

Written evidence submitted by Living Streets

Introduction

1. We are Living Streets, the UK charity for everyday walking. Our mission is to achieve a better walking environment and to inspire people of all generations, backgrounds, and disabilities, to enjoy the benefits of walking and wheeling.

2. Our campaigning led to the UK's first zebra crossings and speed limits. Now our campaigns and local projects deliver real change to overcome barriers to walking, and our ground-breaking initiatives such as the world's biggest Walk to School campaign enabling millions of people to walk. When walking is prioritised, we create better places to live and work.

Summary

3. Living Streets welcomes this opportunity to respond to the Public Accounts Committee call for evidence, ahead of its inquiry following the publication of the National Audit Office's (NAO) report, 'Active Travel in England'. We believe that to make an informed assessment of the current active travel landscape in England it is essential to:

- Understand the public benefits of investment in active travel,
- Assess the Department for Transport's (DfT) current progress against CWIS2 targets, and
- Identify potential approaches to improve progress against the targets set in CWIS2.

4. We recognise that a shifting economic landscape has presented additional challenges to public spending. However, the reduction in funding for active travel from £3.8 billion to £3 billion will have a substantial impact on DfT's ability to increase levels of walking and cycling. The level of funding set was already far below Government's own assessment of what is needed to meet its targets. Failing to deliver progress against the targets in the Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy is a significant missed opportunity.

5. Investing in active travel, walking in particular, is essential for better health and healthy ageing, to improve air quality, reduce congestion and to replace car use.

Understanding the public benefits of investment in active travel

6. It has been said before and needs to be repeated that the public benefits of investing in walking are undervalued. Walking accounts for 31% of all trips per person in England¹. Together with public transport, this is where most of the gains are to be made for reducing the impact of congestion on the economy, improving air quality and public health, and meeting the Government's decarbonisation objectives by replacing car use.

¹ National Travel Survey (2023). Table NTS0303.

Economy

7. Congestion costs the economy. In 2019, British people wasted 115 hours in congestion, costing the country £6.9 billion, an average of £894 per driver.² Evidence shows that investment in both infrastructure and behaviour change initiatives is needed to promote changes in travel behaviour³, in order to achieve the modal shift needed to lower this figure.

8. Shifting funding from new roads to more sustainable modes of transport delivers a high return on investment; the Department for Transport estimate this to be at least £4.50 for every £1 invested.⁴ Active travel contributed an estimated £36.5 billion to the UK economy in 2021, with a relatively modest investment from government when compared to other transport modes.⁵ Living Streets Pedestrian Pound report also shows how investment in better walking environments can increase high street footfall and can boost retail sales by 30% or more.⁶

Health

9. According to the Chief Medical Officer, “if physical activity were a drug, we would refer to it as a miracle cure”.⁷ Road transport is the largest contributor to poor air quality, and the Living Streets’ ‘is walking a miracle cure?’ report dives into this further. People walking, wheeling, and cycling took 14.6 million cars off the road in 2021. This saved 2.5 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions, prevented 138,000 serious long-term health conditions, and avoided more than 29,000 early deaths.⁸

10. According to modelling used in Public Health England’s air pollution project, the total cost of PM2.5 and NO2 combined between 2017 and 2025 is estimated to be £1.6 billion and total health costs resulting from an air pollution range between £8.5 billion and £20.2 billion a year. It has been calculated that the health benefits of increased walking and cycling could save the NHS £17 billion over a 20 year period (2012-31)⁹.

To what extent are DfT on track to meet CWIS2 targets?

11. The NAO report highlights that even the original funding allocation from the 2021 Spending Review had short-changed active travel. The original funding allocations were not even between 25% and 33% of what was required to meet targets set in CWIS2. Figure 8 of the report shows how only in the high funding scenario of £7billion (April 2021 to March 2025) did DfT estimate it would come close to achieving its 2025 objectives.

² INRIX Global Traffic Scorecard: [Congestion cost UK economy £6.9 billion in 2019](#) - INRIX

³ See for example, Song, Y., Preston, J., Ogilvie, D. (2017). ‘New walking and cycling infrastructure and modal shift in the UK: A quasi-experimental panel study’, *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice*, Vol 95, pp 320-333 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tra.2016.11.017>.

⁴ Department for Transport, *Investing in Cycling and Walking*, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/877511/cycling-and-walking-business-case-summary.pdf>.

⁵ Sustrans-commissioned YouGov Survey, 2019.

⁶ Living Streets (2018). ‘The Pedestrian Pound’, p.23. [pedestrian-pound-2018.pdf \(livingstreets.org.uk\)](#)

⁷ Department for Health and Social Care, ‘UK Chief Medical Officers’ Physical Activity Guidelines’ (2019), 3.

⁸ Sustrans. [Walking and Cycling Index 2021](#)

⁹ Jarrett, J., Woodcock, J., Griffiths, U. K., Chalabi, Z., Edwards, P., Roberts, I., Haines, A. (2012). ‘Effect of increasing active travel in urban England and Wales on costs to the National Health Service’, *The Lancet Review*, vol. 379, Issue 9832, pp2198-2205. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(12\)60766-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(12)60766-1)

12. Living Streets strongly welcomed the establishment of Active Travel England (ATE), but it is critical to ensure that the body has sufficient funding both internally and for wider dispersion to local authorities and other delivery partners. Without this, it will not be able to fulfil its potential. The focus on single year rather than multiple year funding has done active travel a huge disservice and compromised England's ability to deliver on its targets. Short-term funding delivered through multiple funding sources slows down the ability of local authorities and other delivery bodies to operate efficiently and strategically.

13. Short-term funding also hinders the ability of delivery bodies to fully assess and evaluate the impact of long-term projects, nor does it allow for longer-term or strategic planning in terms of vital active travel intervention work as well as infrastructure. We therefore welcome the ATE's focus of evaluation and monitoring and the role they will play in leveraging funds across other government departments. It is going to be vital in making the case for active travel going forward and ensuring a joined up, strategic approach.

14. Living Streets emphasise the barriers to successful delivery of active travel interventions listed in Figure 12, page 41 of the NAO report, which are reflective of our experience as a delivery partner in the sector.

Focus on pedestrians

15. By failing to give sufficient priority to active travel, DfT may risk undermining the Government's ability to meet longer-term commitments, such as those set out in Gear Change, the Transport Decarbonisation Plan and the Net Zero Strategy, in which UK government has pledged 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
- deliver a world-class cycling and walking network in England by 2040.

16. Living Streets believes Government targets should be even more ambitious, for example, aiming for 60% of children aged 5-10 to usually walk to school by 2030. This is an extension of DfT's own objective for the walking to school rate to reach 55% by 2025. Rates of children 5-10 walking to school have increased by just 4% from 2014 to 2020.¹⁰ However, current figures are now struggling to exceed 50%.

17. Evaluated outcomes from Living Streets' Walk to School programme 2022-23 show that this programme results in 26% fewer car journeys on the school run and increasing the number of primary-aged children walking to school by 23%. This demonstrates the ability of programmes aimed at supporting people to increase walking rates. However, these interventions require proper long-term funding if they are to support the government's targets.

What changes could be made to support better progress against the walking and cycling investment strategy targets?

A strategic approach to funding

¹⁰ DfT, National Travel Survey 2014, [National Travel Survey: Travel to School factsheet \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) puts the figure for the previous year at 46% compared to 50% in the most recent National Walking and Cycling Survey for 2020; [Walking and cycling statistics, England: 2020 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

18. We believe that funding opportunities should be centralised through ATE, to simplify the process and reduce examples of multiple funding sources for similar pieces of work. In its analysis, the National Audit Office found 36 different central government funds for active travel since 2016, and some with multiple tranches. Currently, funding comes from Department for Transport individual funding arrangements, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' 'Levelling Up fund', Active Travel England, Capability Funding and the Active Travel Fund, amongst others.

19. The time and effort spent preparing bids for often short one-year settlements, takes time and resources away from delivery. By making one body, such as Active Travel England, the central commissioning body it would be much easier to bid for, deliver, and assess the outcomes from active travel investment. This will be central to improving our understanding of which projects (infrastructure and intervention) have the potential to help us reach our active travel targets.

Prioritise maintenance of existing pedestrian infrastructure

20. YouGov polling commissioned by Living Streets found that 48% of adults over 65 would walk more if pavements were better maintained, meaning that a lack of investment in footway maintenance contributes to physical inactivity and social isolation. Poorly maintained footways also cause pedestrian falls; older people are more severely injured and impacted by falls outdoors (e.g. loss of fitness and independence). Living Streets' recently published report on pedestrian slips, trips and falls found that ongoing health and social care costs for the NHS and local authorities could be as much as £500 million annually. These figures show a clear case for investment in pavement infrastructure to prevent future costs to the taxpayer.

21. Between 2019-2021, a comprehensive assessment of the nation's footways was carried out by Gaist on behalf of the Department of Transport (DfT).¹¹ They estimated an average total cost 'of all maintenance operations that would need to be carried out to either address poor condition on a footway or to preserve the footway in its current condition and prevent further deterioration' in England (excluding London) of £1.695bn. Our research suggests that this investment would be returned within the length of a parliament.

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¹¹ Gaist (2021). Healthy Pavements (2nd edition): 2021 national assessment of footways. Gaist_Healthy-Pavements_Ed2_June-2021_v5-increased-quality-1.pdf (lcrig.org.uk)