



URBAN TRANSPORT GROUP

Evidence

Active Travel Inquiry

Transport Select Committee

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Clare Linton

Urban Transport Group

Wellington House
40-50 Wellington Street
Leeds – LS1 2DE
0113 251 7445
info@urbantransportgroup.org



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1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Urban Transport Group (UTG) represents the seven largest city region strategic transport bodies in England, which, between them, serve over twenty million people in Greater Manchester (Transport for Greater Manchester), London (Transport for London), the Liverpool City region (Merseytravel), Tyne and Wear (Nexus), the Sheffield City region (South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive), the West Midlands (Transport for West Midlands) and West Yorkshire (West Yorkshire Combined Authority).
- 1.2. We also have the following associate members: Tees Valley Combined Authority, Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, West of England Combined Authority (WECA) and Nottingham City Council.
- 1.3. Our members plan, procure, provide and promote public transport in some of Britain's largest city regions, with the aim of delivering integrated transport networks accessible to all.

2. Summary

- 2.1. We welcome this inquiry into active travel. There is a compelling case for supporting, promoting and investing in active travel given how it contributes to a very wide range of public policy goals, from improving public health to opening up access to opportunity (which we cover in section 3 of this response). This is why there has been a step change in the priority given to active travel by our members which is reflected in policies, schemes and programmes which have led to substantial increases in walking and cycling (examples of which are highlighted in section 4 of this response).
- 2.2. As a network we support our members in this area by running an active travel group for lead officers to share knowledge and best practice, through reports and publications which make the case for active travel, and through representation on high level Government working groups. We are also working with public health expert Lucy Saunders to deliver 'Healthy Streets for All' - a year-long programme of activity to raise awareness and support UK cities in shaping urban environments around people and their health.
- 2.3. Given the very local nature of active travel, delivery should remain devolved. However there is a need for central Government to show leadership and active travel needs to be a policy priority across government departments.
- 2.4. The funding landscape for active travel remains challenging given that the wider framework for local transport funding is complex, short term and under severe pressure. There is also a clear need for increased funding for local road maintenance (we explore these issues in more detail in section 11).

3. The benefits and risks of active travel, and the extent to which they are properly understood by the public and the Government

- 3.1. The benefits of investing in, and supporting, active travel are compelling. Our 2016 report, [The Case for Active Travel](#), set out the fivefold economic benefits of greater investment in active travel, which are: savings to the health sector; the economic value of active travel trips; the economic benefits of an improved urban realm; promoting inclusive growth; and direct employment and spend.



- 3.2. Key findings on the economic benefits of active travel from this report include:
- ten billion journeys are undertaken in England every year by bicycle and on foot, with an estimated economic value of £14 billion;
 - enhanced urban realm, which incentivises active travel, is associated with an uplift in retail takings of up to 40%; and
 - a report by the London School of Economics found that cycling contributed around £3 billion to the British economy in 2010¹.
- 3.3. The health benefits of cycling and walking bring economic benefits. It is estimated that physical inactivity has a direct cost of £1.06 billion a year to the NHS² and is thought to be responsible for one in six deaths in the UK³. Key health and wellbeing benefits of active travel include:
- helping people to meet recommended activity levels, thus improving physical health;
 - reduced mortality (amongst those who use active travel);
 - improved mood and mental health;
 - reduced absenteeism;
 - improved employee productivity; and
 - improved educational attainment.
- 3.4. There are also many wider benefits to greater levels of active travel and these are summarised in table two below.

Table 1: The wider benefits to society associated with increased use of walking and cycling instead of cars for short trips (under 5 miles)⁴

Issue	Impact of Active Travel
Traffic congestion	Reduces
Local air quality	Improves
Carbon emissions	Reduces
Road casualties	Reduces
Social cohesion	Improves
Public realm	Improves
Quality of life	Improves

- 3.5. UTG members understand the benefits of active travel and are promoting it through infrastructure improvements and softer measures, such as cycle training to help people

¹ Grous, A. (2011), The British Cycling Economy: 'Gross Cycling Product' Report, [Online] <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/38063/1/BritishCyclingEconomy.pdf>

² Allender S, Foster C, Scarborough P and Rayner M (2007) The burden of physical activity-related ill health in the UK, *Journal of Epidemiology Community Health*, Vol.61, pp.344-348

³ Lee, I. Shiroma, E. Lobelo, F. Puska, P. (2012), Effect of Physical Inactivity on Major Noncommunicable Diseases Worldwide: an Analysis of Burden of Disease and Life Expectancy, *The Lancet*, Vol. 380, pp. 219-229

⁴ Public Health England, 2016, Working together to promote active travel: a briefing for local authorities, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/active-travel-a-briefing-for-local-authorities>



overcome barriers to cycling. Our 2018 report [Active Travel: Solutions for Changing Cities](#) illustrated through a series of case studies in urban areas how infrastructure improvements, combined with behaviour change initiatives such as cycle training, can increase participation in active travel.

- 3.6. There is a growing recognition of the benefits of investing in, and supporting, active travel by national Government however this is not yet reflected in the overall balance of transport spending.

4. Recent trends in walking and cycling and factors contributing to these trends

- 4.1. After car or van trips, walking remains the second most prevalent form of travel nationally, with 243 trips per head. National statistics show a recent increase in walking trips (up 22% since 2015), however this partly reflects a change in methodology to correct for previous under reporting of some walking trips. The longer term trend has been one of decline in walking trips. In 1975/6 walking accounted for 47% of all trips⁵, however, by 2016 this had fallen to 25% of all trips in England.
- 4.2. Cycle trips per head remain low and fluctuate from year to year within a narrow band of numbers of trips. In 2016 the number of trips per head nationally was 15. These low numbers resonate with the low levels of satisfaction with provision for cycling in the National Travel Survey. Only 27% of people are either very or fairly satisfied with cycling and walking facilities, compared to 43% for local roads, 53% for trains and 73% for walking⁶.
- 4.3. 24% of trips across all travel modes are under one mile, and 68% are under five miles⁵, demonstrating that many trips are relatively short. For trips under a mile, 82% are made using active modes (81% walking), although this falls to 32% for trips between one and five miles, where car / van makes up 60%. These short trips represent an opportunity to increase levels of active travel.
- 4.4. Behind the national averages there is evidence to show that where there has been significant investment in active travel in the city regions this has led to a significant growth in cycle trips:
- London has reported a growth of 50% in cycling trips between 2005 and 2014⁷.
 - The Greater Manchester Oxford Road scheme showed an increase of 86% in cycle trips along the Wilmslow Road section after the new infrastructure was installed.
 - In Leicester improvements to infrastructure, coupled with cycle training for children and adults, had led to cycling levels growing 10-15% each year since 2006.
 - In West Yorkshire, since the opening of the Leeds Bradford cycle superhighway in June 2016, over half a million trips have been recorded across the route and 61% of surveyed users of the cycle superhighway say their confidence to cycle has increased as a result of the provision, with users citing being safe and segregated from traffic as the main reasons.

⁵ Hass-Klau, 2015, The Pedestrian and the City

⁶ National Travel Survey

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/674568/analysis-from-the-national-travel-survey.pdf

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/davehillblog/2016/sep/21/how-many-londoners-are-switching-from-public-transport-to-bicycles>



5. The effectiveness of the Department of Transport in setting the strategic objectives for active travel and in working with other departments that have relevant responsibilities

- 5.1. Historically active travel has not been seen as a priority thus spend per head from Government has been low. The importance that the DfT attaches to active travel has been changing and is epitomised by the Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Statement (CWIS). The greater emphasis that the Government is giving to active travel is welcome, however, specific funding for active travel remains low and there is a lack of strong and consistent leadership at a senior level across relevant Government departments. By way of contrast greater leadership is now being shown at a city region level, with, for example the appointment in some areas of cycling and walking commissioners.
- 5.2. At a national level there is a need for more cross-departmental buy-in and collaboration on the importance of active travel in order to:
 - realise active travel's potential to make a significant contribution to achieving multiple wider public policy goals including reducing congestion, providing access to opportunity (including education, work, healthcare and leisure), promoting inclusive growth and improving health and wellbeing;
 - reduce the costs to the NHS resulting from treating diseases related to physical inactivity, it is estimated that physical inactivity costs the NHS £1.06 billion per year; and
 - share and disseminate best practice in active travel (further details in point 6.3).

6. The balance of responsibilities for active travel between central Government and local bodies and whether the current arrangements achieve an appropriate balance

- 6.1. The vast majority of active travel trips are by their nature local and make use of local roads and pavements. Delivery of active travel should therefore be a devolved responsibility. Local circumstances also vary and therefore it is right that each area is able to determine the nature of its policies and programmes on active travel in order to reflect this.
- 6.2. However there is a need for central Government to show leadership and have an ambitious national active travel strategy and framework within which local transport authorities can work. Active travel also needs to be a policy priority across relevant government departments.
- 6.3. There is also a role for central Government on research to help local transport authorities understand trends in active travel and how different policy options can contribute to those trends as well as acting as a hub for collation, dissemination and sharing of best practice in active travel. Central Government can also play a key role by providing clear guidance on best practice for infrastructure design.
- 6.4. Central Government guidance and policy support for local authorities has improved in recent years, in relation to Local Cycle and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP), support for tools that help planning for active travel (such as the Propensity to Cycle Tool which aids with



infrastructure planning) and consultancy support for authorities in developing their LCWIPs. However this support needs to be sustained and enhanced in the long term.

- 6.5. Consistent long term funding for local transport capital and revenue spending is also key as at present local transport spending does not enjoy the same long term approach which is now applied to national rail and to national highways. Instead local transport funding is complex, short term and far too dependent on ad hoc competitions which are wasteful and inefficient given costs and uncertainties around bidding as well as troughs and peaks in spending depending on the outcome of competitions.

7. The adequacy of funding associated with the CWIS and any concerns around a lack of ring-fencing

- 7.1. In general we favour single pots for local transport spending as this enables transport authorities to take a more strategic approach about when and where to target funding depending on local circumstances and local aspirations. It also allows local transport authorities to allocate funding in a way which fits with peaks and troughs on spending on different programmes rather than limit spending in an artificial way on the basis of nationally determined floors and ceilings. However, we also recognise that ring-fenced funding for active travel can have the advantage of providing a base level of support for active travel.
- 7.2. More widely higher levels of funding for local road maintenance would have clear benefits for active travel which we explore in section 11 of this response.
- 7.3. There is also a mismatch in the scope of funding provided to Highways England for cycling, safety and integration on the strategic network (£250 million over the period 2015-2021), when compared to funding that local authorities have to spend on active travel on local roads.
- 7.4. Maintenance funding for off-highway routes, such as canal towpaths and greenways presents a further challenge. These form important parts of our cycling and walking networks offering traffic-free routes but are not currently provided for in the calculation of the Highways Maintenance block grant, and the assets are often owned by third parties like the Canal and River Trust and Sustrans which face constraints on their own revenue funding and ability to maintain the infrastructure.
- 7.5. In addition, wider revenue funding cuts to local authorities affects the extent to which officers can spend time working with local communities to enable and encourage active travel as well as the capacity to plan new – and maintain existing – infrastructure. Many authorities are instead having to focus their limited resources on ensuring statutory responsibilities are fulfilled. According to the LGA, between 2010 and 2020, councils will have lost 60p out of every £1 the Government had provided for services, leaving many authorities facing severe budgetary constraints⁸.

⁸ Local Government Association (2018) Local services face further £1.3 billion government funding cut in 2019/20 <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/local-services-face-further-ps13-billion-government-funding-cut-201920>



8. Whether the current mix of initiatives to support active travel is appropriate, particularly with respect to safety

- 8.1. We believe that there are a number of measures that could help support the safe expansion of active travel:
- sustained investment in active travel infrastructure through long term, stable funding deals for local transport spending;
 - sustained revenue support in order to maintain active travel infrastructure, and to pay for the staff who plan infrastructure and staff involved in ‘soft’ measures to promote active travel (such as cycle training);
 - full implementation of the Traffic Management Act 2004 to decriminalise moving traffic offences so that they can be enforced by local transport authorities (such as yellow box infringements);
 - introduce a more systematic and comprehensive system of investigation of fatal and serious road collisions, focused on learning and dissemination of results, as already happens in rail and aviation (as recommended by the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety); and
 - clearer guidance around shared spaces to inform highway and public realm design that ensures everyone’s safety.

9. What can be learnt from international approaches in supporting active travel

- 9.1. Cycling’s mode share is often much higher in comparable European countries and cities. In the Netherlands, 26% of all trips are by bike, with higher levels in Dutch cities, whilst in Copenhagen 35% of trips are by bike⁹. This has been delivered through long-term, sustained investment in active travel.
- 9.2. The link between the level of cycling safety and the amount of dedicated infrastructure and conditions for cycling can be seen in the Netherlands, which has one of the lowest rates of fatalities per billion kilometres cycled amongst European countries. In the Netherlands there has been an 80% reduction in cycling fatality rates since the 1970s. A 2015 study identified the factors that had played the most significant role in this reduction as being: the levels of segregated cycle track provision; degree of separation at junctions; and overall network separation – keeping high volumes of motor traffic away from more local roads.
- 9.3. The UK can learn from this by:
- seeing walking and cycling as a genuine part of the mobility mix/transport options – especially important in urban areas where shorter trips are made. This is increasingly recognised in strategy (e.g. “the natural choice for shorter journeys”) but not in terms of delivery or overall investment (e.g. relatively low funding compared to strategic roads and rail);

⁹ Urban Transport Group, 2017, The Scandinavian Way to Better Public Transport
<http://www.urbantransportgroup.org/media-centre/press-releases/scandinavian-way-better-public-transport>



- understanding the centrality of street design, dedicated provision and reduction of motor traffic dominance (through separation and reduction in volumes) to the numbers of people walking and cycling;
- encouraging a flexible approach in order to apply design concepts from elsewhere (e.g. Cambridge's forthcoming Dutch-style roundabout)¹⁰; and
- investing in an accelerated, long-term programme of road maintenance. Evidence from the Netherlands suggests that standards of road maintenance are higher which improves cycling experience and roads that are heavily used by cyclists are prioritised in maintenance schedules¹¹.

10. Whether there are fundamental planning issues which need to be addressed as part of any approach to active mode travel

- 10.1. Evidence from work conducted by Transport for New Homes¹² suggests that facilities for active travel are being overlooked in the design of new housing developments, with many neighbourhoods being exclusively car-based. Transport needs to be better integrated with the planning process to ensure that provision for active travel and public transport are integral to new developments from their inception and design onwards rather than as an add-on or afterthought.
- 10.2. Decisions about the locations of homes, workplaces and other facilities and destinations can facilitate (or discourage) use of active travel. Strategic spatial planning, which delivers new homes and commercial developments in locations where active travel and public transport are provided can help to increase modal share of active and public transport.
- 10.3. Densification of urban development can help create the circumstances for cycling and walking to become more convenient options, by bringing employment, services, amenities and homes closer together and making active travel easier for everyday activities.

11. The issues of poorly maintained local authority roads and the impact this has on cyclists

- 11.1. We are concerned that current low levels of funding for local road maintenance are undermining wider objectives of promoting active travel as well as compromising the safety of cyclists and pedestrians.
- 11.2. Local roads are in urgent need of repair. In the city regions outside London¹³ alone, DfT statistics show that 5,170km (13%) of local roads are in urgent need of repair¹⁴, a figure comparable to the distance from Liverpool to New York (5,320km).

¹⁰ BBC News (2018) Dutch-style roundabout to be built in Cambridge, [online] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-44456596>

¹¹ Hull & O'Holleran (2014) Bicycle infrastructure: can good design encourage cycling? In Urban Planning and Transport Research, [online] <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21650020.2014.955210> and Cycling UK (2013) Roads to ruin: the problem of potholes [online] <https://www.cyclinguk.org/article/cycling-guide/roads-to-ruin-problem-of-potholes>

¹² Transport for New Homes (2018) Transport for New Homes: Project Summary and Recommendations [online] <http://www.transportfornewhomes.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/transport-for-new-homes-summary-web.pdf>

¹³ Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Tyne and Wear, South Yorkshire, West Midlands and West Yorkshire.

¹⁴ UTG calculations based on DfT Statistics Tables RDL0202, RDC0120 and RDC0130.



- 11.3. There is also a considerable disparity in funding between local authority roads and the strategic road network which we highlighted in our 2015 report '[Bumpy Ride – The funding and economics of highways maintenance on local roads in the English city regions](#)'.
- 11.4. National roads and motorway maintenance receive 52 times more funding than local roads¹⁵. This is despite the fact that local roads carry two-thirds of motor traffic and almost all cyclist movements.
- 11.5. All road users are affected by poorly maintained roads, but cyclists are particularly vulnerable – poor road surfaces can be a matter of life and death. Cycling UK reports that between 2007 and 2016 in Great Britain, a 'poor or defective road surface' was recorded by police at the scene as a 'contributory factor' in incidents in which 22 cyclists died and 368 were seriously injured.
- 11.6. As growing numbers of cities seek to restrict motor traffic and create 'Healthy Streets' which encourage walking and cycling, smooth, defect-free roads will be needed. As Cycling UK point out, potholes, ruts, loose gravel, ice and spills not only make cycling uncomfortable, but can cause serious, sometimes fatal injuries.

¹⁵ LGA (2018) Local Government Association briefing: Debate on potholes and road maintenance