

Scottish Government debate:

The promotion of walking and cycling as active travel in Scotland

Tuesday 31 October 2017

Summary

We warmly welcome the government's announcement of a doubling in the funding for active travel over the coming years. We have long campaigned for increased, sustained investment in active travel and believe this marks a step change in direction by the government which we hope will support a culture and behaviour change across Scotland towards a more healthy, active nation. However, we do have concerns that the debate around active travel is dominated by cycling over walking, despite the fact that a recent study shows 96% of journey stages carried out by active modes are actually done on foot. Walking is by far the most popular non-motorised form of transport and is accessible to almost everyone, so we would like to see at least a balance between walking and cycling in planning and investment for active travel. In addition, while we strongly support this increased focus on active travel, we believe it is important to remember that outdoor recreation is often the most practical way for many people to maintain and increase their levels of physical activity. Outdoor recreation also needs separate, ongoing investment to help avoid an over-reliance on tarmac as a path surface within greenspaces, and to ensure that leisure paths continue to be maintained and created, as they often don't fit the relatively narrow criteria for active travel funding.

Welcome investment in active travel

We very much welcome the commitment in the Programme for Government to double active travel funding to £80m/year. We have long campaigned for greater investment in active travel and since 2008 have supported the [call by the Association for Directors of Public Health](#) for government at national and local levels to commit 10% of their transport budgets to active travel. We believe this recent announcement is a clear step in this direction. We would like to see this increased active travel investment delivering a culture change across the country where walking is part of everyone's daily lives, as a way of spending time with friends or just keeping healthy, as a mode of transport or simply for the joy of being outdoors. We commend those local authorities who are already investing in active travel and trust that the commitment to keep the level of funding at £80m for consecutive years will ensure that momentum can be sustained. We note that [only 17 out of 32 local authorities](#) currently have an active travel or cycling strategy and would urge the remaining 15 councils to develop such a strategy as soon as possible to enable a long-term, sustained approach to planning for increased levels of active travel.

The value of walking

We firmly support investment in everyday journeys to work, school, shops or to access services, whether on foot or by bike. In 2015 [two-thirds of journeys under 3km were done by car](#), either as a passenger or driver. Given this high number of very short journeys still undertaken by private motorised vehicle, there is clearly huge potential for encouraging modal shift to more active modes, bringing benefits to physical and mental health, the environment, economy and our communities.

We would also like to highlight that the vast majority of journeys undertaken by active travel are walked. In 2015, [22% of all journeys in Scotland were walked and just over 1% were cycled](#). The higher incidence of journeys taken on foot is also highlighted in [a recent study](#) which demonstrated that walking accounts for 96% of all journey stages which are actively travelled. However we are also aware that cycling as a mode of transport tends to overshadow walking in discussions and debates on active travel and believe a rebalancing is required to recognise the fact that walking has a far greater impact in reducing motorised journeys and is worthy of at least equal attention.

In terms of social justice, the recent in-depth study noted above also demonstrated that people living in the most deprived areas were more likely to undertake journeys by active travel (and

predominantly by walking) than those in the least deprived areas. This helps to demonstrate that greater investment in walking will specifically benefit those living in areas of deprivation and will help to reduce inequalities. Such investment includes measures such as pedestrianisation of streets, removal of pavement clutter, enforcement of pavement parking and speed limits, maintenance of pavements and paths, and making planning decisions which put the needs of pedestrians first. The use of planning tools such as the [Place Standard tool](#) is recommended, to assess the quality of public spaces and show what aspects need to be improved.

The value of outdoor recreation

We would also like to take this opportunity to stress that active travel is just one aspect of an active, healthy lifestyle. There will always be journeys that cannot be undertaken by active modes, and we hope that the current focus on active travel will not result in further under-appreciation of the value of outdoor recreation as a way of keeping active and counteracting the impact of our mainly sedentary lifestyles. Many people are unable to walk or cycle to work, but they will instead go out for a walk at lunchtime or weekends, or take their dog out for a walk before work. These activities also need to be supported by investment, both in path improvements and in reducing knowledge barriers, such as by ensuring [Ordnance Survey maps include core paths](#) to help people find places to walk. More than 1,200 people have pledged support for our campaign on this topic this year.

According to the [National Walking Strategy](#), physical inactivity contributes to over 2,500 premature deaths in Scotland each year and costs the NHS in Scotland around £94.1 million annually. It is now recognised that lack of physical activity is a risk factor in a number of diseases from type 2 diabetes, stroke, heart attacks and some common cancers. While good progress is being made in addressing some health issues, having a population which is more physically active could decrease the risk of dying early by 30%. That also includes benefits to our mental health and wellbeing, especially if we are being active in the natural environment, with a 30% reduction in the risk of depression achievable too.

While the funding for active travel is welcome, we believe there is the danger of an inverse impact on the paths and infrastructure which are needed to support outdoor recreation. We know of cases where funding for paths can only be gained for active travel projects with the result that many well used paths are no longer being maintained as they do not fit criteria for active travel use. Conversely, some paths which double up as active travel routes are being resurfaced with tarmac or other hard surfacing materials to meet the requirements of active travel funding. This surface may be useful for commuter cyclists but negatively affects the amenity value of that path for walkers, being hard underfoot, making urban greenspaces less attractive and leading to a creeping 'urbanisation' of the countryside. In addition these surfaces mean many paths are impossible for horses to use, thus restricting further the safe places for riding.

VisitScotland recently estimated the [value to the Scottish economy of walking tourism](#) at £1.26 billion per year. It is therefore crucial that walking provision related to active travel does not overshadow the need to similarly invest in walking tourism. We have been pleased to welcome the [recent announcement](#) that £6m has been allocated to support rural tourism infrastructure including projects relating to rural paths, but with overall reductions in public spending, outdoor recreation is in need of much more support. By increasing investment in the separate, but highly complementary, fields of both active travel and outdoor recreation, the Government can go a long way towards achieving its aim of creating a more healthy, wealthy and active Scotland

Ramblers Scotland helps everyone, across Scotland, enjoy walking and protects the places we love to walk. We are the representative body for walkers in Scotland, recognised by **sportscotland** as a governing body of sport, and we are members of the National Walking Strategy delivery forum. We have over 6,500 members in Scotland with 54 local walking groups entirely run by volunteers.

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