

**PRESS RELEASE**

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**Research suggests the Government's biggest-ever road investment strategy (£27 billion over 5 years) breaches the UK's commitments on climate change**

Using data collected by Highways England, environmental consultancy Transport for Quality of Life has calculated the roads programme will add **20 million tonnes of carbon dioxide (20 MtCO<sub>2</sub>)** to UK emissions between now and 2032.

About a third of the emissions will come from construction (including energy required to manufacture steel, concrete and asphalt); a third from increases in vehicle speeds on wider, faster roads; and a third from extra traffic generated by bigger roads stimulating more car-dependent housing, retail parks and business parks.

Transport is the worst-performing sector of the economy in terms of its carbon emissions, and there is increasing pressure to bring emissions down. Even with the Government's most optimistic estimate of the adoption rate for electric vehicles, emissions from trunk roads and motorways in England are not on track to meet 'net zero' by 2050. In order to meet that target, Transport for Quality of Life estimates that emissions from the Strategic Road Network over the next 12 years (2020 – 2032) need to be cut by 167 MtCO<sub>2</sub>, over and above the savings that will occur because of the switch to electric cars.

The report's lead author, Lynn Sloman, said: "People think that electric cars will solve the UK's transport carbon problem, but widespread use of electric cars is going to come too late. If we are to meet the legally-binding carbon budgets that have been set by the Committee on Climate Change, we need to make big cuts in carbon emissions over the next decade. That will require faster adoption of electric cars but it will also require us to reduce vehicle mileage by existing cars.

"Unfortunately, the Government's £27 billion road programme will make things worse, not better. At a time when we need to cut emissions from the Strategic Road Network, the Road Investment Strategy will increase them. And the extra emissions as a result of more road capacity will negate 80% of the benefit arising from the switch to electric vehicles."

Co-author Lisa Hopkinson commented: "Instead of expanding road capacity, we could re-purpose the £27 billion road budget to make it easier for people to reduce their car use. As we come out of the Covid-19 pandemic, we know that many people would like to continue to work at or close to home, at least some of the time. That requires a rapid and massive investment in universal superfast broadband, plus remote working hubs so office-workers who can't easily work at home can still work close to home, avoiding the long commute. And over the longer term, better rail, coach and bus services and better cycle links to stations would make it easier to make essential trips by public transport instead of having to get onto the motorway."



## *transport for quality of life*

The Department for Transport is currently consulting on a decarbonisation strategy for transport, and will publish a transport decarbonisation plan later in the year. Lynn Sloman added: “Transport Secretary Grant Shapps has said that transport has ‘a huge role to play’ in reaching net zero. Unless he cancels the road programme, that role threatens to be hugely negative.”

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Notes to editors

1. The research report is available on request from [lynn@transportforqualityoflife.com](mailto:lynn@transportforqualityoflife.com). Transport for Quality of Life is a research consultancy and think-tank, [www.transportforqualityoflife.com](http://www.transportforqualityoflife.com).
2. The government’s [second Road Investment Strategy \(RIS2\)](#) was published in March 2020. It involves expenditure of £27 billion on motorways and trunk roads (the Strategic Road Network, SRN) between 2020 and 2024, of which £14 billion is for ‘capital enhancements’ i.e. road schemes.
3. The government’s [Decarbonising transport: setting the challenge](#) was also published in March 2020. It started a process of consultation which will lead to publication of a transport decarbonisation plan later in 2020.
4. The transport sector (including international aviation and shipping) is now responsible for over a third of UK greenhouse gas emissions. The SRN in England accounts for roughly a third of all emissions from every type of domestic transport across the whole UK.
5. Although electric vehicles will play an important role in reducing carbon emissions in the long term, their impact over the next decade, the crucial period for emissions reductions to meet climate targets, will be limited. Even if the ban on petrol and diesel cars and vans is brought forward from 2040 to 2035 the majority (about 65%) of vehicles on the road in 2030 will still be petrol or diesel.
6. The research by Transport for Quality of Life calculates predicted emissions from RIS2 using Highways England’s post-opening project evaluations of more than 80 individual road schemes built over the last two decades. This was cross-checked against published Environmental Statements for planned RIS2 road schemes. Adjustments were made to allow for predicted improvements in vehicle efficiency over time.
7. The estimated carbon saving due to electric vehicles using the Strategic Road Network is 25 MtCO<sub>2</sub> between 2020 and 2032. This is based on the government’s Road Traffic Forecasts, and is the difference between (a) Road Traffic Forecast Scenario 1, the “Reference Scenario” and (b) Road Traffic Forecast Scenario 7, which is the scenario with the fastest uptake of electric vehicles.