

## National Walking and Cycling Infrastructure

Proposed by Ramblers Scotland, Transform Scotland and Cycling UK Scotland

### Overall vision – national walking and cycling infrastructure

Scotland's path network is identified, mapped, expanded and promoted as a strategic national infrastructure project on a par with the public road network in terms of planning and investment.

This path network will provide rural and urban options for walking and cycling both for transport and leisure use, including tourism, and help to support a re-adjustment towards more sustainable, local economies, reduced inequalities and improved public health.

This development is based on a massive expansion and adjustment over a 10 year period (2021-2031) of the existing NPF3 National Walking & Cycling Network.

### Background

The climate and nature emergencies require an ambitious, transformative response from everyone, whether national and local governments, businesses or individuals. While Scotland as a whole has made good progress in reducing carbon emissions, the transport sector has failed to respond to the challenge and still accounts for 37% of greenhouse gas emissions. The Scottish Government has pledged to phase out the need for new diesel and petrol vehicles by 2032, but simply replacing these journeys with electric vehicles is unlikely to lead to any significant reduction in congestion and while climate emissions would reduce, some [air pollution](#) would remain due to friction from tyres and brakes. It is therefore clear that other options for sustainable transport are required. This is especially true for local journeys which comprise the majority of personal and business trips and which have the greatest potential for modal shift to walking and cycling. The government's transport statistics show that in [2018](#) 53% of all journeys made in Scotland were under 5km, with the median trip by car or van at 6.8km.

Active travel funding has increased over recent years but is still just over 3% of the overall transport budget. At the same time, development and maintenance of paths predominantly used for leisure or recreation have not received the levels of funding that active travel has enjoyed over previous years. Yet for many people leisure walking or cycling is the main way they are able to keep active, and the evidence is clear that there are huge benefits to health and wellbeing of being active in nature. Likewise, Scotland's tourism sector is looking towards more sustainable practices, and there are opportunities with improved infrastructure and promotion to build on the existing, strong track record of providing holiday experiences which are based around walking, cycling and other types of outdoor activities rather than further promotion of adventures based around private car use.

While it is too early to assess the ramifications of the current Covid-19 crisis, the changes required have resulted, among other things, in a massive shift in the way that people are living their lives with regard to transport. It's not yet clear whether this will result in any long term and permanent change in behaviour once the crisis has passed, but we have already seen a fundamental shift in the way people are adapting to the new circumstances. Working from home has become the norm for a large sector of the workforce with a reduction in commuting or business travel as a result. Also there have been many media reports about

people noticing how quiet, pleasant and safe their town and city centres are without the usual levels of traffic, with a [survey](#) highlighting that people had noticed the cleaner air.

In addition, the government's advice to take daily exercise has been taken up enthusiastically and people have been getting to know their local neighbourhoods on foot, showing the value of local paths and greenspace.

All this demonstrates that people are able to make massive adjustments to their way of life if they see the clear personal and societal benefits that will accrue, and that they respond to government requests which are based on evidence and national need. These factors suggest that there is an opportunity to make more permanent fundamental changes to the way we live our lives in the future due to the climate crisis, with the likelihood that these will be understood and accepted as necessary by a large proportion of the population. This is the underlying justification for this proposal

Scientists predict that we have a decade to make transformative change and respond to the climate emergency. We acknowledge there is already progress towards increasing levels of walking and cycling but this is too slow a response to the climate crisis. Therefore, **our proposal is aimed at making change happen on the ground through a step change in infrastructure expansion, to accelerate current progress with significant investment over the next 10 years**, which can then continue through smaller, incremental increases in following years. People will be more willing to make personal changes in the way they travel if the infrastructure is there to support them to travel safely and easily by active and sustainable modes.

Any response to the climate crisis needs to encompass both rural and urban transport. Rural communities have fewer choices about the way they travel and yet even short trips of up to five miles can be difficult if there is only one, possibly heavily-trafficked or narrow, road for all users. An example of how better rural walking and cycling infrastructure has improved local, regional and national trips is the offroad route parallel to the road between Newtonmore and Kingussie in the Cairngorms National Park. This is used both by young people to get to the high school in Kingussie as well as tourists travelling along the Speyside Way from Buckie to Kincaig and then using this path to continue to Newtonmore. We would like to see other towns and villages connected by similar separated routes. In addition, along with measures to improve rural bus services, electric bikes could revolutionise rural transport by enabling people to cycle hilly routes in poor weather – but only if there are safe routes to use.

### **Location and planning requirements for this proposed national development**

Infrastructure relating to walking and cycling is generally seen as local level development, but **we believe that the transformation in culture and behaviour that is required is so great that it needs to be led at a national level first**. In other words, the approach, leadership and funding are required strategically at a national and then regional level to support local authorities to deliver this change locally.

In order to deliver this transformation, we have suggested below a series of elements which could be phased for funding and delivery over the first 10 years of the NPF4 period. These different but related elements would cumulatively deliver our vision over the period 2021-2031. This is not an exhaustive list but we hope it gives a clear vision of what we are calling for. Planning permission would be required for any new infrastructure or substantial upgrade of existing paths.

### **A note on funding for this proposal**

Currently Scottish Government active travel infrastructure projects are mainly funded from Transport Scotland with match-funding usually provided from the local authority or national park authority. Outdoor recreation funding, however, comes directly from the local authority or national park authority budgets. We have therefore divided the actions below into active

travel and outdoor recreation/leisure projects, although our proposal is to develop a national Scottish path infrastructure for all users. There are likely to be economies of scale to be found through greater national coordination of these activities.

We suggest that the active travel elements of this project are predominantly funded by adjustments to the transport budget, and specifically the Scottish Government's trunk road and motorways budget over the next 10 years. We have long echoed the call from the Association of Directors of Public Health for 10% of all transport budgets at local and national level to be spent on active travel. Given the situation we are now in, we believe that even this funding ambition is not high enough. We are calling for phased annual increases of active travel funding over the next decade to go beyond 10% and by 2030 to aim for an allocation of up to 20% of transport budgets on sustainable transport (excluding investment in buses and trains) to bring infrastructure up to the required standard. The current funding for trunk roads in the 2020-21 budget is £749m but we propose a phased reduction in this budget to cover costs of road maintenance with a presumption against any new road construction or expansion projects, as recommended by the [Infrastructure Commission](#). The resulting funding which is freed up will be diverted to the active travel budget line.

In addition, paths which do not qualify as active travel routes, such as strategic long distance routes and upland paths as identified by Scottish Natural Heritage, should be funded by increased national budget allocation to SNH, and potentially by the creation of a Scottish Paths Fund to be administered by them or another delivery body for paths which are not viable to be funded as active travel routes.

## **(1) Rapid expansion of active travel infrastructure**

**1. Cycle lanes physically separated from traffic along arterial routes into all towns and cities** – A strategic project to give every city and town in Scotland safe separated (also referred to as segregated) cycle lanes along faster or busier main roads into and within cities to encourage a shift to cycling primarily for local functional journeys. This project should in principle look at reallocating the road space available to cars, rather than pushing cyclists and pedestrians into using the same space, and also include improvements to footways.

**2. Integrated network of local walking and cycling routes using quiet roads in each town and city** – Connected to the project above, a strategic project is needed to redesign Scotland's residential roads and neighbourhoods to make cycling and walking a priority rather than vehicles, and to create better neighbourhoods where people can live and thrive. Infrastructure must reassign priority to cycling and walking rather than the car and be appropriate for all ages and abilities to benefit from. This would include 20mph zones for all restricted roads in residential areas and pedestrianisation and other urban realm improvements.

**3. Increase in revenue funding** – local authorities struggle to maintain paths to a high standard. Any increased capital budget must be followed with a proportionate increase in the maintenance budget.

**4. Integration of walking and cycling with public transport** – a specific project is needed to integrate cycling and walking into longer journeys, and especially as part of everyday journeys, such as commuting as well as for tourism. This would include the development of safe walking and cycling routes to urban and rural bus and train stations along with secure bike parking at transport hubs. It would also include the creation of increased capacity for bikes on trains and the introduction of dedicated bike space on long distance buses.

## **(2) Rapid development of paths for leisure and recreation**

**1. Phased expansion of National Walking & Cycling Network.** The NWCN currently includes over 7,000km of paths and is comprised of three path datasets, the National Cycle Network, Scotland's Great Trails long distance routes and canal towpaths. Most of this network was already in existence before it was named as a national development in NPF3, but over the past 5 years links have been created along with upgrades and maintenance.

We believe this network should now be expanded to include the 21,000km of core paths within the next 3 years to ensure great promotion of the network as a whole, and by the end of 10 years it should expand to include the wider path network. This expansion process would firstly involve adding core paths to the existing NWCN dataset, and then working at a national level to audit the network, prioritising areas for maintenance and looking at gaps in the network. This work links to the Mapping Scotland's Paths element as outlined below.

**2. National Cycle Network (NCN) and other 'green route' improvement** – Related to the point above, currently only 27% of the NCN is on traffic-free routes, but investment in the NCN would increase this percentage and massively expand the network as well as creating more links between existing routes and connecting communities that are a short distance apart. This would enable many people in rural areas to make safer short journeys by bicycle or on foot.

**3. Mapping Scotland's Paths.** There is a fundamental need to identify all paths in Scotland in order to create a proper network and prioritise funding and maintenance, and also to improve people's knowledge of where they can find paths to walk or cycle. The NWCN mentioned above has started this process for three national path datasets but, at the same time, Ramblers Scotland is currently working with partners to create a mapped database of the complete path network in Scotland (including core paths, long distance routes as well as local paths which fit an agreed set of criteria), estimated to be 60-80,000km in length. In time, this publicly available mapped network will not only give people the information they need but can also be used as a basis for local promotion of routes, particularly in those areas where the need for greater levels of physical activity and investment in greenspaces is most urgent. While this project is currently funded through Ramblers Scotland's efforts, it could become a national priority and in time form the basis of a NWCN which includes all paths. It is envisaged that ground-truthing and auditing of the paths in the database can be carried out over time as a coordinated volunteer activity, led by Ramblers Scotland in partnership with access authorities and other voluntary sector bodies.

**4. Car free tourism.** Scotland is blessed with opportunities for outdoor recreation and walking in particular is already a popular activity for visitors as well as residents. However, much of this tourism is car-based, so we propose a project to focus on identifying where public transport routes and services could be boosted and promoted to encourage more people to arrive by public transport as well as basing their holiday in a centre and using public transport or active travel to get around. Likewise, many of the walking and cycling paths in this project would lend themselves to promotion as touring routes in the same way as the NC500 is currently being promoted for motor vehicles, although the hope is that the fashion for car-based promotions will reduce over time. For example, the NCN route from Campbeltown to Inverness is already promoted as the Caledonian Way but there are many other potential examples for local communities to develop.

**5. Upland paths.** Scottish Natural Heritage has [identified](#) 410km of upland paths which require upgrade, at a cost of £27-30m in capital investment. These paths are used for leisure and recreation purposes and are crucial for Scotland's tourism industry. It is

therefore important to stress that these paths are an important component of the national path network in Scotland.

### **(3) Investment in transition skills training and capacity building for transport planners and construction staff**

It is clear to us that local authorities and Transport Scotland do not currently have the institutional capacity to deliver a massively expanded network of walking and cycling routes, paths and related infrastructure. In addition, many transport staff who have been trained to build large infrastructure projects will need to be re-trained in delivery of walking and cycling infrastructure. We estimate that this process can be prepared for immediately to get underway as soon as NPF4 is approved, and be boosted by extra investment over 1-3 years until the workforce is at the right level.

### **(4) Other related measures**

Currently active travel funding is supporting a wide range of behaviour change projects under the Smarter Choices, Smarter Places umbrella, as well as projects encouraging young people to walk or cycle to school, including cycle training. In addition there are a plethora of small scale projects relating to bike hire schemes, cycle loans, etc. We would envisage that all projects of this type would continue and expand to support the public's modal shift.

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## **Wider policy context to this proposal, response to the questions posed by the Scottish Government in NPF4 documents**

### **Addressing climate change**

- Transport emissions need to come down in line with other sectors' emission reductions.
- Proportion of short journeys taken by walking and cycling needs to increase.
- Proportion of single occupancy car use should be targeted with incentives for those who share journeys.
- Walking/cycling routes should link to public transport hubs, and bike carriage should be available on long distance bus routes, with increased storage capacity on trains.
- Support is needed for low-emission delivery vehicles and cargo bikes, especially for final stage of deliveries in urban areas.
- Use of e-bikes for longer personal trips should be supported, including installation of charging points for cycle touring opportunities.
- This development will support tourism focussed on promotion of low-carbon options, such as staycations, walking and cycling routes/holidays, rather than motor-based touring.
- Greater use of walking and cycling for functional trips would lead to more support for local shops as people avoid out of town shopping centres, helping to rejuvenate town centres.

### **Supporting quality of life, health and wellbeing**

- Providing realistic options for active travel as a first choice can lead to higher levels of physical activity and improvements in health.
- There is evidence of benefits to mental wellbeing of being active in nature.

- Any new housing developments should be at walking distance from schools, jobs, services and greenspaces, with safe paths and routes built in from the start.
- Local food producers should be able to sell their produce in farm shops or local towns, leading to a re-establishment of small scale markets.
- Rural tourism / eco tourism businesses will be boosted by all-year-round Scottish and other UK tourism.
- Investment in paths and greenspace leads to improved quality of the public realm, including in areas of deprivation.

### **Enabling development and investment in our economy to benefit everyone**

- Walking and cycling routes by their nature tend to be small scale and localised, which means that, unlike for many large transport infrastructure projects, the skilled labour force required to build and maintain this infrastructure is likely to be locally-based, with investment bringing local economic benefit.
- We foresee the potential for revitalising local economies with small scale businesses and industries supplying regional and local needs through more localised supply chains. Economies of scale can only work when there is growth which is unrestricted by geography or environmental factors, and this is no longer the case.
- More small-scale industry and businesses will require workers who live locally and buy their goods locally, reducing the carbon footprints of goods and production.
- We are encouraged by the [plans](#) in Paris to create a '15-minute city' whereby local shops, schools and services are within a 15-minute walk and believe this would be a good model for Scottish cities which are already on a smaller scale than Paris.
- The return on investment in walking and cycling interventions is much higher than for roads, with [studies](#) showing the cost-benefit ratio can be as high as 1:13.

### **Improving, protecting and strengthening the special character of our places**

- The placemaking agenda encompasses both green and blue infrastructure and includes investment in initiatives such as: nature networks; improvements to the quality of urban greenspace and woodlands; and improved and promoted paths along our coasts and between and around our communities, reaching into the wider countryside.
- There is [evidence](#) that the more people engage with the outdoors, the greater their understanding and commitment to the environment becomes, in terms of more sustainable activities such as recycling and environmental volunteering. This applied to all socio-economic groups and implies that people will respond to opportunities to get outdoors by demonstrating more pro-environmental behaviour.

### **Planning and building infrastructure to realise our long term aspirations**

- The climate emergency and nature crisis give us an opportunity to make a break with current patterns of behaviour in planning and infrastructure and create ambitious, transformative projects. While the current Covid-19 crisis is devastating, it does demonstrate that people respond to calls to dramatically change behaviour when there is a clear need.
- The provision of good quality walking and cycling infrastructure is required in order to move people away from the predominance of private car use.
- For longer journeys, paths need to connect to public transport routes, and buses in particular have a strong role to play in the short to medium term, given that new rail infrastructure takes time to build.

### **National policy context**

We believe our proposal would particularly help to deliver the following outcomes, strategies and policies:

### **Sustainable Development Goals**

- **SDG3** good health and wellbeing
- **SDG9** – industry, innovation and infrastructure
- **SDG10** – reduced inequalities
- **SDG11** – sustainable cities and communities
- **SDG13** – climate action

### **National outcomes**

- We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe
- We value, enjoy, protect and enhance our environment
- We are healthy and active

### **Selection of relevant policies and strategies which this proposal will align with / help deliver**

- Environment Strategy for Scotland
- National Transport Strategy
- Active Scotland Outcomes Framework
- Public Health Priorities
- National Walking Strategy and Cycling Action Plan for Scotland
- Recommendations of Infrastructure Commission
- Place Standard

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