



Sport and Active Recreation in Wales – “Climbing Higher” Strategy for Consultation. Welsh Assembly Government, July 2003

Response by Sustrans Cymru

General Comments

We greatly welcome this consultation by the Welsh Assembly. It has much relevance to many of the projects we are working on across the UK and Wales.

Sustrans is a civil engineering charity, which works to change the environment so that sustainable, physically active ways of travelling are more accessible. Sustrans has over 25 years' experience in creating environments for physical activity, such as the National Cycle Network programme, and changing the transport culture to make active travel possible, as with Safe Routes to Schools (SRS).

Sustrans' flagship project, the National Cycle Network, currently provides over 7,000 miles of cycling and walking routes throughout the UK, including over 900 miles in Wales. The creation of the Network has considerably increased opportunities for people to make journeys by bike and on foot, and as with other long-distance transport networks, most of its usage is local. During 2000 the Network carried 60 million journeys. Data for 2002 shows usage to have risen to over 97 million journeys (including nearly 12 million in Wales) with like-for-like growth over the two-year period of +13%. 72% of users say that the existence of the Network has led them to be more physically active. (*Sustrans, 2003 National Cycle Network user monitoring report 2002*).

Safe Routes to Schools (SRS) was originated by Sustrans in the 1980s, at which time it was entirely orthodox for a school to ban cycling and encourage car journeys to school (through provision of large car parks, drop off areas etc). All English and Welsh highway authorities now have a SRS component in their Local Transport Plans and the Department for Transport, Scottish Executive and Assembly for Wales have established networks of travel plan co-ordinators. We provide information to schools throughout the UK which are either implementing SRS schemes or beginning the process of implementation.

Sustrans' Active Travel programme was established in 2001 to collaborate with the health sector. In England we work with the Department of Health, NHS Estates, the Department for Transport, NHS trusts and other bodies to encourage and assist the development of travel plans within the NHS. Active Travel also researches the health impact of measures to facilitate active forms of travel, promotes cycling and walking as health-enhancing physical activity, and is now addressing the role of the NHS in accessibility and social inclusion. The Scottish Executive has recently contracted Sustrans to establish a similar programme in Scotland, addressing the specifics of the Scottish situation. We are also looking to pursue these initiatives by developing Active Travel in Wales.

Sustrans Cymru is Sustrans' National Office for Wales, based in Cardiff Bay. We are working closely with the Welsh Assembly Government to help deliver the Assembly's sustainable transport agenda. We recently assisted the Assembly with the production of the draft Walking and Cycling Strategy for Wales. We are also working in partnership with local authorities and regional transport consortia across Wales on regional programmes to encourage the development of walking and cycling.

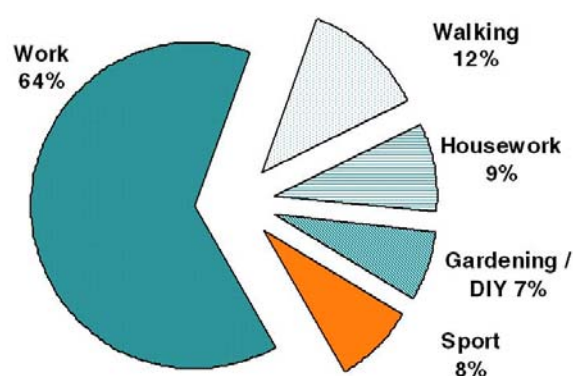
The *Climbing Higher* strategy aims to address the inadequacy of provision for sport in Wales and Sustrans welcomes that. We are particularly heartened by the way it acknowledges the importance of encouraging people to incorporate physical activity into their daily lives from a young age.

A population that is more active generally and that possesses a basic level of fitness is more likely to participate in sport, and more regularly. It is also more likely to produce a bigger percentage of elite performers. Better formal sporting facilities are part of the solution to the problems of physical inactivity, low levels of sports participation, and poor elite performance. However, other interventions are potentially more important to ensure that people can be routinely physically active throughout their lives. This will help to increase sports participation, not least through increased fitness and consequent diminution of the belief of many individuals that they are 'not the sporty type' reported in physical activity research, whilst making people healthier, happier and less prone to illnesses related to physical inactivity.

As the chart below shows, sport actually makes up a relatively small proportion of physical activity in relation to other activities. While the aim of increasing participation in sport must clearly be supported, it must also be acknowledged that it is not likely to be the answer for everyone.

Sport is a subset of physical activity

contributions to total activity among the active population



Source: NCSR / UCL / Health Survey for England 1998 / UK Data Archive

The incorporation of physical activity into daily life, through active forms of travel, is actually likely to be more widely acceptable across the population at all ages, than many more formal sporting pursuits. However, this form of physical activity has been made progressively more difficult by a number of physical and cultural changes, including land-use zoning, the increase in motor traffic and failure to enforce traffic law, the inadequacy of walking and cycling routes and so on. Increased provision for sport is to be welcomed, but it will not substitute for action to resolve these problems, which themselves work against mass participation in sport.

For these reasons we think it essential that the Sport and Active Recreation Strategy is closely linked to other Welsh Assembly policies and investment to promote physical activity, and particularly the Assembly's work to encourage walking and cycling for both leisure and everyday travel, through the Walking and Cycling Strategy for Wales.

Specific Comments

2.10 We welcome the acknowledgement of the role of walking and cycling as means of utility travel in sports promotion.

2.11 By 2005, each local authority in Wales must adopt a Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan for its area that maps out public access routes of all kinds (footpaths, bridleways, cycle routes) and sets out measures to improve their accessibility, connectedness and upkeep. These plans should give rise to better access to open space for active recreation and for active local travel. They have an important role to play in the promotion of sport and active recreation.

2.12. 2.13. 2.14. The role of schools is indeed critical but it is wider than indicated here. Wales is leading many other parts of the UK in its Safe Routes to Schools programme for which the Welsh Assembly provides ring-fenced funding through its Transport Grant. The Welsh Assembly is encouraging all schools across Wales to develop safe routes schemes and to develop school travel plans, encouraging pupils to walk and cycle to school as an alternative to car transport. The Welsh Assembly has appointed five travel plan co-ordinators working across the five transport regions of Wales. One of their key roles is to help schools develop travel plans and integrate this work into the core curriculum. Encouraging children to walk and cycle to school will make them more physically active and help raise their levels of fitness with at least one hour per day of moderate-intensity activity. Children will be more likely to participate in organised sport if they are generally active, an effect which lasts into adulthood. Safe Routes to further and higher educational establishments are equally important as routes to schools.

2.16 New walking and cycling routes have a clear role to play in community regeneration, particularly through the Communities First programme. Problems of environment and people's health often arise from lack of access to open space, employment and community facilities. New walking and cycling routes can help to remove barriers to access, and thus tackle social exclusion, while encouraging more physical activity.

4. Actions

Sustrans supports action to encourage people to build exercise into their daily travelling. These should combine environmental interventions with educational and promotional activities and should include:

4.2 Participation

Initiatives to achieve mass participation... - This should be approached both directly and indirectly through practical projects and communication programmes. People who do not react to other offers of physical activity are more likely to incorporate active travel into their daily routine, particularly where several options are offered. Cycle training supplied locally, both for adults and for children, can also contribute here.

Develop a comprehensive and up to date user-friendly guide to sport and active recreation opportunities across Wales, locally and nationally, to include cycling and walking... - The provision of good quality and frequent information boards, signing and waymarking gives walkers and cyclists the confidence to undertake trips on unfamiliar routes, not only for recreation, but to essential facilities such as schools, public transport interchanges, and community facilities, including sports centres. As with all information systems, maintenance and regular updating are vital to their value. The success of these routes will rely upon infrastructure being of a high quality.

Marketing & Publicity - The Wales Tourist Board (WTB) is currently running a major marketing and product development campaign to promote cycling as part of its work to develop activity tourism. The campaign to promote Wales' world class mountain biking centres was launched in 2001 and has proved hugely successful in attracting visitors from outside Wales.

The WTB is also developing similar campaigns for the Cycle Touring and Cycling Centre products. The Cycle Touring campaign focuses on the long-distance touring route Lôn Las Cymru (Routes 8 & 42) which was ridden by Sports Minister Alun Pugh AM and Head of Sports Policy, Arthur Emyr, in summer 2003 as part of the launch of *Climbing Higher*. It also focuses on the other premier National Cycle Route in Wales, the Celtic Trail.

The WTB is producing a new edition of the Cycling Wales marketing brochure and is invested in a number of new 'soft' products (maps and guides) for the Cycle Touring (National Cycle Network) product and the 9 new local Cycling Centres around Wales. New NCN cycle maps and a route pocket guide have been produced for Lôn Las Cymru and a new route pocket guide published for the Celtic Trail with funding from the WTB and the Adfywio Cefn Gwlad fund. The WTB is also committing considerable investment to the development of its website for online access to all the cycling products.

The WTB's investment is rightly targeted mainly at visitor markets from outside Wales. It does not, however, target residents of Wales. We think it particularly important that marketing to a more local customer takes place, if we are to encourage people to use the National Cycle Network and other routes in great numbers. Local authorities do market cycle routes in their area, but coverage is patchy and the quality of materials is inconsistent. What is clearly needed is a more strategic approach. The Celtic Trail marketing team, which operated between 1999 and 2002, demonstrated the benefits of promoting cycle routes at a local level and linking promotion to other attractions and facilities in a local area. Route user surveys carried out for the Trail showed that most of the users were local people and that the marketing had been effective. The Celtic Trail Marketing team ceased operation when funding from the former Objective 2 programme came to an end. Funding is being sought by the south & west Wales local authorities to re-establish marketing of the Trail with funding from Objective 1 (part of a bid to upgrade the interim sections of the Trail). Sustrans has accessed funding in England and Scotland to produce a range of free NCN local leaflets for key traffic free sections of the NCN. These are produced in a simple consistent format and are distributed locally. We think a similar series of maps for key sections of the Welsh NCN is necessary to encourage local use of the cycle network. We enclose two examples of leaflets from England and Scotland.

Encourage increased family-based participation in sport and physical activity... - The National Cycle Network includes many traffic-free sections that attract utility and leisure walkers and cyclists, as its paths provide a family-friendly environment, away from the adverse effects of road traffic.

Invest in innovative ways to ensure that the physical activity participation levels achieved by primary school children are sustained... - Sustrans regards the school journey as of critical importance in establishing travel habits, good or bad, for the future.

In 1986 nearly 60% of journeys made by children aged 5-16 were on foot and only 16% were by car. By 1999 the proportion of children walking had fallen to 49% while 28% were driven to school. During the same period cycling to school fell from 3.5% to 1%. (*National Travel Survey 1999/01. Travel to School in GB, Personal Travel Factsheet 2, DfT, 2003.*)

Significant benefits to health could be achieved by interventions that encourage children to participate regularly in physical activity - especially in their travel choices. Parent participation is of great importance; we need to ensure that parents are aware of the importance of physical activity for young people's health, so they will encourage their children to lead an active lifestyle and set a good example themselves. This of course means that we need to address the behaviour of adults as well as children.

There is also a growing volume of evidence that children who travel actively to school have higher levels of academic achievement. (*State study proves physically fit kids perform better academically, California Dept of Education; www.cde.ca.gov/news/releases2002/rel37.asp*). Anecdotal evidence from teachers suggests that pupils who have walked or cycled to school arrive more alert than those who have arrived by car.

In general Sustrans would like to see far more emphasis on active travel, for example walking to school. Walking is free and easy to do, and is an easily accessible form of physical activity which does not require attendance at sports facilities. Walking to and from school for many children would incorporate physical activity into the daily routine to improve health, and inculcate walking as a healthy habit for local journeys.

Sustrans would also like to see continued commitment to the Safe Routes to Schools Programme, school travel plans and the Welsh Healthy Schools Network and expansion of these initiatives to all schools in Wales.

Use the media, in its broadest sense, to help explain the shift in mindset that is require to make more people in Wales active... - Sustrans would like to see more intensive marketing of physical activity and active forms of transport to children and parents. Active, on-going promotion of healthy and active behaviour is needed, using promotional and media campaigns and individualised marketing techniques such as those used by the TravelSmart scheme.

Sustrans managed the UK pilots of TravelSmart, individualised travel marketing which helps to overcome real and perceived impediments to cycling, walking and using public transport, in partnership with Socialdata GmbH. Results from the first two pilots, in Gloucester and Frome, showed car trips reduced by around 9% with three quarters of these journeys being substituted by walking and cycling. (*TravelSmart; changing the way we travel, Sustrans, 2002*). This shift from short car

journeys to walking and cycling could make a significant contribution to increased physical activity objectives.

4.4 Infrastructure

Ensure that the requirement for sport, active recreation and physical activity provision be taken into account in the planning process. For example; new housing developments should make provision for sport, physical activity and play areas and cycle paths, while new office developments should include bike racks, changing rooms and fitness facilities - Sustrans is working on the development of Home Zones in residential areas and on other urban redesign, such as self-enforcing 20mph zones around schools (as highlighted within the DfT Road Safety Strategy p. 51) with partner authorities around the country.

A Home Zone is a street or group of streets designed and laid out so that cars have much lower priority, with vehicles travelling at little more than walking pace. The design enables people to use the streets as social space, meaning that children can play outside, neighbours can socialise and the local community can take control over its own environment. Sustrans is working in partnership with the Children's Play Council and Transport 2000 to encourage the development of Home Zones in the UK, both in existing communities and in new housing developments.

With regard to office developments, many employers insist on dress codes or impose other working practices which unnecessarily penalise employees who walk or cycle to work. Cycle parking, changing and showering facilities are often absent at workplaces. All new office developments should include travel plans with clear objectives and targets to measure against, including reduction in solo car use, increases in alternatives such as walking, cycling, car sharing and public transport, and reduction in car parking spaces.

Improve the quality of cycle networks in towns and cities, integrated wherever practicable with the National Cycle Network - Over 900 miles of the National Cycle Network is now in place in Wales, counting route links and braids. Sustrans plans to add another 400km of the NCN by 2006. The cost of completing the National Cycle Network in Wales is estimated to be the region of £30 million. This will require grant funding from a variety of sources including the Welsh Assembly, Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies, the Objective 1 programmes and others.

Funding for walking and cycling routes is not always easy to access. For example the Objective 1 programme has relatively little money for walking and cycling projects, while Transport Grant will mainly fund schemes that deliver urban modal shift but will not fund routes that are designed for leisure. Clearly the Welsh Assembly needs to ensure that funding is available to complete the next phase of the NCN, to support the objectives of this strategy and its wider objectives to promote sustainable access to the countryside and better health. The Sports Policy Division clearly has an interest in this.

A plan of the existing and planned National Cycle Network in Wales is attached. Sustrans is working in partnership with local authorities, Assembly-sponsored public bodies and others to deliver this infrastructure, which will improve walking and cycling provision in both rural and urban areas. The NCN in Wales provides the essential framework for the development of other regional and local walking and cycling networks, which, when complete, will enable more people to use walking and cycling both for leisure and everyday travel. To this end we are working closely with local

authorities in Wales to assist the delivery of their regional route development programmes using Transport Grant and other mechanisms.

Sustrans believes that the environmental, health and safety problems caused by our overuse of private motor transport must be addressed. As regards physical activity, we strongly advocate that more must be done to encourage and facilitate the incorporation of healthy physical activity into the daily routine, by promoting active forms of travel.

4.5 Policy Development

Strengthen and develop communication and collaboration within and between government at national and local level with other key partners on the basis of the strategic priorities - We strongly support this cross-cutting approach. It is vitally important to build the linkage between policy sectors and between the Sport and Active Recreation Strategy and key strategies such as the Walking and Cycling Strategy for Wales, Wellbeing in Wales, the Healthy and Active Lifestyles Framework, Local Transport Plans, Community Plans, Public Rights of Way Improvement Plans, Activity Tourism Strategy etc.

5. Vision for 2023

We strongly support the specific aims of the strategy. We suggest that these could include a target for the number of utility journeys made by active travel modes. This would be a good measure of general everyday physical activity.

Thank you for giving Sustrans the opportunity to comment. We would be pleased to work closely with the Sports Policy Unit on the development and delivery of this strategy.

We hope you find the above comments helpful.

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