

Scotland's Towns Partnership Towns Review Call for evidence

Cycling Scotland submission August 2020

Introduction

Cycling Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to this call for evidence.

Going forward, in response to the current Covid-19 pandemic, there is a need to ensure that transport infrastructure decision-making and spending in towns takes into account the need to support physical distancing for active travel and public transport, both now and in response to future pandemics. This includes space allocation decisions and ensuring sufficient footway and cycle path width. This is critical to ensure people can continue to travel actively. The temporary measures taken by many Scottish local authorities to encourage cycling and active travel during the lockdown period are an important first step, and these should be made permanent and further expanded, where possible.

There has been a significant reduction in car journeys during the lockdown period, which has led to significant improvements in air quality and greenhouse gas emissions in many towns across Scotland. Positively, our cycle counters across Scotland have shown a significant increase in the number of people cycling; however, Transport Scotland data shows a corresponding decrease in the number of people who are using public transport, a mode which has an important role to play in decarbonising transport and delivering the Sustainable Transport Hierarchy. As we move forward in the transition out of lockdown, it is important that the gains in improved air quality and increased levels of cycling are not reversed by a return to pre-pandemic or even higher levels of motorised transport.

It is important that spatial planning and placemaking policies in towns incorporate consideration as to how cycling and walking can be integral to planning decisions to address climate change. Developments which give precedence to cycling and active travel, and connections to public transport, are essential, and should be prioritised over space allocation for private cars.

Parking management and enforcement to promote cycling and active travel

A significant issue in most towns across Scotland is managing parking and enforcement action against poor parking behaviour. Poorly parked vehicles, including vehicles parked on the pavement, can force pedestrians into the road and is unsafe for people cycling and other vulnerable road users. Vulnerable road users, especially those with visual impairments or who use wheelchairs as mobility aides, are greatly affected by poor parking and a lack of enforcement of poor parking behaviour, such as parking over dropped kerbs and pavement parking over access points. Parking control is one of the most effective measures available to a local authority in controlling traffic movement through an area.

Tighter controls on parking are likely to reduce the costs and impact on businesses in town centres. Controlling parking may encourage more people to uptake more sustainable and healthier forms of transport, such as cycling and walking, and these transport modes are known to offer economic benefits to town centres where provision is made for them.

Parking controls are also likely to result in a town centre being viewed as a safer place to be for both people cycling and walking, and all other road users, and again this in turn is likely to lead to increased footfall. In light of the current pandemic, being able to effectively control parking is essential to ensure there is sufficient space for people to physically distance when visiting their local town.

Places and spaces designed for cycling have strong economic benefits associated with them, including increased retail activity, higher house prices, reduced health care costs and greater productivity. Cycling is good for business. It helps to create greater footfall which is associated with an increase in trade and revenue for shop owners. Retail sales can increase by as much as a quarter where bike lanes are provided¹. Research has shown that retailers often underestimate the proportion of customers who access shops and local businesses by bike and over-estimate the proportion of car users among their customers. Cycling delivers five times higher spend than the same area of car parking, and people who cycle do their shopping locally and are more loyal customers².

The case often presented for road development, that it will unlock the economic potential of an area, is not sustainable and should not be used as justification for investment in and expansion of road development. Evidence shows that road developments can have a negative economic impact in an area, including taking money out of, rather than into, the area, for example, due to large out-of-town shopping centres. Therefore, controlling parking is likely to have a positive impact on town centres, and provides an opportunity to promote and encourage a shift towards cycling, and other modes of active travel.

Improving air quality

Poor air quality continues to be a significant challenge for many towns. High levels of vehicular traffic passing through towns produces a toxic mix of greenhouse gas and particulate matter emissions, which have significant negative health impacts, and also reduce the attractiveness of the towns themselves. In Scotland, it is estimated that outdoor air pollution causes 2,500 deaths annually and is second only to smoking in terms of its mortality impacts. Further, it is estimated that long-term exposure to particulate matter air pollution, which is produced almost exclusively from vehicle emissions, leads to about 1,500 (additional) early deaths each year, equating to approximately 2.8% of annual mortality³. Research has shown that shifting 10% of journeys from car to bike would reduce air pollution and save 400 productive life years. Savings of £364 million could be realised from air quality improvements if Scotland realised the 10% vision for everyday journeys by bike by 2020, resulting in nearly 4,000 premature deaths being avoided over a decade⁴. With around two-thirds of car journeys in Scotland under five miles, shifting some of these journeys to cycling and active modes would make a significant contribution to improving air quality in Scotland's

¹ Designed to Move: Active Cities report <http://e13c7a4144957cea5013-f2f5ab26d5e83af3ea377013dd602911.r77.cf5.rackcdn.com/resources/pdf/en/active-cities-full-report.pdf>

² European Cyclists Federation (2019) The benefits of cycling: Unlocking their potential for Europe <https://ecf.com/sites/ecf.com/files/TheBenefitsOfCycling2018.pdf>

³ Scottish Health and Inequality Impact Assessment Network (SHIAN) (2018) Health and Transport: A Guide <https://www.scotphn.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Transport-Guide-2018-Final-Formatted.pdf>

⁴ Sustrans (2017) The role of walking and cycling in solving the UK's air quality crisis https://www.sustrans.org.uk/sites/default/files/file_content_type/role-of-walking-and-cycling-in-solving-uk-air-quality-crisis.pdf

towns, increasing their attractiveness and helping to deliver some of the economic benefits outlined above.

We welcome the introduction of Low Emission Zones (LEZs) in cities throughout Scotland. These could be extended to towns in Scotland that have recorded significantly high levels of air pollution to help reduce the amount of vehicular traffic in the town and improve air quality.

Out-of-town shopping centres and online shopping

A shift to more out-of-town shopping centres and online shopping poses a threat to the economic viability of town centres, as more people move away from shopping in and visiting town centres. As mentioned above, supporting people to travel actively into and from town centres, by controlling and reducing traffic passing through towns, can limit the negative economic impact experienced.

Within planning decisions, there should be restrictions placed on the number of applications granted for out-of-town shopping centres. Such shopping centres are usually not well served by public transport and active travel links and often the only way to get there is by private car, which contributes to increased greenhouse gas emissions. They also take people and business away from town centres, reducing their economic vibrancy. We support the proposal in the National Planning Framework 4 that planning permission should not be granted to significant travel-generating uses at locations which would increase reliance on the car⁵. The 'town centre first' principle should be embedded in the planning system to a greater extent, so that developments in town centres are supported.

E-cargo and standard cargo bikes should be explored as a solution to last-mile deliveries to reduce the amount of vans and other delivery vehicles passing through towns. This would help support and encourage more people to travel actively in town centres, by reducing congestion, improving air quality, and improving safety.

Road maintenance

The condition of local roads in towns is a significant issue for people cycling and can impact on their economic vibrancy.

As local roads are the roads which are predominantly used by people cycling/travelling actively for everyday journeys, poor road conditions have significant implications for the ability of people cycling and other vulnerable road users to travel safely. Local roads in poor condition can be challenging and even dangerous for people cycling. People cycling are disproportionately affected by potholes, rutting, gaps around ironwork, loose or missing manhole covers, and other surface defects. The deterioration of the local roads network can therefore have significant negative impacts for people cycling and for other vulnerable road users. If people cycling do not feel safe when using their local roads, they are less likely to use them, which can negatively impact on local places.

Poorly managed road maintenance works can have an adverse impact on the experiences of people cycling such as, for example, blocking their route and forcing them into oncoming traffic which can be dangerous and off-putting, especially for people new to cycling or the particular road system. Special consideration needs to be given to road maintenance that is located towards the side of the road where someone may be cycling in secondary position;

⁵ <https://blogs.gov.scot/planning-architecture/2020/03/19/national-planning-framework-4-extension-to-call-for-ideas-deadline/>

these could be at or near junctions, where three quarters of crashes involving people cycling occur⁶; on downhill sections of roads; and present a sharp upstand or defects which run parallel rather than perpendicular to cycling pathways and are therefore more likely to trap the wheel of a person cycling.

⁶ <https://www.cycling.scot/mediaLibrary/other/english/3028.pdf>