

## **Debate on Active Travel, Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> January 2015**

There are many benefits from getting Scotland walking, including: more people will use active travel more often and will walk more for pleasure and for recreation; children will have safer routes to school and local facilities; older people will feel more connected with their communities; employers will have a healthier and more productive workforce; Scotland will reduce its use of carbon; and local economies will benefit from increased footfall.<sup>1</sup>

As the government itself recognises in its National Walking Strategy, above, the benefits of a population which walks (and cycles) more regularly are widespread and also widely accepted. Last year, a YouGov survey<sup>2</sup> found that 2014's top new year's resolution (51% of respondents) was to do more exercise and get fitter, while the second resolution (47%) was to lose weight. It's clear therefore that the public is also aware of the need to be more active, and the benefits this can bring.

Ramblers Scotland has campaigned for greater investment in active travel for many years. We believe that active travel is the best way of increasing levels of physical activity within our daily lives. However, there are many factors to overcome since successive administrations have contributed to making it more difficult for us to be active. Our towns and cities are designed in ways which positively encourage the use of cars, and there is a lack of safe infrastructure for walking and cycling to make these the easiest and most pleasant travel option for short journeys. Spending priorities have also been focused on maintaining the status quo, with current transport priorities continuing to support dualling of the A9 and A96 (at an estimated cost of £3bn each) and only then implementing the government's long term active travel vision<sup>3</sup>. Since 50% of all journeys in Scotland under 5km are undertaken by driving<sup>4</sup> (and 36% of journeys under 3km), there is much scope for increasing the proportion of journeys made by walking and cycling.

### **Policy background**

Over recent years, Scotland has made huge leaps forward in terms of creating the policy framework to encourage more active travel. For example, we have a Cycling Action Plan for Scotland, a National Walking Strategy, a national walking/cycling network within the National Planning Framework 3, a Physical Activity Implementation Plan and a 10-year goal of a more active Scotland as part of the legacy benefits from the 2014 Commonwealth Games. Ramblers Scotland has contributed to the development of these policies, and the government is to be commended for this progress.

However, despite this policy context, we still are not seeing a great shift in the levels of physical activity, and active travel modes. The government's national indicator to increase the proportion of journeys to work made by public or active transport has not changed since 2006 (in fact it has decreased from 31.2% to 30.7%)<sup>5</sup>. Likewise, physical activity levels have not shown a huge change, despite the apparent leap in statistics (which was actually caused by physical activity measurements changing from a recommended 30 minutes of activity 5 days per week, to 150 minutes per week). While 64% of Scottish adults met the new recommendations in 2013, only 38% met the previous recommended levels in 2012.<sup>6</sup>, so while we commend the actions taken by the government, there is still much to be done.

### **Funding issues**

<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government 2014 National Walking Strategy <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/06/5743>

<sup>2</sup> <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2014/01/03/new-years-resolutions-britain-looks-health-2014>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/sites/default/files/554346\\_334708\\_Active\\_Travel\\_210mm\\_p9\\_HR\\_20141126103050.pdf](http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/sites/default/files/554346_334708_Active_Travel_210mm_p9_HR_20141126103050.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/system/files/documents/statistics/j333840.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Scottish Government: Scotland Performs, National Indicator <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Performance/scotPerforms/indicator/transport>

<sup>6</sup> Scottish Government Scotland Performs, National Indicator <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Performance/scotPerforms/indicator/physicalactivity>

An increase in active travel modes and their resulting benefits for health, the environment and our communities will not be achieved without stronger, more effective and sustained leadership from the Scottish government, along with a realistic level of funding. Ramblers Scotland has endorsed the recommendation by the Association of Directors of Public Health<sup>7</sup> that 10% of all transport budgets, both local and national, should be spent on active travel. At a national level, Spokes has estimated that in recent years funding on active travel has shown a welcome increase but still remains between 1-2% of the Scottish government's overall transport budget.<sup>8</sup> Some local authorities have chosen to allocate higher levels of their budgets towards active travel, and have seen an increase in modal share as a result. For example, City of Edinburgh Council allocated 5% of its transport budget to active travel in 2012/13, with a year-on-year increase of 1% up to 10% of the total budget. The city has already seen increases in walking, cycling and public transport use, and its Local Transport Strategy sets targets to improve on these levels while reducing car use.<sup>9</sup> This should be emulated by other councils around Scotland, with government support.

### **The cost of physical inactivity**

It is now recognised that lack of physical activity is a risk factor in a number of diseases, including obesity. This has massive implications for the nation's health, and subsequent costs to the health service and in lost economic activity. The Scottish Obesity Route Map<sup>10</sup> estimates that obesity cost the Scottish economy £457m in 2007/8, much of which is avoidable. One of its four recommendations is that opportunities to expend energy in our daily lives, such as by walking and cycling, are increased.

### **Social justice and active travel**

Scottish government statistics show that while car ownership in Scotland continues to rise steadily, 30% of households still do not have access to a car<sup>11</sup>. In addition, 39% of women and 24% of men do not even have a driving licence. Spending on active travel is beneficial to all members of society, but it particularly benefits those who do not have the choice of travelling by car. In addition, around 2,000 deaths per year in Scotland are attributed to air pollution<sup>12</sup>, much of which is caused by traffic emissions. Investment in active travel would lead to a reduction in motorised traffic and therefore help to lower these harmful levels of emissions.

### **Lack of infrastructure**

For active travel to increase, many communities need improvements in the local path infrastructure, especially in lowland areas. There is a need for more safe routes to enable people to travel on foot or by bike to school, the shops or to the next village. The expansion in path networks is frustratingly slow, especially when individual landowners put a stop to new path development by refusing to reach any agreement. When the public interest in the development has been clearly demonstrated, it is inconceivable that a new road project would be held up for years by a single landowner in this way. Yet local authorities seem reluctant to use even the threat of their compulsory purchase powers to get paths built. It is imperative that the opportunity is taken within the forthcoming Land Reform Bill to address this situation by making it clear that compulsory purchase is an option in the toolkit to be used, and government commitment on this matter would be welcomed.

Ramblers Scotland is the representative body for walkers in Scotland and recognised by **sportscotland** as a governing body of sport. Our charitable aims are to promote walking, secure and facilitate access to land, and to protect the countryside. We have around 6,500 members in Scotland and 54 local walking groups, all run by volunteers.

For more information, contact Helen Todd, [helen.todd@ramblers.org.uk](mailto:helen.todd@ramblers.org.uk), telephone 01577 861222.

Ramblers Scotland, Kingfisher House, Auld Mart Business Park, Milnathort, Kinross, KY13 9DA

**President:** Dr Andrew Murray **Convener:** David Thomson

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<sup>7</sup> Association of Directors of Public Health (2008) Take Action on Public Health [http://www.adph.org.uk/downloads/policies/Take\\_action\\_on\\_active\\_travel.pdf](http://www.adph.org.uk/downloads/policies/Take_action_on_active_travel.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/B120pall.reduced.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> City of Edinburgh Council [http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20221/roads\\_and\\_transport/341/transport\\_policy](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20221/roads_and_transport/341/transport_policy)

<sup>10</sup> Scottish Government (2010) Preventing Overweight & Obesity in Scotland <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/302783/0094795.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/system/files/documents/statistics/f333840.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.scotsman.com/news/environment/delay-tackling-traffic-fumes-costing-scots-lives-1-3608923>