

ATW14 Age Cymru

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: Age Cymru | Evidence from: Age Cymru



Active Travel in Wales

Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee, Welsh

Parliament

Introduction

Age Cymru is the leading charity working to improve the lives of all older people in Wales. We believe older people should be able to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, have adequate income, access to high quality services and the opportunity to shape their own future. We seek to provide a strong voice for all older people in Wales and to raise awareness of the issues of importance to them.

We are pleased to respond to the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee's consultation on Active travel in Wales.

Age Cymru supports the aims of active travel for older people, in light of the documented health and social, as well as environmental, benefits that this can bring to individuals.

We've highlighted some issues below in the built environment in our communities that can cause barriers preventing older people from engaging in active travel. Poor neighbourhood design and / or a lack of facilities can lead to older people being cut off within communities. There are already high levels of loneliness and social isolation amongst older

people in Wales and an inaccessible built environment that deters people from taking part in community life can contribute to this.

Local authorities have a key role in making sure that the built environment in public spaces and streets in communities is safe and inclusive.

Furthermore, good practice of inclusive design in our built environments in our communities that are safe and accessible for walking and wheeling should be shared.

Pavements

To enable active travel, it is essential that the built environment in communities is safe and inclusive. More than a third of respondents to Age Cymru's Community Calculator survey¹ rated the pavements in their community as poor. Uneven pavements and brick pavements that are slippery when wet were seen as hazardous. Pavements obstructed with parked cars, tree roots, bins and street

furniture restricted access for wheelchairs and mobility scooters. Problems with dog fouling and litter were also highlighted.

A lack of safe pavements can place serious restrictions on the freedom of movement and mobility of older people. Pavements that are in a state of disrepair or are obstructed can compromise the safety and independence of older people and increase the risk of falls. Increased effort is needed to ensure that pavements are well-maintained and kept free of parked cars and obstacles.

Public seating

We believe it is vital that the built environment enables, rather than prevents, older people taking an active part in their communities and that there should be appropriate infrastructure to facilitate older people to access community spaces safely.

To encourage active travel it's important that there is sufficient provision of public seating and places to rest in communities. More than a third of respondents to Age Cymru's Community Calculator rated public seating

¹ [Age Cymru | Community Calculator \(ageuk.org.uk\)](https://ageuk.org.uk)

and places to rest as poor, with a general lack of public seating in communities being a key issue.²

For some older people, public seating can be the difference between living a full life and feeling cut-off and isolated. Without adequate seating and places to rest, accessing community areas and facilities can present a substantial challenge for older people. In Age Cymru's annual national survey (2024) some older people noted that public spaces were becoming increasingly inaccessible for older people due to the disappearance of public toilets, benches and dropped pavements.³

Shared space

Studies relating to accessible and inclusive age friendly environments identify a number of barriers in the built environment for older people, including a barrier related to the issue of shared space, whereby such 'shared space' is often not segregated between car and pedestrian.⁴

Older people have also expressed concerned over shared space for cycling and walking. A particular concern that has been raised with us is the use of floating island bus stops, whereby passengers need to cross the cycle lane to board or leave the bus, which is potentially hazardous, notably for people with visual impairments. This issue has also been raised by other organisations.⁵

Welsh Government's Active Travel Act Guidance document recognises that shared use facilities which are available for use by both pedestrians and cyclists are generally not favoured by either pedestrians or cyclists, particularly when flows are

high.⁶ It can create particular difficulties for visually impaired people, and the interactions between people moving at different speeds can be perceived to be unsafe and inaccessible, particularly by vulnerable pedestrians.⁷ The Active Travel Guidance document highlights that where a shared use facility is being considered, early engagement with relevant interested parties should be undertaken, particularly those representing

² [Age Cymru | Community Calculator \(ageuk.org.uk\)](https://ageuk.org.uk/community-calculator)

³ [Age Cymru | Annual survey \(ageuk.org.uk\)](https://ageuk.org.uk/annual-survey)

⁴ Age Cymru (2016) EnvisAGE. Towards an age friendly Wales. Article by Judith Phillips 'Accessible and inclusive age friendly environments'. [Age Cymru | EnvisAGE \(ageuk.org.uk\)](https://ageuk.org.uk/envisage)

⁵ [UCL Guide Dogs - Designing for Inclusion full report \(pdf 2.85mb\)](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/transport/transport-research-centre/publications/2019-2020/ucl-guide-dogs-designing-for-inclusion-full-report)

⁶ Welsh Government (2021) Active Travel Act Guidance

https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-12/active-travel-act-guidance_0.pdf ⁷ Ibid.

disabled people, and pedestrians and cyclists generally. Engaging with such groups is an important step towards the scheme meeting the authority's Public Sector Equality Duty.⁷

There is the need to ensure that shared spaces are fit for purpose, and to ensure meaningful consultation with disabled and older people to avoid exclusion as a result of poor design. Welsh Government's Active Travel Act, which promotes walking and cycling as a mode of transport and supports recreational walking and cycling, requires local authorities to consult with members of the public and key stakeholders when local authorities are updating their active travel network maps.⁸

Pedestrian safety

Key issues raised in relation to 'Neighbourhood safety' in Age Cymru's Community Calculator survey included: speeding traffic and lack of facilities to cross roads safely, and a lack of, or dimly-lit, street lighting.⁹ Concerns about bicycles and scooters on pedestrian only areas have also been raised.

Research on older people crossing the road at a pedestrian crossing reports that the 1.2 metres per second that the Department for Transport advises as the speed allowed for people to cross a road is not long enough and in around 89% of cases older people aren't walking at a fast enough speed to complete the crossing before returning to the green phase for traffic to proceed.¹⁰

We believe that local authorities must ensure that streets are safe and accessible, with good lighting. Pedestrian crossings must allow sufficient time to cross roads, signage should be easily visible, and pavements must be well maintained and free of obstruction.

Integrated transport

To encourage active travel there is the need for a fully integrated, sustainable, reliable, accessible and inclusive transport network, with trains and buses linked to pedestrian and active travel routes. Appropriate signage to the various travel networks would be helpful.

⁷ Welsh Government (2021) Active Travel Act Guidance https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-12/active-travel-act-guidance_0.pdf

⁸ [Active Travel Act guidance \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-12/active-travel-act-guidance_0.pdf)

⁹ [Age Cymru | Community Calculator \(ageuk.org.uk\)](https://ageuk.org.uk/age-cymru/community-calculator)

¹⁰ Age Cymru (2016) EnvisAGE. Towards an age friendly Wales. Article by Charles Musselwhite 'Vision for an age friendly transport system in Wales'. [Age Cymru | EnvisAGE \(ageuk.org.uk\)](https://ageuk.org.uk/age-cymru/envisage)

In Age Cymru's annual survey in 2024¹¹ 24% of respondents told us that transport has been a challenge in the last 12 months, which is an increase of 6% from last year. Transport challenges were mostly related to public transport, with the majority focusing on public buses, although poor public train services were cited a number of times. Issues with transport were recorded across all local authorities in Wales, impacting both rural and urban areas.

A lack of public transport was a reason given which affected people being able to get out and about. We heard about poor bus services, with people citing unreliable and infrequent services, which can make it difficult for people to access communities, medical appointments, shops and other services. Cuts to bus services and less frequent and/or unreliable services can impact on older people's ability to access services and communities, and a lack of bus services in the evenings impacted on people's ability to join in social activities.

A lack of facilities at bus stops such as seating and shelter can be a barrier to older people using buses. More bus stops with seating and shelters would enable active travel and make public transport more accessible.

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¹¹ [Age Cymru | Annual survey](#)
