

New appraisal rules set to boost cycling and walking schemes.



The benefit:
cost ratio of the three cycle schemes studied by Sustrans
ranged from 14.9:1 to 32.5:1

walking and cycling scheme appraisal guidance that is due to be published imminently.

Measures to improve walking and cycling have
benefit:cost ratios far in excess of any other local
transport measures, according to assessments carried
out by transport charity Sustrans using the DfT's new

The guidance will, for the first time, enable a monetary valuation to be placed on the costs and benefits of cycling and walking schemes such as new cycle routes and road crossings. In doing so, it will enable the value for money of such schemes to be compared with other transport investments such as new roads, traffic management schemes and public transport investment.

Sustrans last week published the results of applying the guidance to three real-life case studies. The appraisals showed:

- * a £357,000 project to construct a toucan crossing and associated infrastructure close to schools in Hartlepool produced benefits of £12.6m and a benefit:cost ratio (BCR) of 29.3:1.
- * A £92,000 project to improve cycle routes close to schools in Bootle, Merseyside, produced benefits of £5.8m and a BCR of 32.5:1.
- * A £565,000 project to build a shared path adjacent to the A259 in Newhaven gave benefits of £16.8m and a BCR of 14.9.

Sustrans points out that the BCRs are far in excess of the scores normally calculated for other transport projects. In November 2004 the DfT published a list of all the schemes it had approved in the last three years and none of them had a BCR better than 10:1.

The guidance, developed for the DfT by Sustrans, the Institute for Transport Studies at the University of Leeds, and Bolton University, recommends placing monetary values on four scheme impacts:

- * The 'journey ambience' benefits to existing and new cyclists and walkers. Research by transport economists shows that cyclists and pedestrians value the benefits of traffic free routes;
- * The health benefits to people who are encouraged to cycle or walk as a result of the scheme (measured in terms of the reduction in the number of deaths from coronary heart disease, stroke and colon cancer preventable by 30 minutes a day of walking);

* The decongestion reduction benefits arising from mode switch away from the car; accident effects; and costs in terms of reduced fuel tax income for the Treasury;

* Reductions in absenteeism resulting from improved levels of physical activity.

The vast majority of the benefits (over 90%) in each of the case studies were to do with journey ambience and physical fitness.

Sustrans accepts that the appraisal techniques is not as widely tried and tested as appraisal techniques for other modes but says that, in the majority of cases, the guidance uses conservative values. Andy Cope, Sustrans' research and monitoring director, said the physical fitness values were "very conservative" because they ignored matters such as mental health and the benefits of exercise.

Cope said the guidance would have widespread applications. "We think it can be used for any scheme where there's a demonstrable change in cycling or walking," he said. "Obviously that means new routes, route improvements and road crossings but it should also be possible to apply it to the provision of more cycle stands and storage facilities."

"We'd really like to apply it to measures such as cycle training and individualised marketing," he added. "We think it should be perfectly feasible to use it in circumstances other than hard infrastructure interventions," he said, acknowledging that it might need minor amendments to do so.