

CAVENDISH

# Scottish National Party.

2026 Manifesto Analysis



# Why this election matters.

**The Scottish Parliament election on 7 May is shaping up as a contest with starkly different framings depending on which party wins. The SNP's manifesto is built around a dual pitch: competence in government and constitutional change through independence.**

Unlike Labour (struggling with messaging) or the Greens (explicitly positioning for opposition), the SNP is the incumbent Government claiming a delivery record and signalling that a second SNP vote is a renewed mandate for an independence referendum. This dual strategy – first vote for NHS and cost-of-living support, second vote for independence – is central to understanding the SNP's electoral positioning.

The SNP has governed since 2007 and held office throughout the devolution period. John Swinney became First Minister two years ago and has repositioned the party around "delivery" and "competence" – fixing NHS waiting times, improving school standards, tackling cost-of-living crisis. This is a calculated reset from the independence-focused positioning of previous years.

Simultaneously, the SNP is explicit that a second SNP vote is a mandate for an independence referendum. This dual positioning – competence in devolved powers + constitutional ambition – creates a tension that runs through the manifesto. It allows the SNP to claim credit for public service improvements whilst arguing that independence is necessary to unlock Scotland's full potential.

Electurally, the SNP benefits from being the incumbent at a time of voter apathy and disengagement. Polling suggests SNP majority is likely (Electoral Calculus: 67 seats; YouGov MRP: SNP majority in 89% of simulations). The SNP's position as the "known quantity" in a low-engagement election is tactically powerful.

The key consideration is this: the SNP will almost certainly remain the governing party. The question is whether they govern with an outright majority (enabling an independence referendum) or fall short (creating coalition or confidence-and-supply dynamics). Current polling suggests a majority is possible, but unexpected shifts (low turnout, tactical voting, late swings) could change this. Either way, SNP policy and framing will dominate.

# What the SNP is proposing:

## The manifesto in brief

The SNP's manifesto is built around three pillars: investment and delivery on devolved powers (health, education, support for families), economic growth and jobs, and independence as the necessary condition for Scotland to fully control its future.

The first pillar is framed as "On Scotland's Side" – protecting and improving public services that the SNP claims it has already begun to transform. The manifesto opens with a delivery record: NHS improvements (waiting times down for nine months, more operations), employment low, economic growth higher than rest of UK, child poverty falling. These claims establish the SNP as a government that works.

The second pillar is economic: more jobs, supporting business, expanding childcare, lowering costs. The SNP explicitly positions itself against Westminster austerity and Brexit damage, arguing that Scotland's economy is outperforming despite Westminster constraints.

The third pillar is constitutional: independence as the route to controlling Scotland's energy wealth, rejoining the EU, setting own immigration policy, and making decisions that benefit Scotland rather than Westminster. This is framed as pragmatic self-interest – Scotland's energy wealth should benefit Scots; Scotland's decisions should be made by Scots.

The manifesto commits to a 50-point programme covering health, cost of living, childcare, energy, housing, fair work, climate, justice. Within this are some headline-catching commitments:

### Cost of living and public services

- Expanded childcare from 9 months to end of primary school, 52 weeks a year
- £2 bus fare cap across Scotland nationwide
- Food price ceilings on essential items (bread, milk, eggs, etc.) at large supermarkets
- £40 Child Payment for babies under one
- Winter heating payments for pensioners and families with disabled children

### NHS and health

- £200 million annually dedicated to growing elective capacity (more operations)
- Roll out of GP walk-in clinics (30+ sites)
- 24/7 Mental Health Hub expansion and Mental Health Triage Cars in every region
- 24/7 thrombectomy services with national coverage
- Women's health review, IVF provision review, miscarriage care improvements

### Housing

- £4.9 billion investment in affordable housing over next four years
- 110,000 affordable homes by 2032 (70% social rent)
- New housing agency (More Homes Scotland) to accelerate delivery
- First Homes Fund (up to £10,000 deposit support) for 50,000 households
- Tenant right to first refusal on private rental properties
- £50 million homelessness prevention fund

### Energy and climate

- ScotWind Wealth Fund to distribute renewables windfall to benefit future generations
- CARES (Community and Renewable Energy Scheme) expanded to £15 million annually
- Just Transition Fund (£500 million) to support workers and businesses
- Commitment to net zero by 2045
- Opposition to new nuclear power stations
- Opposition to new North Sea oil/gas (case-by-case on existing projects)
- Formal request for transfer of energy powers from Westminster to Holyrood ahead of independence

### Fair work and apprenticeships

- 150,000 apprenticeships over parliament
- Collective bargaining expansion into social care
- Fair Work First policy expansion
- Teacher and NHS job guarantees

### Education

- National mobile phone ban in classrooms
- Maintain best pupil-teacher ratios in UK

### Independence

- An SNP majority would be a mandate for independence referendum (based on 2011 precedent)
- Formal request to Westminster for powers to hold referendum
- If independence achieved, Scotland would rejoin EU, set own immigration policy, control energy policy

**Sector  
implications.**

# Energy and Net Zero.

## What the SNP is proposing

- ScotWind Wealth Fund to distribute renewables windfall to communities and future generations
- CARES expanded to £15 million annually (community ownership of renewable energy)
- £600 million investment in renewables (offshore wind, solar, pumped storage, emerging tech)
- Community right to own up to 20% of onshore wind projects (with independence)
- Reform energy consents process for faster approvals
- Just Transition Fund (£500 million) for workers and businesses in energy transition
- No new nuclear power stations in Scotland
- Opposition to new oil/gas extraction (case-by-case on existing projects with climate compatibility test)
- Formal request for transfer of energy powers from Westminster to Holyrood
- Claim that independence would cut household electricity bills by over a third
- Support for Acorn project (carbon capture) in North East

## What it means

The SNP's energy position is distinctive: support for renewable expansion combined with pragmatic (rather than ideological) approach to existing fossil fuel infrastructure. This differs from Greens (explicit opposition to oil/gas) and from Conservatives/Reform (backing new extraction). The SNP's framing is "Scotland's energy wealth should benefit Scotland" – which is both an environmental and economic argument.

For renewable energy developers, the ScotWind Wealth Fund is significant but more opaque in its implications than the Greens' Community Wealth Fund. The SNP hasn't specified exactly how the fund will work operationally – it's framed as ensuring "future generations benefit" but specifics on community rights, developer obligations, or revenue distribution are absent. This creates some uncertainty for developers about future policy architecture.

The explicit commitment to community ownership of up to 20% of onshore wind (with independence) is significant. This is positioned as a future independence benefit but signals SNP intention to give communities equity stakes in renewables. The opposition to new nuclear (including SMRs) is unambiguous.

The pragmatic approach to oil and gas – "case-by-case" rather than blank refusal – is important context. The SNP is not committing to an immediate phase-out, but neither is it backing new large-scale projects like Rosebank. For oil/gas supply chains, this signals gradual managed decline rather than abrupt exit – but with energy transition funding available through Just Transition Fund for workforce and community support.

The energy price claim – that independence would cut bills by over a third – is a major election argument but operationally depends on Scottish control of energy pricing. Currently Westminster controls pricing policy. The SNP's argument is that if Scotland controls its own renewable energy assets and pricing, lower costs would follow.



# Health and social care.

## What the SNP is proposing

- The NHS will remain publicly owned, publicly delivered, free at point of need, with £200 million annually dedicated to growing elective capacity (reducing operations waiting times)
- Investment in least £10 billion capital spending over ten years on NHS buildings/equipment
- Roll out of GP walk-in clinics (30+ sites across Scotland, 7 days a week, no appointment needed), and a GP investment deal (£530 million) focused on recruiting more family doctors
- 24/7 Mental Health Hub expansion to include psychological therapies (additional £3.5 million investment) and Mental Health Triage Cars expanded to every region in Scotland
- Five new drop-in mental health hubs through SAMH's Nook network (up to £10 million over three years)
- National hospital flow plan to tackle A&E and delayed discharge
- Complex Care Investment (£20 million) for people with significant and complex needs
- Social care: cost-of-living increase to paramedic and student nurse bursaries, and an expansion of the Displaced Workers Scheme (£750,000) for international social care workers
- NHS Job Guarantee for medicine, dentistry, nursing graduates (minimum 3-year contract)

## What it means

The £200 million annual investment in elective capacity means additional funding specifically for growing operation numbers (hip/knee replacements, cataract surgery, etc.). The GP walk-in clinic rollout is operationally significant. 30+ sites across Scotland, open 7 days a week, no appointment needed. This is designed to reduce pressure on A&E and improve primary care access. For GP practices, this could reduce their appointment demand but also changes how general practice operates.

The mental health commitments are substantial. Mental Health Hub expansion, Mental Health Triage Cars in every region, five new drop-in hubs. For mental health charities, community organisations, and training providers, this signals significant ongoing demand for service provision. For traditional NHS mental health services, this expands capacity but also suggests integration challenges across multiple delivery models.

The complex care investment (£20 million) is significant for social care providers. This is specifically for people with significant and complex needs who would otherwise stay in hospital.



# Housing, planning and property.

## What the SNP is proposing

- £4.9 billion investment in affordable house building over next four years
- 110,000 affordable homes by 2032 (70% social rent, 10% rural/islands)
- Introduction of a new agency, More Homes Scotland, to be focused on delivery simplicity, scale, speed
- £20 billion pension fund investment unlocked for social housing
- First Homes Fund (£100 million annually) providing up to £10,000 deposit support for first-time buyers (expected 50,000 households benefit)
- Tenant right to first refusal on private rental properties (legislation to give tenants right to purchase when landlord sells)
- Rural and Island Housing Fund (£75 million) including £25 million for key worker housing and £20 million for rural housing grants
- Homelessness Prevention Fund (£50 million over 10 years), and ending the use of unsafe temporary accommodation for children
- Tenement Reform: reform Tenement (Scotland) Act 2004 and Property Factors (Scotland) Act 2011 by end of parliament
- Heat in Buildings Bill to support transition to clean heating

## What it means

The SNP's housing strategy is supply-focused and planning-focused, similar to Labour's approach but with distinct mechanisms. The £4.9 billion investment and 110,000-home target are material and ambitious.

For housebuilders and developers, the introduction of a new agency, More Homes Scotland, is significant. Like Labour's Housing Development Trusts, this would be designed to create public-sector competition in development. The SNP's agency will be "squarely focused on bringing simplicity, scale and speed to the delivery of homes" – which means direct competition with private developers for land and projects. Developers should expect public agency to prioritise affordable/social housing delivery.

The £20 billion pension fund investment unlock is potentially transformative. The manifesto commits to working with local authorities, RSLs, and pension funds to develop funding models. For developers, this means accessing new funding mechanisms but also potentially working within frameworks that prioritise social/affordable housing over private development.

The Residential Property Tax replacement for Council Tax is complex operationally but progressive in intent. It requires immediate revaluation of all properties and legislates for revaluations every five years. This means property tax revenue will reflect actual property values. For homeowners, those in higher-value properties pay more; those in lower-value properties pay less.



# FMCG, hospitality, and food & drink.

## What the SNP is proposing

- Food price ceilings: statutory price caps on essential food items (20-50 items) at large supermarkets (bread, milk, eggs, etc.)
- Support mechanism to shield Scottish producers from impact of price ceilings
- Public sector food procurement taskforce to improve local procurement
- Support for small producers fund (funding tripled to £1.5 million annually)
- Tourism Infrastructure Fund investment (Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund expansion)
- Film and TV tourism promotion (working with Amazon Prime, Netflix on filming location trails)
- Eden Project support in Dundee
- Major events investment pipeline (£110 million through 2030) including 2026 Commonwealth Games, 2027 Tour de France Grand Départ, UEFA EURO 2028
- Nighttime economy support (Safer Nights Design Champion for improved lighting, surveillance, safe spaces)
- Support for hospitality sector (independent review of non-domestic property valuation methodology for licensed premises, reporting end of 2026)

## What it means

The SNP's food pricing commitment is distinctive and material. Unlike other parties (Labour proposes price ceilings, Greens tax-based redistribution), the SNP would implement statutory price caps on essential foods. The manifesto specifies this would require large supermarkets to make one example line of each listed item available at capped price (not every variation). For food retailers, particularly large supermarkets, this is operationally complex. The SNP is simultaneously committing to "support framework designed to shield Scottish producers" – which suggests mitigation mechanisms but adds regulatory complexity.

For food producers and suppliers, the price ceilings create margin pressure on some products, but the producer protection framework potentially offers compensation. The emphasis on local procurement (public sector food procurement taskforce) creates opportunity for Scottish producers in public contracts.

The small producers fund (funding tripled to £1.5 million) signals support for smaller food and drink businesses, particularly important for artisan and regional producers.

For hospitality, the independent review of business rates valuation is responsive to sector concerns (licensed premises have faced valuation pressures). The nighttime economy support (Safer Nights Design Champion) is positioning Scotland's cities as safe, vibrant destinations.



# Farming and rural affairs.

## What the SNP is proposing

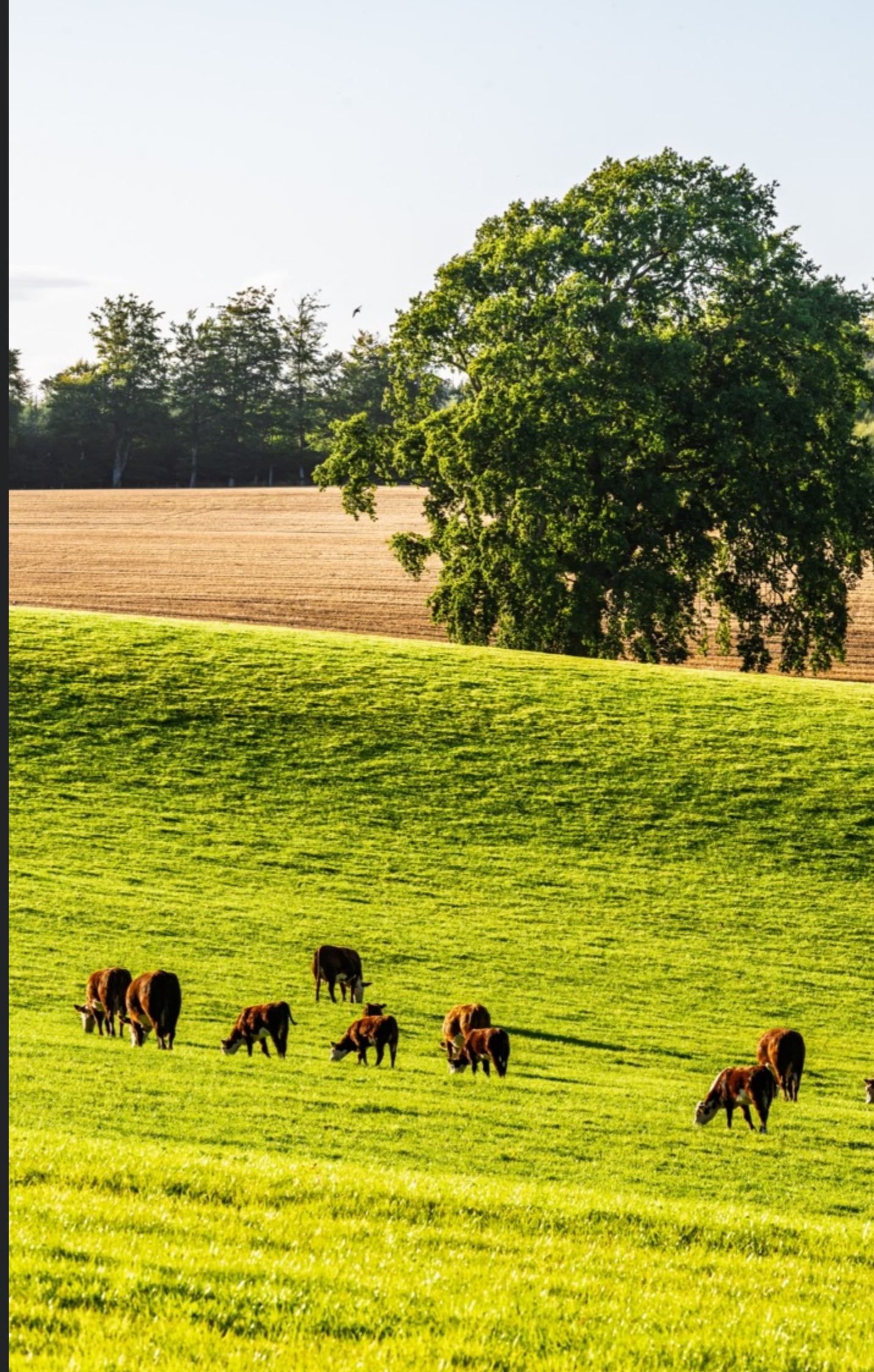
- Rural Renewal Bill (consultation and legislation by end of parliament) covering:
  - Rural planning reform with improved permitted development rights
  - Review of industry levy bodies
  - New small land holdings for rural repopulation
  - Crofting support and opportunities for new entrants
  - Land reform journey continuation (transparency in ownership, anti-avoidance measures, community right to buy support)
  - Unique landscape protection (e.g., machair)
- Agricultural support system: most generous package in UK (£660 million+ annually)
- Support targeted to active farmers and crofters (individual farm action plans for nature and climate)
- Public sector food procurement taskforce to support local producers
- Just Transition Fund support for North East (£40 million match funding with Wood Foundation)
- Mobile health services expansion to rural/island communities (community dental service for Western Isles, £750,000 investment)
- Last Provider Fund to help keep open shops/pubs in remote areas
- Rural workforce planning (revise Golden Hellos to attract GPs, consultants, dentists)

## What it means

The SNP's agricultural positioning is supportive of farming and food production within net zero framework – similar to Labour but with slightly different emphasis. The party is committing to the most generous support package in the UK (£660 million+ annually) which signals confidence in farming viability.

For farmers, the focus on individual farm action plans supporting "nature and climate and sustainable food production" means support is conditional on environmental outcomes. The four-tier framework rewards moving toward nature-friendly practices and means farmers aren't forced to change but incentivised through support levels.

The agricultural research funding is positive for rural innovation. The Apprenticeship Centres of Excellence and Skills Accelerators signal investment in rural skills development. For training providers and colleges in rural areas, this represents demand signal and potential funding.



# Transport.

## What the SNP is proposing

- £2 bus fare cap across Scotland nationwide (building on Highland/Orkney/Shetland pilot)
- Better Surfaces pothole fund (£350 million over parliament)
- Clyde Tunnel maintenance responsibility transfer to SNP government (freeing £1 million local authority cost)
- Peak rail fares permanently abolished, rail fares frozen.
- Rail electrification continued and new railway stations promised.
- Caledonian Sleeper feasibility study (to continent via Euro Tunnel)
- Fixed links exploration for islands (tunnels, bridges, causeways – support Shetland Council's exploration)
- Active travel: £2.5 million bike repair scheme (33,000 people, up to £75 support per repair)
- Scottish Paths Fund development
- Tram-Trains feasibility (South Suburban line Edinburgh, Clyde Metro Glasgow)
- EV charger installation (planning reforms to ease installation)
- Public transport integration (Transport Scotland brought back into Scottish Government, exploring nationally publicly owned transport company configuration)

## What it means

The SNP's transport strategy is infrastructure-heavy (roads, rail, ferry) combined with support for public and active transport. This is a broad-based investment approach.

For road contractors, the A9 dualling commitment (complete by 2035) is substantial. £200 million investment is material and multi-year. The A96, A75, A77 improvements signal continued road investment. The Better Surfaces pothole fund (£350 million) is material for local authorities and road maintenance contractors. For construction and civil engineering, this represents sustained opportunity.

The rail commitments (electrification, new stations, and exploring the feasibility of running the Caledonian Sleeper to Europe) are operationally ambitious but face Westminster constraints on some powers. Peak fare abolition and fare freeze are established SNP policy.

The active travel commitments (bike repair scheme, Paths Fund, EV chargers) are smaller-scale but signal modal shift priorities. For active travel providers and EV infrastructure companies, this creates demand. The public transport integration commitment (Transport Scotland into Scottish Government, exploring nationally publicly owned transport configuration) is significant. It suggests SNP may reorganise transport governance post-election. For transport operators and unions, this signals potential restructuring.



# How Cavendish can help.

We advise clients across public affairs and corporate reputation. Our team combines deep knowledge of the Scottish political environment with sector expertise across energy, health, housing, food and drink, and rural affairs.

If you would like a tailored conversation about what the Scottish Parliament election means for your organisation - whether that is updating your stakeholder strategy, assessing policy risk, or building an engagement programme for the new parliament - we would be glad to talk.

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