

INTRODUCTION

1. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the 22 local authorities in Wales, and the three national park authorities, the three fire and rescue authorities, and four police authorities are associate members.
2. It seeks to provide representation to local authorities within an emerging policy framework that satisfies the key priorities of our members and delivers a broad range of services that add value to Welsh Local Government and the communities they serve.
3. **Implementation and operation to date:**
4. The Active Travel (AT) legislation alongside the Well Being (WFG) Act require a shift in the culture and ethos of organisations across Wales to further embrace the principles of sustainable development. Whilst the legal duties fall upon public bodies in Wales much of the activity involves partners from across all sectors.
5. This includes all relevant parts of the system from developers to communities themselves. Consequently, it is to be expected that there will be a significant learning curve in the initial implementation of these radical pieces of legislation. This is evidenced by the experience that many LA's had in participating in the WFG Act early adopters programme led by WLGA. Only after the principles were fully engaged with across a range of service areas did the opportunities and barriers become more apparent.
6. Therefore, the WLGA welcomes this committee's decision to review progress on this as an opportunity to learn from the best experiences but also to understand the difficulties that have arisen. Of course, the AT Act has been implemented against a backdrop of challenging public-sector resources that undoubtedly have influenced the progress made. Indeed, transport expenditure more widely has come under significant pressure with very difficult decisions to be made at a local level.
7. However, it is important that the vision that this active travel process establishes within LA's and the wider societal gains are revisited to ensure that there remains a common and clear understanding why this area of work is vital for the future of communities across Wales.
8. The implementation of the AT Act has naturally meant that LA's have had to reallocate resources; both staffing and budgets. Primarily to deliver on the inventory exercises to allow production of the Active Travel existing route map (ERM), and the integrated network map (INM). In many areas the WG Local Transport Fund (LTF) funding was

not sufficient to meet the costs of the process and as such additional local resources needed to be used. There is an opportunity cost to this.

9. Some LA's are suggesting that changes to the LTF criteria and funding regime mean that only schemes that have been identified as Active Travel routes are tending to get progressed. The understandable focus on larger settlements may have had the unintended consequence of meaning that smaller rural communities and inter-urban routes have lost out.
10. In specific terms the development of the mapping process has raised certain issues. Some LA's have said they have struggled with the timing of the relevant guidance compared to submission timescales, its clarity and detail in places. There is a balance to be struck between a high level of prescription that eliminates local innovation and sometimes encourages a do minimum approach with an approach that is looser but allows the best to flourish. However, having the right guidance in place at the right time to allow LA's to adequately plan their resources to deliver what is required is a given.
11. The Design guidance also needs to be refined to take account of feedback from all stakeholders, but particularly from LA engineers/officers relating to the suitability of some of the proposals and their experiences of implementing some of the less well-known design elements in the guidance. Examples, ideally from Wales but at least from the UK, where design elements have been successfully implemented need to be included in any refresh.
12. The Delivery Guidance lacked detail in some areas (for example the level of data to be captured/presented on the maps) and this is likely to hamper efforts to achieve consistency across Wales. Tighter definitions would also have provided greater certainty for LAs during the process. Clearer information regarding the role of audits for the INM process will be required for any further iterations.
13. The cost of preparation of the maps proved to be higher than originally estimated and as a result LAs were required to subsidise the allocations from WG in order to complete the work packages, in many cases having to commission external consultants to complete the work on their behalf. The long-term benefits of encouraging modal shift should mean that investment in infrastructure and promotion of active travel proves to be very good value for money but this will need continuous investment and an appreciation of the long-term nature of behaviour change which will mean that results in terms of modal shift are unlikely to be noticed immediately.
14. There also needs to be greater emphasis on ensuring that the information gathered is marketed in a way that the public understands and can actively use. This should be seen in the context of the investment currently being developed for the metro process as well as the branding process.
15. **Effectiveness of wider Active Travel policy:**
16. One concern voiced has been that active travel is not integrated effectively across the full range of local authority and Welsh Government functions. It does not always seem to be fully addressed in the development of new buildings and infrastructure beyond the curtilage of the development. Whilst the planning system has a part to play in utilising S.106 agreements where possible, the ongoing concerns about viability of

especially housing land raises anxieties. The perverse outcome has been that up to date LDP's have not produced the necessary five-year supply of viable housing land and consequently have led to difficult local discussions with developers on what was required by the planning process in light of these viability problems. Without planning gain the resources to implement are limited especially where issues such as affordable housing need to be prioritised.

17. The introduction of funding for development work within the Local Transport Fund is welcome but there needs to be clear signals given to LA's about funding levels over the longer term to allow a strategic and integrated approach to infrastructure development. One issue with the public facing maps is that LA's have been wary of raising expectations about what can be delivered in the short to medium term. This perhaps has resulted in a lack of ambition shown in the development of plans for the future but where LA's have little confidence that resources will be available they have not unreasonably planned accordingly. This may not have been the ambition of the legislation but is an understandable position given that there is little public awareness of the process and it can be confusing to users who are unfamiliar with how the system should work.
18. **Any action which should be taken to improve the effectiveness of the Act and its implementation:**
19. There appears to have been issues regarding trunk roads and the division of responsibility between different agencies. There needs to be a clearer process for this and clarity on whether LA's have a right to consult on making changes to a trunk road.
20. The targeting of larger settlements is an understandable response to the need to ensure limited resources are used effectively. However, it has the perverse outcome of potentially excluding smaller rural communities where a need has been identified, and directing effort at other places where the need may not be as great. This is particularly relevant in rural Wales where connectivity of smaller villages to larger hubs over longer distances are put at a potential disadvantage.
21. There also needs to be further training and support across a range of professional groups to raise understanding and awareness. It is critical to the success of the Act that all organisations understand the implications and benefits corporately.
22. Further work is also required to give the LA's assurance about balancing the gold standard schemes against the more opportunistic but potentially more deliverable scheme. Whilst it is in no-one's interest to continue to develop inadequate infrastructure it is also necessary to deal with current dangers, barriers to connectivity and so on in a proportionate way. Clearly this needs to be done as a stepping stone to full compliance but needs to be part of the journey. Longer term assurances about future resources is also critical to this longer-term planning.
23. **How far the Act has represented, and will continue to represent, value for money:**
24. One criticism expressed of the process is that it has seen very limited additional resources and as such has required the reallocation within LA's. This has potentially

resulted in a shift away from delivery on the ground to develop the mapping and auditing processes. In the long run the process will prove a worthwhile investment if the additional resources are available to deliver on the ambition of the Act. However, it has caused short term issues.

25. These capital investments must also be supported by revenue based schemes of promotion such as behaviour change campaigns and maintenance. LA's are finding it difficult to fund any local promotion and most communications/engagement budgets have been reduced significantly across most LA's. This has meant that the consultation processes that have happened have sometimes struggled to reach beyond the already active and understand what the rest of the community needs to become more active.
26. Without this parallel behaviour change process there is a danger that where infrastructure is developed and not well used it becomes a stick to beat local elected members with as a sign of wasteful investment. This will potentially negatively influence the local approach to this type of work. If there is no provision for maintenance and the routes deteriorate this will only exacerbate the situation.
27. The wider benefits of healthier and more connected communities also often reside in financial terms outside of the Local Authority and as such the wider budgetary impacts with potential reallocations from health should be considered.
28. **To assess the effectiveness of wider active travel policy in supporting delivery of the Active travel (Wales) Act 2013, including the effectiveness of the active travel action plan:**
29. Local Authorities found the Action plan useful at the beginning of the process as it set out how Welsh Government were planning to approach the delivery of the Act. There is some feedback that a longer-term plan would be useful; not least if it was able to indicate the scale of resources that might be available. In some parts of the UK there is a set amount/percentage of transport budget devoted to this issue and a future indication of this may be useful. This would send a clear signal to local authorities of the importance that Welsh Government place on this issue.
30. **The Operation of the Active Travel Board**
31. There is a view that there could be greater local authority practitioner involvement on the board and at the least there should be more formal dissemination of the papers and opportunities to influence the issues discussed.
32. **Whether active travel is integrated effectively in wider Welsh Government and local government policy:**
33. The introduction of the Act and the Well Being legislation does require a step change in how all public agencies understand and tackle these issues. In certain authorities all highway activity is starting to be viewed through the need to understand the active travel implications/opportunities of any maintenance or new development. Also, the

revamping of PPW that is due soon should give greater assurance to planners on the approach to this. Of course, the issues with housing land viability and the lack of a five-year supply in most areas may contribute to the difficulty to ensure new developments have the required infrastructure. It is critical that the Planning Inspectorate support active travel requirements in applications which go to appeal.

34. It is likely that to enable the agenda to move forward that greater thought needs to be given to ensure that a range of professional groups understand and deliver the requirements of the Act across a range of agencies and third sector groups. Thought should be given to how this training need can be met in a regional way that ensures that practitioners and elected members have the knowledge and skills required.

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