



House of Commons  
Committee of Public Accounts

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# Active travel in England

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## Seventy-Fifth Report of Session 2022–23

*Report, together with formal minutes relating  
to the report*

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# Contents

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<b>Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Conclusions and recommendations</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1 Progress with increasing rates of active travel in England</b>	<b>9</b>
The establishment of Active Travel England	9
Progress against active travel objectives	10
Evaluating the impact of spend on active travel infrastructure	12
Perceptions of safety and encouraging participation	13
<b>2 Working with others</b>	<b>15</b>
Joining up active travel with other modes of transport	15
Funding uncertainty	16
The Bikeability Programme	17
<b>Formal minutes</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Witnesses</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Published written evidence</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament</b>	<b>22</b>



## Summary

Walking and cycling as ways of making every day journeys can have a wide range of benefits for health and the environment, but despite this being an area of long-standing focus for government, it has taken the set-up of a new body to start making a real difference to how it approaches active travel. The Department for Transport (DfT, 'The Department') has made little progress against its objectives to increase active travel and it is not on track to meet its 2025 targets. There has been no sustained increase in either walking or cycling since DfT set its objectives in 2017. The establishment of Active Travel England by the DfT in 2022 was a positive development and it has made good early progress. It is important that this momentum is maintained and that adequate funding and support is provided to the new organisation.

Despite spending over £2.3 billion on active travel infrastructure between 2016 and 2021, DfT knows far too little about what this spending has achieved. To properly protect taxpayers' money, and make sure future spending decisions are fully informed, DfT needs to do much more work to improve the evaluation of active travel schemes and how the delivery of cross-government benefits from active travel, including health benefits, are identified, tracked and communicated. Public concerns around safety remain a barrier to more people taking up active travel. To address this, changes made to improve the physical safety of active travel, such as revisions to the Highway Code, need to be communicated effectively. The Bikeability programme is an important part of increasing active travel, but greater support is needed from DfT so that more people can receive training and have the confidence to cycle safely.

We look to DfT to play a much more active role in building support for active travel and promoting its benefits. More needs to be done to join up active travel with other forms of public transport, so that it is easier for people to walk or cycle as part of longer journeys which include trains or buses. We welcome Active Travel England's commitment to work with local authorities to build their capability to ensure that active travel is fully integrated into their local plans. However, as we have repeatedly found in our examination of local government financial sustainability, local authorities need a more coherent and stable system of funding to enable them to take long-term spending decisions and be able to plan and undertake this work effectively.

## Introduction

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Active travel describes everyday ‘journeys for a purpose’ made by walking, wheeling<sup>1</sup>, or cycling. In 2021, an average of 235 walking trips and 15 cycling trips were taken by each person. Active travel is a low-carbon way to get around and offers many benefits compared with other forms of transport. Government believes that active travel can support its wider strategic priorities to increase physical activity, tackle obesity, improve air quality, level up, and achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050. Government expects to spend around £6.6 billion on active travel between 2016 and 2025. It spent £3.3 billion between 2016 and 2021, of which it spent approximately £2.3 billion on infrastructure and £1 billion on other activities such as behaviour change initiatives.

The Department for Transport (DfT) is responsible for active travel policy in England. DfT sets objectives for active travel and the available funding in investment strategies. The first strategy was published in 2017 and the second in 2022. A third is planned from 2025. DfT’s four objectives for active travel are to: increase the percentage of short journeys in towns and cities that are walked or cycled; increase people’s annual walking activity; double rates of cycling; and increase the percentage of children aged 5 to 10 who usually walk to school. Most active travel schemes are delivered by local government. Active travel schemes can range from creating new infrastructure, such as separate cycle lanes on roads or amending existing road space to create pedestrian zones outside schools, as well as activities such as providing training in cycle safety.

In 2020, DfT published *Gear Change: A bold vision for cycling and walking*. This set out government’s ambition to transform the role active travel can play in the transport system. In this, DfT announced its intention to establish Active Travel England (ATE) to improve the approach to investment in active travel infrastructure and deliver better outcomes. ATE was established in August 2022 and became fully operational in August 2023. Its operational budget for 2023–24 is around £7.5 million, increasing to around £9 million in the following year.

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1 Wheeling is an equivalent alternative to walking – for example, using wheelchairs, mobility scooters, prams or pushchairs.

## Conclusions and recommendations

1. **Active Travel England has made good early progress but it is still early days for the new organisation.** DfT set-up Active Travel England (ATE) in August 2022 to deliver its walking and cycling strategy and to address long-standing issues such as the need to improving the quality of active travel infrastructure and local authorities' capability to deliver. The establishment of ATE is a positive development and it has already made good progress. For example, the proportion of cycle scheme designs submitted by local authorities that comply with national guidance has increased by 14 percentage points due to improvements in training sessions and design surgeries held between ATE and local authorities, and ATE beginning to review planning applications in June 2023 when its new role as a statutory consultee in the planning process came into effect. But it has taken the establishment of a new body to begin to make a difference on active travel. Despite fiscal pressures across government, it is important that positive momentum is maintained and ATE is adequately funded and supported.

**Recommendation 1: DfT should review what ATE has achieved in its first 12 months in operation and whether it has adequate funding and support to deliver its active travel objectives and maintain momentum as it continues to develop. This should include reviewing the available capacity within its different functions and if this is sufficient for it to have impact.**

2. **DfT is not on track to meet its objectives to increases rates of active travel by 2025.** DfT told us that its targets to increase active travel were deliberately ambitious. They include objectives to double rates of cycling and to increase the proportion of children walking to school by 6 percentage points. But progress has been disappointingly slow. There has been no sustained increase in cycling rates and, in some cases, for example the proportion of children walking to school, levels of activity are lower now than when the targets were set. The existing national measures that DfT uses to track progress on cycling rates are too high level to capture the impact of local investment accurately. Although DfT suggested that funding has not been a key issue in the failure to achieve its targets, we are not convinced that progress against DfT's active travel objectives will be unaffected by the decisions made by the department to reduce funding. DfT states that it can no longer promise to deliver all 33 actions in Gear Change due to funding constraints and the shifting priorities of Ministers, but that it would focus on the activities could have the greatest impact on increasing active travel.

**Recommendation 2: DfT should include in its Treasury Minute response:**

- *its review of its objectives for active travel in England, setting out what it expects to achieve with the funding now available for active travel to 2025;*
  - *how it plans to improve the monitoring of progress against its objectives. This should include better measures that can track progress on cycling rates where there has been local investment.*
3. **DfT has not done enough to understand the impact and benefits of the £2.3 billion of taxpayers' money it has spent on active travel.** DfT spent £2.3 billion

funding active travel infrastructure between 2016 and 2021, but it knows too little about the quality of the infrastructure that has been built. Local authorities are only required to monitor or evaluate schemes that cost more than £2 million. Yet the average grant per project in the most recent tranches of the Active Travel Fund was £750,000. This has resulted in DfT having an incomplete understanding of active travel infrastructure, as the majority of schemes have cost much less than the amount required to be monitored or evaluated. DfT's approach to measuring the wider impacts of active travel investment is also underdeveloped. We welcome ATE's commitment to investing in evaluation and to support local authorities to collect robust and consistent data without making it over-burdensome. ATE is exploring new methods for data collection and has a dedicated data analysis team to bring together local data.

**Recommendation 3: DfT should, by December 2023, update the Committee on progress with:**

- a) *its plans to evaluate active travel interventions and how it intends to use findings from its evaluation activities to inform its ongoing and future active travel activity and investment decisions;*
  - b) *how it intends to comprehensively identify and measure the benefits of active travel across all government policy areas; and*
  - c) *how ATE will improve the collection and standardisation of data from active travel schemes.*
4. **DfT's communications to the public have not been enough to help tackle perceptions that active travel is unsafe or to encourage more people to take part.** People's perception of the safety of active travel is as important as actual physical safety. There is significant public concern around safety and this remains a substantial barrier to getting more people cycling and walking. We are not convinced that DfT's messaging around the positive changes that have been made to improve safety, such as revisions to the Highway Code, or the benefits of active travel have been communicated effectively to the general public. There are also concerns about the impact on safety of new forms of travel such as e-scooters. DfT accepts that there is a need for greater clarity around the role of e-scooters, including a better legal framework. With the proliferation of e-scooters being used for both leisure and commuting, in and beyond the 23 current trials of rental schemes, there is a pressing need for better advice and guidance from DfT for the public and stakeholders.

**Recommendation 4: DfT should, by December 2023, set out to the Committee how it will lead a proactive and coordinated approach with other stakeholders to: better promote the benefits of active travel; identify and address safety concerns; and encourage more people to participate in active travel.**

5. **DfT has not ensured that active travel schemes are sufficiently joined-up with wider transport infrastructure, for example enabling people to safely walk to bus stops or take their bike on the bus or train.** DfT recognises the importance of integrating active travel with other forms of transport but has not yet taken the steps needed to create a joined-up transport network. We are concerned that a lack of available or secure bike parking, or safe paths, may discourage people from



cycling or walking part of a journey. DfT claims that it has prioritised building cycle lanes and infrastructure that segregated cyclists from other road traffic instead of integrating active travel with other transport modes, for example enabling bikes to be taken on buses or trains. ATE expects the bulk of progress in achieving DfT's active travel objectives to be delivered by increased walking, particularly people walking part of their journey before taking another form of transport. Buses and trams increase the number of walking trips taken because people often walk the first part of their journey to reach a bus or tram stop. Investment in public transport—such as buses, trams and trains—must go hand-in-hand with investment in active travel to allow people to access them and encourage people to walk to stations and bus or tram stops. ATE is working with local authorities to build their planning capability to ensure that active travel is fully integrated into their local plans. It is essential for DfT to ensure that wider transport schemes properly integrate active travel into the public transport network.

**Recommendation 5a: DfT and Active Travel England should, by April 2024, develop a clear and consistent approach for ensuring greater integration of active travel infrastructure with the public transport network.**

***b) In its Treasury Minute response, DfT should set out how, and by when, it will increase the number of public transport stops that can be safely accessed by foot, in both urban and rural areas.***

6. **Local authorities are being held back from delivering successful active travel interventions by the considerable uncertainty in the funding available for schemes.** Since 2016, funding for active travel has been provided to local authorities through more than 36 active travel related funding streams. Local authorities must apply to multiple funding streams separately and each will have different bid requirements and timetables, often with very short deadlines for submissions and even shorter deadlines for delivering a scheme once funding is provided. Funding is often available in the short-term or provided annually, rather than through multi-year settlements and this instability is not conducive to delivering large or innovative schemes that would have a significant impact on active travel rates. Authorities that either lack the resource or experience to construct bids are placed at a disadvantage and the burden of applying for multiple fundings streams or at short notice can be exacerbated for smaller authorities. DfT recognises the need for fewer, more coherent funding schemes.

**Recommendation 6: DfT, working with other departments including HM Treasury, should set out in the next six months how and when local authorities will be provided with greater certainty about the funding available for active travel to enable them to invest in and deliver long-term, ambitious active travel interventions. This work should include an examination of whether the number of grant schemes available for active travel can be reduced or simplified.**

7. **DfT has not set out how it plans to expand its Bikeability programme and increase the rate of children and adults receiving cycle safety training.** Bikeability is an important part of how DfT promotes active travel to children and adults and ensures people have the confidence to cycle safely. DfT plans to continue to fund the programme, but it has not yet agreed a business case for the programme. The

amount of funding that will be provided in 2023–24 is still uncertain, but DfT expects that it will be less than anticipated in the 2021 spending review, due to the current challenging fiscal environment. DfT told us that its planning for how to expand the Bikeability programme is ongoing. Once plans are in place, it will take time to expand the programme and to find and train the instructors needed. We are concerned that this lack of planning may lead to delays in delivering the training, particularly if funding is provided at short-notice and instructors cannot be found in time. DfT has committed to reviewing the Bikeability programme over the next 12 months with the intention of producing a simpler product that is easier for instructors to deliver.

***Recommendation 7: As an urgent priority, and within three months, DfT needs to set out a clear plan for its Bikeability Programme with a revised business case, including the funding it will make available to the programme over the remainder of the investment period to March 2025.***

# 1 Progress with increasing rates of active travel in England

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1. On the basis of a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, we took evidence from the Department for Transport (DfT) and Active Travel England (ATE) about active travel in England.<sup>2</sup>

2. Active travel describes everyday journeys made by walking, wheeling, or cycling. Wheeling is an equivalent alternative to walking - for example, using wheelchairs, mobility scooters, prams or pushchairs. In England in 2021, an average of 235 walking trips and 15 cycling trips were taken by each person. The number of cycling trips taken per person per year has remained broadly similar since 2002, whereas the number of walking trips taken per person per year has slightly increased over that time. DfT's measure of walking includes wheeling.<sup>3</sup> Active travel is a low-carbon way to get around and offers many benefits compared with other forms of transport. For example, the physical activity that is part of an active travel journey can be beneficial for individuals' physical and mental health. Government believes that active travel can support its wider strategic priorities to tackle obesity, improve air quality, level up, and achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050.<sup>4</sup>

3. The Department for Transport (DfT) is responsible for active travel policy in England. DfT sets objectives for active travel and the available funding in investment strategies. DfT published the first investment strategy for active travel in 2017 and the second in 2022. A third is planned from 2025. Most active travel schemes are delivered by local government. Active travel schemes can range from creating new infrastructure, such as separate cycle lanes on roads or amending existing road space to create pedestrian zones outside schools, as well as activities such as providing training in cycle safety. Government expects to spend around £6.6 billion on active travel between 2016 and 2025. It spent £3.3 billion between 2016 and 2021, of which it spent approximately £2.3 billion on infrastructure and £1 billion on other activities such as behaviour change initiatives.<sup>5</sup>

## The establishment of Active Travel England

4. In 2020, DfT published *Gear Change: A bold vision for cycling and walking*.<sup>6</sup> This set out government's ambition to transform the role active travel can play in the transport system. In this, DfT announced its intention to establish Active Travel England (ATE) to address the areas it identified as needing improvement in its Gear Change plan. By improving infrastructure quality, integrating active travel and planning, addressing local authority capability and strengthening the evidence base for active travel, DfT expects ATE to improve the current approach to investment in active travel infrastructure and deliver better outcomes.<sup>7</sup>

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2 C&AG's Report, *Active travel in England*, Session 2022-23, HC 1376, 7 June 2023

3 DfT, *National Travel Survey 2021: Active travel*, published 31st August 2022

4 C&AG's Report, para 1.11 and Figure 5

5 C&AG's Report, paras 2, 9 and Figure 3

6 DfT, *Gear Change: A bold vision for cycling and walking*, published 28 July 2020

7 C&AG's Report, para 3.9

5. ATE was established in August 2022 and became fully operational in August 2023. Its operational budget for 2022–23 was around £6 million and increased in 2023–24 to around £7.5 million. In 2024–24 it will increase again to around £9 million. ATE has a wide-ranging remit including as an inspectorate of the quality of active travel infrastructure, as a statutory consultee in the planning process, as the manager of DfT’s dedicated active travel budget, and as a supporter of local authorities. These various roles require a high-level of expertise.<sup>8</sup>

6. We were pleased that DfT has established ATE and to hear about the progress that ATE has made so far since it was established. For example, the National Audit Office (NAO) reported that ATE had contributed to the improvement in quality of active travel infrastructure design at bid stage. While we note there is still much improvement needed, we were encouraged to see that out of 590 proposals submitted to ATE to be funded in 2022–23, 96 (16%) were compliant with guidance, compared with six out of 352 (2%) proposals in the previous year. ATE attributed this improvement to training sessions and 150 design surgeries that it had held with local authorities. ATE told us that its 21 planning staff had reviewed 220 planning applications since June 2023 as part of ATE’s role as a statutory consultee, all of which had been reviewed on time.<sup>9</sup>

7. We asked DfT about the progress that ATE had made in supporting active travel and how DfT expected ATE to prioritise its activities. DfT told us about the challenging fiscal environment in which it and ATE are now operating in as a result of significant inflationary cost pressures. DfT told us that it had made difficult choices in response to these cost pressures and, as a result, the financial position for active travel was different from the one expected when DfT published *Gear Change: a bold vision for cycling and walking* in 2020.<sup>10</sup> We received written evidence from Living Streets raising its concern that without sufficient funding, ATE will not be able to fulfil its potential to improve investment in active travel in the ways expected by DfT nor provide adequate financial support to local authorities to deliver active travel schemes that will help make progress towards DfT’s objectives to increase active travel.<sup>11</sup>

## Progress against active travel objectives

8. DfT set out its most recent objectives for active travel in 2022. These are to:

- increase the percentage of short journeys in towns and cities that are walked or cycled from 41% in 2019 to 46% in 2025;
- increase people’s annual walking activity to 365 stages per person per year;
- double rates of cycling from 0.8 billion stages in 2013 to 1.6 billion stages in 2025; and
- increase the percentage of children aged 5 to 10 who usually walk to school from 49% in 2014 to 55% in 2025.<sup>12</sup>

8 C&AG’s Report, paras 1.5, 3.9 and Figure 10

9 Qq 75, 77; C&AG’s Report, para 3.10

10 Qq 11, 30, 37; C&AG’s Report, para 1.10

11 [ATE0010](#), Written evidence submitted by Living Streets

12 DfT, *The second cycling and walking investment strategy (CWIS2)*, published 6 July 2022; C&AG’s report, para 3

9. In June 2023, the NAO found that the latest data showed little progress had been made against the targets set by DfT. In 2021, DfT was close to only one of its targets – to increase the percentage of short journeys in towns and cities that are walked or cycled, which was just under 46%. However, this may reflect changes to travel patterns during the COVID-19 pandemic which appear not to have been sustained. For the other three objectives, levels of activity were lower than they were when DfT first set active travel objectives in 2017.<sup>13</sup> For example, between 2017 and 2021, average annual walking activity reduced from 343 stages per person per year to 279 stages, when DfT’s target is 365 stages per person per year by 2025. We therefore asked DfT whether it thought that it would meet the targets it had set. DfT told us that it had raised its ambition to increase active travel very significantly in the last five years and that its objectives to 2025 were deliberately ambitious. It explained that it had set its targets at a “very, very stretching level” and that it thought that the progress recorded in the NAO report probably understated the progress it expected to make. DfT told us that data for 2021 were likely to have been affected by the pandemic and that the data for 2022 was expected to show more progress.<sup>14</sup> On 31 August, DfT published its statistics for 2022. These showed some improvement in rates of walking, although there was not a return to pre-pandemic levels, and the proportion of short journeys walked or cycled remained close to the 2025 target.<sup>15</sup> However, rates of cycling and walking to school showed little new progress. DfT told us that it could not say with confidence that the targets will all be met, but that it was “looking very hard at the way we can secure the maximum benefits”.<sup>16</sup>

10. It is important for DfT to have the right data and information in place to monitor whether its active travel investments are contributing to achieving its objectives. The NAO reported that longer-term progress against achieving DfT’s objectives was uncertain due to a time-lag in availability of DfT’s statistics.<sup>17</sup> ATE told us that, currently, the existing national measures that DfT uses to track progress on cycling rates are too high-level to capture the impact of local investment accurately. DfT explained that it used the National Travel Survey to monitor progress against its objectives, which included around 10,000 people per year. It told us that this was a “very good set of data” and for walking, the numbers reported “is likely to capture what is actually happening”. But it explained that it was cycling it was slightly different, as the survey would look at aggregated results, but that cycling infrastructure could be inconsistent across the country and investment was very localised, so a national survey was “too diluted to reflect what is happening on the ground”.<sup>18</sup>

11. In March 2023 in response to significant inflationary pressure, DfT announced changes to various transport investment plans. This included a £233 million reduction in its dedicated funding for active travel up to April 2025.<sup>19</sup> We received written evidence from the Walking and Cycling Alliance, Sustrans, and Local Government Association setting out their concerns that cuts to active travel funding place a huge challenge on local authorities’ ability to deliver government’s ambition for increased active travel.<sup>20</sup>

13 C&AG’s Report, para 12

14 Qq 9-11

15 DfT, *Walking and cycling statistics, England: Introduction and main findings*, published 30th August 2023

16 Q 10

17 C&AG’s Report, para 2.2

18 Q 11

19 Q 69; C&AG’s Report, para 1.10

20 [ATE0003](#), Written evidence submitted by Bikeability Trust; [ATE0010](#), Written evidence submitted by Living Streets; [ATE0001](#), Written evidence submitted by Walking and Cycling Alliance

We therefore asked DfT, given the ambitious targets and lack of progress so far, whether funding for active travel was a constraint in being able to meet its targets. DfT told us that it did not think that funding was a key issue limiting progress.<sup>21</sup> The NAO found, however, that DfT's modelling suggested that with the funding available, it was unlikely that it will get close to achieving its 2025 objectives.<sup>22</sup>

12. We also asked DfT about progress in delivering the *Gear Change* programme. The NAO found that DfT made progress against most (22 out of 33) *Gear Change* actions, with most progress made on measures targeting capability, including the formation of ATE. Less progress was made on actions around integration, partly because measures to increase and stabilise dedicated funding for longer-term planning have not been achieved.<sup>23</sup> We therefore asked DfT and ATE how they would prioritise delivering the remaining actions. DfT told us that it could no longer promise to deliver all 33 actions in *Gear Change* due to funding constraints and the shifting priorities of Ministers since *Gear Change* was published in 2020. DfT said that it would focus its activities on the activities where it and ATE could have the greatest impact.<sup>24</sup>

## Evaluating the impact of spend on active travel infrastructure

13. Active travel infrastructure is highly varied and can include, for example, cycle lanes, pedestrian crossings, pedestrianised zones, cycle parking, and school streets. The NAO reported that between 2016 and 2021, DfT spent £2.3 billion on active travel infrastructure. The NAO found that DfT has known too little about what has been achieved from active travel investment to date.<sup>25</sup> We asked DfT why it knew so little about how this money has been spent and the quality and value that had been delivered as a result. DfT said it felt this was an unfairly critical remark and it asserted that it asked local authorities to return information on what had been delivered with funds provided to them for active travel, and that it commissioned evaluations of active travel interventions.<sup>26</sup> DfT confirmed that it followed up on incomplete information from local authorities on what they have delivered.<sup>27</sup> However, we note that local authorities are only required to evaluate the impact of schemes that cost more than £2 million, and there is no requirement to undertake any evaluation of schemes that cost less than £2 million.<sup>28</sup> We asked DfT to tell us the average value of active travel grants that it provides to local authorities. In a letter to us after our evidence session, DfT told us that the average grant per project delivered in the most recent Active Travel Fund tranches was £750,000.<sup>29</sup>

14. DfT estimates that for every £1 invested in active travel, government will achieve around £4.30 in benefits. We therefore asked DfT about the benefits of active travel. DfT told us that active travel had many different benefits, including for health, air quality, decarbonisation. It explained that most of the benefits were found in health, including

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21 Qq 11-12

22 C&AG's Report, para 2.2 and 2.5

23 C&AG's Report, para 2.8

24 Q 31

25 C&AG's Report, paras 15, 21

26 Q 47

27 Q 52

28 Qq 48-49; C&AG's Report, para 3.5

29 Q 48; [Letter from Dame Bernadette Kelly DCB, Permanent Secretary for Transport, to Dame Meg Hillier MP, Chair Public Accounts Committee in relation to Active Travel in England, 1 August 2023](#)



reduced incidence of heart attack which it measured.<sup>30</sup> DfT told us that it had conducted an evaluation of the Cycle City Ambition Fund, which showed that while infrastructure had increased cycling by about 40%, it can take between three to five years for a piece of new infrastructure to have a maximum impact on behaviours and active travel participation.<sup>31</sup> DfT recognised that it was “actually measuring quite a limited number of benefits in a qualitative sense” and ATE explained that the data available was inconsistent. It said that it was working to establish a common framework for assessing the benefits of active travel, while minimising the burden on local authorities of collating this data. We were pleased to hear that ATE intended to standardise the approach to evaluation and simplify the process for local authorities. We asked DfT when its plans for evaluating the impact of spend on active travel would be in place, and why it had taken setting up a new body in ATE to make progress. DfT told us that the establishment of ATE provided “five times the people capacity” that DfT previously had working on active travel.<sup>32</sup> ATE told us that it will have 18 staff on its analysis and evaluation team and was working with the Alan Turing Institute to build data repositories, including one that will collate data from local authorities across England on outcomes from investments.<sup>33</sup>

## Perceptions of safety and encouraging participation

15. Concerns around safety and confidence to cycle are key barriers to active travel. The NAO reported that, in 2021, around half of respondents to a DfT survey stated that safer roads would encourage them to cycle (53%) and walk (45%) more. Data from DfT surveys show that, between 2017 and 2020, the proportion of existing cyclists who agreed that it was dangerous to cycle increased from 48% to 57%.<sup>34</sup> We received written evidence from the University of Central Lancashire about its work examining the barriers to active travel. It found that poor infrastructure, roads being very busy with cars, and poor driver knowledge and awareness of cycling had contributed to low uptake of everyday cycling.<sup>35</sup> We asked DfT what more that government could do to address concerns about safety. DfT recognised that perceptions of safety were just as important as actual safety when encouraging people to participate in active travel, and that ATE was working on this. ATE explained that it was working with partners around the country, and with colleagues in local authorities and highways authorities, to consider how to design roads and junctions to ensure they are safer for all users, particularly vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and cyclists.<sup>36</sup>

16. In January 2022, DfT made changes to the Highway Code to prioritise vulnerable road users, including pedestrians and cyclists.<sup>37</sup> However, evidence we received from stakeholders suggested that DfT’s messaging around the changes made to improve safety have not been communicated effectively to the public. Stakeholders told us that a lack of investment in wider public engagement elements may have contributed to low public support for active travel infrastructure and poor perceptions of safety. Liverpool John Moores University provided us with examples that demonstrated the impact of insufficient

30 Q26, Q47, Q55; C&AG’s Report, para 1.11

31 Q33

32 Q 55-57

33 Qq 28, 76

34 C&AG’s Report, para 2.4

35 [ATE0008](#), Written evidence submitted by University of Central Lancashire

36 Q17

37 Q15, C&AG’s Report para 3.2

funding for community consultation and public engagement on public reception to new infrastructure. New “pop-up” schemes were built in Liverpool with emergency funding during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data it collected showed the contribution of these schemes to high rates of cycling and walking, but some have subsequently been removed due to complaints about the schemes from the public. Stakeholders also noted that a lack of positive role models and national promotion of cycling in England may have contributed to more negative perceptions of active travel.<sup>38</sup> Leicester City Council told us that “government has missed opportunities to promote walking, wheeling, and cycling as a sustainable and cost-effective means of replacing car journeys”. For example, it said that government missed an opportunity to endorse walking, wheeling, and cycling as cheaper alternatives to car travel during the rapid cost increases of fuel and electricity following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Increased active travel could have reduced the impact of rising costs on consumers and reduced overall energy demand.<sup>39</sup> London Cycling Campaign told us that cycling continues to be associated with a lack of financial success, compared to ownership and use of private cars.<sup>40</sup>

17. We asked DfT if there was more that it could do to promote the changes it had made to improve safety and encourage more people take up cycling. It told us that it recognised that communication was a big part of tackling perceptions and encouraging changes in behaviour. It told us that it was using its long-standing road safety communications campaign, Think!, to communicate changes it had made to the Highway Code.<sup>41</sup> This campaign was first run in 2022 when the changes to the Highway Code were first made.<sup>42</sup> After our evidence session, on 3 August 2023, DfT also relaunched its Think! campaign reminding people of the changes that had been made to the Highway Code which prioritised vulnerable road users.<sup>43</sup>

18. There are currently 23 trials for e-scooter rentals in England but outside of these areas e-scooters are not legal on roads.<sup>44</sup> Despite that, use of e-scooters has increased rapidly in recent years both within and beyond trial areas, sometimes with negative consequences, including safety, for other road users.<sup>45</sup> We therefore asked witnesses about concerns among the public about the impact on safety of new forms of travel such as e-scooters. DfT told us that it recognised e-scooters were “potentially a fantastic addition to the suite of travel options that people have” and that a better legal framework for their use was required.<sup>46</sup> We told DfT about areas where e-scooters are being used illegally beyond the trial areas and said that there is a need for greater clarity for the public over their use. DfT told us that when the trials end, in May 2024, it will need to undertake an assessment of how they went to inform the possible rollout of e-scooter rental schemes more widely and safely. DfT did not provide us with a timeframe on when a decision will be made on subsequent rollout and noted that Parliamentary time was required for a more comprehensive legal framework to be developed.<sup>47</sup>

38 [ATE0007](#), Written evidence submitted by Leicester City Council; [ATE0012](#), Written evidence submitted by Liverpool John Moores University; [ATE0005](#), Written evidence submitted by London Cycling Campaign

39 [ATE0007](#), Written Evidence submitted by Leicester City Council

40 [ATE0005](#), Written evidence submitted by London Cycling Campaign

41 Qq 17, 18

42 Department for Transport, [Highway Code – THINK!, accessed 29.08.2023](#)

43 Department for Transport, [Government re-launch THINK! campaign in continued drive to improve road safety, 3 August 2023](#)

44 Qq 21, 23

45 Qq 64, 68

46 Qq 23, 24

47 Qq 64, 66, 67



## 2 Working with others

19. DfT has overall responsibility for active travel policy in England and ATE is now responsible for delivering against DfT’s objectives to increase active travel by 2025. Local authorities are key delivery partners who deliver active travel infrastructure in local areas to support increased uptake of active travel. Other organisations are funded by ATE and DfT to deliver behaviour change schemes, such as the Bikeability Programme.<sup>48</sup>

### Joining up active travel with other modes of transport

20. Active travel is one of many options of transport that individuals can choose from to make their journeys. In its 2020 publication *Gear Change: a bold vision for cycling and walking*, DfT identified that limited integration with other transport and planning policy had contributed to inconsistent provision of active travel infrastructure in local areas and was a barrier to increasing rates of active travel. The NAO found, however, that DfT had made limited progress with the actions it set out in *Gear Change* to integrate active travel into transport planning. It also found that DfT had not taken the steps required to ensure that active travel schemes are sufficiently joined-up with wider transport infrastructure, for example enabling people to safely walk to bus stops or take their bike on the bus.<sup>49</sup>

21. We asked DfT why there had not been more focus on areas where integration was key to encouraging active travel. DfT told us that it had prioritised activity and investment on the areas where it felt it could have maximum impact on increasing rates of active travel. It explained that this included focusing on delivering segregated cycle routes in an attempt to address the safety barrier to people cycling. This activity was prioritised above integrating active travel with other transport modes such as rail, buses or trams. As a result, in places like Sheffield, we noted that it is not possible to take a bike onto a tram, limiting the options for how people can complete an end-to-end journey using these modes of transport. Concerns around a lack of safe bike parking facilities at train stations is one area where people may be dissuaded from cycling to a station to catch a train, and we asked DfT whether it had provided grants to increase safe parking facilities at stations. ATE and DfT told us that grants had been provided and furthermore that when local authorities bid for active travel funding, they may choose to spend some of the funds on cycle parking.<sup>50</sup>

22. ATE expects the largest increases in rates of active travel participation will come from more people walking and wheeling, rather than cycling. It recognised that buses and trams can increase the number of walking trips taken.<sup>51</sup> However, ATE told us that there had been “countless examples” of new bus or tram infrastructure being installed without pavements or crossings to enable people to access them safely on foot, including in new housing developments.<sup>52</sup> To create a joined up transport network that enables sustainable and affordable journeys, investment in public transport—such as buses, trams and trains—must go hand-in-hand with investment in active travel to allow people to access them and encourage people to walk to stations and bus or tram stops.<sup>53</sup>

48 C&AG’s Report, para 1.2, Figure 1

49 Q32, Q33, C&AG’s Report, paras 1.4, 2.8 and Figure 9

50 Qq 32, 35

51 Q 33; C&AG’s Report, para 1.7

52 Q 33

53 C&AG’s Report, para 1.12, Q33, ATE0012

23. The NAO reported that DfT expects ATE to have a key role in developing the capability of local authorities. This includes the ability of local authorities to plan local transport networks where active travel is integrated with other modes. ATE has begun its work with local authorities that it deemed to have lower capability and ambition in relation to active travel and is establishing ways of working with authorities to provide guidance and support. We note, however, that there is a long way to go to improve local authority capability and ambition. In 2023, ATE assessed that more than half (56%) of local authorities were at ‘level 0’ or ‘level 1’, indicating relatively low levels of capability and ambition.<sup>54</sup>

## Funding uncertainty

24. In 2018, as part of our examination of the financial sustainability of local authorities, we said that good financial planning within local authorities relied on certainty and stability of funds, while financial uncertainty created risks to value for money.<sup>55</sup> Active travel investment has not escaped funding-related issues, which the NAO reported are hindering the ability of local authorities to plan strategically, deliver active travel schemes more efficiently, and invest in schemes which might make a bigger contribution to DfT’s objectives for 2025.<sup>56</sup>

25. The NAO’s analysis identified that there had been 36 different central government funds for active travel since 2016, some of which had multiple funding rounds. These funds often had different conditions and bidding requirements which local authorities must navigate to access funding for their active travel schemes. They also often had short deadlines for submissions and for delivering a scheme once funding is provided.<sup>57</sup> We received written evidence from Leicester City Council which set out that the competitive nature of funds meant that local authorities must bid to secure as much funding as possible within a given window. It told us that local authorities that either lacked the resource or experience to construct bids were placed at a disadvantage, and that smaller authorities may lack the resource required to formulate competitive bids.<sup>58</sup> In addition, it told us that developing bids is time-intensive, which was often compounded by very short bidding windows. Leicester City Council gave the example of Tranche Four of the Active Travel Fund which it said authorities were notified of on 1 January 2023 with a deadline for submitting bids for funding of 24 February 2023.<sup>59</sup> We have therefore recommended that DfT, along with other departments, examine whether the number of grant schemes and their requirements can be simplified to encourage more local authorities to bid for them.

26. The short-term nature of funding for active travel is also problematic and this was a recurrent theme in the submissions that we received from stakeholders.<sup>60</sup> The Local Government Association told us that “uncertainty over the level or duration of funding

54 Qq 32, 61, 70, 75; C&AG’s Report, para 3.15

55 Public Accounts Committee, *Financial sustainability of local authorities*, [Fiftieth Report of Session 2017-19, HC 970, 4 July 2018](#)

56 C&AG’s Report, para 20

57 C&AG’s Report, para 3.18, Figure 12

58 [ATE0007](#), Written evidence submitted by Leicester City Council

59 Qq 73, 74; [ATE0007](#), Written evidence submitted by Leicester City Council

60 [ATE0007](#), Written evidence submitted by Leicester City Council; [ATE0003](#), Written evidence submitted by Local Government Association; [ATE0006](#), Written evidence submitted by Sustrans; [ATE0012](#), Written evidence submitted by Liverpool John Moores University; [ATE0001](#), Written evidence submitted by Walking and Cycling Alliance

makes it extremely challenging for councils to build in-house capacity to plan and deliver a pipeline of projects, with proper time for engagement and design that can deliver the greatest benefits and value for money”.<sup>61</sup> The NAO found that funds were often provided through one-year settlements and that the lack of long-term investment certainty was undermining the ability of local authorities to plan strategic, integrated, networks. There is a risk that local authorities may prioritise funding for schemes which are easiest to deliver within a funding window rather than those with higher strategic value.<sup>62</sup> For example, Leicester City Council told us that to deliver within the annual bidding cycle for active travel investment, local authorities may prioritise schemes for ease of construction, or expectations of smoother consultation and engagement pathways, over strategic need.<sup>63</sup> The Local Government Association also told us that year-on-year instability of funding was not conducive to delivering large or innovative schemes that would have a significant impact on active travel rates.<sup>64</sup> Liverpool John Moores University told us that the short-term nature of funding meant that innovative approaches to increase active travel could not be sustained beyond the funding period.<sup>65</sup> We asked DfT whether having fewer funding streams which were longer-term in nature would be more conducive to delivering well-thought-out schemes. It told us that the nature of funding, where local authorities “have to cobble together [...] funds”, was an issue that it needed to continue to reflect on and was also a broader issue for local funding.<sup>66</sup>

## The Bikeability Programme

27. The Bikeability Programme plays an important role in providing children and adults with cycle training and skills, helping develop confidence to cycle safely.<sup>67</sup> It helps teach practical skills through instructor-led training sessions. The Bikeability Programme is managed and developed by Bikeability Trust, a charitable organisation, on behalf of DfT. The Bikeability Trust’s mission is that, by 2025, it will have helped 5 million children take up Bikeability cycle training and cycle more confidently.<sup>68</sup> We received written evidence from the Bikeability Trust informing us of the impact that the cycle training can have on increasing cycle rates among children. In 2019, it reported that 65% of children had cycled since the start of term after completing Level 2 or 3 Bikeability training.<sup>69</sup> DfT told us that half a million people went through the Programme last year.<sup>70</sup>

28. In 2020, DfT announced it would expand its Bikeability programme and committed to offering cycling skills to all children in England. However, DfT has not yet completed its plans for expanding the Bikeability Programme and could not tell us when the commitment will be met. In 2022–23, 51% of children received road safety training through Bikeability by the end of primary school. This is much lower than the 80% required to help achieve DfT’s active travel objectives.<sup>71</sup>

61 [ATE0003](#), Written evidence submitted by Local Government Association

62 C&AG’s Report, Figure 12, [ATE0003](#); Written evidence submitted by Local Government Association

63 [ATE0007](#), Written evidence submitted by Leicester City Council

64 [ATE0003](#), Written evidence submitted by Local Government Association

65 [ATE0012](#), Written evidence submitted by Liverpool John Moores University

66 Qq 73, 74

67 Qq 37, 39

68 [About Us - The Bikeability Trust Organisation | Bikeability](#)

69 [ATE0002](#), Written evidence submitted by Bikeability Trust

70 Q 44

71 Qq 37-38, C&AG’s Report, para 2.10

29. Written evidence from Bikeability Trust told us that funding for the Bikeability Programme was provided through a multi-year settlement between 2016 and 2020, but since then funding had been provided in single year extensions often confirmed just before the start of the financial year. Bikeability Trust told us that there was a risk of under-delivery as a result of delays in confirming funding. Its written submission to us set out that 69,985 (20% of all) Level 1&2 and Level 2 places were at risk of not being delivered in 2022–23 as a result of funding not being announced until the end of the prior financial year. It estimated a multi-year settlement for the Bikeability Programme would provide a direct cashable saving of 2.8% of the Programme as well as increase the ability of the Programme to expand.<sup>72</sup>

30. We asked DfT for the details about its plans to fund the Bikeability Programme for 2023–24. It told us that it had been increasing the amount of funding available for the Programme over the last decade, and would do the same again this year, but recognised that the funding would not be as much as expected. It explained that conversations on the Programme’s business case were in live discussion and that it would not be providing the £28.5 million which it had initially expected to as part of the 2021 Spending Review Settlement because of the “challenging fiscal environment”.<sup>73</sup>

31. Bikeability Trust uses trainers to deliver cycle training. ATE and the Bikeability Trust, in their written submission to us, told us that often, local authorities do not directly employ these trainers and there can be complicated arrangements and criteria for becoming a trainer and delivering Bikeability training. In its written submission, Bikeability Trust raised concerns that delays to sufficient and long-term funding will hamper the ability to scale up equitably and overcome the current postcode lottery of Bikeability provision. It told us that it can take time for local authorities to agree contracts through complex procurement processes and any further delay in an announcement of funding for the Bikeability programme could lead to delays in cycle training delivery and entrench inequality in cycle training provision. ATE told us that it planned to review the approach to delivering Bikeability training to simplify the process for trainers.<sup>74</sup> ATE told us that Bikeability training is an effective way to increase the safety of adults who cycle, and that the likelihood of an adult continuing to cycle increases once they have completed the training. ATE told us that it was looking at ways to extend the training to adults but that this will in part be down to the willingness of local authorities to fund adult training sessions.<sup>75</sup>

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72 [ATE0002](#), Written evidence submitted by Bikeability Trust

73 C&AG’s Report, para 2.9, Q37, Q38, Q41, Q42, Q43, Q44

74 Q 46; [ATE0002](#), Written evidence submitted by Bikeability Trust

75 Q 39

# Formal minutes

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**Monday 16 October 2023**

## **Members present:**

Dame Meg Hillier

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown

Mr Mark Francois

Anne Marie Morris

## ***Declaration of interests***

Ashley Dalton declared that she managed active travel schemes in Southend and South Essex in receipt of Department for Transport active travel funding 2011–2022.

## **Active travel in England**

Draft Report (*Active travel in England*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 31 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Introduction agreed to.

Conclusions and recommendations agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Seventy-fifth of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

## **Adjournment**

Adjourned till Thursday 19 October at 9.30am.

## Witnesses

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The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Wednesday 19 July 2023

**Dame Bernadette Kelly DCB**, Permanent Secretary, Department for Transport;  
**Jessica Matthew**, Co-Director for the Local Transport Directorate, Department  
for Transport; **Danny Williams**, Chief Executive, Active Travel England

[Q1-79](#)

## Published written evidence

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The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

ATE numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Bikeability Trust ([ATE0002](#))
- 2 Energy Saving Trust ([ATE0011](#))
- 3 Groundswell ([ATE0004](#))
- 4 Leicester City Council ([ATE0007](#))
- 5 Liverpool John Moores University ([ATE0012](#))
- 6 Living Streets ([ATE0010](#))
- 7 Local Government Association ([ATE0003](#))
- 8 London Cycling Campaign ([ATE0005](#))
- 9 University of Liverpool) ([ATE0009](#))
- 10 Sustrans ([ATE0006](#))
- 11 University of Central Lancashire ([ATE0008](#))
- 12 Walking and Cycling Alliance ([ATE0001](#))

## List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

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All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Session 2022–23

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy Annual Report and Accounts 2020–21	HC 59
2nd	Lessons from implementing IR35 reforms	HC 60
3rd	The future of the Advanced Gas-cooled Reactors	HC 118
4th	Use of evaluation and modelling in government	HC 254
5th	Local economic growth	HC 252
6th	Department of Health and Social Care 2020–21 Annual Report and Accounts	HC 253
7th	Armoured Vehicles: the Ajax programme	HC 259
8th	Financial sustainability of the higher education sector in England	HC 257
9th	Child Maintenance	HC 255
10th	Restoration and Renewal of Parliament	HC 49
11th	The rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine programme in England	HC 258
12th	Management of PPE contracts	HC 260
13th	Secure training centres and secure schools	HC 30
14th	Investigation into the British Steel Pension Scheme	HC 251
15th	The Police Uplift Programme	HC 261
16th	Managing cross-border travel during the COVID-19 pandemic	HC 29
17th	Government's contracts with Randox Laboratories Ltd	HC 28
18th	Government actions to combat waste crime	HC 33
19th	Regulating after EU Exit	HC 32
20th	Whole of Government Accounts 2019–20	HC 31
21st	Transforming electronic monitoring services	HC 34
22nd	Tackling local air quality breaches	HC 37
23rd	Measuring and reporting public sector greenhouse gas emissions	HC 39
24th	Redevelopment of Defra's animal health infrastructure	HC 42
25th	Regulation of energy suppliers	HC 41
26th	The Department for Work and Pensions' Accounts 2021–22 – Fraud and error in the benefits system	HC 44
27th	Evaluating innovation projects in children's social care	HC 38



<b>Number</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Reference</b>
28th	Improving the Accounting Officer Assessment process	HC 43
29th	The Affordable Homes Programme since 2015	HC 684
30th	Developing workforce skills for a strong economy	HC 685
31st	Managing central government property	HC 48
32nd	Grassroots participation in sport and physical activity	HC 46
33rd	HMRC performance in 2021–22	HC 686
34th	The Creation of the UK Infrastructure Bank	HC 45
35th	Introducing Integrated Care Systems	HC 47
36th	The Defence digital strategy	HC 727
37th	Support for vulnerable adolescents	HC 730
38th	Managing NHS backlogs and waiting times in England	HC 729
39th	Excess Votes 2021–22	HC 1132
40th	COVID employment support schemes	HC 810
41st	Driving licence backlogs at the DVLA	HC 735
42nd	The Restart Scheme for long-term unemployed people	HC 733
43rd	Progress combatting fraud	HC 40
44th	The Digital Services Tax	HC 732
45th	Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy Annual Report and Accounts 2021–22	HC 1254
46th	BBC Digital	HC 736
47th	Investigation into the UK Passport Office	HC 738
48th	MoD Equipment Plan 2022–2032	HC 731
49th	Managing tax compliance following the pandemic	HC 739
50th	Government Shared Services	HC 734
51st	Tackling Defra’s ageing digital services	HC 737
52nd	Restoration & Renewal of the Palace of Westminster – 2023 Recall	HC 1021
53rd	The performance of UK Security Vetting	HC 994
54th	Alcohol treatment services	HC 1001
55th	Education recovery in schools in England	HC 998
56th	Supporting investment into the UK	HC 996
57th	AEA Technology Pension Case	HC 1005
58th	Energy bills support	HC 1074
59th	Decarbonising the power sector	HC 1003
60th	Timeliness of local auditor reporting	HC 995
61st	Progress on the courts and tribunals reform programme	HC 1002

<b>Number</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Reference</b>
62nd	Department of Health and Social Care 2021–22 Annual Report and Accounts	HC 997
63rd	HS2 Euston	HC 1004
64th	The Emergency Services Network	HC 1006
65th	Progress in improving NHS mental health services	HC 1000
66th	PPE Medpro: awarding of contracts during the pandemic	HC 1590
67th	Child Trust Funds	HC 1231
68th	Local authority administered COVID support schemes in England	HC 1234
69th	Tackling fraud and corruption against government	HC 1230
70th	Digital transformation in government: addressing the barriers to efficiency	HC 1229
71st	Resetting government programmes	HC 1231
72nd	Update on the rollout of smart meters	HC 1332
73rd	Access to urgent and emergency care	HC 1336
74th	Bulb Energy	HC 1232
76th	The Asylum Transformation Programme	HC 1334
1st Special Report	Sixth Annual Report of the Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts	HC 50
2nd Special Report	Seventh Annual Report of the Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts	HC 1055

## Session 2021–22

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Low emission cars	HC 186
2nd	BBC strategic financial management	HC 187
3rd	COVID-19: Support for children's education	HC 240
4th	COVID-19: Local government finance	HC 239
5th	COVID-19: Government Support for Charities	HC 250
6th	Public Sector Pensions	HC 289
7th	Adult Social Care Markets	HC 252
8th	COVID 19: Culture Recovery Fund	HC 340
9th	Fraud and Error	HC 253
10th	Overview of the English rail system	HC 170
11th	Local auditor reporting on local government in England	HC 171
12th	COVID 19: Cost Tracker Update	HC 173
13th	Initial lessons from the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic	HC 175
14th	Windrush Compensation Scheme	HC 174
15th	DWP Employment support	HC 177
16th	Principles of effective regulation	HC 176
17th	High Speed 2: Progress at Summer 2021	HC 329
18th	Government's delivery through arm's-length bodies	HC 181
19th	Protecting consumers from unsafe products	HC 180
20th	Optimising the defence estate	HC 179
21st	School Funding	HC 183
22nd	Improving the performance of major defence equipment contracts	HC 185
23rd	Test and Trace update	HC 182
24th	Crossrail: A progress update	HC 184
25th	The Department for Work and Pensions' Accounts 2020–21 – Fraud and error in the benefits system	HC 633
26th	Lessons from Greensill Capital: accreditation to business support schemes	HC 169
27th	Green Homes Grant Voucher Scheme	HC 635
28th	Efficiency in government	HC 636
29th	The National Law Enforcement Data Programme	HC 638
30th	Challenges in implementing digital change	HC 637
31st	Environmental Land Management Scheme	HC 639
32nd	Delivering gigabitcapable broadband	HC 743

<b>Number</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Reference</b>
33rd	Underpayments of the State Pension	HC 654
34th	Local Government Finance System: Overview and Challenges	HC 646
35th	The pharmacy early payment and salary advance schemes in the NHS	HC 745
36th	EU Exit: UK Border post transition	HC 746
37th	HMRC Performance in 2020–21	HC 641
38th	COVID-19 cost tracker update	HC 640
39th	DWP Employment Support: Kickstart Scheme	HC 655
40th	Excess votes 2020–21: Serious Fraud Office	HC 1099
41st	Achieving Net Zero: Follow up	HC 642
42nd	Financial sustainability of schools in England	HC 650
43rd	Reducing the backlog in criminal courts	HC 643
44th	NHS backlogs and waiting times in England	HC 747
45th	Progress with trade negotiations	HC 993
46th	Government preparedness for the COVID-19 pandemic: lessons for government on risk	HC 952
47th	Academies Sector Annual Report and Accounts 2019/20	HC 994
48th	HMRC's management of tax debt	HC 953
49th	Regulation of private renting	HC 996
50th	Bounce Back Loans Scheme: Follow-up	HC 951
51st	Improving outcomes for women in the criminal justice system	HC 997
52nd	Ministry of Defence Equipment Plan 2021–31	HC 1164
1st Special Report	Fifth Annual Report of the Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts	HC 222

### Session 2019–21

<b>Number</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Reference</b>
1st	Support for children with special educational needs and disabilities	HC 85
2nd	Defence Nuclear Infrastructure	HC 86
3rd	High Speed 2: Spring 2020 Update	HC 84
4th	EU Exit: Get ready for Brexit Campaign	HC 131
5th	University technical colleges	HC 87
6th	Excess votes 2018–19	HC 243
7th	Gambling regulation: problem gambling and protecting vulnerable people	HC 134
8th	NHS capital expenditure and financial management	HC 344

<b>Number</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Reference</b>
9th	Water supply and demand management	HC 378
10th	Defence capability and the Equipment Plan	HC 247
11th	Local authority investment in commercial property	HC 312
12th	Management of tax reliefs	HC 379
13th	Whole of Government Response to COVID-19	HC 404
14th	Readying the NHS and social care for the COVID-19 peak	HC 405
15th	Improving the prison estate	HC 244
16th	Progress in remediating dangerous cladding	HC 406
17th	Immigration enforcement	HC 407
18th	NHS nursing workforce	HC 408
19th	Restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster	HC 549
20th	Tackling the tax gap	HC 650
21st	Government support for UK exporters	HC 679
22nd	Digital transformation in the NHS	HC 680
23rd	Delivering carrier strike	HC 684
24th	Selecting towns for the Towns Fund	HC 651
25th	Asylum accommodation and support transformation programme	HC 683
26th	Department of Work and Pensions Accounts 2019–20	HC 681
27th	Covid-19: Supply of ventilators	HC 685
28th	The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority's management of the Magnox contract	HC 653
29th	Whitehall preparations for EU Exit	HC 682
30th	The production and distribution of cash	HC 654
31st	Starter Homes	HC 88
32nd	Specialist Skills in the civil service	HC 686
33rd	Covid-19: Bounce Back Loan Scheme	HC 687
34th	Covid-19: Support for jobs	HC 920
35th	Improving Broadband	HC 688
36th	HMRC performance 2019–20	HC 690
37th	Whole of Government Accounts 2018–19	HC 655
38th	Managing colleges' financial sustainability	HC 692
39th	Lessons from major projects and programmes	HC 694
40th	Achieving government's long-term environmental goals	HC 927
41st	COVID 19: the free school meals voucher scheme	HC 689
42nd	COVID-19: Government procurement and supply of Personal Protective Equipment	HC 928

<b>Number</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Reference</b>
43rd	COVID-19: Planning for a vaccine Part 1	HC 930
44th	Excess Votes 2019–20	HC 1205
45th	Managing flood risk	HC 931
46th	Achieving Net Zero	HC 935
47th	COVID-19: Test, track and trace (part 1)	HC 932
48th	Digital Services at the Border	HC 936
49th	COVID-19: housing people sleeping rough	HC 934
50th	Defence Equipment Plan 2020–2030	HC 693
51st	Managing the expiry of PFI contracts	HC 1114
52nd	Key challenges facing the Ministry of Justice	HC 1190
53rd	Covid 19: supporting the vulnerable during lockdown	HC 938
54th	Improving single living accommodation for service personnel	HC 940
55th	Environmental tax measures	HC 937
56th	Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund	HC 941