

RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

PRE-BUDGET/FINANCIAL SCRUTINY ON ROADS MAINTENANCE IN SCOTLAND

SUBMISSION FROM PATHS FOR ALL AND LIVING STREETS SCOTLAND

- **Road maintenance is a major concern to pedestrians and cyclists and research indicates levels of funding are falling and will have serious negative consequences.**
- **Against a background of reduced road maintenance spending we are concerned at the lack of measurable data on walking and cycling infrastructure. This indicates a low priority because you measure what matters.**
- **We consider that the roads maintenance budget needs to explicitly include footways and cycleways. Spending in this area needs to be monitored.**
- **Maintaining safe and comfortable pavements and paths is vital for the delivery of the National Walking Strategy and the National Transport Strategy and addressing the Climate Emergency.**

Introduction

Paths for All and Living Streets Scotland welcome the opportunity to respond to this call for views.

Our understanding is that both Transport Scotland and local authority “roads” budgets normally also include pavements, footpaths and cycle tracks which are considered part of the carriageway. We are however concerned at the low priority given to walking and cycling because councils don’t explicitly monitor spend in these areas. Our view is that the roads maintenance budget should specifically address active travel infrastructure rather than make a broad assumption that people on foot and bikes benefit from general carriageway maintenance.

There is considerable evidence that a fall in footway maintenance spending will discourage people to choose active travel due to reduced safety and a less pleasant experience. Conversely, more revenue spending on basic maintenance will encourage walking and cycling. Whilst it’s difficult to present comprehensive picture, multiple sources of information show maintenance spending is declining and the implications for the promotion of walking are serious.

Importance of road maintenance to people on foot

National survey of attitudes and barriers to walking in Scotland - Paths for All - Final report August 2019 (in press)

The results of this survey suggest that the quality of pavements can be an issue for many people.

Respondents were shown a list of potential issues and asked if they encountered any of these recently while walking locally and whether these issues had caused them to change their route or not walk in this place again.

The most common issues related to experiences on roadside pavements including cars parked on pavements, cyclists on pavements and poor pavement maintenance.

- 38% had experienced poorly maintained pavements.
- 19% had been forced to change where they walked as a result.

Respondents were presented with a series of attitude statements and asked to rate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with each.

- While 41% agreed that pavements in their local area were in a good condition, almost as many (37%) disagreed.
- Only a quarter felt that the condition of paths in their local area had improved in the last 5 years (25%), slightly less than the proportion who disagreed with this statement (28%).

YouGov Polling of older UK adults for Living Streets in March 2019

- 60% worry about cracked/uneven pavements when walking on local streets.
- 31% felt cracked/ uneven pavements prevent them from walking more/at all on their local streets.
- 48% felt that well-maintained pavement surfaces (no cracks, potholes etc would make them more likely to walk more on local streets.

The smaller data sample for Scotland was comparable with the UK picture

Trends in roads maintenance budgets

Councils across Scotland have cut roads maintenance funding by 20 per cent over the past seven years in response to pressure on their budgets. (Local Government Benchmarking Framework <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/benchmarking/>)

Spending on local roads has declined by 26% in real terms across the last five years as a result of the prioritisation of education and care, which now account for around 60% of all local spending. (Road Maintenance Strategic Action Group: Response to Audit Scotland report Maintaining Scotland's Roads: A Follow-Up Report http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/documents/roads_collaboration_programme/sag-auditscotland.pdf)

There aren't any centrally compiled measures of spending on walking and cycling infrastructure. To date the only data available is a survey undertaken by Living Streets Scotland in 2014 using freedom of information regulations (See Scottish spending on pavement repairs falls sharply, BBC News, 7 April 2014.)

The figures compiled from Freedom of Information enquiries made by Living Streets indicate that:

- Footway maintenance spend declined by 20.5% across Scotland from 2009-2013 - from £19.5m to £15.5m, despite total maintenance spend increasing from £137m to £150m over the same period

- The share of maintenance spend for footways versus road carriageways declined from 14% to 10% over the same period
- The data provided surprising results for Glasgow compared with the other largest cities: where Edinburgh spent 31.9% of its total road maintenance budget on pavements, Aberdeen 19.1% and Dundee 21.3%, Glasgow appeared to spend only 9.2%. This reinforces concerns that councils collect data in different ways or have wildly different priorities.

Whilst Living Streets hasn't had the resources to repeat the survey, there is strong evidence that negative trends on spending on footway maintenance will have continued or accelerated.

There is a clear need for better data, given that an estimated £1m+ is spent on compensation for trips and falls by pedestrians. The importance of local road maintenance as preventative spend is illustrated in Edinburgh. Over 10 years, Edinburgh council had to pay out £2.3m in claims resulting from injuries caused by defective pavements but only £250,000 for claims relating to damage to cars from defective roads. Motorists carry insurance and therefore they maybe more likely to claim for any damage or loss than pedestrians. The comparative picture for pedestrians may be much worse than this research indicates.

We recommend that Councils are instructed to collect data on footway maintenance in a consistent manner and that this can be disaggregated from general spending on carriageway maintenance. This is vital to transparency and an increasing the overall priority for walking and cycling. This is identified in the National Walking Strategy Action Plan as a priority but so far councils haven't engaged with the problem.

Impacts of falling maintenance

Well maintained footways are vital to achieving wider policy goals - something recognised by the Scottish Government. For example, The National Transport Strategy consultation states that "*Dedicated walking and cycling infrastructure must also be maintained to encourage use.*" <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/45149/national-transport-strategy-draft-for-consultation-july-2019.pdf> Poor infrastructure has several impacts on pedestrians according to research by the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL). The research identified the following impacts which are taken directly from this 2012 report.

Physical fitness and health

The potential for increased severance noted under the accessibility and social inclusion criterion will be a disincentive for affected communities to maintain physical fitness levels. There are strong connections between road condition and policies on health and obesity as poor carriageway and footway condition deter walking and cycling. Road condition also affects equalities since women will often view the public realm differently from men, primarily because of fear of crime and being alone in an unsafe environment. The success of Government policies (e.g. Cycling Action Plan for Scotland, Route Map to Healthy Weight) is directly related to the standard of provision of carriageways, footways and cycle-tracks.

Structures, footpaths, cycle-tracks

Potential increases in risk of structural failure could have a significant effect on community accessibility (e.g. a bridge spanning a river with a community on both sides of the river) ((James, Harper, Reid, McColl-Grubb, & Tomlinson, 2004). However, due to safety concerns it is likely that such assets will be shielded the most from the effect of budget reductions. If facilities such as pedestrian underpasses or footpaths are poorly maintained and suffer reduced use due to fears of crime and accidents, as noted elsewhere, a similar effect of severance will be realised in the long term. Studies in the Netherlands have shown that well-kept public areas had fewer incidents of dishonesty, suggesting they reduce the propensity to criminal activity, echoing the broken window theory noted in Table 1.

General impacts on pedestrians

An increase in roadside noise or deterioration in local air quality, visual amenity and appearance (e.g. graffiti) and street lighting will have a comparatively bigger effect on pedestrians than other road users. Deterioration in road and footway condition can deter movement by pedestrians, particularly the elderly, adults with young children and the disabled. Reductions in planned maintenance will put more pressure on the need for unplanned maintenance and delays to unplanned maintenance will further deter pedestrians.

Social impacts

Reduced care of footways and roadside environments (e.g. fence repairs, surface repairs, vegetation control) increases the perceived risk of crime for the public and serves as a deterrent to use. This will lead to lower social interaction in neighbourhoods which increases the risks of crime. Funding reductions will exacerbate any such risks (perceived or real), especially among certain groups (e.g. the elderly).

Maintenance activity and air quality

Reduced road maintenance will mean less planned maintenance work on the network. Particularly at major carriageway maintenance sites and for bridge or structures repairs, significant dust can be generated. With lower funding, the number of planned events may reduce and this may lead to better air quality, but this will be part offset by any increase in unplanned maintenance (e.g. more potholes and carriageway surface disintegration) and, potentially, other more significant and intrusive work (e.g. a weakened or collapsed structure requiring urgent repair).

Anecdotal evidence suggests that local air quality will deteriorate due to increased dust if streets are cleaned less but there is no quantified or reported evidence of this

Equalities

Older people are more likely to be adversely affected if there are more and worse defects on footways and if street lighting and other amenity assets and activities are reduced. The elderly have a greater fear of crime and potential accidents and will therefore experience a comparatively bigger effect from these impacts than other road users.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act: Transport Scotland Good Practice Guide for Roads (2009) Local Authorities must ensure that road maintenance policies do not disadvantage

disabled people. Uneven footways have a bigger impact on people with disabilities (e.g. visual impairment, or mobility) so that deterioration in the quality of such assets will have a comparatively bigger effect on disabled people. The Disability Discrimination Act: Good Practice for Roads (2009) lays out clearly the accessibility standards needed to enable disabled people to use road environments. If carriageways and footways fall below accepted standards of accessibility, then this will have a direct impact on the use of the road network by disabled people by affecting access to local businesses and facilities, and thus increasing the severance for those affected.

The TRL research paper can be read in full here

<https://trl.co.uk/sites/default/files/MIS010%20-%20Making%20the%20case%20for%20road%20maintenance%20spend%20in%20a%20competitive%20budget%20environment.pdf>

Street audits

Living Streets Scotland delivers street audits on behalf of Local Authorities and the Scottish Government. It's notable that in almost every location at least some of the factors are present and poor maintenance is a root cause. The Paths for All and Living Street polling indicates considerable concern about the overall state of the pedestrian environment and the need to increase, not decrease revenue spending in this area.

Links to national policy goals

We believe current trends in road maintenance spending are incompatible with achieving the following national strategy and policy goals.

National Walking Strategy

Outcome: Pavements (Footways) are increasingly well maintained by local authorities

Objective: Increase the percentage of footways that are deemed in good condition

Action: All local authorities undertake regular Footway Condition Surveys

<https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/mediaLibrary/other/english/81342.pdf>

National Transport Strategy

We will reinforce the Sustainable Travel Hierarchy to promote and design our transport system so that walking, cycling and public and shared transport are promoted and take precedence ahead of private car use.

<https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/45149/national-transport-strategy-draft-for-consultation-july-2019.pdf>

Climate emergency

Promoting walking is also important in the context of addressing the Climate Emergency. Transport is now Scotland's largest source of climate change emissions, and private cars contribute 60% of the emissions to the sector. There are many benefits from increased walking, cycling and using public transport and improving the quality of

infrastructure, encouraging people to change their behaviour, is key to releasing these benefits.

Transport (Scotland) Bill 2018

We believe that once enacted and enforced the national ban on parking on footways will result in significant maintenance savings. Cars mounting kerbs and parking on service ducts are a significant factor in shortening the life of pavements. Quite simply, pavements are constructed for pedestrians and not cars. Exemptions to the ban must consider whether the paved area is robust enough to support the weight and impact of cars.

Cleaner Air for Scotland Strategy – An Independent Review - Final Report to the Scottish Government

The report recommends more focus on inter-related interventions including improved transport infrastructure that encourages higher levels of active travel (walking, cycling).

It also found that the current funding level for active travel is insufficient to meet the need for transformative change, especially for related infrastructure programmes and the associated behaviour change support work given the paucity of funding over many decades. Doubling the funding level again (since the 2017 doubling announcement from £40 million to £80 million) would signal the seriousness of the task and the need to upskill and expand the human resources also needed. Short-term, stop-start sustainable transport programmes must be replaced with permanent programmes.

It also states that the 50% local authority match funding requirement for the bulk of the active travel budget must be reconsidered.

There are a number of areas which are highlighted where funding shortfall means that local authorities currently do not pursue interventions which could contribute to improving local air quality and broader health co-benefits. The promotion and modal shift towards active travel provides wider economic benefits too. <https://www.gov.scot/news/cleaner-air-for-scotland-1/>

Summary

If national policy goals on physical activity, air quality and climate change are to be achieved, we consider that there is a need for greater emphasis on the requirements of walkers and cyclists – and this applies equally to everyone who walks and cycles as part of a multi-mode journey including bus, tram or train. Road maintenance is a major concern for people on foot based on data collected by Paths for All and Living Streets Scotland

Revenue budgets must also include weather and winter services, such as applying salt and grit to remove snow and ice – our impression is that often priority is given to clearing roads for vehicles at the expense of pedestrians.

Despite limited data there is evidence that the existing situation is unsatisfactory – we are concerned that this may deteriorate. We are concerned that insufficient priority is given to

maintaining walking and cycling infrastructure. Despite the lack of specific, up to date figures, for walking and cycling there is clear evidence that footway repairs are declining as part of the wider squeeze on roads spending. The Scottish Government's own research indicates this type of trend will have multi-faceted and severe consequences for pedestrians and active travel.

These negative trends are relevant to the delivery of several policies and strategies – including the National Walking Strategy and the National Transport Strategy - that seek to promote and increase walking and cycling levels for the undoubted health, environmental and social benefits that entails. Unless reversed other positive work to promote walking and cycling will be undermined by a lack of safe and well-maintained infrastructure.

Background

Paths for All

Paths for All is a Scottish charity founded in 1996. We champion everyday walking as the way to a happier, healthier Scotland. We want to get Scotland walking: everyone, everyday, everywhere.

Our aim is to significantly increase the number of people who choose to walk in Scotland - whether that's for leisure or walking to work, school, the shops or to a nearby public transport hub. We want to create a happier, healthier Scotland where physical activity improves quality of life and wellbeing for all. We work to develop more opportunities and better environments not just for walking, but also for cycling and other activities, to help make Scotland a more active, more prosperous, greener country.

Our work supports the delivery of the Active Scotland Delivery Plan, National Walking Strategy, The Cycling Action Plan for Scotland and the Long-term Vision for Active Travel in Scotland, community and workplace health walking, path network development and active travel policy development. We are a partnership organisation with 30 national partners. Our funders include the Scottish Government, Transport Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, Macmillan and The Life Changes Trust.

Living Streets Scotland

We want to create a walking nation, free from congested roads and pollution, reducing the risk of preventable illness and social isolation and making walking the natural choice. We believe that getting Scotland walking means progress for everyone.

We work with professionals and politicians to make sure every community can enjoy vibrant streets and public spaces. Our Walk to School and Walk to Work campaigns reach every area of Scotland. Through our Walkable Communities project, we empower community groups to deliver improvements to their walking environment.

Progress starts here: one street, one school, one step at a time.