

## **APPG for Cycling & Walking**

### **An inquiry on Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy 2: Call for evidence**

#### **Response from the National Infrastructure Commission**

##### **1. Introduction**

1.1 The National Infrastructure Commission was established in 2015 to provide the UK government with impartial, expert advice on major long term infrastructure challenges. The Commission's remit covers all sectors of economic infrastructure, defined as: energy, transport, water and wastewater, waste, flood risk management and digital communications. The Commission's objectives are to:

- support sustainable economic growth across all regions of the UK
- improve competitiveness; and
- improve quality of life.

In fulfilling our purpose and objectives, we:

- Set a long term agenda – identifying the UK's major economic infrastructure needs, and the pathways to address them,
- Develop fresh approaches and ideas – basing our independent policy recommendations on rigorous analysis, and
- Focus on driving change – building consensus on our policy recommendations, and monitoring government progress on their delivery.

1.2 The Commission is grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the APPGCW's inquiry on a timely subject. In doing so we note that many policy and fiscal levers to encouraging greater use of active travel sit outside of the Commission's remit. This response is focused on areas where we can reasonably comment on how transport infrastructure supports cycling and walking.

##### **2. Context: recent levels of cycling and walking, and their benefits**

2.1 Recent years, even before the pandemic, have seen an increase in overall active travel in England. More people are walking further and more often – with 27% of all trips made by walking in 2018.<sup>i</sup> The average distance cycled has been increasing – by 50% since 2002. However, the number of cycle trips has remained flat over the same period, with only 2% of total trips cycled as the main mode<sup>ii</sup>, though these figures do not capture the more granular data of total number of trip stages (parts of journeys) completed by bike which have increased in recent years.<sup>iii</sup>

2.2 The positive benefits of encouraging active travel – such as reducing congestion and improving air quality, and the health and well-being benefits to those engaged – are well documented. Modelling guidelines suggest that cycles use only 20% of the road space of the average car, helping to cut congestion in cities.<sup>iv</sup> With over 40% of journeys in urban areas being under 2 miles, there is a significant opportunity to increase active travel.

### 3. Context: the opportunity for behaviour change

- 3.1 The pandemic appears to have cultivated ‘green shoots’ of growth in active travel: the challenge is how to sustain this move for the longer term. In London, TfL data shows a seven per cent increase in cycling in inner London and a 22 per cent increase in outer London between spring 2019 and autumn 2020.<sup>v</sup> Nationally in England, cycling trips have increased by a daily average of around 20% during the Covid pandemic, compared to March 2020.<sup>vi</sup>
- 3.2 As with roads and rail infrastructure, delivering high quality cycling schemes will require a pipeline of assured investment that allow local authorities and others to plan in a long term way. We note that government has committed £2 billion of additional funding for cycling and walking over this Parliament.<sup>vii</sup> As a part of this, government provided £225 million for emergency active travel funding in 2020-21 to enable more people to cycle and walk to aid social distancing on public transport; a further £257 million was allocated at Spending Review 2020 to fund new cycling and walking infrastructure and initiatives in 2021–22. This is a significant funding commitment and decisions on what level of funding is appropriate beyond this Parliament should be based on how well the money is spent and able to reach local projects that make a difference to safe active travel use.
- 3.3 Social research undertaken by the Commission as part of its current study into how infrastructure can best support the specific needs of towns<sup>viii</sup> suggests that the ability to walk and cycle safely to local destinations is emerging as an important infrastructure requirement identified by residents. People view attractive and lively town centres which they can access without using a car or public transport as one way that their towns could be improved, but they look for high quality, safe and accessible routes in order to be encouraged make this shift. The Commission will be publishing this research as part of its full report in September 2021 and will be pleased to share all relevant material with the inquiry.
- 3.4 The Commission has recently published a report examining the prospects of long term behaviour change as a result of the pandemic.<sup>ix</sup> Our primary finding is that short term shifts are not necessarily an accurate guide to long term outcomes, especially when it comes to demand for infrastructure.
- 3.5 However, our analysis of past major shocks suggests that the more disruptive and prolonged the shock is, the more likely it is to cause long term changes in behaviour. Shocks of this nature force individuals and firms to find alternative practices or services to meet their needs. In the context of active travel, the impact of Covid-19 on how we live, work and travel offers a major opportunity to encourage more active travel choices.
- 3.6 Critically, our report also notes that policy makers have agency: policy levers can affect the likelihood of long term behaviour change, as seen in South Korea when the government undertook a major public information campaign around internet use alongside their broadband rollout programme over the last 20 years. Here, a technological ‘shock’ was reinforced by policy makers.
- 3.7 As the inquiry notes, the government’s ‘Gear Change’ strategy set out a vision for half of all journeys in towns and cities to be made on bicycle or foot by 2030. Behaviour change

on the scale required will only be achieved by reducing the ‘friction’ around active travel. Building better cycling and walking infrastructure will be a critical part of this, alongside other measures outside the Commission’s remit.

- 3.8 The aim should be to make routes safer and more accessible, and connect places where people actually want to travel between, including rail and bus stations. The Commission agrees that cycling infrastructure should be designed in line with the key principles set out in the government’s ‘Gear Change’ strategy, including physical separation of cycling from high volume traffic and pedestrians.

#### **4. Policy and funding solutions**

- 4.1 The inquiry is rightly exploring the crucial question of how decision making can best be shared between national and local government. The Commission is of the view that the current distribution of powers and accountability for active travel between levels of government is appropriate and likely to be the only effective way of meeting the delivery challenge. This is underlined by the biggest gains in modal shift to active travel being *within* urban areas, rather than over longer distances (see section 2 above). The vast majority of roads where cycle facilities can be of greatest use are controlled by local authorities. Better cycling and walking infrastructure across the country requires lots of local projects which local leaders are best placed to identify, and in a more accountable position to ensure representative views are reflected in scheme choice and design, consistent with national guidance and good practice. Local leadership also enables consistent strategies to be adopted over time to create an effective local network.

##### **National government**

- 4.2 We note that government has said it will set out future funding allocations for active travel beyond 2021 to 2022, as part of the Spending Review later this year.<sup>x</sup> The Commission believes devolving money to local leaders on a stable, long-term basis is the best long term solution to addressing urban transport challenges. The Commission has previously called for an increase in ongoing devolved funding to city leaders for transport, totally approximately £12 billion over the next 20 years, as well as additional funding for major schemes (around an additional £30 billion over the same period).<sup>xi</sup> At the 2020 Budget, government announced £4.2 billion for intra city transport settlements for eight out of the nine mayoral cities outside London between 2022 and 2027.<sup>xii</sup> While a positive step, the Commission recommends these five year local transport budgets for mayoral authorities in England should continue beyond 2027 to create the necessary stability in planning.<sup>xiii</sup>
- 4.3 At a national level, Highways England’s management of strategic roads should include full consideration of how cycling can be better integrated into the network, and the agency should be able to demonstrate how planned road network improvements and maintenance will improve cycling facilities as part of RIS2.
- 4.4 In framing CWIS 2, we would encourage an approach that sets out clearly the timeframe, funding and accountability for each aspect of the strategy. It is evident that seeking to appoint a Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy Expert Committee to help monitor implementation of CWIS 1 did not prove a viable model.<sup>xiv</sup> Alternative models to

enable adequate participation by stakeholders in monitoring and evaluating implementation, alongside Parliamentary scrutiny, will be key.

- 4.5 Looking more broadly, the Commission has noted publicly<sup>xv</sup> that recent government ambitions around Net Zero – as welcome as they are – urgently require detailed action plans, setting out in precise terms what will be achieved, by when and by who.

### **Local government**

- 4.6 Local authorities need to integrate active travel within their own transport strategies. Local authorities need to be empowered and encouraged to provide high quality cycling infrastructure as part of local highway schemes. Indeed, local infrastructure plans, that the Commission has previously called for, should include active travel schemes as an integral component. Our Principles for urban infrastructure<sup>xvi</sup> offer a resource for councils seeking to develop their own strategies, building on case studies from around the country.
- 4.7 As noted above, our forthcoming report on towns will contain further recommendations to government on how local authorities can best be supported to maximise the benefits of infrastructure policy and investment for their residents, focusing on transport and digital infrastructure. We hope publication of this report will help inform CWIS 2, alongside the work of the inquiry and others.
- 4.8 In an independent report prepared for the Commission in 2018, Andrew Gilligan sets out a number of recommendations aimed primarily at local authorities in Oxford, Cambridge and Milton Keynes.<sup>xvii</sup> The recommendations may have broader application of note to the inquiry, such as the potential role of active travel commissioners to champion local delivery, or the possibility of reviewing planning guidance around the distribution of parking spaces.
- 4.9 The Commission acknowledges the need to undertake further work in this area to help inform future CWISs. While the first National Infrastructure Assessment noted the importance of promoting safe cycling and walking routes as part of local infrastructure strategies, and assumed provision for investment in cycle infrastructure as part of larger devolved budgets, the drivers for encouraging greater modal shift within towns and cities have grown over the past three years. As we embark on the second National Infrastructure Assessment (with a baseline assessment beginning the process, due for publication this autumn) we will revisit the importance of active travel in our wide-ranging review of the key long-term infrastructure priorities government must address.

## **National Infrastructure Commission**

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### **References**

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<sup>iv</sup> DfT Cycle Infrastructure Design, July 2020,

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<sup>v</sup> <https://tfl.gov.uk/info-for/media/press-releases/2021/january/outer-london-sees-22-per-cent-rise-in-cycling-as-new-data-further-highlights-vital-role-of-active-travel>

<sup>vi</sup> DfT Transport use during the Covid 19 pandemic, 2021,

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<sup>vii</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/2-billion-package-to-create-new-era-for-cycling-and-walking>

<sup>viii</sup> <https://nic.org.uk/studies-reports/infrastructure-towns-and-regeneration/>

<sup>ix</sup> <https://nic.org.uk/studies-reports/behaviour-change-and-infrastructure-beyond-covid-19/>

<sup>x</sup> DfT Cycling and walking investment strategy 2 announcement, March 2021,

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/cycling-and-walking-investment-strategy-2>

<sup>xi</sup> <https://nic.org.uk/studies-reports/national-infrastructure-assessment/national-infrastructure-assessment-1/#tab-cityregions>

<sup>xii</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/budget-2020-documents/budget-2020>

<sup>xiii</sup> <https://nic.org.uk/studies-reports/annual-monitoring-report-2021/#tab-transport>

<sup>xiv</sup> <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2017-12-08/118368>

<sup>xv</sup> <https://nic.org.uk/studies-reports/annual-monitoring-report-2021/>

<sup>xvi</sup> <https://nic.org.uk/studies-reports/cities-programme/#principles>

<sup>xvii</sup> <https://nic.org.uk/app/uploads/Running-out-of-Road-June-2018.pdf>