

Ramblers Cymru Evidence on the general principles of the Active Travel (Wales) Bill

- Ramblers Cymru is the representative body of The Ramblers' Association in Wales.
- The Ramblers works to help everyone realise the pleasures and benefits of walking, and to enhance and protect the places where people walk. We are committed to encouraging and supporting walking, 'the nearest activity to perfect exercise' (Morris and Hardman 1997¹), as a health-promoting physical activity.
- As Britain's walking charity, the Ramblers is at the heart of walking, with around 6,000 members in Wales, 115,000 nationwide, about 18,000 volunteers, and a network of around 500 local Groups, over 40 of these in Wales. Through these Groups we offer over 38,000 led walks which attract half a million participants each year, covering all types of terrain and levels of ability.
- Although perhaps best known for our work to protect and enhance the walking environment, especially rights of way and other access for walkers in the countryside, we are also active in towns and cities, and work extensively to promote walking and to encourage and support people to walk more. Ramblers' volunteer-driven led walks programme offers over 500 walks a week, including an increasing number of shorter and easier walks and walks suitable for families with children.
- We also deliver projects that specifically target insufficiently active people, those from socially excluded communities and those that suffer from health inequalities.
- We welcome the opportunity to present evidence to the Enterprise and Business Committee tasked with scrutinising the Welsh Government's Active Travel (Wales) Bill.

¹ 'Walking to health' in *Sports Medicine* 23 Jerry Morris and Adrienne Hardman 1997

1. Is there a need for a Bill aimed at enabling more people to walk and cycle and generally travel by non-motorised transport?

It is widely recognised that an increase in active travel is of benefit to the health and wellbeing of a nation² but it would seem that at times these benefits are given insufficient weight to prioritise the facilities and other measures that will have greatest effect in achieving them.

A number of initiatives are in place at local, regional and national levels aimed at increasing walking and cycling. Guidance exists as to street design, active travel plans and safe routes are developed but there is, despite best efforts, a certain amount of disjointedness in the provision.

Further amongst this patchy development the walking environment is often ignored and assumptions made on the acceptability of shared facilities in restricted space which we would at times question.

We see this Bill, if accompanied by robust guidance, as having the potential to improve, consolidate and maximise the positive impact of existing and new measures by bringing active travel to the forefront of transport and planning decision making.

2. What are your views on the key provisions in the Bill, namely –

-The requirement on local authorities to prepare and publish maps identifying current and potential future routes for the use of pedestrians and cyclists (known as ‘existing routes maps’ and ‘integrated network maps’) (sections 3 to 5)

-The requirement on local authorities to have regard to integrated network maps in the local planning process (section 6)

-The requirement on local authorities to continuously improve routes and facilities for pedestrians and cyclists (section 7)

-The requirement on highway authorities to consider the needs of pedestrians and cyclists when creating and improving new roads (section 8).

We recognise the value of the above and strongly support the decision to map walking and cycling routes separately. As the Bill addresses utility rather than leisure journeys it is important that both the existing route maps and integrated network maps take into account the way in which the network will be used in the future as well as current use when deciding what is appropriate for inclusion.

² Healthy Transport=Healthy Lives British Medical Association 2012

We feel that the Bill and guidance must be worded to ensure that the design of new routes takes into account the fact the developments planned under the Bill should release suppressed demand. Whilst current usage may suggest that shared facilities can properly be considered, given planned and desired growth this may soon prove not to be the case.

Active travel routes used by many cyclists will need to meet the demand for fast, direct and uninterrupted passage. Walking is undertaken in a different way from most commuter cycling and demands at times a different environment; paths on which children and adults can walk relatively uninterrupted. We do not walk in straight and regimented lines and a failure to recognise the differences results in facilities that serve neither group of active traveler. Very little of the network is or will be through spacious parks where shared paths can work; it will be in busy streets with junctions and obstacles. To create a network that results largely in cyclists being removed from the streets and onto the pavements will improve facilities for neither group.

In order for the maps to reflect an active travel network that can truly help achieve behaviour change then routes included need to be of a high standard. We would therefore suggest that where existing routes do not meet a sufficiently high standard this is somehow reflected. This is especially the case where facilities are shared. We welcome the requirement for continuous improvement but would suggest that when creating new routes and links the emphasis must be on delivering to a high standard in the first instance.

Integrated maps could play a positive step towards helping achieve the aims of the Bill. They should also take into account the need to link walking networks with public transport facilities.

We would suggest that there should be a presumption in favour of providing facilities for walking and cycling when creating and improving new roads rather than allowing Authorities to merely have regard. The onus is then on highway authorities to justify their rebuttal and strengthens the position of active travel measures.

3. Have the provisions of the Bill taken account of any response you made to the Welsh Government's consultation on its White Paper?

We welcome the fact that Welsh Government are having regard to the differing needs of walkers and cyclists by determining that walking and cycling routes be mapped separately.

We would hope that this recognition continues through all stages of implementation. Evidence shows that the state of the walking environment is of key importance; Colin Pooley³ indicates that concerns over comfort, ease of use and safety are key barriers to active travel for those not accustomed to both walking and cycling.

Walkers can be subject to the same concerns whilst walking on shared paths as cyclists are when faced with traffic. Fears, whether real or perceived, are reported as preventing active

³ Understanding Walking and Cycling Summary of key findings and recommendations Colin G Pooley Lancaster University 2011

travel and to accept this on the part of cyclists but to dismiss on the part of walkers is we would suggest counterproductive.

We recognise that current Rights of Way law and definitions are not straight forward but support the view that they need further consideration and therefore come outside the remit of this Bill.

4. To what extent are the key provisions the most appropriate way of delivering the aim of the Bill?

Mapping existing and planned networks should enable strategic and linked developments. Strong guidance will ensure that the routes are of a standard that can really support behaviour change. Routes will need to be direct and as pleasant and uninterrupted as possible.

Infrastructure is only one aspect of promoting active travel and then only if it is of sufficient standard. Education and information will be needed to both raise awareness of the facilities available and to break down other identified barriers. There is also a need to address matters such as traffic flow priorities and enforcement of existing traffic laws and to ensure that links with public transport are established.

5. What are the potential barriers to the implementation of the key provisions and does the Bill take account of them?

Mapping and developments will need to be of a high standard and without cross departmental buy in there is the danger that active travel will not be prioritised sufficiently for real progress to be made. Current provision is often designed out by engineers with different priorities. There is a lack of political will to increase the space available for active travel with the flow of motor traffic being given priority. Forcing walkers and cyclists together in ever decreasing amounts of space and not tackling car use, parking and public transport links will jeopardise the success of this Bill.

6. What are your views on the financial implications of this Bill?

Investment in active travel produces a good return on investment when the full range of benefits are considered and we would welcome a Bill which supports the type of investment that recognises this true value. We would stress the need to ensure that funds from a wide range of sources be made available to reflect the desired status of the mapped network.

Local Authorities are unable to meet their current statutory duties to maintain the rights of way network some of which will form part of the mapped network. We would not wish to see these scarce resources reallocated as doing so would further endanger the future of our economically, culturally and historically important network.

7. To what extent has the correct balance been achieved between the level of detail provided on the face of the Bill and that which will be contained in guidance given by Welsh Ministers?

As referred to above the ability of this Bill to affect real change will rely in the main on the strength of the guidance and the extent to which Authorities are required to implement rather than required to have regard. We already have existing routes that do little to promote active travel as they do not meet the needs of the user. We have routes full of inconsistencies and compromises; designed so as not to take space from nor impede the journey of motor vehicles. If the guidance does not address such things the Bill will struggle to have the impact it could.

Not having sight of guidance renders it difficult to comment on whether the correct balance has been achieved.

8. Are there any other comments you wish to make on the Bill that have not been covered in your response?

As noted above we welcome the fact that mapping of walking and cycling routes be considered separately. Too often the effect that the walking environment has on peoples willingness to walk is overlooked in a way that the needs of cyclists is not and this is evidenced in the rhetoric surrounding the Bill and many of the consultation responses.

We feel it necessary to emphasis the importance of bearing in mind the walking experience and the reality that walking, especially when combined with public transport, is an activity that the majority of people can undertake and yet often don't.