

Living Streets assessment of the implementation and operation to date of the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013

On behalf of pedestrians in Wales, Living Streets Cymru wants to see active travel as the preferred and best choice for people making short, everyday journeys such as the walk to school.

The letter of the Active Travel Act, to produce maps is on track, with some small delays. However the vision to transform our country into an active travel nation is not being realised by the Act and those responsible for its implementation.

In regard to implementation there is still a lot to be done. The letter of the Act is being delivered, mostly on schedule. However, the spirit and purpose of the Act is to increase active travel and this cannot be done in the transport portfolio alone. Delivery needs to be seen across health, education, communities as well as environment briefs amongst others. A joined-up effort across Welsh Government could make efficiency savings and, most importantly, see more people benefit from active travel. Active Travel delivery sits within Road Safety and Transport but the bulk of benefits would be seen in public health.

The wide variety of benefits of active travel are not being seen across the country. While there are hot spots of behavior change delivering higher rates of walking and cycling and some good examples of infrastructure improvements, these are the exception.

For example out of 1549 schools in Wales there are fewer than 100 are funded by Welsh Government to have intensive support to increase and improve active travel, only 30 schools received Safe Routes in Communities funding to improve the journey to school in 2016/17.

Given the scope for savings across government in health alone - low physical activity levels among children and adults is estimated to cost the NHS Wales £650 million a year – investment in active travel schemes is excellent value money. Compared with other investment in transport projects, walking environment improvements are good value for money¹.

In order for the act to be effective the Action Plan needs to be more strategic and ambitious, setting targets and increasing multi-year funding to delivery partners and Local Authorities. Data collection and evaluation are important to guide this work, but should no longer be used as a delaying tactic to hold up progress or innovation.

We need to invest in schemes that are proven to increase walking (and cycling) across the country and ultimately make every school an active travel school, and every workplace an active travel workplace. Some of the levers to make this change exist but they are not being coordinated centrally or expected to deliver. The 21st Century Schools programme and the Wales and Borders and Metro franchise are key opportunities, led and funded by Welsh Government that must be harnessed.

Action Plan

Without a clear road map for improvement, including targets, deadlines, funding streams the Action Plan is unable to deliver change. The current action plan sets out a vision, but no method to get there.

A revised Active Travel Action Plan should set out an ambitious approach to funding, targets and implementation across departments and public bodies.

Mapping

These maps need to be made relevant to those who need them, but the target audience is still unclear. If they are for planners and local authorities then this was an expensive and time consuming exercise. If they are meant for public use it needs to be clear how and why they would access the maps. The mapping is at worst an exercise that has raised expectations with communities that there will be infrastructure improvement, which may not be the case due to funding.

The Welsh Government needs to raise the bar and offer greater leadership so these processes yield maps fit for purpose, i.e. they increase and promote active travel for all.

Consultation

The design guidance section 3ⁱⁱ sets out the best practice and tools for consultation. I would suggest the majority of Local Authorities did not adhere closely to this, but rather followed the statutory minimum of 12 weeks online consultation. With the complexity of the process, an online approach was not an ideal method to consult communities on the active travel routes they use and would like to use. Living Streets, Sustrans and Cycling UK worked to identify the opportunity and methods for consultation on the integrated network maps across Wales, using our networks to encourage people to get involved where they live, work, study.

Living Streets developed a bilingual school route audit toolkit for schoolsⁱⁱⁱ based on a pilot in three Local Authorities, this was sent out to all 22 Local Authorities as a consultation tool for the active travel mapping, school travel plans and safe routes in communities bids. To my knowledge this has not been used by any local authorities to date.

Impact on the ground

The scale of impact on the ground is still extremely small. When I ask if people have noticed a difference since the Act was passed I have never heard anyone say they have noticed a positive difference. There is an implementation deficit that needs to be addressed urgently.

A recent pedestrian survey highlighted a number of concerns, issues which prevented people from walking as often or as safely as they wished. The top two issues were pavement parking and reducing the speed limit in residential areas to 20 miles per hour. The Wales Act 2017 devolves powers speed limits of Welsh roads to the Welsh Government Ministers. The Act should be used to lead the way in making Wales one of the safest and easiest places to walk.

Walking schemes in Wales

There was one walking scheme for health impacts, Let's Walk Cymru in Wales. The scheme was run by the Ramblers for over 12 years. Walking for health schemes like this focus on shorter community walks, particularly as a method to tackle social isolation and increase physical activity, thereby reducing the rate of preventable illnesses such as heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, some cancers and obesity.

In 2017 this scheme was ended, with no announcement or explanation given. In England and Scotland walking for health is a growing area of work. Given we have the Act in Wales, this seemed to be a retrograde decision. There are no other walking schemes looking at behaviour change, which are funded by the Welsh Government.

In 2017 Living Streets carried out a School Route Audit pilot project for 3 schools, despite the success of the pilot there was no scope within Welsh Government to develop this scheme.

Schemes such as the Daily Mile are promoted but not funded by Welsh Government.

Walk to School

Living Streets runs the WOW walk to school challenge across the UK. In England over 3000 WOW schools participate, with over 1200 funded directly by DfT. In Scotland there are over 300 WOW schools, with about 200 funded directly by Scottish Government. In Wales there are currently 8 self-funded or LA funded WOW schools, and 0 funded by Welsh Government.

The WOW scheme works to increase walking rates to school on average by 23%^{iv}. It is based on the badge collection incentive for children to walk at least once a week. Last year 600,000 children took part across the UK.

Crucially the data collected in each school records the mode of travel for every child every day. This data tracks progress and effectiveness of interventions to increase active travel.

We submitted a proposal to Welsh Government for funding to place WOW in Welsh schools, in particular to translate materials and the data collection software, Travel Tracker^v, into Welsh language, this was unsuccessful.

Active Travel Board

The role of any board is to provide an external perspective and offer timely and informed advice, for government boards this should ideally be for the Minister, in an opportunity for direct communication and dialogue with industry/sector experts.

The Active Travel Board has had several iterations since 2014, the chair, membership and ministerial attendance has varied. As several board members are also (potential) delivery partners there is a need to increase transparency on the actions and advice of the board.

The role of Welsh Government officials should also be clarified on the board, for example in ensuring advice gets through to the minister in this direct forum. A chair of the board should be engaged in the agenda and neutral, not an interested party.

In our view ministerial attendance is essential at all Active Travel Board meetings. If the Board is to drive a real increase in active travel there needs to be Ministerial oversight to ensure better coordination across government.

Funding

Firstly there is very little transparency when it comes to the amount of funding being spent on active travel, where this money is being spent and the outcomes achieved.

Our experience in behavior change programmes shows that multi-year funding is key to achieving results that can be then sustained without direct support. Most of the funding to Local Authorities, either for the mapping process or Safe Routes in Communities are one year pots of funding, with no guarantees for future funding. This makes it impossible to plan a series of work. Year on year Local Authorities do not know what they will receive and many have stopped bidding for funds from these pots as they cannot be relied upon.

We support the calls for there to be a minimum spend per person on active travel, of at least £10 per head. This should also be divided into capital and revenue schemes to support behavior change alongside infrastructure improvement. Potential streams of dedicated funds include a model like England with DfT spending 1.2 billion on the CWIS, coupled with Department for Education PE and Sports Premium grants for schools raised by the 'sugar tax' which can now also be spent on active travel to and from school^{vi}.

An independent study for DfT has shown for every £1 invested, our walk to school programme is expected to return £7.64^{vii} in benefits. Interventions like these can help reverse the long term

decline in the number of children walking to school in Wales. Other delivery partners have similar return on investment ratios for cycling schemes.

Target-setting

The Westminster Government has signed up to the Living Streets target to reverse the decline in the number of children walking to school, to get it back to at least 55%.

Having passed the Active Travel Act, the Welsh Government should be able match or better this commitment.

Living Streets Cymru have offered to hold workshops with experts and government officials from England, Scotland and Wales to develop targets for walking and cycling that are ambitious and suitable.

Active Travel Strategy – some comparisons

While we have an Act here in Wales it is clear that we need to better integrate policies and implementation across government to deliver strategic change.

DfT have the Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy^{viii} includes targets by 2025 for children walking (to 55%) and cycling (double) to school and increase walking as the natural choice for short journeys. The Strategy sets out how government departments, local governments, industry, other transport networks, business and the third sector all work to deliver these targets.

Scotland has a National Walking Strategy and Cycling Action Plan for Scotland 2017-2020 with aims to increase walking up with the best performing countries.^{ix}

Recent Active Travel Wales data – some UK comparisons

Firstly it is worth noting the data released by Welsh Government not as detailed as the DfT's Cycling and Walking statistics for England released earlier this year.

Data on active travel released by the Welsh Government^x reveals a severe drop in walking rates for people in Wales, including children on the school run. The Welsh Government statistics reveal 42 per cent of primary school children walk to school, down from 50 per cent in 2013-14.

Most alarmingly the release suggested this was a 'slight' reduction. With over 270,000 pupils in primary school a reduction of 8% is estimated at 22,000 fewer children walking to school. There is a correlation between this data and an increase in the number of children travelling to school by car.

The reduction in the number of children walking to school seems to be largely the result of a fall in the number of those walking to school on their own or with friends. Safer crossings, school street closures and 20mph limits are all ways to help parents feel safer walking to school.

Walking for travel

- 61% of adults walked for at least five minutes at least once a week for active travel purposes. This has fallen from 66% in 2013-14, despite the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 and the Active Travel Action Plan published in February 2016.
- For comparison, the England 2016 figures showed 68% of adults walked at least ten minutes at least once a week.

Walking to school

- 44% of children actively travel (and 42% walk) to primary school, and 34% to secondary school. This was a reduction for primary school children from 50% in 2013-14, which seems to be largely the result of a fall in the number of children walking to school on their own or with other children, and a corresponding rise in the number travelling by car.

- Distance to school is not surprisingly a strong predictor of walking: 78% of primary school children who lived less than a kilometre from their school sometimes walked to school, but just 26% of those who lived 1–2 km away did so. 86% of secondary school children who lived less than a kilometre and a half away from their school sometimes walked to school but just 47% of those who lived 1.5–3 km away did so, and fewer than 5% of those who lived at least 3 km away.
- Again there's a rural / urban divide: Children living in more sparsely populated rural areas, defined as 'hamlet and isolated dwellings' were more likely to use a car to get to school and less likely to walk, than those who lived in urban areas. It seems likely this is correlated at least partly with distance, but there's no data on it.
- As children get older they reduce their reliance on an adult and are more likely to walk on their own or with other children. Travelling to school by car is very common for young children (over half of children under 10 years old), but as children get older and go to secondary school, use of the car reduces (less than a fifth of children aged 17 to 19).

Regional variations

- The percentage of people who walked for more than 5 minutes as a means of transport, more often than once a month, varied from 42% in Flintshire to 86% in Cardiff. Cardiff was also the local authority with the highest proportion of people walking as a means of transport most frequently and Flintshire the lowest, with 44% walking every day in Cardiff and 14% doing so in Flintshire
- This is partly due to the rural / urban divide: 72% of people in urban areas walked for more than 5 minutes as a means of transport, more often than once a month, compared with 59% of people in rural areas. People in urban areas were also more likely to walk more frequently, with 31% of people in urban areas walking every day compared with 22% in rural areas.

ⁱ <https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/media/1392/making-the-case-summary-final.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <http://gov.wales/docs/det/publications/141209-active-travel-design-guidance-en.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/media/2770/living-street-toolkit-english-online-final.pdf>

^{iv} <https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/what-we-do/projects/wow>

^v <https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/what-we-do/projects/wow-travel-tracker>

^{vi} <https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/what-we-do/walk-to-school/sport-premium>

^{vii} Economic webtag analysis carried out by Capita, March 2014

^{viii} <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-publishes-12-billion-plan-to-increase-cycling-and-walking>

^{ix} <https://www.transport.gov.scot/our-approach/active-travel/walking-and-cycling/>

^x <http://gov.wales/docs/statistics/2018/180130-active-travel-walking-cycling-2016-17-en.pdf>

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