and whether it is aligned, and what you say in your long-term strategy. I go back to the point that, at the end of the day, every country can make commitments. Are they delivering? That is why the transparency framework will be so important to get over the line.

Q12 **Darren Jones:** Have your officials asked G20 nations to put their net zero targets into law—yes or no?

Alok Sharma: I can turn to Peter if you want.

Q13 **Darren Jones:** What is your answer?

Alok Sharma: The initial ask has been that countries come forward with their net zero commitments.

Q14 **Darren Jones:** I am conscious of the time, so I will not repeat the question.

My last question is about the news over the weekend from the corporate sponsors of COP26, who seem to be unhappy about the level of organisation in advance of the conference, with some criticism that you have not been given the resources you need in the Cabinet Office to run and set up the conference in the way they may have expected, having made pretty large donations to cover some of the cost. What is your answer to their concerns?

Alok Sharma: I saw the same reports. There were no named sources in it. Frankly, I was quite disappointed that effectively there was an attack on junior civil servants. I do not believe that is acceptable. Subsequent to that, we have heard from all of our principal sponsors, who have said they are supportive of the work we are doing together. They want COP to be a success. I have had conversations with some of the individual CEOs as well, who have made the same point.

Q15 **Chair:** Darren raised the question of the attendance of President Putin. How important is it that national leaders attend in person in order to secure a deal?

Alok Sharma: We want every single world leader to be there, but individual world leaders will have individual constraints. Until quite recently there were lots of calls for this COP to be postponed once again, and I am sitting here telling you that we already have confirmation from over 120 world leaders that they are coming in person.

Q16 **Chair:** That is not just for the visual effect, as it were; it is better to have people in the room to be able to negotiate.



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Alok Sharma: As ever, it is better to do things in person, but since you raised it Russia will be sending a delegation that will be there for that two-week period. For the first two days world leaders will be there as part of the world leaders summit setting out commitments, but the rest of the time will be devoted to the negotiations, and those individuals will be there in person.

Q17 **Chair:** What level of pushback are you getting from countries that have low levels of vaccination against Covid?

Alok Sharma: I have told you the number of leaders who are coming. The vaccination issue came up some months ago. That was why in June the Prime Minister made the commitment that we would vaccinate any accredited delegate who was not able to get vaccinated in their home nation. We have ensured that through the UN that vaccination process is happening. Indeed, some of the people who applied through our individual offer now have the ability to get vaccinated in their home nations because they have started their own programmes. I am pretty confident that anyone who applies for that process will have been vaccinated either through our system with UN support or in their home nations.

Q18 **Chair:** As far as you know, has that offer been taken up?

Alok Sharma: That offer has been taken up. About 1,000 people applied initially. I think that on 23 July there was a closure of applications and we opened it up again for any late entrants, so to speak. Those 1,000 people have been vaccinated through our system, using UN resources or Palladium, or they are now able to get vaccinated in their home nations.

Q19 **Chair:** Are you aware of any countries that cannot come perhaps because they are unwilling to vaccinate just a cadre of people rather than the whole population? That is not something you have experienced.

Alok Sharma: No. There are some countries where the logistics of getting to Glasgow, because of the quarantine rules they would experience as they transited through various places, were an issue initially, but we have got round that with support from international partners.

Q20 **Graham Stringer:** At the very beginning you said in answer to Greg that China had said it would stop funding coal plants elsewhere in the world. You did not mention that there was no time limit or schedule given for that, or that President Xi had incentivised the reopening of coal mines and an increase in coal production in China. China is responsible for about 27% of world CO₂. Without a commitment from China, COP26 is likely to be dead in the water, is it not? Even when they give commitments, would you trust a Government that is carrying out genocide on the Uyghurs and has broken its agreements on Hong Kong?

Alok Sharma: I was in China in September and had three specific asks. One was on coal. Domestically, President Xi Jinping has said that China



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will restrict the use of coal in the next five-year period and then phase it down from 2026. I asked to see the details of the policy. I understand that subsequent to that we have had some reports that they will be coming forward and publishing a sector-by-sector analysis of where they are going in emission reductions.

I asked for a more detailed policy related to the commitment President Xi Jinping has made for climate neutrality before 2060 and peaking before 2030. Let us see what comes forward. My final big ask was about the NDC. We are waiting for that as well.

This goes back to the point about the transparency framework, which is very important. If we have that in place—since the Paris agreement six years ago people have been trying to get this in place—we will be able to see for every nation whether it is keeping to the commitments it has made. I do not know whether Peter wants to add anything.

Q21 Graham Stringer: That does not really answer the question about whether you trust them, even if they go as far as to give a commitment.

Alok Sharma: The whole point of having a transparency framework is that it is not relying on somebody's word; it is reporting on what has happened in the economy, and then it is for people to be able to assess whether the commitments that have been made have been delivered in action.

Q22 Graham Stringer: Can I ask about the operation of COP26? I think it looks bad to have however many thousands of people going to it mainly flying on aeroplanes that are burning fuel. If you do a back-of-the-envelope calculation, since the first COP probably about 500,000 plane journeys have been made for this. Do you not think that makes it look hypocritical? A lot of people who argue the case for reducing carbon dioxide are making a great deal of money out of it. John Gummer is one of them; Al Gore is another; and there are others. Do you think they should declare their financial interests at the conference?

Alok Sharma: Can I take first the issue of the physicality of the COP? I can tell you that particularly for developing and climate-vulnerable countries being able to sit at the same table face to face with the big emitters is incredibly important. Ultimately, this is a negotiation among almost 200 countries. Over the past year or so we have had lots of virtual discussions. ESB meetings have been taking place. Parties have not been willing to do formal negotiations in a virtual setting. Obviously, there are constraints related to time zones and connectivity, so that has to happen physically and that is what the parties want to see.

Q23 Graham Stringer: What about the declaration of interests?

Alok Sharma: If you are talking about parliamentarians, there is a process by which we all have to declare our interests.

Q24 Graham Stringer: We do, but there are people coming from other parts



of the world. Do you not think that the world should be able to see if businesses are making a lot of money out of that?

Alok Sharma: My job is to get almost 200 Governments together to try to reach agreement on a complex set of issues. When it comes to disclosures and so on, individuals will have to comply with whatever the setting is in their own nations.

Q25 **Graham Stringer:** I take your point about Governments being able to make face-to-face contact, but I have been to a COP. There are an enormous number of other people there, making it between 20,000 and 30,000. Why do they need to go and burn aviation fuel?

Alok Sharma: Very many of the people who are there will be part of the negotiating groups, but we will also have businesses represented at COP. As you know, there is a full programme during the 12-day period, with certain theme days. It is very important that at the same time as we are having negotiations they are seeing real economic commitments come forward. I think that we will see those being made by companies, Governments and the financial services sector, and that will help to drive the move towards net zero longer term.

Q26 **Rebecca Long Bailey:** Minister, I am sure you will agree that at this COP the UK has to be seen as an international role model. Sadly, as I am sure you are well aware, for some time the UK was way off track in meeting some of its carbon targets. This week the net zero strategy was criticised by many as being too sparse. Indeed, Greenpeace said that it was more like a pick and mix than the substantial meal needed to reach net zero and there was, frankly, complete silence on many of the carbon-intensive sectors on which we need to focus. As the President-Designate of COP26—the person charged with spurring on radical, dramatic levels of action across the world—are you concerned that the UK's somewhat half-hearted policy approach will damage your leverage in negotiations?

Alok Sharma: I believe Mr Merriman referred earlier to Climate Action Tracker. If you look at that, although the UK needs to do more, like every other country, I think we lead developed economies. Talking about not just ambition but action since 2000, we have been the country that of all the G20 has decarbonised its economy the fastest.

The net zero strategy is comprehensive; it provides pathways across individual sectors, and it has received a pretty good welcome from the business sector.

The whole point of going to net zero is that it is not just about ensuring that we get to that point and reduce emissions—it is vitally important that we do so—but, at the same time, there is an opportunity for us to create jobs and grow the economy. You have seen the projection that by 2030 we are looking at an extra 440,000 jobs and £90 billion of inward investment. There is an opportunity here. I have visited countries and spoken to well over 100 Governments. The UK is seen as a leader when it comes to climate action.



Q27 Rebecca Long Bailey: Unfortunately, the net zero strategy, although better than where we were before, has been widely criticised by well-known scientists and economists over the past few days. More concerning is the risk of the UK appearing to be quite contradictory in its actions. The UK has been criticised for not blocking new oil and gas fields—for example, the Cambo oilfield. It has also been criticised for cutting its overseas development aid at a critical time in fighting climate change. It would be interesting to know what impact these issues have had on your negotiations with other countries.

Alok Sharma: You made reference to ODA. I have been asked about it at previous Select Committees. I think that people have appreciated the fact we are doubling our climate finance commitment, made in 2019. We are sticking to it, and that has been an important component in my being able to drive forward the \$100 billion goal.

As for the 0.7% being restored, that discussion took place some months ago and the Government set out under what circumstances that will happen. I hope that as the economy grows it will be possible to get back to 0.7%.

As for oilfields, I will ask Lee whether she wants to comment on Cambo, but I say two things. One is that we have set out a climate compatibility checkpoint, about which BEIS will be putting out more details at the end of this year. The aim is to ensure that any potential grant of new licences has to be judged against and be compatible with our legal commitment to be net zero by 2050.

Lee McDonough: You are right. I cannot go into details because the decision on Cambo has not been made. The licence for that oilfield was granted in 2001, and, as part of the process over the coming years as we move forward on our climate agenda, all the potential emissions from that field are already factored into forward projections—so it is not ignored and additional.

Having said that, given where the developers have got to, they now want to go forward to production. That requires a formal consent process to be undertaken and it is being scrutinised by our regulators. That is a comprehensive process to make sure that we are satisfied that it meets all of the environmental requirements.

The Oil and Gas Authority, as part of the consent process, published its new strategy this year, even for consent processes, including Cambo. That will impose additional net zero considerations on the current process as well as the forward plans for the climate conference.

Q28 Rebecca Long Bailey: In the light of that very helpful intervention, may I ask the Minister whether he will be calling for a moratorium on fossil fuel extraction at COP26?

Alok Sharma: One of the things that we did was to ask the IEA to publish a report on net zero. That came out some weeks ago. If you look



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at its projections and pathways for net zero by 2050, it is significantly reduced, but there is still an element of oil and gas as part of that net zero end position.

A point that I make when I go around the world is that different countries start from different positions in their energy mix. What we ought to be doing and are doing, particularly with developing countries, is support them to make a clean energy transition. Lots and lots of countries are very keen to follow the example of the UK. We have built the biggest offshore wind sector in the world; we are looking to quadruple that. I think that that is the support that we can help provide to developing nations, but the individual energy mix of countries will depend on their starting position.

Chair: Chris Law may want to follow up some of that.

Q29 **Chris Law:** It dovetails with what I want to say. President-Designate, I remember when you earned cheers as International Development Secretary and you said, "I get development." You will also understand that the least developed countries will suffer the greatest impact from climate change.

Does it not beggar belief that there is an inherent contradiction between setting a goal of keeping global warming at 1.5 degrees on the one hand and introducing a rather lax fossil fuel policy on the other? I ask that because the UK's lax fossil fuel policy and the lax influence it exerts on the CDC Group hint at a half-hearted endorsement of renewable energy in developing countries. What more influence will you have on CDC to make sure that we no longer invest in fossil fuels, which means that developing countries are locked in for decades to come before they get to the point that they are using renewables?

Alok Sharma: I think that CDC set out its new policy in July. That details, and dovetails into, the commitments that the Government have made on no more fossil fuel financing through UKEF. We have also set out some clear exemptions, but the overall commitment is on no more fossil fuel support through UKEF.

CDC has, I think, also committed to net zero—I guess that would apply also to its investment—by 2050. I think that is the case. If not, I am very happy to write to you and perhaps ask ministerial colleagues in the Foreign Office to write to you on this issue.

Q30 **Chris Law:** I would appreciate that.

You also mentioned UK Export Finance. For many years it has been criticised for its enormous investments in fossil fuel finance, compared with renewables, and there are still exemptions. Is now not the time to rule out all exemptions and make the difference for those countries that can least afford to transition?



Alok Sharma: I can tell you that we did a lot of work on this policy. When I was at BEIS, and through chairing the Climate Action Implementation Committee, there was a lot of discussion in government. I think that we have arrived at a policy that is pragmatic. There will be countries where the only transition fuel is gas. I would like us to have clean energy across the world; I want us to have renewables. I am supportive of nuclear, as the Government have set out, but I go back to the point about different countries having different starting positions in their energy mix. We need to support them.

One of the big campaigns that we have been running is to consign coal power to history. If you had said a year or so ago that all the G7 would be saying no to international coal financing, and that South Korea and China would be saying no to it, I think people would have been surprised, but we have got there. This is a process that we need to work through with every country.

Q31 **Chris Law:** Graham Stringer brought up the point about individuals travelling to COP. You have travelled most of the world in the past year. I wrote to your office almost two months ago, but have not yet had a reply to ask what steps you as President-Designate will be taking to offset the carbon production that you have created. I have also asked Parliament to work with my office to do the very same for me as an individual MP and my staff. When are you going to publish the strategy for your own offsetting, and will you endorse making sure that all MPs and their staff do the same with their offices to be net zero?

Alok Sharma: We are offsetting for my travel and for those who travel with me. The intention is for this to be a carbon-neutral COP.

Peter Hill: The whole presidency has to be carbon neutral and meet various sustainability criteria. That includes travel by the COP President and others, which will be offset to ensure that it is a carbon-neutral endeavour.

Q32 **Chris Law:** Could you endorse that for all MPs and their staff, so that when we meet our constituents they know that we are doing our level best to be net zero in the work that we do?

Alok Sharma: I am happy to have that discussion, but I am not sure that I am in a position to commit individual MPs to go in a particular direction. From a COP perspective, as Peter has also said, the aim is for this to be a fully sustainable COP.

Q33 **Huw Merriman:** It is great to open up to the Transport Committee members who are among us. This is particularly apt for us because in every inquiry we hold we ask what this policy, innovation and reform does to our target of delivering net zero, transport having a particularly poor carbon footprint.

In the net zero strategy we have the zero emission vehicle mandate. That has been looked at in California and China, but not anywhere else. The



end of the sale of combustion engine vehicles by 2030 is in the strategy, but you do not see that with China, India, Germany, Italy or the US.

My question is: what can you do to get the other countries attending Glasgow to put in place similar policies, or will you just be setting the framework with them and leaving them to deal with the detail?

Alok Sharma: One of the things that we have done through the COP process is to run individual sector campaigns. We have the Zero Emission Vehicles Transition Council, on which sit Ministers whose countries account for a significant part of the auto sector around the world. We have a regular set of discussions. We discuss the commonalities of the challenges that we face and how we overcome them. We have discussions with vehicle manufacturers as well.

We have seen some progress. You have set out what we are doing in the UK, but in the US we have had a recent commitment that by 2030 50% of new car sales will be ultra-low emission vehicles. The EU, through its Fit for 55 programme, has said that by 2035 de facto new car sales will also be ultra-low emission vehicles. You talked about the mandate in California.

This is a process, but we have shown some progress. A number of car manufacturers, both in the UK but internationally, have been setting out their own commitments to go to new models of ultra-low emission vehicles and set phase-out dates. A significant number of those have come forward. We are making progress. We have our presidency year, which will not start until this COP; we will have a year to run, so I am very keen that the work that we are doing through the Zero Emission Vehicles Transition Council and Energy Transition Council continues.

Q34 **Ruth Cadbury:** You have addressed questions about zero emission vehicles on our roads, but we will have to do an awful lot more in reducing the emissions from aviation because they will be an increasingly growing proportion, even if they decline. Sixteen per cent. of the global population living in the highest-income countries account for 62% of aviation emissions and greenhouse gases, not just carbon.

As for COP26, to avoid individual countries taking unilateral action in the wrong direction, what international action do the Government think is needed, particularly at COP26, to address the challenge of aviation emissions?

Alok Sharma: I think that this question came up at orals. The UK is including in its carbon budget international shipping and aviation emissions. We are working through the various aviation and maritime bodies to see what can be done internationally.

More widely, we have talked about what else will happen at COP other than negotiations. I hope that we may see some further international announcements on aviation, but I cannot pre-empt where that goes.



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There is work going on through the IMO and other organisations. I do not know whether Lee wants to add anything.

Lee McDonough: Domestically, in our strategy and as announced yesterday, we will focus the innovation lens on sustainable aviation fuel and the investment that the Government have made, because that is an important plank of our overall strategy.

Q35 **Ruth Cadbury:** May I go back to road vehicles? There is no point in everyone going electric—I know the Secretary of State is a real fan of electric vehicles—if it just clogs up the roads. To be fair, the Government have had quite a good record in the past 18 months on promoting active travel, but we need more investment in public transport. What leadership are the Government giving through COP26 in providing other ways of moving locally and regionally other than by electric vehicles, particularly active travel and public transport?

Alok Sharma: This is a domestic policy issue. We have published our transport decarbonisation strategy, which I think sets out what we want to do in public transport and investment in cycling and walking. I would recommend that anyone with an interest look at that.

Q36 **Ruth Cadbury:** In your role at COP26, what leadership are you able to provide because of the good example in international negotiations?

Peter Hill: I believe that Thursday of the second week of COP is devoted to cities and the environment. That will be one of the themes of the cities day, which is particularly relevant, and we will be doing our best to provide an example in laying on the best possible public transport offer in Glasgow so that people have no reason to choose any other form of transport.

Alok Sharma: To add one other point, I think that we have published today—I hope so—our presidency programme so that parliamentarians and everyone else will be able to see what we are doing on each day, and what the themes and events are. I would recommend that colleagues have a look at the website.

Q37 **Gavin Newlands:** You mentioned the transport decarbonisation plan. The Government describe it as world leading, but it's not really, is it? For instance, on zero emission vehicles and charging, the record is quite patchy. Incentives are reduced. The ZEV mandate will come in only in 2024; the charging network is nowhere where it needs to be; there is a much-delayed zero emission bus scheme, which will replace only about 10% of the English bus fleet. About £2 billion is to be spent on active travel before 2024.

On the other hand, Scotland has extra incentives to switch to zero emission vehicles, including interest-free loans. It has nearly twice the amount of rapid chargers per head than England; a zero emission bus scheme is already in its second round and will replace 50% of all the Scottish bus fleet. The Scottish Government have committed to spend the



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equivalent of £3 billion a year on active travel, not £2 billion over the next few years. Is that not the kind of bold leadership that the host of COP26 should be setting?

Alok Sharma: I welcome everything that is going on across the United Kingdom when it comes to pushing forward on electric vehicles and decarbonisation.

When we announced last year that we would be ending the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles from 2030, we brought that forward from 2040. I was at BEIS—one of your successes, Chair—and we had a lot of discussions with the sector. I believe that the reason it landed well is that we were also providing financial support in building up the charging structure, supporting the expansion of giga-factories and providing grants for people to be able to buy ultra-low emission vehicles.

We are close to 25,000 public charging stations across the UK, and several thousand of them are fast-charging stations. I believe that is one of the biggest networks of charging stations in Europe. I am certainly not saying that it is all done, but there is a big plan to expand as well. I think that from where we are starting we are making good progress.

I do not know whether Lee wants to say anything else about the net zero strategy.

Lee McDonough: The net zero strategy draws on the transport decarbonisation plan and sets out the investments that we are making.

Q38 **Gavin Newlands:** I could dig into it further, but it is not really your brief.

In answer recently to the Chair of the Transport Committee, you spoke about zero emission vehicles and the process. I cannot remember the name of the council, but you spoke about that and about businesses doing their own thing. What outcomes are you hoping to see from COP in trying to accelerate the take-up of zero emission vehicles and in promoting the use of public transport and active travel? What is a win for you?

Alok Sharma: Negotiations of the rulebook are quite separate, but one of the things that we have been pressing for is for countries in developed car markets to commit to the sale of only ultra-low emission vehicles from 2035 and, for other markets, 2040. I set out where there has been some progress, and we need to keep pushing on this. I hope that we can do that in the presidency year.

Q39 **Gavin Newlands:** The last question from me moves from transport and is about Acorn. This is not your decision; it is a Treasury decision. About £350 billion of tax has been taken by the UK Government out of the North sea. This has been promised a couple of times in the context of Peterhead and now St Fergus, or the Acorn cluster, as it is called. Is it not a bit regrettable for you as host that that decision has been made on the cusp of COP26, and that north-east Scotland, which generated a lot of



the carbon essentially out of the North sea, has been shafted again, to coin a phrase?

Alok Sharma: You will forgive me, I was not part of that decision. I do not want to speak to a decision on which I do not have full details, but, as you said, I am sure that there will be an opportunity to quiz other Ministers when they come before you.

Gavin Newlands: Well sidestepped, Minister.

Q40 **Grahame Morris:** We were rather hoping that we would have a session just on transport, because of some of the key issues here. I listened very attentively to your opening remarks about this being a negotiation, and your officials referring us to this document. We have not had a chance to go through it in detail, because it is 364 pages long, plus the Treasury document. We will get to it.

It is hard to hold you to account when this is a process, not an event. My colleagues have put questions to you about what success looks like. I do not think you have been quite definitive. How do we judge whether this will be a good COP or a bad COP? I heard your official Peter Hill say specific things about the take-up of zero emission vehicles, the reduction in aviation emissions and public transport, but we are showcasing the best of British, are we not, like our self-charging all-electric trains? When we hold you to account, how can we say that this was a successful COP?

Alok Sharma: I did set out our overarching objectives for COP, but you have made a very important point. This COP is a very important game in the league, if I might so describe it, but it is also part of a process. What we are looking to do as part of this process is get to net zero by 2050. There will be another COP next year in Africa, and further COPs will take place.

We need to ensure that at this COP we are working through consensus to set out plans for that trajectory over the next decade and the pathway to 1.5. You are absolutely right. This is part of an ongoing process; this is COP26. I said at the start of this discussion where we had moved. Before the Paris COP, scientists were predicting that we were heading towards 6 degrees of global warming. The commitments made at Paris bent the curve to below 4 degrees. The commitments that we have managed to get in recent years have meant we will bend the curve further towards 2 degrees. Therefore, it is a process and there will be future COPs where hopefully we will make more progress.

Grahame Morris: I am grateful for the answer, but I still do not know how we can judge whether it is a good COP or a bad COP without more specific targets, particularly in those areas of concerns to us as members of the Transport Committee, but I realise that time is pressing. I am grateful to have had the chance to raise these issues.

Q41 **Mark Logan:** We will try to do a quick-fire round from my side. President-Designate, is President Xi able to attend COP26 by Zoom?



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Alok Sharma: The world leaders summit is taking place in person and over 120 world leaders are coming. We want all world leaders there, but the critical point is the negotiations over that two-week period. You make reference to President Xi Jinping. We know that a delegation from China will take part in those physical negotiations. I do not know whether Peter wants to add anything further.

Peter Hill: As you have said, the world leaders summit is a physical event where leaders will be coming. That is how we have designed the two days of the world leaders meeting.

Q42 **Chair:** Is it possible for leaders who cannot come in person to join the meeting by Zoom?

Peter Hill: We have said, to date, that it is a physical meeting and the participants will be there physically.

Q43 **Chair:** Therefore, if President XI wants to join the meeting by Zoom the answer is no, and the same goes for any other leaders.

Peter Hill: The national statements that are given come under the aegis of the normal UN procedures. National leaders, as at the UN General Assembly, will come and give their national statements, and it is normal UN procedure that those are given in person.

Q44 **Chair:** It is not hybrid; it is entirely physical. You cannot join by Zoom, even if you are the head of the Government of another country?

Peter Hill: As I say, the normal procedures for a UN event is that people come and give their statements in person.

Chair: There is no change in those procedures.

Q45 **Mark Logan:** It sounds as if there is a possibility that he could still attend virtually. You said "to date".

Peter Hill: I do not see us changing the procedure that you would use for national statements under a UN event, which is that people give those in person.

Q46 **Mark Logan:** Recently, in conversations with your counterpart, Xie Zhenhua, did he give any indication that President Xi would attend COP 26?

Alok Sharma: I do not have confirmation of whether President Xi Jinping is coming in person. We very much hope that he does; we very much hope that all world leaders will come. Clearly, having world leaders attend is good for the process and for the COP.

Q47 **Mark Logan:** Do you think that, in the run-up to COP26, with China accounting for roughly one quarter of emissions, it was ideal climate change diplomacy to have changes in ODA and the recent Aukus deal, given China's reaction to COP26 and working bilaterally or multilaterally with the UK?



Alok Sharma: I have an opportunity to speak to very many Governments, as has Peter. I think every Government has recognised that climate change is a great leveller; it does not recognise borders. They can all see the impact of climate change in their own countries. I think that is one of the reasons why countries have been willing to have discussions with us on climate and have been to quite a number of the G20 as well. I think that is why we have such strong representation from world leaders coming to this COP. Climate absolutely matters and countries recognise that they do need to work together. Every single nation that I have spoken to says they want COP26 to be a success.

Q48 **Mark Logan:** Specifically on China, in the run-up to the Paris agreement, for example, do you think that the French did a better job or a similar job to ourselves in bringing China on board for an agreement?

Alok Sharma: I was not in Paris, so I cannot give you a personal reflection. The only thing I would say is that the US also played a key part in Paris. We have been working with US colleagues and others as part of the global effort to ensure that we can get a consensus and some of these key agreements over the line.

Q49 **Mark Logan:** My final question is related to that put earlier by my colleague Graham Stringer. How do you make COP26 something that is in China's interests to sign up to?

Alok Sharma: China recognises that tackling climate change is absolutely in its interests. When I was there in September, that was very clear in the discussions I had, and in every meeting that I had Ministers were very keen to point out that they wanted us to work together constructively to make COP26 a success. That is the spirit in which I hope every country at COP will approach the proceedings.

Q50 **Huw Merriman:** One of the overarching goals of COP26 is to mobilise \$100 billion of climate finance on a yearly basis. The OECD has suggested that that is proving difficult to deliver. Why is it proving difficult to deliver, and what will it do for the wider success of COP26 if that commitment cannot be sought?

Alok Sharma: I have said from the start of getting into this role that that \$100 billion is very much a matter of trust. For developing countries, it has become a totemic issue, and we have to try to get this over the line. The last set of official figures is from 2019. They show that just under \$80 billion was mobilised in that year, so we were \$20 billion short at that point.

I have spent a lot of time, as indeed have other colleagues in our Government and the German and Canadian Governments and other partners, asking donor nations to step up. You have seen additional commitments. At the end of the G7 you saw additional commitments coming from Canada, Japan and Germany; more recently, you have seen announcements made by the Nordic countries and others.



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I have also spent a lot of time talking to multilateral development banks, so I do think that we are in touching distance of \$100 billion. We will set this out in a delivery plan. Obviously, the numbers that we set out will be verified by the OECD. These are not numbers being put together by France, Germany or ourselves; they are numbers fed into the OECD and then verified and checked off by them.

Q51 **Huw Merriman:** One of the other matters for you in Glasgow is finalising the Paris rulebook. Do you anticipate that those matters can be finalised? Why has it proved so difficult?

Alok Sharma: There are a number of outstanding issues. There are three particular issues, one being article 6: the transparency frameworks and common timeframes. I think that we have made some progress. We had a ministerial meeting in London; about 50 Governments came together. Many of the Ministers came physically to that. In Milan, we had a pre-COP meeting.

We are starting to see some landing grounds, but the reality is that individual countries will need to compromise on long-held positions. This will be a big challenge. The fact that after six years we are still discussing these issues demonstrates just how difficult and knotty they are, but if we are to give full life to the Paris agreement we will have to get them over the line. Everybody understands what is at risk if we do not, but I cannot sit here and say to you it is a slam dunk because this is very, very tough.

Q52 **Chair:** On Hugh's point about climate finance, are you confident that you will get to the \$100 billion?

Alok Sharma: We are in touching distance, and when we set out the delivery plan everyone will be able to see and make comments on what is there.

Q53 **Chair:** You have been travelling the world visiting lots of countries, sometimes for the first time. Which countries have impressed you most?

Alok Sharma: I am not trying to be diplomatic here. I think that in every country I have visited and spoken to I have been struck by the genuine commitment and understanding that climate change matters internationally but also for their populations. I have been to some countries that have experienced flooding. That is something that we have discussed. We have seen what is happening as a result of permafrost melting and the impact that has on infrastructure. The fact that countries recognise that this is having a detrimental impact on their populations has been incredibly encouraging.

That is one point. The other is for countries to make commitments and take action, and that is what this whole process is about.

Q54 **Chair:** We need leaders, examples and role models. There must be some countries that you have gone to that you think have really got it and we



are making common cause with them. Which ones would they be on your travels?

Alok Sharma: Take India, for instance. I have been there twice. I have met Prime Minister Modi. He is very invested in climate action. We had a discussion on biodiversity. The reason I pick India—I spoke earlier about energy transition—is that it has an incredibly ambitious plan to get to 450 gigawatts by 2030. It has already reached 100 gigawatts and it is determined to push this forward. One of the things that I said I would like to see in India is for that 450 GW to be reflected in its NDC. As an example, that country is making big efforts to move to clean energy.

Q55 **Graham Stringer:** Is Modi going to Glasgow?

Alok Sharma: It is probably up to individual Governments to set out formally whether or not they are coming. All I can say is that I would like to see as many world leaders come as possible. I do not know whether Peter wants to add anything.

Peter Hill: No. It is up to the country to say whether or not they are coming.

Q56 **Chair:** As you contemplate COP starting in two weeks, what adjective best describes your feelings as you look forward to it?

Alok Sharma: Challenge.

Chair: On that note, we said that we would keep you no more than an hour. We have gone over by a couple of minutes. President-Designate and officials, thank you very much for coming to this Joint Committee today.