

SP2026 Manifesto Analysis

Infrastructure

Lighthouse PR

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Purpose, scope and method

Scope

This analysis examines what the six main parties contesting the 2026 Scottish Parliament election say about infrastructure. It covers trunk roads and dualling, ferries and ports, rail, buses, active travel, digital infrastructure, bridges and capital delivery including borrowing and delivery bodies.

Purpose

Rather than look at individual manifestos or the differences between them, I have taken what might be an unconventional approach and looked at commonalities: **where might the parties set aside ideological and tribal politics to work together in the interests of Scotland?**

After all, even if the SNP get a majority it may be a fragile one. The probability remains that throughout or at some point in the parliament, two or more parties will have to work together. That is exactly how the parliament was intended to work. It does on many occasions, but not nearly enough.

There are also a skint public sector and a stagnant economy. We aren't going to solve those issues without more collegiate working.

Method - please read these important notes

I have not done this as paid or even unpaid work for any client. It has been for my own interest and as a contribution to reframing the conversation between the worlds of politics, business and society.

It would not have been humanly possible - for your author at least - to read, digest and cross-reference all of the manifesto content and produce a timely report. Therefore I have used a sophisticated AI tool to help before doing a light-touch review and edit of the most important points. **Both AI and human may have made mistakes. Please do not rely on it as definitive.**

Talking points represent my view and are designed to support further discussion and enquiry.

All page references cite the published PDF page number. Page references are not definitive of a party's whole position - they are signposts to one or more places where policy points are mentioned, not a comprehensive index.

Parties covered: Scottish Conservatives, Scottish Labour, SNP, Scottish Liberal Democrats, Scottish Greens and Reform UK Scotland. They are listed in no particular order.

Links to manifestos

- [Scottish Conservatives manifesto \(PDF\)](#)
- [Scottish Labour manifesto \(PDF\)](#)
- [SNP manifesto \(PDF\)](#)
- [Scottish Liberal Democrats manifesto \(PDF\)](#)
- [Reform UK Scotland manifesto \(PDF\)](#)
- [Scottish Greens manifesto \(PDF\)](#)

Cross-party consensus

Infrastructure is the theme that every party uses to make the case for delivery competence. All six accept the current model is not working.

Broad agreement (four or more parties)

- **A9 dualling must complete.** All six manifestos reference the A9 either by name or by delivery record. Labour and the SNP target completion by 2035. The Lib Dems would speed up the programme. The Conservatives would legislate to guarantee it. Reform bundles it into a 10-year trunk road programme. Only the Greens do not commit to dualling, preferring climate resilience and rail freight. (Conservatives p.34, 94; Labour p.53; SNP p.73; Lib Dems p.65; Reform p.12; Greens p.16)
- **The ferries programme has been badly mismanaged.** All parties but one – naturally - treat ferries as a delivery failure. The remedies differ from private investment (Conservatives) to statutory replacement duties (Lib Dems), 10-year renewal programme (Reform), structural reform (SNP), and exploration of fixed links (Greens). Labour criticises the ‘fiasco’ but does not offer a structural reform headline. (Conservatives p.37; Lib Dems p.62-63; Reform p.12; SNP p.66; Greens p.15; Labour p.54)
- **ScotRail should stay in public hands.** No party proposes re-privatisation. The Greens would go further and bring Network Rail into Scottish public ownership. (across manifestos)
- **Bus services need public control.** Labour, Lib Dems and Greens explicitly back franchising or a Transport for London-style model. The SNP would use franchising in underserved areas. Reform backs bus corridors. The Conservatives would create a Small Town and Rural Bus Services Fund. Five routes to the same destination. (Labour p.51, 53-54, 95; Lib Dems p.62, 66; Greens p.13; SNP p.67; Reform p.12; Conservatives p.37)
- **The delivery model is broken.** SNP creates a Major Projects Office. Conservatives merge Transport Scotland, CMAL, CalMac and others into Growth Scotland. Labour makes SNIB a key institutional investor and reforms delivery. Lib Dems revise the infrastructure pipeline. Reform fast-tracks consenting around 10 business clusters. Greens require environmental rights checks on all plans. Every party changes the machine. (SNP p.19, 39; Conservatives p.25, 37; Labour p.82, 95; Lib Dems p.15; Reform p.14; Greens p.40)

Narrower agreement (two to three parties)

- **Free bus travel.** Greens would extend to every resident. SNP retains for under-22s and over-60s. Conservatives and Labour would withdraw passes for specified offences. Lib Dems revamp but do not extend. Reform is silent. (Greens p.13, 83; SNP p.5, 7, 19, 40; Conservatives p.37-39; Labour p.61)

- **Shetland fixed links.** Lib Dems commit to fund tunnels. Greens propose feasibility work across the sounds of Mull, Harris and Shetland. SNP explores Shetland bridges, tunnels and causeways. Three parties see a project; none publishes a financing vehicle. (Lib Dems p.10, 12; Greens p.15; SNP p.66-67)
- **Borders Railway extension.** Conservatives back extension and East Coast reopening. Lib Dems back Hawick and Carlisle. SNP explores Carlisle route. No party commits a capital envelope or a funded timetable. (Conservatives p.38; Lib Dems p.66; SNP p.67)

Talking points

Trunk roads - scope and funding

The Conservatives would pursue seven trunk road dualling programmes: A1, A75, A77, A83, A9, A90, A96. That is the most ambitious single roads commitment of the six manifestos. The cumulative capital cost is not published. What falls out of the existing capital programme to make room is not stated.

The SNP commits to A9 completion by 2035 and “key sections” of the A96, A75 and A77. Labour would commission a business case for the A96. The Lib Dems would set an A96 timetable within 100 days of the Parliament convening, which is the most time-bound commitment of the three. The Greens would not support wide dualling and would upgrade for climate resilience and shift freight to rail. Reform would run a 10-year trunk road programme without naming routes.

Ferries and Ferguson Marine

The ferries issue is delivery-failure theatre. The Conservatives’ private-investment route implies some routes become commercial; which ones is not set out. The Lib Dems’ Ferries Bill with a 30-year statutory replacement strategy, renewed every five years, is the most structural intervention. Reform’s 10-year rolling ferry renewal programme is the most time-bound. The SNP signals structural reform of west coast ferries without naming the structure. The Greens would explore bridges and tunnels to island groups - the most capital-intensive long-term solution.

Rail

Labour’s Glasgow airport rail link commitment is the only named capital rail project of the six manifestos with a specific station in view. The Greens pledge full electrification of Scotland’s rail network and a Scottish Rail Freight Operator. The Lib Dems commit to electrification as standard. The SNP commits to Winchburgh station and explores several other routes. Reform runs a 10-year rail modernisation programme without naming projects. The Conservatives prioritise Borders Railway extension and East Coast rail reopening.

To my personal disappointment, there is no place for resurrecting the long-lost direct train link between Perth and Edinburgh. It’s a national shame that it takes longer now to travel between the heart of Scotland and the capital by rail than it did for the Victorians.

Buses

Five of the six parties support a franchising or equivalent model. Implementing franchising in Manchester took three years and a dedicated transport authority budget. (Scotland does of course have the successful Lothian Buses model.) The manifestos do not publish the funding increase to local authorities that franchising implementation would need.

On free travel, the SNP's under-22 and over-60 offer is retained. The Greens would extend to all residents - the largest service extension on offer. The Conservatives and Labour would withdraw passes for specified offences.

Bridges, active travel and rural infrastructure

The Conservatives' Scottish National Bridge Restoration Fund is new and specific in intention; its scale is not published. The Greens would allocate at least 10% of the national transport budget to active travel, which is a significant reallocation. Reform's rural broadband expansion needs a roll-out plan beyond Reaching 100% commitments.

Capital, borrowing and delivery bodies

The SNP's £10bn capital investment commitment over the Parliament averages £2bn a year. That is within current Scottish Government capital spending norms. The new Major Projects Office is the delivery-reform lever, but whether it is a new body, a unit within Scottish Government, or a rebrand is not specified in the manifesto.

The Conservatives' Growth Scotland consolidation merges Transport Scotland, Scottish Canals, CMAL, CalMac and enterprise bodies. That is a major bureaucratic change with transition costs and governance questions that the manifesto does not address. Labour's designation of the Scottish National Investment Bank as a key institutional investor is a governance move; what additional capital comes with it is not set out. Reform warns that an independent Scotland would face higher borrowing costs without UK Treasury backing - a point that other unionist parties imply rather than state. Greens would introduce an infrastructure levy on large property developers; rate and yield are not specified.

What is missing from most manifestos

Digital infrastructure beyond rural broadband is thin. Airports strategy - Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen - is barely referenced outside aviation tax. Freight networks on road and rail only get a modal-shift target from the Greens. Water and wastewater capital need is not discussed. Electricity grid reinforcement sits in the energy chapter in most manifestos, not the infrastructure chapter. Construction workforce capacity is only linked to workforce planning by Labour and the Greens. Cost-overrun governance appears only in Labour and Lib Dem text.

At a glance

The table below summarises each party's headline approach to infrastructure.

Theme	Conservatives	Labour	SNP	Lib Dems	Reform	Greens
Trunk roads	Legislate dualling of seven routes (A1, A75, A77, A83, A9, A90, A96)	A9 by 2035; £350m pothole fund; A96 business case	A9 by 2035; key sections of A96, A75, A77	A9 and A96; A96 timetable within 100 days; Shetland tunnels	10-year trunk road upgrade plan	No wide dualling; climate resilience; rail freight shift
Ferries	Private investment; consult CalMac; end taxpayer subsidy	Criticise fiasco; no headline structural reform	Structural reform of west coast ferries; port investment	Ferries Bill with 30-year replacement strategy	10-year rolling ferry renewal programme	Explore bridges, tunnels, causeways; Rosyth to Europe
Rail	Borders extension; East Coast reopening	Glasgow airport rail link; Aberdeen-Dundee intercity	Winchburgh station; explore Peterhead/Fraserburgh; Borders to Carlisle	Borders to Hawick/Carlisle; automatic compensation; electrification	10-year rail modernisation; passenger and freight	Full electrification; Scottish Rail Freight Operator; devolve Network Rail
Buses	Small Town and Rural Bus Fund; strip passes for offences	Fast-track franchising; strip passes for antisocial behaviour	Retain £2 cap; free under-22/over-60; franchising where underserved	TfL-like model; statutory community powers; tap-and-go	Bus corridors; charge utilities for road space	Free bus travel for all residents; Scottish Bus Bonds
Delivery body	Growth Scotland merger (Transport Scotland, CMAL, CalMac)	SNIB as key institutional investor; delivery reform	Major Projects Office	Revise infrastructure pipeline; SNIB SME arm	Fast-track planning regime around 10 business clusters	Rural First; environmental rights checks on plans
Capital and funding	Reallocate within existing envelope	Realistic funding plans; value-for-money checks	£10bn capital investment	Fund capital investment in key infrastructure	Warn on independence borrowing costs	Infrastructure levy on large developers

Theme	Conservatives	Labour	SNP	Lib Dems	Reform	Greens
Active travel and rural	National Bridge Restoration Fund	Bus franchising; broadband improvements	Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund	Shetland tunnels; Dangerous Roads Programme	Rural broadband expansion	At least 10% active travel budget; rural £2 cap
Key differentiator	Seven trunk roads legislated; Growth Scotland merger	£350m potholes; Glasgow airport rail link; SNIB reform	£10bn capital envelope; Major Projects Office	Statutory ferries duty; Shetland tunnels funded	Four 10-year rolling programmes	Universal free bus travel; infrastructure levy

Scottish Conservatives

General thrust

The Conservatives frame infrastructure as evidence of SNP delivery failure. Dualling in law, a new oversight body and rural fair share dominate, alongside a clear line against net zero transport restrictions such as low emission zones and the 20mph default. (p.33-39, 94)

Key proposals

- **Legislate dualling:** A1, A75, A77, A83, A9, A90 and A96. (p.34-35, 94)
- **A9 priority:** full completion between Perth and Inverness. (p.34)
- **Bridge fund:** Scottish National Bridge Restoration Fund. (p.34)
- **Rural buses:** Small Town and Rural Bus Services Fund; protect routes. (p.37)
- **Borders Railway:** extension and East Coast reopening. (p.38)
- **Peak rail fares:** maintain scrapped peak fares. (p.38)
- **Bus passes:** remove from asylum seekers and those committing bus-related crimes. (p.37-39)
- **Growth Scotland:** merger of Transport Scotland, Scottish Canals, CMAL, CalMac and enterprise bodies. (p.25, 37)
- **Ferguson Marine:** support to attract future ferry work; welcome private investment to end taxpayer subsidy. (p.37)
- **Net zero road push-back:** abolish car usage reduction target; respect driver mode choice; end 20mph default. (p.35-36)
- **Fines on disruption:** target increases on roadwork disruption. (p.33-34)
- **Accessibility:** synchronise bus and train timetables; work with disability charities. (p.38)

How they propose to fund it

Legislating seven dualling programmes creates a statutory capital liability with no identified funding envelope. Growth Scotland consolidates distinct organisations, which carries transition costs and governance questions. Private investment in ferry routes needs a defined route economics exercise. The Bridge Restoration Fund has no envelope. Peak rail fare scrap continues a policy the SNP began; the fiscal note is not new money.

Scottish Labour

General thrust

Labour positions infrastructure as the frame for industrial strategy delivery. £350m for potholes, A9 completion, Glasgow airport rail link, fast intercity rail, bus franchising and SNIB reform are the anchor commitments. Delivery reform to end spiralling costs runs through the whole offer. (p.27-33, 51-54, 82, 87-95)

Key proposals

- **£350m pothole fund:** repair roads; fix up to five million potholes. (p.4, 51, 95)
- **A9 dualling:** complete by 2035; commission A96 business case. (p.53)
- **Glasgow airport rail link:** delivered as a national priority. (p.4, 87)
- **Intercity rail corridor:** Aberdeen, Dundee and central belt. (p.27, 30)
- **Bus franchising:** fast-tracked to bring services back under local control. (p.51, 53-54, 95)
- **National Transport Connections Plan:** identifies priority projects. (p.31, 54)
- **Delivery reform:** end spiralling costs and delays; realistic funding plans; value-for-money checks. (p.82)
- **SNIB as institutional investor.** (p.95)
- **Zonal planning:** accelerate infrastructure approvals. (p.31)
- **Freight modal shift:** road to rail; expand intercity. (p.30, 32)
- **Rail fares:** no return to peak fares; continued electrification. (p.54)
- **Bus pass withdrawal:** for those committing antisocial behaviour. (p.61)
- **Infrastructure pipeline review:** back local projects in every region. (p.31)

How they propose to fund it

The £350m pothole fund is a headline number without phasing - capital or resource, one-off or multi-year. Glasgow airport rail link has been deferred twice since 2009; the working cost and opening date are not in the manifesto. SNIB designation as institutional investor needs a mandate change and additional capital, neither of which is quantified. Bus franchising implementation needs a local authority uplift that is not set out. Delivery reform is described in principle; the change to Procurement Journey, Capital Investment Group and approval gates is not named.

SNP

General thrust

The SNP pitches infrastructure delivery continuity - record rail station openings, peak fares abolished, free bus travel for the young and old, £2 fare cap - alongside a new Major Projects Office and at least £10bn in capital investment. On roads, the 2035 A9 commitment is retained; on ferries, a structural reform is signalled. (p.5-7, 17, 19, 39-40, 66-67, 73-74)

Key proposals

- **£10bn capital:** minimum investment over the Parliament. (p.17)
- **Major Projects Office:** expand government capability to deliver capital projects. (p.19, 39)
- **A9 by 2035:** complete dualling Perth-Inverness. (p.73)
- **A96, A75, A77:** drive forward key sections. (p.21, 73-74)
- **Free bus travel retained:** under-22s and over-60s; £2 fare cap. (p.5, 7, 19, 40)
- **Peak rail fares:** no re-introduction on ScotRail. (p.67)

- **Rail projects:** Winchburgh station; explore Peterhead and Fraserburgh rail; explore Borders Railway to Carlisle. (p.67)
- **West coast ferries:** structural reform to improve accountability, transparency and efficiency. (p.66)
- **Shetland links:** explore bridges, tunnels and causeways. (p.66-67)
- **Bus franchising:** where public transport is underserved. (p.67)
- **Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund maintained.** (p.43)
- **EV chargers:** continued installation. (p.66)
- **Active travel:** walking and cycling routes including capital railway line reuse. (p.66)

How they propose to fund it

£10bn over the Parliament averages £2bn a year. That is within the existing Scottish capital programme baseline; it is not a step change. The Major Projects Office's form - body, unit or rebrand - is not specified and neither is its budget. A9 completion by 2035 needs forward-funded spend in 2026-27 and 2027-28 that the manifesto does not break out. Structural ferry reform has no legal form. Shetland links "exploration" has no feasibility funding commitment.

Scottish Liberal Democrats

General thrust

Lib Dems treat ferries and potholes as emblematic of SNP failure, make Shetland tunnels a totemic commitment, and pitch a Transport for London-style model for bus control plus a Dangerous Roads Programme and a tap-and-go payment system. A Ferries Bill with statutory replacement duties is the centrepiece. (p.10-12, 62-68)

Key proposals

- **Ferries Bill:** end the fiasco; 30-year ferry and port replacement strategy renewed every five years. (p.10, 62-63)
- **Statutory replacement duties:** for vessels and port infrastructure. (p.63)
- **Compensation expansion:** beyond selected islands affected by the ferries fiasco. (p.63)
- **A9 dualling:** speed up; safer junctions. (p.65)
- **A96 dualling:** set timetable within the first 100 days of Parliament. (p.65)
- **Shetland tunnels:** funded. (p.10, 12)
- **Dangerous Roads Programme:** data-driven. (p.62, 65)
- **Bridges:** upgrade to acceptable condition. (p.65)
- **Potholes:** fair funding guarantee for local authorities. (p.65)
- **TfL-style bus model:** community control; stronger regional transport partnerships. (p.62, 66)
- **Demand-responsive transport:** expanded. (p.66)
- **ScotRail redesign:** commuter-friendly; late-night services; automatic compensation for delays. (p.10, 63, 66)
- **Rail electrification as standard.** (p.66)
- **Borders Railway:** extension to Hawick and Carlisle. (p.66)
- **Tap-and-go:** nationwide, across all modes, bank card with daily caps. (p.63, 67)
- **Pipeline revision:** infrastructure investment pipeline reflects Lib Dem priorities. (p.15)
- **SNIB SME arm.** (p.23)

How they propose to fund it

A 30-year statutory replacement strategy needs a duty-holder - Ministers, Transport Scotland or CMAL. Shetland tunnels' published cost runs into multiple hundred million pounds; the financing vehicle is not named. The A96 timetable within 100 days needs the engineering and fiscal plan to exist at entry. The TfL model carries implementation costs for regional partnerships that are not published. Tap-and-go across all modes is a platform build with an ownership question and integration cost.

Reform UK Scotland

General thrust

Reform presents infrastructure as deteriorated through SNP years, and pitches four rolling programmes - roads, ferries, rail and buses - plus fast-track planning around 10 business clusters. The narrative links capacity to economic sectors and makes independence a liability for borrowing cost. (p.3-5, 10-12, 14)

Key proposals

- **Trunk road upgrade:** 10-year plan. (p.12)
- **Ferry renewal:** 10-year rolling programme; vehicles charged on ferries to subsidise islander travel. (p.12)
- **Rail modernisation:** 10-year passenger and freight programme. (p.12)
- **Bus corridors:** major cities. (p.12)
- **Rural broadband expansion.** (p.13)
- **Fast-track planning:** regime around 10 business clusters. (p.14)
- **Road disruption fines:** charge utility companies for road space during busy times. (p.12)
- **LBTT phase-out; business rates reform:** revenue-neutral; relief for small businesses. (p.6-7)
- **Workforce plans:** linked to 10 priority sectors and apprenticeships. (p.8, 10)
- **Independence borrowing cost warning.** (p.5)

How they propose to fund it

Four 10-year programmes need combined capital. The manifesto does not publish a combined figure. Vehicle charges on ferries to subsidise islanders transfers cost from public purse to motorists. The 10 business clusters are not named. Rural broadband expansion needs a roll-out plan beyond Reaching 100% commitments. Road disruption fines are a revenue-generation mechanism; yield is not quantified. The independence warning is argumentation rather than costed policy.

Scottish Greens

General thrust

Greens use infrastructure as an environmental and equality lever - free bus travel for all, Scottish Bus Bonds, full rail electrification, rail reopening, active travel share of 10%, infrastructure levy on big developers and bridges/tunnels to islands. Rural First and environmental rights checks run through all plans. (p.12-18, 21-22, 40, 82-83)

Key proposals

- **Free bus travel for all residents:** £2 fare cap in transition. (p.3, 13, 83)
- **Scottish Bus Bonds:** local authority investment vehicle. (p.13)
- **Local bus control:** more buses back under local control; simplify franchising rules. (p.13)

- **First class rail abolished:** on ScotRail; national Scottish Rail Card; expanded rail and sail ticketing. (p.13)
- **Rail investment:** new stations, routes, accessibility on expanded publicly owned network. (p.15)
- **Route reopening:** Aberdeen, Peterhead and Fraserburgh; upgrade overcrowded lines. (p.15)
- **Scottish Rail Freight Operator:** nationalised; government to purchase its own trains. (p.15)
- **Network Rail devolution:** demanded from Westminster. (p.15)
- **Full rail electrification.** (p.16)
- **Freight modal shift:** road to rail; reduce HGVs on A9 and similar. (p.16)
- **Climate resilience:** upgrade trunk roads and rail vulnerable to climate. (p.16)
- **Roads taxation devolution:** press for it. (p.16)
- **Fixed links:** explore bridges, tunnels and causeways to Mull, Harris, Shetland. (p.15)
- **Rosyth-Europe ferry:** reopen. (p.15)
- **Active travel budget:** at least 10% of national transport budget. (p.18)
- **Rural 40mph limits:** extend on roads popular with walkers and cyclists. (p.18)
- **Infrastructure levy:** on large property developers. (p.22)
- **Rural First:** approach to infrastructure investment. (p.83)
- **Environmental rights checks:** on all planning and infrastructure decisions. (p.40)

How they propose to fund it

Universal free bus travel is the largest single service extension; the annual full roll-out cost is not specified. Scottish Bus Bonds need a security, issuer and interest rate - none published. Full rail electrification has a substantial outstanding mileage; capital cost is not quoted. The Scottish Rail Freight Operator needs an asset base and service pattern. Network Rail devolution requires UK Government consent. The infrastructure levy rate, yield and hypothecation are not published.