

ATW09 Living Streets

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: Living Streets | Evidence from: Living Streets

Living Streets' response to the inquiry into Active Travel in Wales

Introduction

We are Living Streets, the UK charity for everyday walking. We want Wales to be a nation where walking is the natural choice for local everyday journeys, free from congested roads and pollution, reducing the risk of preventable illnesses and social isolation and making walking the natural choice. We are responding to this inquiry because we believe that investing in active travel, in particular measures to promote walking and wheeling, is necessary to reduce transport inequalities and encourage people out of their cars in rural areas. Every journey begins and ends with walking and a walking nation means progress for everyone. Our ambition is to get people of all generations to enjoy the benefits that this simple act brings and to ensure all our streets are fit for walking.

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

Living Streets broadly welcomes the Welsh Government's new active travel delivery plan, in particular the setting of specific national and regional targets for active travel following the collection of data from the new National Travel Survey. We approve the intention to improve integration of active travel in wider policies across planning, education, regeneration and health departments, but would like to see more detail on how this is to be achieved. Currently, collaboration and policy integration needed to promote active travel is not happening in practice – for example, planning decisions on new schools and housing are often taken without enough consideration of active travel. We support the allocation of core funding for local authorities as part of the Active Travel Fund, this is essential for them to build their in-house capacity and develop a continuous pipeline of active travel schemes. The delivery plan includes key actions and a timetable for delivery – our concern is over future funding and government commitment to active travel.

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

In 2024, Living Streets held a workshop in Cardiff to discuss Living Streets' context for public realm and walking improvements to high streets in Wales in preparation for the new Pedestrian Pound report. This included a broader discussion of the geography and social context, key walking targets, policies, funding and delivery mechanisms for public realm/active travel schemes.

Delegates expressed strong support for the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which, it was agreed, provides a long-term vision, a framework for decision-making and encourages joined-up thinking. Other key policies supported by delegates included the Town Centre First policy, the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013, together with Llwybr Newydd (the Wales Transport Strategy 2021) and Planning Policy Wales, both of which emphasise the hierarchy of transport users and the integration between transport, health and communities.

However, it was noted that political commitment can be variable, with too much siloed working, a lack of coordination between departments on placemaking and a lack of training and vision within local authorities. There is also a large focus on short-term measures and funding, and a lack of longer-term delivery programmes. Wider collaboration and policy integration needed to promote active travel is not happening in practice – e.g. planning decisions on new schools and housing are often taken without enough consideration of active travel.

The key policy recommendations to emerge from the workshop in the Pedestrian Pound report are for:

- Political leadership and consistency on transport policies (at Welsh Government and local authority level).
- More evidence-driven policies – participants recommended better monitoring of the impacts of public realm schemes, with a need for robust evidence, longitudinal data and standardised metrics.
- Policies that empower communities to take better care of their place.

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

Transport for Wales (TfW) has similar role to Active Travel England. It will help to develop the professionalism of the active travel behaviour change sector and provide an important service to local authorities, such as: active travel funding, training (e.g. on inclusive design) and help developing a monitoring and evaluation framework. We look forward to working with TfW alongside other willing partners in the third sector, in academia and in government bodies (e.g. Public Health Wales).

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

The Board now has a clearer role particularly in terms of scrutiny of how active travel funding is spent and making recommendations for improvement. However, we would welcome more alignment with the Active Travel Delivery Plan as well as terms of reference on the respective roles and responsibility of the Board and its members e.g. the Welsh Government, Public Health Wales and Transport for Wales.

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

There has been great emphasis on capital funds. Funding allocations 2024-25 reached just over £65 million. Of this, revenue funding accounted for £1.4 million and Walk to School Wales / Cerdded I'r Ysgol Cymru accounting for £385,000. While small by comparison, behaviour change interventions can make a real impact: in the last academic year (September 2023 to July 2024) our project logged 2.9 million walking journeys by 42,500 primary school pupils across 22 local authorities in Wales.

A regional approach (through Regional Transport Plans) should enable more tailored resource allocation and multi-year funding allows for long-term planning. However, in the absence of ringfencing, active travel investment needs to be prioritised. We must ensure that Regional Transport Plans have active travel at their heart, and that funding reflects this.

Local authorities may be unclear on which funds can be used for behaviour change schemes. While some clarity has been given, the picture is still somewhat confused. From Living Streets perspective, the building of physical infrastructure has not been accompanied by a strong enough focus on awareness raising and behaviour change. Effective community engagement would help to promote use of routes, but there is a lack of capacity within local authorities and in organisations representing people with protected characteristics (e.g. disabled people) to do this.

6. 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.

We are concerned that annual funding cycles and uncertainty over future funding make some local authorities reluctant to take on ambitious multi-year projects. Different funds also have different rules, adding complexity. Nevertheless, some authorities are doing better than others. For example, Cardiff has active travel plans for every school and a school streets programme; Glan Yr Afon primary school in Cardiff has recorded 92% attendance by active travel (as measured on

Travel Tracker). Torfaen is the local authority with the highest response rate to the Hands Up Survey – because they employ an Active Travel Officer who reminded schools to participate. This underlines the importance having dedicated staff time for active travel within local authorities. Capacity constraints will reduce engagement and active travel outcomes. Increased emphasis on regional transport planning (e.g. provision of bus services) will be beneficial as long as active travel (and walking and cycling connectivity) is considered as part of those longer journeys by bus or rail.

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

As a piece of legislation, the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 is fit for purpose. The issue is how well has it been implemented. We feel positive about the network maps, the emphasis on active travel to school, the establishment of the Active Travel Board and Active Travel Funds. The implementation of the 20mph default speed limits is also a real success story – despite initial teething problems. Now we need to see the Welsh Government take action on pavement parking!

We believe that successful implementation should be measured against tangible targets in the active travel delivery plan. Multi-year funding has only just been realised and should encourage local authorities to adopt more ambitious active travel plans and help to retain staff. We have seen different levels of commitment to active travel among local authorities (e.g. Cardiff and the Vale have dedicated staff for active travel) and a lack of integration across local authority teams (e.g. considering active travel when planning the location of new schools). We would also like to see more emphasis on behaviour change interventions alongside new infrastructure projects.

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

The only way to drive behaviour change in support of active travel is to increase investment in behaviour change programmes. For example, the Welsh Government funded Living Streets' Walk to School Wales project, recruiting 178 primary schools in all 22 local authority areas. Compared to the baseline data, results for the last academic year (2023-24) showed a 28% increase in primary school children walking or wheeling all the way to school and a 54% increase in active journeys – this is including cycling, scooting/skating and Park and Stride alongside walking and wheeling. At Next Steps secondary schools, 52% of pupils said that they had walked more because of the Next Steps Walking Challenge, with a 19% increase in the number of pupils who said they usually walk/wheel to school, 23% increase for active travel (based on survey results from 2687 pupils at 22 schools).

Current barriers to more people walking and wheeling include:

- **Obstructions/clutter:** the biggest problem is caused by vehicles parking on the pavement. Other temporary obstructions (or clutter) include advertising boards and wheely bins on bin day. Permanent obstructions include barriers to prevent vehicles using public footpaths which prevent access by mobility scooters too.
- **Connectivity:** walking or wheeling is part of every journey, but a lack of connectivity to public transport and transport hubs reduces the likelihood of active and sustainable journeys. Connectivity includes the provision crossing points (in particular informal crossings) to reinforce the pedestrian priority at side road junctions in the updated Highway Code.
- **Enforcement:** alongside the need for legislation and enforcement on pavement parking, action is needed to enforce against adults illegally cycling and scooting on pavements – especially on e-bikes and e-scooters which have powerful acceleration and speed. They are silent and can act as a deterrent to people walking (e.g. in older and less mobile pedestrians).
- **Design:** inclusive designs are developed by listening to communities (including groups representing users with protected characteristics). Often people are not asked about what they want, they are told what they are going to get.

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

Ensuring that active travel is safe and inclusive applies to existing streets and spaces as well as the creation of new infrastructure (which may include new infrastructure designs). In both cases, the aim should be to prioritise schemes that meet the needs of all users, ensuring that accessibility and safety are at the forefront of all design considerations. Living Streets supports the Active Travel Board Inclusive Active Travel Subgroup's recommendation for a thorough review of existing Active Travel routes and infrastructure to identify and remove physical and systemic barriers that prevent equitable access. For example, the removal barriers on the coastal path in Flintshire¹. As stated above (question 8), it is essential engage with and to listen to people disabled by the state of our streets and poor scheme designs (e.g. using inclusive language, providing materials in accessible format and actively reaching out to all groups of people)

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

Living Streets welcomes the Welsh Government's plans to enhance data collection through the new National Travel Survey (NTS). We are keen that the NTS draws out:

- Walk to school rates
 - Walk to work rates
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- Everyday/short walking routes over the course of a week (including short walking routes as part of a longer journey e.g. used to measure the target of 365 journeys per person per year in England)
- Walk to school rates for different age groups including disaggregating at primary level between infants and juniors.

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

Living Streets welcomes the new targets for 45% of journeys to be by public transport, walking and cycling by 2040, and, an increase trip mode share of active travel from 27% to 33% by 2030 and 35% by 2040. However, these will need to be assessed against new Wales NTS data as soon as possible to ensure that they are achievable.

We would like walking and cycling targets set at local authority level coupled with multi-year funding to drive delivery for active travel. In England, the Government sets the local authorities targets to increase active travel. Local authorities then use their Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans to prioritise capital investment for improvements to walking and cycling networks (e.g. [Local Walking and Cycling Implementation Plan Frequently Asked Questions | Milton Keynes City Council](#)).

ⁱ See [Flintshire: Campaigners vow to push on until all Wales Coastal Path barriers removed | Deeside.com](#)
