



Public Accounts Committee

Oral evidence: Active travel in England, HC 1335

Wednesday 19 July 2023

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Olivia Blake; Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown; Ashley Dalton; Mr Jonathan Djanogly; Mrs Flick Drummond; Anne Marie Morris; Sarah Olney

In the absence of the Chair, Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown took the Chair.

Gareth Davies, Comptroller & Auditor General, National Audit Office, Jonny Mood, Director, NAO, and Marius Gallaher, Alternate Officer of Accounts, HM Treasury, were in attendance.

Questions 1-79

Witnesses

I: Dame Bernadette Kelly, Permanent Secretary, Department for Transport, Jessica Matthew, Co-Director for the Local Transport Directorate, DfT, and Danny Williams, Chief Executive, Active Travel England.



Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General

Active Travel in England (HC 1376)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dame Bernadette Kelly, Jessica Matthew and Danny Williams.

Q1 Chair: Good morning, everybody, and a warm welcome to the Public Accounts Committee today, Wednesday 19 July 2023, particularly to our interns from the NAO and various staff interns. A warm welcome to our witnesses as well.

Today we are investigating active travel in England. Active travel describes everyday journeys made by walking, wheeling or cycling. The Government believe that active travel has the potential to support their wider strategic priorities to increase physical activity, tackle obesity, improve air quality, level up and achieve net zero carbon emissions. In 2017 and 2022, the Department for Transport published cycling and walking investment strategies that set out its aims for increasing active travel in England by 2025 and beyond. They also contained funding to support investment in several active travel initiatives delivered by local authorities. Last year, the Department established Active Travel England to address long-standing issues relating to the standard of infrastructure and support improvements in the capability of local authorities. There is a lot there that we want to delve into.

A very warm welcome to our witnesses. In the centre is a frequent attendee at this constituency: a warm welcome to the permanent secretary of the Department for Transport, Dame Bernadette Kelly. On her left is Danny Williams, the chief executive of Active Travel England. Is this your first appearance, Mr Williams, at the PAC?

Danny Williams: Yes. I have done the Transport Committee, but this is my first time at the PAC.

Q2 Chair: A warm welcome. On Dame Bernadette's right is Jessica Matthew. Have you been here before or not?

Jessica Matthew: I have not been here before; this is my first time too.

Q3 Chair: A very warm welcome to you too. You are the co-director for the Local Transport Directorate in the DfT. Welcome to you all.

Dame Bernadette, would you mind if at the top I raise the DVLA? These are fairly straightforward issues, actually. As you know, when you came before us to give evidence, we had the chief executive. I have some fairly simple questions about the catch-up. What new plans does the DVLA have to identify fast-track driving licence applications from customers who would be badly affected by delays, such as people unable to work? That detail was missing in your Treasury minute response to our recommendations.



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Dame Bernadette Kelly: I have seen the letter from the Committee that set out a number of areas where you felt that our response did not fully address your questions. I know that you asked for a reply by 27 July. I am seeking to provide a full response in writing to the further questions that the Committee asked for further detail on, including on backlog data. I think there were questions about the three-to-five-year strategy and about improving communication with MPs. I am afraid that I have not come equipped with full answers to those questions this morning, but I fully intend to write to the Committee with more detail on the points where you are not satisfied.

Chair: That is perfectly acceptable. We did not warn you that I was going to ask that. It may be that for some of these other questions, you want to answer in the same way, and I am perfectly happy to accept a follow-up.

Dame Bernadette Kelly: That question is one of the ones that are highlighted—

Q4 **Chair:** There may be others here that I am going to ask you. How does the DVLA plan to improve communications with important stakeholders, such as MPs, rather than just continue to hope its existing attempts are working?

Dame Bernadette Kelly: I think I have four areas that the Committee has highlighted. You have just highlighted two of them, and there are two further areas. The Committee has asked me and the chief executive of DVLA to respond by 27 July, and that is what we are preparing to do.

Chair: I suspect that the other two questions will be exactly the same—

Dame Bernadette Kelly: They will be exactly the same answer.

Q5 **Chair:** But to get it on the record so that we know exactly what we are covering, has DVLA resolved the backlog in applications from drivers with no definable medical conditions? If so, when did it do that? If not, why and when will it do so? Again, I am perfectly happy—

Dame Bernadette Kelly: Same response.

Q6 **Chair:** Same reply—I am perfectly happy to accept that. Finally, what progress have you and the DVLA made so far in developing a longer-term strategy to further re-engineer and modernise the driving licence process? Same answer?

Dame Bernadette Kelly: It is the same answer. Those are exactly the questions that I have.

Chair: I am perfectly happy to accept that. I am not in any way critical of you for doing that. We would rather have a fuller correct answer than an off-the-cuff answer. Thank you for that. I think Ms Olney wants to raise one other issue at the top, relating to London's bridges. We cannot let you go without asking you about that.



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Q7 **¹²Sarah Olney:** You were expecting me to ask about Hammersmith bridge, but in a change to my usual approach I am going to ask about Wandsworth bridge instead.

Dame Bernadette Kelly: Unfortunately, I have not done my homework on Wandsworth bridge.

Sarah Olney: Wandsworth bridge is due to close for 10 weeks from next Monday. Obviously, as you know from the extensive earlier discussion on this point, the continued closure of Hammersmith bridge is already causing a huge amount of congestion in the area, not just in Barnes, which I represent, but in Putney. Obviously, Putney residents in particular, but also my residents in Barnes and East Sheen, are very concerned about what further impact this 10-week closure of Wandsworth bridge will have. I am interested to know what conversations the DfT have been having with TfL and others about the increased congestion that will cause in south London and what might be done to mitigate it.

Dame Bernadette Kelly: I am sorry; you have caught me slightly off guard on Wandsworth bridge. I understand the question, but I do not have an immediate response. As you indicate, the management of traffic flows and congestion, which I am sure will be a challenge, is principally a matter for TfL. I will go back and make sure we have had a conversation with TfL, and I will write to you setting out what steps are planned to manage that and minimise the impact.

Q8 **Sarah Olney:** I really appreciate that. Thank you so much. Why has it been so much easier to arrange for the repairs to Wandsworth bridge than it has been for Hammersmith bridge? What are the particular factors?

Dame Bernadette Kelly: I do not know whether they are simply different in nature or of a different scale. I would need to go and investigate and come back to you.

Sarah Olney: I would be really grateful, and I know that my constituents would be too. Thank you so much.

Dame Bernadette Kelly: Of course. I understand.

Chair: I think Ashley has a declaration of interest.

Ashley Dalton: Yes. I want to declare that from 2011 to 2021, I managed the Southend Active Travel programme and the South Essex Active Travel programme, funded by the DfT.

~~**Chair:** Thank you very much. We will move straight on to the main~~

¹ [Correspondence from Dame Bernadette Kelly DCB, Permanent Secretary, Department for Transport, re closure of Wandsworth Bridge, dated 1 August 2023](#)

² [Correspondence from Dame Bernadette Kelly DCB, Permanent Secretary, Department for Transport, re Active Travel in England, dated 1 August 2023](#)



session.

Q9 Mr Djanogly: Good morning, everyone. I will start with progress on increased active travel by 2025. The DfT have set four specific targets for cycling and walking to 2025 and, indeed, onwards. Those figures are in the NAO Report at paragraph 3 and figure 8.

The specific targets are to “increase the percentage of short journeys in towns and cities that are walked or cycled from 41% in 2018-19 to 46% in 2025”, secondly, to “increase walking activity to 365 stages per person per year in 2025”, thirdly, to “double cycling from 0.8 billion stages in 2013 to 1.6 billion stages in 2025” and, finally, to “increase the percentage of children aged 5 to 10 who usually walk to school from 49% in 2014 to 55% in 2025.”

The NAO Report then goes on, in paragraph 12, to say that “DfT’s progress to date suggests it will not achieve three of its four 2025 objectives for increasing active travel, and progress on the fourth is uncertain.” Do you agree with that assessment, Dame Bernadette, and how is performance going against these targets in practice?

Dame Bernadette Kelly: Thank you. I will come back, if I may, to the objectives and say a little bit more in detail about those in a moment. I would observe from the outset that they were set deliberately at an extremely stretching level, but let me come back in a moment.

In terms of the progress, I would also like to set out a few words by way of context. The NAO Report does indeed identify that three of the four objectives are not on track to be made. It is also important to note, though, that the NAO Report acknowledges the very significant progress that we are making on active travel, and I think we need to look at the targets and objectives in the context of that overall progress.

Through the cycling and walking investment strategies 1 and 2, we have set a long-term approach to active travel. We have raised our ambitions on active travel very significantly in the last five years. In 2020, “Gear Change” set out a really ambitious programme for increasing walking and cycling. Most importantly, the establishment of Active Travel England, which we will hear more about this morning, including from Danny, is a real step change in how we are now approaching active travel, and I think we expect to see progress and success in future. It is important to put that context in front of the Committee.

The NAO acknowledges that we have raised our ambitions, that ATE has the potential to be a catalyst, that we are making good progress and that that momentum needs to be maintained. I think it is important to—

Q10 Mr Djanogly: I’m sorry, but I am still not sure whether you are going to meet the targets.

Dame Bernadette Kelly: On the objectives, I think they were set at a very, very stretching level. The progress that is recorded in the NAO Report probably understates the progress that we expect to make. The time series data ends at 2021. That, of course, was when we were still in



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the period of pandemic measures and so on, so we do not yet know, and do not yet have the data that will show, the full extent of post-pandemic recovery in all those indicators.

The data that we have suggests that we will see progress on them. For example, we have data for the year ending '22. It is not analogous data—I need to have that caveat—but for the year ending '22, it shows an increase of 11% in cycling activity compared with 2019. So I would be surprised if, as we get further data on those four targets, we do not see progress. I cannot say with confidence that the targets will all be made, but we are looking very hard at the way we can secure maximum benefits.

Danny Williams: Can I—

Q11 **Mr Djanogly:** Sorry. You said that the targets were tough ones.

Dame Bernadette Kelly: Yes.

Mr Djanogly: Given that they were tough ones, what has happened or not happened that means that you are not going to get to them? Specifically, is it a question of the reduced real-terms funding that we are now seeing?

Dame Bernadette Kelly: I would not identify funding as the key issue here. Of course, funding is always a constraint on everything that we do, and that is true for active travel as it is for other things. It is also true that we are in a much tighter fiscal environment, and I am sure that the Committee will have questions on the impact that that has had on funding.

Mr Djanogly: Mr Williams wanted to come in.

Dame Bernadette Kelly: Can I just finish and then bring Mr Williams in? What I think is more important in making progress here is the quality of investment and the quality and capability of good practice right across the country in terms of cycling and walking interventions. This is where Active Travel England and Danny Williams are going to have such a pivotal part to play. I am sure he will say more about those activities.

Danny Williams: First, having targets like this is very helpful for a new organisation, as you can imagine. They are super challenging, but they are super inspiring when you are bringing together a team of new people in a new executive agency with a bit of a mission. Let's establish that first and foremost.

The targets themselves are quite interesting, because most of them are based on the National Travel Survey. The survey looks at roughly 10,000 people a year, and it asks them questions about their daily travel habits. The NTS is a very good set of data. It has been going for years and years and years, and it is a good survey. For walking, it is likely to capture what is actually happening, because most people get up, walk out the door and can walk to their destination. For things like walking to school, you would imagine that the numbers represented in our objective are fairly close to what is actually happening on the ground, but, as Dame Bernadette just



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said, the numbers that we are looking at in 2021 are still catching the tail end of lockdown. You are not going to see lots of kids walking to school when schools are not open, so we have to wait for that to catch up.

On cycling, it is slightly different. The National Travel Survey will look at aggregate results—are people cycling or not? In most parts of the country, there is no cycling infrastructure. If there is cycling infrastructure, it is very inconsistent and bitty, and what you will find is that a national survey is too diluted to reflect what is happening on the ground. A real case study of that would be some funding that DfT put in place between 2006 and 2013, which is the Cycle City Ambition fund. That was a fund of about £181 million, which went to eight cities. In all eight, the average cycling volumes increased by about 41% to 42% following the investment. But when you look at a survey that was done at the same time, it actually recorded less cycling, because the cycle routes that we implemented were only really going from A to B. If you did not happen to live near A or B, it was not going to pick you up.

They are very useful targets to have. Over time, it would be useful for us, together with our colleagues at DfT, to look at whether the cycling target is the right one and whether it is reflected in the right way or not, because the level of investment going into cycling is quite small. It is very localised, so a national survey is not going to pick up results in a consistent way for us.

Q12 Mr Djanogly: I am slightly confused, because Dame Bernadette said that financing was not the issue here. Are you saying that if you had more money, you would not get closer to the targets?

Danny Williams: I would love to have more money. Anybody in a new executive agency would love to have more money. What I am saying is that cycle schemes are necessarily quite localised. What I am really trying to demonstrate is that we might look at a way of measuring outcomes from cycling that is different from the national survey.

Q13 Mr Djanogly: Okay. I want to move on to safety targets. I am looking at paragraph 2.3 in the NAO Report. In 2021, the number of casualties increased to 1,100, although the NAO notes that it was lower than in 2017. I would read from that that progress has been made, but that we are now falling back. Can you give more recent figures that would disprove that?

Dame Bernadette Kelly: I do not know whether we have more recent figures. I might ask Jessica if we do.

Jessica Matthew: We have recently published the provisional 2022 road safety statistics. There will be a more detailed set later on in the summer. That shows quite a good story on pedestrians and pedal cyclists. There is quite a reduction in fatalities of pedestrians and pedal cyclists: both are down, compared with 2019, by 15%. It is a bit difficult to compare the 2022 figures with 2021 or 2020, because, as has already been mentioned, clearly that was during the covid period and far fewer people were travelling. The most recent figures suggest quite a good story.



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Q14 **Mr Djanogly:** Do you mean it's going to be better the next time we see the figures, at the end of the summer

Jessica Matthew: The figures later on in the summer will be a refined version of the figures that we have already published. They will show a reduction of 15% for both pedal cyclists and pedestrians.

Q15 **Mr Djanogly:** Okay. Dame Bernadette, why did you drop your objective of improving safety from the second cycling and walking investment strategy?

Dame Bernadette Kelly: Sorry, I just want to check whether that is factually correct. Can I check what the safety objective was?

Jessica Matthew: We did have safety in earlier cycling targets. We did not put it in these targets because we were planning other safety work around that time. We have done quite a lot on other road safety measures, so we wanted to have a really focused set of cycling and walking objectives.

Dame Bernadette Kelly: In terms of the steps we have been taking, safety is absolutely a paramount issue. I will ask Danny to say a bit more about how ATE is approaching it, because it is at the heart of ATE's work.

Stepping back from that, there were changes that we made to the Highway Code this year, which have had really strong cut through to the public. They are about ensuring that roads are a safer environment for cyclists and walkers. The evidence does suggest that fatalities are on a positive trend in terms of downwards. We expect to publish a new road safety strategic framework.

Q16 **Mr Djanogly:** When will that be?

Dame Bernadette Kelly: I think we expect to that before the end of the year. I am being a little cautious because, as you know, it is sometimes difficult to give timings with precision. But there is another road safety framework due. It is important to put our work on active travel safety in the context of the overall approach to road safety, but I think we should hear from Danny on ATE.

Q17 **Chair:** Before we go to Mr Williams, this safety issue is cited in the NAO Report several times as one of the issues that deters people from cycling. Both on the safety stats that Ms Matthew gave to Mr Djanogly, and on the changes to the Highway Code, is there anything more that the Government can do to promote those and encourage more people not to worry quite so much and take up cycling?

Dame Bernadette Kelly: You are absolutely right that perception of safety is as important as actual safety. Again, I think we should hear from Danny on this, because it is something that ATE is doing a lot of work on.

Danny Williams: Safety is absolutely our core reason for being, to be honest. Active Travel England is now working with partners around the country, and we think about this from the perspective of road danger



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reduction. With our colleagues in local authorities and highways authorities, we look at how you can design roads and junctions—particularly junctions—so that they are safer for all users, and particularly for vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and cyclists.

There are some great examples in London. London has had a fairly consistent pattern of investing in its most dangerous junctions. It has got through about two thirds of those—there are about 70 of them. In the time that it has been doing that, the number of collisions at those junctions has reduced dramatically. The number of cycle collisions is down about 42%. The number of collisions involving pedestrians is down about 19%, and collisions involving cars alone are down 22%. With that kind of philosophy in terms of how you think about designing junctions and roads, you can achieve really great results.

- Q18 **Chair:** With respect to both of you, these are all fantastic things; do not get me wrong, what you are saying, Mr Williams, is really great. The reduction in fatalities is really great. The change in the Highway Code is really great. I do not think—but I may be wrong about this—that those messages are getting through to the public. I wonder what more the Government can do to spread that good news.

Dame Bernadette Kelly: Indeed, communication is a big part of the challenge when what you are trying to do is tackle perceptions and encourage changes in behaviour. On the changes to the highway code, which were a significant step forward, we have done extensive communications on that via our Think! campaign—our long-standing road safety communications campaign. The evidence is that this has had a real impact on the public's understanding of the changes that we are proposing, which give priority to pedestrians and cyclists.

To give you some data: understanding of pedestrian priority at junctions among the people surveyed is up 20% to 72% from 52%; understanding of how you treat cyclists riding two abreast is up 16% to 46%. Your challenge is a very fair one. I think we are taking steps. There is always more that can be done, and I think the ATE can—

Danny Williams: There is more, actually. If you look at some of the recently announced devolution deals, Greater Manchester, as part of its devo deal, has written in that it would like to pursue an extended trial of what is called a sideroad zebra. I said earlier that a lot of collisions happen at junctions. In this country at the moment, if you are a pedestrian trying to cross a sideroad, the highway code states that you have priority if you are already in the carriageway. That is not really established in everyday thinking for a lot of motorists. A lot of countries have minimalist zebra crossings on those sideroads. Trials have recently been happening in Wales to see how effective they are, and some trials were undertaken a few years ago by Manchester. Those trials resulted in, I think, 65% more motorists slowing down to let the pedestrian cross the road. Manchester is looking at working with colleagues at the DfT on extending those trials. A lot of research is starting to happen around how we can implement really cheap and effective measures to enforce more of that highway code.



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Q19 **Chair:** Dame Bernadette, we have received a very late piece of evidence, so I am not going to ask anybody about it. It is from Mike Kane, the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East, and basically concerns the turning down of an active travel scheme along the Princess Parkway because of the high levels of nitrogen oxide. I wonder whether I might, on his behalf, send you details—

Dame Bernadette Kelly: Please do.

Chair: And copy in Mr Williams, and ask for an answer.

Dame Bernadette Kelly: Of course.

Q20 **Mrs Drummond:** You were talking about research, and I just wondered whether there had been research on places that have imposed a 20-mph limit: London, Portsmouth and so on. Has there been research on how many casualties there have been and whether that has reduced the number?

Danny Williams: There has been local research, and at DfT there is a new set of research that we are working on. Sorry, I say “we”; colleagues at DfT are working on that and it will be published fairly soon, I think before the end of the year. It is looking in part at 20-mph zones, school streets and a whole batch of other initiatives.

What I would add is that 20-mph zones often correlate with, for example, more children walking to school. Portsmouth and Hull were both at the forefront of doing that sort of thing, and they have 78% or 80% of primary school kids walking to school, which is awesome. That is not directly attributable, but you can see there is a correlation.

Q21 **Mr Djanogly:** I have one further question. Is it true that e-bikes count towards active travel but e-scooters do not, and if so, is the reason for that that the soaring number of accidents on e-scooters would ruin your statistics?

Jessica Matthew: The classification is correct: e-scooters do not count towards active travel and e-bikes do. The reason is that you have to pedal on an e-bike and therefore you have to use up some calories, and on an e-scooter you do not. Plus, outside trial areas, obviously, e-scooters are not legal on British roads.

Q22 **Mr Djanogly:** You have to balance—you have to wobble.

Jessica Matthew: It might do you more good than sitting in a car—possibly—but it doesn’t quite count as active travel.

Q23 **Mr Djanogly:** But seriously, people are, obviously, using e-bikes—

Dame Bernadette Kelly: Just to be clear, it is absolutely not the reason why e-scooters are differently categorised; that is not in order to try to present a better picture on safety. E-scooters are potentially a fantastic addition to the suite of travel options that people have, and it is a really important emerging technology, but we know that the safety issues—



Q24 **Mr Djanogly:** So they're just not in your thinking—

Dame Bernadette Kelly: They are—that's not true. There are some questions about e-scooters and how they are rolled out across the country. At the moment, we have 23 trials of rental schemes etc. We are also recognising the need for, ultimately—when parliamentary time allows—a better legal framework. So we are thinking about that. I just want it to be clear on the record that we are not deliberately categorising them in a different way—it is for the reason that Jessica gives, which is that this is not that active; it is not because we are trying to change the figures or make the figures look more favourable. Danny, you might like to say something about e-scooters.

Danny Williams: Yes, there are a couple of areas. First, when we think about how we design or set the guidance for designing cycle infrastructure, we clearly have to think about things like e-scooters or new mobility options, of which there are increasingly more and more, and the speeds that those things operate at. We are working with colleagues at the DfT on—

Q25 **Mr Djanogly:** I will come back to the trials later, so let us stop there.

Danny Williams: One of the interesting things that the trials the DfT and local authorities are undertaking is that there is an insane amount of data starting to come together around how people are using those e-scooters. You can see literally in any city whether an e-scooter user is riding on the pavement or not. We are starting to have conversations with colleagues, particularly in the larger cities, about finding ways to publish that data so we can inform better guidance and so on. Generally, the evidence is already showing us that where you put in good cycle infrastructure, people get off the pavement. That is obvious, but having meaningful data for that for the first time will be quite exciting for developing future guidance.

Q26 **Mr Djanogly:** Where you do not increase the number of cycle lanes, but you increase the amount of cycling, is there a danger to health as a result?

Danny Williams: To health?

Mr Djanogly: Yes. In other words, if the number of cycle lanes does not keep up with the increase of cycling, is public health—

Jessica Matthew: Overall, most of the benefits of active travel are found in health, reduced incidence of heart attacks and an increasing number of people going to work. Clearly, there is an increased accident potential disbenefit, but that is vastly outweighed by the increases in overall physical health. When you look at it in the round, the health benefits by increased activity greatly outweigh the risk of accidents.

Danny Williams: I do not have the data to hand, but when London started to get serious about cycle infrastructure, the way that it did that 10 to 15 years ago was to put some blue paint on the road and tell people that was a cycle highway. That, along with various other initiatives, had the combined effect of helping more people to start to cycle to work and

particularly into central London. The collision rates definitely went up—I do not have the data to hand—and what you saw was: more people cycling, more collisions. Subsequently, however, TfL has been very clear about addressing that—I referenced, for example, the safer junctions programme earlier—and have looked at that from the perspective of a road danger reduction philosophy. What you are seeing now is cycle levels going up but collision levels going down. It is totally possible.

In an oblique way, the answer to your question is yes, probably. Let me go back and find the actual data, and I will come back to you on it. But it is resolvable.

Q27 Chair: Mr Williams, just to be absolutely clear to everybody, your organisation does not cover active travel in London. That comes under the Mayor.

Danny Williams: We collaborate very closely with London. We are establishing a working arrangement with London, but it comes under the Mayor. What is interesting about London is that it has been, to date, the epicentre of how this stuff happens in this country. What we are about is starting to change that and empowering other cities and other parts of the country to get up to speed faster than they would on their own.

Q28 Chair: I absolutely get that, but in case anyone thought you were speaking for London, you cannot. You liaise with them.

Before I bring in Miss Blake, are you working on any different and better ways of measuring cycling?

Danny Williams: Yes, lots. When I joined, which was almost a year ago as we were established on 1 August last year, one of the most important things I felt was that ATE would help the country as a whole to understand better what is happening with cycling and walking. We have a fairly large data and analysis team now, we have set up an agreement with the Alan Turing Institute to help us do data science calculations and we are essentially building a central dataset of two real things.

One is a proper understanding what infrastructure and what assets Government are funding, because in the past funding has been through different streams and it has not always been easy to represent that in a cohesive manner. That is the first part. The second part is working with colleagues and partners around the country—by that, I mean particularly local authorities—to find ways to consistently measure outcomes. At the moment, Sheffield, let's say, will measure before and after data from a cycle investment in a different way from the way Southend or Manchester might. It sits in a filing cabinet somewhere and no one really looks at it. What we are trying to do is pull all that data into a consistent dataset, so that you can see, if I spend a pound on this, what I get for my money. It is different in different parts of the country.

That is not a small job, as you can imagine. It involves working collaboratively with local authorities around the country and getting their agreement to start to look at data in a similar way. As I referenced earlier,



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it is quite an exciting area because there is a lot of what we call micromobility data. As for the e-scooters, you can see highly individual data points about what is happening. We are looking to really manipulate all that as much as we can.

Chair: Brilliant. Thank you very much. Your answer on Sheffield beautifully segues into a question from one of the Sheffield Members, Olivia Blake.

Q29 **Olivia Blake:** How many calories does 30 minutes of e-scooter burn compared with 30 minutes of walking?

Jessica Matthew: That is a good question. I am afraid I do not have the answer in front of me.

Dame Bernadette Kelly: Do you have the answer, by any chance?

Olivia Blake: I have just done a quick google. I am a biomedical scientist by background, so I wanted an evidence base for your disincentive to include e-scooters. It says that 30 minutes of e-scooter burns 150 calories. That is almost equal to 30 minutes of walking, which can be between 150 and 200 calories. Maybe you should think about the evidence base for that.

Dame Bernadette Kelly: Thank you. That is interesting.

Q30 **Olivia Blake:** Moving swiftly on to the "Gear Change" programme, figure 9 is a nice figure in the Report. It shows the number of actions that have been made against the 33 actions that were in that Report. I understand that only eight actions have been completely delivered. I am quite concerned about how the DfT and Active Travel England are going to prioritise the 25 actions that have not yet been fully implemented. I wonder whether each of you have a view on how it is going and how you are choosing to prioritise.

Dame Bernadette Kelly: Can I say a few things and then I will hand over to Jessica and Danny? First, 33 commitments is an awful lot of commitments. I think the fact that we have implemented or are making significant progress on 22 of those demonstrates that we have been actively seeking to take those things forward. I think that is significant at a time when we have gone through a very challenging period in the Department and more widely.

It was identified that there are 11 areas on which we have not yet made progress. On some of those, there have just been some funding constraints, as I have spoken to the Committee about previously. In the Department, we have had to make very difficult choices in the current inflationary and fiscal environment. That is a different position from the one we expected to be in when "Gear Change" was published in 2020. That has had an impact. In others, however, we are fully intending to make progress and we have plans in place to do so. Perhaps I might ask both Jessica and Danny to offer a bit more detail.



Jessica Matthew: Some of the commitments that the Report suggests we have yet to meet are around Bikeability. Active Travel England definitely has plans to continue with Bikeability and to issue funding for the next few phases. The Report also mentions that there is not a commitment around long-term funding. You will appreciate that there has been quite a complex fiscal environment over the last year or two and it is definitely Government policy—it is clearly set out in the levelling-up White Paper—that there should be long-term funding for local authorities across a range of budgets, not just transport. In a number of places, we are intending to make progress. We think we have met about 22 of the 33 commitments, and there is still some more work to do.

Danny Williams: Some of the commitments that are red on that table are quite interesting. One of them is that the Government will establish freight consolidation hubs in city centres. It is obviously not up to me to establish how we define policy, but Amazon has opened one in east London, one in central London and one in Birmingham. I cannot tell you how many more it is opening, but the numbers are not inconsiderable. DHL is doing the same. This sort of thing is happening anyhow, so there are a few things in there on which the private sector is just cracking on and making it happen, which is quite exciting to watch. On that one, for example, Amazon finds that having a cycle hub for distributing to city offices and so on is 30% more profitable than using a van, which makes loads of sense. Whether Active Travel England, as a new entity, which has a lot of things to focus on, needs to worry about all of them is debatable.

Q31 **Olivia Blake:** On the 11, how are you ensuring that you will get started on those priorities?

Dame Bernadette Kelly: We do have a tracking mechanism in the Department to ensure we know where we are in making progress against all the commitments in “Gear Change”. I will ask Jessica to say a bit more.

I have mentioned that there have been funding constraints. In some areas, we have had a lot of changes of Minister in those times, as well. It is fair to say that in one or two areas priorities have shifted slightly. We have to recognise that that will have an impact on how some of these recommendations are taken forward.

As Danny has said, the world moves on, and we need to ensure that we are focusing our activities on the areas where Government and ATE can have the biggest impact. I am not going to promise that we are slavishly committed to delivering on all 33, because I think we have to recognise the changed environment, but we do have internal tracking for the measures in “Gear Change”.

Q32 **Olivia Blake:** That is interesting. I was intrigued that five of the 11 seemed to be in integration. To give you one example, in Sheffield at the moment, you are able to take your bikes and dogs on buses but not on trams. That seems counterintuitive if we are trying to increase the number of people using it as a network, rather than doing all their journey by walking, which could be impossible due to time constraints.



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Why has there been a lack of focus on those five areas where integration is key? Some of those are around making railways better for cyclists, making buses able to carry more bikes, promoting cycling on freight, to ensure that businesses use bicycles more readily for local deliveries and things like that. Why is that kind of policy given the slip?

Jessica Matthew: I agree with you that integration between different modes of transport is important. In delivering “Gear Change”, we have focused on where we think we can make the maximum impact. That is why we focused on setting up Active Travel England, and focused on ensuring that there are clear standards for infrastructure.

We talked earlier about what puts people off cycling, and safety. The National Travel Attitudes Study shows clearly that the biggest barrier to people cycling is the infrastructure and segregated cycle routes. That is why we have put most of our effort into that. It does not mean that integration with rail is not important, but we need to prioritise and put our effort where we are going to make the biggest difference.

Dame Bernadette Kelly: Is it worth saying something about how Active Travel England is working with local authorities to build capability? I think a lot of these issues around integration come through local authority capability, planning and capacity, to ensure that active travel is fully integrated into their local plans. That is quite an important area of work.

Danny Williams: The first thing we did when we were established was to ask local authorities to self-assess essentially their capability and ambition levels in this area. We worked with them in a collaborative way to assess that, and essentially give each of them a rating. I was recently in South Yorkshire meeting your combined authority colleagues. They did fairly well on those ratings; other places did less well. That is absolutely fine. Some places are really keen on getting this agenda going, and some places are not.

We have been focusing on spending our lives touring round the country, establishing ways in which we are going to work with each of these authorities, and trying to get those authorities that want to essentially up to speed faster than they would on their own, either by buddying them with other authorities, or providing advice and guidance.

I think you will see things like your issue with trams will start to evolve, as South Yorkshire develops its capabilities in delivering active travel. It is already good, but there are areas where we need them to work together, to focus, so that it is a robust part of their offer.

Q33 **Olivia Blake:** To follow up on the “Gear Change” actions—and this goes back to data—how are you ensuring that the journeys done by car can be replaced by active travel? Are you taking people off public transport and into active travel? If it is not an integrated system, how are you ensuring that people can make the right choice?

Danny Williams: I will come to your second question first. Firstly, let us be clear what we mean by active travel. We have our objectives. The bulk



of those objectives will be delivered by walking, not by cycling. Buses, trams and so on are awesome drivers—pardon the pun—of walking trips or walking stages. There is no point investing in a nice tram network if you cannot actually get to that tram.

We have been to see countless examples of nice, new, shiny bus or tram infrastructure, but you cannot get across the road to get to the tram or the bus, or there is a lack of pavement. I was in Bradford recently. They have a bus stop in the middle of nowhere; it is just in a field. There is a housing estate right there, but you cannot get to it, so we are looking to fund a pavement.

It is critical to think about this sort of stuff in a holistic way. We are trying very hard to collaborate with authorities in terms of public transport but also active travel, and the two go hand in hand. For example, a lot of the funding dedicated to active travel is in the CRSTS programme, which is a DfT funding programme, and that is very much about buses or public transport and active travel. About 25% of that fund is active travel-related, but it is all interlinked to buses, trams and public transport.

Jessica Matthew: It is also true that for every major funding stream, we carry out a very extensive evaluation. One of the questions we will be looking at is: where did those extra journeys on cycle or by foot come from? That will be part of the evaluation.

Danny referred earlier to the evaluation of active travel fund 2 that will be coming out later this year. When we looked at the Cycle City Ambition fund, it increased cycling by about 40%, but one of the other observations in that evaluation is that it takes time to build the infrastructure, and then it takes a bit of time before people start to use it at the full numbers they will use it at. The evaluation found that it was about three to five years.

Q34 **Chair:** We are going to move on to Bikeability in a minute but before we do, there are one or two other points to raise. Mr Williams gave the example of Amazon and what the private sector can do. I wonder whether there is more that the Government could do to encourage the private sector—particularly larger employers like Amazon—to promote active travel, make it part of their corporate responsibility and promote the virtues among their shareholders and in their annual report. Is there more we could do on that front?

Danny Williams: Yes, there is. If we go back in history to 10 or 15 years ago, 100-plus very large employers in London wrote to the Mayor to encourage him to build cycle infrastructure because their staff needed it to get to work safely. That, I understand, helped push him in that direction. What we are finding as we go and talk to authorities around the country is that there are often one or two very large employers, one of which is often NHS or a university.

Active Travel England is setting up a working arrangement with NHS England focused on helping NHS trusts to enable more of their employees to cycle or walk to work. In Sheffield, 12% of the employees at the



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children's hospital cycle to work. Big employers can make a very big difference to local areas' infrastructure.

Chair: Ms Blake may well come back on that in a minute.

Dame Bernadette Kelly: You make a very good point, Chair; I am sure there is a role for us in promoting and encouraging employers to take positive steps. I would probably hesitate a bit on turning that into a corporate reporting requirement. The bar for those sorts of requirements needs to be quite high generally, but that does not mean that there is not, as you say, a really important role for private employers and for us in encouraging them to take positive steps.

Chair: Thank you.

Q35 **Mrs Drummond:** Obviously, the cycle to work scheme is also very effective. I know that lots of people have taken that up. One of the infrastructure issues is safe bike parking, because if you are going to a train station, you want to know that your bike—particularly if it is a nice one—will be there when you come back. Are you giving grants to private companies, railway stations etc to be able to do that?

There was an article in *The Times* about someone who had a Brompton, which I also have, saying that it was not worth having because it got nicked every time. I certainly would not use mine to go to the shops, because there is no safe parking there, whereas I cycle to work and back because I know that I can leave it; I would not dream of leaving it somewhere else. That is a really crucial part of getting people out of their cars and on to bikes.

Danny Williams: There are two parts there: one is funding, and the other is planning. Can I touch on planning first, because we have not talked about planning at all? One of our functions since June this year has been to be a statutory consultee in the planning process. Planning is not an insignificant part of your question. We have responded to about 220 applications so far.

Typically, we find that in a large development—let us say a large student block or something—where a developer is putting in thousands of student bedrooms and stating to the local authority that it will see 70% of use being by active travel to and from the facility, they are then putting some sort of cycle store round the back by the bins. We are bringing together essentially existing guidance and now starting to work quite closely with developers and the Home Builders Federation to develop more and more standing advice on how to not do that, because that is a real issue.

If you have your supermarket but you cannot actually park there, that is daft. That will have a slow burn, but over time it is quite exciting. Doing it together with developers is the most exciting bit because they are actually quite keen on this. They want a standard, national set of guidance, not one for this part of the country and one for that part of the country. The more that we can accelerate that, the better and more efficient for them.



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It would be good news. Jessica, I do not know if you want to fill in on the funding piece and rail?

Jessica Matthew: We have provided grants to rail companies to provide cycle parking at stations. When a local authority bids for a cycling or walking investment, it might well choose to spend some of that on cycle parking. I am pretty sure that there are some where we have done that; I do not have the figures in front of me.

Mrs Drummond: Because in schools in particular there are lots of people cycling, but they have five bike racks, which is not enough.

Q36 **Chair:** What I am quite keen on and trying to get going in my constituency—and we have had a few questions on this already today—is synchronising different modes of transport. You would come on a train to Moreton-in-Marsh, and there would be a Boris-type bike scheme available when you got to the station so that you and your family could have a nice day out in the Cotswolds, come back to the train and go back to London. Are you encouraging more schemes like that?

Danny Williams: Most of those schemes are down to local authorities to crack on with. For example, Manchester is looking at developing and extending its cycle hire scheme. We are beginning to have conversations with them and other partners—I do not want to say who—around how we bring together some of the private sector, some other parts of Government and local authorities to make those things happen a bit faster. I am certainly having conversations with two cities and one national park on those sorts of things.

Q37 **Olivia Blake:** Moving on to Bikeability, there are some quite stark figures in paragraph 2.10 in the Report. In London, 51% rather than the assumption of 80% of children are completing basic road training before leaving primary school. It goes on to say that the funding for ramping up Bikeability seems to be in question.

Could we have more clarity on where that extra funding is at the moment following the settlement you received, given that there has been quite a reduction in the budget for active travel?

Dame Bernadette Kelly: On funding generally, I think the position is that, for over a decade, we have been increasing Bikeability funding every year, and we will be doing so again this year. We will not be increasing it by exactly the amount anticipated in the spending review in 2021 because of the challenging fiscal environment that I have already mentioned. However, we will still be seeing a further increase in Bikeability funding. We absolutely recognise this as an incredibly important part of how we promote active travel. Danny can say more about the programme itself.

Danny Williams: First, Active Travel England is not responsible for what happens in London, which is funded by the Mayor separately. The Bikeability scheme is managed, on behalf of us, by the Bikeability Trust. As you said, about 51% of year 6s go through that scheme at the



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moment, and we are working with Ministers on how we extend that. That is probably all I can say right now.

It is a super cool scheme, though. Kids who go through all levels of it are much more road aware, although it is quite scary how un-road aware kids are. Once a year 6 student has been through that scheme, they will typically be able read a junction 25% of the time and make sure they do not get hit. Before they have gone through that scheme, it is 7% of the time, which is exactly why our philosophy is around designing junctions to make them safer for road users.

Q38 Olivia Blake: I want to ask Dame Bernadette and perhaps Ms Matthew when the manifesto commitment for offering Bikeability to all children will be met.

Jessica Matthew: I think that is in live discussion, as Danny has just suggested.

Q39 Olivia Blake: Okay. I am very conscious that the way people move around cities has changed quite a lot since covid. Is there a move to ensure that Bikeability is available to adults? I know it has kind of been said in the Report, but how far along are the plans around that? It seems to me that parents would want to have the skills that their children have.

Danny Williams: It is interesting. The effectiveness of it among adults is super high. If an adult goes through a Bikeability course, they will typically continue riding, and much more safely. We are looking at ways to extend it, although some of that is also down to local authorities, as they fund and run some of that themselves.

Q40 Olivia Blake: Finally, there are quite a few sites in Sheffield where there are off-road cycle routes that people really want to get to, but a lot of people feel that cycling to them safely is impossible. Is any funding going to be available to increase leisure cycling, or will there just be a continued focus on getting people to work?

Danny Williams: Local authorities are tasked with developing local cycling and walking infrastructure plans, which are part of the local transport plan and will be increasingly part of the local transport plan. In that, they are tasked with essentially working out where to prioritise and focus their investment. It will be on a case-by-case basis, and it is up to the local authority what they want to do. So my answer is yes, if that is what they want to do in Sheffield.

Q41 Olivia Blake: Finally, DfT has not yet completed the business case for expanding Bikeability, which was planned in 2021. When would you expect to complete that business case?

Jessica Matthew: That is in live discussion right now. I think it is all part of the package of things that we are currently thinking about and will take forward.

Q42 Olivia Blake: There is no ballpark figure for when.



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Jessica Matthew: My long experience of being a civil servant has taught me that it is very unwise to predict dates, so soon.

Q43 **Olivia Blake:** Five years? Six months?

Danny Williams: It is a very live discussion. I think that is about as much as we can say.

Q44 **Chair:** Given the potential benefits of the Bikeability scheme—and you cannot just announce funding one day and put into action the next day, because you need to get people to teach it—it would be helpful if the Government could give a bit of a better steer on when it is likely to give funding for this, and also fund it over a period of time so that Mr Williams's organisation can gear up and implement it on a substantial scale.

Jessica Matthew: The money is part of Active Travel England's current budget. As Danny has explained, the scheme is administered by the Bikeability Trust. Children are being trained today on Bikeability. It is not as though it has had a hiatus. We have had half a million people—places—go through it in the last year or so, and we expect to be able to announce something more shortly.

Q45 **Chair:** There is considerable potential, as Ms Blake has already said. The basic training by the end of primary school was only just over half. This was below ATE's planning assumption of 80%, so there is a big gap still and it is a big scheme to get into action.

Dame Bernadette Kelly: The point you make is a very fair one. This is why I think my colleagues are talking about very live discussions in a meaningful way. This is an incredibly positive scheme. It is one that we are absolutely keen to support. The more we can provide clarity around funding and so forth, the better. Work is very much under way.

Chair: Thank you. Ashley Dalton is next.

Q46 **Ashley Dalton:** We are talking about Bikeability. I have to disclose I have my Bikeability level 3 and I have been involved in the delivery of several Bikeability programmes.

Forgive me if I am a little out of touch, but it was mooted a few years back that the criteria for what you needed to do in order to teach Bikeability were being changed quite significantly. There are some quite complicated arrangements for the delivery of Bikeability in local authorities. My local authority is perhaps the only one that directly employed cycle instructors. My experience was that it was not necessarily the funding that was problematic, but the hoops you had to jump through to meet the criteria to deliver it.

To what extent are you taking into account the capacity of local authorities to deliver that? As Sir Geoffrey said, you cannot just say, "Here's the money. Go out and do it." You could probably do that with my one because we had our own in-house instructors, but if you have to bring people in and set up an infrastructure to deliver it, that can take



time. How much do you think that that has impacted on the delivery of the Bikeability targets? How is that being considered as you look at the future plan?

Danny Williams: You are spot on—it is quite labyrinthine. Different local authorities have different structures according to who they are training, what age group they are training and so on. It is an area I am super-aware of. We have not had bandwidth yet to completely review it, but we will be reviewing it root and branch over the next 12 months. It needs a bit of fine tuning and needs to be made a much simpler product, particularly for the instructors.

Q47 **Sarah Olney:** The money diverted to local authorities to fund active travel was about £2.3 billion between 2016 and 2021, but the Report says you do not know a huge amount about how that has been spent and how successful that has been. I was conscious of your remarks at the beginning, Dame Bernadette, when you said it is not how much you spend but the quality of provision. Why do you know so little about how the money has been spent and what quality and value has been delivered as a result?

Dame Bernadette Kelly: The comment is possibly a little unfairly critical. I will ask Jessica to say a few words, because we genuinely do track. We do not just hand money over to local authorities and not then track the results. We can say a bit more about that. We also know that in general the BCRs of travel investment are really high relative to our many other forms of transport investment. The Report acknowledges around a £4.30 return on every £1 spent.

As I say, we do evaluation as well. I will ask Jessica to say a bit more about that. It would then be helpful to hear from Danny about the ATE's role now in working with local authorities on a case-by-case basis to raise capability and quality.

Jessica Matthew: I think of this in two ways. First, as you would expect, when we give money to a local authority through the grant mechanism, we get a monitoring return back to confirm that they did actually build or comply with the terms of the grant. That is a standard feature of the local government finance system, so we know that it got built. We are tracking that—or Active Travel England are now tracking that.

Then there is the evaluation of whether it actually worked and the purpose for which it went in. As we discussed earlier, it takes a bit of time to build some infrastructure and then it takes time for people to use it. We do that through evaluation. We usually let out to an expert company to do the evaluation for us. That takes a bit of time and I think that is partly what the Report refers to. That is why it has the word “yet” in there—because sometimes it takes a bit of time. Of course, given that active travel is so beneficial for so many different areas—health, air quality, decarbonisation and various other things—we do not always track every single benefit that we could get, because we have to focus our evaluation resources where that is going to be most effective. Then, as Bernadette has mentioned, this

has very good value for money. For infrastructure schemes, it is around four; for Bikeability, which we were just talking about, it is over eight.

- Q48 **Sarah Olney:** May I quickly ask what the average value of the grants you are giving is? The reason I ask is that I see from the Report that you are only really doing a full evaluation of anything that is over £2 million. I just wonder if that is the right level to set that, depending on the average value of the grants.

Jessica Matthew: I don't have the average figure for the grants to hand. It will vary from funding scheme to funding scheme. I am sure we can write to you. We do publish that information, so we can write to you to let you know.

- Q49 **Sarah Olney:** My point is more about if you are only doing a full evaluation on everything that is over £2 million, are you perhaps missing a great deal of evidence that you are not collecting on anything under that value?

Danny Williams: I don't think so. There are a few questions in here for me. Coming back to your first question—I will get to your final question later—one of the core purposes of Active Travel England is as an inspectorate. We now have a team of 20 professional designers whose job it is to go and physically look at schemes and see that they comply with policy and legislation. We are doing that in two ways. One is that we are helping authorities when they design schemes, right at the get-go. We have already reviewed over 1,500 plans. We have looked at them and thought, "Well, okay, if you do that, that is going to bung up all that road with motor traffic. It is not a good idea." Or, "If you do that, you have not consulted your local population and engaged with them properly. It is not going to pass." We are trying to capture schemes right at the beginning of their designs and make sure they will be successful in a broad context. That is the first piece.

Then, at the end of the design process, we look at the physical output and make sure that it complies with what we all agreed they were going to build in the first place. That check is now up and running and we have inspected at closure 38 schemes already. We are just developing the processes a little more for that because we want to do that in a collaborative way rather than a top down, gun to head kind of way. We find that it is better to work with local authorities rather than against them. That is part one.

In terms of measurement, as Jessica said, lots of great academic measurement is done on funds as a whole. For instance, I referenced earlier the Cycle City Ambition scheme, where we saw a 42% on average increase in cycling. That is slightly academic; there are people out there looking at numbers and so on. What we are now looking to do, as a team with our own analysis capability, is to work with authorities and say, "Actually, if you are going to build this thing, a condition of the funding is that you measure before and after. This is how you do it and these are the tools you might use." Again, we are trying to do that collaboratively,



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rather than saying, "This is what we insist you use." We had a session last week, for example, with all the combined authorities where we agreed a framework for how that is going to operate across the country, so that we can have consistent data. I really want to get to the point of being able to answer to Treasury, "If you give me a pound, what do you get for it?" That will take 18 months, roughly, but we are en route.

- Q50 **Chair:** I think the reason behind Miss Olney's question about this £2 million in-depth figure was that £2 million in Gloucestershire would be for a very big scheme, and if Gloucestershire had never done such a scheme before, that would merit further investigation, whereas a £2 million scheme in a big city that had done several similar schemes would probably not require so much investigation. What I was hoping to get from your answer to Miss Olney's question was that it is horses for courses. You need to investigate those schemes where your intelligence will tell you that it might not be delivering the best value for money.

Danny Williams: That is completely right; I simply did not get to that point. The whole way we have gone about thinking about how we set the organisation up is that different outputs are right for different parts of the country at different stages in their journey. We set up the capability ratings for the local authorities with that very much in mind. There is no point in us coming in heavy on an authority that is not yet further up the ladder.

- Q51 **Chair:** I wasn't implying that you came in heavy. It is just that, to take my example, somewhere like Gloucestershire, which probably had not done such a scheme before, would probably need more investigation and evaluation than some big inner city.

Dame Bernadette Kelly: Absolutely, and that is, I think, what you have been doing. Having done the capability assessment, you have been providing active support to those authorities that are lower rated, because clearly they have not reached a level of maturity to do this sort of investment well. That is also why the early investments on active travel have gone to those authorities that have higher capability, but, as Danny says, this is exactly the journey the organisation is on.

Danny Williams: We deliberately skewed our resource funding—our revenue funding—to authorities that were lower capability in order to enable them to recruit more people to start to work on that sort of thing.

- Q52 **Chair:** Yes. We will come to a question on revenue in a minute.

Dame Bernadette, the Report seems to indicate that, as a Department, you do not always know whether the schemes have been done and whether they are effective. In paragraph 3.4, it says: "DfT expected local authorities that received its dedicated funding to complete periodic returns describing progress made with implementation of the active travel schemes and the outputs achieved." That is perfectly fair enough, but the NAO found that "while around nine in 10 local authorities had provided returns, they were often incomplete." Do you send returns back when they are not complete?



Jessica Matthew: We chase them up, yes.

Chair: You do. Thank you very much.

Q53 **Sarah Olney:** Dame Bernadette, a lot of money was spent quite quickly at the outset of the pandemic and the lockdown, obviously seizing an opportunity to encourage more active travel while people were at home and not using their cars. What did you learn from the way that was approached?

Dame Bernadette Kelly: As you say, a conscious decision was taken to accelerate funding for active travel schemes during that period when, with positive intent, we wanted to capitalise on what we knew was a moment when people might be changing their behaviours, and we wanted to support and encourage active travel participation. Clearly, some of those schemes proved to be controversial and very challenging. As the Report highlights, a conscious decision was taken at the time to roll schemes out very fast and to give a premium to those things that could be done most quickly.

The very obvious learning point from this is that there is a trade-off to be struck between doing things fast and doing things in a way that really engages local communities in the design and implementation of active travel schemes. On reflection, some of those were rolled out too fast and, we now know, with too little engagement, and they were not successful as a result. Where that has been true, those schemes have been withdrawn. Actually, the majority of schemes have endured and been effective, but we know that that was not universally true. The really big learning point is that in order for these things to succeed you absolutely need to do that broader community engagement and really think about the impacts of schemes.

Q54 **Sarah Olney:** Drawing on that answer about public engagement, is that the full explanation for why the increase in cycling during the pandemic has been difficult to sustain now that we are all back at work?

Dame Bernadette Kelly: I might ask Jessica to say a bit more. We probably do know some of those answers, although I suspect some of them are intuitive as much as analytical. Jessica, why don't you take that?

Jessica Matthew: What we saw during the pandemic was a big increase in leisure cycling. I don't think that is that surprising; people were being advised not to do many of the other leisure activities that they normally partake in, or it was not possible to do them at the time, so they resorted to cycling. That is also why we were very keen to introduce these schemes—because we could see that there was a big increase in cycling numbers, and we wanted to make sure that people could do that safely. Clearly, when things reopened, people had more options for things that they could do. We are also still seeing a fall right across the transport system; people are still taking fewer trips than they were before the pandemic.



Danny Williams: I slightly dispute that it has fallen back. It has certainly fallen back in that the rate of growth has declined, but we are finding in those areas where investment has been consistent that that is not the case. In Manchester, cycling volumes are up 19% on 2019, and that is very recent data—a couple of months ago. In London, it is, I think, 18%. In Leicester, the numbers are up as well. In those areas where infrastructure has gone in the ground and people can use it, it keeps ticking up.

Sarah Olney: Interesting. Thank you.

Q55 **Ashley Dalton:** I just want to nip back to the issue of evaluation and measuring. We have already talked a lot about the variety of impacts that active travel has. Given the fact that we spent billions of pounds on active travel, why have we not been tracking those cross-Government benefits? As I said earlier, I have filled in many DfT returns for active travel programmes, and in my experience they were at best quite sparse. They measured a very limited amount of things. From my experience, we were measuring all sorts of stuff that we were not required to report to DfT, but we measured it because we thought it was important. Why have we not grasped that yet? Why are we not measuring things that are cross-departmental, such as not just health benefits but the impact on community cohesion, social inclusion and so on?

Dame Bernadette Kelly: I can tell that Danny is dying to come in, so I will very quickly hand over to him. I think your basic point—that we probably underestimate the benefits of active travel—is a very fair one. In preparing for this, I investigated a bit more what we count in our appraisal systems, evaluations and BCRs, and I was quite surprised that we look at impacts on heart attacks, and one or two other things, but it seemed to me that we were actually measuring quite a limited number of benefits in a quantitative sense. I am sure about what you say: logically and intuitively, we know that the benefits go beyond that. Danny, can you talk about how we are going to approach this in future?

Danny Williams: My really broad answer, which I hope does not come across as flippant, is that this country has not dealt with this stuff seriously since about 1930. It just hasn't. What my team and I have been finding is exactly what you have just described: there are inconsistent pots of data all around the place. To ease the burden on local authorities, we are trying to establish a common framework for assessing it, because the number of surveys that get sent to local authorities is ridiculous, especially when we could do a lot of the data automatically.

We are working with colleagues across Government, for example in Health in particular—one of our advisers, Chris Whitty, is super helpful at accelerating all of that—on what metrics we can pick up or should be using. There is a lot of work going on at the moment, and we are trying to do that collaboratively with LAs.

At the moment, that is confined to the combined authorities, but I know that Essex is up there. I was in Essex a couple of months ago; I spent the



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day with colleagues there. Next, we will be moving to those authorities—those on the next level down—that want to get on this programme. Not all authorities do, actually, but for those that do, we want to agree a framework for doing that.

- Q56 **Ashley Dalton:** That's great. Is there any plan to build a requirement for a certain level of evaluation into the bids that people make for funding? It is not unheard of that the local authority gets the money, eight months later somebody from DfT sends you a form to fill in, and you then find out what you were supposed to have been measuring and you haven't done that yet. What are we doing to improve the understanding of what local authorities need to do and to give that information in a timely manner?

Danny Williams: The short answer is that, yes, we are looking at standardising an approach to evaluation. I think I referred earlier to before and after data, and doing that in a common way. What I need to do with colleagues in DfT is ensure that that is consistent across funding streams, regardless of the fund. The piece of work that is yet to be done is establishing those frameworks internally.

Jessica Matthew: You are right that it is a standard feature of a grant letter that the local authority will need to help us out with monitoring and evaluation—and thank you for doing all those returns.

- Q57 **Ashley Dalton:** You are welcome. Finally, when are we looking at getting that plan in place? Why has it taken setting up the new body to get there? What benefit has there been from doing that?

Dame Bernadette Kelly: I will go first, but Danny can speak to the ATE's plans for getting there. I am pleased that the NAO Report noted that this is a significant change, that Active Travel England can now be a catalyst. Just on basic capacity terms, we have now got, through ATE, five times the people capacity that we had before we set it up. Those are people with very particular skills, as well. There is an opportunity to achieve a real change in progress now. Danny is leading the plan.

Danny Williams: Across the dedicated active travel fund, there are 816 schemes. All of those are now on a central dataset. That might sound really small, but you could not say concisely that that was specifically that thing from there to there.

We will have all CRSTS and LUF funding and all other DfT-related schemes on that same system by the end of the year. Next year, we will launch a national infrastructure database, which will be designed collaboratively with local authorities. That will enable us for the first time to see what assets we have actually got. Then we will put on top of that what the outcomes are of that investment.

Believe it or not, it is really hard at the moment to go, "Is there a cycle track?" In Germany, 41% of main roads have a cycle track next to them. That is standard, and is why Germans use bikes for 11% of their trips. You cannot find that dataset in the UK. There is no consistent way of measuring it. I suspect, by the way, that the number is 1% or 2%, but we



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need to be able to answer that question. If you say, “Why is no one cycling?” you could say, “Because there is no infrastructure.” But I cannot say that in a systemic way at the moment.

Ashley Dalton: Thank you.

- Q58 **Chair:** Thank you, Ashley. I guess that some of this digitalisation comes from your previous experience working at GlobalData. This may be a question for you or for Ms Matthew or Dame Bernadette. Given the billions of pounds spent on active travel, why have you not tracked cross-Government benefits delivered with this spend? I know that is a difficult thing to do, but there are health benefits, DCMS benefits and DEFRA benefits. Perhaps that is question for you, Dame Bernadette. What more can you do to demonstrate to the whole of Government that this programme is important and gives the Government as a whole considerable benefits?

Dame Bernadette Kelly: I think you are correct, in that what we tend to do is that the totality of funding for active travel comes from a wide variety of sources. We will evaluate and monitor those various funding streams in different ways, according to how things have been set up—levelling-up fund or CRSTS and so on. It is not a single consistent pattern.

One thing that Active Travel England can help us with is to reach out to and generate stronger partnerships with other parts of Government, which clearly have a major interest in the benefits of active travel. Health is the most obvious one. I know that Danny has met the Secretary of State for Health and regularly meets Chris Whitty, because health is the No. 1 area in which active travel can support wider Government objectives.

Chris Boardman is the chair of Active Travel England and is also chair of Sport England, so he can help make some of those connections, as well. That is absolutely something that we are encouraging Active Travel England to help us to do. Coming back to this point about what we measure and what we assess in active travel, it does underestimate the wider benefits. I think we need to acknowledge that and try to build those partnerships in a collaborative way.

- Q59 **Chair:** That was a really great reply, but what are you actually doing about it?

Dame Bernadette Kelly: Over to you—I will ask Active Travel England to answer that.

Danny Williams: Essentially, we are cracking on. That aligns with the answer that I gave earlier. It sounds really boring, but we have to build the central frameworks, which is what we are doing at the moment. When is a cycle lane a cycle lane? It is about that sort of question. We are building that, and then everything else flows quite quickly. There is tons of data sitting in Southend, Essex and Liverpool, mouldering away in cupboards. We want to pull that into a consistent way of talking about it, and I think we will have that next year.



Dame Bernadette Kelly: The other broader answer I would give—to try again—is that that is a good challenge on lots of Government activity. We experience that all the time on transport. We can look at it from a departmental and a Government perspective—we can look at our funding streams and programmes—but where this all comes together, and where the benefits really catalyse, is in places. It is through the impact of these investments on local communities and cities. The partnership with local authorities is critical because that is where you make the connections with the wider social and economic factors.

Danny Williams: The main tool that we use to assess the value for money of investment in active travel is called AMAT. It is a bit geeky. Dame Bernadette said that it looks at health outcomes, but it looks at only two health outcomes really: heart attacks and absenteeism. It doesn't look a whole host of things at all well. Manchester has a tool that does that considerably better than our tools. It is about creating a process whereby we take the best out of what Manchester, Liverpool and Essex are doing, and fuse that with what the DfT is doing. That is under way right now.

Q60 **Chair:** I think we are still not quite getting there. Let's try again. Let's use a specific issue and see where we get to. Obesity is one of our greatest health problems. What can you do with this programme to track, with the Department of Health and Social Care, the benefits of social prescribing and the benefits to obesity so that you can demonstrate to the Department how important this programme is to them?

Danny Williams: We are talking with them at the moment about exactly how that is going to operate. There is an academic study set up already around the social prescribing thing, and the first iteration of that will be out in the next two to three months. That aside, we are looking at agreeing with the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities how we will measure those outcomes. It makes sense for them to take a lead with us on that, because we are not public health experts; they are. If we can come back to you on that more formally, that would be good.

Chair: That is very helpful.

Q61 **Mr Djanogly:** I want to come back to the consistency and co-ordination of schemes through ATE. We discussed the positive aspects, but what do you do to address the poor-quality schemes that are currently in place?

Danny Williams: We are setting up a programme of inspections at the moment, and that will initially look at all directly funded schemes—active travel that is funded through dedicated investment. The end product of that inspection is an inspection report. To put it bluntly, a highways authority does not want an inspection report that registers critical safety issues. That is our strongest tool to bring to bear. We have very clear guidance around what we regard as critical safety issues—there are 15 of them. If an authority fails on those, and then subsequently fails to do anything about that, that is a mark of non-compliance. That flows through into our ratings. I mentioned earlier that we rate the authorities. Increasingly, those ratings will be used to influence funding. We already



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use the ratings to influence dedicated funding, and we are looking to establish ways to ensure that flows through wider programmes. It should become quite a smooth process.

Q62 **Mr Djanogly:** Are these published as league tables, in effect?

Danny Williams: We will publish an inspection report next year.

Q63 **Mr Djanogly:** So people will be able to make comparisons?

Danny Williams: We will update the ratings early next year, and we will also publish an inspection report.

Q64 **Mr Djanogly:** Okay. The other thing is the compatibility of schemes with the places that do not have the schemes. I will give you an example, and I am afraid I am coming back to e-scooters.

The city of Cambridge has an e-scooter pilot scheme. I have not seen statistics for it, but from what I hear locally it is very popular. Visitors come into Cambridge and use an e-scooter to go around the city, and people who live on the outskirts will use them to go in and out—I am thinking of the Huntingdon Road, which goes from the centre of the city to the outskirts, a spoke road. The scheme seems to be popular.

If you continue down that road for about 15 miles, you get to Huntingdon, my constituency, which has no pilot scheme. Huge numbers of illegal scooters are now used in my constituency. They are rarely stopped by the police, but they are often dangerous to drivers and they go on the pavements. There is no provision for them, because there is no scheme, and when people are stopped, they say, "Ah, we thought it was legal", because they refer to what is going on in Cambridge down the road. My question is: do we need some more joined-up thinking on how those schemes fit together?

Jessica Matthew: I think we discussed earlier that having a more comprehensive legislative regime for e-scooters and micro-mobility would be desirable, and we will do that when legislative time allows.

Dame Bernadette Kelly: My understanding—I suspect Danny knows more than I do—is that where the trials are in place, as they are authorised trials, there should be provision for people to use e-scooters. I think there is geofencing, which should mean that those scooters cannot be taken out of the trial areas. What you are describing is people—I suspect knowingly, oftentimes—riding their e-scooters illegally on pavements.

Mr Djanogly: Yes.

Dame Bernadette Kelly: That is really an enforcement issue, rather than—

Q65 **Mr Djanogly:** On pavements, on the streets, everywhere. I think e-scooters are only allowed to be used on private property, unless there is a pilot or a scheme, so people are using them illegally in very large



numbers and very dangerously.

Dame Bernadette Kelly: And that is an enforcement issue. Local authorities and the police authorities are responsible for ensuring that, where people are acting illegally, that is addressed.

Q66 **Mr Djanogly:** It is of course an enforcement issue, but the fact is that people are using these things. In some parts of the country, you can use them legally, but in others not, so it comes into your remit as well.

Dame Bernadette Kelly: It does. When the trials are complete, we will need to do some assessment of what that means and of how those trials went. The intention, obviously, is to find a way of enabling those sorts of schemes—e-rental schemes—to be rolled out more widely and safely.

Q67 **Mr Djanogly:** Is there timing on that?

Dame Bernadette Kelly: The scheme ends, I think, at the end of May 2024. I cannot give you a timeframe for exactly when decisions will be taken on subsequent roll-out. As Jessica mentioned and I did earlier, there is also a broader intention, when parliamentary time allows, to provide a more comprehensive legal framework. But that is subject to parliamentary time—

Q68 **Mr Djanogly:** I just say this because I am very much playing down the increased anger that I am getting from constituents, particularly the older ones, who are scared by these e-scooters. I am not necessarily against e-scooters; it is just how they are managed. We have to think about how to deal with them.

Dame Bernadette Kelly: I agree. This is people using them—it sounds as if that is almost exclusively people using them illegally. With the challenge of illegal activity, the police have responsibility to enforce action.

Q69 **Chair:** May I take you all to figure 8? I do not know whether you have had a chance to see the evidence of the Walking and Cycling Alliance, but it makes the point very strongly that the reduction in funding will mean that the various CWIS targets will not be met. The alliance says that, given the provisions of the 2015 Act, if a target is set, the funding should be set to enable that target to be met. How would you react to that?

Dame Bernadette Kelly: I think it does come back to an acknowledgment that at the time we set the targets in Figure 7, they were set at an incredibly stretching level. There is of course logic in Government always setting targets exactly aligned to the funding level provided, but there is also an argument for setting more stretching targets, which will encourage more innovative ways of making progress against them. Also, it is a reality—I keep coming back to this, in this hearing and others—that a lot of decisions taken over the past few years around funding have not always been easy decisions in the context of the wider environment we are operating in.

Jessica Matthew: And I think it would be fair to say that when, under the Infrastructure Act, we set out the cycling and walking investment strategy,



it's a forecast. We are forecasting what expenditure we might have, because some of the funding that we count under that is distributed by competition and until we have had the competition, we know what people have bid for and we have awarded the grants, we don't quite know what it will be. So it was a forecast. In cycling and walking investment strategy 1, the original forecast was one point something billion pounds, but by the time we had completed it and were out of that period, as this Report shows, it was over £3 billion. So the forecast can vary quite a lot in the course of the period.

Danny Williams: Just to give a flavour of that, we were three times oversubscribed for active travel fund 4, which is a dedicated fund. If you look at the CRSTS funding, I think 25% of that fund, which is quite large—I can't remember the total number—is local authorities proactively pulling and saying they want to invest in active travel. And what we are seeing is certain parts of the country saying they want more funding for this, so I would expect that number to increase over time. It's not a fixed number.

Q70 **Chair:** Going back to Mr Djanogly's question on rating of local authorities, I want particularly to cite paragraph 3.16 on page 37 of the Report. It says that your organisation "is using this rating system to guide its allocation of dedicated DfT funding to local authorities. Higher-rated authorities are eligible to access more funding. In 2022-23, local authorities assessed to be 'level 3' received, on average, £10.05 per head in dedicated...funding compared with £3.34"—a considerable reduction—"in 'level 1' local authorities." Isn't that continuing to reward those local authorities that are doing well and penalising probably the rural authorities, which I am coming on to in a minute, for not doing enough?

Danny Williams: On the rural question, just over half of the last dedicated fund that we granted went to rural areas, so I don't think that is true. In terms of the penalisation question, I don't think it does do that. What we established was, essentially, a set of 13 types of intervention that might be funded. It might be, for example, dropped kerbs so that disabled users can cross the road more easily, or zebra crossings. For an authority that has no cycling and walking staff, it would be inappropriate, I think, to spend public money on funding, for example, nice new cycle highways or superhighways if they don't have the capability to really deliver that or if they don't have the local leadership behind that, because that will come with all sorts of local engagement issues. So we worked to try to find products that would fit the capability level and also the leadership level locally. Our goal is very much to try to help all those authorities that want to step up a level, to do so.

For example, Worcestershire, who were rated level 0, received no capital funding from us. However, they did receive quite a considerable amount of revenue funding, and the revenue funding was designed to help them to recruit staff into this area, but also it was to give us a framework to work collaboratively with them. I personally spent half a day with a large number of their teams. Our officers are in there all the time, working with them on a plan to get them to level 1, so that they can access more funding the second time round. But that is conditional, really, on their



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capability developing. So it is a bit of a stick, but we are trying also to come in with the carrot and help them to develop.

- Q71 **Chair:** That is exactly what I was coming to next. There is a perception out there that there is a multiplicity of capital schemes—which I will be coming on to in a minute—but not enough revenue funding to at least give a part-time officer funding to be able to work up some of these schemes, particularly in smaller local authorities.

Danny Williams: We tried very hard in our last round of funding to ensure that revenue funding was distributed in a way that was, I think, disproportionately towards those that had less capability but also had ambition.

- Q72 **Chair:** Okay. You give the example of Worcestershire; has it worked? Have they been able to—

Danny Williams: I cannot comment on whether they will or won't, but they are doing a good job so we will rerate them in time for the next funding round.

- Q73 **Chair:** Fine. Fair enough. Can I take both of you—or all three of you—to figure 12 on page 41? That tells us all about the multiplicity of schemes to do with this whole subject, often with very short deadlines for submissions and even shorter deadlines for implementation. That does not seem very conducive to producing well-thought-out schemes, or to encouraging local authorities to actually bid for these schemes because a lot of officer time is involved, which is often wasted when they don't get a scheme. Would it not be better to have fewer funding streams and give authorities more time to bid and then proper time to implement them?

Dame Bernadette Kelly: I will take the general point first. It is true that, if you look at the funding that we look at in the context of the cycling and walking investment strategy, there are a number of different funding streams. Some of those are formula allocations, such as through the integrated transport block. Some are dedicated cycling funds for which local authorities bid, such as the ATF. Then there are things such as city region sustainable transport settlements, which MCAs—mayoral combined authorities—determine. Then there are funds such as the levelling-up fund, which are not active travel—or indeed transport—specific, but where local authorities have chosen, quite often, to bid for schemes that support active travel.

Clearly, there is a general point here, and we discuss it often with local authorities, which is whether the multiplicity of different—almost competitive—funding schemes is a drain on capacity. I think that that general point is one that I personally would recognise, having worked in not only transport but local—

- Q74 **Chair:** May I just stop you, Dame Bernadette? It is not only the number of funds but that they are often announced at very short notice, with very short deadlines to actually bid for them.



Dame Bernadette Kelly: There are a number of things. First, there is the general critique, which is, "Are there too many funding streams? Can we reduce the burden on local authorities by having fewer and more coherent funding schemes?" That is a fair question, and I think it is one that we need to continue to reflect on. That is not just a transport issue; it is a broader issue about local funding. On the timings, perhaps, Danny, you might like to say a bit in relation to the active travel funding and how the timing has worked there, just as an example? Again, very often, there is a tension between wanting to crack on and get funding out to local authorities so they can start implementing their schemes and allowing them enough time to prepare for those.

Danny Williams: Your broad point, though, is, "Can we give authorities a more consistent way of dealing with this?" You find that when an authority has consistent funding, however it pulls that together, you see quite strong increases in people walking and cycling. You can typically see cycling almost doubling over three to five years, for example. The way authorities have to work at the moment is that they have to cobble together those funds, to be honest. Some authorities are great at doing that—Leicester is brilliant at doing that—but other authorities are quite poor at doing it. However, where they are good at saying, "This is where we want to go," and bidding, it works. I would like it to be a bit different.

Q75 **Chair:** But Mr Williams, I appreciate, of course, that you are coming before us to give us a gloss and the good news, but, actually, I have a suspicion about what is going on out there. I come back to my previous point, particularly if we look at figure 11, with the map of England and how those authorities are rated; 44 are rated at levels 0 or 1, and only 35 are rated at levels 2, 3 or 4. It seems that what is going on out there is that the good are getting better, but the worst are not being helped. I just wonder, really, whether your organisation could do more to level up—to use the in-vogue phrase if you like—those that are not actually doing very much.

Danny Williams: First, that is absolutely what we are about, and so we have undertaken 150 design surgeries with local authorities. We are focusing them, mainly, on those authorities that are slightly lower down on the capability ratings.

I would also add that we published those ratings in September, but we have only really got up to speed with our capacity and staffing since about March. What is happening is that we are out there talking to authorities all the time. We have been engaging both with officers and members, because it is an education for both parties. We have a full programme of getting out there and hitting the ground running with those authorities that want to.

Q76 **Chair:** Coming on to your own organisation, we were delighted that the Department set you up. You have a budget of about £6.5 million, which funds about 18 full-time staff. Presumably that is mainly spent on evaluation.



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Danny Williams: No, we have a budget of about £10 million, actually. For staff it would be about £8 million, but this year it will be slightly less, at about £7 million. There is then an evaluation. We are handing over legacy schemes to the DfT, and we will be taking on evaluation for new schemes. That is about just over £1 million. The rest is internal recharges.

Dame Bernadette Kelly: I think I heard the Chair quote a figure of 18 members of staff. That is for the evaluation; that is not the total staffing. The total staffing complement is expected to be 98, so substantially more than 18. Active Travel England and Danny are well on the way to fully staffing the organisation.

Danny Williams: It is 18 in the analysis and evaluation team—or it will be soon—but the total organisation is 78 people at the moment. It will be 88 people by the end of next month and just hovering over 90 by mid-September.

Q77 **Chair:** We are going to have to make this very brief because we have got to finish in five minutes. You have very recently been given statutory consultee status. At the moment you are only looking at those applications that are over 150 houses. One piece of evidence says that to do the job properly you will need at least 30-odd staff. You have only 18 staff to do it. How is that going to work?

Danny Williams: We have 21. It is interesting; we are expecting to see 3,100 applications a year, roughly. That is about 60% of new housing being built in the country. We compare ourselves with other agencies in a similar position. The Coal Board has 4,900 applications that it gets through a year, I think, with nine people. We have 21. We have agreed a one-year review period with DLUHC. So far, we have reviewed 220 applications, and 100% of those have been on time. It is very much a review period though, so we will see how it goes. There is a lot of appetite from local authorities for us to look lower down, so not just at 150 units. I think 94% of them said that they would like us to look at 50 units plus, when we surveyed about 400 planning officers. It is very much a programme of works, and we are constantly reviewing it.

Q78 **Chair:** I must keep you fairly brief. You mentioned the figures about cycling along roads in Germany. What are you doing to ensure that all new road schemes in this country at least have an active travel component considered?

Danny Williams: We are working with colleagues at the DfT on the major roads network. We have already worked together with them on 16 schemes. On the strategic road network with National Highways, we are hoping to agree a MOU and a joint approach. That will be particularly to address severance, which is where a new road is built and people in one village can no longer get to another village because the road is in the way.

Q79 **Chair:** Finally, going back to that complicated table—figure 12 on page 41—in my area there is a two-tier authority. With planning, you are looking at the applications for over 150 houses in the district authority, yet transport is covered by the county council. How do you manage that



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and how do you weld those two together?

Danny Williams: We have to work collaboratively with both parties. We try to ensure that there are no surprises for either party.

Chair: I am sorry that we have to wind up quite early. We are on the last full day of term. I thank you all very much for giving evidence. We think this is a splendid scheme. We think it could work even better, and we look forward to hearing even better news when you next come before us. Thank you.