

WRITTEN EVIDENCE TO THE ENTERPRISE AND BUSINESS COMMITTEE
ACTIVE TRAVEL (WALES) ACT 2013
COMMITTEE FOLLOW-UP SESSION – 20.01.16

Introduction

1. The purpose of this paper is to set out for the Enterprise and Business Committee written evidence on progress with implementation of the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013, which received Royal Assent on 4 November 2013 and was commenced on 25 September 2014.
2. This Government has made active travel a priority. The ambition to achieve modal shift to the more sustainable modes of public transport, walking and cycling was originally expressed in the Wales Transport Strategy and has been a continuous strong theme in our plans and programmes, most recently the National Transport Finance Plan. Its importance in contributing to strategic priorities becomes clear when the objective of increasing levels of walking and cycling is viewed against the wellbeing goals set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Active Travel has the potential to clearly support every one of these goals.

The importance of promoting active travel

3. The Explanatory Memorandum for the Active Travel Act set out clearly the rationale for increasing rates of active travel. Since the Act's making, the case for promoting active travel has continued to grow stronger and is now widely accepted beyond the transport sphere. Particular progress has been made in recognising the links between active travel and public health, meaning that efforts to promote active travel are now made by a wider range of partners. These advances have been made in recognition of the multitude of potential benefits, which can be realised without any significant disadvantages. The benefits of increased rates of walking and cycling cover a very wide spectrum and are too extensive to list in full for the purposes of this paper. The following paragraphs set out brief examples of key benefits against each of the Well-Being Goals.
4. A healthier Wales: the health impact of active travel is widely understood and includes direct and indirect health benefits through increased physical activity and associated cardiovascular health and reduced obesity, improved mental health and improved respiratory health due to reduced air and noise pollution.
5. A prosperous Wales: Increasing uptake of walking and cycling is associated with wide ranging economic benefits, such as those derived from reduced congestion, reduced absenteeism and increased spending in local high streets.
6. A resilient Wales: Some of the environmental benefits are self-evident, such as reduction in carbon emissions and pollutants, but where active travel replaces car journeys, it can also free up urban space and reduce demands for creation of new infrastructure for motorised transport.
7. A Wales of cohesive communities and A Wales vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language: Social benefits of increased walking and cycling for everyday journeys can also be substantial. Areas with high levels of walking and cycling often equate

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to more vibrant local communities contributing to the experience of greater social inclusion and cohesion, as well as a greater sense of community safety.

8. A globally responsible Wales: Walking and cycling are the two modes with the smallest carbon footprints. If motorised journeys are replaced with active travel journeys, this contributes to a reduction in global carbon dioxide emissions.
9. A more equal Wales: Walking and cycling are very low cost modes of travel that, with the right conditions in place, are available to the vast majority of the population, including those with protected characteristics.
10. Realising these far reaching benefits is not a task that Government alone can achieve: it requires the joined effort of the whole Welsh public sector, third sector partners, businesses and not least the Welsh public, including parents, teachers, commuters, shoppers.

The Active Travel Act 2013 to date

11. Since its commencement, I put in place the suite of supporting pillars for the implementation of the Act. I made a Direction designating localities under the Active Travel Act to which the Act's mapping requirements apply and published two sets of statutory guidance to supplement the Act: the Design Guidance and the Delivery Guidance.
12. I published the first Annual Report on Active Travel on 9 December 2015. It provides data on a set of key measures that help us track levels of walking and cycling journeys in Wales. Whilst it is too early to measure quantified progress as a result of the Act, the foundations are there from which we start moving in the right direction.
13. The Active Travel Act's approach to increasing levels of active travel was developed in recognition of some of the key barriers to walking and cycling. These include the perception that there is a lack of safe and convenient walking and cycling infrastructure, as well as the less tangible, but very important lack of an active travel 'culture'.
14. Infrastructure - The Act will achieve change through a multi stage process: At the outset, there is an objective assessment of existing walking and cycling infrastructure in the designated localities and identification of existing active travel routes, which need to be published on Existing Routes Maps. These are based on extensive survey work which we funded and mapped centrally, and capture the current active travel routes in each designated locality and assess their standard. The deadline for submission of these first maps is 22 January.
15. As the next stage the Act aims to start to address causes for the patchy provision of appropriate infrastructure with the introduction of Integrated Network Maps, starting no later than after submission of the Existing Routes Maps. The Integrated Network Maps mean that network planning for walking and cycling will be done on a strategic and consistent basis across Wales. For many local authorities this will be the first time that they will be moving away from planning

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walking and cycling infrastructure at individual scheme and route level and instead look at all the key destinations in their areas and how they need to be connected with where people live.

16. A key duty under the Act is that local authorities need to make year on year improvements to their walking and cycling infrastructure and report on these. The Existing Routes Map and the Integrated Network Maps together provide the basis on which to prioritise these improvements and target them at those routes that have the potential to achieve the greatest increase in numbers of walkers and cyclists.
17. Culture Change - In order to achieve the necessary culture change to allow this to happen, the Act and its supporting guidance emphasise the need for engagement and consultation at every stage. This should not be limited to current walkers and cyclists, but include potential users, with a view to help identify barriers to uptake of walking and cycling and address them through the prioritisation of improvements.
18. The Annual Active Travel Conference, held in November, focused on how we can achieve this culture change by widening the appeal of walking and cycling and extend the benefits to those important segments of the population who are currently less inclined to take up active travel.
19. The Act set out that these infrastructure improvements need to be accompanied by promotion of active travel, both by local authorities and by Welsh Ministers. I have put in place a new three year contract, which will deliver Active Travel Promotion in Schools. The contract will achieve more intensive engagement with many primary and secondary schools that have been selected through an appraisal process and also make resources and support available to all schools across Wales.
20. The duty to make year-on-year improvements to infrastructure started with the commencement of the Act. At the end of this financial year, we expect the first annual reports from local authorities on the improvements that they have made and the cost that these incurred, which will provide the first full overview of the Act's impact so far.
21. In implementing the Act, we need to continue to learn from best practice, including following progress in other countries that set international bench marks. I commissioned Professor Cole to carry out a review of current delivery models, here and elsewhere, the report on which has been passed to the Committee. This work will inform how we progress delivery of active travel infrastructure in Wales.

Design Guidance

22. The Design Guidance was published in December 2014 and sets out the standards for active travel infrastructure in Wales and provides guidance on how to plan active travel networks. The Guidance is statutory and takes precedence over other guidance, where they are in conflict. It must be used when designing

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trunk road active travel routes and it must be considered for all non-trunk road networks. Where local authorities decide to follow alternative guidance, they must set out how the route deviates from the standards and explain why the respective route can still be regarded as an active travel route.

23. The Guidance has been recommended to English local authorities by the Department for Transport.
24. The Design Guidance's main aim is to lead to the creation of safe, convenient and comfortable active travel networks, thus addressing a key barrier to take up of active travel. It does this by setting out a three step range of possible infrastructure solutions for different circumstances; ranging from those that are widely tried and tested ('standard details'), via those that are less wide-spread, but which have had good results ('suggested details') to designs that have only been used infrequently and which may be more experimental in character ('possible details'). The design guidance encourages application of all of these categories to build up a body of experience in Wales. The more innovative the design of a scheme is, the greater is the need for close monitoring and evaluation.
25. It is the intention that the Design Guidance will be updated to reflect the experience of using the different infrastructure solutions as it builds up, as well as new developments elsewhere.
26. My own officials are starting to build up experience of using the Design Guidance by using it to develop new active travel schemes on trunk roads. Local authorities are required to comply with the Design Guidance where they receive Welsh Government funding for schemes from the Local Transport Fund, the Safe Routes in Communities Grant or in some cases the Road Safety Grant.
27. Following appraisal of the Existing Routes Maps, my officials will invite local authorities to regional workshops to capture the experience and learning from the first year of implementing the Act, in particular the experience of preparing the Existing Routes Maps and consulting on them and using the Design Guidance to assess and plan active travel routes.

Active Travel Action Plan

28. We consulted on a draft Active Travel Action Plan last year. Feedback from the consultation and from the Active Travel Board, which is made up of key departments, external partners and chaired independently, suggested that the Action Plan would benefit from a different approach and structure. We also decided to align the Plan more closely to the goals of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
29. The new Action Plan will identify how Welsh Government, across the different portfolios, aims to support walking and cycling and increase its uptake. My officials have worked with colleagues in other departments to revise the Plan. This approach reflects the multiple benefits described above which make promoting active travel a clear case for cross cutting activity. The revised Plan will be finalised in February.

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Overcoming barriers

30. The Active Travel Act broke new ground, without direct precedents either in the UK or elsewhere. It is in its first full year and therefore still in its infancy. This requires commitment and willingness to learn and experiment from all those involved in implementation, both within Welsh Government and local authorities, as well as among stakeholders and the public who are involved through consultation and engagement. Where commitment, resources or skills are not in place, implementation is likely to suffer.
31. We have taken a number of important steps to address such barriers. We recognised that the work involved in the initial survey phase was likely to cause many local authorities problems due to staff constraints and we mitigated this by commissioning a survey covering all designated localities centrally. We added further value by creating an all Wales data capture system that is available to all local authorities to map and plan their active travel routes and which will be used to create the required maps in a consistent format.
32. When the survey work took longer than planned, I extended the deadline for the submission of the Existing Routes Maps to give local authorities sufficient time to consult. We are continuing to provide on demand training on this system to address any skills and knowledge barriers. We have also provided training on the Design Guidance and will capture experience and learning in the regional workshops planned following appraisal of the Existing Routes Maps.