

Climate Policy on Transport & Mobility

Advice 3: Climate Crisis Policy Team (KBT)

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Summary

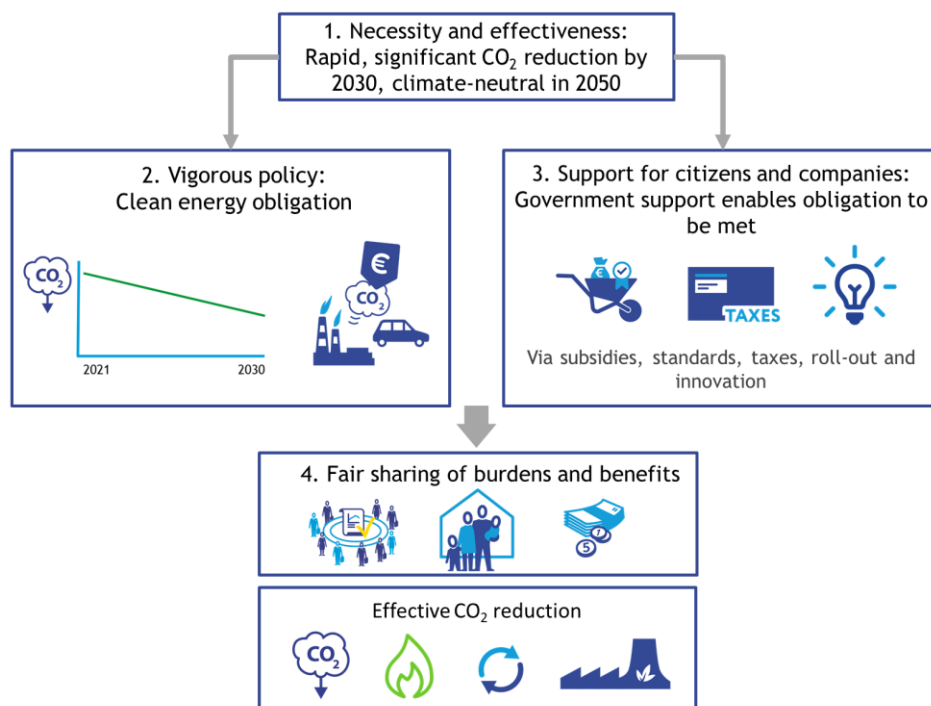
Climate change is becoming more apparent by the day, while global greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise. As a EU Member State the Netherlands has committed itself to the Paris Climate Accord to limit temperature rise to preferably 1.5 degrees. While the 2018 National Climate Agreement is an important step, it will deliver no more than 34% emissions reduction by 2030, while 49% is what was agreed. Like the Covid crisis, the climate crisis requires the marshalling of all the know-how and funds available.

While there is widespread appreciation of the need for vigorous climate policy, too few people are translating this into reducing their own transport energy consumption. The Covid situation has been an exceptional period in which that has been achieved with very robust measures. Those measures have shown that transport demand can be drastically reduced. Because many people have grown used to home-working and video-conferencing, it is well conceivable that both commuting and business air travel will remain on a lower par in the future. The challenge is to achieve a major reduction of transport emissions in a 'normal' world, in line with the political decisions made.

The Climate Crisis Policy Team (KBT) sees the need for a four-track policy to reduce transport emissions both swiftly and equitably:

1. A clear narrative that climate change means we need to rapidly reduce our CO₂ emissions, including those associated with transport and mobility (necessity and effectiveness), and that this brings other benefits too (improved air quality, reduced noise nuisance).
2. Vigorous policy, by introducing a clean energy obligation.
3. Advice and support for citizens to take action.
4. Ensure low-income groups can remain mobile.

Figure 1 - Main thrust of KBT advice



1. Necessity and effectiveness

If the government is serious about pursuing a climate crisis policy, the underlying reasoning needs to be clearly explained in language understandable to everyone. The same holds for what that policy precisely entails and what it will achieve. The government must ensure citizens are imbued with an awareness of why a rapid reduction of CO₂-eq. emissions is needed in transport/mobility, as well as in other sectors - not only in the Netherlands, but around the world. To halt the rapidly accelerating pace of climate change requires a clearly explained crisis policy. Besides, sustainable mobility has other major benefits, including improved air quality and reduced noise nuisance.

2. Vigorous policy: clean energy obligation

The only way to rapidly reduce transport CO₂ emissions is to achieve a rapid and major reduction in both the energy required for mobility and the carbon content of the energy sources used. Crucial for all modes of transport is a clean energy obligation for all the energy used by vehicles and vessels. Initially this can be based on the Annual Obligation for Renewable Energy in Transport currently in place, later on a carbon budget for the transport/mobility sector. To avoid border effects this should preferably be at the European level, but with initial roll-out nationally. In moving towards zero-carbon energy carriers, it is essential that sustainability limits are respected, with no problem-shifting. This means using only biofuels produced from waste, for example.

3. Support for citizens and companies

To reduce transport energy demand and transition to low- or zero-emission energy sources, it is important that the government helps citizens and companies in that process. This flanking policy builds on the National Climate Agreement, but goes further and plays out in a different context. Our advice is based on the premise that energy needs to be made cleaner and more expensive far quicker by making energy users pay for their CO₂ emissions.

The government is advised to pursue an active policy to help citizens reduce their transport energy demand as rapidly as possible. We suggest the following steps:

- active Dutch support for tougher European vehicle standards, aiming for zero-emission in 2030
- rapid increase of zero-emission zones, for passenger vehicles, too
- introduction of excise duty and VAT on aviation and shipping fuels
- curtailment of employer reimbursement for ‘private kilometres’
- reducing business trips and short-distance air travel.

The loss of revenue due to zero duty on clean energy sources does not have to be balanced out in the transport/mobility sector, but could be recuperated via a land tax, for example.

4. Accessibility important for everyone

Another key issue in maintaining public support for swift and effective climate policy is that those unable to shoulder the extra costs are compensated accordingly. In the realm of transport this means steps need to be taken to ensure there is no loss of mobility for the lowest-income group - by providing cheap public transport and facilitating (off-peak) car-sharing for this group, for example. The government can also ensure that key destinations are within walking or cycling distance or accessible by public transport. This is particularly relevant for new development projects in the coming years.

Figure 2 - Emissions by transport segment, within Dutch borders, 2019 (Mt CO₂-eq.)

