

Consultation on the future National Transport Plan

Sustrans submission to Plaid Cymru consultation into the future National Transport Plan

April 2014

Introduction

Sustrans is a leading UK charity enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day. We work with families, communities, policy-makers and partner organisations so that people are able to choose healthier, cleaner and cheaper journeys, with better places and spaces to move through and live in.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on Plaid Cymru's priorities for a National Transport Plan. Our practical and policy work focuses on local journeys, some of which falls under the responsibility of local government. Nonetheless, only two out of every five journeys under 5 miles in Wales is currently made on foot, by bike or by public transport¹, and therefore it is vital when pulling together a National Transport Plan for Wales that local journeys are considered as part of this.

Providing for local everyday journeys should, therefore, be right at the heart of any National Transport Plan, ensuring that active travel integrates with other transport modes as well as being the primary mode of transport for everyday local journeys. While a National Transport Plan should not micro-manage each local community, it should set clear priorities and provide governance structures that enable these priorities to be delivered.

As the landmark Get Britain Cycling report stated in 2013, "Cycling is a profoundly democratic activity open to people of all incomes, men and women, young and older - each with their own style, pace and pattern of use."² It is because cycling (and walking) can be for all that active travel should sit atop the hierarchy of transport modes when planning for the future.

Cycling can increase urban mobility and connectivity, and tackle barriers to employment, alongside providing health and environmental benefits.

Our work on transport poverty in Wales in the past has looked at the importance of bus travel, particularly to younger people, the elderly and those on low incomes or out of work.

As an organisation, our expertise is around everyday travel. Therefore, we have not responded to the sections of ports and aviation. However, we are concerned about the subsidy levels for flights between Cardiff and Anglesey and question whether this provides value for money considering the importance of bus and rail travel to Wales; and the potential to upgrade the rail network to provide a more reliable journey time between Anglesey and Cardiff.

Strategic Aims

- 1. Are Plaid Cymru's strategic aims for transport appropriate for the Welsh nation?**
- 2. What are your views on the possible functions of a National Transport Authority?**
- 3. What, if any, other strategic aims would you like the next Plaid Cymru Transport Minister to set out?**

Sustrans Cymru supports the strategic aims outlined in the document.

[Plaid Cymru's strategic aims for transport include;

- Connecting the nation internally, with links between our main towns and cities.
- Connecting the nation externally, with links to our neighbours and trading partners in the British Isles, European Union and further afield.
- Making public transport more affordable and attractive; ensuring that there are viable alternatives to the car.
- Transport solutions that work for rural Wales and its demographic and geographic challenges.
- Achieving environmental goals and a more sustainable society.]

Of particular relevance, our work on transport poverty in Wales has identified the negative consequences of having a transport system that relies almost entirely on car ownership. As highlighted in our report – Access Denied³ - in parts of Wales 30% of households do not have access to a car, and these areas are some of the worst affected by transport poverty – meaning people are struggling to afford to make everyday journeys, or simply aren't able to.

Transport is a significant barrier to those seeking work entering employment, limiting the number of jobs that can be applied for. The 2003 report from the Social Exclusion Unit highlighted that two out of every five jobseekers saw transport as a barrier to accessing work⁴; and the problem is even more acute among young people (and those in rural areas) as highlighted by The Work Foundation in their 'Missing Million' report.⁵

We also welcome the commitment to sustainability and environmental goals – especially as emissions from transport in Wales have been rising in recent years.⁶ As meeting environmental goals is a strategic aim, we would recommend listing the goals within the National Transport Plan to raise awareness of their prominence.

We believe there is merit in considering a National Transport Authority for Wales. Regulation of transport has been effective in parts of England, most notably through Transport for London (TfL) in the capital. It is particularly notable that, in London, bus use has been rising, whereas it has been in decline across the rest of England.⁷

However, Wales is a rural nation, and transport needs vary from south to north, east to west – therefore it is important any National Transport Authority has inherent flexibility to tackle these different transport needs and priorities. This flexibility could be facilitated through regulation for transport at regional level – such as the developing City Regions centred in Cardiff and Swansea, and new regions across other parts of Wales.

While a National Transport Plan will have its focus on those journeys linking communities, or indeed longer journeys within and outside of Wales, local journeys form the majority of our daily lives – yet only 34% of journeys under five miles are made on foot or by bike in Wales (compared to 39% in England and 36% in Scotland).⁸ A National Transport Plan should take a view on these local journeys, with delivery of the Active Travel Act⁹ forming an integral element.

Rail Services

1. Are there any areas of the country where additional services should be prioritised?

We welcome the announced hourly service on the Aberystwyth – Shrewsbury line, and hope upgrades between Wrexham and Chester will increase capacity on lines in north Wales, opening up new services to cities like Manchester and Liverpool.

It is important that the next franchise makes the most of the new capacity delivered by the electrification of lines in south Wales, and that rail becomes a reliable, efficient and affordable means of travel between communities – particularly linking into Cardiff, Newport and Swansea. The additional services from the newly upgraded Gowerton station are proving a success, and show that demand for regular rail links exists.

New rail services should also be linked into the Local Development Plan (LDP) and City Regions process at the earliest possible stage, to ensure that new homes and communities are served with good public transport links.

2. What other considerations should Plaid Cymru propose for specification of the next rail franchise?

The 2018 franchise provides an opportunity to link the Welsh railways with other forms of transport and the wider aims of the National Transport Plan as a whole. With the passing of the Active Travel (Wales) Act in 2013, this is an important opportunity to link rail travel with walking and cycling. In our response to the Welsh Assembly’s Enterprise and Business Committee inquiry into the next franchise, we highlighted how UK wide 85% of journeys to railway stations are under 5 miles, and 65% are under a mile – offering major potential for shifting from the car to active modes.¹⁰

A clear commitment should be made in the next franchise agreement to ensure the franchise operator improves conditions for integrating the rail network with active travel, in particular cycling. This includes new or upgraded rolling stock to cater for increased bike storage; ensuring stations are pedestrian and cycle friendly and accessible; providing information on onward walking and cycling routes and increasing safe and secure cycle storage at stations. These improvements will aid integration of active travel and the rail network.

Integrated ticketing will also be crucial to encouraging more people to leave their cars at home and switch journeys to public transport. The next rail franchise should be designed to include measures to enable integrated ticketing in the future. Led by London, much of the rest of the UK is already moving toward using contactless payments via debit and credit card, rather than having a pre-payment card (e.g. Oyster). We would urge that this development be taken forward in Wales.

Contactless systems have the ability to drive down costs associated with ticketing, and we would recommend engagement with the Greater London Authority Transport Committee to learn lessons following their review into future ticketing in 2011, and how this could relate to the future franchise.

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3. What are the most effective ways we could make rail travel more affordable?

In 2013, we partnered with Chwarae Teg to publish a paper calling for season ticket discounts to be passed on to part time workers in Wales.¹² Regular rail travellers can purchase season tickets for time periods ranging from 7-days to a calendar year, benefitting from significant discounts compared to purchasing a daily return ticket. These tickets, however, are not cost effective for people working part time, for example working three days a week. This means either high costs for regular rail travel, or that driving becomes a more cost effective option.

Providing discount tickets for part time workers on public transport should be a key part in making rail travel more affordable for many, helping people back to work and providing a boost to the local economy. The cost of transport to work, particularly part time work, can be a significant barrier for many when deciding whether or not to take up an offer of employment.

Sustrans also recommends the Welsh Government support the principle of 'Open Access' for passenger services running into and out of Wales, aside from the Wales & Borders franchise (e.g. the Holyhead – London service currently provided by Virgin Trains; the Cross Country run service linking Cardiff with Nottingham; and the Great Western route linking Swansea to London).

The Centre for Policy Studies highlighted that “passenger journeys increased by 42% at those stations which enjoy rail competition, compared with 27% for those without competition”; “revenue increased by 57% where competition occurs compared to 48% for those stations without competition”; and “average fares increased by only 11% on those stations with competition, compared to 17% at those stations without competition.”¹³

Such a model has the potential to reduce costs for taxpayers, and on the East Coast Mainline has led to an increase in discounted fares available for longer journeys, and the upgrading of old stations – for example Wakefield Kirkgate.

Rail Infrastructure

2. Which stations should be prioritised for future redevelopment, and where in Wales should new stations and lines be prioritised?

Sustrans believes that station upgrades should be prioritised where active travel is already, or has great potential, to be the main mode of travel to a particular station, but where facilities (as mentioned earlier in our response) are not currently in place.

The process should also be brought into line with Local Development Plans (LDPs), to ensure that public transport provision and infrastructure is improved alongside the development of new housing and communities.

We are supportive of Plaid Cymru's commitment to investigate the feasibility of re-building a rail link between Aberystwyth and Carmarthen – and we think it is appropriate this (and other similar studies) is referenced as a long-term aim, considering its likely cost and the length of time that would be needed to build new routes.

Bus Services

1. How could regulation of the buses work in Wales?

Sustrans has supported calls for bus regulation to be devolved to Wales and alongside the Bevan Foundation we argued for this in our response to Part 2 of the Commission on Devolution in Wales.¹⁴ As we highlighted in that response, there are several issues with the current arrangements for bus services, notably that companies can cherry pick profit making routes, meaning that subsidy is ineffectively spent supporting loss-making routes across the country.

Regulation could be used in a number of ways to support bus services across Wales, and we believe further research on new models being used in England (notably in London, South Yorkshire and Dorset) would be welcome in advising future policy in Wales. Regulation of services run by private operators has worked in London, where between 1993 and 2007 bus use has increased by 57%, whereas across the majority of the UK bus use has been in decline, particularly in rural areas.

Changes in South Yorkshire, centred on Sheffield, have seen an additional 2.75million fare paying passengers use the bus network.¹⁵ As the City Regions develop in south Wales, further work will be needed on where transport governance¹⁶ – and therefore bus regulation – should best sit within Wales.

English city regions have benefitted from having powers through being a Passenger Transport Executive (PTE) – and this model should be further explored for Wales. Importantly, such powers can (and should) be extended to local rail. Powers of regulation will be vital if the planned South Wales Metro project is to deliver on its potential.¹⁷

2. Are there any further ways of using public money innovatively to support bus services?

In our responses to the Regional Bus Network Strategy consultations, published by the Regional Transport Consortia in 2013, we welcomed proposals to look at issuing grant funding based on bus companies meeting certain criteria that fit with wider transport policies and ambitions. This could, for example, be around additional grant funding for operators who offer a discount to all people in full time education; or for investing in low carbon buses. The South East Wales Transport Alliance (SEWTA) had taken a lead in looking at ways grant funding could be used for innovatively, and further analysis of their ideas would be valuable.¹⁸

Sustrans also believes that the future governance of the M4 Severn Crossings should be looked at with the potential of providing ongoing revenue funding for public transport in Wales (arguably the area of funding most under pressure recently).

It is being predicted that the need to pay tolls to the private operator of the bridge will cease in 2018.¹⁹ Current political debate in Wales has been to reduce tolls on the bridge to a level that will cover maintenance and staffing costs (somewhere around £1.50-£2 per car), and no more. There is no evidence that motorway traffic on the M4 in Wales is significantly different to other (untolled) motorways across the UK. For many people, road user charging acts as an incentive to use public transport (in this case rail or coach) rather than drive into Wales and add to congestion, on the M4 and in our towns and cities in south Wales.

While there may be an argument to cut the tolls slightly, we believe that there is potential to use the M4 tolls as an ongoing source of revenue funding for public transport within Wales. Such a fund could deliver additional bus services (more frequent or new routes) and aid with discounted rail fares (such as season tickets for part time workers).

Cutting tolls to making driving a cheaper and more attractive option runs counter to the strategic objective to have a more sustainable transport system, cutting carbon from transport and making public transport more attractive for users. We therefore feel that Plaid Cymru should look again at the future of the M4 tolls with a view to using future income to meet the strategic aims of a Plaid Cymru National Transport Plan.

3. What further steps are required to integrate bus and rail?

It is important, as recommended in the Part 2 report of the Commission of Devolution in Wales that Wales has its own Traffic Commissioner, rather than sharing personnel with the West Midlands region of England.

This will enable the Traffic Commissioner to be fully engaged with public transport policy in Wales and work with the Welsh Government to deliver on these objectives.

Ticketing is the most crucial aspect in delivering a fully integrated bus and rail service, and this should be the top priority to deliver integration.

However, there are also timetabling issues, of which the role of Traffic Commissioner impacts. Currently, bus operators are fined if their bus runs late, which means that a bus linking to a railway station cannot wait for a delayed train, even if the following bus is an hour later and the delay might only be minimal. In rural areas of Wales, where trains and buses are less frequent, ensuring timetables link is important, alongside building in some flexibility to cope with delay (noting that a bus stopping at more than one transport interchange may not always have the potential to wait for a connecting service). A bus operator seeking to wait for potential passengers from a delayed train

should not be fined for attempting to provide an integrated service, but the current system does not allow for flexibility.

Roads

3 What more can we do to improve road safety and reduce casualties?

Sustrans welcomes the support for introducing 20mph speed limits in the consultation document. However, we strongly advocate they should be extended across communities and not just outside schools. Children do not just walk or cycle outside of their school, many will walk or cycle from home (and a policy objective should be to increase this number) and children play with their friends where they live. In fact, very few casualties occur outside schools.²⁰

Our children have the right to a safe journey to and from school; and to be safe playing on the streets in their communities – therefore we believe that 20mph should become the norm in residential areas right across Wales.

Good street design is also key in reducing road user conflict and therefore casualties. As part of the Active Travel (Wales) Act, the Welsh Government is producing new, best practice, design guidance for walking and cycling. Local Authorities already have a duty under the Act to bring routes up to these standards or explain why they cannot be. It is important that in delivery of the Act, any future Welsh Government takes a strong stance in ensuring the design guidance is followed, ensuring the built environment is designed to reduce conflict between all users.

As we highlighted in our response to the Plaid Cymru's Sustainable Communities Commission, the built environment has a major role to play not only in supporting the sustainability of a community but also can positively impact on other considerations, such as public health outcomes. Community-led street design projects can increase levels of walking and cycling, slow down traffic and lead to streets being a place to socialise and play – leading to a more sustainable community for all.²¹

Active Travel

1. How would a general increase in funding be best directed?

Wales currently spends around £3.30 per head per annum on cycling, mainly capital investment in infrastructure (such as the Safe Routes in Communities Fund). Countries such as the Netherlands and Denmark spend upwards of £15 per head per annum, and have done so for a generation.²²

To maximise the potential in shifting shorter, everyday, journeys to walking and cycling we need to invest both in hard measures (new routes, redesigned roads) and softer measures (training, information provision). This was the lesson from the Department for Transport's Sustainable Travel Towns in England.²³

Each community will need differing solutions. Cardiff, for example, has the makings of a walking and cycling network (although there is still more to build before it becomes comprehensive), and information provision on the available routes may be the most useful tool in the medium term. Other parts of Wales simply have no network at all.

We hope this and future Welsh governments will work with local authorities as part of the Active Travel (Wales) Act to determine the key barriers in communities to get more people walking and cycling, and work with them to overcome these.

We welcome Plaid Cymru's commitment to look at the Community Links' fund in Scotland and how it could be transferred to Wales. In Scotland, this fund is now regularly over-subscribed with applications far outstripping the funds available. It has successfully engaged local authorities in delivering key routes in the heart of communities for everyday cycling and walking trips.

Ultimately, it will take a sustained increase in funding (a minimum of £10 per head, per year, increasing over time) sustained over a length of time, aimed at harder and softer measures that will deliver the shift in journey modes that is desired.²⁴

2. How can the safety of walking and cycling on or alongside roads be improved?

In our previous answer under “Roads” we have highlighted the importance of following the best practice design guidance that is to be published alongside the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013. Following these design standards will ensure that the networks created are the safest for cyclists.

We also refer to our previous comments on 20mph on a community wide level. In 2013, our own research in Wales found that lowering speed limits to 20mph was supported by 6-in-10 people and was seen as an important part of encouraging people to walk and cycle.²⁵

One other key area of ensuring roads are the safest possible is to ensure they are well surfaced. Poorly maintained, and potholed, roads cannot only damage vehicles, but are particularly dangerous for cyclists – either through hitting them and coming off or by having to take evasive action, perhaps putting the cyclist suddenly into the flow of traffic. In 2013, along with other organisations, we submitted a letter to the Chancellor urging him to prioritise fixing existing roads ahead of building new roads. We would urge the same for Wales.²⁶

3. What kind of promotion is needed to encourage more people to walk and cycle?

A wide variety of promotional tools are available to increase cycling use within Wales and there is no one size fits all approach.

Positive publicity campaigns around the benefits of cycling (for example TV adverts and billboard posters) can raise awareness of the benefits and encourage all road users to behave responsibly. It is important such marketing campaigns are pitched in the right way, for example depicting people in everyday clothing cycling and walking to make both seem like ‘normal’ activities.

We would highly recommend further study of the Understanding Walking and Cycling report²⁷ produced by Professor Colin Pooley (who provided evidence on the Active Travel (Wales) Act at committee stage) and others, which looks at the reasons why people choose (not) to walk and cycle and provides policy solutions to overcome these barriers.

Sustrans has developed a number of promotional tools that increase walking and cycling levels. Our successful schools programme has regularly been shown to treble cycling journeys in school thanks to its holistic approach,²⁸ taking in cycle training, route planning and bike maintenance. The programme is currently limited to working in five Welsh local authorities. We have also launched a resource that sits alongside the Literacy and Numeracy Framework, to promote active travel alongside raising educational standards.²⁹

Our Personalised Travel Planning work (funded by Welsh Government) has had a major impact in Wales. The largest project of its kind in Britain, Sustrans staff provided tailored travel information to residents in Cardiff and Penarth. Interim results have shown an 8% cut in single occupancy car journeys in the capital, with marked increases in walking, cycling and public transport use. We hope to publish the full results in due course. The project has since worked in Caerphilly and Pontypridd, and is now beginning in Mon a Menai. However, there is no further work programme beyond 2014.

Our main criticism of promotional work in Wales is its limited scope and timeframe. All too often pilot projects have been run in only a few limited areas for a short period, meaning the full benefits of such work are not realised. A future National Transport plan needs to shift away from this, and commit to longer term, national programmes of walking and cycling promotion if we are to begin the journey of changing towards a sustainable transport culture in Wales.

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