

PEDAL ON PARLIAMENT

WRITTEN SUBMISSION

Reducing Scotland's carbon footprint and getting more people walking and cycling

In 2010, Scots cycled a total of 298 million km,¹ saving approximately 74,500 tonnes of CO₂ a year (if the trips would otherwise have been by car) or 32,000 tonnes if the trips would otherwise have been by a mixture of bus, car and on foot.²

If cycling rates were to increase from the current (approx) 1% of trips to 10% of trips (as in the CAPS target), assuming the trip lengths remained the same, then savings would increase tenfold: 320,000 tonnes of CO₂ per year.

Unfortunately, Scotland is nowhere near meeting its CAPS aspiration. Since CAPS was launched, there have been only modest rises in the distances cycled, and levels are still below the figure for 1998/99.³

Fortunately, the example of Seville shows that cycling rates can be rapidly increased. In just six years, Seville's €32m network of cycling tracks increased cycling more than tenfold - from 0.5% to 7%.⁴ This is comparable to the sort of rates of increase Scotland needs if it is to have a hope of meeting the CAPS vision. In fact, it suggests that 2014 is the last chance Scotland has to meet the deadline of having 10% of journeys by bike by 2020. There is certainly no way that the current rate of progress, nor that the current CAPS approach will achieve anything like the growth required. Seville is not unique. Everywhere that safe, separated, convenient networks of cycle tracks have been built have seen cycling figures rise substantially.⁵ Cycling rates city by city are directly proportional to the amount of cycling infrastructure that city has.⁶ Off road cycling facilities are particularly important for female cyclists.⁷ Nowhere has managed to bring about sustained increases in cycling levels across the population ('8 to 80 cycling') simply through training, exhortation and encouragement.

Seville's network cost approximately €45 (about £35) per head. What Scotland currently spends on cycling is not entirely clear, but the best estimate is that it will peak at just over £5 per head in 2014/15 for all spending (i.e. not just on infrastructure).⁸ Almost as importantly, the amount allocated is extremely short term - extra cash is announced at short notice, often to be spent within a year or two years at the most. This is a recipe for wasted spending, as councils scramble to put in bids for Sustrans funding to meet deadlines rather than a stated need.

To build a coherent network you need a coherent plan. One aspect of the revised CAPS that we welcome is the encouragement for councils to provide a cycling strategy, which could help them to make the most use of what money is announced. However, if there were a long term commitment to

investing Dutch levels of spending (approximately £25 per head,⁹ or about £100m a year) then plans to develop strategic networks, council by council, could be achieved in reasonably short time scales. According to Sustrans' estimates for costs this would be enough to build a minimum of 100km of segregated tracks (similar to those built in Seville) – basically building a network somewhat larger than Edinburgh's existing off-road cycling network (70km) every year.¹⁰ While it would take time to ramp up to that level of investment, Sustrans' current funding round was heavily oversubscribed, suggesting that councils already have routes in the pipeline. With the current strategies being developed, more routes will be being planned all the time (for instance, NESTrans' draft strategy identifies nine strategic routes stretching from Banff to Angus¹¹) and plans could quickly be ramped up if the money is there. Having well-funded schemes available for Local Authorities to bid for would ensure that cycling rose up the agenda even in areas where it has not historically be a priority.

The return on investment in cycling and walking infrastructure is beyond anything else that can be achieved in transport projects. The median benefit to cost ratio is 19:1 for projects in the UK - compared with estimates of barely more than £1 for every £ spent for projects such as HS2.¹²

Reducing congestion

Cycle tracks can also reduce congestion, even if they appear to take capacity away from cars. Even if only a small percentage of road users switch from cars to bikes, the effects on congestion can be dramatic: a drop in traffic of just 1% can lead to a reduction in travel time of 18%.¹³ The experience in New York after cycle tracks were built was that journey times for all road users fell, even as speeding decreased.¹⁴ Traffic collisions of all kinds were reduced – which in itself also reduces congestion (it is often when roads have to be closed after a fatality that real gridlock ensues), as well as the obvious benefits to safety and improvements in livability. A collation of all the evidence for cycling by British Cycling has also shown huge benefits to health, the economy and wellbeing, although these are not under discussion here.¹⁵

Conclusion

In short, there are few investments the Scottish Government can make that are as beneficial to everyone – not just those who would like to cycle – as in proper, safe, well-designed cycling infrastructure.

¹ http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefingsAndFactsheets/S4/SB_12-24.pdf

² Based on calculations from http://www.ecf.com/wp-content/uploads/ECF_CO2_WEB.pdf

³ http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefingsAndFactsheets/S4/SB_12-24.pdf

⁴ <http://lcc.org.uk/pages/seville-goes-dutch>

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- ⁵ http://bikeportland.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/NITC-RR-583_ProtectedLanes_FinalReportb.pdf
- ⁶ <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs11116-011-9355-8>
- ⁷ <http://minority-health.pitt.edu/916/1/12pm.pdf>
- ⁸ <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wordpress/2014/10/budget-confusion-yet-again/>
- ⁹ <http://www.fietsberaad.nl/index.cfm?lang=nl§ion=nieuws&mode=newsArticle&repository=Jaarlijks+487+miljoen+euro+voor+de+fiets>
- ¹⁰ <http://www.sustrans.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/files/migrated-pdfs/17%20costs%5B1%5D.pdf>
- ¹¹ http://www.nestrans.org.uk/db_docs/docs/AcTrAP_Draft_for_Consultation_Sept_14.pdf
- ¹² <http://www.travelwest.info/sites/default/files/cd-essential-evidence-no-24-economic-benefits.pdf>
- ¹³ <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23259045>
- ¹⁴ <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/2012-10-measuring-the-street.pdf>
- ¹⁵ http://www.britishcycling.org.uk/zuvvi/media/bc_files/campaigning/BENEFITS_OF_INVESTING_IN_CYCLING_DIGI_FINAL.pdf

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