

## **ATW04 Bevan Foundation**

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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: Sefydliad Bevan | Evidence from: Bevan Foundation

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# Bevan Foundation response to the Senedd Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee's consultation on Active Travel in Wales (March 2025)

The Bevan Foundation is Wales's most influential think tank. We create insights, ideas and impact that help to end poverty, inequality and injustice in Wales. We are a registered charity and company limited by guarantee, funded by charitable trusts and foundations, donations, and trading as a social enterprise. We are pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee's call for evidence on Active Travel. The following response lays out our position on four of the suggested evidence areas which are relevant to our work.

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

The Bevan Foundation is supportive of the Welsh Government's stated commitments to increasing active travel. Alongside public transport investment, investing in/enabling active travel holds many potential benefits for people on low income – these include improved safety and air quality in the areas where people live, work, and learn, improving wider health outcomes, and reducing inequalities in the availability of transport people need to access work, goods and services, and social opportunities

However, we are concerned about the slow progress of developing active travel since both the passing of the Active Travel Act in 2013 and the publication of the current transport strategy, Llwybr Newydd, in 2021. There is broad agreement that rates of active travel have not increased significantly as a result of spending since 2013.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Senedd Research, The Active Travel Act: 10 years on (2023). Available at:

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In addition to the lack of progress in increasing active travel we are concerned that a focus on deprivation and reducing financial inequalities is noticeably absent from the active travel delivery plan. This is despite the Welsh Government's broader transport strategy, Llwybr Newydd, stating that its three priorities (reducing need to travel, allowing people to move easily from door-to-door via accessible and sustainable transport, encouraging people out of cars) are intended to improve the living standards of people in Wales with a particular focus on tackling poverty:

"Together, these three priorities will improve our health, tackle poverty and open our transport system to all, particularly for those without access to a car and those living in rural areas.

If the Welsh Government is to succeed in meeting this ambition then it is crucial that the needs of people on low incomes are considered in active travel plans. People on low incomes<sup>2</sup> often do not have access to a car, and many already rely on active travel modes to get to their place of work and to access other services.

An example of how the failure to consider the needs of people on low income within active travel plans could negatively affect the Welsh Government's ability to meet its overall ambitions can be seen when looking at how local authorities may allocate funding for active travel.

It is likely that there are more 'easy wins' when it comes to extending active travel networks in urban areas, areas that already have cycle lanes, or in more affluent areas. This creates a risk that people living in rural areas and areas of deprivation are less likely to benefit from any investment into active travel. Whilst the plan outlines the intention to identify the routes which have the highest impact<sup>3</sup> it is not made clear what is meant by highest impact in this context. To realise the Welsh Government's ambition, we believe it is vital that such impact measurements include social justice outcomes – such as the impact of any investment on people on low incomes – alongside, for example, metres of cycle path added to a network.

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

Adequate spending on both public transport and active travel is crucial for raising the living standards and life chances of people living in poverty in Wales.

Though the size of the Active Travel Fund increased for a number of years from 2018, it pales in comparison to the money spent both on public transport and road investment. Furthermore, though the active travel delivery plan emphasises additions to the active travel fund until 2023/24, it is concerning that active travel

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<https://research.senedd.wales/research-articles/the-active-travel-act-10-years-on/>.<sup>2</sup>

Welsh Government, Llwybr Newydd: The Wales Transport Strategy 2021. Available at:

[https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-03/llwybr-newydd-wales-transportstrategy-2021-full-strategy\\_0.pdf](https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-03/llwybr-newydd-wales-transportstrategy-2021-full-strategy_0.pdf), page 4.

<sup>2</sup> Welsh Government, Active Travel Delivery Plan 2024 to 2027 (2024). Available at:

<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2024-03/active-travel-delivery-plan-2024to-2027.pdf>, page 5.

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appears to have now lost its ringfenced funding—with a specific active travel line being replaced in the 2025-26 Budget by a 'regional and active travel fund'.

While it is a positive move in principle that more decision making power has been given over to the Corporate Joint Committees with the increased emphasis on regional transport planning, groups such as the Transport Action Network<sup>3</sup> and Cycling IJK<sup>4</sup> have raised serious concerns about this apparent change in the funding structure for active travel.

Rowing back on ringfenced active travel spending now risks losing progress on developing networks that would benefit low-income households. The UK Government's Department for Transport-commissioned analysis established that the return on investment in active travel schemes is high — €5.62 for every £1 spent in the UK <sup>5</sup>—

bringing a much higher return than spending on road building (£ 2.50 for every £1)! These economic benefits include job creation and spending within communities. The IPPR has recently criticised the lack of investment in active travel in England, and notes that while Wales was ahead of England on per head spending on active travel in 2023, it lagged far behind Scotland and many countries in Europe. <sup>8</sup> Now that active travel has been merged with regional spending in the Welsh Government's budget we are concerned that it will make it more difficult to scrutinise Welsh government spending in this area.

Holding firm to active travel commitments is crucial if momentum is not to be lost on developing the opportunities active travel brings. There are often political pressures on local authorities to water down active travel schemes; given the lack of legislative imperatives for local authorities to achieve specific targets on active travel there is a risk that funding will not be utilised in ways which prioritise the benefits for low-income households.

Our concerns are echoed by Audit Wales' September 2024 report on Active Travel, which found 'variation in the extent to which local authorities are prioritising active travel and related investment' . <sup>9</sup>

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

The Active Travel Act has not succeeded in enabling the sea-change that is needed in developing sustainable and user-centric active travel options in Wales. There is arguably a need for stronger legislation to ensure that action on active travel makes the best use of the available funding, including improved evaluation, monitoring and reporting and strengthening the duties placed on the Welsh Government and local authorities.

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<sup>3</sup> Transport Action Network, Welsh Roads Review: Two Years On (2025). Available at: <https://transportactionnetwork.org.uk/welsh-roads-review-two-years-on>.

<sup>4</sup> Cycling UK, Wales risks losing ground on active travel following budget announcement (2024). Available at: <https://www.cyclinguk.org/blog/wales-risks-losing-ground-active-travel-followingbudget-announcement>.

<sup>5</sup> Davis, A, Claiming the Health Dividend: A summary and discussion of value for money estimates from studies of investment in walking and cycling (2014). Available at:

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The duties the Act places on local authorities to make progress on active travel are vague, lacking in sanctions for non-compliance, and may be contributing to opportunities being missed:

'Each local authority must in every year secure that there are— (a) new active travel routes and related facilities, and (b) improvements of existing active travel routes and related facilities.

We support the Auditor General for Wales's recommendations in September 2024 that the Welsh Government should work with local authorities to develop enhanced monitoring and reporting of progress on active travel, including setting delivery milestones. <sup>11</sup> The recommendations also included the need for more attention to be paid to how progress

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7dd183ed915d2acb6ee528/claiming\\_the\\_health\\_dividend.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7dd183ed915d2acb6ee528/claiming_the_health_dividend.pdf), page 6.

<sup>7</sup> Transport Select Committee, Strategic road investment: Government response to the Committee's sixth report: Eighth Special Report of Session 2022-23 (2023). Available at: <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/41785/documents/206994/default/>, page 1. <sup>8</sup> IPPR, Stride and ride: England's path from laggard to leader in walking, wheeling and cycling (2024). Available at: <https://www.ippr.org/articles/stride-and-ride>, pages 12 & 13. <sup>9</sup> Audit Wales, Active Travel (2024). Available at:

[https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/publications/active\\_travel\\_eng.pdf](https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/publications/active_travel_eng.pdf), page 19. <sup>10</sup> Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013, S. 7. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2013/7>. <sup>11</sup> Audit Wales, Active Travel (2024). Available at:

[https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/publications/active\\_travel\\_eng.pdf](https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/publications/active_travel_eng.pdf), [https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/publications/active\\_travel\\_eng.pdf](https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/publications/active_travel_eng.pdf), page 11.

on active travel contributes to the Welsh Government's wider well-being goals, including consideration as to how wider policy and programme areas can contribute. Given the clear potential benefits of active travel initiatives to people living in poverty in Wales, there is a strong case for more joining up with Welsh Government responsibilities and policy to tackle poverty and social justice.

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

As stated above, we are in support of stronger requirements for monitoring and evaluation of active travel to be placed on Welsh Government and local authorities. Currently, adequate scrutiny of action on active travel is impossible because of the lack of reliable and regular data collection. Although it contains some questions about active travel, the National Survey for Wales does not allow for analysis at a local level or to investigate differences between e.g. income- or ethnic groups due to sample sizes, and changes to its design year-to-year have meant that comparing results over time has limited meaning.

The Wales National Travel Survey is a crucial and overdue step in developing a reliable evidence base to enable an understanding of the way people travel in Wales. It is extremely unfortunate that under the current plans, we will not see

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even interim results from the survey until March 2026.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Audit Wales has drawn attention to the fact that the survey is not expected to allow for analysis at the local authority level. The Welsh Government should consider further improvements to the availability of travel and transport data in Wales to ensure that spending on active travel is utilised effectively.

As we have advocated above, the Welsh Government should also require fuller and standardised reporting on active travel from local authorities and incorporate this in the development of a more detailed annual reporting and monitoring framework.

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<sup>6</sup> Transport for Wales, Wales National Travel Survey (2025). Available at: <https://tfw.wales/projects/wales-national-travel-survey>.

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