

## **ATW01 Lee Waters, Member of the Senedd for Llanelli Constituency**

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Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

**Y Pwyllgor Cyfrifon Cyhoeddus a Gweinyddiaeth Gyhoeddus | Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee**

**Teithio Llesol yng Nghymru | Active Travel in Wales**

Ymateb gan: Lee Waters, Aelod o'r Senedd dros Etholaeth Llanelli | Evidence from: Lee Waters, Member of the Senedd for Llanelli Constituency

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**LEE WATERS** Aelod o'r Senedd dros Etholaeth Llanelli / Member of the Senedd for Llanelli Constituency

I appreciate the inquiry by the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee into Active Travel, and note your call for anyone with expertise or experience of these issues to share their views.

I have some experience of providing leadership in the development of active travel policy, first as the organiser of the campaign for an Active Travel Act in 2008 in my role as Director of Sustrans Cymru between 2007 - 2013, then later as the first Chair of the Senedd's Cross-Party Group on Active Travel and then for five years the Minister responsible to the policy and delivery.

There are a number of observations and frustrations I think it might be helpful for me to share with the committee to help inform its scrutiny.

I will focus my comments on the themes that you have invited views on.

A)The Welsh Government's new active travel delivery plan, including any perceived gaps in coverage.

It is not clear if the Welsh Government is still committed to implementing the active travel delivery plan. There is no mention of it in the Cabinet Secretary's Written Statement on 'Promoting walking, wheeling and cycling' of 21st January 2025, and no reference to it in the guidance for CJsCs in drawing up Regional Transport Plans.

Further, the Cabinet Secretary priorities for 'walking, wheeling and cycling' in the Written Statement make no mention of cycling other than to promote it to young people. This is out of step with the Net Zero Wales Carbon Budget 2 (2021 to

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2025) commitment of 'increasing trip mode share of active travel from a current estimated proportion of 27% to 33% by 2030 and at least 35% by 2040.'

B) Opportunities for improved mainstreaming of active travel considerations in wider policy and programmes.

Increasing levels of active travel can contribute to a whole range of policy outcomes but generally in each of them the impacts can be modest, but cumulatively can be significant. However, there is no system leadership to maximise the impacts across all areas.

The delivery of active travel is seen too narrowly as a responsibility of transport departments, and is not mainstreamed in the delivery of other policy areas where it strongly contributes to policy outcomes. For example, there is little signposting by primary care of the physical activity benefits of everyday walking and cycling; School leaders and education departments consider car parking an appropriate area for their focus, but not the journey to school by active modes; The recently imposed Duty to promote the air quality benefits of active travel in Environment (Air Quality and Soundscapes) (Wales) Act 2024 have been applied to public authorities in the first instance, despite the clear evidence of benefits and the commitments given by Ministers when the Bill was passed.

C) The developing role of Transport for Wales as part of the delivery arrangements for active travel.

Councils regularly report difficulty recruiting staff with skills in delivering active travel policy and yet despite the ability to fund staff teams at a regional level there has been no appetite from local authorities to pool limited expertise. TfW has been gradually stepping into this gap as it progresses into a multi-modal transport delivery body by providing support and advice to local authorities in the development and delivery of their active travel schemes.

The development of TfW's Active Travel Academy to train local authority staff and the creation of an expert design team are meeting long standing needs for AT delivery. Further developing TfW into a centre of excellence is an obvious opportunity to support the delivery of local schemes.

More needs to be done to mainstream and integrate active travel as a transport mode within TfW. Building greater capacity within the regional teams is a clear way in which capacity and capability can be developed to assist local authorities, which will also help ensure active travel is developed alongside bus and rail within TfW.

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## The role and activities of the Welsh Government's Active Travel Board.

Despite being given additional independence it is not clear how the Active Travel Board has been challenging delivery organisations. The decision by the WG to remove independent secretariat support for the board has not helped.

The Welsh Government's active travel spending and how it is distributed and prioritised between different schemes and types of intervention.

The evidence is clear that a combination of infrastructure and behaviour change interventions is necessary for sustained increases in levels of walking and cycling.

However, the relative difficulty of obtaining revenue funding in transport budgets is a significant barrier to funding 'softer measures' and in-turn achieving active travel targets.

Capital funding has been easier to free up for infrastructure investment than it has proven to release revenue spending for schemes like cycle training, travel planning, promotion and marketing because of revenue pressures in the transport budget. This could be an area where other departments contribute, but overall downward spending pressure has made this a difficult conversation to have.

The extent to which local authorities are prioritising active travel and related investment, capacity constraints, and potential impacts from an increased emphasis on regional transport planning.

The Audit Wales work has noted the stubbornness of the levels of walking and cycling despite increased levels of investment. This needs unpicking. First, the evidence from countries with higher levels of active travel show that change requires long-term, multi-generational investment to create dense networks and a compilation of incentives and disincentives to change. Secondly, the granularity of the data is not sufficiently robust for us to know how behaviour is changing. And thirdly, the infrastructure changes that are made need to prioritise interventions that make the greatest difference.

The projects put forward for funding by Councils prioritise deliverability over impact. Favoured schemes tend toward prestige civil engineering projects such as bridges, or infrastructure that is easier to build such as paths alongside roads. Even though TfW have made available a prioritisation tool to local authorities to identify which routes have the greatest potential to attract users it is far from clear if this is being used.

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There is little evidence that local authorities are committed to achieving modal shift. The active travel schemes that are developed in most local authorities tend to follow the path of least resistance. There is a reluctance to put forward interventions that reallocate road space away from cars to prioritise movement by active modes. For example, taking away residential car parking spaces to create segregated on-road cycle lanes, or lower cost interventions such as contra-flow lanes, traffic light priority for pedestrian crossing or cycles, are not common. Equally few Councils have taken up powers for moving traffic offences which would allow enforcement against antisocial parking.

Whether the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 itself remains fit for purpose, including its requirements around active travel network mapping.

The purpose of mapping in the Act was intended to be two-fold - to make people aware where the existing network is, because the evidence showed that a barrier to change was an ignorance of alternatives to car use; and to highlight the gaps in the network in order to develop a plan to connect them. The need for both these things remains. However the first purpose has been lost, the maps are not being used as a promotional tool in part because of the lack of emphasis on revenue funding, but also because the maps have been led by transport teams with a focus on engineering and not on behaviour change.

How best to drive behaviour change in support of active travel, and current barriers

There is a simple design principle - make it easy. People will do what is easiest. For 70 years we have followed transport policies which have emphasised, facilitated, and prioritised the convenience of driving. As a result it is easy to drive, and so most people who have a choice do so. If similar effort is put into removing the friction of using sustainable transport modes it is reasonable to suggest more people will choose public and active travel modes.

Levels of walking and cycling in the UK have been in long-term decline. As a result relatively few people have adopted the habit and confidence of travelling actively for most everyday journeys. To compound this our environment has been shaped around facilitating the convenience of car use, and services have been placed at locations that assume access by car.

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Challenging these trends is not easy. Achieving meaningful progress in active travel requires a coordinated, systemic approach that addresses both structural and behavioural barriers. While Wales has taken initial steps to promote walking, cycling, and other sustainable modes, accelerating behaviour change demands greater ambition, integration, and evidence-based innovation.

Ensuring active travel is accessible and inclusive, including around scheme design

The key to ensuring active travel is accessible and inclusive is good design and good engagement.

Early engagement with the community and particularly groups representing the disabled is key, but is only as good as the follow-through. Equality Impact Assessments often say the right things but are not applied well or consistently. This is another issue of capability and capacity in transport teams and is another example of why the improvements are needed to ensure compliance with the *Active Travel Design Guidance* across all schemes.

TfW should be leading design reviews for all active travel projects, which include specialists in equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). These reviews should assess compliance with accessibility standards and ensure provision for groups with protected characteristics.

The debate around inclusivity in active travel can be binary and can lose sight of the fact that many disabled people are advantaged by schemes to encourage walking and cycling. For example, while many blind and partially sighted users have significant concerns about shared-use infrastructure, families of children with autism value the ability to walk and cycle side-by-side, as do users with physical disabilities who use adapted bicycles. There will be tensions between user groups, for example 'floating bus stops' are a good example of where there is tension, which can be mitigated but not always entirely resolved between different needs.

TfW's scheme scrutiny needs to be data-driven. Expanding data collection efforts to incorporate qualitative insights, such as the experiences of disabled cyclists, and disaggregating metrics by age, disability, and socioeconomic status will provide a more comprehensive understanding of user needs. Integrating behavioural insights, including equality impact assessments and participatory monitoring, into all projects will help track inclusivity outcomes and refine strategies accordingly.

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Improving monitoring and evaluation and the Welsh Government's plans for enhanced data collection through a new National Travel Survey.

The introduction of a new National Travel Survey is a significant step forward.

There is now, finally, an Active Travel Monitoring Framework in place. This needs to be underpinned by a consistent approach at scheme level with a baseline and continued monitoring for at least two years. Each LA should be required to monitor their significant routes on a permanent basis. The data from these provisions and other LA monitoring needs to be easily publicly accessible.

Any other issues of concern in relation to delivery of the Welsh Government's active travel ambitions.

The Welsh Government's strategy is not aligned with the delivery mechanisms.

The Net Zero Wales Carbon Budget 2 (2021 to 2025) has a commitment of 'increasing trip mode share of active travel from a current estimated proportion of 27% to 33% by 2030 and at least 35% by 2040'. However, neither the delivery mechanisms nor budgets (in both capital and revenue) are calibrated to achieve this.

The capacity and capability at WG, TfW and local government levels are not sufficient to ensure the budget is targeted to achieve maximum impact. The monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are not yet in place to track progress against it.

In short, the system is not set up to succeed. And when the charge is then made that active travel spending has been ineffective and its future questioned, the government is not well placed to defend its policy interventions. This is deeply frustrating.



Lee Waters

MS for Llanelli constituency

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