

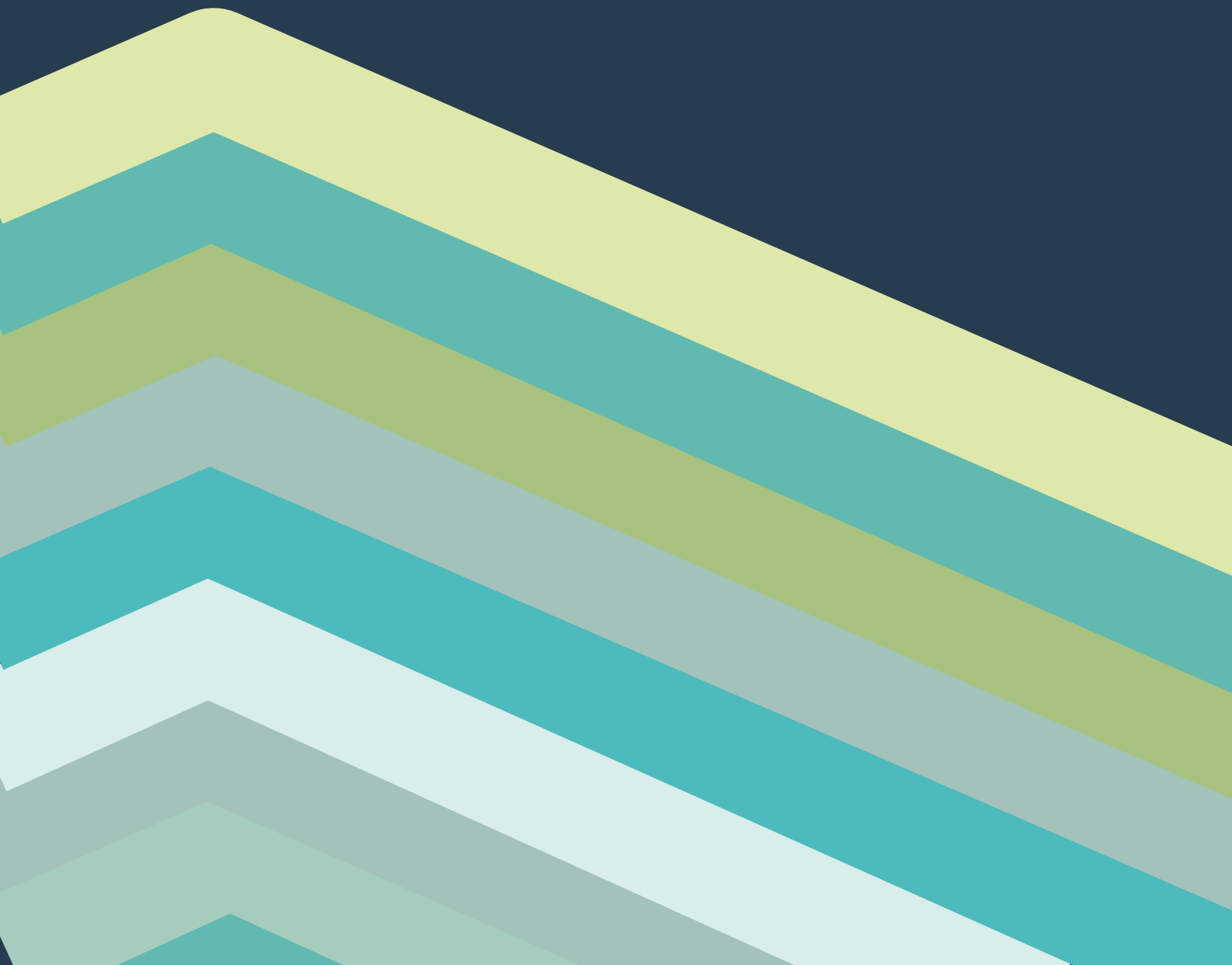
CLIMATE EMERGENCY RESPONSE GROUP

Briefing Paper

Delivering on Climate for a Thriving and Resilient Scotland

Recommendations for the next Scottish Government

October 2025





Summary of key recommendations to address the delivery gap:

1. **Unlock the benefits** – Support a thriving, resilient Scotland through a whole-of-government approach to climate.
2. **Test every decision** – Assess the carbon impact and climate resilience of all policy, programme, and investment decisions.
3. **Ensure it works** – Make climate governance and structures fit for delivery.
4. **Empower all levels** – Enable national, regional, and local governments to plan and deliver coherent climate action.
5. **Deliver results** – Ensure all climate policies have a delivery plan that is practical, achievable, and actionable.
6. **Launch missions** – Establish national missions to achieve society-wide transformations.
7. **Stay on track** – Keep delivery evidence-based, adaptable, and under real-time review.
8. **Listen and act** – Harness public support and participation to build a clear, compelling vision for climate action.

Tangible actions that the next Scottish Government could take to unlock delivery and deliver benefits across sectors:

CERG urge the next Scottish Government to embrace the following actions with a delivery mindset - making sure policies and plans have robust management, effective implementation, and a clear focus on achieving measurable outcomes.

- A. **HEAT** - Establish a mission-oriented approach to delivering heat networks at pace and scale.
- B. **TRANSPORT** - Reinstate multi-year capital funding commitments for bus priority measures on Scotland's road network.
- C. **LAND-USE** - Focus national action on enabling regional scale delivery that unlocks private investment
- D. **ADAPTATION** - Make climate risk screening mandatory for all future infrastructure investments.
- E. **FINANCE** - Launch a £10 million Technical Assistance Facility to unlock private investment into climate action by 2030.



Introduction

The response to climate change has the potential to unlock benefits, value and resilience but Scotland is at risk of missing opportunities, delaying benefits and increasing the costs of inaction.

Progress against devolved policy areas has been slow, with Scotland failing to make significant progress, beyond the renewables sector, to transition key sectors of our economy (agriculture and land use, buildings, transport) away from fossil fuel dependence. Meanwhile there is an ever growing need to adapt to climate change, with the impacts of increasing storms, flooding, water scarcity and wildfires already being felt.

New strategies, guidance and plans appear regularly, but these aren't driving transformational change at the pace and scale needed. Poor delivery means that the benefits are not being secured - leaving political, business and public confidence in the transition at risk. It risks fuelling the perception that tackling climate change is 'too difficult' or 'too expensive'.

Yet, Scotland's 2045 net zero target is achievable, and something the majority of the Scottish public believe should be a high priority for the government.

This paper sets out eight recommendations for the next Scottish Government to address the 'delivery gap' and, in doing so, deliver a fair transition with warmer homes, cleaner air, better health, safer streets, biodiversity, economic opportunities and new jobs. It also presents a series of examples of deliverable actions from different sectors that are both implementable and transformative.

About CERG

The Climate Emergency Response Group (CERG) is a collection of like-minded climate leaders from Scotland's private, public and third sectors, including delivery organisations and membership bodies. Our members bring extensive cross-sectoral expertise and practical insights into the steps that must be taken for Scotland to achieve its vision of a just transition to a net zero, climate-resilient future.

The group aims to inform and influence the Scottish Government's response to the climate emergency by promoting practical solutions that can be taken now - unlocking delivery, cutting emissions, and securing broader benefits for people and the economy.



Recommendation 1 - Unlock the benefits – Support a thriving, resilient Scotland through a whole-of-government approach to climate

We're in the middle of an amazing transition. The response to climate change is a massive opportunity that must be seized. If we want Scotland to be more resilient, secure tangible benefits and unlock new economic opportunities (i.e. warmer homes, lower energy and transport bills, cleaner air, better health, nature recovery, new jobs, resilience, energy security) we need a policy coherent, whole-of-government approach.

All Scottish Government policies, budgets and programmes need to align with emissions reduction pathways, climate resilience and just transition outcomes to realise the benefits and avoid locking us into high carbon, climate-vulnerable pathways that will become outdated and require expensive retrofits.

This is not about climate policy. It's about good policy. Policy that delivers lasting benefits for people, and climate, across a whole range of different sectors. From health to housing to economic and fiscal policy - there are multiple interdependencies, and multiple opportunities for positive outcomes.

Making the case for a thriving, resilient Scotland and the significant benefits that can be realised, must be front and centre of how policies and proposals are both presented, and managed.

The full range of outcomes and benefits (short, medium and long term) need to be made explicit and built into strategic business cases and delivery plans. These should include how policies and proposals will deliver across the government's climate targets and other priorities (tackling cost of living, cutting energy bills, health inequalities, energy security, nature); clarity on timeframes, transition processes and how fairness, and just transition will be assured; and how investment will be secured, including through policy certainty, market shaping and investible pipelines.

Recommendation 2 - Test every decision - Assess the carbon impact and climate resilience of all policy, programme and investment decisions

To support a coherent, 'whole of government' approach, both the whole life climate impact and the climate resilience of all government policies, budgets and projects need to be considered and quantified.

The next Scottish Government should evidence that all government legislation, policies and plans are climate resilient and in line with, and delivering against, carbon budgets by



mandating a Net Zero Assessment¹ process and Climate Resilience Screening (see proposal D).

Without such arrangements in place, we risk incurring greater costs in terms of replacing stranded assets, exposure to volatile energy prices, and vulnerability to climate impacts. We also fail to develop the evidence needed to support robust business cases for private investment in net zero and climate resilient infrastructure.

Recommendation 3 - Ensure it works – Make climate governance and structures fit for delivery

Climate governance for delivery refers to the systems, structures, and processes that ensure policies and plans are effectively implemented to achieve real-world outcomes—such as emissions reductions, adaptation measures, and other benefits. It is about turning climate goals into action through clear leadership, accountability, coordination, and resource allocation.

The next Scottish Government has a role to ensure that policies, investments, and programmes are creating the conditions essential for delivery. They should co-ordinate cross-government and stakeholder collaboration for delivery through mission-based approaches, allocate responsibilities across government directorates and improve transparency.

There should be cross-governmental ownership, leadership and accountability on climate with every Director-General accountable to the First Minister on how their division is delivering against climate targets (e.g. through published whole-life carbon assessments, resilience screening, budget tracking and reporting).

Recommendation 4 – Empower all levels – Enable national, regional, and local governments to plan and deliver coherent climate action

Climate action cannot be delivered by government alone. However, the process used to develop climate policy is often top-down, with only limited engagement of the public, private and third-sector agencies who will ultimately be responsible for delivery. Separation of setting targets and outcomes from the reality of what's needed to deliver jeopardises delivery (i.e. considerations of funding, capacity and capability, competing priorities, market forces etc.).

There needs to be co-ordination and sequencing of delivery priorities, investment and delivery across local authorities and regions.

The next Scottish Government should strengthen the capacity and capability of the Climate

¹ <https://cerg.scot/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/CERG-Briefing-Mandating-Net-Zero-Assessments.pdf>



Delivery Framework to enable central, regional and local levels of government to work together to plan for, coordinate and deliver climate action, with adequate resourcing.

They should also ensure compliance of the Public Bodies' Climate Change Duties, with leadership from the Climate Delivery Framework, and capacity building support from the Sustainable Scotland Network and the Scottish Climate Intelligence Service.

Recommendation 5 - Deliver results – Ensure all climate policies have a delivery plan that is practical, achievable, and actionable

A 'deliverable' climate policy requires clear pathways and timetables linking policies to outcomes, with sufficient detail and clarity on responsibilities. This allows other stakeholders to plan, deliver and understand their role.

This clarity enables improved coordination across departments, organisations and places, as everyone understands how their role fits within the pathway, and it is easier to track progress.

The next Scottish Government needs to present these clear routes to delivery, setting out specific outcomes, delivery milestones, details on the powers and levers that will drive change, investment needs and roles and responsibilities for delivery.

They need to develop operational delivery and investment plans, co-designed with stakeholders, and supported by robust programme management, publish a clear pipeline process and timetable for the progression of 'proposals' to 'policies' to 'delivery programmes'; and ensure greater transparency and scrutiny of whether policies and proposals are ready for delivery.

Recommendation 6 - Launch missions – establish national missions to achieve society-wide transformations

Delivery on climate requires significant ramp up of delivery and cross-government effort focused on achieving outcomes. 'Business as usual approaches' aren't, and won't, deliver. Large scale transformations need long term policy certainty and a strong enabling environment, cross-government action and sufficient political priority so that resources, policy development and solutions to barriers are deployed in a timely way. The government also needs to take a more proactive role to shape markets, drive innovation, tackle sectoral silos, develop policy and delivery mechanisms at pace and enable private investment to flow.

The next Scottish Government should establish a small number of high priority delivery missions focused around the most significant transformations in heat, transport electrification, land use, required over the next 10 years.



Missions are 10 year + transformational goals on which government can concentrate resources and political capital. They go beyond the control of those working in central government, relying on significant system coordination across multiple actors - public bodies, local government, businesses, charities, communities, families or individuals. This approach helps to breakdown silos and galvanise stakeholders and investment to translate complex goals into clear, actionable priorities.

These new ‘missions’ should be articulated as outcomes, and need to be embedded into government structures, priorities and decision-making systems. They need to have a ‘mission control’ with the mandate, authority and political support required to drive cross-government action to deliver tightly defined outcomes. They need to have structured ‘delivery’ bodies and be led from the top of government.

Recommendation 7 - Stay on track – Keep delivery evidence-based, adaptable, and under real-time review

Inconsistent data collection and poor data quality have made it hard to assess progress on climate change policies. Time-lags in data availability for key indicators make it difficult to be agile and adapt plans where emissions reductions are off track.

The next Scottish Government should create robust monitoring frameworks that allow for consistent, real-time assessment of progress towards milestones and outcomes.

By using data from delivery programmes, local authorities and other delivery partners and using technologies and tools, such as Climate View, to collate that data on area-wide emissions it should be possible to enable agile planning, monitoring and evaluation. This would provide an understanding of whether delivery is on-track, and if not, what can be done to improve it.

Recommendation 8 – Listen and act – Harness public support and participation to build a clear, compelling vision for climate action

Public support for climate action in Scotland is strong — recent studies showing that almost three quarters of the Scottish public view climate change as ‘an immediate and urgent problem’² and 68% believing it should be a high priority for the Scottish Government.³ The next Scottish Government should harness this mandate to present a clear and compelling vision for climate action, highlighting the economic, social, and environmental benefits of decisive action as well as the costs and risks of delay. Rebuilding confidence that climate action is necessary, ‘doable’ and affordable will be key to successful delivery.

² [Views on climate change - Scottish Climate Survey: main findings - gov.scot](#)

³ [UK Climate Opinion Maps 2024 - Yale Program on Climate Change Communication](#)



To strengthen legitimacy and ensure enduring public backing, this vision must be rooted in meaningful participation. Climate action will only succeed if people feel ownership of the policies that affect their lives. Research shows that when people are actively involved in shaping policy, it increases the likelihood of success, strengthens trust in decision-making, and reduces conflict, giving policymakers confidence to act.⁴

People hold valuable insights into what will work, where and how within their area. Scotland's Climate Assembly and Peoples' Panel on climate change both resulted in ambitious proposals in favour of rapid climate action, encouraging the Scottish Government to go faster.

The next Scottish Government should therefore invest in democratic and participatory processes to engage citizens and communities in dialogue and planning for the transition. This should include publishing easily accessible public updates on delivery, allowing people to track and understand climate transitions in their area and nationally. Deliberative approaches to engaging the public should also be prioritised, with the government building its expertise in designing and running this.

Deliberative approaches enable people to form judgments about particular policy ideas within a wider context and helps them engage with the complexity of change more effectively than traditional, narrowly focused consultations. Deliberative tools carefully select representative participants to ensure a diverse cross-section of the public is heard, preventing the most vocal and organised groups from dominating the perceived 'public' opinion.

By listening and acting on public insights, the government can strengthen trust, legitimacy, and momentum behind Scotland's transition to a fair and sustainable future.

Tangible actions that the next Scottish Government could take to unlock delivery and deliver benefits across sectors

Below we set out tangible examples of how our recommendations on delivery can be embodied in specific policy areas. The following proposals are all clear, can be implemented now and measurable. Each has clearly defined roles and responsibilities, will help reduce emissions, build resilience and deliver wider benefits.

While these examples do not provide comprehensive solutions for each thematic area, they are practical, implementable and are supported by CERG members as having the potential to drive meaningful and transformative change.

It is no coincidence that a common thread across all these examples is the emphasis on finance—specifically, the role of public finance in unlocking further investment and delivery. Each example highlights the significant returns and public sector savings that can result when

⁴ <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/the-role-of-deliberative-public-engagement-in-climate-policy-development-university-of-lancaster/>



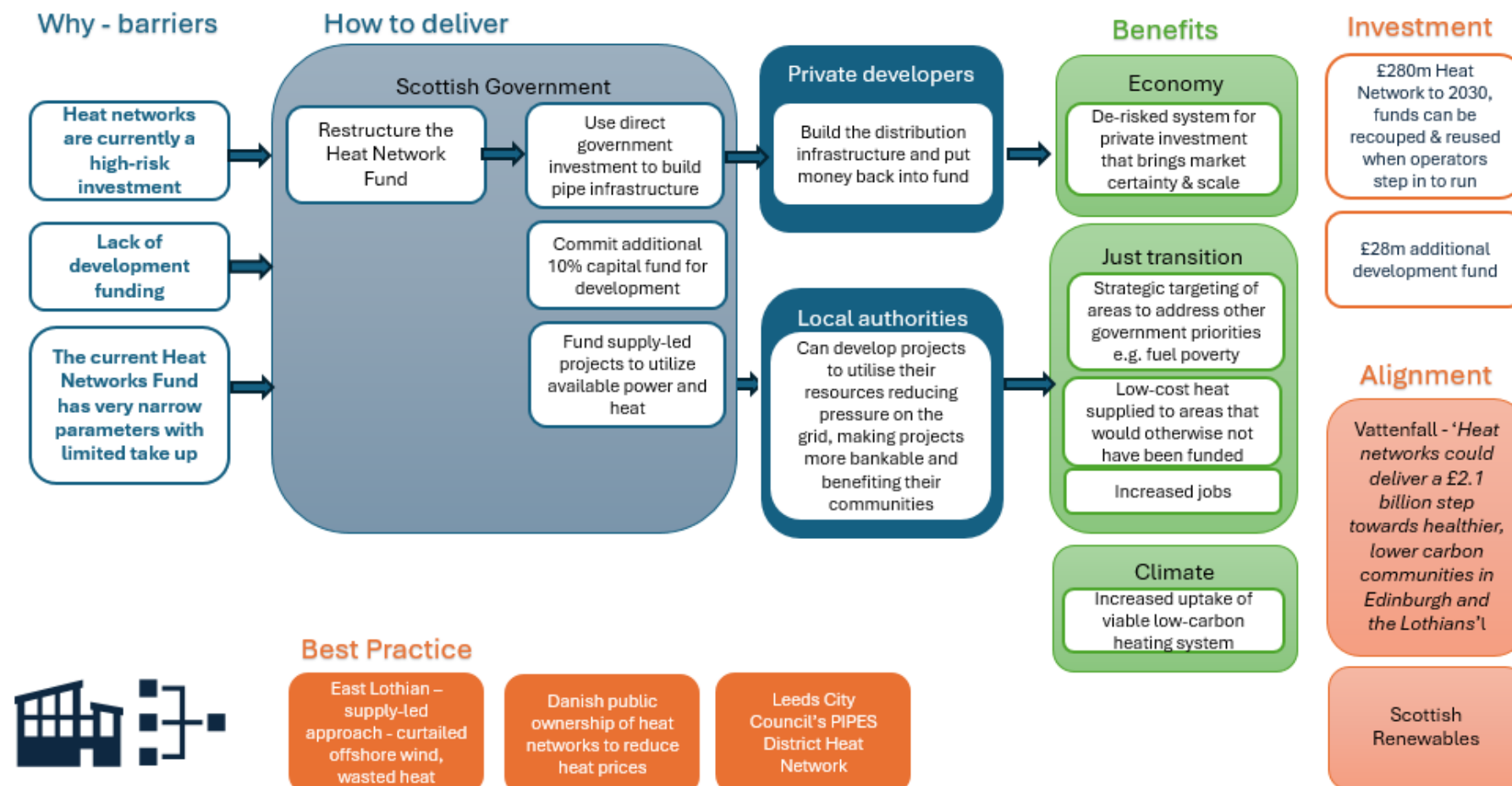
public investment is applied strategically, at scale, and with multi-year certainty. These examples demonstrate the potential for major economic, social, and environmental benefits—but these outcomes will only be realised if supported by consistent and unwavering policy certainty.

Adopting a delivery mindset

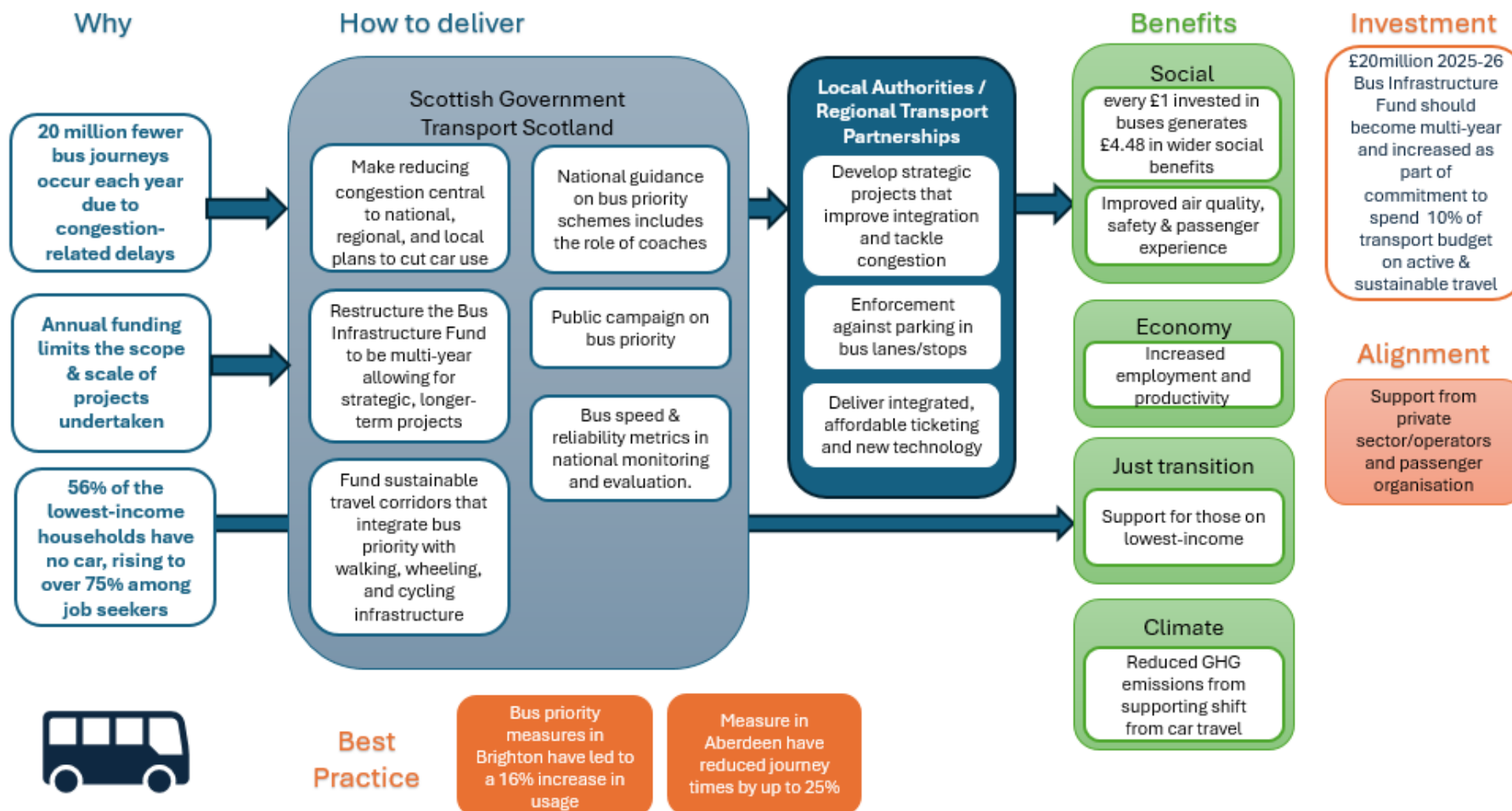
CERG urge the next Scottish Government to embrace these ideas with a ‘delivery mindset’. This means focusing not just on policy development but on making sure policies and plans are implemented effectively and achieve real outcomes. For any intervention to succeed, the following must be in place:

- **Clear accountability:** Named individual in Government with the mandate and responsibility to drive delivery and achieve outcomes.
- **Programmatic approach** – Programme managers with the authority and agility to adapt strategies based on learning and to bring in external expertise when needed.
- **Strong risk management and delivery** - Focused monitoring and reporting systems that support learning, adaptation, and keeping programmes on track.
- **Fast and streamlined decision-making** - Direct access to Government decision-makers to quickly overcome barriers and respond to challenges.
- **Collaborative governance** - Clear roles and responsibilities between national, regional, and local levels of Government, delivery bodies, and stakeholders.
- **Specialist delivery bodies** - Dedicated organisations or teams with the authority, skills, and resources to deliver outcomes at the required scale and pace.
- **Systems thinking** - Programmes should identify and address all barriers to delivery, working across sectors and institutions as needed.

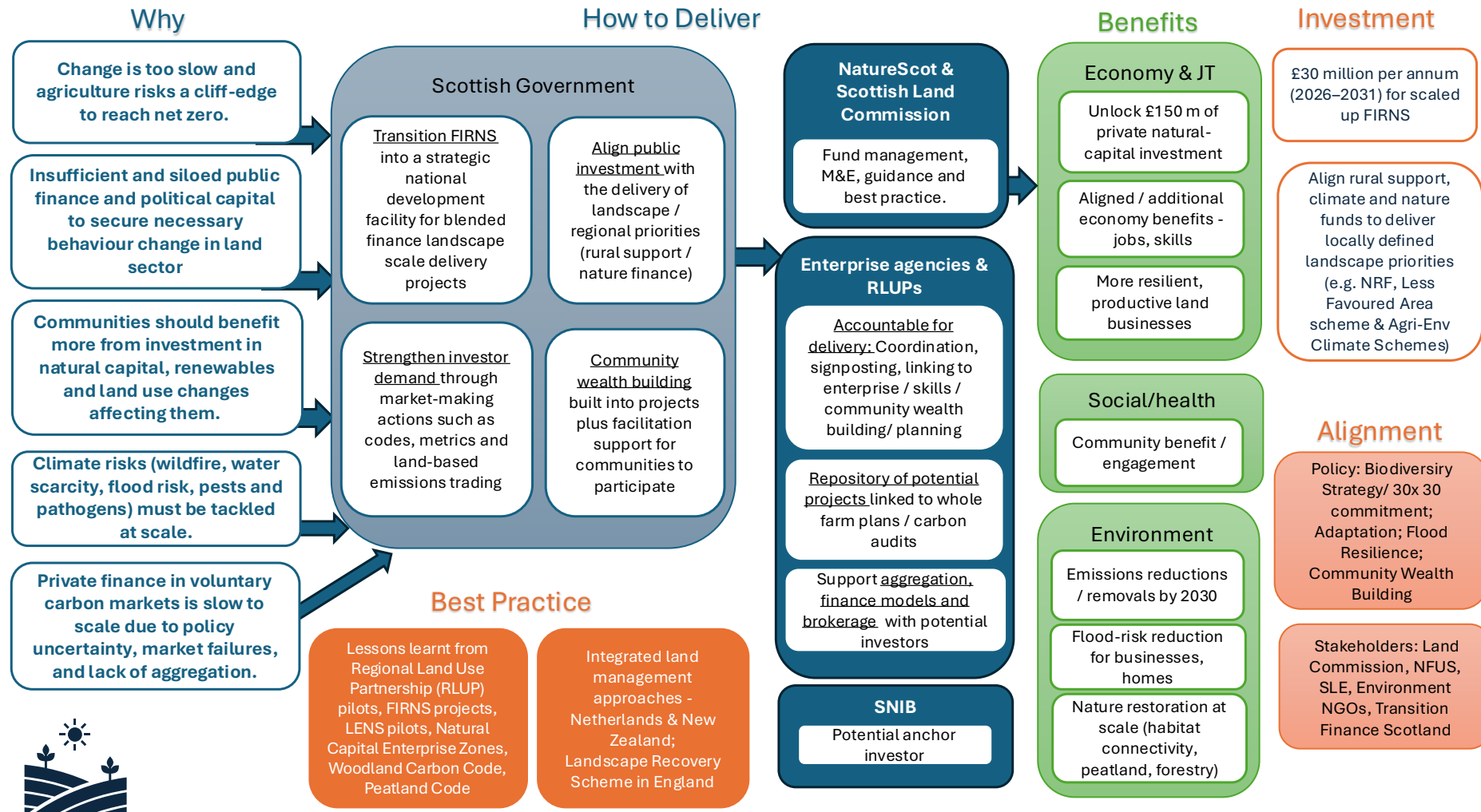
Proposal A - HEAT – Increase the pace & scale of heat network delivery through direct investment in infrastructure



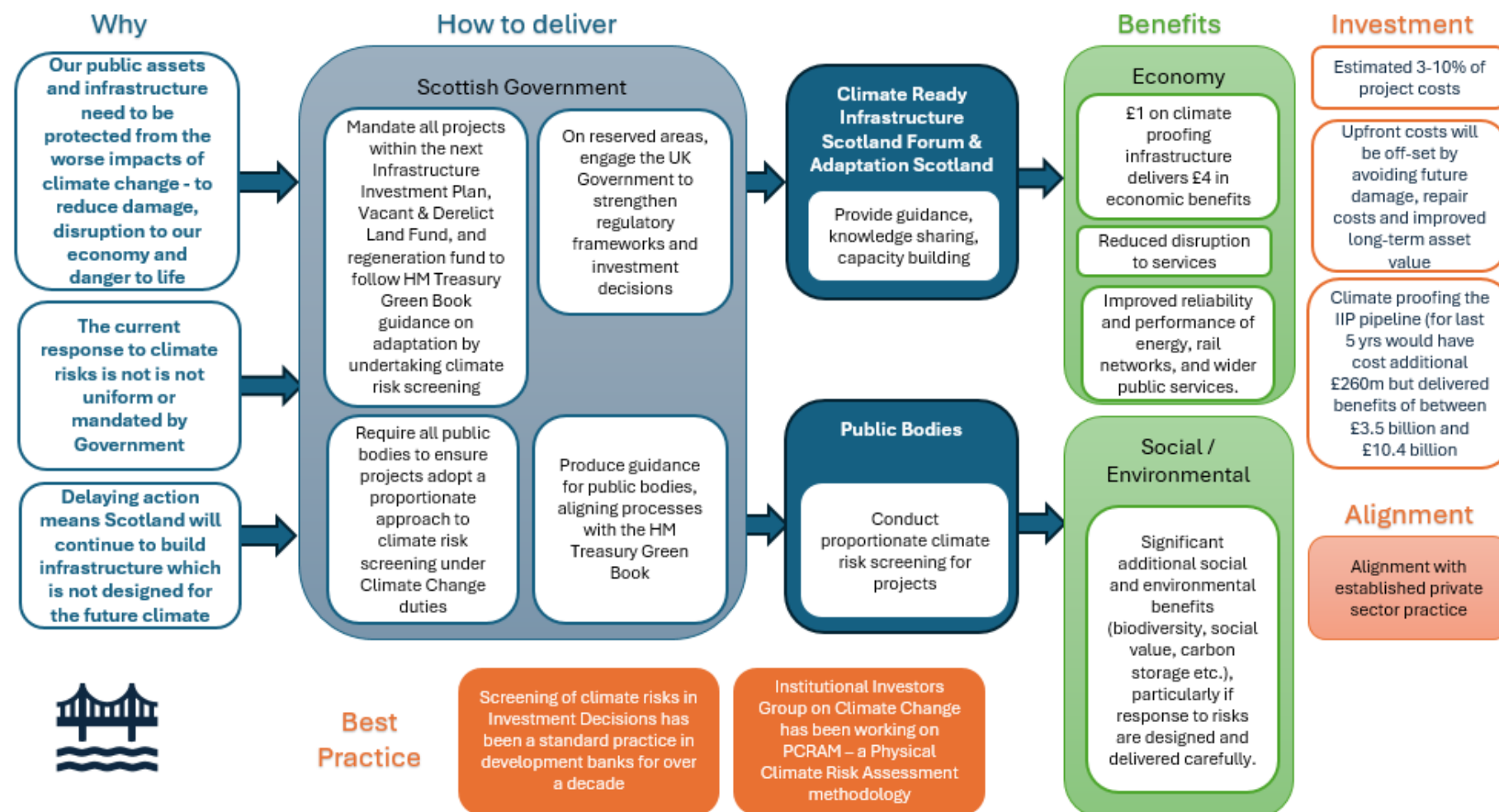
Proposal B - TRANSPORT - Multi-year capital funding commitments for bus priority measures on Scotland's road network



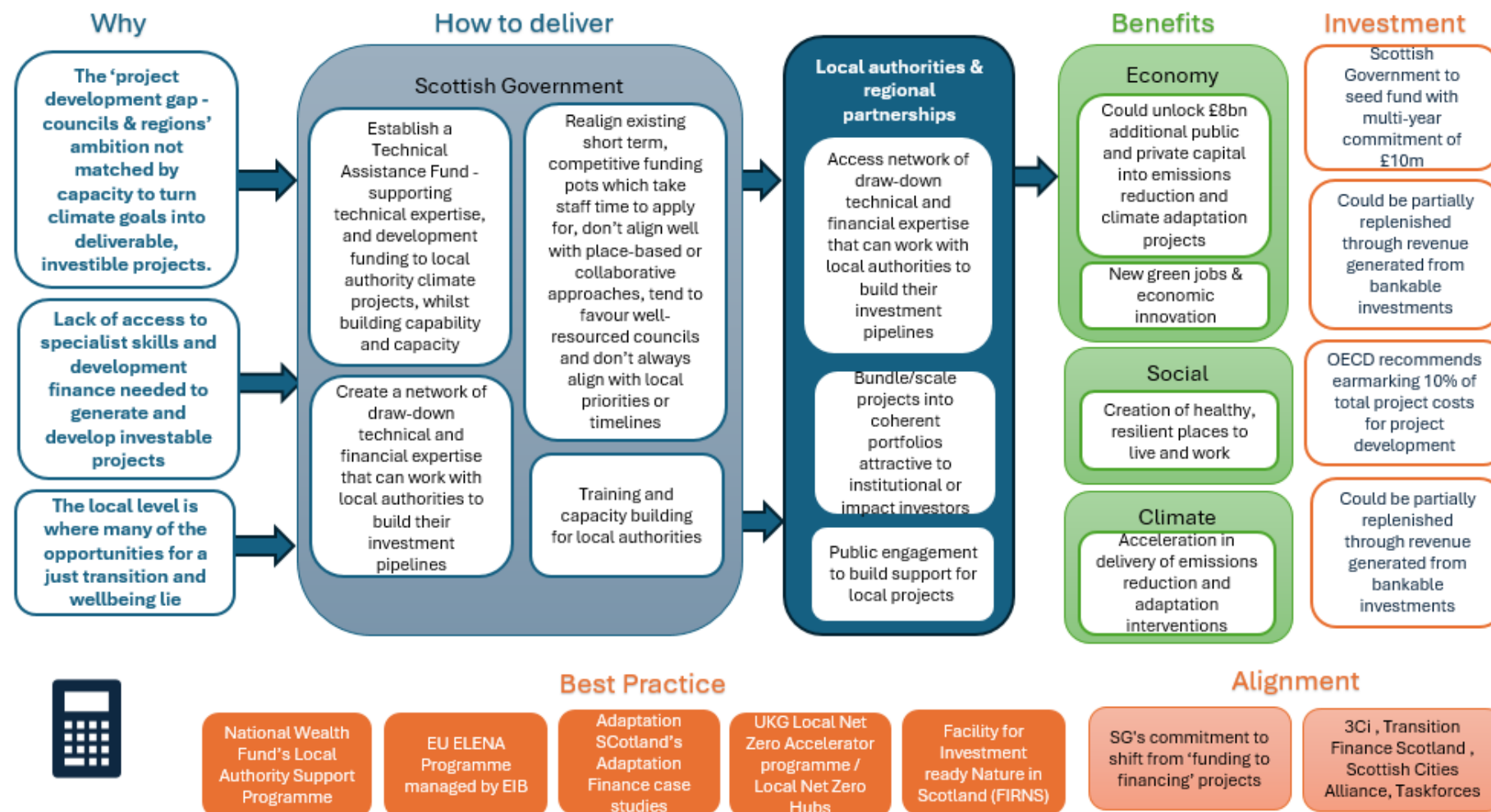
Proposal C – LAND-USE - Focus national action on enabling regional scale delivery that unlocks private investment



Proposal D - ADAPTATION - Make climate risk screening mandatory for all future infrastructure investments



Proposal E - FINANCE - Launch a £10 million Technical Assistance Facility to unlock private investment into climate action by 2030



About CERG

The Climate Emergency Response Group is a collection of like-minded climate leaders from Scotland's private, public and third sectors, working to inform and influence the Scottish Government's response to the climate emergency.

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