

Conservation policy: call for written evidence

Sustrans response to Bright Blue

March 2019

About Sustrans

Sustrans is the charity making it easier for people to walk and cycle.

We are engineers and educators, experts and advocates. We connect people and places, create liveable neighbourhoods, transform the school run and deliver a happier, healthier commute.

Sustrans works in partnership, bringing people together across communities to find the right solutions. We make the case for walking and cycling by using robust evidence and showing what can be done.

Summary

Sustrans is pleased to respond to Bright Blue's call for written evidence on conservation policy. We have answered the following questions from the urban sub-section, with our submission summarised below.

Urban sub-section

1. Sustrans advocates for the implementation of urban transport policies which facilitate and promote active travel in order to better protect Britain's urban environments. This will require 5% of total transport spending on walking and cycling in 2020/21, rising to 10% over the five years of the next spending round (by 2024/25).
2. Cities and towns in the UK are dominated by vehicle traffic, the most inefficient way to move people and goods; and plagued by air pollution which shortens the lives of between 28,000-36,000 people each year. Road space should be allocated according to the most space efficient transport modes to improve efficiency and environmental conditions in urban areas.
3. New developments can be made more ecologically friendly by pursuing transit oriented development. I.e. integrating housing growth, transport, and health policies; building within or adjacent to existing urban areas or commuter hubs; designing higher density and mixed use developments; and designing in and accounting for walking and cycling.
4. Rather than building more on the green belt, new developments and their associated transport measures should be planned and built in line with transit orientated development to create higher density communities which enable more people to get around on foot or by bike.
5. Evidence shows that green access to green space is associated with positive health outcomes and reducing health inequalities in urban areas. Access to green space can be improved and maximised by investment in and improvement of UK-wide networks of traffic free and low-traffic routes such as the National Cycle Network. Investment of £2.3bn in the Network over the next 22 years (until 2040) could realise annual estimated benefits of £7.6bn or more.

Detailed response

1) What are the key policies which the Government should introduce to better protect Britain's urban environments?

Britain's urban environments currently suffer from high levels of air pollution, congestion, sedentary behaviour and road danger. These factors are not only detrimental to public health, but also the economic vitality of affected urban areas.

A major contributor to these issues is road transport and, accordingly, Sustrans advocates the implementation of urban transport policies which facilitate and promote active travel, i.e. walking and cycling. Increasing active travel will reduce congestion; improve air quality and the environment; improve economic vitality; reduce noise, isolation and improve wellbeing; and improve public health through increased physical activity.

Sustrans' Bike Life¹ reports outline that the 123 million bike trips made in 2017 in seven UK cities alone contributed to:

- Savings to the NHS of £8 million annually, equivalent to the average salary of 343 nurses;
- Taking up to 111,564 cars off our roads each day, equal to a 333-mile tailback;
- £281 million total economic benefit annually to the seven cities from people riding bikes for transport and leisure each year.

Key policies

We believe that the key policy instruments which will have the most effective impact in increasing active travel are investment in the Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy² (CWIS) and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP)³. Both currently receive a level of funding, but require much more investment to simply meet their own targets.

Funding

The ambition of the CWIS is to make cycling and walking the natural choice for shorter journeys, or as part of a longer journey, so that cycling activity is doubled from 0.8 billion stages in 2013 to 1.6 billion stages in 2025.

In 2018, the Government released a 50 point plan as part of a review of how to tackle the safety issues that cyclists and pedestrians face, or perceive, when travelling on the road⁴. However, in this document the Department for Transport (DfT) admitted its current policy, and funding, would only see cycling increase by a third over the next six years.

Similarly, LCWIPs are an excellent opportunity for local authorities to put long-term plans in place for walking and cycling, but although funding for formation of the plans is in place, funding does not currently exist for their implementation. This prevents local authorities from investing in staff in the long-term to put these plans in place and creates a real risk that they will just become documents on a shelf.

Only 2% of current total transport spend is on cycling and walking. Accordingly, a walking and cycling alliance made up of the Bicycle Association, British Cycling, Cycling UK, Living Streets, Ramblers and Sustrans are calling for the UK Government to empower a second CWIS (CWIS2) as part of its forthcoming Spending Review with resources that are consistent with its stated aims and ambitions.

This will require CWIS2 to amount to 5% of total transport spending in 2020/21, rising to 10% over the five years of the next spending round (i.e. by 2024/25). Based on figures for 2016/17 transport spending in England excluding London, this would amount to £17 per person annually (for walking as well as cycling) in 2020/1, rising to £34 per person in 2024/5.

¹ [Sustrans, 2017, Bike Life](#)

² [Department for Transport, 2017, Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy](#)

³ [UK Govt, 2017, Planning local cycling and walking networks](#)

⁴ [DfT, 2018, Government Response to Call for Evidence. CWIS: Safety Review](#)

2) What can improve a city or town's efficiency and environment?

Cities and towns in the UK are dominated by vehicle traffic. However, this is the least space efficient way of moving people and goods around, while air pollution is most acute on busy and congested roads in our towns and cities. For example, a four-metre wide lane can typically move a maximum of approximately 1,000 people per hour in cars⁵, but for bicycles and walking, typical maximum capacity increases to 5,000-10,000, and for buses 8,000-12,000.

Accordingly, Sustrans recommends reallocating road space according to the most space efficient transport modes to improve efficiency and environmental conditions in our cities and towns.

In terms of economic benefits, the congestion benefit of switching car journeys to bicycle is quantified in the Department for Transport's transport appraisal guidance (WebTAG). For London in 2015, the marginal external cost that represents the benefit of decongestion when car kilometre use is reduced is 62.1 pence per kilometre, at 2010 market prices⁶. In 2020, the marginal external cost for decongestion is 81.0 pence per kilometre.

Regarding environmental benefits, road transport is responsible for 80% of the NO₂ pollution where legal limits are being broken. Air pollution has been linked to cancer, asthma, stroke and heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and dementia, with the 'Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants' estimating that air pollution causes between 28,000-36,000 early deaths each year in the UK⁷.

We believe that air pollution should be tackled at source, by reallocating road space to active travel modes, providing incentives for cleaner vehicles for trips that cannot be shifted, and the implementation of new clean air legislation.

3) How can new developments for housing and other infrastructure projects be made more ecologically friendly?

The UK population is expected to rise by almost 10 million over the next 25 years. As new homes are built local populations will grow, increasing travel and exerting additional pressure on existing networks.

It is therefore critical that urban planning pursues transit oriented development: the principle of putting public transport front and centre in new developments, to maximise access by public transport, encourage walking and cycling and minimise the need to own and use cars.

Integrate housing growth, transport and health

Local planning authorities should better integrate their goals for housing growth, transport and health to ensure mutual objectives can be realised. This helps ensure walking and cycling provision is considered from the beginning of the planning process.

Build within or adjacent to existing towns and cities or commuter hubs

We must seek to identify and build in the most appropriate locations that enable cycling and walking, such as within or adjacent to existing settlements where the distance to jobs, schools and other services is reduced.

Design higher density and mixed use developments

Building to a higher density, wherever feasible and appropriate, encourages more compact settlements thereby increasing proximity and enabling active travel whilst reducing private

⁵ Litman, T., 2017, Evaluating Transportation Land Use Impacts. Victoria Transport Policy Institute

⁶ Department for Transport, 2018, TAG UNIT A5.4 Marginal External Costs

⁷ Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants (2018) Associations of long-term average concentrations of nitrogen dioxide with mortality
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/734799/COMEAP_NO2_Report.pdf

motor vehicle use⁸. Creating mixed use developments enable people to live closer to services they need meaning active travel and public transport can become normalised.

Design and account for walking and cycling in new developments

Planners need to design and account for sustainable transport in the planning of new housing developments to make active travel as easy as possible. Finally, motor vehicle use and parking should be managed effectively to reduce dependency upon the car and create more liveable places.

For further information, please refer to the Sustrans Active Travel Toolkit⁹ for linking active travel and public transport to housing growth and planning.

4) Should more building be permitted on green belt designated land? If so, how should such development be carried out so as to minimise ecological harm (or maximise ecological benefit)?

The green belt is one of the most important historic planning mechanisms for supporting sustainable transport. Green belt policy helps to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently underdeveloped whilst ensuring more compact geographical settlement patterns that support journeys by walking, cycling and public transport.

Accordingly, we believe that rather than building more on the green belt, new developments and their associated transport measures should be planned and built in line with our recommendations made in our response to Question 3.

5) How important is access to green and blue space in urban areas and what policies could the Government adopt to improve access to such spaces in the UK?

Evidence shows that green access to green space is associated with positive health outcomes and reducing health inequalities in urban areas¹⁰.

National Cycle Network

Access to green space can be improved and maximised by a UK-wide network of traffic free and low-traffic routes such as the National Cycle Network (Network), of which Sustrans are the custodians. Some of the Network's routes are traffic free 'Greenways' – linear green spaces – that provide safe places for families and beginners to walk and cycle. Sustrans research has found that currently 52% of trips are walked and 48% are cycled on the network.

A UK-wide network of motor traffic-free or low-traffic routes would also achieve the aim of the CWIS to increase the numbers of people walking and cycling.

Economic modelling suggests the NCN is currently worth £3.8bn to the UK every year. This could be even higher if usage increased further. Our 2018 review of the network, Paths for Everyone¹¹, outlined that investment of £2.3bn over the next 22 years (until 2040) would realise annual estimated benefits of £7.6bn or more.

Reduced speed limits

Access can also be improved to green spaces by reducing speeds on minor rural roads to increase safety and access for everyone whether it's those walking, riding or using a bike. For example, whilst cyclist injuries are more likely to occur in urban settings, cyclist fatalities are most likely to occur in rural settings.

⁸ Kenworthy and Laube, 1999, Patterns of automobile dependence in cities: an international overview of key physical and economic dimensions with some implications for urban policy. Transportation Research Part A 33 691-723

⁹ [Sustrans Active Travel Toolkit](#)

¹⁰ Mitchell R, Popham F., 2008, Effect of exposure to natural environment on health inequalities: an observational population study. Lancet., 372(9650):1655-60

¹¹ [Sustrans, 2018, NCN Review: Paths for Everyone](#)

The Network is partly off-road and partly on minor rural roads. A speed limit reduction to 40 mph on minor rural roads would increase safety where the Network interacts with roads and rural road safety overall. This will not just improve safety for people on bikes but also for walkers, horse riders and those taking part in recreational activities.

If you would like to clarify or discuss these matters further, please don't hesitate to contact us:

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