

Cross-Party Group on Active Travel

Review of the Active Travel Act

Wheelrights - Swansea Bay's Cycle campaign has been active in promoting cycling for everyday journeys for over a quarter of a century. We have about 70 members and over 200 supporters. We are promoting Active Travel at an individual, Council and National level. Here is our feedback to help the All-Party Group.

1. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ACT IN INCREASING WALKING AND CYCLING.

Stats Wales currently only publishes national figures for cycle use on roads and not on cycle paths and Shared Use Paths. These figures are not broken down by Local Authority. Between 2014 and 2019, there was no increase at all in the absolute number of cycle journeys on roads, but a decrease in the percentage of journeys undertaken by cyclists (due to a rise in car usage). The figures for 2020 show an increase for cycle use, but may well be an outlier due to the Covid pandemic restrictions. There seem to be no figures at all published for walking.

The City and County of Swansea does have cycle counters on cycle paths which, we understand show an increase in cycle numbers. It is impossible to know the percentage of these journeys that are for Active Travel reasons. The best figures for AT journeys are probably contained in the UK transport surveys that are published annually. Unfortunately, Wales opted out of this data collection a decade ago. The last figures from 2011 show that out of the 36 largest U.K. cities, Swansea is the second most car dependent city for commuting journeys in the country. We currently have no figures to show whether this has changed.

The latest Welsh Transport Strategy, Llwybr Newydd, contains an excellent commitment from the Welsh Government to increase modal shift to sustainable travel by 0.75 per cent p.a. until 2040. However, without better data collection and publication, it is impossible to say this goal or the ATA has increased or will increase levels of walking and cycling.

RECOMMENDATION

- Wales to undertake an annual transport survey for its major towns and cities to ascertain the levels of walking and cycling that are undertaken for Active Travel reasons like journey to work, school, college or health provision.

2. EVIDENCE TO BACK UP YOUR VIEWS

It is hard to see that there will be any major expansion of Active Travel numbers until there is a change in the hostile atmosphere that motor traffic generates on our roads. Time after time, our surveys show that women's number one reason for not cycling more is the feeling of being unsafe on our roads. In the last 7 years, only 1 lane of traffic in the city has been changed into a provision for cyclists. Without a comprehensive network of cycle paths throughout the city, many cyclists will have to share the main roads with motorists.

Swansea's major employment, leisure, retail and office accommodation is sited in the City centre and the Enterprise Zone. The links within these 2 areas (e.g. Boulevard, Kingsway) and between these 2 areas (eg. Morfa Rd S.U.P.) have improved as a result of the ATA funds.

There are 9 main routes that feed into the City Centre from the suburbs. Before the ATA was enacted there were cycle paths along 4 of these main routes (all National Cycle Network routes) into the City centre/Enterprise zone. There have been some improvements on all these routes, which are to be welcomed. Disappointingly, on the following 5 major routes there has been no application for AT funding and so no cycle provision at all.

a)- Carmarthen Rd; b) Middle Rd. c) Llangyfelach Rd. d) Walter rd./Sketty Rd./Gower Rd.

e) Cockett rd./Walter Rd.

One example stands out. Two of the City's (and Wales!) major employers, Morriston Hospital and the D.V.L.A. are still not connected to the cycle network, despite years of campaigning by Wheelrights and others. This is a major oversight in the planning and delivery of AT.

In terms of AT provision to the 15 comprehensive schools and F.E. college campuses, there has been some minor improvements since AT funding became available. 5 of these schools have had AT monies to build 1 route each to part of their catchment areas. This is a start but we need to remember that students will be taking multiple different routes on their school/college commute. 10 secondary educational establishments remain without any cycling provision at all. The situation in the primary schools is far worse. The Welsh Government funds cycle training at years 5 and 6 when there is a hostile traffic environment around almost all primary schools.

RECOMMENDATION

AT connections for major employers, health providers and secondary schools should be seen as a priority for AT funds in the next 5 years.

Each Local Authority should report on its progress in this provision in its annual AT funding bid.

3. YOUR EXPERIENCE OF TRYING TO DELIVER A.T. PROJECTS

We as a campaign group have no direct experience of delivering A.T. projects. However, we do have a wealth of experience at trying to work alongside the City and Council of Swansea. Our early experiences after the Act's introduction were mainly positive with the Council's Transport Strategy Officer consulting us regularly both on future schemes and implementation of approved works. An example of this is the proposed route to Pontarddulais, where there were extensive discussions with many groups and organisations about several possible routes.

In the last few years this situation has now reversed with little or no consultation with the Local Authority on particular schemes. This has resulted in a number of

poor outcomes. For example, Gors Ave cycle path was built with multiple breaches of the A.T. design Guidance. Not only has this been a setback for local cyclists, but it has also entailed further expenditure for the Welsh Government to correct these failures and much valuable staff time from the Council. Another example of the failure to consult with local residents and groups was the Mayals Rd. Scheme. Although the AT Design Guidance clearly states the needs to undertake early consultation, the Council seems to regard this requirement as not applicable to them. Indeed, a recent letter from the Head of Service said

'I suggest that it would be more appropriate to engage on specific projects once they are developed, which would assist in highlighting those aforementioned competing demands and explain how officers propose to address them.'

Currently, there is not a requirement on a Council to take into account the views of groups and others before they submit A.T. funding applications. Two examples of the draw back to this approach stand out. Firstly, the £2.4M Swansea Arena Bridge was 50 per cent funded by AT Funding, even though the bridge was an integral part of this 'City Deal' funded scheme. Secondly Swansea did not submit any plans for additional cycle lanes on roads or School Action zones under the Covid emergency funds.

RECOMMENDATION

That all bids for A.T. funds should clearly show how the requirements of the AT design guidance have been followed

4. MEASURES THAT HAVE BEEN THE MOST EFFECTIVE AND BARRIERS TO DELIVERY.

There can be little doubt that the extra funds for Active travel have been very welcome. However, as these have all been capital grants, this has meant that increasing pressures have been placed on existing transport staff for writing bids, working up schemes, delivering new routes and evaluating the schemes. Sometimes this has felt like a mad rush rather than a structured approach. The recent changes with a longer time frame in planning has been useful with the involvement of other organisations like TfW and Sustrans. Often the additional monies have been used to employ outside consultants some of whom do not know the locality or areas under discussion.

The most effective measures have been those that have enabled some element of co-production. One example that highlights this is the Olchfa link in the Clyne valley area where both Wheelrights and Clyne Valley Country Park volunteers suggested an additional link to improve access and avoid damage to a children's playground. The Council's engineers took on board the issues and delivered a route that benefits cyclists, walkers, sports lovers and those who use a children's playground.

A second example was an opportunity to discuss an AT proposal in December 2020 when we met with the Civil Engineer to look at options to link 2 cycle paths. The

Engineer said in his last email that our information and recommendations were 'greatly appreciated'. There have been no further consultations since that date on any scheme or plan in the whole of Swansea.

It is of some concern that although we have offered to help the Council to deliver its programme through leaflet drops, surveys, and audits, none of these suggestions have been taken up. Indeed, in the latest AT network map consultation in 2021 there was a duty placed on the Local Authority to audit its existing routes. The Council do not appear to have undertaken this task as several imaginary routes were placed on draft network map. Wheelrights completed this work for them to correct this deficit. The feedback from the 'Commonplace' consultation was extraordinary both in the numbers of people responding and the understanding they showed in their comments. It clearly demonstrates that residents want to be part of what happens in their area.

Our feeling is that there needs to be a culture change within the Authority at both Officer and Member levels, so that they fully understand the intentions of the Act and the need to involve local communities. Without this necessary engagement, there may well be resentment and even opposition to some schemes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Welsh Government consider making additional Revenue allocation to Local Authorities as the Climate Change plans are long term commitments to the Welsh public. It will also allow continuity in staff and help with recruitment of properly skilled staff. In addition, this allows for better value for money as fewer consultants are engaged.

Training in engagement with communities is an urgent need for both officers and members of the Local Authority

5. CHANGES IN LEGISLATION, POLICY OR OTHER MEASURES TO INCREASE LEVELS OF A.T.

Wheelrights have warmly welcomed the AT emphasis in Welsh Government's new planning policy, Llwybr Newydd and the AT design guidance. In terms of the Act, it would appear that often AT is considered separately from other forms of transport even though there is a vague commitment in Section 6 to have regard to the AT network map. What has often occurred is that other transport decisions like new roads and improvements have been made regardless of the urgent need to decarbonise our transport sector. For example, huge public monies went into car parking provision at the Swansea Arena, further increasing dependence on the private motor car. Whenever new schools are built public monies pay for a free staff car park e.g. Burlais Primary School. In effect the AT staff and parent users are subsidising the car users and polluters! The building of new car parks with public monies only increases our dependence on the private car.

The Llwybr Newydd clearly sets out a hierarchy of users correctly placing walkers and cyclists at the top of the pyramid. It is now time for the Welsh Government to insist that all transport monies to Local Authorities and public bodies should be

delegated to 22 new sustainable Transport Forums. These forums would be tasked with drawing up transport plans for their areas and submitting funding bids which would prioritise the use of sustainable transport. At the moment this task is left just with the Council's Transport section. The decision making for transport needs to be dramatically widened if the Welsh Government is to get buy-in to its carbon reduction plans.

RECOMMENDATION

Set up 22 Sustainable Transport Forums to plan and deliver the commitment made in Llwybr Newydd. Publish yearly data on how modal shift is occurring in each Local Authority.

6. EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE OF AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR A.T. DELIVERY

Wales seems to have a reputation for developing innovative new Acts, Policies and Strategies and then leaving the delivery to the whim of those who are left with this responsibility. All too often, this facet of public service has received little attention. The best examples of delivery improvement in Wales are possibly the Education and Waste Management services. In the Education sector, the system of external audit through the school Inspection system and the publication of exam results has seen a dramatic improvement in the qualification levels over the last 30 years and an attention on those schools who are failing to deliver for our youngsters. Parents and children became involved in the management of every school and attention switched towards the outcome rather than the input. In terms of waste management, targets were set for recycling that had penalties attached to them. Publication of these targets and the involvement of residents in meeting the targets were seen as vital to the improvement process.

Transport is the one persistent thorn in the side of Welsh decarbonisation with virtually no decrease over the last 30 years. The Government has shown its commitment through the increase in AT funding but has then left delivery to Councils whilst at the same time asking them to monitor and evaluate their work – rather like asking pupils to mark their own homework! In Swansea this has led to an apparent disregard not only for delivering what their application forms said but also a selective approach to the AT design Guidance. An example of this is the Llansamlet to Morriston Hospital route where part of the route (Llanllienwern Close) was never delivered despite being clearly outlined on the application form and the Council's own plans.

In the last 2 years, the local Council has consistently refused to share plans developed with public monies meaning that groups such as Wheelrights have to submit FOI requests for information.

This represents a serious setback to delivering an integrated network for Active Travellers. Accountability for the delivery of the AT schemes and evaluation of the effectiveness of schemes must now rest outside the Local Authority with another body such as TfW who should publish a yearly report of their monitoring activities.

RECOMMENDATION

Task an outside body with the job of monitoring and evaluation of AT funded schemes

7 ANY OTHER ISSUES

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