

Letter from Scotland

Yet again Scotland is parting company with England over climate change. The First Minister Humza Yousaf has called Rishi Sunak's retreat on target dates for phasing out petrol cars and gas boilers in England "unforgivable."

Scotland will press on with the tighter deadlines of 2030 and 2035, even though going-it-alone will be more difficult.

Scotland has the ambition of achieving "net zero" by 2045, five years ahead of England. And Mr Yousaf was at a climate event in New York earlier this week blaming world leaders for "catastrophic negligence" in not taking the climate emergency seriously. He went on to pledge more money for flood reparations in Malawi, Scotland's "twin" country in Africa, much affected by changing climate.



First Minister Humza Yousaf speaking in New York PHOTO courtesy of The Scottish Government

But the Scottish Government's own record on carbon emissions is not great. It has missed its targets in four of the last five years. And its blanket opposition to new oil and gas fields has been watered down. It will now consider each project on its merits.

One project the SNP did judge on its merits was the [tram network in Edinburgh](#). The party was against it originally and used its difficulties as weapon to beat the Lid Dem/Labour coalition that ran the local council at the time. Just like Rishi Sunak's attempt this week to differentiate the Conservatives from the Labour Party over climate change. So when the project got into trouble, the SNP's John Swinney, the finance secretary at the time, promised "not a penny more" for the trams and withdrew Transport Scotland the government agency, from the project.



Troubles over the Green Agenda. A deceptively quiet pool on the River Dochart, Perthshire.

Everyone knows what happened next. The 8.5 miles of track from the airport to the city centre was three years late, it cost £835 million (At least £230m over budget) and it was only half the length originally planned. I say “everyone knows,” but it has taken nine years for an official inquiry chaired by Lord Hardie to find out exactly what went wrong. [The report was published this week](#) and it lays the blame on the Scottish government, The City of Edinburgh Council and its arms length company Transport Initiative Edinburgh or **tie**.

The inquiry itself has turned into something of a scandal. It has taken nine years, has cost £13 million, and its lessons have long since been learned. In fact the new phase of the tram network, from the city centre to the port of Newhaven, has already been built and this summer it carried its first passengers, on time and on budget. There’s now talk of

extending the network to the west and south of the city, all in the name of reducing car usage and playing a part in cutting Edinburgh's carbon footprint.



On the eve of the launch of the Trams to Newhaven press were invited aboard to see for themselves what the new part of the line is like PHOTO ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter

Researchers at Edinburgh's Queen Margaret University have also been making their contribution to the crusade against climate change. They have developed an alternative to palm oil which could save thousands of square miles of rain forest in countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia. It's made from a by-product of linseed and rapeseed and contains 80 per cent less saturated fat and 30 per cent fewer calories but is said to taste exactly the same as palm oil. The university has patented the product and it is now looking for a large scale manufacturer.

It looks like next week's school strikes are going ahead. Janitors, kitchen workers, and other non-teaching staff, in three unions, are set to go on strike on Tuesday, Wednesday

and Thursday in most council areas. As the negotiation deadline approached on Thursday, the government found an extra £80 million from other budgets to help local councils make an improved offer of 8 per cent. But it seems this is not going to be enough to have the strikes called off.

These pay disputes across the public sector – from railways to hospitals to schools, to council workers – are a cry of protest against the sharp rise in the cost of living and against “government austerity” and Mr Sunak is being blamed for both. It seems he doesn’t want to be blamed for yet another hardship, the need to cut our carbon emissions. Hence the softening of his climate change targets.

The Conservatives saw how opposing the extension of the low emissions zone in London helped them beat off a Labour challenge in the by-election in Boris Johnson’s old constituency there. They are desperately hoping this will work on a grander scale in next year’s general election.

I wonder if it will work, even here in Scotland. Or will people conclude that what’s good for the Conservatives is bad for the planet. And will they care?



Rishi Sunak speaking in the House of Commons in March 2022
PHOTO UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor



18/09/2023 Picture Alan Simpson Nine years after the Edinburgh Tram Inquiry was ordered by First Minister Alex Salmond Lord Hardie has issued his report which has cost £13.1 million. The four volume report contains criticisms of several organisations whose acts or omissions were principally responsible for the failure to deliver the Edinburgh Trams Project on time, within budget and to the extent projected.