



alliance against road building

Briefing on road transport and climate change

How much does road transport contribute to climate change?

“Road Transport and climate change”

What do the experts say?

According to the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, “*carbon emissions from transport since 1990 have moved spectacularly in the wrong direction – in marked contrast to other sectors*” [1].

They added, “*the continued growth of carbon emissions from transport remains one of the most serious problems we have, and the government’s commitment to sustainable development will be called into question unless it takes steps to confront this issue*” [2]

So, how much carbon is the road transport sector responsible for?

Transport, including both roads and aviation, makes up 21 per cent of the UK's total carbon dioxide emissions [3]. Road transport makes up 18 per cent of the UK total, in contrast to 14% in 1990 [4]. Road transport is 85 per cent of all transport emissions [5]. Transport is an exception to the overall decline in UK greenhouse gas emissions [6]. Greenhouse gas emissions from transport (including aviation) were 47 per cent higher in 2002 than in 1990. Total UK greenhouse gas emissions declined by 10 per cent during the same period [7].

Greenhouse gas emissions from UK households' **private vehicles** rose by 6 per cent from 1990 to 2002, and are now 9 per cent of all UK emissions.

Emissions from the **road freight industry** rose by 48 per cent for the same period, and now account for 3.4 per cent of UK emissions.

Meanwhile **air transport** emissions rose 85 per cent from 1990 – 2002 and now accounts for 5.3% of UK emissions. In the same period, greenhouse gases from **public transport** sources fell by 7 per cent [8].

According to the Government's Climate Change Review consultation paper [9], carbon dioxide emissions from road transport are expected to grow by another 9 per cent or so between 2000 and 2010. As emissions from most other sectors are forecast to fall in the same period, transport's share of total emissions will increase.

The 2004 Transport White Paper [10] outlined the Government's 10 year transport plan. It talked of the “need to ... identify, fund and deliver promptly additional road capacity”. This was effectively a commitment to transport policies which cater for traffic growth through roadbuilding.

It doesn't have to be this way: tackling climate change emissions from transport is entirely possible. The UK has the resources and the claimed interest to take action on climate change. However, as the Prime Minister himself has said [11]: “to acquire global leadership on this issue, Britain must demonstrate it first at home”.

NOTES

[1] Environmental Audit Committee, Tenth Report of Session 2003-4, *Budget 2004 and Energy*, 11 August 2004, para 24.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmenvaud/490/49005.htm>

[2] Ibid. para 45

[3] Greenhouse gas emissions from transport, Office for National Statistics, 2004

http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_environment/transport_report.pdf

2005 Greenhouse gas emissions (the transport industries are 63-71 and cars are 93), Office for National Statistics, 2005

<http://www.nationalstatistics.gov.uk/statbase/Expodata/Spreadsheets/D5695.xls>

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid. and authors own calculations from ONS data

[9] 8.2, Review of the UK Climate Change Programme Consultation Paper, December 2004,

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/ukccp-review/ccpreview-eight.pdf>

[10] The Future of Transport - White Paper CM 6234, 20 July 2004, para 3.5

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/strategy/futureoftransport/>

[11] Speech to the Prince of Wales' Business and Environment Programme, 14 September 2004, <http://www.number10.gov.uk/output/page6333.asp>