

Enterprise and Business Committee
Active Travel (Wales) Bill
AT 2 - Welsh Local Government Association

NAFW ENTERPRISE & BUSINESS COMMITTEE – Evidence on the Active Travel (Wales) Bill

March 2013



WLGA • CLILC

INTRODUCTION

1. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the 22 local authorities in Wales, the three national park authorities and the three fire and rescue authorities.
2. It seeks to provide representation to local authorities within an emerging policy framework that satisfies the key priorities of our members and delivers a broad range of services that add value to Welsh Local Government and the communities they serve.
3. The WLGA welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the Enterprise and Business Committee's call for evidence on the general principles of the Active Travel (Wales) Bill. Comments are offered against the eight questions posed by the Committee.

Is there a need for a Bill aimed at enabling more people to walk and cycle and generally travel by non-motorised transport? Please explain your answer.

4. There is considerable scope within existing legislation for local authorities to undertake works that promote active travel. To date, local authorities and Regional Transport Consortia have played a pivotal role in putting in place the existing network of cycling and walking routes which has resulted in more people travelling by non-motorised transport.
5. However, there is growing recognition in local authorities of the need for more action to address increasing risks faced by our communities – be that in relation to climate change, rising levels of obesity, reducing employment opportunities or various forms of poverty and inequality.
6. This legislation, if properly resourced, could support a strategic and targeted approach to the development of networks to facilitate and encourage walking and cycling, thereby contributing to wider efforts to mitigate the above risks. A key question in this respect is whether promoting active travel represents better value for money than other possible measures. Provided this assessment has been made, and with the crucial caveat about an adequate level of resourcing, the WLGA believes there is a need for the Bill. Without legislation to require action, the chances of additional funding being prioritised in this area over the coming years are slim.

What are your views on the key provisions in the Bill, namely –

- **the requirement on local authorities to prepare and publish maps identifying current and potential future routes for the use of pedestrians and cyclists (known as “existing routes maps” and “integrated network maps”) (sections 3 to 5);**
7. It is our understanding that the details of what is to be mapped and the design of the maps will be contained in guidance. Comprehensive guidance will be the key to the production of good quality mapping which will enable users of the maps to interpret the information easily across the different local authority areas.
 8. WLGA understand that the Welsh Government will make funding available to local authorities to enable them to prepare and publish the maps. The costs associated with the production of maps will in many cases involve the costs of carrying an audit of existing routes against published design guidance to ascertain whether the routes are suitable for active travel use. For example, for the preparation of the Cardiff cycling map the audit cost £10,000 and production of a map £5,000 with printing costs additional.
- **the requirement on local authorities to have regard to integrated network maps in the local transport planning process (section 6);**
9. The integrated network plan will form part of the suite of plans that local authorities have regard to in the discharge of their transport planning duties. It will be important that decisions about highways, rail, bus services and active travel are looked at comprehensively and that networks develop in a complementary way. Equally, it will be important that local transport planning influences, and is influenced by, wider development plans for the geographic area.
- **the requirement on local authorities to continuously improve routes and facilities for pedestrians and cyclists (section 7);**
10. A note of caution is advised with regards to the implementation of this requirement to continually improve. The publishing of an integrated network map could raise expectations of users when the reality is that the continuous improvement may be slow, subject to the availability of funding. Failure to deliver within a reasonable timescale, will no doubt, be perceived by users as a failure of local government.
 11. Also local government is concerned about the push for additional routes to create an integrated network when there are inadequate resources for the maintenance of existing routes. The maintenance of existing and future routes will not be maintenance free and the responsibility of this will fall to local authorities.

- **the requirement on highway authorities to consider the needs of pedestrians and cyclists when creating and improving new roads (section 8)**

12. Local government welcomes this proposal and would agree that this could assist with the delivery of the network. However, it also recognises that the incorporation of walking and cycling routes is not always possible as part of a new road scheme so the requirement to 'consider' is therefore appropriate.

Have the provisions of the Bill taken account of any response you made to the Welsh Government's consultation on its White Paper? Please explain your answer.

13. Much of the detail which will concern local authorities will be within the delivery and the design guidance so without sight of this guidance it is difficult to answer this question.

To what extent are the key provisions the most appropriate way of delivering the aim of the Bill?

14. The provisions of the Bill should increase the uniformity of active travel routes across Wales which will be of benefit to the users. However, without substantial additional resources made available to local authorities continuous improvement to the network will be slow and patchy.

15. The submission of the integrated map on a 3 yearly cycle is considered too frequent given the lead time in the delivery of schemes which may involve the identification of funding, negotiation with landowners, procurement and delivery.

What are the potential barriers to the implementation of the key provisions and does the Bill take account of them?

16. The main barrier to the implementation of the key provisions is the cost. For the provisions relating to mapping many local authorities do not have the necessary in-house skills so would have to engage specialist mapping consultants which would be an additional cost. As stated earlier in the evidence, local authorities understand that funding will be available from Welsh Government for the production of the initial maps.

17. Delivery of new parts of the network will be subject to available funding. RTCs have been directed to make funding available for active travel but this is not sufficient to instigate the behaviour change that the Bill is purporting to bring about.

What are your views on the financial implications of the Bill (this could be for your organisation, or more generally)? In answering this question you may wish to consider Part 2 of the Explanatory Memorandum (the Impact Assessment), which estimates the costs and benefits of implementation of the Bill.

18. The financial implications of the Bill on local authorities should not to be underestimated and are being introduced at a time that local authority budgets are under pressure. The new duties require an existing route map and an integrated route map to be produced, for these maps to be available in hard and electronic copies and to keep the integrated route map updated and submitted to the Minister every 3 years.
19. The more significant financial implications relate to the duty of continuous improvement. There may be opportunities in some areas to access European funding but as stated earlier without significant 'new' money available progress towards an integrated network will be slow.
20. Another significant financial implication is the ongoing maintenance. There is already a backlog in relation to the maintenance of the existing highway (estimated at some £170m-200m) which in some cases may be part of the integrated network. If resources for maintenance of existing routes are inadequate, the proposal in the Bill to develop additional routes is of concern to local authorities.

To what extent has the correct balance been achieved between the level of detail provided on the face of the Bill and that which will be contained in guidance given by the Welsh Ministers?

21. Much of the detail which will concern local authorities will be within the delivery and the design guidance. For that reason, WLGA's view is that the correct balance has not been achieved. WLGA also notes that the Bill states that the existing route map and the integrated route map are to be submitted to the Minister for approval. It is assumed that the criteria against which the Minister would assess the maps will be published at a later date in guidance. It is difficult to comment on the Bill when a significant level of detail is currently unavailable. It will be important that local government continues to have the opportunity to input to the development of delivery and design guidance.

Are there any other comments you wish to make on the Bill that have not been covered in your

22. The above comments reflect the harsh financial realities facing local authorities in terms of their ability to maintain existing assets, let alone take on new responsibilities without additional and adequate levels of funding. They are not intended to be in any way negative in relation to the overall support of the Bill and its intentions which local authorities support. Once the Bill is enacted local authorities will respond as positively as they can to achieve the provisions of the Bill but without an appropriate level of additional funding it will not be possible to realise the benefits that many will be expecting.

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