

15 July 2021

Chair  
All Party Parliamentary Group for Cycling &  
Walking

County Hall  
Bythesea Road  
Trowbridge  
Wiltshire  
BA14 8JN

Dear Sir/Madam

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

Please find below an officer submission to the above process.

### **Introduction**

Wiltshire is a large and mostly prosperous county which has a rich, diverse heritage, with areas of national and international interest such as Stonehenge and Salisbury Cathedral. With a population approaching 500,000, Wiltshire Council is also the third largest authority in the country. About half of people in Wiltshire live in towns and villages with fewer than 5,000 residents. A quarter of residents live in villages of fewer than 1,000, and about 90% of the county is rural.

Wiltshire Council was founded in 2009, bringing together the five former authorities – the county council and the four districts. Central to the creation of Wiltshire Council was our vision of empowering local communities to do more for themselves (e.g. the council has created area boards).

### **Questions and Responses**

**Targets.** Are the existing targets for cycling and walking consistent with getting transport on course to reach net zero by 2050? More specifically, do we need a new walking target for 2025, and do any other targets need to be revised or added?

It is unclear if the existing targets are consistent with net zero by 2050 as the targets for all transport sectors ideally need to be set out along the same timescale (i.e. what is the target for walking and cycling beyond 2025?).

The IPPR's recent report 'All aboard: A plan for fairly decarbonising how people travel' demonstrates that the Climate Change Committee's preferred approach to decarbonisation could lead to:

- an 11 per cent rise in traffic between 2021 and 2050
- a 28 per cent increase in car ownership, rising from 34 million cars owned today to 43.6 million in 2050.

The consequence of the above is that even if the carbon targets are met, we will be missing public health objectives and our towns and cities will remain dominated by traffic rather than pleasant places to live and work.

While the overarching targets are helpful, clearly large urban areas have more propensity to exceed the targets, while more rural areas will face significant challenges in achieving the targets – particularly if funding is focussed on areas where there is more propensity to cycle and walk. This issue needs to be clarified, since if the large urban areas only meet the targets with rural areas falling short, then the overall targets will not be met.

For a predominately rural area such as Wiltshire where the population is distributed across a network of market towns and rural hinterlands, it can be more onerous to survey walking and cycling trips, requiring multiple cordons / screenlines and counters on inter-urban routes. Budget constraints have increasingly made it more difficult to undertake robust and timely surveys, while surveys such as those by Sports England do not have a large enough sample size to demonstrate whether any changes are statistically significant.

If there is a focus on targets related to trips, then additional monitoring funding would be required to install and maintain cordons / screenlines or counters on key routes. If monitoring is tied to scheme funding, this does not allow councils to develop a consistent approach to monitoring. This is particularly relevant for those local authorities that do not have a history of obtaining significant amounts of capital funding.

An alternative approach that may be preferable is to have a target relating to the principle that everyday needs should be accessible within a 20-minute walk, cycle or public transport trip (e.g. percentage of a population that is able to walk, cycle or use public transport to access everyday needs using routes that meet LTN 1/20 criteria or bus routes with minimum service frequencies, etc).

Micromobility vehicles including electric bicycles have different carbon emissions and health impacts compared to cycling and walking. It would be helpful to have separate targets for these different modes.

**Overall level of funding.** What level of funding is required to meet the Government's targets for increased cycling and walking by 2025 and 2030, and/or any new targets we may propose?

In the report referred to above, the IPPR also states that in order to achieve a genuine increase in walking and cycling, investment by the UK government needs to reach at least £6 billion over the term of this parliament, £4 billion more than is currently committed.

The current level of funding offered through the Active Travel Fund is unlikely to deliver the schemes in the council's emerging LCWIPs, let alone the schemes in towns where LCWIPs have yet to be developed. This is a particular issue for local authorities like

Wiltshire Council where the market towns have narrow streets and where high-speed single carriageway rural roads frequently do not allow for road re-allocation. This means that it is likely that a significant proportion of schemes will need to be new traffic-free routes away from the highway.

**Capacity.** Do local authorities and other bodies have the capacity and skills needed to spend the funding allocations required to meet the Government's targets (or any new ones)? If not, how can this capacity be boosted, and how quickly can CWIS spending be ramped up? What should be the role of Active Travel England? What resources will it need to fulfil this role?

Current staff capacity for active travel is limited although the council is looking to address this by utilising available funding streams. While the apprenticeship programme is excellent, it would take a number of years to train up apprentices in order to meet the large programme of cycling and walking infrastructure that needs to be delivered. Also, the council has had some difficulties progressing its interest in transport planning apprenticeships given the spatial spread of educational institutions that offer relevant courses. It would be helpful for Active Travel England to consider how transport planning or active travel apprenticeships could be more readily provided in all areas.

Technical advice from Active Travel England on schemes would be extremely helpful, particularly on schemes in rural and environmentally sensitive areas (e.g. flood plains) where standard construction, lighting, etc as recommended in LTN 1/20 will be difficult to achieve. It would be beneficial if more detailed national design guidance for such areas could be developed.

While recent work the council has undertaken with the Environment Agency has been very positive and productive, it may be helpful for Active Travel England to act as a facilitator in some cases between local authorities and government agencies (the Environment Agency, Natural England, Network Rail, Great British Railways, etc.) as it will have greater access to nationwide / best practice experience in order to offer advice and facilitate progress.

It would also be helpful for Active Travel England to lead on and/or provide advice in obtaining certain types of land required to deliver cycle networks, in particular:

- When acquiring land that has been leased to ArchCo by Network Rail through Project Condor.
- When compulsory purchase is necessary as local authorities can sometimes lack the experience and resources to secure land for cycle routes in this manner.

Lastly, it would be helpful for Active Travel England to play a role in gaining permission for new design ideas from the DfT (e.g. collating requests from a number of authorities, rather than each authority needing to apply for a departure from standards individually).

**Breakdown of funding.** What should CWIS 2 funding be spent on – i.e. what programmes or initiatives should be funded? How much capital and how much revenue? How much of this capital and revenue should go to transport/highway authorities, to Active Travel England, to the voluntary sector, to Highways England and HS2 Ltd, etc, and how much

should be spent by government directly? How can government maximise the opportunities for its funding allocations to leverage in additional funding from other sources?

We are pleased to see that the Active Travel Fund: Local Authority Capital Funding for 2021/22 recently announced by the DfT may be used for feasibility, design or construction and includes the costs of consultation and monitoring. It is hoped that future funding rounds will continue in this manner. However, the ongoing maintenance costs of schemes can prevent schemes being delivered at all, regardless of whether capital funding is available.

In terms of revenue measures, the stop-start nature of much funding makes it extremely difficult to recruit staff or gain consultancy support in the limited timeframes available. Possibly some measures might be better delivered by Active Travel England (marketing across local authority areas, personal travel planning at large employers that have several sites across the country, etc.).

**Public and political acceptability.** The extensive and widely reported opposition to schemes such as low-traffic neighbourhoods emphasises that interventions promoting walking and cycling are often controversial. How can consensus be built both nationally and locally to support the action required?

At the national level, it would be helpful if the narrative around the future of transport more fully and clearly referenced the important part that active travel needs to play and the benefits of doing so.

At the local level, the recent experience of local authorities delivering LTNs and active travel schemes has highlighted that a step-change in community engagement is required to ensure that all voices are heard. However, this step-change in community engagement will typically require an associated step-change in available resources.

To help achieve public acceptability, active travel schemes should be seen within the context of, and supported by, wider measures which form part of a more holistic approach to movement and accessibility in an area.

Some elements that make schemes more acceptable to the public such as planting, CCTV or art works have ongoing revenue costs. While the council makes an effort to engage volunteers and/or parish councils in some types of maintenance programmes, there is a limit to the capacity and capability that volunteers can provide especially given ever-increasing demand.

**Behaviour change.** The pandemic has shown how flexible people's travel behaviour is in certain circumstances. What combination of schemes and policies will provide the basis for a substantial and lasting shift towards active travel?

There is compelling evidence that the biggest barrier to the uptake of active travel is the lack of safe infrastructure. Behavioural measures will therefore usually work best when carried out shortly after capital measures are delivered. Given this, it would be helpful if

revenue funding for promotional measures was made available for schemes that had been constructed in the previous year's funding round.

**Walking as much as cycling.** The differences between the two modes are significant and cycling has been shown easier to “cater to” than walking. How can CWIS 2 exploit the shared characteristics of walking and cycling whilst at the same time ensuring that both modes receive appropriate attention and emphasis?

Many of the council's cycling schemes are predominantly used by pedestrians; for example, traffic-free paths installed to connect new developments in suburban and rural areas. The standards for cycle schemes (widths, surfacing, lighting, etc) ensure that people with disabilities, parents with buggies, etc are catered for. If funding rounds make clear that they are directed at both walking and cycling schemes, it is likely that the framing of such schemes will change. In terms of more urban schemes, most town centre pedestrian schemes (that are not specifically aimed at cyclists) have a strong element of urban realm improvement. Schemes which, for funding reasons or otherwise, omit or ignore urban realm improvements can result in poorer quality schemes and make it more difficult to gain community buy-in.

**Levelling up.** How can CWIS 2 assist with the delivery of the levelling-up agenda? In particular, what can be done to correct the pattern that councils with a strong track record in active travel receive disproportionately large shares of the funding?

For those councils that have a genuine desire to deliver active travel schemes but have not historically received large shares of available funding (such as Wiltshire Council), it would be helpful to have funding streams that are aimed solely at scheme feasibility or design. This would help break the circle of a lack of funding leading to low rates of scheme development / delivery, leading to reduced outputs and outcomes, leading to low funding awards.

It may be helpful for Active Travel England to pilot a process of engagement with a select number of local authorities providing a 'gap analysis' of policies, processes, skills, etc. This would help provide best practice learning that Active Travel England could roll out more widely.

**Justice and inclusion.** Walking and cycling are the most accessible modes of transport but the profile of those travelling by these modes does not reflect this. How can the priorities of justice and inclusion be “baked in” to CWIS 2?

While it is understandable (e.g. for public health and carbon reasons) that most funding is aimed at areas with the highest propensity to walk and cycle, this does mean that more rural areas with lower levels of propensity lose out. This impacts on those people in rural areas without access to a car or adequate public transport. To help address this, adequate funding should be made available for rural routes, prioritising those routes that have strong tourism potential as this will help regenerate local areas and attract facilities such as shops and cafes.

**Decarbonising transport.** Given the extraordinary contribution active travel can make to tackling the climate emergency, how should CWIS 2 be positioned within transport and wider climate policy? More specifically, how should CWIS 2 fit with the anticipated transport decarbonisation plan?

As set-out in the Royal Town and Planning Institute's 'Net Zero Transport' document, active travel needs to play its full role in an approach that encompasses the full range of measures that will need to substantially exceed the 'best practice scenarios' that previous evidence from the UK suggests is possible.

**The relationship between central and local government.** Given that most "on the ground" delivery will fall to local government whilst funding and oversight will lie at the centre, how can CWIS 2 provide successful mechanisms to support this? What can be done to support transport/highway authorities that may not have a strong record in promoting walking and cycling?

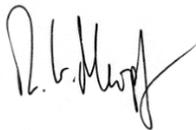
Please see other responses.

**Programme and project management.** Complex programmes require skilled management and certainty about funding. How can CWIS 2 help to create a culture of successful planning and delivery of investment?

As highlighted in the question, certainty about funding is essential to enable local authorities to adequately plan the development and delivery of schemes.

I hope the above is helpful.

Yours faithfully



Robert Murphy  
Principal Transport and Development Manager  
Sustainable Transport Group  
Wiltshire Council