RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

PRE-BUDGET/FINANCIAL SCRUTINY ON ROADS MAINTENANCE IN SCOTLAND

SUBMISSION FROM CYCLING UK IN SCOTLAND

Executive Summary

- Badly maintained roads are a major issue for cyclists because they are dangerous. The present maintenance regime favours trunk roads, with around 87-90% “acceptable” in 2016, over local roads, with an 'acceptable' rating of only 66%, and no improvement in 10 years. The system is thus not working.
- Cycling UK in Scotland recommends a substantial shift in the balance of transport funding: from national to local roads, and from building new road capacity to maintaining the existing network.
- We believe that reduced road spending must not compromise safety for the most vulnerable road users such as cyclists. Furthermore, any spending cuts must not discourage people from cycling – rather reduced spending should be targeted in a way which encourages people away from car use and to active travel forms such as cycling or to use public transport.

Introduction

Cycling UK is a charity and works to inspire and help people to cycle and keep cycling, whatever kind of cycling they do or would like to do. Our projects in Scotland are focussed on addressing inequalities in transport and towards anyone needing a bit of extra support to get riding, such as older people, people with complex health conditions, and people with disabilities. www.cyclinguk.org.

Cycling UK in Scotland welcomes the opportunity to comment on road maintenance to the Scottish Government's REC Committee.

Cycling UK in Scotland believes that spending on roads must be rebalanced to encourage active forms of travel including cycling. Spending on road maintenance must make cycling safer and not put people off regular cycling or starting cycling for the first time. Poorly maintained roads are just an inconvenience for cars, but for pedal cycles they are much more, they are *dangerous* - and hence discourage cycling. Rebalancing road spending is an urgent issue for Scotland, not least for the two following reasons:

Climate Emergency - Scotland has declared a climate emergency; transport is a major contributor to carbon emissions (over 25%). People riding bikes for regular journeys and for leisure has a major role to play in reducing emissions.

The Health Crisis - An alarming percentage of Scotland’s population is now over-weight or, indeed, obese, putting great pressure on the health services. This is largely due to reduced levels of physical activity, which in turn is linked to rising levels of car use.

Well-maintained roads play an essential role in encouraging active travel, which in turn benefits public health and the climate emergency.

How have recent spending decisions on roads maintenance affected the quality of Scotland's roads, road users, businesses, public services, and the economy?

For cyclists, road maintenance is a major issue - 'poor or defective maintenance' was recorded by the police as a 'contributory factor' to 368 incidents in which cyclists were seriously injured and 22 were killed on Britain's roads between 2007 and 2016[1]. Many of the complaints Cycling UK in Scotland receives from members are about road maintenance. Around 12% of the legal claims handled by Cycling UK's solicitors on behalf of our members are due to poor maintenance.

Most cycling takes place on local roads rather than trunk roads. Many cycle crashes are caused, directly or indirectly, by poor road maintenance, and on many local roads, cyclists are unable to keep to the side of the road because of potholes. Cyclists are often forced out to change direction to avoid potholes, exposing them (and other road users) to danger.

A Cycling UK investigation found that the average payout for a successful maintenance-related damages claim is 13 times higher for cyclists than for drivers – and that is without including their own (significantly greater) legal costs. This is doubtless because cyclists' claims, and indeed those from pedestrians, are much more likely to involve serious injury, whereas motorists' claims are more typically for property damage only[2]

Due to many local roads are so poorly maintained, some cyclists, especially commuters, choose to ride on a trunk road if a choice is available, despite the fact that this exposes them to a greater danger from fast-moving motor traffic.

Cuts to road maintenance budgets have significantly higher disbenefits on local roads (where pedestrian and cycle traffic is disproportionately concentrated) than on trunk roads. A £1 maintenance cut for local roads has an economic cost of £1.67, compared with just £1.12 for trunk roads[3].

The 'Background Information' summarised in the Committee's 'Call for Evidence' clearly shows the unfavourable comparison in spending on road maintenance between trunk roads and local roads. Thus, while the latter comprise over 93% of all roads, in 2011 only 66% of local roads were 'in acceptable condition', compared with 78% for trunk roads, and in 2017-18 "some 37% of the local road network may require some kind of maintenance, compared with 8.6%/11% of trunk roads being "life-expired" – i.e. local roads are around 4 times worse. In 2016, 87-90% of trunk roads were "in acceptable condition", while local roads remained "broadly stable since the last assessment", i.e. just 66% in acceptable condition.

The likely reason for this discrepancy is that Local Authorities (LAs) are generally under-funded and have to meet a very wide range of obligations. **Whatever the reasons, the fact is that there is an imbalance in the funding of road maintenance.**

How could any negative effects of reduced road spending best be addressed?

We believe that reduced road spending must not compromise safety for the most vulnerable road users such as cyclists. Furthermore, any spending cuts must not discourage people from cycling – rather reduced spending should be targeted in a way which encourages people away from car use and to active travel forms such as cycling or

[1] Answer to a parliamentary question. 15 March 2018. https://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2018-02-22.129317.h
[2] See www.cyclinguk.org/press-release/156-local-authorities-spend-total-ps433-million-pothole-claims.
[3] https://trl.co.uk/sites/default/files/MIS010%20-%20Making%20the%20case%20for%20road%20maintenance%20spend%20in%20a%20competitive%20budget%20environment.pdf

to use public transport. The benefits of this for health, improved air quality, reduced road congestion etc are well known.

Cycling UK in Scotland believes that the following recommendations can improve spending on roads, particularly with regard to maintenance, and may be used to improve standards despite reduced road spending:

- Local Authorities should adopt processes to ensure that opportunities are routinely taken to improve cycling conditions when carrying out planned highway maintenance works, thereby achieving 'best value' from the synergies between their cycling and planned highway maintenance programmes. For example:
    - Planning maintenance (i.e. full resurfacing of a road), at the point when it is cost-effective to do so, rather than patch-fixing potholes when a road has already become badly degraded. Pro-active maintenance is more cost-effective than 'worst-first' maintenance of potholes of roads that have degraded will beyond the point when they should have been fully resurfaced. Sufficient funding is needed to achieve this.
    - When fully resurfacing a road, local authorities should adopt procedures to ensure they consistently consider opportunities to redesign the road to be more cycle-friendly at the same time. For instance, it is far cheaper – and less disruptive to traffic – if relatively low-cost 'light segregation' measures (such as traffic wands) are installed when contractors are out on-site working on the road already.
- The following site-specific factors should be taken into account in assessing the risks posed to cyclists by potholes and prioritising maintenance:
    - their position relative to the edge (or the effective edge) of the road;
    - their alignment (i.e. whether they run parallel to or across a cyclists' line of travel, and thus the likelihood that cyclists' wheels will get trapped in them);
    - whether they are at or near junctions, particularly major or complex junctions; and
    - whether they are on gradients. Awareness of these issues should be incorporated into professional training for highway inspectors.
- Highway authorities should be encouraged to use bicycles with sensors to monitor road and cycle track surface quality, and to use specialised narrower vehicles to keep cycle tracks free of debris and vegetation, or from snow and ice in winter.
- The providers of defect management systems for highway authorities should integrate their products with Fill that Hole https://www.fillthathole.org.uk/ and similar public defect-reporting websites, to facilitate two-way communication between users of these sites and the highway authorities themselves.
- Cycle safety should be taken into account in managing road works, street works and construction sites[4], in accordance with).
- The business case for highway maintenance investment should reflect the environmental and health benefits of reduced fuel consumption, and the deterrent effect of poor surfaces on cycling and walking (due to the greater risks and effort involved), as well as the reduced costs of highway repairs, delays, and damages to both people and vehicles.

[4] A good example of guidance on 'Cyclists at Roadworks' is set out in TfL's 'Temporary traffic management handbook' https://consultations.tfl.gov.uk/cycling/draft-london-cycling-design-standards/user_uploads/appendix-cyclists-at-roadworks.pdf

Is the current model of funding and delivering roads maintenance, which is split between Transport Scotland and local authorities, the most economic and efficient option?

Local roads are different from other categories of local public spending. For most local services, the 'consumers' are truly 'local' – e.g. schools, care homes, social work etc, cater for a local catchment. Many local roads, however, especially in cities, are used by everyone - potentially from all over Scotland and beyond - this applies particularly to businesses and commercial traffic. There is a good case, therefore, that many local roads serve a national purpose rather than a purely local one.

The most road damage is caused by buses and HGVs, then LGVs, followed by cars - pedal cycles cause very little damage. Damage occurs in approximate proportion to the fourth power of the axle weight[5]. Local roads are subjected to almost no restrictions on the type of traffic that uses them. Hence, these roads not only serve long-distance traffic, but that traffic is often of the heaviest and most damaging type.

Cycling UK in Scotland recommends a substantial shift in the balance of transport funding: from national to local roads, and from building new road capacity to maintaining the existing network. These allocations should be informed by a wider review of the optimal balance of transport spending. We recommend that a policy to address this need to shift in spending on road maintenance in this way be included in the National Transport Strategy – a draft of which is currently open for consultation. We also recommend that this shift in priorities is seen in the Strategic Transport Projects Review – currently under development by Transport Scotland.

We believe that the case for better maintenance of all Scottish roads, but especially local roads, is in our view overwhelming, and should be addressed without delay.

[5] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AASHO_Road_Test and https://trl.co.uk/reports/LR979 .