

Sustrans Cymru

Submission of evidence to the National Assembly Economy, Infrastructure & Skills Committee post-legislative scrutiny of the Active Travel (Wales) Act (2013)

February 2018



About Sustrans Cymru

Sustrans Cymru is the charity that makes it easier for people to walk and cycle in Wales. We work for a Wales with happier, healthier people; greener, better local environments; and stronger economies and communities. With bases in Aberystwyth, Bangor, Cardiff, Ruthin, and Swansea; our behaviour change, built environment, policy and communications, volunteer teams work across Wales to help implement the Active Travel Act.

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Summary

Sustrans Cymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to the National Assembly Economy, Infrastructure & Skills Committee's Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 post-legislative scrutiny.

Having led the civil society campaign for the introduction of the Act, Sustrans Cymru was pleased when the National Assembly passed legislation in 2013. Whilst the Act has been a positive development, Sustrans Cymru believes its implementation has failed to deliver the level of ambition originally promised. Further, we would caution that whilst the Act is welcome, the effects of the legislation will be limited unless Welsh Government tackles Wales' overreliance on the car.

Sustrans Cymru recommends that Welsh Government re-asserts its support for the Act by providing appropriate political leadership and funding, and boosting the capacity and capability of professionals to deliver.

Further, we would recommend that Welsh Government places modal shift at the heart of its transport agenda, and uses the new Welsh Transport Strategy and the review of active travel funding as two vehicles for driving forward a step change in how Wales travels.

How far the stated objectives of the Act have been achieved

Introduction

The Act has a broad, three-party purpose: the mapping process; enhancing provision and giving due regard; and the wider promotion of active travel journeys.

On **mapping**, whilst Welsh Government and local authorities are implementing the letter of the law, Sustrans Cymru remains disappointed at the quality of implementation and the extent to which public bodies are following the spirit of the law. On **enhancing provision and ensuring due regard**, we are content that some progress is being made, however we would caution that without a concerted effort this progress will become isolated examples of good practice rather than common practice. Finally, on the **wider promotion of active travel journeys**, whilst some work has been undertaken the extent to which Welsh Government is prioritising active travel in both spending decisions within transport, and beyond the wider mapping process is poor. Sustrans Cymru maintains that overall revenue funding for behaviour change interventions is insufficient.

Mapping process

This section of the Act should be more than a mapping exercise. The Existing Routes Maps (ERMs) and the Integrated Network Maps (INMs) process is an opportunity for local authorities to engage with communities, develop a vision for active travel, and lay out a strategic plan aligned with other council priorities. It should be an opportunity for local authorities to consider how they can use transport planning as a tool for implementing the Well-being of Future Generations Act; tackling issues like air pollution, physical inactivity, obesity and other public health concerns; congestion; road safety; community cohesion, isolation and loneliness; prosperity and retail vitality. Local authorities should view the INM as one of a number of important corporate documents alongside their corporate plan/programme for government, LDP, or economic development plan. In this respect, the Act should be 'more than a map'.

Despite some examples of good practice, local authorities have largely failed to see this process as 'more than a map'. Whilst we are content that local authorities have followed the letter of the law, the spirit of the Act and the original promise of the Act have largely not materialised. Cardiff and Wrexham are two examples of authorities that have aligned INMs to corporate priorities.

Why does this matter? On a policy level, local authorities risk misusing an important weapon in their armoury: active travel contributes to at least five of the seven well-being goals. On a delivery level, without a strategic vision for local route networks, current scheme prioritisation methods do not provide an effective forward planning process.

The cause of this problem is complex and Sustrans Cymru is clear that the cause does not lie with any one particular body. There are four factors that we believe contribute to the problem: political leadership; insufficient capacity; unpredictable and insufficient funding; and insufficient capability; which are all expanded upon below.

Political Leadership

Despite the passage of the Act, and the will on the part of some Welsh Ministers to implement it effectively, overall active travel has not been afforded the kind of political attention it has enjoyed in other parts of the world. Experience shows that to deliver change, we need political leaders who are prepared to personally lead this agenda, challenge business as usual, paint a positive vision for the future and enable delivery bodies to meet their obligations. In Scotland, London and New York City, we see leaders who have articulated a vision, crafted a strategy and have been hungry for results. Here in Wales, that kind of leadership is beginning to be demonstrated by the new administration in Cardiff council. A more assertive approach at a political level will drive this agenda

forward which in turn would stimulate greater buy-in and results from the civil service (beyond the small team working on active travel) and within local government, political leaders and senior officers. We would cite as an example the political leadership provided by Welsh Ministers in the implementation of the Waste (Wales) Measure (2010) and municipal waste targets as an example of what can be achieved.

Insufficient capacity

Within Welsh Government there is insufficient staff resource to implement the Act. Our understanding is that there are just 2.5 FTE within the civil service working on the Act and allied active travel matters. Similarly, within local government, there is insufficient staff resource with very little capacity at a senior level for walking and cycling.

Insufficient funding

Welsh Government has failed to provide appropriate funding streams to implement the Active Travel Act. Over the last 10 years capital budgets for transport have been around £300m per annum (equating to broadly £100 per capita per annum). Welsh Government understands that funding for active travel schemes was usually between £12-20m, an average of 5% of the total budget per year, or £5 per capita per annum. However because Welsh Government fails to capture investment data accurately, our estimate is that spend could be as low as £3 per head per year.

In Scotland, the investment picture is considerably better with around £16 per head per year. In 2016 the Mayor of London made a commitment to invest in 'record levels' in cycling which is expected to equate to £17 per capita per annum, an amount similar to that in Denmark and parts of the Netherlands. In Copenhagen city, investment levels on cycling have been more than £35 per capita per annum since 2004, resulting on a 41% modal share for cycling in the city.

Sustrans' Bike Life report which was published last year was the UK's biggest assessment of cycling in seven major UK cities including Cardiff. Our research found a considerable difference in spending levels across the seven cities ranging from £25 per capita in Bristol to just £4 per capita in Cardiff. The research also found overwhelming public support for investment, with 79% of those sampled by ICM in Cardiff liking to see more money spent on cycling. Bike Life went on to highlight the return on investment spending on cycling creates. Current spend in Cardiff delivers a £28m total benefit to the city including a saving for the NHS of £699,000 annually (equivalent to the average salary of 30 nurses); and taking 11,008 cars off the capital's roads each day (equivalent to a 33 mile tailback).

We have warmly welcomed the statement from the Cabinet Secretary for Economy & Transport to increase the 'aggregate' spend on walking and cycling. We have recommended to government that it increases investment to £10 per capita per annum for the financial year 2018/19, rising to £15 by 2019/20 and £20 by 2020/21. £20 by 2020 would not only provide the certainty and sustainability that delivery bodies including local government require, but would also send a strong political signal that the Welsh Government is truly committed to delivering the Active Travel Act.

As with any sector of the economy, transport needs certainty and predictability that enables forward-planning and instils confidence and ambition. At present, the allocation and delivery of active travel funding has made investment hugely challenging. Without a mandate of future funding streams aligned to the Active Travel Act, local authorities have little incentive to consider the development of a strategic programme for active travel schemes, and prioritise them effectively. The lack of multi-year funding has created a situation whereby smaller, 'shovel-ready' schemes are usually the only schemes to progress, often at a standard below the Design Guidance. This in part explains why very few landmark schemes have progressed over the last few years.

Notwithstanding the INM process, historic allocation of funding has tended to be piecemeal without any real alignment to a set of strategic objectives directed by Welsh Minister or any assurance that the final delivery of schemes will meet standards.

In addition to recommending an increase in investment, we have also recommended to Welsh Government that the budget is moved onto a five-year cycle and that firmer criteria are developed for the allocation of funding.

Insufficient capabilities

Whilst Welsh Government has provided some resource to support local authorities and industry to deliver the Act (such as the Design Guidance, guidance on funding applications, support on the INM drafting process) this level of support falls short of what is needed. We compare the situation regarding the Active Travel Act with that of the support provided by Welsh Government to the construction industry when it created new national standards for sustainable buildings and changed Building Regulations. Professionals need to have a better understanding of the policy agenda and a greater technical understanding of how schemes should be delivered. Issues include: Planning and Development Control processes, Road Safety Audit, and links to statutory approaches outlined in the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges. Often, because the Act guidance is viewed as subordinate to these well-established approaches, there is little evidence of either the desire or ability to achieve the required step change in approach that is needed to properly implement the Act.

It remains to be seen the extent to which the mapping process will make a transformative contribution to new and improved active travel routes and related facilities needed to create integrated networks of active travel routes and related facilities in local authority areas.

Enhancing provision and giving due regard (in preparing transport policies and under the performance of functions under the Highways Act (1980))

We are content that some progress is being made in the implementation of these provisions of the Act; however we would caution that without concerted effort this progress will become isolated examples of good practice rather than common practice.

At a policy level, Sustrans Cymru has worked with Welsh Government to revise WelTAG and we are currently in dialogue with officials regarding the refresh of Planning Policy Wales (PPW). However, other strategic policy documents, like the Programme for Government and Prosperity for All, whilst making strong reference to active travel, fail to recognise and appropriately prioritise active travel as an agenda that will deliver wider government objectives (for example, town centre regeneration, carbon reduction and improved air quality, public health). At a senior-level, both within Welsh Government and local authorities, there is still a disappointing lack of awareness and understanding of the Act and the wider active travel agenda. Walking is often seen as a lesser-order problem that does not require government intervention, whereas cycling can be seen as a leisure or sporting activity, rather than a mode of transport. We are pleased however that the Future Generations Commissioner has prioritised sustainable transport and active travel as primary work stream for her office.

At a delivery level there exists a 'practice chasm', a gap between national policy and local delivery. Increasingly, policy documentation and strategic plans take account of the Active Travel Act in principle, but the reality of delivery timescales, lack of awareness among delivery staff and reluctance to innovate means that there is still little evidence of policy being put into practice on a wide scale. Application for funding of active travel schemes via programmes such as the Local Transport Fund and Safe Routes in Communities require authorities to consider the Act and this is reflected in scheme

submissions in terms of links to policy. However, scheme implementation often falls short of the required standards, particularly on innovative approaches, and this is not reflected in reduction or removal of funding approvals which is required to change the status quo. This is exacerbated by weak monitoring of scheme implementation. Without punitive measures to address this gap, it is unlikely the required step change in approach will be achieved within current funding systems.

Promotion of active travel journeys and securing of new and improved active travel routes and related facilities

Regarding the wider promotion of active travel journeys, whilst some work has been undertaken, the extent to which Welsh Government is prioritising active travel in both spending and policy decisions within transport, and beyond the wider mapping process is poor. Sustrans Cymru maintains that the level of Welsh Government support for behaviour change programmes is insufficient.

The Wales and Borders rail franchise procurement process (and the development of a South Wales Metro) represents a missed opportunity to better integrate walking and cycling with public transport. Integration between active travel and rail is often wrongly confused with bike storage on trains. The issues impacting integration are much broader and include the accessibility of stations for pedestrians and cyclists; the placement of a station within its wider physical environment (wayfinding, placemaking); safety and security measures; bike storage and allied facilities at stations; disabled access etc.

It is our view that Transport for Wales under-specified requirements for active travel in the bidding process, leaving a gap that has been filled by franchise bidders, local authorities and third sector organisations like Sustrans Cymru. The franchise could have been an opportunity for Welsh Government to clearly state its vision for an integrated active travel/rail network.

There is still an opportunity for Welsh Government to consider key walking and cycling routes as part of Wales' national infrastructure base, alongside motorways and trunk roads, broadband, energy distribution, flood management. It is for this end that we recommend that the National Cycle Network and other walking and cycling routes of strategic importance be included within the remit of the National Infrastructure Commission for Wales and the National Development Framework for Wales. Such an approach would ensure a more strategic approach to funding regionally important walking and cycling routes (such as the proposed Cycle Superhighways in Cardiff, or the travel to work corridors around the Deeside Enterprise Zone).

In our model of change, Sustrans Cymru believes there are three components to promoting active travel: infrastructure, individual behaviour change, and community engagement. Whilst Welsh Government investment in infrastructure is insufficient, the amount of resource it provides to support individual behaviour change and community engagement is even poorer.

Sustrans Cymru is funded by the Welsh Government to deliver our Active Journeys programme which works with schools across Wales to create a culture that makes it easier for children to walk, scoot or cycle. Supporting Schools in all 22 local authorities, we provide graduated interventions that help to build the skills, confidence and awareness that make active travel for everyday journeys a reality. Our work typically increases the levels of active travel by 9% after one year of engagement. Whilst we are proud of the impact this programme is having, we are conscious that we are engaging just 8% of schools in Wales. Further, with the end of our Cymru Active Travel Challenge project (focused on workplaces) there is no Welsh Government funded workplaces programme in Wales. This is despite Welsh Government's national strategy *Prosperity for All* stating a commitment to work with and

support the business community to improve the health and well-being of workers and help people to remain in employment.

Our Better Places programme is based on approach which combines placemaking with Complete Streets (a similar example can be seen in the Mayor of London's Healthy Streets programme). By involving residents and local communities in the street design process, Better Place is able to deliver low-cost physical interventions that improve the street scene, and improve walking and also cycling provision. Sustrans Cymru is delivering a number of projects as part of our Better Places programme, but would welcome Welsh Government support to ensure that, like in London, this approach is seen as an important vehicle for delivering community regeneration.

The effectiveness of subordinate legislation and guidance made under the Act

Sustrans Cymru considers the Design Guidance to be generally be good, however we would observe that we have yet to see any schemes that have been developed from start to finish using the Design Guidance. Local authorities have generally not been good at innovative design measures, except in Cardiff. One continual challenge has been the extent to which local authorities have wanted to reduce traffic capacity. It is still the norm that the Design Guidance is used in a way which 'fits' walking and cycling around space for cars.

Action which should be taken to improve the effectiveness of the Act and its implementation

Our mantra is better implementation and increased investment. Both are urgently needed and both are mutually dependent.

Action requiring ministers to report on active travel

Welsh Government produces an annual report documenting progress made in delivering the Act. The annual report is laid as a document before the Assembly and has been accompanied by a Written Statement from the minister. It is our view that this does not provide Assembly Members sufficient opportunity to scrutinise progress, and that Welsh ministers should commit to holding an annual debate of no less than one hour during government time.

The effectiveness of wider active travel policy in supporting delivery of the Active Travel (Wales) Act

The effectiveness of the Active Travel Action Plan

The Active Travel Action Plan should be a vitally important document that drives the implementation of the Act. However, the current content and use of the Action Plan is insufficient for this purpose. There is little political scrutiny of the Action Plan, SMART objectives and milestones are lacking, ownership can be confused. Sustrans Cymru does not recommend a lengthy redrafting exercise at this stage, however we would welcome the establishment of a national set of targets for walking and cycling based on evidence where latent demand for walking and cycling can be released.

The operation of the Active Travel Board

Whilst the Active Travel Board provides a useful forum to share information, the way the body is currently constituted is not fit for purpose. We also note calls for an active travel commissioner for Wales and observe the degree to which similar roles are working in other territories. In light of this, we would recommend that the Active Travel Board is replaced with a new National Advisory Board for Active Travel, which comprises of Welsh Government, local government, other transport sector stakeholders (such as regional transport authorities, Transport for Wales), NGOs, and academics/experts. The Board should have a publicly appointed chair, have a clear terms of reference, with papers published online.

Wider sustainable transport agenda

Despite the introduction of the Active Travel Act, transport policy in Wales is still largely driven by the car. In a Wales designed around the car, those that are unable to afford to own or run a car risk being excluded socially and economically. With more cars on the road, we know that levels of air quality are worsening and congesting is increasing, generating greater negative impacts on our health, economy, communities, and environment. There is a danger that new technology like EVs and major infrastructure projects like the South Wales Metro will be seen as silver bullets, but our concern remains that without a fundamentally different approach to the car, we will continue to entrench problems that harm the well-being of future generations.

Sustrans Cymru advocates a people-centre approach to transport policy. One where people are able to access shops, schools, healthcare and work within a short distance on foot or by bike. Where that is not possible, quality public transport including buses, should be the modal choice but properly integrated with walking and cycling routes. For some, using the car for shorter journeys will remain necessary. Urban shift workers and those in large parts of rural Wales are two examples. But for necessary car journeys, EVs fuelled by renewable energy should be the choice.

Welsh Government and all political parties need to grasp this challenge, and lead a step change in how Wales travels. The forthcoming Welsh Transport Strategy offers an opportunity to place a people-centred approach that delivers modal shift at the heart of transport policy.

