

Transport Committee

Oral evidence: [Work of Active Travel England](#), HC 640

Wednesday 7 September 2022

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Members present: Huw Merriman (Chair); Ruth Cadbury; Robert Langan; Grahame Morris; Gavin Newlands; Greg Smith.

Questions 1–77

Witnesses

I: Chris Boardman MBE, National Commissioner, Active Travel England; and Danny Williams, Chief Executive Officer, Active Travel England.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Chris Boardman MBE and Danny Williams.

Q1 Chair: This is the Transport Committee's evidence session on Active Travel England. Before I ask the witnesses to introduce themselves, on behalf of the Committee I would like to put on record our thanks and best wishes to Grant Shapps, who has always collaborated well and provided the information and scrutiny we have hoped for from himself and the Department. In the same vein, we wish his successor, Anne-Marie Trevelyan, well and hope that we can engage in the same positive spirit.

I go back to today's session on Active Travel England. We have two witnesses. I ask them to introduce themselves for the record.

Chris Boardman: Good morning. I am Chris Boardman, the Active Travel Commissioner for England.

Danny Williams: I am Danny Williams, the relatively new CEO for Active Travel England.

Q2 Chair: Good morning to both of you. Thanks very much for being with us. We are really keen to talk all things walking, wheeling, cycling and other modes that fit within your remit. During today's session we want to get a good feel for what Active Travel England is going to do—your aims, your objectives, how you are being set up, what you can do to meet targets, your views on the current trajectory for targets and some of the pointers for us, where you need other agencies and bodies to step up to the plate to be able to deliver. I hope that it will be a good exchange of ideas. Knowing the two of you, I am sure that it will be.

I will start. We want to look at the establishing of Active Travel England. We will ask a few questions about that and then move on to other sections. This is just a general opener. I noted that on social media you gave us a suggested question. We thought that it was a good one but, if we did that for everyone, we would probably be replaced by a robot on social media. It may well be that you will give the same answer that you were going to give anyway, but I want to know in what ways you think that walking, wheeling and cycling will benefit from the establishment of Active Travel England.

Chris Boardman: I do not know whether you want to direct the questions or to leave it open to—

Q3 Chair: We will throw it over to the two of you, working as a team. I am sure that you will decide how you want to divvy it up. Chris, why don't you start?

Chris Boardman: I think that the climate has changed—if you will excuse the pun—quite dramatically over the last few years. Globally, not just nationally, people have realised that active travel is a big part of a sustainable future. I do not mean that just in terms of climate change but in the ability to have a sustainable and equitable transport system. We



know that 31% fewer young people now own cars. It is not how they want to spend their available disposable income. They are looking for alternatives. As we know, the benefits for health and all the other areas that active travel brings are now pushing further and further up the agenda. That has proved very much the case throughout the pandemic.

Right now we also have a duty to ensure that people have access to cheap transport. Active travel provides all of that for local journeys, the vast majority of which are less than 5 miles. A huge number—about a third—are less than a mile. It is part of our future, as part of an integrated transport system. Now is an important time for Active Travel England to exist. I welcome the Government's policy on it. The Gear Change strategy is very robust. Our job is to deliver it so that 50% of all journeys in towns and cities are cycled or walked by 2030.

Q4 Chair: In a nutshell, how do you think that the formation of Active Travel England will go towards delivering those aims and achievements?

Danny Williams: I will pick that up from a more operational perspective. If you look back at investment in walking, wheeling and cycling in the UK— certainly in England—in the last decade, it has been fairly hit and miss. There is a pocket of money here and a pocket of money there. When you look around, that results in pockets of excellence around the country, but it is a bit stop and start. What we have is forms of transport that are sometimes well funded and sometimes not well funded. As a result, you have people who are sometimes part of that and sometimes not part of that.

Active Travel England gives us an opportunity to get a sense of excellence and to start to do things properly, with a long-term plan and a robust commitment to making that happen. You can start to see that as we start to talk to people about joining us. There are some fantastic people all around the country, but we have never switched them on as a cohesive force. That is the first thing that we can do.

Chris Boardman: I will add some numbers to that. For example, in London, where you have had sustained investment in active travel, there has been a 25% increase on pre-pandemic levels in people getting around by bike and on foot. In Greater Manchester, where I have been working for five years, it is now up 40% from 2015 levels. We have really good examples in this country, where we have had sustained investment, that people have chosen to ride and walk.

Q5 Chair: I do not want to canter over the brief, because we are going to look at how you will work with stakeholders, but just to set the scene, and throughout this, do you see your role as not just encouraging and enabling but auditing those other bodies and, ultimately, acting as a bit of a stick to make sure that they deliver it?

Danny Williams: It is carrot and stick.

Chair: Both.



Danny Williams: Yes.

Chris Boardman: Hit them with a big carrot.

Danny Williams: There is definitely a lot of love. What we need to do is to find ways for everybody who wants to to win. Not everybody does want to, to be frank, but we really want to support those who do with toolkits, resources, advice, guidance and so on. The stick element is really just a peg to say, "This is how you are doing compared with other people. Why don't you think about doing some more of this?"

Chair: Later we will come to the point about what you do to those who just will not move. We will save that for as we go through. Sticking with the establishment of the body, I go to Gavin Newlands.

Q6 **Gavin Newlands:** A new Prime Minister assumed office yesterday. We know that she has already been asked for her opinions on active travel, but what commitments on active travel are you hoping to see from Liz Truss?

Chris Boardman: To start with, continuity. As I mentioned, we have a really robust strategy in Gear Change. It is integrated with the rest of transport. The means to deliver it are in place. I assume that we will get into that. It is about continuity.

To reiterate what I said at the start, I do not think that there has ever been a more important time for us to ensure that people have the option to drive less—to have that choice—and that it is a viable and attractive option. Continuity is the main thing I will be looking for. I am very hopeful that that will be the case.

Q7 **Gavin Newlands:** On continuity, on the way in this morning I passed a bus promoting a citizens' assembly on how to deal with the climate crisis. From an active travel and model shift point of view, does that represent a concern or an opportunity?

Chris Boardman: I am sorry; I missed the first part of the question.

Q8 **Gavin Newlands:** There was a bus promoting a citizens' assembly, or something akin to that, on how to deal with the climate crisis that the Prime Minister will be promoting. Does that concern you, or is it an opportunity?

Chris Boardman: No, certainly in terms of buses, these are all things that have to work together. To digress slightly, I have spent four years working in Greater Manchester. The latter part of my job was integrating transport. The integrated offer is absolutely key.

On the climate crisis, the beauty of the product that we have—to use that terminology—is that, if you pick a crisis, this is part of the solution. It is very robust, whichever way we come to look at it. Right now it is cost. People need a cheap way to get to work, to the shops and, ideally, to schools, so that they do not have to do the school run and can shrink the



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family car ownership down by one. Those are practical measures. We are a part of that.

Q9 **Gavin Newlands:** On that modal shift and that integrated approach, to some degree, I do not know whether you are aware that in Scotland the Scottish Government have a target of reducing car kilometres by 20% by the end of the decade. Essentially, every transport policy—buses, active travel and what have you—is viewed through that prism. You will obviously be aware of that travel spending in Scotland. Do you think that that is an approach that could be considered by the Government down here?

Chris Boardman: Lee Craigie, my equivalent in Scotland, has just moved on, but we work together closely. A lot of the Scottish policy is very strong. The integration is a huge part of it. We have that now. As we will hear during these proceedings, active travel is part of a lot of the different funding for combined authorities and for buses. It is built into it. That is a really progressive way of doing it.

Q10 **Gavin Newlands:** Mr Williams, senior appointments have now been made and a few more documents have been published. What remains for Active Travel England to be formally constituted as an exec agency?

Danny Williams: We are formally constituted as an exec agency. We are still recruiting some of our senior posts, but we have a majority of them in place now. A raft of other positions will go live this week.

Chris Boardman: We have existed for five weeks. The policy was two years ago.

Q11 **Gavin Newlands:** I know that you are exceptional at spending the time, so that is not a surprise. Mr Williams, what are your immediate priorities for establishing your functions and activity, other than filling those last vacant posts?

Danny Williams: At the moment, we are round about 20 people. We need to get ourselves up to around 98, which is our maximum capacity. Getting people to do more of this stuff is absolutely critical. We are working really well with our colleagues in the DFT to do things where we do not yet have our own resource. That is priority No. 1.

Priority No. 2 is ensuring that some of our funding gets through the machine. We can talk about that in a minute. Then we are off.

Q12 **Gavin Newlands:** Can I come back to Chris? I do not want to belabour the point, but by the end of this Parliament the budget in Scotland will be roughly seven times greater per head. The cost-of-living crisis may change this, but there is an aim at the moment for the active travel budget to be around seven times higher per head in Scotland than it is down here. Are you happy with the budget that has been provided to Active Travel England?



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Chris Boardman: As you know, we have a dedicated £2 billion fund. More poignantly, we are overseeing £3.8 billion built into some of the other funding mechanisms that I mentioned. We know that reaching the targets will require, I think, £9 billion. Stop me if I am wrong—

Danny Williams: It is.

Chris Boardman: Between £9 billion and £18 billion, depending on how it is done. If we focus on areas of high population density and people who have the capability now to meet targets by 2030, we can do that. If we want to spread it more equitably across the country and go into rural areas, it will move towards £18 billion. That is a governmental choice.

Danny Williams: As ATE, we need to prove that we are a safe pair of hands. Once we do that, it will be perfectly legitimate for us to start arguing for the number to increase.

Q13 **Gavin Newlands:** You may have touched on this earlier. For the record, how many staff do you expect to employ?

Danny Williams: Ninety-eight. We are capped at that.

Gavin Newlands: We will come on to the budget in more detail, and how we tackle rural areas, a little later on.

Q14 **Chair:** We are really keen to know exactly how much you will need to deliver the targets that the Government have set, but we will save that.

There is one final question from me in this section. It comes to your CV, Danny. I know that we sometimes see that diversity is not there in terms of people with corporate experience coming into Government agencies. You have 25 years leading media businesses. What attracted you to this particular role?

Danny Williams: That is a really good question. As you say, I have spent my professional career working in media and tech businesses—essentially, start-ups—and building those up. During most of that time, I have been involved in some form or fashion in advocating for safer or better cycling and walking. It started when I lived in the City of London. I was involved in helping work on contraflow cycling streets, which was quite important at the time. Essentially, it evolved and evolved as I saw more of my colleagues starting to cycle to work and some of my colleagues being knocked off when they cycled to work. My passion play has always been around this.

What appealed here was, partly, Chris phoning me up, but also bringing the two together. I really like the excitement of building something new, which is what we are doing here, and I am deeply committed to making this country a better and safer place to walk and cycle.

Chair: Let us go on to your strategic aims and functions. Grahame Morris will start us off.



Q15 **Grahame Morris:** Good morning to the witnesses. Active Travel England's framework document says that one of your strategic aims is "Putting walking and cycling at the heart of transport, place-making, and health policy". I know that there are difficulties because you do not have the requisite number of staff yet, but how do you plan to achieve that? I am particularly interested in what you are going to do on health policy.

Chris Boardman: I will open, and then Danny will talk you through the nuts and bolts of it. As alluded to earlier, a lot of the building blocks are already in place. Crudely speaking, in Greater Manchester, if you want your money for buses, you have to do the active travel part as well. The policy is there for us to enact. Our job is to make sure that it is at the standard that is usable so that we do not waste public money. Despite the fact that Active Travel England has existed for only five weeks, the policy has been really solid over the last two years. In this interim period, we have used a hybrid model of DFT existing staff to help to start the delivery process, even though we do not exist, so it has been quite a frantic few months. Danny will pick up the different areas.

Danny Williams: First, we have been involved with DFT and colleagues in the Department of Health on social prescribing, which was announced a couple of weeks ago. We are looking to mesh those much more closely together so that we collaborate, particularly on data and evidence, for that scheme. Over the next few weeks, as we start to recruit people, particularly into our data and analysis side, we will be looking to recruit people with particular specialisms who come from that sort of background.

We are not purely about transport. We are about changing some of those things for the better, where we can, albeit that we are tiny. There will be only 98 of us. What we can do is influence, have discussions and try to shape frameworks and policies with colleagues in other Departments. I very much see the way in which ATE will work as being that we can succeed only if other people help us to succeed. It is going to be about collaborating.

Coming back to my professional and personal interests, that has been very much my track record—how do you get other people to help you to make things happen? There is no way that we can do it on our own. We do not want to be set up like that anyhow, because we are not really about forcing change from the top. We are about trying to bring other people on a journey and seeing whether they can run with it.

Chris Boardman: It is worth saying—I said it to the health taskforce—that the Active Travel England Gear Change strategy is the biggest single health intervention this Government are making. It is built into everybody's everyday life, so, although we are here to talk about transport, the benefits are much wider. I will not go into detail at this time, if you do not mind, but to that end I am putting together an ancillary advisory group to the board, with notable names from different Departments, including Health, that will help us to integrate policy across



the board and make sure that it is properly joined up. Probably the most effective thing that we will do, other than getting tarmac under ground, is make sure that it is visible and valued across the political spectrum.

Q16 Grahame Morris: It is interesting that you said that you were working with other Departments and agencies because there is a concern that, by setting up a separate standalone agency, the Department is just saying, "You crack on with this agenda." You mentioned that you were relying quite heavily, at least in the interim, on support from the Department to deliver your agenda. You do not have the feeling that you are being pushed out along the plank.

Chris Boardman: No. One reason why I was attracted to Danny, if I can talk publicly about his character, is that he is steely but all about helping you to get it right. If you do not want to get it right, that is fine—we will work with other people. It is very much about helping excellent links that are already established throughout the Department for Transport, which is our parent body and is essential for delivering. We must be involved with rail. We must be involved with Highways England. That has to happen. We have identified and started those conversations.

The key is that we have a specialism. Active Travel England has a collective knowledge. For the first time ever for the Department for Transport, rather than giving out money with criteria, we have the ability to help. We have never done that before. We have actually started with the first £200 million, which was allocated a few months ago. Some authorities did not have designs. Danny's team was able to say, "Do you want some help?", and, in a couple of cases, "Would you like us to draft something for you?" That is a wholly new collaborative and helpful way of getting the job done. Some of those authorities may say, "No," which is fine, but the vast majority have been very positive.

Q17 Grahame Morris: I know that we are going to come back to that a bit later, because there are huge disparities between different parts of the country. I am thinking about my area, in particular, compared with Manchester or London.

I want to follow up on something that Danny said earlier. In the framework document, Active Travel England is charged with "Influencing ... the public debate"—leading it. I understand the point about having the evidence to persuade people. You said that some people do not want to participate, so how are you going to do that?

Danny Williams: I will clarify how I see the public debate piece. Before I do that, my first comment would be that the DFT did a great job of building up a shadow structure for us. It assigned a certain number of roles for me to pick up, literally on day one. I have slightly changed that straight off the bat so that we have more focus on data and analytics, in particular. That is my professional background, so I feel quite comfortable there, but I think that it is really important to help us to have a common



consensus around the data points, some of which get very muddled at a local level at the moment. That is one point.

I am now blanking on the second point. On public debate, I do not think that it is ATE's job to influence the public at large necessarily. We are too small to do that. That does not feel appropriate. However, it is appropriate for us to help local councillors, local politicians and MPs to understand what good can look like if they want to adopt that. It is not our role to impose it. It is our role to give facts, information and data or media-type stuff. For example, right now we are putting together 15 guidance videos for local transport planners on case studies: how do you do this or that? We are doing exactly the same for local councillors. We give examples of things that have been done and say what local councillors felt about them before, during and after that process. It is really about encouraging others to see what is possible.

Q18 Grahame Morris: With the different strands, there is different strategy for influencing individuals and a different set of tactics or strategies for businesses and for organisations, be they local authorities or others.

Danny Williams: Yes.

Q19 Grahame Morris: You get things like the cycle-to-work scheme. In fact, I think that it used to run in Parliament. There was a scheme where you could get a loan to get a bike to bicycle into work, if it was reasonable.

Danny Williams: That is a really good example. That is still a DFT initiative, but colleagues at the DFT are coming to us to talk about how they can change it—for example, for people who need accessibility-type tools, mobility devices and things like that. Those sorts of discussions have not really happened to the same extent as they are happening now. It is quite exciting for everybody, because we can feel the potential to open that up and make more opportunities for people.

Grahame Morris: That is helpful.

Chris Boardman: I will speak briefly to the communication point. Active Travel England is a delivery agency. It is not a campaigning agency. That is really important.

There are two elements to the communication that we do. There is making sure that messaging is correct. My job, when speaking to the public by various media, is to context this in what it actually means and to stop it being divisive, so that it is not about cars and people riding bikes as separate species, but is about how you would like your kids to get to school. Would you like not to have to drive them to school? If we choose and utilise the right language, we can connect with the values that the vast majority of people have. That is my bit.

Internally, as Danny has just alluded to, it is about saying, "Who are the decision makers? Who are the people who are understandably nervous?" We have both worked with councillors—I did so in the north-west—and



understand their problems. It is about connecting them with somebody like Clyde Loakes from Waltham Forest—there are various other examples—who can say, “This is what it was like for the first year. It was really grim. This is what happened afterwards,” so that they can see that that is consistent and that people would be just as vociferous now if I tried to take it away. Local councillors do not have access to that knowledge because everybody is buried working flat out in their own little world. That is the part of communication to shift the debate to which Active Travel can contribute.

Q20 **Greg Smith:** Good morning. Building on some of the themes from the last two questions, can I look at a specific policy that was mooted over the summer and then went on to the great hamster wheel of, “It’s on, it’s off, it’s on, it’s off”—the concept of registration plates?

Chris Boardman: Excuse me, Greg, but I am actually quite deaf.

Greg Smith: Let me speak up.

Chair: We are struggling to hear in this room, so we will probably all have to speak up. Danny, I think that your mic may have switched itself around, so that may help us.

Q21 **Greg Smith:** Typically, the most modern part of Parliament is the part that works the least well when it comes to all of that.

Building on the themes that came out of your answers to the last two questions, can we look at a very specific concept so that the Committee can best understand how Active Travel England plays into these things? We had the “it’s on, it’s off” concept of cycle registration over the summer. It was announced, then it was denied, then it was dismissed and then some said that it was a good idea. No matter what people’s view on that policy was, were you consulted on it before it came out? Were you part of the mechanism that then essentially killed it? When we get into specifics like this, where is your exact role? Who wants to go first?

Chris Boardman: No, we were not consulted on that. The DFT’s data has looked at it several times—once in the last year—and showed that any measures like that would be very much not in the public interest. I think that the only place in the world that has registration is North Korea, so it would not be useful. It would knock uptake. The bureaucracy around it would cost hugely, to address a problem that is not really there. Often people confuse enforcement and legislation, which are very different things. The ability to enforce is there now. It was almost useful for the issue to be aired and for people to re-examine it. Active Travel England was not part of that. It is not Active Travel England’s job to get involved in policy. It is the Secretary of State’s and Ministers’ job to decide what their position is. Ours is a delivery agency.

I hope that we will now be able to start to inform that messaging much more clearly and to align it with Government policy. There is a real



opportunity for us to help to make sure that the messaging is right. We may get into more of that a bit later on. There is quite a bit of making sure that how the message is delivered lines up with making sure that the public see the whole picture. Context is what is often missing in these soundbites, and context is absolutely everything. It can turn it around by 180°.

Q22 **Greg Smith:** I accept that. You are absolutely right to say that Ministers decide. However, if we are looking at all sorts of measures that will meet the objectives that you have been set, as a principle, where there is a concept such as cycle registration or insurance—forget the whys and wherefores of the exact policy, but policy that could change nationally, in legislation, guidance or whatever it might be coming from Government—do you not have to be more than just the delivery agency if you are to be most effective? Do you not have to be actively feeding into that process?

Danny Williams: I will try to talk more loudly. Hopefully that is better.

Just now we were talking about the cycle-to-work scheme, for example. We will absolutely be influencing, advising and helping to steer on that. This particular example came out of the blue in a media statement, so it is possibly slightly different, but it is absolutely the case that we are about helping to influence frameworks. If you look at planning, for example, we are now talking all the time with our colleagues at DLUHC. We are looking at ways in which we as specialists can help them in some of their thinking.

We are talking to the people working on EV charging and kerbside points for EV chargers about what that means for access to pavements and for wheelchair users, people pushing prams or other mobility devices. As each of these steps up, we are getting involved. We have set up an internal board where we are triaging all of them. At the moment we are sharing some of that with our colleagues at DFT. That will keep evolving, but it is an internal operational thing to keep us live and aware of what is going on.

Chris Boardman: The very shortest answer is yes, basically. Five weeks, and you have how many dedicated employees at the moment?

Danny Williams: Slightly under 20.

Chris Boardman: So, less than 20 people. I completely agree.

Q23 **Chair:** Picking up Greg's points there on messaging, there seems to be a perception in certain quarters of the press that cyclists are outside the law and regulations that other motor users have to abide by, which is not the case. Do you see yourself as being responsible for messaging and for making that clear? For those of us who cycle in London, it is incredibly frustrating. I was at a junction and there must have been about 30 of us waiting at a light, and someone just dawdled along and went straight through it. As I said to that person, "You give us all a bad name."



Motorists get the exact same situation, where the minority give a bad name, but cyclists seem to be tarred by the same brush. What are you going to do to pull some of the bad cyclists up and, at the same time, defend the majority of good cyclists? Do you see that within your role as well? Ultimately, that encourages more people to cycle, if they feel it is safe to cycle.

Chris Boardman: Almost the short answer again is no. We are not an enforcement agency. People breaking the law, regardless of how they are travelling, should be prosecuted. Where you do not have the resource to prosecute everybody, it would be logical to start with those who can do the most harm and work backwards. That seems to be the most robust position that I can think of.

People are often surprised when I say, "Yes, absolutely you should prosecute cyclists who are breaking the law." Really? Of, course you could. But then you context it. Context is everything, but if you cannot do everything, where do you start? It is what can do the most harm, whatever that might be, and you work backwards.

I think that is about as equitable and fair as we can get. It is an enforcement issue as opposed to a regulation issue. All the rules and regulations are in place to do that. I am very much on the messaging front that we move away from a tribalisation of, "People travelling this way do this and people travelling that way do that." It is people, and people will behave badly whether they are walking, driving a car or on a bicycle, in roughly the same proportions. We just have to focus first on those who can do the most harm to others.

Chair: We will move on. We are keen to look at the active travel targets that you have talked about, and the progress that is being made. I will hand back to Greg.

Q24 **Greg Smith:** I want to look at some of the forecasts, what lies underneath them and how reliable they actually are. When you look at some of the stats that we have—the National Travel Survey and so on—they talk about very small increments in percentages of people who have got on a bike or walked instead of driving, and so on.

For a start, the data from July seems to suggest that the 2025 targets are not going to be met. How useful are these very specific targets in the first place? How reliable is the monitoring of them? I know that your background is very much in this data analysis. How does anyone know that I walked for 15 minutes this morning? It seems to be quite a difficult thing to get your head around. Danny, do you want to have a go?

Danny Williams: I think we will have a twin response.

Chris Boardman: If you are alluding to the figures that were released by the DFT last week—the 8%, or the 7%, I think it was—that was really unfortunate. This is a real opportunity for us as well, which Danny can speak to. Cycling dropped by 7%, but the unfortunate part of it was that



that figure was released on its own. Driving had dropped 23% and train use had dropped 47%. Releasing that figure on its own gave 180° the wrong impression. In fact, active travel, and cycling in particular, was the most robust of all modes in that period. That should really give us some cause for hope.

Danny very much talked to the data. In fact, he actually put that into context—again, it is a word I will keep using. The picture from that data was very strong, and it backs up what we saw in the pandemic when we were seriously under stress. Cycle use went up 300% in some places.

Danny Williams: The data point of 50%, or that target, is actually incredibly helpful because it focuses us as a team, and it focuses us in the way that we communicate with the outside world on our objective. Our absolute core objective is increasing the number of active travel trips. I think it is good and really healthy for an organisation to have one metric that actually matters. This metric matters, and we can anchor everything else around it. That, in itself, is a really useful starting point for any team or organisation to have so that we know where we are going. Then, what we try to do is to ensure that what we are delivering delivers against that core objective. I think that is helpful.

As to the survey that you refer to, as Chris said, at the moment we are slightly catching issues like that as they come up. What I hope and expect we will move to is being more involved in shaping the way that that is done in the future. I have some concerns—that would be too strong a word—

Chris Boardman: You have said it now.

Danny Williams: —about the way that that is put together and what it actually represents, but there are other sorts of measures and other data points which have not really been given enough time to bed down in the active travel world. The way we calculate value for money uses very minimal data points that are not fully accurate. There is a whole programme we need to build around really representing this stuff properly and better, using tools and data that are now available that were not available previously—for example, Google Maps and movement data. Some of that is beginning within DFT. We can accelerate that. That is super exciting.

The team we are looking to build on the data side will be able to do that kind of big computing and big representation of analytics, but we are trying to do it in a way that would help, for example, a local constituency MP to see how that impacts their own area or their own high street rather than just at a macro level.

Q25 **Greg Smith:** That is a very helpful answer. It goes to my follow-up. Everyone has to have a metric, and I accept that, but how useful is it setting specifics such as, “We want to see an X% increase in cycling and an X% increase in walking,” as opposed to coming at it from the other



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way round with the metrics being, “What have we actually done to help people do X, Y and Z?” At the end of the day it is going to come down to personal choice. I have no doubt that lots of people have been spurred into it because of all the various watches and things. They like to see how many steps they have done that day or whatever, in a way that you could not do 10 years ago.

Isn't the better metric “actions taken” rather than a pretty meaningless number of increase in journeys?

Danny Williams: I agree with you. However, in the start-up phase, which is where we are right now, when you have a very small team and you are really just beginning, it is useful just to have one. As Chris said, I am five weeks in. It will be my job to make sure that we are delivering against what you are talking about. That is much more meaningful. You want to be able to talk to your local councillor or local MP and say, “Look, based on evidence that we have from elsewhere, we have run the numbers properly. You might expect X to happen in your local environment or your local area.” That is what I aspire to us being able to do, but it is probably 18 months to two years away before we really have that anchored down.

Chris Boardman: If I could build on that on a micro level, going back to my regional work, one of the schemes that we have banged on about to the point that I just got sick of it was the Oxford Road cycling corridor, which incidentally was built with bus money and not active travel money. It was 6 km. When it went in, it saw a 200% increase in cycling in a single year. On that micro level, that was politically very helpful for somebody who is trying to do hard stuff to show that difference.

Having a national target is really important because it keeps everybody honest. My background is measuring everything from quite a long time ago. It allowed you to see whether you were closer or further away, but it does not mean we cannot break that down. For example, with the £200 million allocation earlier this year, we can say how many kilometres of safe space that will deliver and how many new active travel journeys that will allow. That is the bit that is useful.

Danny Williams: I think what you are hitting on actually—

Q26 **Greg Smith:** That is exactly what I am hitting on.

Danny Williams: —is the difference almost between DFT and ATE. At DFT level, it is fine to have a slightly broad-brush approach, which we have just been talking about. At ATE level, that is not really acceptable. We need to justify ourselves, and we need to justify ourselves to local decision makers, not just at national level.

Q27 **Greg Smith:** My final question very briefly, to link that together and to put to you where I am coming from on this, is that, when I think of my own constituency, in 335 square miles of rural north Buckinghamshire we have one greenway at the moment—the Waddesdon Greenway—which



links Aylesbury Vale Parkway and Waddesdon.

Our main levelling-up bid in the current process is to build a safe cycle space that links Waddesdon Greenway all the way up to Silverstone racetrack through Buckingham, Stowe and so on.

Are you not better having a target that—to your point, Chris—looks at kilometres built that will enable, as opposed to the actual journeys taken on it? I have a belief, particularly from the rural nature of my constituency, that the vast majority of the constituents I speak to do not really want to get on a bike on rural roads with HGVs thundering past, tractors and big agricultural machinery, before you even get on to cars. That is why there has to be separate safe space built. Is that not the better metric to look at?

Danny Williams: Internally, we have built that metric already. We have set ourselves a target of funding 3,000 miles by 2025—we can do it in kilometres—of active travel route. That is one of the metrics. We want to interact with 2,000 projects. We want to be involved with at least 1,000 new housing developments in helping to make those all work better.

At the moment those are internal metrics, but we have to build the wider metrics around more people travelling and so on, because that has not been given quite the focus that it now needs rather than in the past. Does that make sense?

Greg Smith: Yes, that is very clear. Thank you, Chair.

Q28 **Chair:** Just wrapping up on this, we see the National Travel Survey, which has been published recently for the last year. That goes through every single mode of transport and the metrics for usage. It appears that, because of July's cycling and walking investment strategy report to Parliament, it focused purely on the cycling and walking metrics, and it was completely taken out of kilter. Would it be better for the Department just to refer to one bank of metrics, which are, time period, identical to each other, otherwise the metrics that apply to you just do not have any context, do they? Is that something you think we should be pushing as an idea to the Department?

Danny Williams: Yes, although we are also working on that from the bottom up, if that makes sense.

Chair: We are all aligned on that basis. Let us move on rapidly to managing the active travel budget. I am handing back again to Greg Smith.

Q29 **Greg Smith:** It is like being a yo-yo. I promise you this is the last one from me. First, and being very straightforward, what is the total amount of funding that you are going to manage through to 2025?

Danny Williams: We are directly managing just over £700 million, but we are overseeing £2 billion-worth of other funding where we have an influence and voice rather than directly overseeing it.¹



Q30 **Greg Smith:** In my last question I mentioned that my council, with my support, is putting in a levelling-up bid for cycle infrastructure. Is that the sort of thing you include in the £700 million oversight? Can you break it down?

Danny Williams: It slightly breaks down. As to the levelling-up and other things, we do not directly control that funding. Obviously, that comes from other sources. For example, on the levelling-up fund, we are now reviewing all of those submissions. Your area's submission will be something that we are now looking at. What we are doing in those is helping to advise DLUHC on whether or not the bid needs improving, and then coming in and actually making suggestions about how we could make that work better for everybody.

Of the £700 million, we directly control that funding, and we can directly issue that funding to highways authorities. There is a kind of split between areas where we indirectly influence it and directly control it.

Q31 **Greg Smith:** That leads to one of the more widely spoken about criticisms, not of you but of the system as it stands. The funding packages for this policy area are piecemeal, inconsistent, separated out and very siloed. Do you think your creation, as an organisation, can bring all of that together? What will it take to bring it together? You have referenced a few times that you are only five weeks into the job, so I do not expect you to have all the answers, but how do we get over this quite legitimate, historical criticism that there are just different pots of money everywhere and no real oversight?

Danny Williams: I am very new to the civil service, so my answer is in that context. First, I mentioned earlier that we need to prove that we are a safe pair of hands to be trusted with how we spend money. I am confident that we will be fine with that.

I do not think it is a problem that there are different funding sources. That is okay. What matters is that we can influence and help shape those for the better, where possible. That said, seeing consistent funding is really important. I have talked to local highways authorities where 40% of their transport team is complete, and they can never recruit 100% because the funding has traditionally been so inconsistent in this country—unlike other countries—that people are not going to commit their jobs, their livelihoods or their homes to that kind of career. That is definitely something that needs fixing if we are going to take this seriously.

Right now, as an example, we are in a slightly odd situation where, although we are set up to deliver that £700 million of funding, the latest round of infrastructure funding has actually ended, and we are in a limbo

¹ Clarification by witness: We are directly managing £2 billion, but we are overseeing £3.8 billion-worth of other funding where we have an influence and voice rather than directly overseeing it.



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period as we change Ministers. There is currently no infrastructure funding going ahead for England yet, but it is going ahead for London because that has already been signed off.

It is still a bit clunky. I am sure we will be fine. We just have to get over a few internal things.

Chris Boardman: The first thing we do is build trust and build relationships. I mentioned the health benefits and the fact that this is the single biggest health intervention that the Government are making. That voice was not previously at the table. That was at the health taskforce. A lot of people around the table who were so busy dealing with it simply sat back and went, "Oh yeah." That voice was not there, and that is the point of active travel and the need to co-ordinate. There will always be different funding streams. I think that is not going away. Now, we have the capacity to have somebody who will plug into all of that, bring it together, co-ordinate it and bring somebody from rail and somebody from Highways England all to the same table to have an agreed plan.

As Danny mentioned with London, London has now secured its deal. I think it is for a couple of years, £80 million a year. Active Travel England will help ensure that the standards are in line with the rest of the country. The Treasury now has a three-year business plan in front of them for active travel to deliver this as part of the funds that Danny mentioned. We are really quite excited about that getting signed off so that we can give local authorities that continuity to plan and employ.

Q32 **Chair:** Before I hand over to Ruth Cadbury, using London TfL as an example, is your involvement within London as a result of the Department's request that we have a standardised process, notwithstanding the devolved aspects of it, or is it a collaboration that you already have with the Mayor of London and TfL?

Chris Boardman: There was very much a desire to ensure that London standards were exactly the same as the rest of the country. It is a different funding model. That is absolutely fine. Relationships that Danny and the team had built with London—with Will Norman and with TfL—are already great. We all want the same thing, and it is absolutely fine.

I have visited a couple of councils in London, to go and have conversations. That has been fed back to TfL. We cannot enforce, and nor should we, but as part of our job we then go back to the funding partners—it might be TfL or another department that is responsible for CRST funding—and say, "This scheme is not up to standard. We cannot recommend that be funded." It is for the other body to implement that policy. It might be that the recommendation from the Secretary of State is that funding will be withheld on that.

That is how we are going to integrate all of this stuff together. It is absolutely early days, but relationships are already building fast and have been wholly positive.



Q33 Ruth Cadbury: On the total amount of funding available for active travel, for instance, the Government's target on cycling is £1.6 billion cycle stages by 2025. There seems to be a common consensus in the active travel world that the funding available is out by a long way and should be in the range of £6 billion to £8 billion over that period.

What is your assessment of the adequacy of the funds that are available for active travel?

Danny Williams: I will put that question in the context of who we are working with, so the delivery partners that we are working with. We have just completed an assessment process, where we have gone out to all of the highways authorities around the country. We have said to them, "We would like you to tell us how you see yourselves in terms of your ability to deliver, in terms of your local leadership and support for active travel, and also how prepared you are in your planning and how much your active travel policies are integrated with health and other things."

They have come back to us, and I have to say it is amazing. When I first met everybody—I think on 1 or 2 August—I said, "You have three weeks to do this." There was an audible and collective sigh of, "You must be joking. It's August. Go away." By the end of the meeting it had turned into, "Yes, absolutely, we're up for this." Sixty-nine out of 70 highways authorities and local authorities returned their submissions on time. All the MTAs returned their submissions on time. It was absolutely fantastic work, and super buoying.

The reason I am telling that story is that my response is contextual. We find that some authorities are not yet at a place where they can meaningfully deliver some of the bigger schemes or more complex projects or, politically, they are not quite there yet. What we have to do is find ways to match funding with both local leadership and support, and also local technical capability to deliver.

So, absolutely, we would like to be working with a larger funding pot, but I think the whole country is on a bit of a journey here. We have to find a way to mesh with that and get into the right—pardon the pun—gear with different partners, and then start to bring everybody up who wants to be brought up.

Chris Boardman: I would add one point, if that is okay. You have heard me make it before. The amount of money is important. We know what it costs to deliver. It is going to be between £9 billion and £18 billion, depending on how Ministers want it delivered. If we focus in, then we can do it for £9 billion. If we do not focus in, it is going to cost £18 billion.

Q34 Chair: Is that by 2030?

Chris Boardman: That is by 2030, yes. What is more important than that is consistency. That is what local authorities need. It is consistency to know that they can employ people and they can start to build that capability. Both are important, but consistency is the one that local



authorities need so they can plan ahead. This is a change to what we do to our streets. Some are already on their way and have officers in place who can do the designs. Others cannot afford it, and it is how you get them started too. That is an important point.

Q35 Ruth Cadbury: You have basically identified a risk that we have. There is inconsistency in terms of levels of leadership and technical capability, but what you are saying is that you are focusing on those who are able and ready to deliver.

Danny Williams: Yes, and we apply different measures for those who are not yet ready. For example, if you are not quite there, our focus, in your case, will be building your technical capability so that you can work with us rather than us just giving you money that goes in the wrong direction.

Q36 Ruth Cadbury: A lot of England is still in the two-tier county district system. How can you support district councils that are up for active travel and have the political leadership and technical capacity, but are not supported by their county authority?

Danny Williams: That is a fantastic question because it is absolutely our key weak point at the moment. Again, due to the size of who we are, we have had to take the decision that we will operate at highway authority level. Over the next 12 months, and maximum 18, we want to evolve that into being able to work and collaborate with district or local councils. The same would operate, for example, within an MTA. We are operating at the moment with the MTAs, our delivery partner, and that is correct. We are leaving the MTA to decide for itself who it wants to work with within its operating area.

Q37 Ruth Cadbury: All local authorities have to follow the design guidance, which, for cycling, is set out in the local transport note 1/20 and, for walking, the "Manual for Streets". That is how they get your funding.

Do you anticipate that the conditions are going to provide clarity on design expectations? Will they help to resolve disputes between local authorities and, say, the DfT over scheme designs? Are they a help?

Chris Boardman: I did not fully understand the question.

Q38 Ruth Cadbury: How strongly are you going to use conditionality?

Danny Williams: The guidance is super, super helpful.

Q39 Ruth Cadbury: It is.

Danny Williams: Yes.

Q40 Ruth Cadbury: Thank you; that is the answer to the question.

Danny Williams: I would just add that it is not perfect. We have to be mindful that in some situations we will need to flex it, and we will need to learn from it. We will be inviting, quite soon, local authorities to help



participate in shaping some of that guidance. Again, that is slightly different from how the DFT might have operated in the past. We are not coming as a top down. We are coming as a top down but now let's help sort it out together.

Chris Boardman: Talking to the Chair's point earlier about enforcement, that is where it is firm but fair and collaborative. This is the process. We have brought in a lot of expertise. A lot of our expertise has come from local authorities. "Here is how we are going to assess, but then tell us how we can do it better," and make sure it is an evolving tool. Ultimately, if the will and the leadership is not there to deliver—if you have only employed one officer and you would really like to build a £20 million scheme—we are all going to fail if we let that happen, and so we will not. We will help an authority who really wants a £20 million scheme, "This is what you need to put in place." In the first instance we will match resources that are offered to the capability and the political support in the area. It is robust and I have seen it work at a regional level.

Q41 **Ruth Cadbury:** For some schemes, in order to receive funding, in effect local authorities are going to have to reallocate some road space from vehicles to active travel, either widening the pavements, creating segregated cycle paths or changing junction arrangements. Do you believe that local authorities are willing to take that step?

Danny Williams: Some are, yes, but by no means the majority.

Chris Boardman: We need to create examples. We know that over the last 10 years there are 28 billion more miles being driven on minor roads around our homes, which is a staggering figure. I might need to correct this, but I think the increase was just under 30%. It is absolutely huge. We have filled up the space for alternatives to take that back. It is not pain-free. In pockets, there are absolutely authorities who say, "We need to do this because we can't afford not to," and they will create examples. We will help grow those examples. It is not going to be uniform. In some cases we absolutely know if it touches the traffic flow that we are not going there. In other places it will be, "Yes, we will."

Q42 **Ruth Cadbury:** Some of the local pushback seems to complain about space being taken for cycle paths, but not a lot for widening pavements. We never hear pushback about bus lanes, or do we?

Chris Boardman: Yes, we do.

Q43 **Ruth Cadbury:** To the same extent?

Chris Boardman: I actually worked in the north-west when the BSIP funding was going through. First, it stated that you must do active travel at the same time. This is how people are going to get to the bus. It is really important. You cannot have one without the other, and you cannot just buy lots of buses. You have to make the space, otherwise you will have lots of shiny buses sitting in a traffic jam. The road space allocation



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was more important than making sure you had the buses, so that it is reliable, dependable and trustworthy.

It faces the same thing. We have a choice on how we use our collective road space. It is becoming more and more apparent what our choices have done in the past and what needs to change.

Q44 **Robert Largan:** Apologies for being late. Following on from what has just been talked about, you have already covered in your remarks the level of delivery expertise in local authorities. There are some that are excellent and some that need bringing up.

Perhaps you could go into a bit more detail about how ATE plans to help build the capacity in those local authorities that are not quite there yet. What sort of support is being provided and what is the training going to be like? It would be useful if you could provide a bit more detail on that.

Danny Williams: The first step is funding, so providing funding for local authorities to train up their officials essentially to get their planning skills or delivery skills up to scratch. A set of funding letters went out this week and we are waiting for authorities to come back to us on that.

Secondly, what we are already doing is looking at individual schemes. If it is a cycling or walking scheme, we are looking at it and assessing it. We are then providing written feedback with suggestions of how to improve it. We are becoming almost like a centre of excellence that can provide help to them.

Q45 **Robert Largan:** Is there a cost to local authorities for you doing that?

Danny Williams: Not currently. That is with my corporate/public hat on. There is a slight conflict. That is one angle.

If you look at planning, there are two areas. If you think about planning rather than actual cycle or walking schemes, we are also looking to influence policy frameworks and trying to find ways to help local authorities know what good looks like.

The Royal Town Planning Institute put out a report this week saying that investment in planning in public bodies in the UK is 43% or 45% lower than it needs to be currently. That was a statement that was fairly echoed by the DLUHC Select Committee.

Our job there is to provide toolkits and ways to help local authorities know what good looks like. In the next couple of weeks we are issuing our first planning toolkit. I cannot remember exactly how many, but we are sharing that with a couple of dozen local authorities. They are going to be road-testing it on live plans and coming back to us with feedback. The idea is that we iterate and keep improving it on their behalf.

That will allow them to create essentially templated reports to collaborate better with developers on areas where they can both move the needle a bit better. Our role here is as an enabler of local authorities.



Q46 **Robert Largan:** What does good look like? What would be an example that we should be looking at? What should I be telling my county council to go and look at?

Danny Williams: If we were talking about, let us say, a new housing development, often you will find that a new housing development will have car transport baked in as pretty much the only meaningful way for people to get about. That is not great, ultimately. We want to find ways to enable different options and different opportunities. The toolkits that we are working on are essentially giving clear guidance on how to make that happen.

Chris Boardman: That is a really good question at the end, or one certainly that resonates with me. The thing that changes people's opinion is looking, feeling, smelling and touching it yourself so you get it and you can see how it embeds. Those examples are in the UK; they are around. There is not a huge amount. We know of a school in Ipswich where 60% of kids ride to school every day. I have just been finding out about that. That is there, and it is because there is a network all around it. That is remarkable. That is more than Dutch levels of cycling. Imagine if we take people there.

I am getting a bit sick of talking about Waltham Forest and it is another London example. London has had sustained funding for a period of time. It has been able to go through the journey and out the other side. To take councillors there and speak to a councillor who was surrounded by huge protests at the time—he was not pro-cycling or walking at the start but came out the other side evangelical about it—and being able to show all the benefits, I think that could be a benefit. It is not lobbying, but it is the education part of Active Travel England's job and one I would be really keen to do.

The piece that I missed in Greater Manchester is that we provided that experience and the people who turned up were all the ones who went, "This is going to be great. I love this stuff," as opposed to the ones who said, "I hate this stuff," and who needed to know about it. I have to find a way through that. It is that hearts and minds. We have the evidence and the examples. A part of our job can be to join that up.

Q47 **Robert Largan:** Interesting. Pivoting back a bit to try to improve those local authorities that do not have the design capability, does ATE have any thoughts of engaging with groups which perhaps are not at the local authority level? An excellent example would be in High Peak, where we have Buxton Town Team. This is a group of volunteers who have come together and written their own sustainable and active travel plan for the town, which is absolutely fantastic. It would be really interesting to know if there are plans to engage with groups on that kind of level, perhaps where local authorities are not doing what needs to be done.

Danny Williams: Absolutely. Of the 98 people we are going to be recruiting, we have broken down exactly how we think we are going to



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deploy them: 56% of our resource will be deployed on reviewing, supporting and providing advice on specific plans or projects; 33% of our time will be spent on training or engagement. That will be with either local authorities or it might be with developers. It might be with local advocates or other teams of people who are trying to get change.

Chris Boardman: We do not have the capacity for that now. I am mindful that we need to be careful that we are a delivery agency, but there are lots of people who want to help and want to know how. We need some guidance for them. Communicating with large parts of the public is something we could do, but we are going to have to feel our way with that.

Danny Williams: I will add one more point. What I have found incredibly interesting over the last five weeks or so is the amount of latent support that is bubbling away under the surface for what we are trying to do. Wherever I talk to people, there is a sense that 5% of my brain thinks about this or 3%. I would really like someone to help make the sum of the parts bigger. I am finding that everywhere, which is quite exciting but slightly terrifying.

Q48 **Chair:** To wrap up the funding section, we talk about the fact that there is £2 billion allocated up to 2025. The targets are there to be delivered by 2030. You have said yourself that it could take somewhere between £9 billion and £18 billion to meet those targets, but 2025 is not that far away in terms of future funding.

Do you think there is something to be said for having a percentage of the Department's budget allocated so that you always have running funding? You work in a business background, Danny. You would not expect your business just to run out of money and not do anything about it three years ahead.

Chris Boardman: As that is more of a political decision it is probably better that I answer that. It would be something I would certainly welcome. I am sure Danny would welcome it as well. It is not within our gift to do that. What do we have to work with? We have 98 people and this much money. In actual fact, £3.8 billion is the amount that we are influencing to do with active travel specifically. We have a timeframe and a target of 50%. We have devised a strategy to meet that as best we can, but also to make sure that Ministers are appraised that, to achieve this mission in total, by the time we get to 2025, it will take £9 billion if we do it this way; it will take £18 billion if we do it that way. That is a political decision.

Q49 **Chair:** I understand it is a political decision, but if you have targets which are to be delivered by 2030 then, in an ordinary business form, you would expect the funding to take you to the same time as the targets are to be delivered, which would be 2030.

Chris Boardman: I would hope so, but, again, that is not for us.



Q50 **Chair:** I know it is quite a difficult one. I thought I would ask the question rather than put my opinion in.

Chris Boardman: This is what it takes to deliver the product. Then it is a political decision as to how important you think it is. I think it is fundamental. I mentioned at the start that I consider it an obligation to provide cheap travel. It is incumbent on us to make sure that our kids can get to school under their own steam, and parents feel confident enough to let them. They should have the right to travel the streets and feel safe. We can deliver that. If this Government prioritise that and fund it accordingly, then we will get it done.

Chair: That neatly takes us to our next section, which is how we can widen participation in active travel. Grahame Morris will start this.

Q51 **Grahame Morris:** We touched very briefly at the beginning about how active travel varies very much in different parts of the country. Even within a particular area—I have noticed in different parts of London—it is much more common and prevalent. What can we do collectively—you have told us you are not an advocacy agency—to encourage greater participation from women, people with disabilities and people from ethnic communities?

Chris Boardman: I am quite pedantic about this. We need to use the word “enable” over “encourage”. If you can encourage or provide bikes, or do things that do not change the environment, then they will have very low impact until you make me feel safe and until you give me space which is connected to everywhere I want to go. That is why LTN 1/20 is so important for the work of Active Travel England. We will not fund something or back anything that does not do all of the journey for where people want to go. That is why it is so important. We cannot skip around that. Safe space is the fundamental canvas. I am getting a bit lyrical now, but without that we cannot do anything.

It is refreshing and scary to just cut to the chase and say, “If I’m not feeling safe, I’m very unlikely to do it.” Where that has been provided, active travel is very equitable. In Holland, 51% of people who travel by bike every day are women. It is financially equitable. It is a cheap form of travel. It is there, but we have to focus in on what is really going to make the difference in a safe space.

Once you have safe space, if a council or local authority has the courage to do that, that is where we should focus the activation work. That is where we will get the best return for public money. It comes down to political will and regional leadership to actually want to do it. It is an uncomfortable change in the use of street space, but if somebody wants to do it then we will help them.

Danny Williams: If I can back up that point, I have two points to make. You referenced different areas of the same city. If you look at London, if you travel around north-east London you will see very different sorts of people on bikes to the sorts of people you will see coming in from south-



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west London. A large part of that is down to the conditions that they have to deal with. In north-east London there are slower streets, with a little bit more space for walking and cycling. There are long-term plans to make that happen. In the south-west it is more of a race through on very busy arterial roads on speedy bikes. That is one thing.

One point that is worth picking up is how ATE looks and feels. ATE needs to look and feel like the country it represents. It needs to think about who we recruit. We are going to be proactively recruiting in different pools, where we can, bearing in mind we have to blind recruit as a civil service department. We will go looking and fishing for people in different parts.

We are putting accessibility and disability at the heart of how we think about things. Although I cannot talk further about that, that will be an operational structure that we will put in place. It is really important to me. The first public comment I made when I took up the post was talking about feminism in transport planning and how typically planning is done for people who are making journeys from A to B, which might be home to work. Quite often that is men and it is not as much about multi trips, where you are going from home to school and then to work.

I recently went with Minister Harrison to the Netherlands. It is absolutely fascinating seeing Dutch stations which are absolutely rammed with bikes with kids' racks on the back. Mums or dads would cycle their kids off to school and then pop to the station and go off to work. That sort of multipurpose trip is what we need to start looking at.

Q52 **Grahame Morris:** Conceivably—not that I am suggesting that Active Travel England would do this—if it was target driven, and the aim is to increase the number of miles by concentrating on those who are already doing it at the margins, without broadening participation and without doing the delivery agency job of enabling safe spaces and so on, it could be done in a way that is not so inclusive. I am not suggesting you should, or would, but unless you set out deliberately to tackle the issues that are stopping women or people from ethnic communities and so on—

Chris Boardman: The two things often go together. Most deprived areas are the least likely to own a car. I think it is about 30% of the country that does not have access to a car. That is where we need to do the most active travel, so the two things go together quite nicely.

Q53 **Grahame Morris:** Is that a general offer that you made to my colleague about working with local authorities to enable safe spaces to be created?

Chris Boardman: I would turn that challenge right around and say this. If you have the will to do it and if you will build to this standard—meaning it is usable by a competent 12-year-old, which was the standard we used in Greater Manchester, and their parents would let them, and they would choose to—if you build to that standard, you want to do it and



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you have the political will and the capacity, then crack on. If you have some of those ingredients but not the others, we will help you.

The first one is the leadership locally to want to do it and see it through. If that is not there, then everything else is almost impossible.

Danny Williams: We have been super clear in our communications on that exact point, both written and in holding regular drop-in sessions and Q&A sessions with local authorities every week since they started. The will to get there is absolutely critical.

Chris Boardman: We are here to help people win bids.

Q54 **Grahame Morris:** I am just going to tweak that out. I want to mention pavement parking. We have discussed it many times in this Committee. I know that we have a new Secretary of State. There was a transport Bill promised from the Queen's Speech. What is your view on pavement parking and the impact that has on active travel for both walking and cycling?

Chris Boardman: I have actually got a picture of a tank parked in Greater Manchester on one of the streets. It is actually a people carrier, but I like to call it a "tank" because it is more dramatic. The officer in charge in Greater Manchester said, "Do you want me to try to get it moved?" I said, "No, I want you to go and use the normal process that you would do and see what happens." He could not get it moved. Everybody was outraged when I showed them a picture of a tank on the pavement. Then I pointed to the cars right behind the tank, taking up virtually the same amount of space.

The messaging around this is really important. It is a big cultural change. It has to be addressed. A parent pushing a double buggy was our minimum standard in Greater Manchester. I think it was a minimum 1.5 metres or we would not fund it. Walking is more important than cycling. It will need to do all of the heavy lifting. It is critical. Clear pavement is a huge part of that, and not just enough. We need enough that it is a pleasant experience and one that I would choose, which is side by side having a conversation and dealing with the junctions. We have done some work on exploring side road zebra crossings on the design line, as used in the rest of Europe and most supermarket car parks in the UK. That work is progressing really well now. That would be a cheap, simple way to reinforce the Highway Code and to service people who want to walk.

I have just rambled on quite a lot there. I think cars belong on the road and people on the pavements.

Q55 **Grahame Morris:** Pavement parking is already banned in London. I do not suppose you have a crystal ball, but is there any indication that a similar restriction will apply in the rest of the country? Is that provision going to be in the Transport Bill? Has anyone given you a nod and a



wink?

Chris Boardman: That is not something I could discuss, but if anybody should bring in such legislation it would very much have my support.

Q56 **Chair:** We were given assurances that it would be in the Transport Bill. We have been given repeated assurances—and I have been on this Committee for seven years—that this will be brought in. We have done an inquiry. We have published recommendations that it could be. We see that it works well in London. It is not as if this is a scheme only operating in Mars. Yet we get countless promises and a continued failure to deliver. I personally very much hope it is.

Danny Williams: We are fairly actively engaging with people on that, pretty much every day at the moment.

Chair: Anyone who doubts this should just go out with somebody who has lost their sight and see what they have to deal with all the time. Sorry, I rant on. Gavin, do you want to come in on this exact point?

Q57 **Gavin Newlands:** When I was asking questions earlier on you mentioned the wider transport policy and a more integrated approach down here now. Just to push on that, earlier on I mentioned that there is an aim in Scotland to reduce car kilometres, as we are calling it, by 20% by the end of the decade. It essentially informs everything else. For instance, on the buses we have free bus travel for over-60s and under-22s. There are a lot more modern zero-emission buses and more modern rail, because we are decarbonising rail by 2035. We have frozen rail fares and so on.

As a Minister driving active travel targets, how important is it that 10% of the transport budget will also be spent on active travel by the end of this Parliament? How important is it to have that strategy and that single focus to drive this forward, if we are to meet those targets?

Chris Boardman: Coming back to macro and micro, the progress we have made in the last two or three years has been because the Prime Minister has believed in this mission and pushed that policy. We now have a properly integrated transport policy for active travel. It is in the bus strategy. It is in the road strategy. That just shows how important political leadership is, if that is what you are alluding to.

We are talking about culture change in how we use our streets. Culture change is always slow and painful. You will not get there without that leadership, if that is answering the question.

Q58 **Gavin Newlands:** You mentioned earlier being hit with a big carrot. Sadly, often, I think this Government tend to show a small carrot and hit with a big stick.

Chris Boardman: I will let Danny get a word in in a second. I think our job is to create the properly evidenced options. The first thing I did in Greater Manchester was to tot up what it cost to do what you are doing



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now. It was £3.75 billion. That is a fact. Here is how it breaks down. Can you afford that? If you want more people to ride more, this is what it would cost. You choose what you want to do.

At a local level it is: this is what it will take for people to ride significantly more, and we will fund that. If you do not want to do that, that is absolutely fine but we are not funding it. I am not sure whether that is hard or just clear. I think Active Travel England will be a trusted partner. You will know what you get, and any answer that you give will be properly evidenced. If you can find a flaw in it, we will change our position.

The biggest thing, and it has come in all the way through this conversation, is that Active Travel England is now a voice in the transport conversation at the top table, able to make the case, context the evidence and plug it into Health and DLUHC. In a matter of weeks or months that has already started to change things. I think Scotland have done an awful lot of that integration work already. I will be living in Scotland shortly. I have just bought a house there, so I am very interested in what happens across the border.

Danny Williams: If we just cast our eyes a couple of hundred miles east, to the Netherlands—

Q59 **Gavin Newlands:** We are on Scotland at the moment.

Danny Williams: I am quite a fan of Scotland, but if you look at the Netherlands then per capita their car ownership is about the same or slightly higher than here. They love their cars. It is actually a brilliant place to drive. However, 51% of people arriving at train stations in the Netherlands arrive by bike. The reason they do that is partly infrastructure, but it is also masses of parking and the fact that you can pick up a Dutch railway bike at either end. We have to be integrated with transport.

In Northumberland, where our new Secretary of State comes from, there is potentially a new railway line coming. Activating that railway line with walking and cycling so that it links properly is absolutely critical. The closer we can be aligned to public transport at the ministerial level, the better.

Q60 **Ruth Cadbury:** In terms of getting local buy-in and adaptation for new schemes such as widening pavements for segregated cycle paths, the Government implemented pop-up infrastructure during Covid, and it was very successful. Is there still a role for pop-up infrastructure and temporary regs changes as a way of rolling out or trying out schemes?

Danny Williams: We are not funding it in our current thinking, but it was useful for local authorities to be able to test stuff that they had had on their books for ages. In some cases it may have been a little hasty; in others it was more successful. For the next phase of our funding we are not planning to do that.



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Chris Boardman: When the pop-up stuff went in, I was in the north-west. They are not pop-up now; they would be trials. I am a big supporter of trials because it gives people a chance to try different things. It is not always applicable. It is very hard to trial a junction. You have to commit beforehand. It is junctions that are key. Junctions are more important than the links. They are the bits where it is really difficult and often get left, and so the other bit does not get used at all. I am a big fan of trials. It allows people to try different things. It takes away a lot of the fear. It might be something that we explore, but it is technically quite difficult when the bits that make a difference are very difficult to trial without jumping in.

Hopefully, those trials can then be used elsewhere. In Greater Manchester now and in several other parts, there are CYCLOPS junctions going in en masse that enable kids to ride to a local school, even turning right across traffic without ever coming into contact with traffic. The traffic flow has actually improved. Those examples, those trials, can then be used elsewhere. I think that is probably going to be more useful for us in the long run.

Q61 **Robert Largan:** Mr Williams, you have talked very compellingly about a lot of the reasons why the Netherlands are very good at active travel and have very good statistics. They play a key role, but, of course, there is another element to that, which is the geography. The Netherlands is significantly flatter and is also comparatively more urban.

Speaking as someone who represents the Peak District, obviously a lot of the targets are very much focused around urban areas. I am compelled to ask: what are the plans to try to improve active travel in those rural areas where it is a much more challenging landscape, in more ways than one?

Danny Williams: You are completely right on all of those points. By the nature of our core objective, we have to focus a little bit more on places where there are more people per square mile. There is absolutely funding in there for rural communities. I very much hope that we see really good bids from rural communities. We have run the numbers and actually slightly increased the amount of funding we expect to be putting into rural communities when we do our next funding round.

There are loads of ways we can work. If we just step away from cycling for a minute, let us think about schools in rural communities—villages that had a primary school but that no longer have a primary school and where the kids have to go to the next town. Things we would really like to encourage are ways for those kids to be able to walk or bike to school if it is a mile or a mile and a half. In many cases they cannot do that, and that feels fundamentally wrong and, in answer to your point, inequitable. It is not necessarily just about commuters or adults. It can be about schemes like that.

Q62 **Robert Largan:** Mr Boardman, have you anything to add on the



challenge?

Chris Boardman: No, not at all. We would like to work everywhere. I mentioned providing choices. We can cover the whole country and do it much more equitably with our 50% target, and it will cost £18 billion, or we can focus on population density and it will cost £9 billion. They are the choices. They are not our choices to make but they are a fact. If we do it with the community, then the value for money in terms of what we have to spend versus what we get in trips developed is going to be lower. I would absolutely love that, and we should do that.

As Danny suggests, there is a concentration around schools. We are really interested in that. It is something that often gets a lot of local support. Activity around schools enables kids to be able to get there. We know that 12% of traffic in the morning is the school run, so the impact is much bigger.

Just to step completely sideways for a second, on things like decarbonisation, the figures used to calculate moving from a car to riding a bike or wherever they are at the moment do a like for like. You are taking that journey from a car and doing it on a bike, and it only credits that. In my own case—and the reason why I raise it—I gave up my car as an experiment. I was only able to do that because I could do the short journeys, things like to the station, by bike. I had safe space to do it. If I did not have access to that 30-minute route, I would be driving a car.

Although we only count that carbon saving on a national level, the carbon saving is the fact that I have given up a whole car. We are underestimating the impact that local active travel can have on meeting our climate target commitments. Going back to locally, the school run is part of that. It may be a short journey and a very small bit, but it enables people to go down from a two-car to a one-car family, which is absolutely huge.

Danny Williams: There is a broader point there. Chris mentioned the 12% figure for traffic in the rush hour school commute. As a rough average, if you remove 15% of the traffic, you remove 85% or 90% of the congestion. It is quite a win-win. You get an awful lot more time back for a lot of people.

Scotland has done an incredible job on building links to rural schools, much better than England has done.

Robert Largan: You also see air quality improvements along with it.

Chair: Do you want to come in and dispute that point, Gavin?

Gavin Newlands: No; I will let it go for now.

Q63 **Chair:** There are two final areas. The first is around the inspection function that you have, which I will do. The second is on planning. I will hand over to Ruth for planning.



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I know it is five weeks in, but I just wondered if you had any process in place for how you are going to develop your inspection schemes.

Chris Boardman: Can I just clarify? Inspection in terms of everything we deliver, or are you talking in terms of the planning situation?

Q64 **Chair:** Sorry, forget planning. Ruth will come in there. This is the inspection of schemes on completion. If they have not been completed to design standard, then you would have the powers to withdraw funding for that failing, as I understand it. You tell me if I am wrong.

Danny Williams: We have thorough processes in place. There are two streams here. There are things that we fund ourselves directly and things that we influence, so levelling-up funds, for example. Where we directly fund it, we absolutely have the power to say, "No more of that, thank you very much." Where we are influencing, we have the power to recommend and then we can work with our colleagues in the DFT or in other departments to say, "Hold on a minute, these guys promised that they would deliver X and they have not done, so you need to take that into account." That is the broad split.

Q65 **Chair:** Logic would dictate, and it would make sense, that you had the same powers for both pots.

Danny Williams: Yes; it is a bit of a weak point, but you are right. The processes are in place. We have a fantastic lead on our inspectorate team—Brian Deegan—who is pretty well known around the country. He is in fact right now interviewing for the next three roles. Then we are going to be recruiting another 20 people literally in the next couple of weeks.

Q66 **Chair:** Are they going to be regionally based, or is it more design—

Danny Williams: The core is going to be based in York. Then we are having at least three people per region whose job it is to have their ears to the ground and to be able to work and collaborate with local communities, local developers, local authorities and so on, and act as the ears and eyes of the core team.

Q67 **Chair:** They might cover four or five counties.

Danny Williams: The south-west or—

Q68 **Chair:** More of a region. That is interesting. My understanding also is that those inspections of highway authorities' performance on active travel will influence the funding they receive for other forms of transport. Does that mean effectively that, if they do not deliver the goods, that could impact the Government funding for bus, road and so on?

Chris Boardman: As it is written down, and when I was on the receiving end of the letters that we got from the Secretary of State in Greater Manchester, that absolutely stated the case. "If you do not deliver this aspect, then you will not get your bus money." I think that is laudable. It is joined up and it is the right way to do it.



We do not have the direct powers to do that. We have the authority at the moment to inspect, work with and try to raise the standards. Ultimately, we want people to win. Where they cannot, our duty is to inform the partner body responsible for that funding stream and direct them to the directive of the Secretary of State as to what action should be taken at this point. We cannot take that action.

Q69 **Chair:** How often has the Secretary of State actually taken that action? When you were giving your example in Manchester, you said that you could be subject to the Secretary of State telling you that you had lost funding for other transport modes in Manchester because you had not delivered. Ultimately, as you say yourself, you can only make the recommendation. It is for the Secretary of State to issue that.

Chris Boardman: Yes. I only pause because I know that our own structure and the one that Danny is putting in place—and we had in Greater Manchester—is stage gate funding, exactly the same as a bank does. “What do you want to build? That looks fantastic. Here is the money for the foundations.”

We are putting in place a mechanism so we can make sure that everybody is doing what they have said they will do. If they hit a problem, we will try to help them. If they do not want to deal with the problem that has been there all along, then we stop. I would like to see that reflected across the funding streams, but it is not within our gift to do that. That would be the most sensible way to do it and make sure that it stays on track.

Q70 **Chair:** Of course, this is all about inspection. What can be done when local authorities just are not delivering at all?

Chris Boardman: In our case, that would count against their next assessment as in, “You have not delivered what you said.”

Q71 **Chair:** What if they don’t even say? What if they just do not care enough about active travel and they are just not going to deliver anything? It is a postcode lottery otherwise.

Chris Boardman: I am not sure it is a postcode lottery. It is a leadership lottery perhaps, but it is not our job to force people to behave differently. It is a horrible cliché, but we work with the willing. We do not have the funds or the capacity with 98 people, or the time, to work with people who fundamentally do not believe and do not want to. So we cannot. We will do everything we can to help, and that may include councillors taking people who are on the fence. Danny referred to latent support where it is, “Oh, we quite like this but it is quite scary.” We will take them somewhere to get that education. We can do that part, but it is not our job to tell a politician what their policy is. If they want to do this bit, we will help.

Q72 **Chair:** I understand your point about working with the willing. Unfortunately, with this Committee, we tend to hear a lot of experiences



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of the unwilling and who can crack that. I suppose it comes to another part. As MPs we have quite a holistic role. We tend to hear of these different problems and a failure to join up locally.

The classic thing we hear is that you have a district council who gets section 106 money for housing. You have the highways authority that would like to put a pedestrian crossing in place but does not have the funding, and they do not seem to talk to each other. The two could marry up and deliver a solution.

You also see local authorities sometimes consulting to death or over engineering projects and saying that it is all too expensive, when they could be relatively simple. I remember talking to you in Manchester about some ideas you had.

We also see the local authority saying, "We would like to put this in place, but the DFT rules say that we cannot because it would not be 100% safe." As MPs, we check in with the DFT, who say, "Actually, those aren't our rules at all."

I list those because I wonder if your agency can actually deliver a solution there. I know that colleagues across the House struggle with these examples. We would like to see someone with a bit more clout get involved.

Chris Boardman: I think there are two points. Finishing up on the previous one, if I may, one of the things that we will be doing—again, this was enacted regionally and was quite effective, and could have been enacted more strongly—is to publish who is doing what. We will have a map of the country to show who is excelling and who is not interested. That is very uncomfortable for people who were not. Where we started in Greater Manchester, when we published a draft map online for consultation, the biggest outrage we got was, "Where's our bit?" That really helps align people because it creates a positive pressure to change.

Again, we are just putting the evidence out there. It is something that Active Travel England can do. Then the local leadership has to own that, whether it is good or it is bad. I think that is important.

In terms of all those barriers, the majority of people who Danny is employing are coming from those environments, so they know the systems and they know, in some cases, how the system has been gamed. They know what the real barriers are. The block changes in different areas. It could be at a leadership level; it could be at officer level. That varied across the 10 districts of Greater Manchester. We have to be able to change the tools. The first thing is that you need to have the conversation to know where it is and try to help unblock it. I am not sure that fully answers your question.

Chair: It gives me confidence that the culture change is going to shift and that something is going to move some of those blockers on. I am grateful for that.



Let us move to the final section, which is the planning system and your role within it.

Q73 Ruth Cadbury: It absolutely links because it is the disjoint between different players. We have seen across England, particularly on the edge of and outside towns, housing estates and other developments that just seem to embed car dependency because of the way they are designed and have managed to get planning permission.

ATE is going to become a statutory consultee for major developments. What are your priorities in dealing with the planning system? Where do you see problems in it that are holding back cycling and walking infrastructure and that behaviour change that we want to see?

Danny Williams: You are right that we become a statutory consultee in April of next year. We have been working really closely with DLUHC on that. We have been really lucky that Chris managed to recruit Joanna Averley, who is the chief planner, to help us with our planning on that. She has been fantastic.

It is two-pronged really. One is influencing policy, which is important but has a slightly longer shelf life, obviously. The other is essentially supporting the local planning process.

The first thing, which I alluded to earlier, is that we are test-launching the first of our toolkits in about two weeks' time. That is going to go to about two dozen authorities. Those toolkits are really designed to speed up and help local authorities assess whether development is essentially good or bad on various metrics. There are something like 25 or 28 metrics that we are working through. Essentially, it spits out recommendations and ways to fix those. That is critical and we will launch that in April when we become a stat con.

We are going to be reviewing and triaging any application over 150 units. We think that is about 3,000 applications a year. Obviously, we are not going to do all of those manually, but we are putting in place processes to streamline all of that. We already engage with and help authorities on the knottier ones of those.

Q74 Ruth Cadbury: Will you have the resources to be able to deliver that capacity? We are only talking about housing developments, but what about other developments? Being a statutory consultee is more than just ploughing through planning applications, although that in itself is quite a job.

Danny Williams: Indeed. The way that we are trying to operate is this. I mentioned earlier the regional teams. Part of the purpose of the regional teams is to exercise influence, not just to put a yes or no on a piece of paper. We are just one of many statutory consultees, so a really critical part is that we can work locally and try to effect change and bring people together.



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Chris Boardman: I think you make a very good point about the 98 people. We have nearly 300 supporting them under my other hat. It is a challenge. Then we have to make tough choices, or we have to present the choice we are making to the Secretary of State. I think Danny and the team have very practically set their threshold at what they can cope with and the proportionality of the team.

The secondary challenge with planning is that this is the sort of thing that is going to deliver results in over a decade, but our target is 2030. It is something we have to do for the future so we do not have the problems we are dealing with now in the future. We are not being measured against it, success-wise. It is a duty and part of the bigger picture. It is quite a challenge squaring that circle.

Q75 **Ruth Cadbury:** I have one quick other question. Do you know when the Active Travel Fund for funding will be announced?

Danny Williams: It is ready to go. We are completely ready. It was approved by the Secretary of State. We are waiting for Treasury to sign this off.

Q76 **Ruth Cadbury:** You are waiting for Treasury.

Chris Boardman: The Secretary of State has signed it off. The business plan is in place. Everybody is happy with it. It sits with Treasury at the moment to enact, and then we can give local authorities that confidence.

Danny Williams: I would point out again that those local authorities busted a gut over the summer to enable us to deliver it. We have a few phone calls coming in every minute really.

Chris Boardman: We are very relieved for London and quite excited to see the rest of the country get its settlement as well.

Q77 **Ruth Cadbury:** Is there enough funding in London for the ambition of the local authorities and London Mayor?

Chris Boardman: Well, £80 million each year for the next two years is quite a lot. London is set up to spend it. I think you can always spend more. That is the cover answer, is it not?

Ruth Cadbury: Thank you.

Chair: We might want to write to the Department to say how exciting it is that London's money is there to be delivered and everyone else has worked incredibly hard. It would be good to have non-London areas also able to deliver as well, so can someone sign off please?

Unless there are any other questions, or you think we have missed anything out—you have given us an hour and three-quarters-worth, so I would like to hope not—I just want to say thank you to you both. I know it is early days, but it is very exciting listening to the plans that you have already made and intend to make. As you can probably tell, we have a real determination to get rid of the blockers and allow these policies to



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get delivered to make a difference.

Please keep in touch with us if there is anything we should know about. It would be good to have a running dialogue with you. I wish you both all the very best. Thank you.