

Local Government and Communities Committee

City Region Deals

Submission from Sustrans Scotland

Introduction

Sustrans is the charity making it easier for people to walk and cycle. We connect people and places, create liveable neighbourhoods, transform the school run and deliver a happier, healthier commute.

Our response to the call for evidence on City Region Deals is based on our understanding of the basis of the programme and our involvement in agreements, both in Scotland and the UK. We highlight the insufficient focus on walking and cycling, the potential for uneven implementation of national policies and the potential missed opportunity for investment in walking and cycling for functional, every-day, short trips.

1. Insufficient focus on walking and cycling

1.1 City Region Deals represent an important opportunity for local devolution and promotion of active travel. Agreements in England include substantial active travel funding, notably over £8 million on cycling in Cambridge¹ and £7.5 million in Sheffield², but current City Region Deals in Scotland underrepresent both walking and cycling.

1.2 The original basis of City Region Deals is 'Unlocking growth in cities', the UK government white paper published in 2011. Point 8 states city deals would 'allow cities to take strategic transport decisions by devolving local transport major funding'³. This should be an opportunity for the regions to reflect the Scottish Government's National Transport Strategy (2016)⁴, Cycling Action Plan for Scotland (2017)⁵ and National Walking Strategy (2014)⁶.

1.3 However, agreed City Region Deals in Scotland do not announce significant active travel projects or promote Scotland's aim of 10% of journeys being completed by bicycle by 2020.

1.4 Both the Aberdeen and Inverness City Region Deals have agreed high-level working arrangements. Though the actual projects are yet to be approved, both proposals include indications of roads to be built or upgraded and no specific active travel projects. The Glasgow City Region's planned infrastructure investment programme is heavily focused on increasing road infrastructure and improving

¹ http://www.gccitydeal.co.uk/citydeal/info/2/transport/1/transport_projects_and_consultations/4

² <https://sheffieldcityregion.org.uk/2017/02/city-region-boosts-cycling-walking/>

³ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7523/CO_Unlocking_20GrowthCities_acc.pdf

⁴ <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/10207/main-doc-transport-scotland-national-transport-strategy-january-2016-final-online.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.cyclingscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Transport-Scotland-Policy-Cycling-Action-Plan-for-Scotland-January-2017.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0045/00452622.pdf>

access to Glasgow Airport⁷. Other City Region Deals in Scotland are still only in the development or negotiation stage.

1.5 A Fraser of Allander Institute Economic Commentary in December 2016 highlighted how City Region Deals should consider “road, rail, bus, tram and active travel” (p.14). However, active travel projects and funding have been non-specific when compared to existing deals’ focus on roads.

1.6 City Region Deals are tasked with catalysing economic growth, but the evidence that road building increases productivity, jobs or growth is, at best, debatable. Road building can also encourage air pollution, and increase the need for parking⁸.

1.7 Increasing walking and cycling, on the other hand, has economic benefits to local consumer spending⁹ and to tourism revenue¹⁰. It also confers indirect economic benefits through increased physical fitness, and reducing congestion, consumer cost and road casualties^{11,12}

1.8 City Region Deals in general underrepresent walking and cycling. This is through the balance of attention given to all modes of transport, and the many direct and indirect benefits that walking and cycling have to economic growth.

2. The risk of fragmented implementation of national policies

2.1 Scotland has strong national policies in both walking and cycling listed in 1.2. A challenge which has recently reduced the impact of these policies is the translation to local action¹³.

2.2 One of the potential strengths of City Region Deals is regional coordination of active travel and strategic transport networks. However, differences in the governance structures between proposed City Regions risks leaving important stakeholders out of a deal.

2.3 This makes it difficult to comment on the overall effectiveness of shifting responsibility to local leaders. However, the level of effectiveness is uncertain in the context of Scotland’s national ambitions for walking and cycling, given that coordination between national strategies and local implementation is already disjointed in Scotland.

2.4 City Region Deals provide an opportunity to implement the goals of Scotland’s active travel policies. But, without direction or specific funding within deals there is no impetus to use this as an opportunity to further walking and cycling.

⁷ <http://www.sbbusinessforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/City-Deals-Overview-Audit-Scotland.pdf>

⁸ <http://www.vtqi.org/walkability.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.citylab.com/transportation/2012/12/cyclists-and-pedestrians-can-end-spending-more-each-month-drivers/4066/>

¹⁰ <http://www.sustrans.org.uk/news/new-research-reveals-cycle-tourism-worth-%C2%A3345-million-scottish-economy>

¹¹ http://www.cyclinguk.org/sites/default/files/economic_cycle_exec_summary.pdf

¹² <http://www.vtqi.org/walkability.pdf>

¹³ <http://www.sustrans.org.uk/blog/working-towards-active-future-scotland>

2.5 This problem, in part, stems from a lack of a transparent structure in bids and negotiations that means City Regions do not necessarily cover the same sectors as each other.

2.6 There is a role for the Scottish Government to review City Region Deals to establish whether existing agreements meet all national transport strategies, and ensure that future deals contribute to achieving Scotland's ambitions for increasing walking and cycling.

2.7 City Region Deals should reflect the Scottish government's sustainable travel hierarchy outlined in the NTS (2016), which promotes walking and cycling, prior to other forms of movement¹⁴.

2.8 It is notable how Glasgow City Region have made improvements benefitting walking and cycling to their City Region Deal after the initial agreement was published^{15,16}. It is therefore positive that Deals already agreed still have the capacity to deliver significant investment in walking and cycling. This is an opportunity that may need to be seized by other Deals.

2.9 Given the Scottish government's considerable matched-funding of City Region Deals agreed so far¹⁷, there is significant leverage for translating and embedding the vision and targets that the government has for active travel.

3. The case for investment

3.1 City Region Deals are an opportunity for major walking and cycling infrastructure projects to draw funding from multiple sources, but Scottish deals have announced limited active travel projects so far, compared to other forms of transport.

3.2 Sustrans Scotland has long advocated that funding for walking and cycling should rise incrementally to 10% of transport budgets. City Region Deals should contribute to this aim.

3.3 The UK government white paper states 'local transport major funding' will be devolved, but City Region Deals in Scotland give the impression that the most significant measures are road building and rail, and active travel is not a subject given major attention or funding.

3.4 However, our Community Links PLUS funding programme attracts significant interest from local authorities for major cycling infrastructure projects¹⁸. It is our experience from Community Links Plus, and the well-established Community Links programme, that there is greater demand for major cycling infrastructure from local authorities than there is funding available. City Region Deals should be one of the structures available to increase available capital funding.

¹⁴ <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/10310/transport-scotland-national-transport-strategy-january-2016-final-online.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=19525>

¹⁶ <https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=20819>

¹⁷ http://www.parliament.scot/ResearchBriefingsAndFactsheets/S5/SB_17-19_City_Region_Deals.pdf

¹⁸ <http://www.sustrans.org.uk/scotland/communities/community-links-plus-design-competition>

3.5 It is arguable that the use of ‘major’ inadvertently translates to ‘expensive’, thereby promoting road and rail projects which are more costly. City Region Deals in Scotland should instead promote devolution of ‘strategic’ transport funding, which does not bias expectations towards a limited number of high expenditure projects.

3.6 As active travel infrastructure is, in general, cheaper than road or rail it can be less eye-catching, but often elicits more favourable benefit to cost ratios. Benefit to cost ratios using Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) are generally higher for projects that enable more walking and cycling¹⁹ due to the many co-benefits associated with active travel.

3.7 For example, the World Health Organisation’s Health Economic Assessment Tool²⁰ highlights the significant economic benefits that active travel interventions can have. Many of the co-benefits of active travel contribute to areas which are or will be further devolved under City Region Deals.

3.8 Using the HEAT tool we have been able to show that Community Links projects can have benefit to cost ratios as high as £13 gained to £1 spent. A Glasgow University study into commuting by bicycle estimated that regular cyclists halve their risk of cancer and heart disease²¹. Spending on walking and cycling is therefore strategic, and would reduce expenditure in other areas. Notably the yearly bill of £100 million to the NHS in Scotland to treat related heart conditions²².

3.9 The Fraser of Allander Institute Economic Commentary²³ in December 2016 highlighted how City Region Deals “*should enable integrated approaches to public transport...health, unemployment, care, adult skills, and employability, so that these budgets can be combined to achieve greater impact.*” (p.14). Several of these are areas that active travel has a well-evidenced positive effect²⁴, without mentioning network resilience, and devolved matters such as climate change and air pollution.

3.10 Given that City Region Deals are aimed at transport infrastructure and economic growth, the strategic value of walking and cycling to both of these core priorities should be recognised in the funding structures to ensure appropriate and balanced investment in transport.

4. Conclusion

4.1. It will be a missed opportunity if City Region devolution is not more explicit about encouraging active travel. However, Sustrans Scotland contend that this should not present a barrier to City Regions promoting policies on walking and cycling, or an expectation from the Scottish Government of this in exchange for its matched funding.

4.2 Glasgow has demonstrated that those Deals in advanced stages of completion can change and improve planning for walking and cycling, whilst those

¹⁹ <http://www.starconference.org.uk/star/2011/angelaWilson.pdf>

²⁰ <http://www.heatwalkingcycling.org/>

²¹ http://www.gla.ac.uk/news/headline_522765_en.html

²² <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0045/00458289.pdf>

²³ https://pure.strath.ac.uk/portal/files/62917707/FEC_40_3_2016_ClarkG_CouturierJ_MoirE_MoonenT.pdf

²⁴ <http://www.sustrans.org.uk/policy-evidence/the-impact-of-our-work/related-academic-research-and-statistics>

deals in embryonic stage should seize the opportunity to highlight the strategic benefits of making it easier for people to walk and cycle.

4.3 The case for investing in walking and cycling needs to be made more clearly, especially in reference to the economic benefits. Whilst progress has been made in existing City Regions in Scotland to focus more on active travel, the level of investment and attention does not match the ambition of the target of 10% of journeys to be completed by bike by 2020.