



Policy Consultation Paper

Developing An Active Travel Strategy

Introduction

The growth of active travel in recent times has been considerable, with increasing numbers of people choosing it as a lifestyle option for a whole range of benefits. However, it is increasingly apparent that, despite some high-profile announcements, government has been slow to respond to this growth and has failed to take advantage of opportunities in relation to it arising from society's emergence from the Covid pandemic.

The Consultation Process

This consultation paper will involve a substantial amount of research and consultation, ultimately giving rise to an in-depth and lengthy document. A three-stage consultation process is therefore envisaged:

- Full consultation paper – This will propose policy ideas and options to address the identified issues and those highlighted in the pre-consultation process. Throughout this process, it is also envisaged that there will be direct engagement with some of those who are currently working in this field, and visits to some best practice examples.
- In parallel with the consultation paper, there will be considerable internal consultation with elected representatives on relevant committees and those with a specialism in some of the areas outlined.
- Final policy document – Following the consultation process a final policy paper will be adopted that will inform future DUP manifestos.

As part of the preparation of the full consultation paper, an internal engagement group has been identified. This paper will be circulated to them for comment and input before final publication.

Nothing contained within the consultation papers constitute DUP party policy.

Background

The DUP is committed to developing transport policies which recognise the benefits of cycling and walking on a regular basis. This reflects the changing demands in society as we seek to create more sustainable forms of transport and improve health and quality of life outcomes.

In the most recent DUP manifesto for the 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly elections, we committed to supporting sustainable travel and proposed:

*'The DUP will continue to invest in infrastructure that supports active travel, public transport provision and a shift to more sustainable and carbon neutral solutions. It is unacceptable that Northern Ireland has only a third of the total number of rapid-charging points and top-up chargers for electric vehicles recommended by the independent Committee on Climate Change currently in operation. Even among those that are in place there are concerns around a postcode lottery. We will promote greater investment in active travel routes and greenways, codesigned with communities and service users, and support e-travel schemes, including in rural, coastal, and off-shore communities...improve cycling networks across Northern Ireland.'*¹

Active Travel Act

What is an Active Travel Act?

*'An Active Travel Act (ATA) is essentially legislation which places a statutory requirement on various levels of government to take steps to enhance infrastructure for people walking and cycling, including when they carry out any transport infrastructure development or maintenance. So, whenever a government or council make changes to our roads, transport legislation or public transport, an ATA could require them to consider and improve provision for active travel. The precise requirements of an ATA can vary from country to country depending on needs, existing legislation, and which bodies have responsibility for transport.'*²

¹ DUP Assembly Manifesto, April 2022, p. 51. <https://s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/my-dup/029311-DUP-Manifesto.pdf>

² [Cycling UK | The UK's cycling charity](#)

Wales has in place an Active Travel Act, underpinning its long-term goal to strengthen the active travel network across the country. This plan has two main components: i) to continuously develop a network of local routes for walking and cycling, connecting people with the places they travel to for everyday journeys, and ii) to refresh the Active Travel Network Plans (ATNPs) every three years, based on extensive consultation with a particular emphasis on people who do not currently walk or cycle for local trips.

In seeking to achieve these aims, several measures are incorporated into the Welsh *Active Travel Network Plans* ATNPs to encourage behavioural change:

- training and developing professionals in best practice active travel design and guidance to ensure high quality infrastructure is put in place
- developing a package of 'soft' behaviour change measures, such as aiming to make cycle training available for all and travel planning, to complement 'hard' infrastructure investment like putting in place a policy framework that ensures that all new developments, including new school and health facilities, make provision for walking and cycling from the outset
- encouraging all schools to have an active travel plan and adopt actions to slow traffic and widen pavements around schools
- changing the default speed limit from 30mph to 20mph in built-up areas to reduce traffic related injuries and fatalities
- make walking and cycling safer, support safer, better cycle paths and provide more space for walking and cycling through closing roads to vehicle traffic,
- introducing pilot schemes to make use of electrically assisted bikes (e-bikes) and e-cargo bikes an affordable option for more individuals and businesses
- working with partners on behaviour-change programmes to encourage uptake of active travel through, for example, workplace schemes, including the provision of facilities such as cycle parking
- working with UK partners on a regulatory framework for the development of micro-mobility modes such as e-scooters

- managing and evaluating the active travel fund which supports local authorities to develop and deliver active travel schemes, including best-practice sharing and regional collaboration
- working towards ‘safe cycling from village to town’ giving villages safe cycling access to the nearest town and creating hub-and-spoke active travel corridors connecting market towns and other significant local centres to surrounding villages and outlying developments³

It is hard to consider the Welsh model without seeing lots of potential opportunities for Northern Ireland.

To this end we would welcome any comments on the Welsh legislation, and its implementation and also any reflections on the following statement made by Cycling UK, which applies the ATA concept directly to Northern Ireland.

How would an ATA benefit Northern Ireland?

*‘Beyond the obvious advantage that an ATA could require ministers and civil servants to improve provision for active travel, there are other major benefits given the government structure we have in Northern Ireland, because the Act would apply to the Minister for Infrastructure regardless of their (or their parties’) position on active travel, and if they failed to consider active travel when delivering infrastructure development, they could be held accountable, and be challenged legally. If Stormont was in suspension, the ATA would continue to hold civil servants in the DfI accountable for considering and delivering active travel improvements year on year. It would give the public an opportunity to hold politicians to account’.*⁴

³ [115/20: Active travel and trunk road improvement schemes \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

⁴ <https://www.cyclinguk.org/blog/active-travel-act-could-get-more-people-cycling-northern-ireland>

The Greenway Network

Across Northern Ireland the growth of the greenway network has been substantial and there is scope for much greater work in this area, regenerating routes with active travel options at their heart. There is a need to consider how we can best help support the development of the Greenway network across Northern Ireland. In doing so we can draw on best practice examples regarding the reinvention of existing route infrastructure, for example, in the case of the Comber Greenway the old railway network. Greenways are a great way to encourage cycling and walking and can be integrated with road networks to provide safe routes of travel. We believe that significant social and economic benefits flow from Greenway provision, and these should be encouraged through the adoption of a more coordinated approach to Greenway development led by the Department for Infrastructure but with input from other departments and stakeholders such as local government, charities and users.

Access to Cycling

Initiatives such as Belfast Bikes have widened access to cycling for both domestic users and visitors. In addition, we have also seen an increase in schemes providing bike repairs and maintenance, all of which are designed to improve access to this form of active travel and make it more attractive, especially during this cost-of-living crisis. Sustrans has a permanent presence in CS Lewis Square, and another 'Hub' has recently opened in Belfast city centre, beside the new Ulster University campus. These provide a range of services associated with promoting bike travel, including bike repairs. The PSNI has also hosted repair programmes as part of their community engagement strategy. In this era of rising fuel costs the benefits of cycling are becoming even clearer and we are minded to support further developments in this area as an alternative, cost-effective form of travel. We are keen to hear people's views on the current active travel infrastructure. While there have been successful initiatives across Northern Ireland, it is fair to say that considerably more could be done to enhance cycling infrastructure.

Connecting Communities to Active Travel

Northern Ireland is a compact region with good connections between commercial and residential spaces, and, in this context, it is well placed to develop even better connections using active travel opportunities. But what does the provision of active travel opportunities mean to our communities? Is there an appreciation of the health and financial benefits of cycling and walking? Is the motivation there to encourage many more people to pursue active travel-led lifestyles? There are clear health benefits for those who pursue a more active lifestyle, and as we are in a cost-of-living crisis, alternative, cheaper forms of travel should have additional appeal.

We are interested in understanding the perceptions held by communities with regards to active travel, what incentives would encourage wider take up of active travel, is it a generational experience or is there demand for active travel across age groups?

As we move from motor transport to active travel options the question of infrastructure comes to the fore. New infrastructure such as: dedicated cycle lanes, new walking space, walking bridges, safe crossings etc are all key to a successful active travel network. However, the provision of this infrastructure is also expensive and must be considered alongside competing priorities. The costs must also be set against environmental obligations. With constraints on public spending there will be a balance to be struck in future infrastructure investment and a need to look at innovative ways of financing and delivery. We are particularly interested in hearing people's views on these matters and any proposals they might wish to make.

Case Study

Active travel is now being increasingly integrated into local government regeneration strategy. This is in recognition of the increasing priority it is now rightly being given. For example, Belfast City Council has developed the 'Bolder Vision' document⁵ which focuses on active travel and is an ambitious blueprint to explore a shared approach to creating a more attractive, accessible,

⁵ [A Bolder Vision for Belfast – reimagining our city centre consultation \(belfastcity.gov.uk\)](https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/bolder-vision)

safe, and vibrant city. This has been worked up in partnership with central government departments, and based on several principles:

- promoting wellbeing for all
- prioritising walking, cycling and public transport
- creating lively, safe, and green streets
- removing barriers to movement between the city centre and surrounding communities

The aim of the Vision is to identify opportunities to intervene to transform critical parts of the city to create a green, people focused, connected city centre for current and future users.

These include the following objectives:

- **Create a Civic Spine** – establish a clearly defined and recognisable north-south civic route to provide safe and accessible movement through the city centre, including car-free streets
- **Reimagine the Inner Ring Road and End Car Dominance** – transform the ‘inner ring’ to reduce physical severance for surrounding communities and become a sustainable mobility corridor
- **Promote City Centre Living** – encourage city centre living by providing greater quality, choice and affordability of accommodation. Establish a city-wide network of people friendly routes and city parks
- **Embrace the River Lagan and Waterfront** – enhance existing, and create new riverside attractions to encourage better use of the River Lagan. Strengthen connections between the river and the city centre

Questions

We would be very grateful if you would take time to answer the questions below.

- (1) Do we need to see an Active Travel Act in Northern Ireland?
- (2) What lessons can we learn from other parts of the UK and further afield in developing effective Active Travel strategies?

- (3) How can central and local government work together more effectively to develop Active Travel options?
- (4) How has our emergence from the Covid pandemic impacted on Active Travel?
- (5) How could government have responded better over the past three years in promoting Active Travel?
- (6) What is the best way to develop the greenway network in Northern Ireland?
- (7) How can we redevelop town and city centre infrastructure to better adapt to Active Travel options?
- (8) Do you have any other suggestions or ideas concerning the development of Active Travel in Northern Ireland?
- (9) Do you believe that we should consider replicating the 'Belfast Bikes' model in other towns and cities in Northern Ireland?
- (10) Do you have any further points you would like to make about how best to advance active travel in Northern Ireland?

This is a Public Consultation document released by the Democratic Unionist Party. None of the proposals within it constitute present party policy. The final policy position will be adopted by Party Officers at the end of external as well as internal engagement processes.

If you want to contribute to this consultation please reply with your comments and proposals to:

Email: georgedorrian@dup.org.uk

Write to: DUP Policy Unit
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If you wish to request a meeting to discuss these proposals email George Dorrian, georgedorrian@dup.org.uk.