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Kate Forbes MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Finance
Scottish Government

26 February 2020

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

Thank you for your engagement over the Scottish budget process over recent weeks. As you know the Scottish Green MSPs believe that we have a responsibility to seek positive change from the Scottish Government, and we are pleased to have achieved significant progress in recent years that would not have otherwise taken place.

While you will naturally wish to emphasise the merits as you see them of the budget as it was first published, we believe that it fell short in a number of important areas, and we welcome the recognition that changes were needed.

The climate emergency requires a shift of priorities in many areas of public policy, not least on transport. Over many years public transport has grown unacceptably expensive. There is an urgent need to reverse this trend if we are to achieve a shift toward more sustainable transport patterns. This is why the Scottish Greens have been making the case for fare-free public transport, a policy that has proved successful and popular elsewhere.

The Green MSPs aim at all times to operate best practice in complying with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (the GDPR), the Data Protection Act 1998 and any Act that replaces the Data Protection Act. You can find details of our privacy policy at www.greens.scot/msp-privacy-notice

The provision of a National Concessionary Travel Scheme to offer free bus travel for young people aged 18 and under, which we have secured in this deal, is an important step in this direction. It will bring a very real benefit both to young people themselves and to families who wish to use public transport.

We look forward to working with you to see this policy delivered during the 2020/21 financial year, and we will continue to make the case for its future extension beyond the age group initially covered.

Wider transport policies remain in need of fundamental change, as recognised by your own Infrastructure Commission, whose recommendations include a presumption against building additional road capacity. Aligning your strategic investment decisions with this new agenda will help to bring about the new approach which is needed on transport. In the meantime, we welcome your agreement to review the Sheriffhall proposal, and to build on the work of the Local Rail Development Fund by taking forward investigation of much-needed rail improvements as set out in your letter.

The funding gap for local government has been noted by all opposition parties, and your agreement to provide an additional £95m of unringfenced revenue funding will allow councils to protect vital public services across Scotland.

The additional capital investment you have agreed to will help both national and local government to address the climate emergency, particularly in the areas of energy efficiency and active travel. Bringing the active travel budget to a total of £100m represents important progress in correcting the longstanding underinvestment in this area.

We also welcome the additional revenue and capital funds being provided for the Scottish Police Authority.

On the basis of this package of measures I can confirm that the Green MSPs will support the Budget at stage 1, and assuming that relevant amendments are passed at stage 2 we will also give support at stage 3. We remain of the view that the Scottish Government's tax proposals are adequate but not perfect. We will not oppose the relevant instruments on income tax and NDR.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Patrick Harvie', with a stylized, cursive script.

Patrick Harvie MSP