

SWWITCH Response to NAFW Enterprise & Business Committee Call for Evidence into the general principles of the Active Travel (Wales) Bill. – March 2013

Background

The South West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium (SWWITCH) comprises the four Local Councils in South West Wales working together to plan, develop and deliver improved transport and access to:

- Support the local and regional economy
- Enhance social inclusion and
- Protect and improve the environment

SWWITCH was set up in 1998 and has evolved over the years since to meet changing demands. It is organised as formal Joint Committee and operates by a legal agreement.

Introduction

SWWITCH welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Committee's consultation into the Active Travel Bill and the change in emphasis it represents. The Bill creates an opportunity to influence the health and attitudes of current and future generations and is supportive of national and regional transport objectives.

SWWITCH recognises the importance of walking and cycling as a means of sustainable, affordable access to a wide range of facilities and services, as well as for leisure purposes. As a result a SWWITCH Walking and Cycling Strategy was adopted in 2002 and SWWITCH has since developed proposals for measures to encourage more walking and cycling.

The SWWITCH Regional Transport Plan has a component strategy for Walking and Cycling and also included in the RTP programme pool is a range of walking and cycling capital projects. SWWITCH has also used RTP funding to implement increased cycle and pedestrian monitoring so that outputs and outcomes can be monitored over time. This funding is also supplemented by other grant funding such as Safe Routes in the Community, Sustainable Travel Centre funding, Road Safety Grant and internal Council funding, focused on creating and improving facilities for pedestrians and cyclists and also for training and encouragement to address psychological barriers to more active travel.

SWWITCH, as part of the Compact agreed following the Simpson report, has also agreed to investigate Walking and Cycling as a consortium "Quick Win" project. This has involved the establishment of a sub group with appropriate Officers from each Council, alongside Welsh Government and Sustrans representatives.

SWWITCH was also a member of the Physical Activity Ministerial Advisory Group which seeks to improve the health of the nation through facilitating and encouraging more active travel, until the recent dissolution of this Group.

SWWITCH is also part of the Active Travel Bill reference Group and the Group set up to look at standards and guidelines to provide a framework for future compliance.

SWWITCH Response

Question 1 - Is there a need for a Bill aimed at enabling more people to walk and cycle and generally travel by non-motorised transport? Please explain your answer.

SWWITCH is wholly supportive of the aims of the Bill, as set out in the consultation document. Encouraging more walking and cycling can improve health, increase social inclusion, access to jobs and training and help reduce poverty, congestion and air quality issues. The Bill will empower Highway/Planning Authorities to consider the need for active travel interventions in the planning process supporting sustainable land use transportation planning

SWWITCH believes that there is a need to create the step change required to reduce barriers to walking and cycling at the same time as promoting, encouraging and training people to be more active as part of their everyday lives.

The Bill will help to address a situation that has arisen after decades of centralisation and planning decisions based on access to personal motor cars. The planning system must also play a part in enabling and enforcing more sustainable travel and in particular where other public sector organisations are involved in new developments and where there should be a clear requirement to work with consortia on travel plans to reduce car borne access.

SWWITCH recognizes that the Bill is not a quick term fix and that it will take time to create the right environment and facilities to make walking and cycling a viable and attractive choice. Most importantly, SWWITCH believes that the emphasis on encouraging more active travel must be long term and consistent beyond political administrations.

Question 2. What are your views on the key provisions in the Bill, namely –

- ***the requirement on local authorities to prepare and publish maps identifying current and potential future routes for the use of pedestrians and cyclists (known as “existing routes maps” and “integrated network maps”) (sections 3 to 5);***

SWWITCH is of the view that the Bill should place a duty on Councils to work together through the transport consortia to develop the mapping and improve the network over time. This would be most appropriately done through the Regional Transport Plan process as it allows priorities to develop and be aligned with regional funding bids.

In turn, SWWITCH considers it is important to have clear strategic direction of walking & cycling, and supports the concept of establishing of a national strategic group, whose remit would be to coordinate and develop Active Travel.

- ***the requirement on local authorities to have regard to integrated network maps in the local transport planning process (section 6);***

SWWITCH supports moves forward to embrace a more sustainable and integrated transport system for the future, and therefore supports the suggestion that the Bill places a duty on Councils to work together through the transport consortia to develop the mapping and improve the network over time, subject to available finance.

SWWITCH welcomes confirmation that the mapping should not be intended to create blight or prevent development, and this will need to form an important part of engagement to ensure that expectations are not raised unrealistically.

- ***the requirement on local authorities to continuously improve routes and facilities for pedestrians and cyclists (section 7);***

The SWWITCH RTP which was adopted in 2009 already includes implicit and explicit reference throughout to the contribution walking and cycling can make to improving access. It also references the growing concerns about health and obesity (and the way in which more active travel can help to address a less physically active society) and addressing barriers to walking and cycling.

Funding to achieve the aspirations is clearly important. SWWITCH believes that a separate funding stream should be established, to be managed by the consortia and dedicated to moving the provision for walking and cycling from the “current” map to the “aspirations” map. The promotion of behavioural change and thus revenue funding to support the capital investment intended is also critical.

SWWITCH would also seek clarity around the terminology of “continuous improvement” and what impact a requirement would have on any monitoring and evaluation scheme.

- ***the requirement on highway authorities to consider the needs of pedestrians and cyclists when creating and improving new roads (section 8)***

SWWITCH supports the concept for the potential for enhancing walking and cycling provision in the development of new road schemes, but is assuming in the context of the Bill that any W&C infrastructure relates to shared use (W&C) provision and does not include facilities deemed suitable for single mode use only (e.g. existing footpaths, footway or dedicated cycle lanes) nor Shared Streets where traffic has been calmed and/or volumes reduced to a level suitable for safe cycling with no dedicated cycle lanes.

In developing strategic thinking on the needs of pedestrians and cyclists, SWWITCH stresses the need for robust and clear baseline and ongoing monitoring data, which can be used to help inform the need for new infrastructure, and monitor the implementation of projects.

A further consideration is the need for common approaches to design standards and guidance to ensure a consistent approach. SWWITCH recognises that some work on

design guidance has already been undertaken in Wales, such as the “Cardiff Cycle Design Guide”. In principle, SWWITCH recognizes that this appears a good starting point to harmonise design. However, this will need to be considered in more detail as the Active Travel approach develops, in particular a review of design guidance affecting more rural areas.

Question 3. Have the provisions of the Bill taken account of any response you made to the Welsh Government’s consultation on its White Paper? Please explain your answer.

The SWWITCH response to the consultation sought guidance on the terminology used, which could mean something different to different people. It is pleasing to note that detailed guidance and directions will be issued to support the delivery of the Bill and that a national design guidance document is being prepared to inform Local Authorities.

SWWITCH was concerned that the requirements of the Bill would be difficult to achieve at a time of constrained public sector finances. Additional funding for the mapping related work is not being made available to Local Authorities, although a breakdown of likely costings has been produced which is useful for revenue planning.

Question 4. To what extent are the key provisions the most appropriate way of delivering the aim of the Bill?

SWWITCH welcomed the requirement to identify existing and aspirational Active Travel routes and has already undertaken some regional mapping work on walking and cycling routes through the Collaboration Group. A visual representation of Local Authority plans for Active Travel, which is accessible to the general public, provides transparency and certainly improves the efficiency of walking and cycling service delivery in the region. A prioritisation process is being developed and the mapping will help to identify appropriate schemes for inclusion in programmes of work.

SWWITCH Councils are already actively working to include appropriate facilities in new road developments as they arise and it is encouraging that such practice will be a requirement nationally.

Question 5. What are the potential barriers to the implementation of the key provisions and does the Bill take account of them?

As noted earlier, SWWITCH hopes that the proposals in the bill will create the step change required to reduce barriers to walking and cycling. However, running in parallel, there needs to be a clear national policy which tackles issues relating to a reduction in car use.

The difficulty will be in changing the hearts and minds (and thus habits) of the population, legislation alone will not fully achieve that aim.

Question 6. What are your views on the financial implications of the Bill (this could be for your organisation, or more generally)? In answering this question you may wish to consider Part 2 of the Explanatory Memorandum (the Impact Assessment), which estimates the costs and benefits of implementation of the Bill.

The three year mapping update cycle may present a challenge to Local Authorities during such difficult financial times. The Impact Assessment quantifies likely costs in great detail and these costs will clearly be countered by the value of benefits accruing from Active Travel. However, there are some concerns about the assumptions made in the assessments and a degree of optimism about likely timescales. Overall revenue and resource implications may present a problem for most Local Authorities where budgets are under severe pressure.

The Explanatory Memorandum refers briefly to the need for maintenance costs to be factored into the assessment of any particular Active Travel measure. It is acknowledged that the scale of these costs will be dependent on the nature of the provision made. A more expensive measure however, whilst lasting longer, will eventually require a more expensive standard of maintenance and repair.

Question 7. To what extent has the correct balance been achieved between the level of detail provided on the face of the Bill and that which will be contained in guidance given by the Welsh Ministers?

SWWITCH have difficulty commenting on this. The guidance is referenced in the future tense, so is not available for us to comment on whether it provides a correct balance with the Bill.