

Wheelrights Response to the Senedd Consultation on Active Travel Funding

About Swansea Wheelrights

Swansea Wheelrights is a voluntary organisation campaigning for improved facilities and conditions for cycling in the Swansea Bay area. Our vision is for a future in which everyone – regardless of age, ability, or background – can travel safely and easily by bicycle or on foot for everyday journeys. Active travel should be a practical and attractive choice, supporting better public health, reduced congestion, cleaner air, and more livable communities.

We support the development of infrastructure that enables inclusive access to walking and cycling, and we work in partnership with local authorities, Transport for Wales, and other stakeholders to advocate a safe, connected, and equitable transport network. We also promote cycling through public rides, training, and collaboration with organisations such as BikeAbility Wales and Re-Cycle Swansea.

The Active Travel Act has had a significant impact on the availability and take-up of travel options other than private motor car. For this to become widely adopted by the general public, with all the ensuing benefits to health and well-being of society, we need to examine what has worked best and what needs to be fine-tuned. It is with this in mind that we make the following observations in the light of the experience in our local area.

Equity, Inclusion and Transport Poverty

Everyone should have the same freedom, dignity, choice, and control – at home, in work, in education, and within their community. Access to transport plays a fundamental role in making this a reality. Without viable and affordable transport options, people risk exclusion from employment, healthcare, education, social opportunities, and cultural life – all of which are vital for living happy, healthy, and connected lives.

Transport poverty is most likely to affect those on lower incomes, people living in rural areas, and those in communities with high levels of deprivation. However, income and location are only part of the picture. Particular groups such as women, people with disabilities, older people, children and young people, and people from ethnic minority backgrounds are disproportionately affected. These inequalities must be addressed if we are to deliver a truly inclusive transport system.

The Sustrans *Bike Life* report (2019) found that 47% of people don't cycle or cycle less often due to concerns about safety. Improving cycling infrastructure and ensuring it is designed with the needs of vulnerable users in mind is essential for reducing these fears and enabling more people to choose active travel.

We reject the notion that cycling is not an inclusive mode of transport. Many people with limited mobility rely on bicycles or tricycles for independence. We commend organisations such as BikeAbility Wales, which provide accessible cycling opportunities for people with disabilities and mental health needs.

Cycling also enhances personal safety for many women, who may feel more secure on a bike than on foot due to increased mobility.

Affordability concerns are often overstated. Social enterprises such as Re-Cycle in Swansea – trading for over 15 years – have shown that refurbished bicycles can be made accessible to a wide range of people. Notably, bike ownership rates are significantly higher than cycling participation rates, suggesting that lack of safe infrastructure is a far greater barrier than cost.

We also note the transformative potential of e-bikes in this regard. As one participant in an e-bike trial put it:

“I found that with the e-cycle I can master the wind. I find it a great help to have the assistance. Somebody at my age – which is over 80 – it's a great assistance.”

Retired teacher

Another participant commented:

“I felt more confident in traffic, which was a surprise for me – that was a great positive. It exceeded my expectations. We went on one or two longer rides than we would have otherwise... jollies... the places we went were too far to go out on an ordinary bike.”

Woman over 60, living in a hilly area

These experiences highlight how e-bikes can empower older people, and others with mobility limitations, to travel independently and confidently. Tackling the barriers that prevent people from cycling—whether cost, safety concerns, or physical ability—will unlock transport freedom for many who are currently excluded.

Wheelrights’ Concerns Regarding Recent Active Travel Funding Use in Swansea

We highlight these as an example of how the funds are being used.

Active Travel Funding Used for Minor Upgrades Instead of Strategic Improvements

- The originally planned Penclawdd–Gowerton and Walter Road links were key missing links in the active travel network.
- Instead of reinvesting the funding in a new high-value scheme, the money is now being spent on resurfacing and minor crossing improvements that should be part of the Council’s routine maintenance budget.

Last-Minute Reprioritisation Resulting in Limited Impact

- The late withdrawal of the Penclawdd–Gowerton and Walter Road schemes by Swansea Council left the Council with little time to develop meaningful alternatives.
- The new works were chosen based on deliverability within a short time frame, rather than being a genuinely high-priority investment in active travel infrastructure.

Failure to Add Value to the Active Travel Network

- The reallocated funding does not deliver a new route or significantly improve connectivity.
- It represents maintenance rather than expansion, meaning the money does not contribute to increasing active travel uptake or network reach.

The Case for Sustained and Strategic Action

If we can maintain the momentum of recent years, we can make substantial progress toward the active travel targets in *Net Zero Wales*. However, this depends on:

- Sustained, ring-fenced funding.
- A clear definition of the roles and responsibilities of delivery bodies.
- Rigorous prioritisation of schemes.
- Comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of active travel progress.
- Ongoing development of in-house expertise.
- Consistent promotional campaigns and community engagement.
- Full implementation of the Active Travel (Wales) Act.

We are concerned that devolving active travel funding to CJsCs will coincide with an end to ring-fencing, forcing walking and cycling schemes to compete with other transport priorities. This risks undermining active travel investment, especially in areas that most need it.

We also note a pattern of prioritising routes that avoid causing inconvenience to motorists, rather than choosing those likely to deliver the greatest modal shift. Wales’ only active travel target – to increase the mode share from 27% to 33% by 2030, and at least 35% by 2040 – will only be achieved if routes are constructed where they genuinely encourage people to shift from car use.

Although Transport for Wales' prioritisation tool was designed to address these issues, it is now unclear whether CJsCs will continue to use it. A loss of strategic coherence and evidence-based decision-making would be a step backwards.

Strategic Recommendations and Asks

To realise a more just, inclusive and sustainable active travel system, we propose the following priorities:

- Establish an expectation that local authorities will provide walking and cycling infrastructure that connects communities to each other and to essential services, and that this infrastructure is integrated with the wider public transport network.
- Prioritise investment in active travel access within economically disadvantaged communities, connecting people to employment, healthcare, education, and social opportunities.
- Embed the *20-minute neighbourhood* concept in both local and national planning policy, allowing people to meet their daily needs within a 20-minute walk or cycle.
- Improve the safety and security of vulnerable groups when accessing sustainable modes of transport, including through community engagement to understand what makes people feel unsafe.
- Emphasise walking as a key partner mode to cycling—supporting Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, enforcement of pavement parking restrictions, improved pedestrian crossings, and school safety zones.
- E-bikes offer huge potential, particularly in hilly areas and for older or less confident riders. They can replace second cars in many households and have been shown internationally to boost cycling uptake. It is essential, however, that we distinguish clearly between legal e-bikes and illegal, unregistered e-motorbikes, which risk undermining public confidence. A public education campaign on this issue would be of great value.
- Clarify the delivery responsibilities of each relevant body, learning from successful models such as TfL and previous local authority-led public health initiatives.

Conclusion

Access to active travel should be a right, not a privilege. Walking and cycling are key to unlocking healthier, fairer, and greener communities across Wales. We must be bold and strategic in our choices, ensuring funding is protected, delivery is effective, and that the system works for everyone – especially those currently most excluded.

Swansea Wheelrights is committed to working with local and national partners to support these aims. Together, we can create an active travel network that empowers people, strengthens communities, and supports the goals of *Net Zero Wales*.

John Britton
Chair: Wheelrights Routes Group
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