

Green transport

I have sent in my views on the need for an early return to work along with strict safeguarding for all people at serious risk from the disease, and my views on actions needed to reduce the rise in unemployment and termination of businesses in the meantime. Today I wish to turn to another issue.

The government has just produced a document entitled “Decarbonising transport – Setting the challenge”. It shows how on current policies transport will still be a major source of carbon dioxide in 2050 when the government wishes to be carbon neutral. The Paper recommends six big actions to shift the carbon dioxide curve more decisively downwards.

It says we “need to accelerate the modal shift to public and active transport”, decarbonise deliveries, make the UK a hub for green transport technology, toughen regulations to decarbonise road transport, develop place based strategies that get cars off the roads, and reduce the global carbon dioxide output of ships and aviation.

One of its most amusing charts is the one telling us just how much carbon dioxide journeys by plane or car entail. It tells us that if we journey to Edinburgh from London by plane we will cause the emission of 144kg of carbon dioxide. If we go by petrol car it falls to 120 kg and diesel car to 115 kg. However, if we walk or go by bike it assures us it will mean no carbon dioxide at all.

They cannot seriously think that walking or cycling to Edinburgh is an option for most of us. The Paper is short on specifics, and recognises that there will need to be new technologies and new greener fuels for old technologies if they are to get anywhere near the zero carbon dioxide target by 2050.

They remind us that cars account for 77% of miles travelled, buses 4% and trains 9%. They anticipate a 35% increase in distance travelled by car by 2050, bus distances staying the same and rail going up by 60%. They also assume a 70% increase in van use but only a 7% increase in heavy goods vehicles, which is a strange variation.

I would be interested in your thoughts on how feasible net zero for transport is by 2050, and what changes could deliver it.