

ATE0006

Comment [DS]: How?

Written evidence submitted Sustrans

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

Please note Sustrans has also responded to this inquiry as part of the Walking and Cycling Alliance, a group of seven organisations that work together to improve active travel across the UK.

We welcome the NAO report and share their 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 walking and cycling.

This joint submission focuses on what we believe to be the reasons for the near-certain failure to meet the CWIS2 targets and the importance of increasing our ambition and investing more in active travel for the next CWIS (CWIS3).

Inadequacy of the funding for CWIS2 to meet 2025 objectives

The NAO found investment of £7bn over the CWIS2 period was required to meet two of the four CWIS2 2025 targets and come close to meeting the other two (Figure 8 based on DfT modelling in 2022).

Yet despite this, 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. Spending just £3.8bn would effectively result in all four 2025 objectives being missed by a large margin.

The UK Government were aware from 2022 that their own CWIS2 objectives would not come close to being met, even before it reduced the funding further still, to around £3 billion, in a Written Ministerial Statement on 9 March 2023.

This included a stark reduction in the amount of dedicated funding (which is primarily capital funding for local authorities' Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans). Ringfenced funding for the final two years of CWIS2 (i.e. 2023/4 and 2024/5) was cut by £233m, from £488m to £250m (of which only £100m is capital funding). 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.

We strongly 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.

Impact of investment in walking, wheeling and cycling

Evidence shows the valuable contribution of active travel to the economy, public health, and the environment. The Department for Transport's current assessment is a 4.3:1 benefit to cost ratio putting it in the highest bracket of investment benefits.

As a low-cost mode of transport, active Travel plays a huge role in increasing choice for people to access the things they need, even more so during the current cost of living crisis. It is therefore critical to support interventions that help people walk, wheel or cycle. Active travel is good for the climate and air quality and has huge public health benefits. Ambition should therefore be much higher than we currently see.

Sustrans' Walking and Cycling Index has been assessing walking, wheeling and cycling in urban areas since 2014. In 2021, we found walking and cycling contributed £36.5 billion to the UK economy. In 2021, by keeping people active, walking, wheeling and cycling led to 138,000 serious long-term health conditions being prevented, took up to 14.6 million cars off the road, and saved 2.5 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions.

We strongly recommend that Ministers stick to, or even increase ambition for walking and cycling in tandem with increasing the investment required to reach these targets.

We believe the existing longer-term CWIS objectives to “increase the percentage of short journeys in towns and cities that are walked or cycled to 50% in 2030 and to 55% in 2035, and deliver a world-class cycling and walking network in England by 2040” are credible and achievable with the necessary investment provided within CWIS3.

Impact of specific active travel programmes and schemes

The NAO report shows the benefits of walking, wheeling and cycling are clear, but there isn't always the necessary evaluation of investment impact across England.

The Government has also recognised this issue and taken action to create Active Travel England, who will play an important role here, but clearly it will take time to obtain data. This approach will clearly only be successful with adequate funding to deliver greater ambition and robustly inspect and evaluate delivery.

While there are clear gaps in evidence of active travel investment from recent funding rounds for active travel, there is compelling, robust evidence of the benefits of investing in walking, wheeling and cycling. Examples are provided below.

Cycle City Ambition programme

The evaluation of the Cycle City Ambition (CCA) programme from 2013-18 found that, in all eight cities, city-wide cycling levels increased during the course of the programme. Scheme-level changes relative to control sites was mostly in the range +14% to +40%, but with one scheme showing an exceptional increase of +158%.

At least 1 million car trips per year were estimated to have switched to cycle trips as a direct result of CCA-funded infrastructure. This replaced over 6 million km per year travelled by car, saving nearly 2 kilotonnes of carbon dioxide per year.

[Cycling City and Towns Programme and Cycling Demonstration Towns](#)

The Cycling City and Towns programme was a Department for Transport funded programme of investment in cycling in 12 towns and cities from 2008-2011. Cycling trips increased in all 18 towns and cities.

From automatic count data, there was an overall 29% increase in the six Cycling Demonstration Towns (CDT) in five and a half years, ranging from 6% to 59%; and an overall increase of 24% in the 12 Cycling City and Towns (CCT) over three years, ranging from 9% to 62% across towns.

[The Local Sustainable Transport Fund evaluations](#)

The Local Sustainable Transport Fund supported a range of activities including reinforcing modal shift from the car to more sustainable modes, including increasing cycling and encouraging sustainable travel to work. Outputs included 33,600 new or improved cycle parking spaces, 780km of new routes and 340 new crossings. 88,600 people took part in led walks and cycle rides and 69,400 children had pedestrian training. They gave 62,000 adults the skills to repair bikes or serviced their bikes for them.

[Transforming Cities Fund](#)

The Transforming Cities Fund aimed to improve productivity by investing in public and sustainable transport infrastructure in English cities.

This process evaluation helped to document strengths and weaknesses of the approach set up to manage and deliver funding including recommendations for future funding.

We recommend that greater funding is released to ensure adequate monitoring and evaluation of investment in active travel to demonstrate outcomes and benefit for society. This should have an explicit aim to understand how schemes and programmes benefit people who are more likely to be disadvantaged to reduce inequality and how schemes benefit other outcomes including their contribution towards the economy and net zero.

[Active travel and the spatial planning system](#)

The NAO's report also revealed that the Department for Transport had identified limited and inconsistent consideration of active travel within the planning system as a key barrier to increasing uptake, and that out of the barriers identified, solutions to this were the least developed.

This mirrors Sustrans' findings. A report we released in 2022, '[Walkable Neighbourhoods](#)', found that too many new developments were being built in ways which embedded car dependency. This followed on from numerous studies from RTPi, Place Alliance, Transport for New Homes and others, which demonstrated that many new housing developments are being built in locations that are too far away for residents to walk or wheel to key services, and that infrastructure and placemaking within developments is also lacking.

Again, ATE's creation has the potential to contribute towards addressing this, especially now that it has become a statutory consultee for larger developments. However, their capacity and approach in this role needs to be kept under review: the report revealed that ATE has fewer than half the FTE planning personnel they estimated they would need.

ATE cannot address this issue alone: integration, by definition, works both ways. The current process of planning reform needs to provide local authorities with the mandate to consider

active travel and other health and environmental factors to a far higher degree. For example, there need to be clearer standards on walkable proximity to key services and amenities, to allow local authorities to consider them more explicitly. Our research found that only 16% of Local Planning Authorities had rejected a site for development with proximity being a major reason, despite clear research showing that, where journeys are short enough (typically below 800m, though this depends on the type of amenity), most people walk them.

There also needs to be language in the National Planning Policy Framework or future National Development Management Policies which promotes active travel infrastructure, rather than simply 'sustainable transport' (including, for example, electric cars). This should include protecting existing routes, providing permission in principle for new routes or developments to existing routes (as exists in Scotland), and requiring new developments to be linked to the existing cycle network.

More generally, the planning system needs – either through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill or through clear, unambiguous policy – to give proper consideration to the Government's net zero duties and frameworks, and to health inequalities and improving wellbeing, to mirror Levelling Up Missions 7 and 8. This would provide a proper framework within which active travel infrastructure could be considered.

We recommend that planning guidance in England is reviewed to ensure that new developments support mixed communities of housing, amenities and services. This would act to increase travel choice and reduce car dependency, increasing active travel. It would also create thriving communities and local economies and increase public transport.

Conclusion

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 meeting the Governments objectives for active travel in 2030, 2035 and 2040
- sustained multi-year funding across the CWIS3 period (2025-2030), including greater dedicated funding for active travel
- non-competitive bidding
- adequate resourcing of evaluation and monitoring
- integration of transport and planning by putting active travel and proximity at the centre of planning

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