

SW Wales: Regional Transport Plan – Consultation

I am submitting this consultation as an individual, but, as Swansea's *Cycling UK* rep. I have been careful to ensure that my suggestions reflect their policies, thereby adding weight to them. I am also a member of *Wheelrights* and support the RTP submission made on behalf of the group by their Chair, John Sayce.

I base my comments on the three priorities and the 21 policies identified in your Consultation Summary.

Overall it seems to me that the RTP's Aims and Commitments clearly spell out what is required, in particular it comes across that achieving a modal shift from the car to more sustainable means of transport is central to the Plan. I also see modal shift as central and my suggestions focus on how it might be achieved, particularly in my section below on Buses. It is however weak on implementation. It fails to spell out in sufficient detail how the aims will be achieved and financed.

My comments are as follows.

General

That active travel is considered a Priority 1 aim is as it should be. Policies 9 and 13 touch on this, but I suggest a new Policy to strengthen this, perhaps subsuming Policy 9, be added to the Priority 1 policies. It might be worded: "... recognises the need to provide quality infrastructure to encourage active travel."

Of the four policies included as Priority 1, I support in particular Policies 1 and 2: *Reduce the need to travel and ensure public transport is fit for purpose*. I comment below on 2 under the heading "Buses".

Infrastructure

The importance of quality infrastructure to enable the use of our roads by means other than the car could, I suggest, be emphasized. Yes, you do commit to "make it easier to walk, wheel and cycle for local trips" and Policies 13 and 16 recognise the need to maintain a road network that is safe, convenient and fit for purpose, and that the road network and routes for walking and cycling need to be well maintained. But there is little (no?) mention of the role of infrastructure to encourage young people to walk and cycle more, in particular by the provision of safe routes to schools. This should be included in the RTP.

How the resources to achieve these aims is to be provided needs to be spelt out. These should include a budget for providing and maintaining walking and cycling infrastructure. While the Plan contains policies which look to secure additional funding for maintenance it does not say how much. I read that in Scotland 10% of the transport budget goes to funding active travel; and that the figure for England is 2%. I do not know what the Welsh figure is but suspect it is well below the Scottish; 10% would I suggest be appropriate. This would cover both capital expenditure and maintenance, and probably also contribute to public transport costs, especially buses.

The Welsh Active Travel Guidance, matches similar UK guidance such as LTN1 20. It is the key to providing safe traffic free routes which will facilitate in particular the uptake of cycling as a means of transport.

Buses

Policy 2 which aims to ensure public transport is fit for purpose is key; the bus service at least is not fit for purpose. Again, some guidance on how it may be made fit is needed. Recent moves to overhaul how buses are run in Wales appears to be a step in the right direction. I understand that LA's will get more control over timetabling and the integration of bus and train travel. I have a suggestion which, by making bus travel more attractive than the car, would go a long way to achieving the sought for modal shift.

It is simply to provide a *free and frequent* (FF) bus service. Ed Miliband in his book "Go Big" advocates this. He notes that a number of towns and cities across the world have it, especially in France. He gives details about Dunkirk where in 2018 a free bus service was introduced. This resulted in a 65% increase in bus use during the week and a 125% increase at weekends, with about half of those users switching from the car. The loss of income was covered by a tax on local businesses which had previously funded 90% of the cost of bus travel.

While an FF bus service would be expensive, at least in the short term, this would be offset by both short and long term benefits. It would benefit both the affluent and the poor. I live in affluent Pennard where most houses boast more than one car. The service to Swansea (#14), now being run by Adventure Travel, is at least in my recent experience punctual, but with 1½ hours between buses is too infrequent to be of use to most. Were it be half hourly, punctual and free then surely it would attract many out of their cars. Here frequency and punctuality is key. My rich neighbours could well afford to contribute (by some form of tax rather than a fare) to the cost. In deprived areas the benefits of a free service are obvious. An additional benefit is that the driver would not have to collect fares. As indicated above part of a 10% active travel share of the transport budget could go towards a FF bus service.

Conclusion

I cannot fault the draft RTP on its priorities and statement of aims. But it lacks guidance on the means to achieve these aims and on how they will be financed. Regarding finance I am advocating that 10% of the transport budget be assigned to active travel (including buses) as in Scotland.

I have focussed on just two issues: infrastructure and buses. Both it seems to me are key to achieving modal shift. 10% of the transport fund should be adequate to fund quality infrastructure which will provide a safe alternative to the car, particularly for cyclists, and partly fund a free and frequent bus service. I have also pointed out that the Plan needs to do more to encourage young people to travel actively, notably by the provision of safe routes to schools.

I am submitting this as an individual but am confident that my views are shared by Wheelrights and also by Cycling UK, whose Swansea rep. I currently am. (Due to my age [90], and that I am not able to get around on a bike the way I think a CUK rep. needs to, I have indicated that I will stand down as soon as a replacement can be found.)

David Naylor
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