

## Written evidence submitted by Liverpool John Moores University

### 1. ABOUT US

We are a research group from Liverpool John Moores University who have been doing various research on encouraging active travel using digital innovations. We have been working extensively with a wide range of stakeholders and partners, including two combined authorities, six local governments, a number of schools, NHS trusts, NHS bodies, businesses, social enterprises and active travel campaign groups.

We are submitting evidence, based on our experience and research findings, to highlight some possible shortcomings of the current Active Travel Strategy, and the challenges for the government to achieve its ambitions for active travel by 2025 *in our areas*<sup>1</sup>. These shortcomings and challenges can be categorized as follows:

- A possible lack of investment in wider public engagement elements has led to low public support for active travel infrastructure intervention.
- The current mechanism of funding (mostly capital with very limited revenue funding, and direct mostly to local authorities) does not encourage access to UK research and innovation, and also limits opportunities for wider participation of other stakeholders in delivering active travel initiatives.
- The narrow focus on only active travel infrastructure limits opportunities to link up with public transportation, and other related sustainability areas such as air quality, health, well-being, environment, and social equity.

### 2. SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

**2.1. A possible lack of investment in wider public engagement elements has led to low public support for active travel infrastructure.**

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<sup>1</sup> The evidence applies to the areas within our case studies only. We do not have data to generalize the observations to other areas.

It seems that only a very limited dedicated DfT funding for active travel is ring fenced to public engagement. For the period 2016/17-20/21, the total pot for both cycling/walking outreach and innovation was only £16.8 million (just 4% of the £386m ring-fenced for cycling and walking investment<sup>2</sup>). For the next CWIS2 period, the only outreach funding announcement that we are aware of is the £2.5 million to continue two existing outreach programmes<sup>3</sup>. This amounts to just 0.1% of the £2 billion funding of dedicated investment for active travel announced by the government<sup>4</sup>.

The lack of engagement funding has hampered progress of active travel infrastructure development and active travel encouragement in the Liverpool City Region, especially when combined with the fact that the infrastructure had been installed (temporarily) before any consultation was made. We provide two examples here.

The first example demonstrates the impact of not having proper public engagement. This was the implementation of some “pop-up” cycling and walking lanes funded by the government’s Emergency Active Travel Fund. Despite our data at 22 observation sites showing that these lanes have supported about 3.2 million walking journeys and 600 thousand cycling journeys in the first six months of 2021 (January-July 2021), some lanes have since been removed due to complaints from the public. This includes one lane in a busy active travel corridor (over 280,000 active travel journeys within 15 months). In this case, there was no revenue funding for an engagement campaign to raise awareness, and no revenue funding for the local authorities to communicate evidence on congestion and/or active traffic. We and the local authorities tried our best to communicate the positive evidence of the scheme, but without any outreach/engagement budget, there was very little that we could do.

The second example demonstrates the impact of having some (belated) public engagement to support intervention. This is the implementation of a segregated cycling lane on a busy road in the region, together with other interventions. This was done again without pre-intervention consultation. At the first post-intervention consultation, the local authority reported that they were absolutely inundated with objections – the local residents were not happy that they were not consulted, and they did not see any benefit of the intervention. Incidentally, on this location we had installed some sensors monitoring

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<sup>2</sup> Department for Transport (2020), Investment schedule in cycling and walking interventions - Assessment of the level of investment in cycling and walking, 2016 to 2019. [online at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/investment-schedule-in-cycling-and-walking-interventions>]

<sup>3</sup> <https://modeshift.org.uk/modeshift-news/government-announces-2-5m-funding-for-active-travel-including-500k-for-modeshift/>

<sup>4</sup> Department for Transport and Active Travel England (2020), Gear change: a bold vision for cycling and walking, [online at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cycling-and-walking-plan-for-england>]

traffic and weather as a part of our two other unrelated research projects. The local authority approached us for data and we helped them with data and analyses, which were then shown to local residents in subsequent consultations. The data showed that there was a 57% decrease in traffic flow post-intervention, and there was a significant increase in cycling usage, averaging at 17% daily. We were told that the data helped convincing local residents of the benefits of the intervention, and once the data has been shared with the public, they has not received any more objection. This positive change of outcome helped the intervention scheme to stay for an extended period.

**2.2. The current mechanism of funding (mostly capital with very limited revenue funding, and direct mostly to local authorities) does not encourage access to UK research and innovation, and also limits opportunities for wider participation of other stakeholders.**

The latest cycling and walking investment schedule<sup>2</sup> showed that most funding were distributed to local governments, most funding were capital, and none of the recipient was an innovation or research/development organisation. As mentioned above, total funding for both outreach and innovation was just 4% of the ring-fenced cycling and walking investment, and amounted to just 0.69% of the total £2.4 billion cycling and walking related investment in the period 2016-21<sup>2</sup>. This means that local governments were severely restricted in what they can do, and there was no room for innovative solutions (e.g. using AI or other digital innovations) to encourage active travel.

In our case, despite delivering six research projects to promote active travel, none of our project received any funding from the ring-fenced budget for cycling and walking. The local authorities explained to us that there was very little to no revenue funding to support innovation. The local authorities did work hard to shift some small revenue budget from other non ring-fenced pots, e.g. Transforming Cities Fund, to support some of the innovations we developed, e.g. an AI-powered dashboard to monitor active travel traffic across the Liverpool City Region and an AI-powered mobile app to encourage active travel. However, funding were very short-term (one-year duration maximum, with no continuity and prospect for extension), making it impossible to sustain the innovations beyond the funding period. Despite these severe restrictions in funding amount and period, those funding were still crucial for us and the local authorities to generate significant impact (e.g. providing data/analysis to assist the development of 57.5km green cycling/walking routes, reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by an estimated 334 tonnes in the period 2019-21, and the establishment of 11 pop up cycling/walking routes – see examples of our impact in footnote<sup>5</sup>). The impact would have been much

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<sup>5</sup> LJMU impact case “A decision-support system for transportation and logistics”, evaluated by the National

more widespread and sustained had there were dedicated active travel funding for research and innovation organisations like ours.

All other non-local government active travel stakeholders that we have been working with are in the same situation, including Living Streets whose DfT active travel outreach funding has ended. Many schools, hospitals, businesses, universities and social enterprises in our region are working on dozens of initiatives to promote active travel, at their own expenses, since there is no active travel funding for them. Since there is no DfT funding nor an overarching programme from the government, all these initiatives are being done in very small scale, mostly in silos, and thus generate relatively small impact. A co-ordinated funding stream to support research and innovations in active travel, perhaps delivered by Innovate UK or one of UK research councils, would significantly improve the situation.

### **2.3 The narrow focus on only active travel infrastructure limits opportunities to link up with public transportation, and other related sustainability areas such as air quality, health, well-being, environment, and social equity.**

Active travel may not always be the most practical ways to get around, especially for long distance travel. Thus it is important to link active travel with public transportation and other modes of transport to create a more comprehensive and sustainable travel solution for the residents. We believe this is the easiest way to encourage more active travel. Unfortunately, to the best of our knowledge, none of the existing cycling and walking investment as listed in the Investment Schedule<sup>2</sup> cover this. Our experience with local authorities confirms this. Due to the way funding have been provided in silos, there is little incentive or practical way for the Active Travel department to work with the Public Transportation department in a funded project to deliver integrated public transport/active travel solutions.

Similarly, active travel, as one area of sustainability, closely links with other areas of sustainability such as air quality, health, well-being, environment, and social equity. For active travel to maximise its benefits, it should be promoted as a part of a wider sustainability development. This, however, does not currently happen because of the way top-down funding is being formulated. Funding from government is being provided to local authorities for each mode of transport in silos, for example Access Fund, Active Travel Fund, Bikeability, Cycle Safety Fund etc. were provided specifically for active travel. In our experience, this forces local authorities to have a very narrow focus, concentrating on delivering only specific objectives such as renovating a bike parking space, then monitoring its usage to justify

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Research Excellent Framework 2021 (REF2021) as “world-leading” or “international excellence”. Online at <https://results2021.ref.ac.uk/impact/3f8d39d9-27cb-4e08-a2ff-ae15c278392d?page=1>

investment, without considering the wider impact of this bike parking space on sustainability and society.

In our experience, such a narrow focus also makes it more difficult for the active travel department of the local governments to collaborate with other organisations, who, sustainability wise, normally have a wider focus thanks to having a sustainability officer or sustainability team. As an example, in June 2023 around Clean Air Day we delivered keynote talks or presentations in three different conferences/events organized by an alliance of NHS trusts, a group of schools, and a public health organisation, each attracted a large number of important stakeholders. Although the events were about air quality or health, they all had a strong active travel element on their agenda and they all promoted active travel. Yet, to the best of our knowledge, none of the conferences were directly sponsored by Active Travel England (ATE) or the DfT nor part of ATE/DfT initiatives, and only one was attended by the active travel department of the local authorities.

We believe the impact of active travel investment would be much more significant if investment can be made in a holistic approach rather than being in silos for each mode of transport or each area of sustainability.

**July 2023**