

Written evidence submitted by Sustrans (CAUK0002)

About Sustrans

Sustrans is the charity making it easier for people to walk and cycle. We connect people and places, create liveable neighbourhoods, transform the school run and deliver a happier, healthier commute.

We are engineers and educators, experts and advocates who work in partnership, bringing people together to find the right solutions. We make the case for walking and cycling by using robust evidence and showing what can be done. We are grounded in communities and believe that grassroots support combined with political leadership drives real change, fast.

Contact

We are pleased to respond to the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee's inquiry into the findings of the report of Climate Assembly UK.

1. Has Climate Assembly UK (both its process and recommendations) been helpful to your work (or the work of your organisation), and if so, how?

Sustrans attended the second weekend of Climate Assembly UK in an observer capacity. The session was focused on 'how we travel on land'.

Process

Observing the process provided an opportunity to learn about the benefits of such a process and reflect on our own organisational community engagement work. For example the following should be considered:

- Ensure multiple learning styles are catered to. The information shared through Climate Assembly UK was in a conference room using only slides with a handful of pictures and lots of text. Other kinds of experiences may have strengthened people's understanding of the discussions. This is of particular relevance to Sustrans when linking travel with the qualities of a place; designing changes in local neighbourhoods and considering the needs of different people and communities.

- Create space for individuals to share personal experiences. Particularly if replicating a Citizen's Assembly, or similar, at a smaller geographical scale - more time and space should be dedicated to people's own experiences. It would also be beneficial to get them out to experience what is being discussed to foster more connected thinking between place and travel. On a larger scale, time should be dedicated to personal testimony and reflection on how individuals travel around and interact with their own local areas.
- Clearly signpost on the purpose of each presentation in informing the final discussions and recommendation. To make discussions more fruitful it would be beneficial to give participants a sense of the questions they may want to keep in mind when listening to each expert.
- Provide clear context of existing measures being implemented, to give participants a sense of how their recommendations would fit with what is already occurring.

Recommendations

The recommendations from the Assembly show public support for many of Sustrans' areas of work. For example the support for localisation as a solution to transport emissions is echoed in our work on 20-Minute-Neighbourhoods, the idea that residents should be able to meet most of their needs within a 20-minute return walking trip.

The process undertaken also added credibility to these recommendations, thanks to the level of information provided to participants and the efforts undertaken to strive for a representative sample of the population.

2. What impact has Climate Assembly UK had across your sector, and more widely?

Broadly Climate Assembly UK has had little impact across the sector. The evidence presented was not new information, indeed experts from the sector were brought in to share their knowledge. As the recommendations of the Assembly aren't binding they do not directly impact Government policy. They also have not been adopted by any political party.

The exception to this, is the work of the Committee on Climate Change, who have incorporated the Assembly's recommendations into their advisory reports on the sixth carbon budget. Though the government does not need to follow specifically the policy

recommendations of the Committee's report it has significant influence on their decision making.

The recommendations of Climate Assembly UK have, however, illustrated the public mandate for bolder action than is currently government policy. This has demonstrated the importance of comprehensive public education from credible sources. Spending time educating the participants, and then presenting them with a variety of plausible solutions resulted in broad support for many of the policies presented to the Assembly.

Increased awareness among the wider public about Climate Assembly UK, its process and its recommendations would have taken society on the same journey as the participants of the process. The ability to educate and discuss the topics in depth resulted in greater understanding of the need for trade-offs by participants and buy-in for bolder policy options. Wider public support of such policy options would create more confidence in government to adopt the recommendations.

3. How do you perceive Climate Assembly UK to have affected the work of Government since the Assembly's report was published (10 September 2020)? To what extent do the Government's actions since then reflect Climate Assembly UK's recommendations?

The establishment of Climate Assembly UK lacked a requirement of Government to respond directly to the Assembly's report. As such it is hard to determine how the report has affected the work of government directly.

It was positive to see that shortly after the report's publication the Government chose to bring forward the phase out of the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles to 2030. This was directly in line with the Assembly's recommendation of "A ban on the sale of new petrol, diesel and hybrid cars by 2030–2035". It is likely that the nationally representative support from the Assembly, in conjunction with wider support following consultation contributed to this decision.

However, it is disappointing to see certain Government actions have rejected even the foundations of the work that Climate Assembly UK's recommendations have been built on. The most notable of these is the Government's Road Investment Strategy (RIS2), followed by the planned RIS3. RIS2 will see £27.4 billion invested in England's Strategic Road Network for upgrades and maintenance. Analysis has shown that RIS2 is predicted to drive up

demand for car use and add 20 million tonnes of carbon dioxide (20 MtCO₂) to UK emissions between now and 2032¹. These extra emissions, as a result of more road capacity, will negate 80% of the benefit arising from the switch to electric vehicles on the Strategic Road Network (SRN) between now and 2032. This is particularly concerning given that multiple studies show that even without RIS2, reducing the number of vehicles trips made will be required to meet the UK's climate change targets².

Discussions on surface transport by Climate Assembly UK were based on an assumption to halt road building until at least 2045. This is clearly in conflict with current Government strategy, as well as being in conflict with the Government's infrastructure priority of putting the UK on the path to meeting its net zero emissions target by 2050. However, Government have not yet acted on this conflict or addressed the emissions RIS2 will cause.

Also of note is the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government's proposals for Planning Reform. The planning system to date has been failing to create beautiful and vibrant neighbourhoods or communities. It does little to support the Government's levelling-up agenda. Too many new developments are built in remote locations, or are designed in ways that lock people into car dependency and have little in the way of services and amenities within walking distance^{3 4}. This is bad for our health, our communities and the environment.

Planning should ensure developments are built in the right places, to better building design standards, and ensure our neighbourhoods are attractive places to live and where there is a greater incentive to walk, cycle or use public transport, rather than drive.

This sentiment was recognised in the recommendations of Climate Assembly UK, with 72% of members strongly agreeing or agreeing that localisation should be a part of the how the UK gets to net zero. However, revisions to planning policy do not reflect this recommendation.

Thirdly, the Assembly recommended "Investing in cycling and scooting facilities" with 70% of participants agreeing with this policy, including 53% who 'strongly agreed'. At the time of publication of the Assembly's report the Government had already committed to, a welcome, £2 billion in investment for walking and cycling. However, modelling illustrates that in order to achieve its own targets of doubling cycling levels compared to 2016 levels by 2025 and ensuring half of all journeys in towns and cities are cycled or walked by 2030 in an equitable and distributed way, the government needs to continue to build on this investment and commit to a minimum of £8bn over the next five years and ensure funding prioritises reducing inequity.

In comparing to the French Climate Assembly, which happened at a similar time, it is clear that the impact is not as great. French President Macron stated at the launch of the Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat (CCC) that there would be “no filter” implying the recommendations from the CCC would be directly acted upon. A similar statement from the Prime Minister may have given Climate Assembly UK more political influence.

4a) What would a good response to Climate Assembly UK from the Government look like?

Overarching response

From the outset it was disappointing that there was no obligation on the Government to act in response to the results of Climate Assembly UK. Any future citizens’ assemblies should include a requirement on Government to publish a response to the findings of such a report.

The Government should publish a response that explains where and how the recommendations from Climate Assembly UK have been implemented to date. This information would allow the public to continue to hold the Government to account. There should not be cherry picking of the recommendations that suit the Government’s existing agenda.

Government, in its position as COP26 president should use the findings of the report to set the tone at the international conference. This should be reflected in the design and delivery of the conference; how people are encouraged to travel to the venue, what products are available on sale within the conference centre, the types of organisations represented at stands and how the conference is powered. It should also be reflected in the UK’s agenda. This is a clear moment to show the world what commitments the UK is making. It also provides an opportunity to better integrate meaningful public participation into what is typically a very exclusive process that lacks public influence.

Responses directly to recommendations

Looking forward, a good response would be consideration and inclusion of Climate Assembly UK’s recommendations in the Government’s own Net Zero Strategy. This should include both specific recommendations from the Assembly as well as inclusion of the Assembly’s underlying themes.

Similarly Ministers with control over individual areas addressed by the Path to Net Zero report must also pick up the recommendations of the report relevant to their policy areas. For example the Department for Transport's Decarbonising Transport Plan.

Responses to 'how we travel on land' recommendations

Considering specifically the recommendation: "A reduction in the amount we use cars by an average of 2–5% per decade;" the Government should:

- Review planned investment for building new roads, including RIS2.
- Set an overarching objective for traffic reduction on the Strategic Road Network in line with our climate change goals.
- Introduce road pricing and increase fuel duty, fairly.
- Incentivise alternatives to car trips through support for public transport and active travel, as detailed below.

Considering the recommendations aimed at increasing public transport, the Government should:

- Make public transport affordable or free.
- Introduce a frequent flyer levy and use this to make travel by trains, buses and ferries cheaper, greener and more attractive.

Considering specifically the recommendation for "localisation" the Government should:

- Adopt the 20-Minute Neighbourhood concept as a central principle of the planning system, including both the National Planning Policy Framework and Local Plans.
- Produce updated planning guidance to create active neighbourhoods that prioritise walking, cycling and public transport and reduce demand for car use.
- Embed the National Cycle Network within the National Planning Policy Framework as a UK-wide network of national importance.

Considering specifically the recommendation for "Investing in cycling and scootering facilities;" the Government should:

- Increase funding for walking and cycling with a minimum of £8bn over the next five years and ensure funding prioritises reducing inequity. This investment also needs to better address all people's needs and prioritise where need is greatest. Currently too much investment focuses on improving infrastructure for commuter trips into and out of the city centre. This ignores the travel needs of many people and changing travel habits following Covid-19.

- Walking and cycling investment should focus more on connecting areas with reduced public transport options, areas of higher deprivation and unemployment, or tackling journeys most likely to contribute to climate change.
- Investment needs to prioritise the infrastructure we need to make walking and cycling attractive, welcoming and comfortable – protected space for cycling, better pavements and increased crossing priority; and liveable neighbourhoods across all our cities and towns.
- The following additional measures should also be implemented to make it easier to walk and cycle:
 - make it illegal to park on the pavement anywhere in the UK
 - make 20mph the default speed in all urban and residential areas
 - consider removing VAT from cycle sales to increase access to cycles for all people, including e-bikes and adapted cycles
 - give all councils the power to enforce moving traffic offences, including enforcement of school streets.

4b) What would a good response from Parliament look like?

It was welcome to see the debate held on the Path to Net Zero report, shortly after its publication. Parliament must continue to hold government accountable for following through on implementing the recommendations of the report.

Chairs of the Select Committees involved in the creation of Climate Assembly UK stated the recommendations would inform their work going forward. It has been welcome to see that multiple Committees have followed up on this, undertaking inquiries into the recommendations of Climate Assembly UK. Notably, of the six Select Committees involved the Treasury Select Committee is the only not to have launched a subsequent relevant inquiry.

All six Committees should continue to launch relevant inquiries to understand how the recommendations of Climate Assembly UK can be acted on. Sustrans would particularly like to see the Committees generating evidence on:

- Policy options for traffic reduction. The Assembly recommended a reduction in the amount we use cars by an average of 2-5% per decade and research has indicated a need to reduce traffic in the order of 35-58% between now and 2030-35⁵. This work should include examining the need for traffic reduction targets and the need to scrap road building commitments. It should also consider the wider aspects necessary to realise this type of traffic reduction, including significant investment in walking and cycling and adoption of the 20-minute neighbourhood principle.
- Policy options for localisation. Planning should ensure developments are built in the right places to better building design standards, and ensure our neighbourhoods are attractive places to live and where there is a greater incentive to walk, cycle or use public transport, rather than drive.

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References

¹ Transport for Quality of Life, 2020. [The carbon impact of the national roads programme](#)

² Tyndall Centre has found that even if all new cars were ULEVs by 2035 (80% battery electric, 20% plug-in hybrids), a 58% reduction in car mileage between 2016 and 2035 would be needed for car CO2 emissions to be in line with a 'well below 2°C' pathway; Transport for Quality of Life also estimate that necessary mileage reduction could be as low as 20% or as high as 60% by 2030 (assuming a 2040 ban). Friends of the Earth, 2019, *More than electric cars*.

³ BBC, 2020, New UK housing "dominated by roads"

⁴ BBC News, 2018, Young couples "trapped in car dependency"

⁵ Tyndall Centre has found that even if all new cars were ULEVs by 2035 (80% battery electric, 20% plug-in hybrids), a 58% reduction in car mileage between 2016 and 2035 would be needed for car CO2 emissions to be in line with a 'well below 2°C' pathway; Transport for Quality of Life also estimate that necessary mileage reduction could be as low as 20% or as high as 60% by 2030 (assuming a 2040 ban). Friends of the Earth, 2019, *More than electric cars*.