

## Written evidence submitted by Local Government Association

### Decarbonising the power sector

The Local Government Association (LGA), as the national voice of local government, welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Committee on the Active Travel Fund.

The LGA welcomed the Government's ambitious plan for walking and cycling, [Gear Change \(2020\)](#), and the £2 billion in funding that the Government committed to begin to realise its vision. This marked a step change in both attitudes and resources. The LGA also supports the creation and work of Active Travel England - to provide capability and capacity support to councils, to design and deliver high quality and high impact active travel schemes – and the new powers given to councils to enforce against [moving traffic offences](#) outside London. However, the LGA shares the National Audit Office's view that the Government's targets for 2025 and 2030 will be missed.

The LGA shares Government's ambition and councils are doing what they can to help deliver the national vision. However, there are three major challenges for councils to deliver against active travel targets and value-for-money, which need to be addressed. These are funding, inflexibility and integration across Government policy, and inadequate local powers.

### **Funding**

Funding remains the major challenge for councils to deliver on their own and the Government's ambitions for active travel. The Department [estimated](#) that a minimum of £4.4 billion is likely to be required to meet its cycling and walking objectives to 2025, and that a minimum of £5.5 billion is likely to be required to meet the objectives to 2030.

While we welcome the increased funding for active travel over previous levels, the quantum falls significantly short of the level the Department has identified will be required to achieve its targets.

Government has now cut £200 million of active travel funding from the previously promised allocations for the two-year period up to April 2025. Existing allocations have also been impacted by inflation in the construction sector. Inflation in construction is running at around 20 percent and has reduced the scale of schemes that can be delivered. There is a risk that this will reduce value for money, as larger, more expensive, but higher impact schemes – which also improve the business case for subsequent smaller schemes – may be pushed to the back of the queue in favour of smaller, less impactful schemes that can be delivered within budget.

Short funding cycles for active travel also impede councils from delivering on the Government's medium-term targets. Government provides councils with funding allocations for active travel on an annual basis. Moreover, funds have been allocated and disbursed too late. Councils have not been told how much they are set to receive in advance of the financial year, and even well into the financial year it is due to be spent. Officers have had to rely on informal verbal guidance in meetings with bodies such as Active Travel England for assessments of the funding they will receive. An informal October to October financial year for active travel funding has developed in some cases, making life difficult for councils who must set budgets ahead of every financial year. This issue is not unique to active transport funding.

Uncertainty over the level or duration of funding 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. Longer-term funding, allocated with appropriate notice, is vital to allow councils to develop and deliver a wider programme of works over multiple years, opposed to one or two-year programmes. Active travel infrastructure in all

areas, as part of local transport funding, should enjoy the same five-year investment periods as the strategic road and rail networks, similar to the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements (CRSTS) for mayoral combined authorities. This would enable a more strategic approach, deliver more transformative benefits and value for money, as well as more effective engagement with communities.

### **Inflexibility and integration across policy**

Currently, funding for active travel, buses, and electric vehicle charging points are each distributed to local authorities in distinct streams without the flexibility for local authorities to combine funding streams to deliver integrated travel plans.

Central government policy decisions on the cost of motoring also appear detached from its local transport policies. While the Government has strong ambitions for reduced vehicle mileage and modal shift to active and/or sustainable travel, the Government have frozen and recently cut fuel duty. There has also been no progress on replacing fuel duty revenues as a form of mileage fee for EVs, to incentivise a reduction in overall road mileage.

### **Lack of powers**

Councils are committed to improving accessibility for those with disabilities and ensure that they can equally participate in active travel. However, councils continue to face major challenges in ensuring that footways are clear of obstacles for those walking and wheeling, with those with disabilities continuing to take fewer journeys due to these obstructions. The progress on powers to ban or control pavement parking outside London, for example, has become stuck at consultation stage. The LGA would like to see a ban on pavement parking to help clear footways for easier walking and wheeling, and to prevent costly damage.

### **Integrated, place-based approaches**

Councils are eager to play their part in improving active travel and public transport options that will improve the health, wealth and fairness of their communities. Local leaders are best placed to understand what travel improvements are needed to meet the needs of place and their community. However, addressing the barriers that I have outlined above will be crucial to developing the capability, capacity, resources and flexibility for local government to get on and deliver.

Government has a clear path towards empowering councils to deliver a step-change in active travel through the funding model of the [CRSTS](#), which is currently only available to Mayoral Combined Authorities. The CRSTS have provided consolidated, long-term capital funding to 8 city regions across England through 5-year settlements from 2022/23 to 2026/27. The CRSTS model allows areas to design long-term transport plans, backed with the long-term funding certainty to deliver them. This facilitates a whole-place approach to increase active travel, as part of a single plan that improves the connectivity and reliability of public and active transport across an area. In addition to improving integrated planning and delivery, a consolidated local transport budget reduces the unnecessary burden on Government of administering numerous separate transport funding streams each year.

The Government should roll-out this approach to all areas, in line with the recommendations of the [National Infrastructure Commission](#). The funding settlements would be underpinned by refreshed Local Transport Plans, based on anticipated new DfT guidance for these plans, and a strong accountability framework based on the current CRSTS model.

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