

FAIRER IS FASTER

THE ROUTE TO
GREENER AND
HEALTHIER
DOMESTIC
TRANSPORT



Stephen Frost

August 2025

ABOUT IPPR

IPPR, the Institute for Public Policy Research, is an independent charity working towards a fairer, greener, and more prosperous society. We are researchers, communicators, and policy experts creating tangible progressive change, and turning bold ideas into common sense realities. Working across the UK, IPPR, IPPR North, and IPPR Scotland are deeply connected to the people of our nations and regions, and the issues our communities face.

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Actions that prioritise equity, climate justice, social justice and inclusion lead to more sustainable outcomes, co-benefits, reduce trade-offs, support transformative change and advance climate resilient development.

Equity, inclusion and just transitions at all scales enable deeper societal ambitions for accelerated mitigation, and climate action more broadly.

Individuals with high socio-economic status contribute disproportionately to emissions and have the highest potential for emissions reductions.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

ABOUT

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

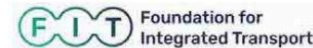
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INTRODUCTION

In 2024, IPPR published analysis of the way people travel in Great Britain and the opportunities that exist for different groups on the path to net zero.

In this paper we revisit the 12 profiles developed in [*Moving Together*](#) and consider how current government policy might impact them and whether there is a faster, fairer approach to reaching net zero emissions.

Our focus is domestic transport emissions, as these are most closely tied to making transport work better for most people in UK, particularly those on the [*lowest incomes*](#).

In this report, we:

- present new analysis of the likely impact of current policy and the advice of the Climate Change Committee on the mobility and transport emissions of different people
- consider how a decarbonisation pathway that is focused on addressing inequality in transport differs from existing policy, and the implications of this on different people
- provide a policy framework for delivering emissions reductions in transport whilst addressing inequality.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Although the approach is unique, the story told by this new analysis on the central role of ‘fairness’ in decarbonisation policy is nothing new. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change have already made clear to governments around the world that **there is one path for accelerated climate action: prioritising social justice.**

A fairer transport system will not happen by accident. It has to be explicitly set out in government policy and prioritised at every level of transport decision making. Success does not just mean mitigating climate change but also creating healthier places and securing the long-term prosperity of every part of the United Kingdom.

There is no single policy that will deliver the fairer pathway described here. It will require broad and deep reforms to both transport and spatial planning. As significant as that challenge may seem, **every step towards the fairer pathway will be worth it – especially for those on the lowest incomes.**

The starting point for managing the trade offs in climate policy must be public involvement. **Without a public engagement strategy for sustainable travel transformative change is unlikely, perhaps impossible.** This will involve changing the wiring of transport decisions and who has the power to shape policy.

The UK government’s new climate strategy needs to go further than existing policy if it is to deliver the emissions reductions required. **The carbon budget delivery plan must include an ambitious sectoral target for transport to drive the change required.** This should incorporate a policy framework that shows global leadership on equitable demand reduction.

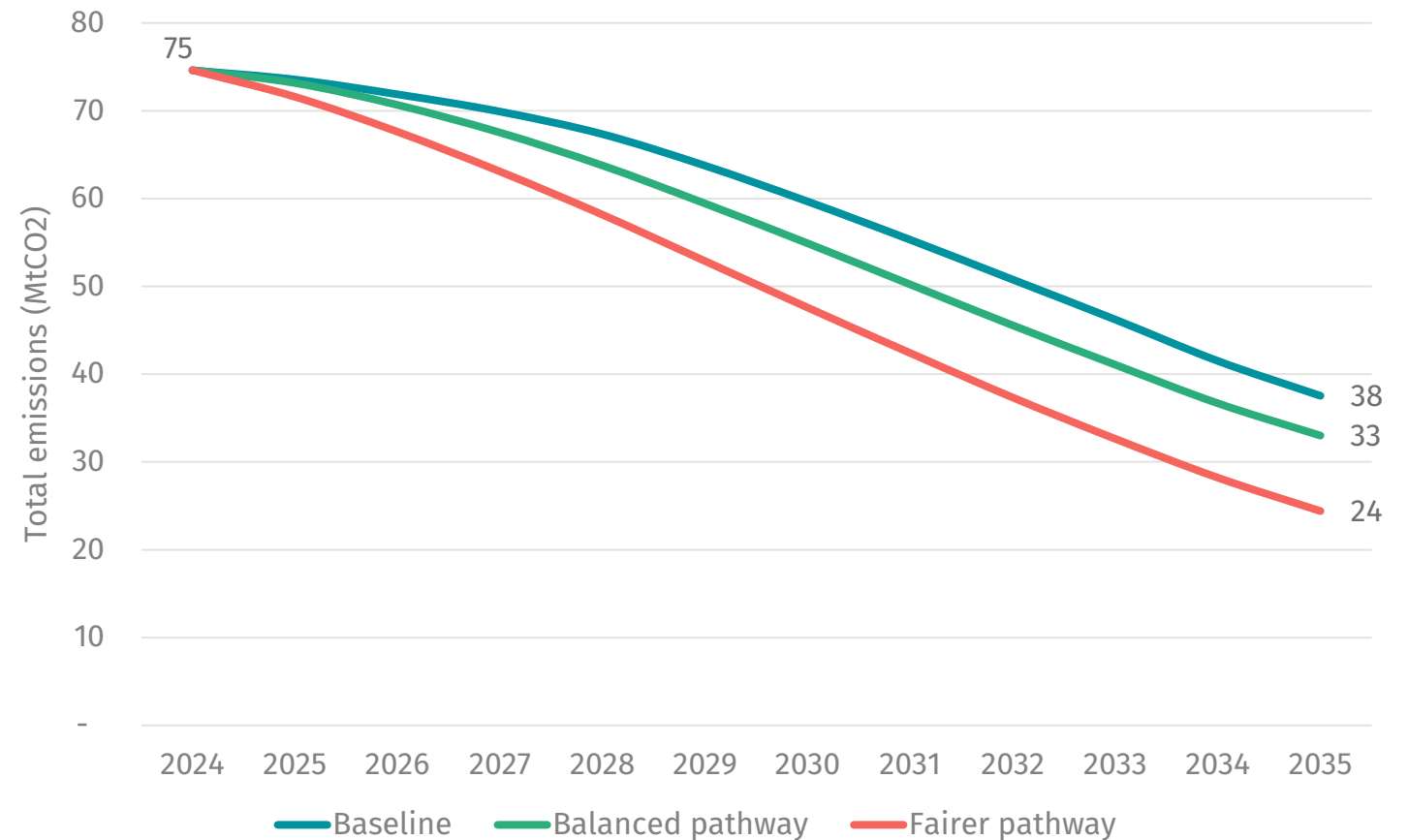
Although the focus of this work is domestic travel, **the need for far great leadership by the UK government on international aviation can’t be ignored.** Excessive polluters must pay more. The government should increase taxes on domestic flights, set out a credible framework for airport capacity and join global efforts to tax private jet, frequent and premium flyers more.

KEY FINDINGS

- **A fairer approach to transport decarbonisation outpaces existing policy**, delivering reductions in emissions of two-thirds (67 per cent) compared to half (50 per cent) by 2035.
- **Emissions inequality from domestic transport will rise under existing policy.** Currently, the highest emitters produce 10 times more than the lowest, this is expected to grow to 13 times more.
- **Reducing excess private car use will see the gap between highest and lowest emitting groups fall faster than through electrification alone.** A 25 per cent reduction in traffic by 2035 is achievable with the right mix of modal shift and demand management policies.

FIGURE 1: THE FAIRER PATHWAY REDUCES EMISSIONS AT THE FASTEST PACE

Domestic transport emissions from 2024 to 2035 under three pathways



Source: Author's analysis. Methodology detailed later in this briefing.

1. APPROACH

METHODOLOGY

This analysis is based on England's National Travel Survey and Scottish Household Survey data for the years 2013–2021. It has been weighted to be representative of the Welsh and Northern Irish population.

As previously noted in *Moving Together*, our analysis of travel behaviours will reflect the limitations of the data collection methods used in these national surveys. The divides between the most mobile and the least are even greater than our modelling shows.

Approaches to accounting for emissions from flying vary. The standard method is to count flights that originate in the UK, excluding return flights by British residents. The impacts from non-CO2 emissions from aviation are also discounted. As the analysis in *Moving Together* focussed on the emissions of people's travel, we included both return flights for international travel and adjusted for the wider impacts of flying.

To ensure the analysis of domestic travel in this briefing is as comparable to national emission accounts as possible we have applied an uplift for the non-CO2 impacts of flights using UK government's suggested multiplier but not included return flights.

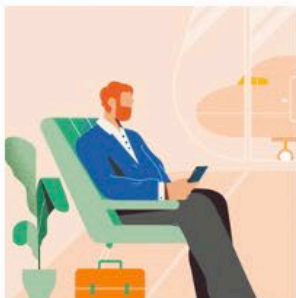
Our analysis of the impact of existing policy and the Climate Change Committee's Seventh Carbon Budget advice relies on a qualitative assessment of which groups in society are most likely to change their behaviours or access alternative modes of travel.

There is significant uncertainty about the future of transport and the impact of policies on different groups in society. This analysis should be considered indicative and a starting point that could be built on by government, the Climate Change Committee (CCC) and others with a stake in the fairness and effectiveness of transport and climate policies.

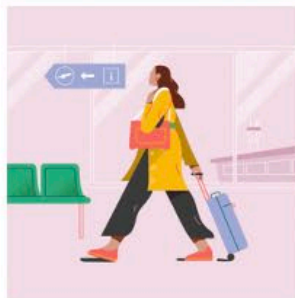
RE-INTRODUCING OUR TRANSPORT PROFILES

Our 12 transport profiles capture the breadth of mobility behaviours by different groups in Britain today. They highlight the vast differences in experiences of transport between those with essentially unrestricted mobility and those whose ability to get around is severely constrained.

Most frequent flyers

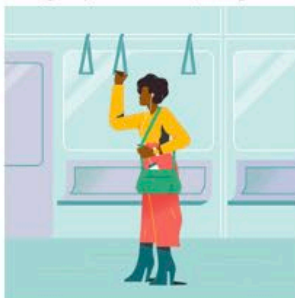


1: HIGHLY AFFLUENT,
UNRESTRICTED
MOBILITY

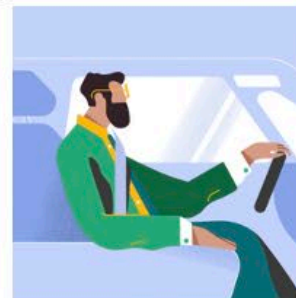


2: FREQUENT FLYERS,
LOW DAILY TRAVEL

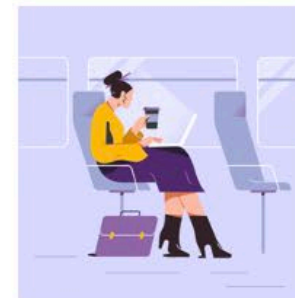
Highly mobile, regularly fly



3: CAR FREE,
FREQUENT FLYERS



4: HIGH CAR USE,
HIGH FLYING



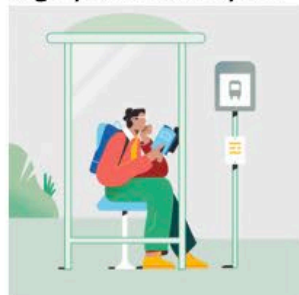
5: HIGH RAIL, HIGH
FLYING

Car reliant



6: CAR RELIANT

High public transport

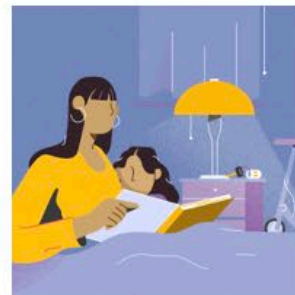


7: HIGH PUBLIC
TRANSPORT

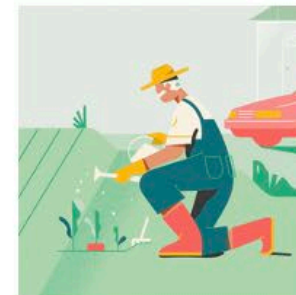
Average travellers



8: HIGH CAR USE,
FLIES ONCE A YEAR

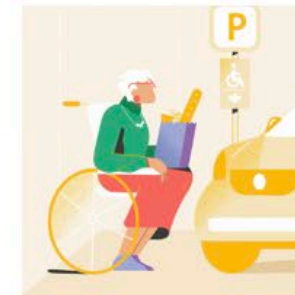


9: AVERAGE DAILY
TRAVEL, NO FLYING



10: OLDER, AVERAGE
DAILY TRAVEL, NO
FLYING

Less mobile



11: LIMITED MOBILITY,
CAR RELIANT



12: CAR FREE, HIGH
BUS, LESS AFFLUENT

INTRODUCING THREE TRANSPORT DECARBONISATION PATHWAYS

Scenario	Description	Key assumptions
1. Baseline	Based on the policies confirmed by government as of the beginning of June 2025. These are largely inherited from the Net Zero Strategy (2021) and Transport Decarbonisation Plan (2021).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavily focused on adoption of climate technologies (zero emission vehicles (ZEVs) and sustainable aviation fuels (SAF). • Additional flexibilities introduced by the government in 2025 as part of the ZEV mandate have been included. • Limited policies focusing on either demand reduction or modal shift. • Growth in flying and traffic built into forecasts of future demand.
2. Balanced pathway	Based on the policy recommendations and emission reduction trajectory contained in the CCC's Seventh Carbon Budget advice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faster uptake of ZEVs and SAF than current government mandates. • Expectation of some reduction in car use via modal shift. This modal shift assumption has been applied equally across all our transport profiles. • Limited reduction in flights.
3. Fairer pathway	IPPR's indicative pathway , based on the principles of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Reducing excess private car travel and flights for those with the means to change their behaviours fastest. b) Increasing transport options for those with the least mobility and greater use of active travel and public transport from all parts of society. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant reduction in flights for the highest emitting groups with high level of modal shift to rail for domestic flights. Increase in international flying for those who currently don't fly (up to one flight a year). The implications of international flights on emissions pathways is not addressed in this report, which focuses on domestic transport, and these assumptions only inform Fig 3.1. • All groups with higher than average car use drop to average by 2030. No presumption of background levels of traffic growth. • All groups increase levels of active travel and public transport use. • ZEV and SAF uptake same as described in the balanced pathway.

The table describes the three scenarios considered in this analysis and the key assumptions on travel behaviours that underpin them.

2. UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE

DRIVING WILL GET CHEAPER AS FOSSIL-FUELLED CARS ARE REPLACED WITH ELECTRIC VEHICLES

In the Seventh Carbon Budget, the CCC provided its first ever assessment of the impacts of climate policies on households. This is an important innovation in communicating the benefits of climate action.

The CCC found that **the majority of households can expect to see their transport costs fall once they make the shift to electric vehicles** (figure 2.1).

However, the limits of this analysis are clear. A wider picture of the impact of policy choices, including who faces the negative consequences of increased traffic from cheaper driving, is needed. It is notable that **only non-car owners, including those at the lowest income level, are expected to see their transport costs go up by 2050.**

FIGURE 2.1: TRANSPORT COSTS FALL FOR ALL BUT CAR-FREE HOUSEHOLDS

Change in transport costs as a proportion of income under an indicative policy package 2025 to 2050, split by archetypes created by the CCC



Source: Author's analysis of [Climate Change Committee](#)

THERE IS A SIGNIFICANT GAP BETWEEN HIGH AND LOW EMITTERS IN THE UK TODAY

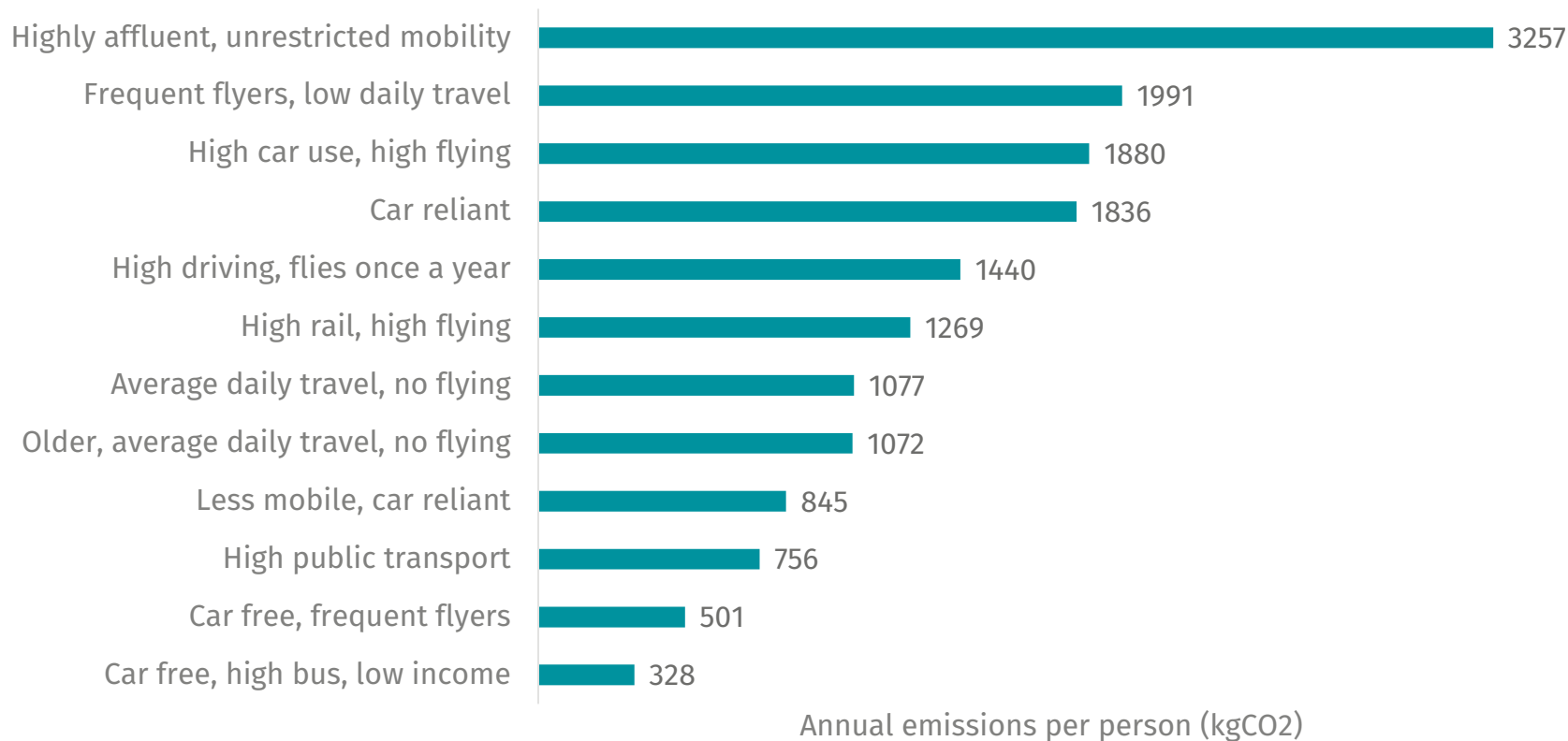
Figure 2.2 shows the current level of inequality in domestic transport emissions in the UK.

In 2024, people in our highest emitting group emitted 10 times more from domestic transport than our lowest emitting. These groups also represent our most and least affluent profiles.

This vast difference in emissions is driven by the largely unrestricted mobility of the wealthiest and highest emitting group: they travel six times further than our lowest income profile.

FIGURE 2.2: THE MOST AFFLUENT EMIT FAR MORE FROM DOMESTIC TRANSPORT THAN THOSE ON THE LOWEST INCOME

Domestic transport emissions per capita by transport profile in 2024



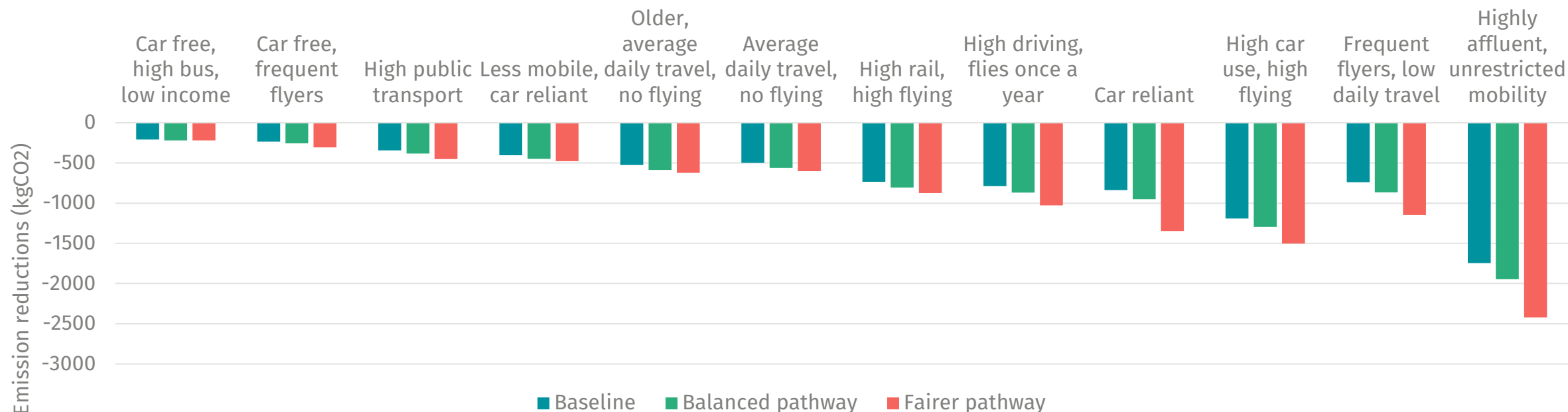
Source: Author's analysis

EVERYONE SEES THEIR DOMESTIC TRANSPORT EMISSIONS FALL BY 2035

Existing government policy asks the least of highest emitting groups compared to the other pathways as it relies solely on the voluntary move to electric vehicles. The balanced pathway's faster rollout of electric vehicles, and allowance for modal shift, sees the most affluent cut their emissions more rapidly. The fairer pathway puts the onus for emissions reductions on the highest emitters and those with the most resources to change their behaviours.

FIGURE 2.3: THE FAIRER PATHWAY ASKS THOSE WITH THE MOST RESOURCES TO MAKE STEEPER EMISSION REDUCTIONS

Domestic transport emission reductions per capita between 2024 and 2035, split by transport profile



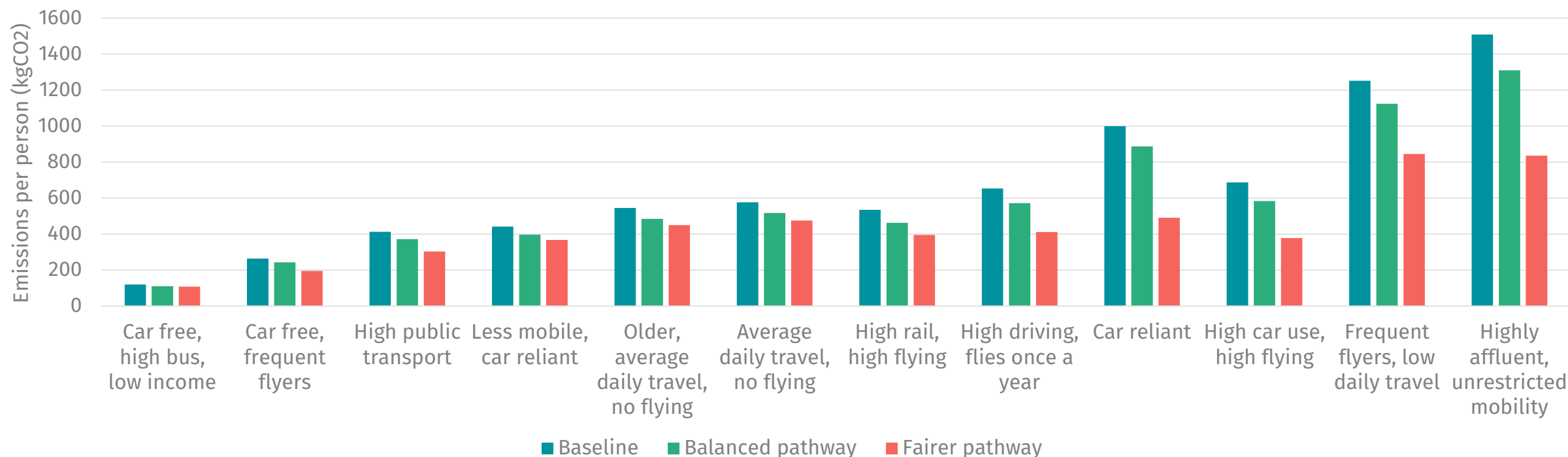
Source: Author's analysis. Profiles organised by lowest to highest emitting in 2024.

DESPITE THIS, THE MOST AFFLUENT REMAIN SIGNIFICANT EMITTERS IN 2035

Per capita emissions from all transport profiles are highest in 2035 under existing government policy. This is due to the reliance on electric vehicle uptake and this being slower than in the balanced pathway. **Targeting excess domestic flying and private car use will see the gap between highest and lowest emitting group fall faster.**

FIGURE 2.4: EVEN UNDER A FAIRER PATHWAY AN EMISSIONS GAP REMAINS BETWEEN THE MOST AND LEAST AFFLUENT

Domestic transport emission per capita in 2035, split by transport profile



Source: Author's analysis. Profiles organised by lowest to highest emitting in 2024.

THOSE ON THE LOWEST INCOMES ARE DOING THE MOST WORK IN REDUCING THEIR EMISSIONS

As shown across figures 2.2 and 2.4, the most affluent of our transport profiles are:

- by far the highest emitters in 2024
- remain the furthest from absolute zero emissions of all our profiles in 2035.

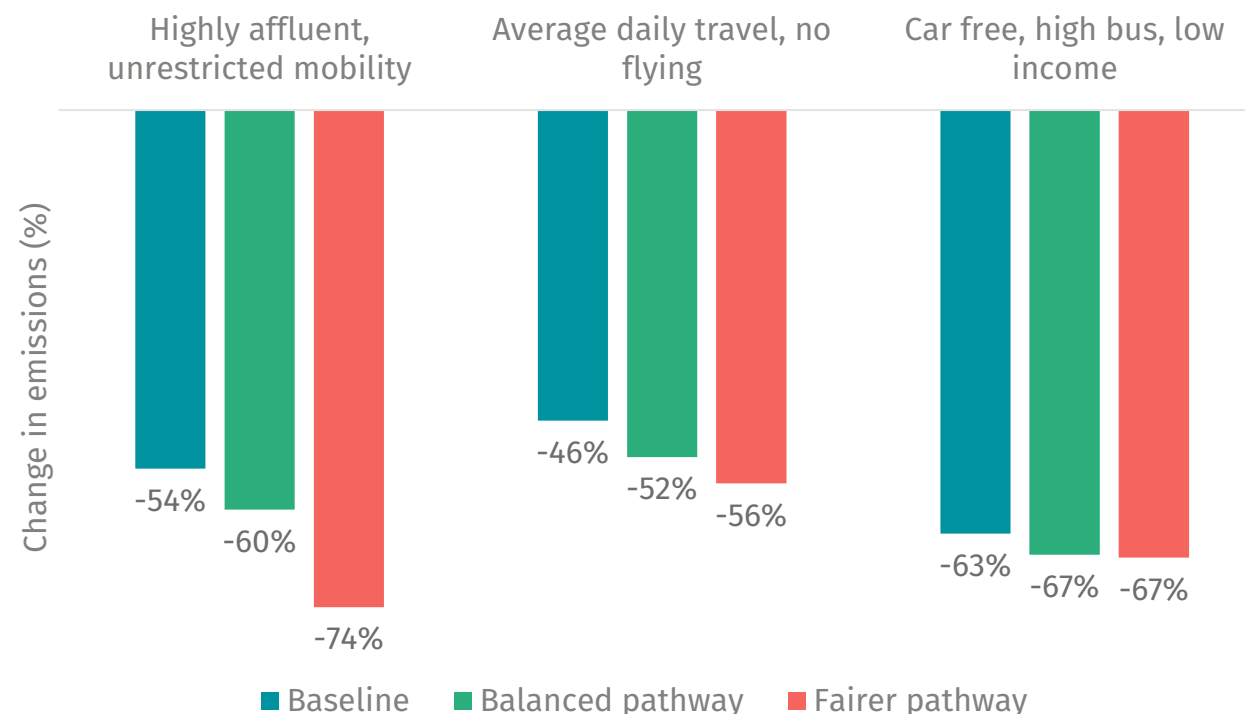
Another way of considering the ‘effort’ put in by different people in decarbonising how they get around is the proportion of the emissions they cut between 2024 and 2035 (figure 2.5).

By this measure, **under existing policy and in the balanced pathway those on the lowest income cut their domestic transport emissions at a faster rate than those on the highest income** (63 and 67 per cent compared to 54 and 60 per cent).

Only the fairer pathway sees the highest emitting and most affluent group cutting their emissions at a faster rate than those on the lowest income who already emit the least (74 per cent compared to 67 per cent).

FIGURE 2.5: ONLY THE FAIRER PATHWAY SEES THE MOST AFFLUENT GROUP CUT THEIR EMISSIONS AT A FASTER RATE THAN THOSE ON THE LOWEST INCOMES

Percentage difference in emissions from domestic travel, 2024 to 2035, for select transport profiles



Source: Author's analysis

INEQUALITY IN DOMESTIC TRANSPORT EMISSIONS MAY RISE UNDER EXISTING POLICY

Figure 2.6 describes the emissions inequality for domestic travel between the highest and lowest emitting of our transport profiles.

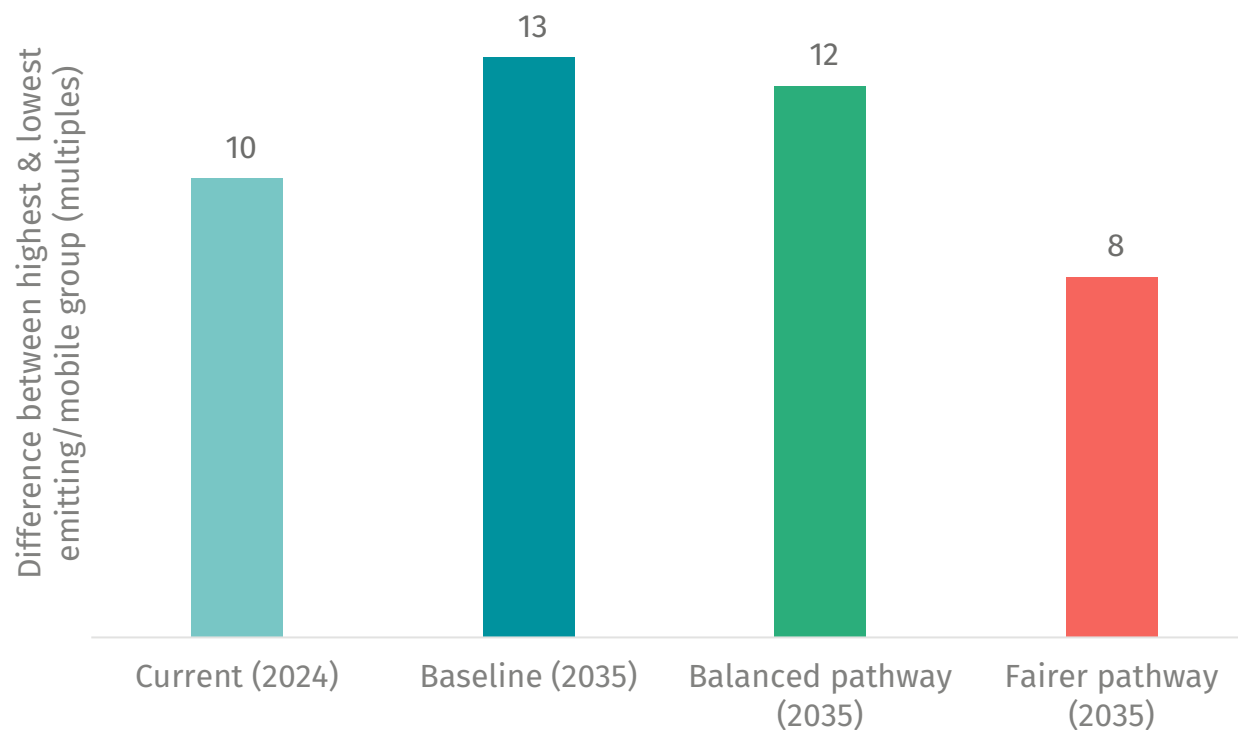
Under both existing policy and the balanced pathway, emissions inequality could rise by 2035, to 13 times greater under existing policy and 12 times greater following the balanced pathway.

A fairer pathway would see the emissions gap fall, with the highest polluting group emitting eight times more than the lowest (against a baseline of 10). The challenge in reducing this further reflects, at least in part, just how low the emissions from domestic transport for some people in the UK.

It should be noted that the scale of emissions inequality in 2024 increases significantly when accounting for international aviation, including return journeys. The highest polluting groups emits at least 20 times more than the lowest across all their travel.

FIGURE 2.6: THE DOMESTIC EMISSIONS GAP WILL BE GREATER IN 2035 THAN 2024 UNLESS EXPLICIT ACTION IS TAKEN TO ADDRESS IT

Difference in domestic transport emissions between highest and lowest emitting groups today and in 2035



Source: Author's analysis. Calculated as the highest estimated emissions per person divided by the lowest.

POLICY WILL SHAPE WHO IS TRAVELLING DIFFERENTLY IN 2035

Current UK government policy assumes that everyone will be travelling more in 2035. This increase in travel is built into current transport decarbonisation policy.

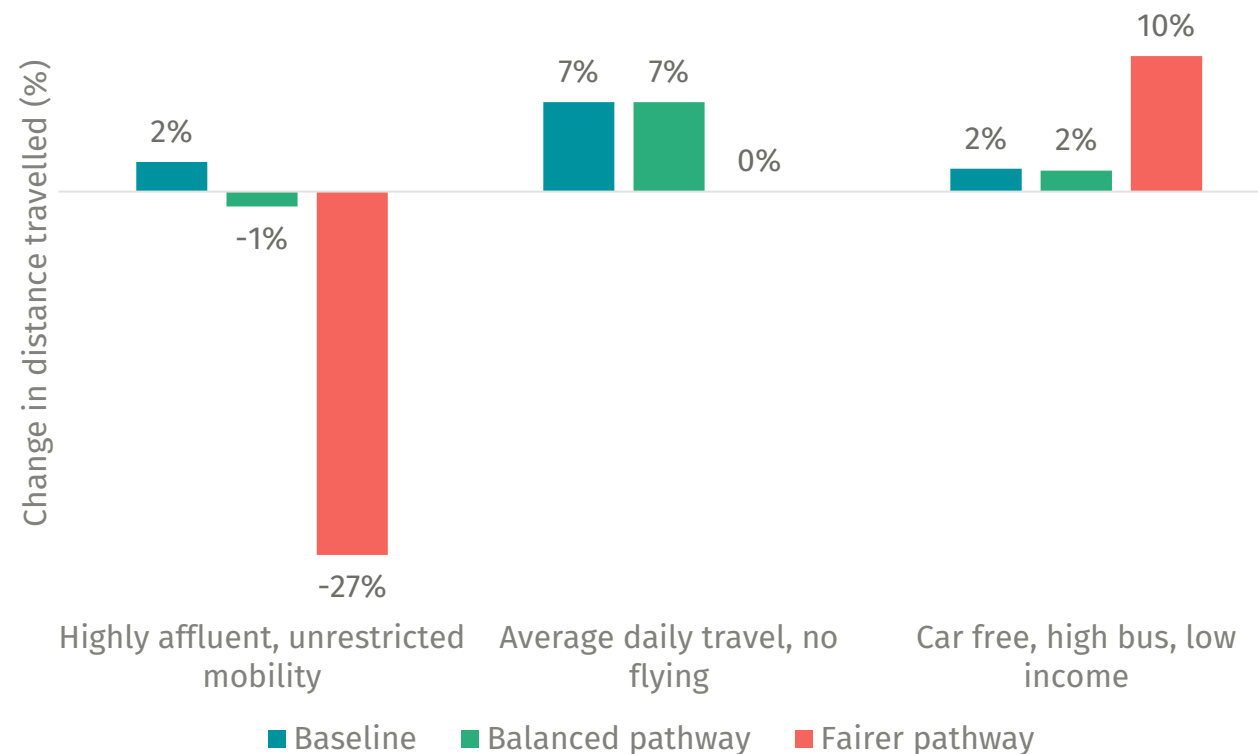
The balanced pathway sees some reduction in flying but otherwise follows government forecasts on increasing mobility.

The fairer pathway makes unique assumptions.

- More mobility options are provided to those on the lowest income seeing the distance they travel each year increase by 10 per cent.
- Average travellers change how they get around, shifting some journeys to public transport and active travel, but the overall distance travelled doesn't increase.
- Reductions in excess car use and flying by the highest emitters sees their distance travelled each year drop by 27 per cent, bringing it closer to average but they still travel further than all other groups.

FIGURE 2.7: A FAIRER PATHWAY WOULD SEE THE MOBILITY OF THOSE ON THE LOWEST INCOMES RISE BY 10 PER CENT BY 2035

Difference in distance travelled domestically per person per year, 2024 to 2035, for select transport profiles



Source: Author's analysis

A FAIRER PATHWAY REQUIRES A DECADE OF SIGNIFICANT GROWTH IN ACTIVE TRAVEL AND BUS USE

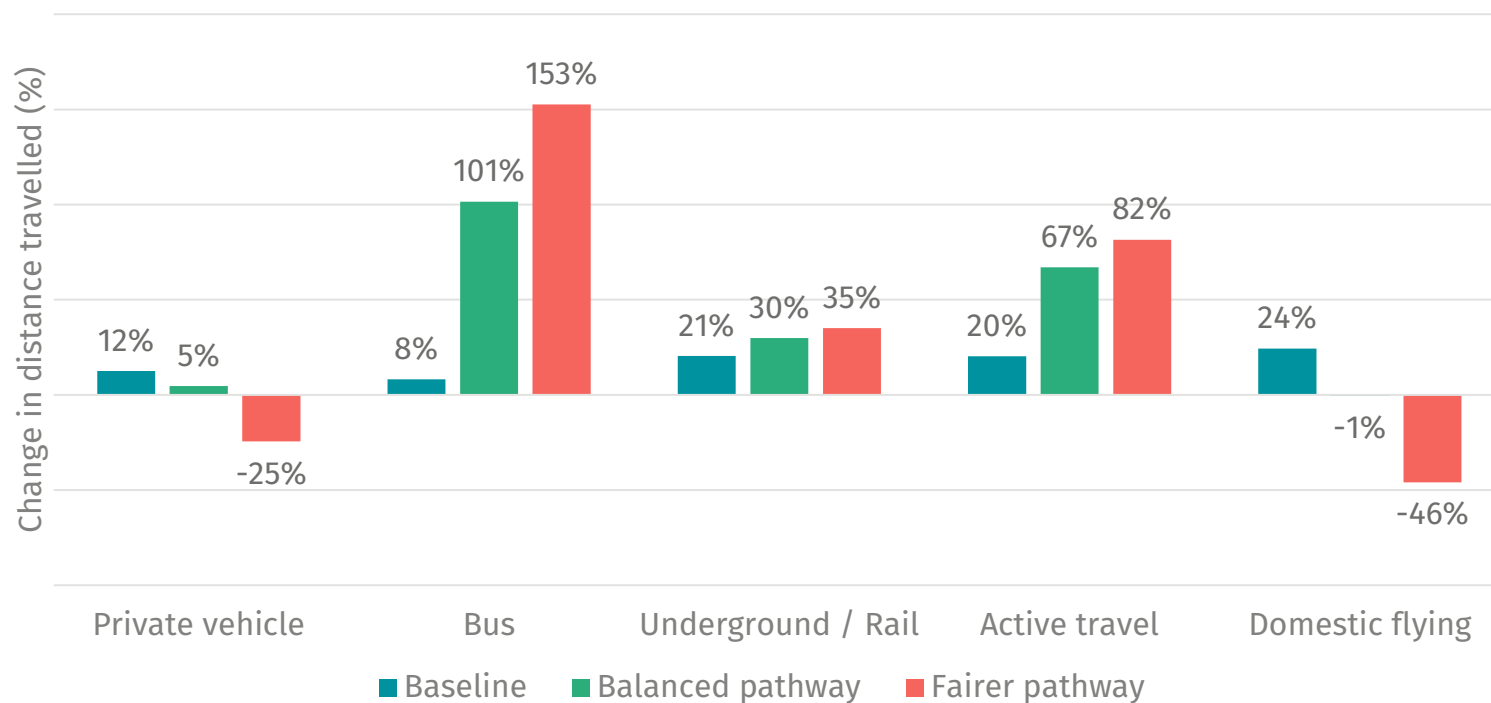
Figure 2.8 details the overall change in distance travelled by different modes between 2024 and 2035 across the three pathways.

The seemingly modest modal shift assumptions incorporated into the balanced pathway translate into significant increases in sustainable travel.

The fairer pathway uniquely sees a 25 per cent reduction in private vehicle use by 2035. This would be achieved by modal shift of 10 per cent (the highest imagined by the CCC) and demand reduction, including removing any background assumption on traffic growth. Domestic flying drops by 46 per cent, with much of this travel being moved to rail.

FIGURE 2.8: A FAIRER PATHWAY REQUIRES A COMBINATION OF DEMAND REDUCTION AND MORE TRAVEL BY SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT MODES

Change in domestic distance travelled by mode in the UK, 2024 to 2035



Source: Author's analysis. The CCC do not detail their mode shift assumptions so the balanced pathway figures should be considered highly indicative.

EQUITY-BASED POLICIES AVOID THE RISK OF EVER RISING TRAFFIC

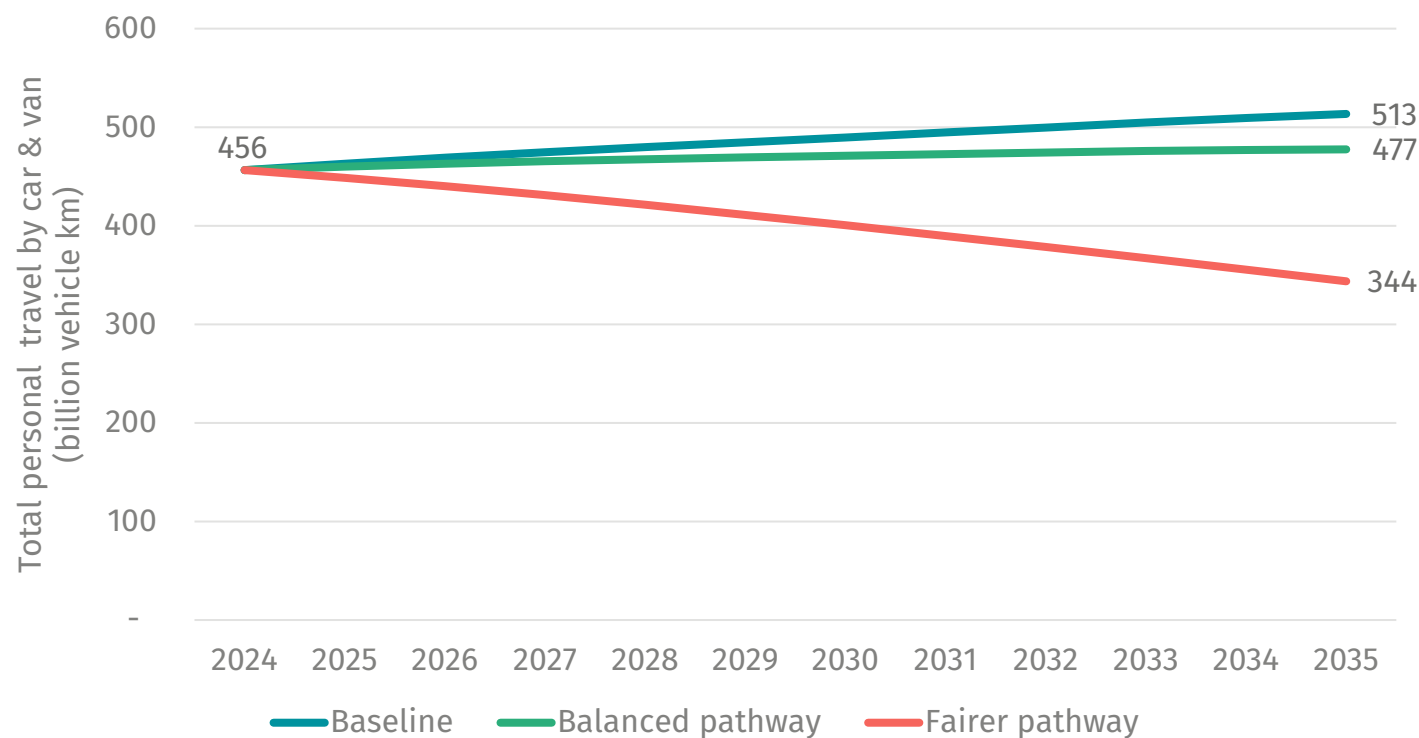
Despite its ambition on modal shift, the CCC's pathway doesn't anticipate a reduction in car use in coming years, in part due to anticipated increases in driving brought about by the lower cost of electric vehicles.

A fairer pathway would prioritise demand reduction measures that make it easier to access the things people need by means other than a private vehicle. This would be achieved through increasing the density of urban areas and a step-change in the access to public transport.

Our model assumes that these transformations allow planners to assume lower traffic levels in the future. This reflects changes already adopted in Welsh government appraisal, arguably better accounts for real life trends in travel than the DfT's core scenario and is in line with the relationship between economic growth and traffic levels seen in 21st century Britain.

FIGURE 2.9: TRAFFIC CONTINUES TO RISE UNDER ALL BUT THE FAIRER PATHWAY

Comparison of forecast traffic levels by scenarios, billion vehicle-kms travelled by car and for personal travel in vans, 2024-2035



Source: Author's analysis

3. EMISSIONS PATHWAYS

AFTER DECADES OF NO PROGRESS, EMISSIONS FROM TRANSPORT NOW HAVE TO FALL AT PACE

Figure 3.1 describes the historic transport emissions from people in the UK, including international aviation, and the forecasted path to 2050 across the three pathways.

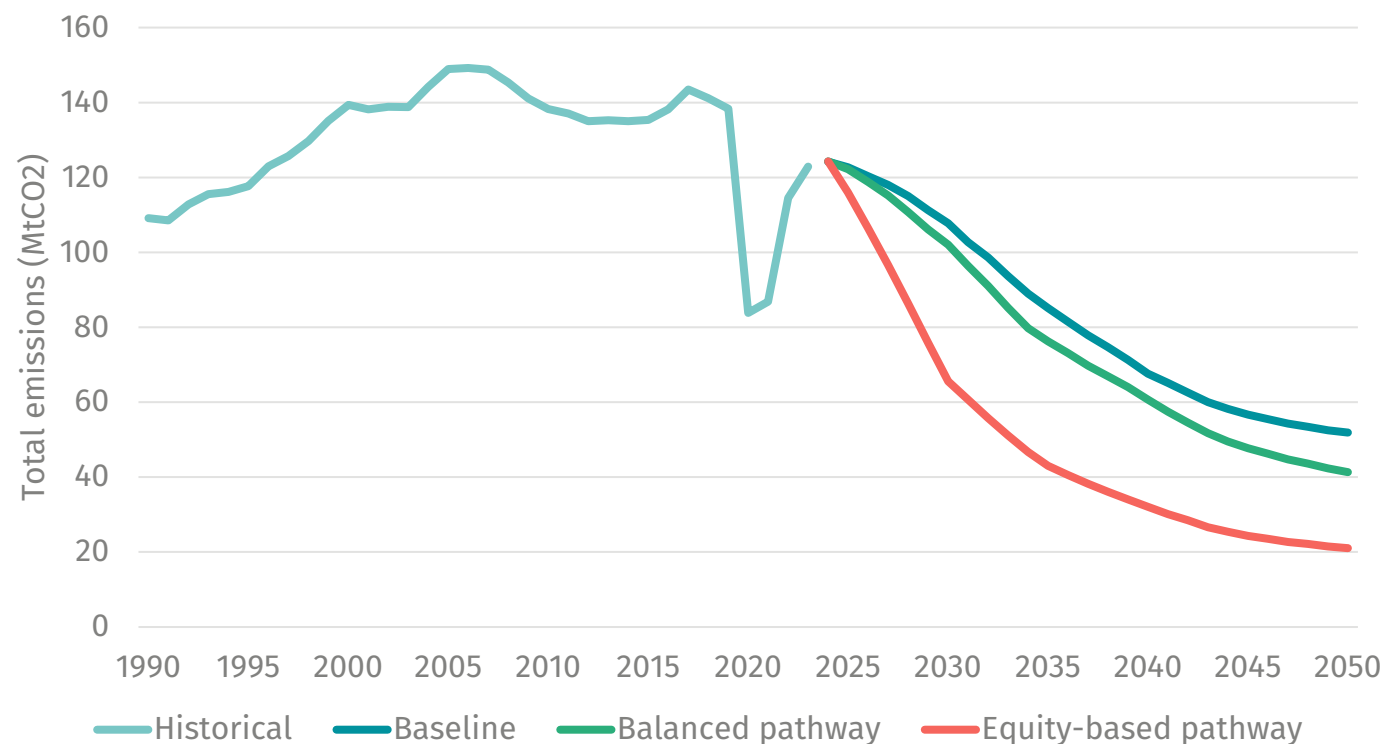
Emissions from transport remained flat for decades and should now have peaked due to the changes in behaviour brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic and electrification.

The three scenarios show very different trajectories for emissions from transport, with a significant emissions gap between the balanced pathway and current government policy.

The fairer pathway delivers a steeper drop in emissions up to 2035. This is due in large part to the focus on reducing emissions from those flying excessive amounts whilst boosting access to flights for those who currently don't fly.

FIGURE 3.1: PACE OF EMISSION REDUCTIONS VARIES ACROSS THE THREE SCENARIOS

UK domestic and international transport emissions, historic (1990-2023) and three scenarios (2024-2050)



Source: Author's analysis. Seventh Carbon Budget and [DESNZ](#). Accounting for non-CO2 impacts of flying (domestic and international) but not return flights from international destinations.

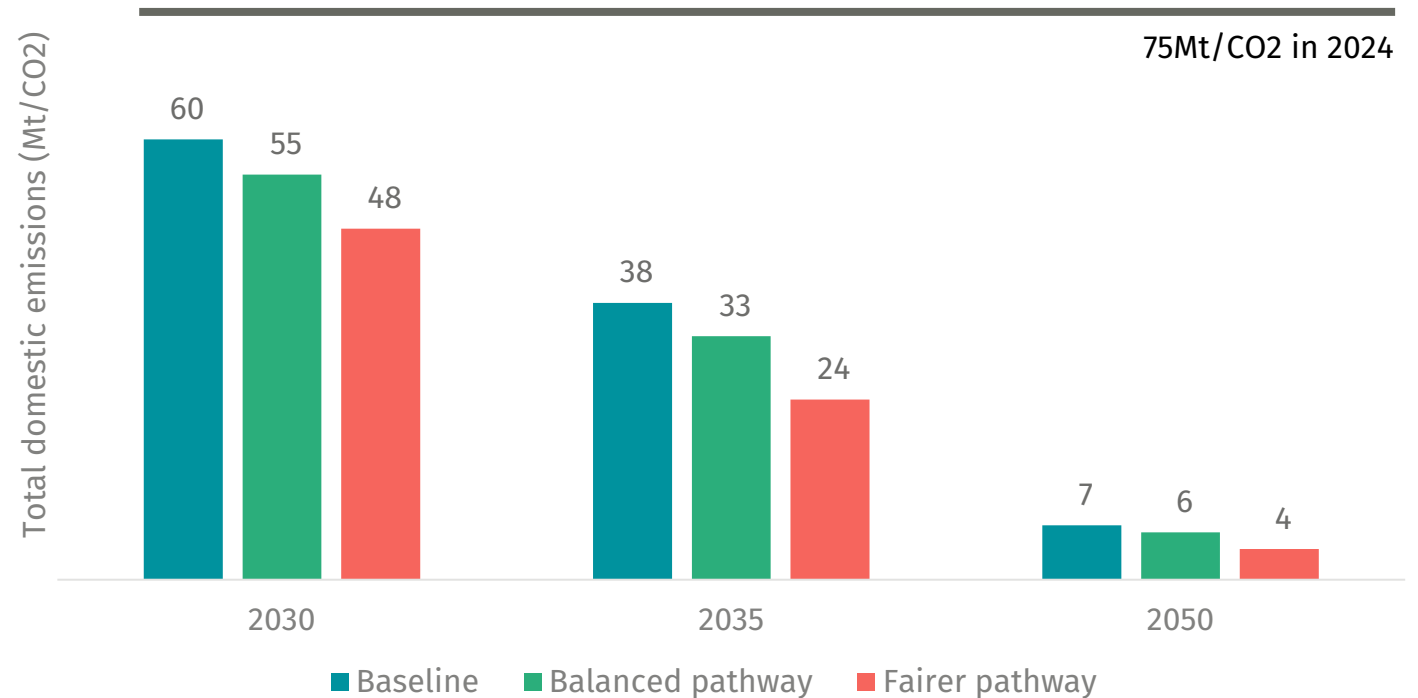
DOMESTIC TRANSPORT EMISSIONS MUST FALL QUICKLY THIS DECADE

The pace of reductions in emissions from domestic transport varies a great deal across the three scenarios between 2024 and 2035 (figure 3.2):

- **The balanced pathway requires emissions from domestic transport to fall by more than half** (56 per cent).
- **Current government policy is lagging behind this goal.** Existing policy is likely to achieve a 50 per cent reduction in emissions from domestic transport by 2035.
- **A fairer pathway exceeds the emissions reductions in the balanced pathway**, achieving a cut of two thirds (67 per cent).

FIGURE 3.2: FAIRER IS FASTER ON THE PATH TO REDUCING EMISSIONS FROM DOMESTIC TRANSPORT

Total domestic transport emissions in 2030, 2035 and 2050 across the three scenarios



Source: Author's analysis

4. POLICY FRAMEWORK

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following slide provides an overview of the policy framework that should be embedded in the government's approach to achieving fairer and faster emission reductions from domestic transport. The key policies required to deliver the step change in the UK's approach to reducing domestic transport emissions are:

- Establishing a sectoral emissions reductions target for transport** to ensure the sector is contributing its share of the government's economy-wide target of at least 81 per cent reductions by 2035 on 1990 levels. A 71 per cent reduction from domestic transport could be achieved following the fairer pathway compared to 55 per cent under existing policy.
- Set a modal shift target** that at least matches the Climate Change Committee's stretch target of a 10 per cent shift from cars to public transport and active travel by 2035 with a linked target to reduce levels of private vehicle traffic by 25 per cent.
- Produce a public engagement strategy for sustainable travel** that includes activities to educate, inform and combat misinformation, learning from the Republic of Ireland's approach. This should provide meaningful opportunities for people to shape the future of transport, starting with a UK-wide citizens' jury on the future of motoring taxation.
- Better account for the environmental and social costs of transport by raising fuel duty, increasing VED on oversized, high polluting SUVs and increasing taxes on private jets and domestic flights.** Funds raised from these changes should be earmarked for investment in providing sustainable and affordable transport alternatives.
- Place a moratorium on major road expansion projects and increases in airport capacity.** The Third Road Investment Strategy (RIS3) must prioritise renewal and resilience of existing assets and no airport expansion should go ahead until a capacity framework is in place that ensures it can be delivered in-line with the UK's climate commitments.

POLICY FRAMEWORK

GOAL

Accelerating the transition to a fairer, greener and healthier domestic transport system in the UK

PRIORITIES

Reduce the need to travel as far by providing more opportunities to access jobs, goods and services locally

Widen access to public transport and active travel options

Support the efficient use of more affordable and cleaner vehicles

Better account for the environmental and social costs of transport

ENABLER

A high quality, well-resourced public engagement strategy for sustainable travel that includes activities to educate, inform and combat misinformation as well as meaningful opportunities for people to shape decision making (eg through citizens' juries)

POLICY LEVERS

- Spatial planning in favour of higher density and transit-oriented development
- Public service redesign
- Increase digital access
- Prioritise transport investment in sustainable modes
- Local growth plans

- Minimum bus service standards
- Active travel infrastructure (including ban pavement parking)
- Road danger reduction (including 20mph)
- E-bike subsidies and cycle parking schemes
- Investing in community transport

- Reduce public EV charging costs and increase accessibility
- Strong ZEV mandate
- Regulations on car sizes
- Social leasing
- Shared mobility
- Circular economy for mobility

- Reform motoring taxation (VED and fuel duty)
- Road charging zones
- Parking charges
- Increase domestic aviation taxes (including excise duty and VAT on aviation fuel and private jet tax)
- Frequent flyer levy

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