

**To:** Transport & Health Policy Makers, & Practitioners  
**From:** Prof Adrian Davis, TRI, Edinburgh Napier University  
**Date:** November 30<sup>th</sup> 2020  
**Subject:** Essential Evidence 4 Scotland No. 31 Politician & lay knowledge gap on most effective transport schemes

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Top Line: Decisions about which schemes are funded remain with non-transport experts, such as government ministers and local politicians, and this invariably leads to highway ‘solutions’ being chosen which limit the potential success of any initiatives to create long-term change to travel behaviour.

There is a growing body of international evidence available that shows highway construction fails to solve issues of congestion and improvements to the local economy. There is also evidence that due to changes of land use and expectations of being able to travel further due to new road provision that extra traffic is induced to the highway network. Alternative methods of managing travel demand; such as Voluntary Travel Behaviour Change (VTBC) initiatives have been delivered internationally. In order to tackle city traffic congestion, VTBC schemes have been delivered in Europe, Australia and North America since the 1990s, with varying degrees of success. VTBC schemes are designed to provide a range of alternative, or ‘soft’ measures (compared to ‘hard’ infrastructure measures), such as personalised travel planning and cycle training, to enable people to travel by alternative means than by car. VTBC schemes are designed to reduce the number of car trips, particularly single-occupancy journeys. VTBC schemes were first discussed by Goodwin et al. (1991) as they concluded that it was not possible to provide enough highway capacity to meet the levels of demand predicted in the 1989 White Paper for highway growth.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, an alternative approach would be required to reduce this predicted level of demand. Goodwin et al. (1991) specifically queried whether people would change their behaviour and begin to travel by alternative means to the car, something that in the intervening years a suite of VTBC initiatives have sought to make happen.

The Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) operated between 2011 and 2015 across England in an attempt to reduce carbon emissions, whilst also boosting the UK economy. The funds were allocated on a local authority competition basis, with the local authorities including match-funding commitments in their bids, leading overall to over £1bn of investment in VTBC schemes being committed over a four year period. Government set aside equal amounts of capital funding, for investment in new sustainable transport infrastructure, and revenue funding to provide funding for staff, services and resources to help people travel by alternative means. A study of the effectiveness of the LSTF gathered views from those officers involved in its implementation.<sup>2</sup> In order to gain a broader understanding of the context in which transport officers are developing interventions, the survey asked whether respondents believed that they had any influence on limiting climate change, both as individuals and through their professional roles. These findings were then compared to the results of the Office for National Statistics’ Opinions Survey 2011 to examine whether the respondents’ views differed from those of the wider public in terms of agency in respect of climate change.

The findings show that transport officers engaged in the LSTF process understand the societal challenges related to transport and their role in solving these issues. When the results of the survey are compared to the public responses to issues of climate change, driving less and induced traffic demand from the construction of new highways, it is evident that a disconnect between what the academic literature says and what the transport officers believe, and lay people (including politicians) view these issues. The message about the need to change how we travel is therefore getting lost between the experts and transport users. This has led to continuation of more highway capacity despite evidence of lack of benefit.

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<sup>1</sup> Goodwin, P., et al, 1991. Transport: The New Realism. Transport Studies Unit, University of Oxford, Oxford.

<sup>2</sup> Williams, D. et al, 2019. An assessment of Voluntary Travel behaviour Change delivery in England as an alternative to highway construction, *Case Studies in Transport Policy*, 7: 318-329.