



RESPONSE TO SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT'S TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE'S CONSULTATION ON ACTIVE TRAVEL

Introduction

Aberdeen Cycle Forum (ACF) is a voluntary organisation based in Aberdeen campaigning for better facilities for all cyclists in the city. Founded in 2003, over the last 6 years we have engaged with both private and public bodies on a number of issues affecting cyclists and have seen first hand the barriers to further increases in cycling in the city.

This submission relates primarily to cycling, based on our experience within Aberdeen, but we feel the general principles would apply across Scotland. ACF would be happy to provide the committee with further input at its convenience.

QUESTION 1 - What more can be done to encourage people to change their traveling habits and walk and cycle more?

In our experience, the most frequently expressed reason for not cycling is anxiety about safety on the roads. ACF sees five ways to tackle this, and they need to run in parallel:

(1) Our towns and cities have to become pedestrian and cycle friendly. Too many are still designing themselves around the needs of the car and are reluctant to restrict car access and car use. To be pedestrian and cycle friendly requires central areas where pedestrians and cyclists have clear priority over motor traffic. It requires broader transport measures to reallocate road space away from the private car, to discourage single occupancy commuting, and give priority to sustainable and active travel. There is no great mystery here. There is plenty of evidence from elsewhere that shows the right mix of measures can be effective in reducing car use and encouraging greater levels of cycling (see Q6).

(2) Reduce traffic speeds and tackle poor driving standards. Responses to ACF's annual cycle "*commuter challenge*" show that, when asked about the worst part of the cycle trip, over 60% cited the behaviour of drivers. Whilst some of this is genuinely aggressive, and should be tackled by the Police, some is down to a lack of awareness of what is required for safe driving. There needs to be an ongoing cycle awareness campaign aimed at drivers. It is vital that such a campaign doesn't reinforce an impression that cycling is a dangerous activity and thereby discourage cycling – the most effective cycle safety measure is actually more cyclists on the road^[1]. We also support the wider calls for extensive 20mph zones in urban areas. However, the experience in Aberdeen suggests that such zones require supporting enforcement measures. Aberdeen did adopt a mandatory 20mph zone for the city centre some years ago but our experience is that the 20mph limit is almost totally ignored. We are not aware of any enforcement of the speed limit and there are no physical traffic calming measures across the whole of the zone. So whilst we still support the principle of 20mph zones, it is crucial that these are supported by the right mix of physical design and enforcement measures to achieve compliance.

(3) Investment in good quality cycle infrastructure. Whilst good design standards are set out in Government guidance, our experience is that the design of good quality cycle infrastructure is frequently compromised by the overwhelming priority given to maximising traffic flows. This results in fragmented cycle lanes; multiple traffic lanes even at minor junctions which crowds out provision for cyclists; roundabouts being retained when they could have been removed^[2] and replaced with a safer signalised junction; and traffic capacity on city roads being increased with minimal or no provision for cycling. It also results in cyclists being shunted onto "shared pavements" which can result in conflict with pedestrians and frustration for cyclists as they lose priority at side junctions. Whilst we accept that transport planners and engineers have to balance competing pressures, we believe that too often the needs of cyclists are given the lowest priority. This needs to change

if we are to achieve a cycle infrastructure that is good quality, that is joined up, that gives cyclists safe passage at junctions and that opens up cycling to the widest range of people.

(4) Increased provision of child and adult cycle training. The provision of cycle training at primary schools is patchy. It should be available to all primary pupils. There should also be opportunities at secondary school for older pupils to refresh their skills, as it is at this age that they will be more likely to want to cycle independently. The availability of cycle training for adults should be expanded so that cyclists have the skills and confidence for safe on road cycling, especially in the urban context. We believe that cycle training in Scotland should become fully integrated into the Bikeability^[3] training program running elsewhere in the UK.

(5) Active promotion of cycling by local agencies and by the Scottish Government is important to signal the benefits of cycling and to encourage a perception of it as a normal, everyday activity. One example is the *Get-About* travel awareness initiative supported by NESTRANS^[4]. Such initiatives over time can provide a supportive context for individual decision making towards more sustainable modes.

In addition to these overarching measures, there are some practical issues to address. For many residents of flats or other “communal” housing there are often limited opportunities to store a bike, and thus one is never owned. ACF is aware of a number of such flatted developments recently completed in Aberdeen where there was much provision of car parking, but little or no provision of secure cycle storage. There also needs to be secure cycle parking at destinations. Design guidance does exist for cycle parking facilities^[5], ^[6] but these standards are poorly reflected in the planning system, allowing developers to provide sub standard facilities. ACF has subsequently worked with the city council on supplementary planning guidance to improve this situation but across Scotland the picture will be mixed. Improvement of the planning process to ensure the provision of quality cycle parking at such developments would remove a significant barrier to utility cycling.

QUESTION 2 - Is enough progress being made in developing and delivering improvements in the uptake of walking and cycling?

There is clearly not enough progress at national level, as the cycling share for cycling has barely changed. In Aberdeen, progress is mixed. The annual cycle count by ACF^[7] has shown a 10% increase in numbers of cyclists from 2008 – 2009; however Aberdeen has not been successful in tackling traffic growth^[8] and hence the modal share of cycling will show no change.

To achieve a 10% modal share by 2020, cycling levels in Aberdeen would need to more than double every five years – suggesting a 20% annual increase being needed, and this in the context of overall traffic levels remaining constant. At the same time we are aware of people giving up cycling because they see it as becoming too dangerous. Serious cyclist and pedestrian injuries have risen sharply in Aberdeen in the last two years. This emphasizes the point that increasing the uptake of cycling (and walking) is not just about investment in cycling but is crucially about ‘civilising’ traffic.

QUESTION 3 - If not, what are the barriers to progress? (for example, lack of policy development, lack of political leadership, lack of funding/investment, the lack of prominence given to active travel in transport policy development, project planning and construction etc.)

We do not see **policy development** as the main barrier. Rather, the barrier is the disconnection between policy and what actually happens on the ground. As an example, Aberdeen’s Local Transport Strategy (LTS)^[9] says all the right things about cycling, modal shift, tackling carbon emissions, and about “locking in” the benefits of the proposed Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route etc. At the same time, the city council is bringing forward plans to develop a dual carriageway through the heart of the city. This will serve to encourage more single occupancy commuting, encourage longer journeys and bring more traffic into and through the city centre – further diminishing the cycling environment. This is seriously out of date transport planning that will lock in higher levels of car use. It is out of step with the council’s own aims of encouraging modal shift and tackling carbon emissions.

Political leadership at the local level is crucial, but typically absent. For cycling and walking to flourish, transport schemes have to be rebalanced away from motor vehicles especially in urban areas. Many councils are unwilling to do this, for fear of losing votes or of the reaction of a “pro-car” local press. But we believe these fears are overstated – there is plenty of support for making city and town centres less dominated by traffic, less polluted and more pleasant to spend time in. Without a ‘champion’ in the local authority who is willing to lead the debate, it is even more important that there is leadership at national level, with an effective mix of incentives and legislation to encourage local authorities to make progress.

Funding – the current funding situation is fragmented with cycling projects being funded via ring-fenced “CWSS” (cycling, walking and safer streets) budget from the Scottish Government, funding via NESTRANS the regional transport partnership and Sustrans. Aberdeen city council does not have a history of allocating any of its own transport capital budget to cycling (see the annual Spokes surveys^[10]). There has been recent significant investment in cycling via NESTRANS – but as this has to be approved annually by the council, it is not possible to be certain that this will be sustained. With ring fenced CWSS in its final year (2009/10), the Sustrans budget under strain and the lack of local political leadership on Active Travel, the chances of any financial allocation from the council’s mainstream budgets are very low. The future funding situation looks perilous and makes long term strategic planning near impossible.

Skills base in local councils – If councils are to deliver good quality cycle facilities and to integrate cyclists needs into broader transport schemes then they need the appropriate skill base amongst their staff. We believe that there should be a senior “cycle projects officer” in each local authority that will bring a blend of technical, project management and cycle advocacy skills into the council.

Without this expertise, facilities can be implemented that ‘go by the book’ but are clearly far short of a satisfactory outcome. One significant example of this a recently constructed off-road cycle path in Aberdeen, 25% of which is covered by “*cyclists dismount*” signs. These designs also result in the problems with cycle infrastructure outlined in Q1.

Transport and the Planning System – Whilst Scottish Government guidance ^[11] provides a transport hierarchy with walkers and cyclists at the top, our experience is this is seldom carried out. Current major capital projects in Aberdeen are normally designed to optimise the flow of vehicular traffic, and in our experience any cycle facilities are added as an “after thought”, and are often of poor quality. Pressure from local groups such as Aberdeen Cycle Forum can sometimes achieve an improvement but it is essentially ‘firefighting’.

QUESTION 4 : Why do walking and cycling policies set out in national, regional and local transport plans not result in a greater modal share for walking and cycling?

We would refer you to the answers to Q1 and Q3 above..

QUESTION 5 : What further action is required by the Scottish Government, local authorities and other bodies to ensure that significant progress is made in the development and implementation of walking and cycling, particularly if transport is to make a greater and more meaningful contribution to the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions?

At an operational level local councils manage a number of priorities with a constrained budget, and with limited local political leadership a step change in cycling provision will not happen. Effective leadership is required at the highest level of the Scottish Government, otherwise Scotland will continue to underachieve in this area. This is resulting in a postcode lottery – a few councils are making progress, many others are not. We believe that there has to be much stronger direction from the centre.

The Scottish Government can help provide a strong legislative framework, with incentives and penalties to impel local authorities to make progress. For example, an individual local authority is unlikely to take action alone to introduce workplace car parking charges. National legislation to mandate this, with the revenue stream being kept within local areas to fund sustainable transport, would provide the necessary framework for local authorities to act. In Aberdeen, over 90% of car commuters pay nothing to park their car all day.

Scottish Government needs to be really interested in the outcomes that local authorities are achieving on the ground, not just in their policy statements, in respect to transport’s contribution to achieving climate changes targets. This will require a focus on modal shift and achievement of much higher levels of active travel. A much stronger monitoring and assurance framework needs to be in place and the Scottish Government may want to consider what penalties should be in place for local authorities who fail to make sufficient progress.

QUESTION 6: What can Scotland learn from good practice/successful implementation in other countries?

The ways to achieve modal shift and reduce car use are well known. There are the obvious examples of Amsterdam, Copenhagen and Freiberg. But there are less well known examples such as Trondheim in Norway^[12] and Portland in the USA where cycle levels have increased dramatically in recent years due to sustained priority given to cycle investment and discouraging car use. The work of the Integrated Transport Commission shows that carrots and sticks are needed to achieve progress. The experience of London in recent years shows that a cycling culture can quickly develop resulting in increased modal share.

Within the UK, the initial results from the Cycling Demonstration Towns in England^[13] show that with support for an integrated package of measures, progress can be made and made quickly. People are increasingly aware of the benefits of cycle use and the negative impacts of car dependence. We know that over half of trips made by car are less than 3 miles. The latent demand for cycling is large and this can be converted to real modal shift if we get the conditions right.

References

1 – Safety in Numbers, Cyclists Touring Club, UK

[LINK-TO-ONLINE DOCUMENT](#)

2 –South College Street Redesign, Aberdeen City Council, UK

[LINK-TO-ONLINE DOCUMENT](#)

3 – Bikeability, Cycling England, UK

[LINK-TO-ONLINE DOCUMENT](#)

4 – Get-About, North East Scotland Transport Partnership (NESTRANS)

[LINK-TO-ONLINE DOCUMENT](#)

5 – Sustrans Cycle Sheet FF37 “Cycle Parking”

[LINK-TO-ONLINE DOCUMENT](#)

6 – Key elements of cycle parking provision, Traffic advisory leaflets, Department for Transport, UK

[LINK-TO-ONLINE DOCUMENT](#)

7 – Your Number’s Up – The Cycle Count Results, Aberdeen Cycle Forum, UK

[LINK-TO-ONLINE DOCUMENT](#)

8 – North East Scotland Regional Transport Strategy, Nestrans, UK

[LINK-TO-ONLINE DOCUMENT](#)

9 – Aberdeen Local Transport Strategy, Aberdeen City Council, UK

[LINK-TO-ONLINE DOCUMENT](#)

10 – Cycle Spending Survey, Spokes (The Lothian Cycling Campaign), UK
(not available online)

11 – Scottish Planning Policy 17 ‘Planning for Transport’

[LINK-TO-ONLINE DOCUMENT](#)

12 – Presentation by Erik Jolsgard, Directorate of Public Roads, Trondheim at Cycling Scotland Annual Conference 17 Nov 2009, Aberdeen

(not available online)

13 – Analysis and synthesis of evidence on the effects of investment in six Cycling Demonstration Towns, Cycling England, UK

[LINK-TO-ONLINE DOCUMENT](#)
