

Written evidence submitted by Walking and Cycling Alliance

This submission is made jointly by the Walking and Cycling Alliance (WACA). WACA comprises:

- The Bicycle Association (the trade body representing the UK cycling industry);
- The Bikeability Trust (the charity which promotes and delivers 'Bikeability' cycle training);
- British Cycling (the national governing body for cycle sport);
- Cycling UK (the national cycling charity);
- Living Streets (the national charity for everyday walking);
- The Ramblers (Britain's walking and outdoor access charity); and
- Sustrans (the walking and cycling charity best known for the National Cycle Network).

We welcome the opportunity to submit evidence to the Public Accounts Committee inquiry on active travel in England, following the National Audit Office (NAO) report on that subject.

We regrettably share the NAO's view that the Government's targets to increase cycling and walking by 2025 – as set in its 2nd Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy (CWIS2) – are now very unlikely to be met. This is all the more disappointing given the NAO report's endorsement of the strong value-for-money case for investing in cycling.¹

We endorse the NAO's analysis of the key reasons for this failure, notably the historic lack of capacity and capability among local authorities to develop and deliver active travel policies and schemes, and the past failure of the Department for Transport (DfT) to monitor what measures or types of measure were, or were not, delivering value for money. Yet we also agree that DfT deserves to be commended for setting up Active Travel England (ATE) to address these problems.

This joint submission focuses on what we believe to be the two main reasons for the near-certain failure to meet the CWIS2 targets:

- The inadequacy of the funding provided at the outset for CWIS2 (and indeed for its predecessor, CWIS1); and
- The lack of certainty and stability of CWIS funding, arising from (a) the large proportion of CWIS funding expected to come from non-ringfenced sources, and (b) the more recent cuts to both ringfenced and non-ringfenced funding for CWIS2.

Individual WACA member organisations will also be making separate but complementary submissions to this inquiry, to outline other steps that could be taken to ensure better value for money from cycling and walking investment in the future.

Inadequacy of the initial funding for CWIS2

We draw the Committee's attention to Figure 8 of the NAO report, which is based on modelling undertaken by DfT in 2022. It shows that investment of £7bn over the CWIS2

¹ We note incidentally that the NAO report quotes a Department for Transport (DfT) estimate for the benefit-to-cost ratio of its current spending on active travel as 4.3 : 1. Although this amounts to "high" value for money under the Government's WebTAG process for assessing the value-for-money of transport investments, it is markedly lower than a previous DfT estimate of 5.62 : 1 for UK investments, and 6.28 : 1 for international investments. See www.gov.uk/government/publications/economic-case-for-active-travel-the-health-benefits.

period was required to meet two of the four CWIS2 2025 targets and come close to meeting the other two.

It also shows that spending just £4.4bn would result in all four of these targets being missed by a large margin. This contradicts information given to Parliament on 13 October 2022, when former Transport Minister Lucy Frazer MP told the House (in answer to oral question):

“The Department estimates that a minimum of £4.4 billion is likely to be required to meet its cycling and walking objectives to 2025; and further, that a minimum of £5.5 billion is likely to be required to meet the objectives to 2030.”

We therefore urge the Committee to invite the current Minister to correct the Hansard record and to publish the evidence on which these estimates were based.

Yet despite the above evidence, the Government initially committed to spend £3.8 bn through CWIS2, of which only just over a third (£1.3bn) was ring-fenced for active travel.

This means the UK Government was aware that their own objectives set out in CWIS2 would not come close to being met based on funding committed, even before it reduced the funding further still, to around £3 billion, in a Written Ministerial Statement on 9 March 2023.

It is important that this never happens again. We therefore recommend that, **when Ministers are ‘setting’ or ‘varying’ a CWIS in the future (in accordance with section 21 of the Infrastructure Act 2015), they should be required to demonstrate that the financial resources allocated to that CWIS are sufficient for the objectives set in that CWIS to have a reasonable prospect of being met.**

Otherwise, ATE in future faces a serious reputational risk, from being set overly-ambitious targets with seriously inadequate funding, only to be blamed for the resulting failure when these targets prove to be unattainable.

Lack of stability and certainty in CWIS funding

Section 21 of the Infrastructure Act requires the Secretary of State to “have regard to the desirability of maintaining certainty and stability in respect of Cycling and Walking Investment Strategies”, when considering whether to vary a CWIS. However the current arrangements have provided a marked lack of certainty and stability, for two reasons.

Firstly, as noted previously, only about a third (35%) of the original CWIS2 funding (i.e. £1.298bn out of £3.759bn) consisted of ‘dedicated’ (or ‘ringfenced’) funding. The rest came from other sources – some from it was to come from other DfT funding pots (e.g. Local Transport Plan funding, City Regions Sustainable Transport Settlement and the National Highways ‘Designated Funds’ programme), while other amounts were to come from other departments’ budgets (e.g. from the Levelling Up fund).

Whilst DfT officials have in practice managed admirably well to secure these additional funding pots, the shortage of ringfenced funding for local authorities to deliver their Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs, a key component of the CWIS) has seriously undermined the ability of many of them – particularly the shire county authorities – to plan and deliver high-quality walking and cycling networks, and indeed to recruit, train and retain the staff with the skills required to do this.

Secondly, we highlight Figure 4 of the NAO report, which highlights the stark reduction in the amount of dedicated funding (which is primarily capital funding for local authorities’ LCWIPs) that was made in March 2023. Ringfenced funding for the final two years of CWIS2 (i.e. 2023/4 and 2024/5) was cut by £233m, from £333m to just £100m. This has massively

exacerbated the sense of uncertainty which undermines the ability of local authorities to recruit, train and retain the capability to deliver the Government's cycling and walking ambitions.

To ensure stability and certainty of Cycling and Walking Investment Strategies in the future, and to ensure their objectives are deliverable. We believe the following is required:

- higher levels of investment
- sustained funding
- non-competitive bidding
- not funding through multiple small pots (35 different pots mentioned)
- adequate resourcing of evaluation and monitoring

July 2023