

# Active travel

September 2024



This report has been prepared for presentation to the Senedd under the Government of Wales Act 1998 and the Government of Wales Act 2006.

The Auditor General is independent of the Senedd and government. He examines and certifies the accounts of the Welsh Government and its sponsored and related public bodies, including NHS bodies. He also has the power to report to the Senedd on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which those organisations have used, and may improve the use of, their resources in discharging their functions.

The Auditor General also audits local government bodies in Wales and conducts local government value for money studies.

The Auditor General undertakes his work using staff and other resources provided by the Wales Audit Office, which is a statutory board established for that purpose and to monitor and advise the Auditor General.

Audit Wales is the umbrella brand of the Auditor General for Wales and the Wales Audit Office, which are each separate legal entities with their own legal functions. Audit Wales is not itself a legal entity. While the Auditor General has the auditing and reporting functions described above, the Wales Audit Office's main functions are to provide staff and other resources for the exercise of the Auditor General's functions, and to monitor and advise the Auditor General.

© Auditor General for Wales 2024

You may re-use this publication (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium. If you re-use it, your re-use must be accurate and must not be in a misleading context.

The material must be acknowledged as Auditor General for Wales copyright and you must give the title of this publication. Where we have identified any third party copyright material you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned before re-use.

For further information, or if you require any of our publications in an alternative format and/or language, please contact us by telephone on 029 2032 0500, or email [info@audit.wales](mailto:info@audit.wales).

We welcome telephone calls in Welsh and English. You can also write to us in either Welsh or English and we will respond in the language you have used. Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay.

Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

# Contents

---

Key facts	4
Key messages	5
Recommendations	10
<b>Detailed report</b>	
1 Strategy and leadership	14
2 Welsh Government investment	22
3 Developing active travel networks and changing behaviour	34
4 Monitoring and reporting	40
<b>Appendices</b>	
1 About our work	49
2 Key duties in the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013	52

# Key facts

## Targets



**45%**

target for journeys to be by public transport, walking, and cycling by 2040



**35%**

trip mode share of active travel by 2040

## Investment



**£65 million**

Welsh Government allocation for its key active travel initiatives in 2024-25



**77%**

proportion of the £65 million for the Active Travel Fund



**£218 million**

expenditure by local authorities from the Active Travel Fund or equivalent, 2018-19 to 2023-24

## Rates



**51%**

proportion of adults aged 16+ walking at least once a week for at least 10 minutes in 2022-23 for active travel purposes



**6%**

proportion of adults aged 16+ cycling for active travel purposes at least once a week in 2022-23

## Active Travel Fund schemes



**83**

main infrastructure schemes completed, 2021-22 to 2023-24



**81**

minor works schemes over £100,000 completed, 2021-22 to 2023-24

## Routes



**1,484 miles**

of active travel routes included on local authority Active Travel Network Maps in 2022

Note: Our [data tool](#) provides further information about active travel routes based on published network maps, national active travel rates from the National Survey for Wales, and local authority expenditure from the Active Travel Fund. The expenditure data above is not the full picture of active travel related spending by the Welsh Government and/or wider public services.

# Key messages

---

## Background

- 1 'Active travel' describes walking and cycling for everyday journeys (see **Exhibit 1**). The [Active Travel \(Wales\) Act 2013](#) (the Act) aims to increase active travel rates.

### Exhibit 1: definition of active travel

The Act describes an 'active travel journey' as to or from a workplace or educational establishment, or to access health, leisure or other services or facilities.

Supporting guidance refers to active travel as walking and cycling to a destination, possibly combined with public transport, but differentiated from walking and cycling solely for leisure. This includes travel by foot, wheelchair, pedal cycles, and adapted cycles.

Source: Audit Wales summary from Welsh Government, [Active Travel Act Guidance](#), July 2021 and the Act itself

- 2 The benefits of walking and cycling for health and well-being are well documented. There are wider benefits when active travel journeys replace car journeys. Such 'modal shift' is central to *Llwybr Newydd*<sup>1</sup>, the Wales transport strategy. *Llwybr Newydd* puts walking and cycling at the top of the sustainable transport hierarchy for new infrastructure investment. In practice, action to support active travel requires effective integration with wider Welsh Government policies and programmes.
- 3 The Welsh Government has overall policy responsibility for active travel. Delivery also involves Transport for Wales, local authorities, and third sector organisations including the charity Sustrans. In March 2024, the Welsh Government published a new active travel delivery plan<sup>2</sup>.

---

1 Welsh Government, [Llwybr Newydd, A New Wales Transport Strategy 2021](#), March 2021

2 Welsh Government, [Active Travel Delivery Plan 2024 to 2027](#), March 2024

- 4 The Welsh Government's most significant financial intervention is the Active Travel Fund. The Fund helps local authorities develop and deliver improvements to active travel infrastructure and related facilities. Transport for Wales administers the Fund for the Welsh Government, although Welsh Government officials remain involved with it and Ministers approve allocations.
- 5 In 2018, the Senedd's Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee<sup>3</sup> concluded that a lack of leadership, funding, and ambition had resulted in poor progress. In 2022, the Senedd's Cross-Party Group on the Active Travel Act<sup>4</sup> (the Cross-Party Group) said the Welsh Government's ambition for active travel had not been followed through with the actions needed to deliver transformative change.
- 6 We considered whether the Welsh Government is well placed to lead a step change in active travel rates, as part of its wider approach to modal shift. **Appendix 1** provides more detail about our work. **Appendix 2** summarises key duties on the Welsh Ministers and local authorities.
- 7 We have focused on national level arrangements led and/or managed by the Welsh Government and Transport for Wales. We have not examined interventions by individual local authorities, although we recognise their important front-line role and reflect certain evidence about issues at a local level. Nor have we considered the part that wider public, private and third sector organisations can play to promote active travel as employers or otherwise in, for example, the case of the NHS.

## Overall conclusion

- 8 Despite increased spending through its Active Travel Fund and a new, wide-ranging, delivery plan, the Welsh Government remains a long way from achieving the step change in active travel intended through the Act. And approaches to monitoring and evaluation do not currently go far enough to enable robust tracking of progress or an overall assessment of value for money.

---

3 Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, [Post Legislative Scrutiny of the Active Travel \(Wales\) Act 2013](#), June 2018

4 The report by the [Cross-Party Group on the Active Travel Act](#) is in the public domain but only via the group's social media.

## Key findings

### Strategy and leadership

- The Welsh Government has set active travel targets without Wales specific data to establish the baseline position. It is uncertain whether the targets are achievable.
- The new active travel delivery plan is wide-ranging but includes some actions outstanding from the 2016 plan.
- Various national policies and initiatives integrate commitments to active travel, but this does not always play through to local decisions. There also appears to be variation in the extent to which local authorities are prioritising active travel and related investment.
- Leadership and oversight is complicated by the involvement of multiple stakeholders and some lack of clarity around responsibilities amid changing remits.
- The Welsh Government's active travel team is small, and while Transport for Wales's team has grown over the past three years there are capacity issues in local authorities.

### Welsh Government investment

- The Welsh Government has allocated £65 million to its key active travel initiatives in 2024-25, mainly to improve infrastructure with the Active Travel Fund the largest component.
- The fuller picture of Welsh Government and wider public services expenditure on active travel is not clear.
- Building on its existing programme and delivery structure, the Welsh Government intends to develop a new assessment and funding framework.
- Annual Active Travel Fund or equivalent expenditure by local authorities increased significantly between 2018-19 and 2023-24, from £20 million to £46 million. Total expenditure in the period was £218 million.
- The annual funding cycle and uncertainty about future funding can make some local authorities reluctant to take on more ambitious multi-year schemes.

### **Developing active travel networks and changing behaviour**

- It is difficult to assess the extent to which active travel networks have improved over time from the network maps alone, but the pace of change appears too slow currently to achieve the ambitions.
- We heard that routes put forward for funding by local authorities are not always in the best areas, or adequately connected, to facilitate modal shift but Transport for Wales has developed a tool to improve prioritisation.
- Building of physical infrastructure has not been accompanied by a strong enough focus on awareness raising and behaviour change.

### **Monitoring and reporting**

- The limited information available suggests active travel rates have not improved in recent years, with headline walking rates below pre-pandemic levels.
- The Welsh Government and Transport for Wales are developing an overall monitoring and evaluation framework, but it has been a long time coming.
- The Act's reporting requirements are not being met consistently and a Welsh Government review of the operation of the Act is overdue.
  - The quality of information reported by local authorities varies considerably, including baseline information against which to assess impact.
  - The Welsh Government's annual reporting has been limited in scope.
- Current arrangements for monitoring and evaluating Active Travel Fund expenditure do not enable an overall assessment of value for money.



The Welsh Government needs to reflect on why, in over a decade, the Active Travel (Wales) Act and the arrangements to support delivery have not yet had the desired impact. Various factors influence active travel behaviour across a range of policy areas.

The importance of being able to put value for money to the test through strengthened monitoring, evaluation, and reporting, reflects a recurring theme from my wider audit work. Without better supporting evidence, the risk is that doing more of the same, including in how funding is prioritised, may simply produce the same results.

---

**Adrian Crompton**  
Auditor General for Wales



# Recommendations

---

In framing our recommendations<sup>5</sup>, we have been mindful of the 51 recommendations already set out by the Cross-Party Group, including in relation to the scope of the Act to support wider mainstreaming. The recommendations – directed at the Welsh Government, Transport for Wales or local authorities – spanned the following key areas:

- delivery
- governance
- behaviour change
- equality
- active travel to school
- monitoring and data
- legislative change

Also, shortly before publication of our report, the Welsh Government's Active Travel Board published its own annual report<sup>6</sup>. It raised nine recommendations on issues relevant to themes in this report and that of the Cross-Party Group.

More generally, it is also important that the Welsh Government now delivers with its partners on its Active Travel Delivery Plan.

---

<sup>5</sup> We have provided paragraph references to the core context for each recommendation. However, some are also informed by issues covered in other places in the report.

<sup>6</sup> Active Travel Board, [Active Travel in Wales Annual Report 2023-2024](#), August 2024

## Recommendations

---

### Ambitions and monitoring

- R1** The Welsh Government should articulate a consolidated set of long-term active travel indicators and targets, with delivery milestones. These should include coverage of wider outcomes than just active travel rates in the context of its transport strategy ambitions, the wider well-being goals for Wales, and expected contributions from wider policy/programme areas (**paragraphs 1.4 to 1.5 and 1.10 to 1.13**).
- R2** To support monitoring against active travel related indicators and targets, the Welsh Government should ensure it collects consistent data over time that allows long-term trend analysis and, where practical, pan-UK comparison on key measures (**paragraphs 1.4 to 1.5 and 4.2 to 4.4**).
- R3** As it finalises plans for a new National Travel Survey, the Welsh Government should re-appraise the costs and benefits of collecting enough data to support meaningful analysis and scrutiny of active travel rates at local authority level (**paragraphs 4.6 and 4.8 to 4.10**).
- R4** In developing a new monitoring and evaluation framework and providing fresh guidance to local authorities, the Welsh Government and Transport for Wales should clarify expectations around objective setting and a proportionate, but more consistent, framework for reporting benefits that extend beyond changes in active travel rates. This could include, for example, impacts on air pollution in the context of new reporting duties in that regard (**paragraphs 4.8 to 4.10, 4.16, and 4.20 to 4.25**).

## Recommendations

---

**R5** Building on the new monitoring and evaluation framework and reporting by local authorities, the Welsh Government should revert to the publication of a fuller annual report on active travel (**paragraphs 4.14 to 4.17**). As a minimum, the report should include coverage of and/or signpost to:

- evidence relating to active travel behaviour at a national and local level;
- expenditure data compared with allocations for key areas of specific active travel spending, analysis of local authority match funding and, where practical, contributions from other programme areas in transport and beyond;
- progress with active travel delivery plan actions, including behaviour change initiatives;
- progress with scheme delivery and network expansion; and
- evidence about how active travel investment is contributing to wider strategic goals.

## Responsibilities

**R6** The Welsh Government should use its new assessment and funding framework to support periodic reviews of local authorities' capability, plans, and active travel delivery. It should then report transparently on the outcome of those reviews (**paragraph 2.16**).

**R7** To manage potential risks around duplication of public funding and conflicts of interest around the administration of the Active Travel Fund:

- a) Transport for Wales should assess opportunities to further strengthen safeguards relating to the involvement of Sustrans officers, alongside its own officers, in the appraisal of Active Travel Fund bids.
- b) the Welsh Government and Transport for Wales should ensure they have a clear understanding of any work Sustrans may be involved with at a local authority level that relates back to the Active Travel Fund (**paragraphs 2.2 to 2.7**).

## Recommendations

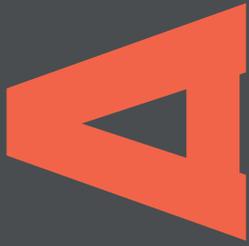
---

### Funding

- R8** The Welsh Government should devise a longer-term, multi-year, funding strategy to provide local authorities with more certainty and stability on active travel funding (**paragraph 2.22**). The strategy should reflect on the overall balance between capital funding for infrastructure, including the split between core and scheme specific funding for the Active Travel Fund, and revenue funding for other activities such as behaviour change initiatives. It should also include details of how active travel delivery plan actions will be resourced.
- R9** The Welsh Government should set out minimum requirements which, if not evidenced satisfactorily, will mean that Active Travel Fund bids for main infrastructure schemes will not be approved regardless of their overall ranked score. These minimum requirements should include equality impact assessment (**paragraph 2.15**).

### Review of the operation of the Act

- R10** The Welsh Government should complete a comprehensive, post implementation review of the Act in line with the scope envisaged when the Act was passed. It should involve other delivery partners and include consideration of the overall impact of active travel network maps and the extent to which they support public awareness of active travel routes (**paragraphs 3.9 and 4.18 to 4.19**).



# Strategy and leadership

---

01

- 1.1 This part of our report is about the Welsh Government's strategic approach and leadership at various levels.

### What we focused on:

We looked for evidence of clearly defined ambitions and a resourced delivery plan. We also looked at how well the Welsh Government's thinking on active travel is integrated with other priorities, clarity of roles and responsibilities, and capacity for driving change.

## The Welsh Government has set active travel related targets without Wales specific data to establish the baseline position

- 1.2 Llwybr Newydd does not include a specific active travel target. However, it includes a target of 45% of journeys to be by public transport, walking, and cycling by 2040. As part of net zero planning, the Welsh Government has also set targets to increase the trip mode share of active travel from a 27% baseline to 33% by 2030 and 35% by 2040<sup>7</sup>.
- 1.3 The Welsh Government previously set ambitions around walking and cycling rates in its 2016 active travel action plan<sup>8</sup>. The plan referred to a 2014 baseline of 6% of people making at least one cycle trip a week, and 64% making at least one walking trip a week. It aimed to achieve a rise to 10% for cycling and 80% for walking by 2026.
- 1.4 When the Welsh Government set its Llwybr Newydd and net zero plan targets, it estimated baseline rates by extrapolating from the England Travel Survey 2019<sup>9</sup>. Without a robust baseline for Wales, it is uncertain whether the targets are achievable.
- 1.5 The Welsh Government is working with Transport for Wales to develop a National Travel Survey for Wales (see **paragraphs 4.8 to 4.10**). The survey aims to secure a more robust baseline position and support monitoring against targets. Existing targets may also need resetting if the new baseline differs considerably from existing estimates. The new active travel delivery plan commits to setting more specific, stretching but achievable, targets once the National Travel Survey has reported.

---

7 Welsh Government, [Net Zero Wales Carbon Budget 2 \(2021-25\)](#), October 2021.

8 Welsh Government, [An Active Travel Action Plan for Wales](#), February 2016.

9 UK Government Department for Transport, [National Travel Survey: 2019](#), August 2020.

## The new active travel delivery plan is wide-ranging but includes some actions outstanding from the 2016 plan

- 1.6 A refreshed delivery plan was a key Cross-Party Group recommendation. The new plan sets out how the Welsh Government intends to implement active travel commitments in Llwybr Newydd. The Welsh Government considered feedback from its Active Travel Board (see **paragraphs 1.18 to 1.20**) before finalising the plan. The plan relies on collaboration with and between Transport for Wales, local authorities, and other partners.
- 1.7 The plan's 65 actions reflect important themes in the Cross-Party Group report<sup>10</sup>. They include continued development of infrastructure alongside other initiatives to encourage active travel. Certain actions are new and time limited, while some commit to continuing existing activity<sup>11</sup>. If delivered effectively, the plan could lead to important progress.
- 1.8 However, some actions were also in the 2016 action plan. Examples include actions around targets and monitoring and development of toolkits for active travel promotion and engagement (see also **paragraph 3.17**). This raises questions over the pace of change to date. It is also difficult to determine what success would look like against some actions. The absence of milestones and measures of success makes it more difficult for the Welsh Government and other stakeholders to be held to account for progress.
- 1.9 The plan does not include information about the resources needed to support delivery. While these may be subject to change, the Welsh Government considers that the plan reflects what is affordable and achievable within current capacity and budget expectations. The plan recognises the importance of integration with wider policies and programmes and that more needs to be done in that regard. However, its main focus is on actions that will be taken by the Welsh Government's transport teams and Transport for Wales.

---

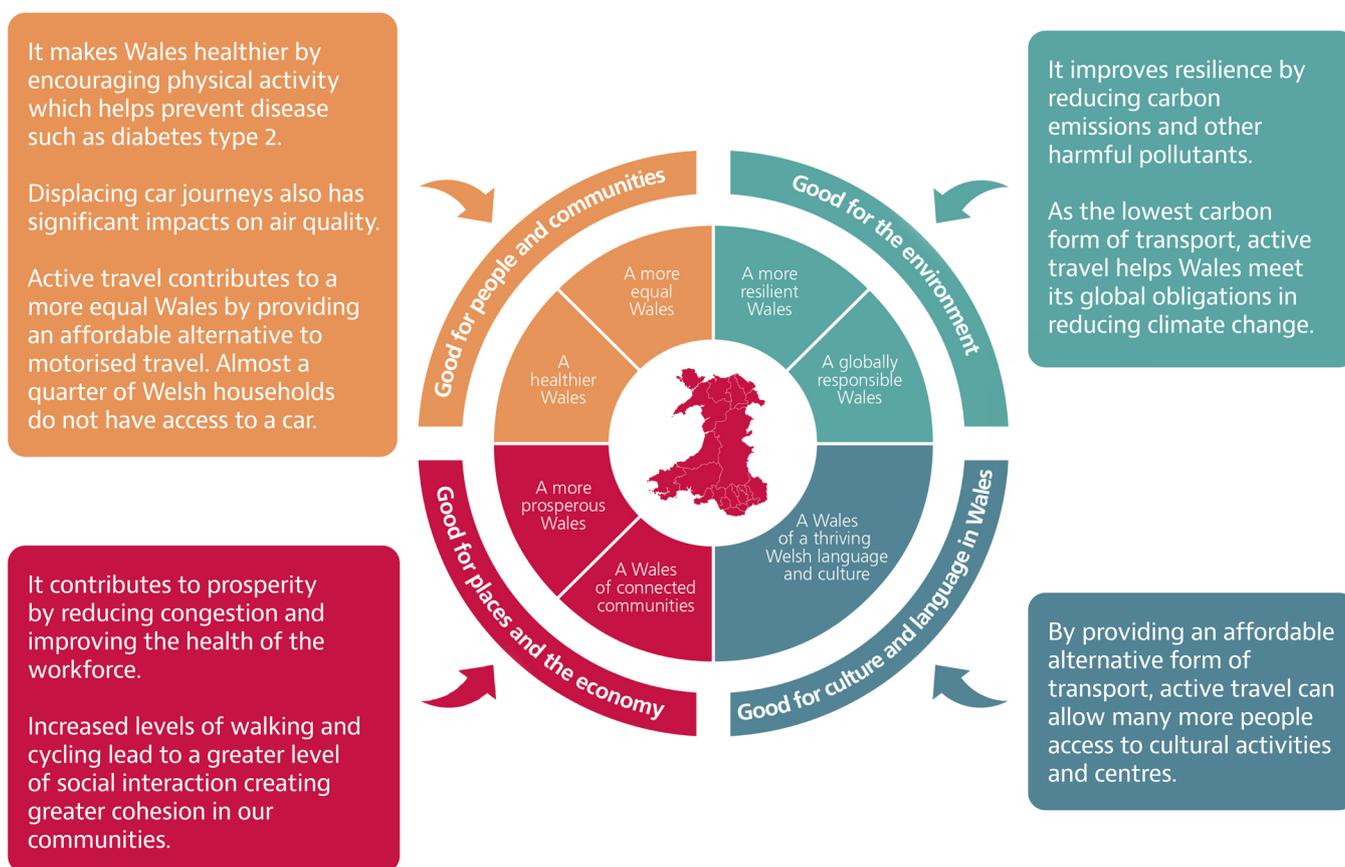
<sup>10</sup> The Welsh Government provided a detailed response to the Cross-Party Group and the Active Travel Board in March 2024. The Welsh Government accepted 25 of the report's recommendations in full, 24 in principle, and two in part.

<sup>11</sup> The Welsh Government intends that the plan runs to the end of 2027.

## Various national policies and initiatives integrate commitments to active travel, but this does not always play through to local decisions

1.10 The Programme for Government positions its specific active travel related commitments under a climate change theme<sup>12</sup>. However, the Welsh Government’s active travel guidance outlines how active travel can contribute to broader well-being goals (see **Exhibit 2**). Llwybr Newydd also positions active travel in the context of wider policy objectives.

### Exhibit 2: how active travel can contribute towards the well-being goals for Wales



Source: Welsh Government, Active Travel Act Guidance, July 2021

<sup>12</sup> Welsh Government, Programme for Government – update, December 2021. Alongside general actions to promote walking and cycling, three commitments refer to active travel. These concern Transport for Wales’s powers, integrated network maps, and promotion in schools.

- 1.11 Recent transport policy developments have pointed to a greater political focus on active travel. However, developing and promoting active travel requires wider collaboration and policy integration. For example:
- reflecting the emphasis on prioritising active travel in the national development plan<sup>13</sup>, Planning Policy Wales<sup>14</sup> notes that active travel must be an essential component of development schemes. Planning authorities must ensure new developments are designed to make active travel a practical, safe, and attractive choice.
  - the [Environment \(Air Quality and Soundscapes\) \(Wales\) Act 2024](#) included provisions to amend the Active Travel Act to create new duties to promote active travel as a means of reducing or limiting air pollution (see **Appendix 2**).
  - the investment objectives of the Sustainable Communities for Learning programme<sup>15</sup> for school and college buildings include an expectation that projects should support active travel.
  - Healthy Weight Healthy Wales<sup>16</sup> notes that healthy environments are a key component of the strategy around preventing and reducing obesity. It recognises that increasing rates of active travel can help drive this theme forward.
  - the remote working strategy for Wales<sup>17</sup> makes connections to the active travel commitments in Llwybr Newydd. It also reflects the Welsh Government's commitment to gathering additional data on travel patterns as ways of working change.
- 1.12 Despite expectations set out above, stakeholders told us that planning decisions on new schools and housing developments are often taken without enough consideration of active travel. And although Welsh Transport Appraisal Guidance (WelTAG)<sup>18</sup> says new transport projects, including road or rail, should integrate active travel at the outset, we heard of examples where this has not happened.

---

13 Welsh Government, [Future Wales: The National Plan 2040](#), February 2021.

14 Welsh Government, [Planning Policy Wales, Edition 12](#), February 2024. Updating technical advice on transport that supports Planning Policy Wales is an action in the active travel delivery plan.

15 Welsh Government, [Sustainable Communities for Learning rolling programme](#), February 2023.

16 Welsh Government, [Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales](#), October 2019.

17 Welsh Government, [Smarter working: a remote working strategy for Wales](#), March 2022.

18 Following consultation in 2022, the Welsh Government updated WelTAG in early 2024. Welsh Government, [Welsh Transport Appraisal Guidance \(WelTAG\)](#), February 2024.

- 1.13 We also heard of cases where local authorities do not comply with the duty under the Act to enhance walking and cycling provision when maintaining or improving roads, and to take these needs into account during roadworks. These are missed opportunities, with evidence suggesting it is more difficult to encourage active travel once travel patterns have established.
- 1.14 Beyond its general policy direction, the Welsh Government also has a role in encouraging local support for active travel. Active travel interventions can prove contentious locally. This is particularly the case for ambitious schemes involving reallocation of road space or reduced car parking. There can also be conflicting local policy decisions, for example free car parking to promote town centre economies.
- 1.15 Sustained community engagement is important to build the case for active travel and understand local barriers and needs. However, there appears to be variation in the extent to which local authorities are prioritising active travel and related investment. The Cross-Party Group found some local authorities had no active travel policies or delivery plans.

### **Leadership and oversight is complicated by the involvement of multiple stakeholders and some lack of clarity around responsibilities amid changing remits**

- 1.16 We heard that the delivery landscape is crowded, with stakeholders commenting on some lack of clarity over responsibilities. The Cross-Party Group commented on widespread praise for the support from Transport for Wales to local authorities. But it also noted that some local authorities felt that Transport for Wales's role in administering the Active Travel Fund has added complexity. Meanwhile, Corporate Joint Committees' regional transport planning functions mean they will have an increasing role in determining priorities, including in respect of strategic cross-boundary active travel routes<sup>19</sup>.

---

19 Corporate Joint Committees came into effect in April 2021. In a report on progress, we found that budgets for regional transport planning varied considerably and noted that we would have liked to see more progress with these functions. Auditor General for Wales, [Corporate Joint Committees – commentary on their progress](#), November 2023.

- 1.17 Responsibility for behaviour change is a particular area where stakeholders feel there is a lack of clarity. The Welsh Government has remitted some work on behaviour change for modal shift to Transport for Wales. The Cross-Party Group called for a structure to deliver professionally designed behaviour change interventions for active travel and a centre of expertise.
- 1.18 The Welsh Government established an Active Travel Board in 2014 to advise on activity and support the uptake of active travel. The Welsh Government has made changes, partly in response to the Cross-Party Group report. The Group concluded that the Board structure did not work well as there was not enough challenge or scrutiny, and a lack of data and power made it difficult to drive change. The report noted that the Board's role had become less clear since Transport for Wales's remit has widened.
- 1.19 The newly structured Board first met in May 2023<sup>20</sup>. Its purpose is to scrutinise the Welsh Government and other delivery partners, report annually on its activities and progress, and share best practice and identify challenges. The new delivery plan commits to a review of the operation of the Board in 2026.
- 1.20 Although too early to assess their impact, we heard that some changes have been well received. These include the addition of independent members and new scrutiny sessions on specific themes. However, some stakeholders told us it is still difficult for the Board to effectively scrutinise all delivery partners as there is no formal accountability relationship. While the Board includes local government representatives, we also heard some concerns around the flow of information to and from the Board.

---

<sup>20</sup> Terms of Reference and minutes are not in the public domain although we understand the Terms of Reference is being revisited and will be published shortly. Members of the Board include an independent Chair appointed by the Welsh Government, six to eight independent members, and representatives of the Welsh Government, local government, Transport for Wales, and Public Health Wales. The charities Sustrans and/or Living Streets also attend as nominated representatives of the 'Transform Cymru' coalition of organisations that promote sustainable transport for all.

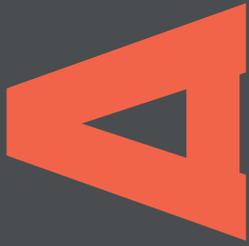
## The Welsh Government's active travel team is small, and while Transport for Wales's team has grown over the past three years there are capacity issues in local authorities

- 1.21 Active travel work requires skills in policy development and implementation, and understanding of scheme planning and implementation, engagement, promotion, communication, and behaviour change. The Welsh Government's active travel team is small relative to its active travel ambitions<sup>21</sup>, although it has also chosen to build capacity in Transport for Wales.
- 1.22 Transport for Wales's remit now includes maximising modal shift, delivering a fully integrated transport system, nurturing a multimodal culture, and encouraging and supporting people to consider sustainable modes as their default option. It administers the Active Travel Fund and provides technical support and guidance to local authorities<sup>22</sup>. It also provides support to the Welsh Government on active travel policy, reviewing network maps, and developing a monitoring framework.
- 1.23 Transport for Wales's active travel team has grown over the past three years to respond to its expanding remit. However, to bolster its own capacity with relevant expertise and help manage workload variations, Transport for Wales has also contracted with Sustrans. This arrangement has been supporting aspects of Transport for Wales's work on the Active Travel Fund (see **paragraphs 2.2 to 2.7**).
- 1.24 Staffing in local government is a key barrier to the ability to plan, implement and monitor active travel schemes. We heard there is variation in the capacity and skills of local authority teams, resulting in part from differing levels of support for active travel (see **paragraphs 1.14 to 1.15**).
- 1.25 The Cross-Party Group reflected similar issues, as have surveys by Transport for Wales and Sustrans. There have also been recruitment and retention challenges, including some local authority staff moving to Transport for Wales. Gaps in resources have led to some local authorities relying more on external contractors at additional cost.

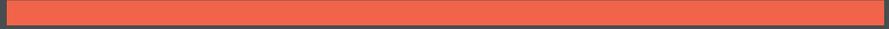
---

21 The Welsh Government team's capacity currently comprises 3.8 full time equivalent staff.

22 While Transport for Wales administers the Fund, Welsh Government officials remain involved with its governance and Ministers approve allocations.



# Welsh Government investment



02

- 2.1 This part of our report is about Welsh Government spending, with a particular focus on the Active Travel Fund. Figures we report may differ from those presented previously by the Welsh Government for other audiences because they are on a different basis, for example allocations versus expenditure.

**What we focused on:**

We looked for evidence that the Welsh Government understands its investment and that its allocations suggest that it sees active travel as a strategic priority.

**The Welsh Government has allocated £65 million to its key active travel initiatives in 2024-25, mainly to improve infrastructure, with the Active Travel Fund the largest component**

- 2.2 Various funding streams link specifically to active travel. The capital allocations for the key 2024-25 allocations set out in **Exhibit 3** reached just over £65 million. Of this, £50 million (77%) relates to the Active Travel Fund. The revenue allocation is small by comparison, at around £1.4 million. A common theme through our fieldwork was that increasing capital investment would have limited impact in changing behaviours without significant increases in revenue.

**Exhibit 3: key Welsh Government active travel funding allocations, 2024-25<sup>1</sup>**

	<b>Project / Programme</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Allocation (£s)</b>
<b>Capital</b>	<u>Active Travel Fund</u>	Supports local authorities to develop and deliver active travel schemes. Transport for Wales administers the Fund.	50,047,512
	<u>Safe Routes in Communities</u>	Funding for local authorities to improve road safety and walking and cycling routes to schools.	6,149,338
	Active Travel Support	For Transport for Wales to support the active travel agenda, including delivering the support programme for the Active Travel Fund <sup>2</sup> .	2,852,488
	Strategic Road Network Walking and Cycling Programme	Funding for walking and cycling routes connected to the roads managed by the Welsh Government.	2,800,000
	Active Travel Pathfinder	Managed by Transport for Wales, a programme to enable more innovative, high quality, and higher impact schemes.	1,000,000
	Sustrans Core Grant	To deliver enhancement and improvement schemes across the <u>National Cycle Network</u> <sup>3</sup> .	700,000
	Active travel projects	Allocation for other small grant programme for bike loan, repair, and recycling schemes.	300,000
	<b>Total (capital)</b>		<b>63,849,338</b>

## Notes:

- 1 These allocations are not the full picture of active travel related spending by the Welsh Government and/or wider public services (see also **paragraphs 2.8 to 2.11**).
- 2 Transport for Wales uses part of its capital allocation for a contract with Sustrans to assist with managing the Active Travel Fund. This includes supporting local authorities with active travel projects and providing monitoring and evaluation expertise. The contract value for 2024-25 is £156,393.
- 3 The National Cycle Network provides approximately 1,500 miles of mainly traffic free paths that connect cities, towns, and countryside across Wales. Sustrans created the network, which is part of the wider UK network, and is a custodian of it.

	<b>Project / Programme</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Allocation (£s)</b>
<b>Revenue</b>	<u>Active Travel Promotion in Schools</u>	A contract with Sustrans to support the Active Journeys programme which works with schools to create a culture that makes it easier for children to walk, wheel, scoot, or cycle.	420,000
	<u>WOW Walk to School</u>	Funding to Living Streets to support an initiative aimed at encouraging school pupils to walk or cycle to school.	385,000
	Sustrans Core Grant	Covering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• strategic advice and support.</li> <li>• Active Travel Schools Planning which supports schools to look at how transport and travel patterns affect them.</li> <li>• Healthy Workplaces, which targets large site employers and offers interventions to encourage active travel and physical activity.</li> <li>• support to local authorities to deliver National Cycle Network enhancements.</li> </ul>	380,000
	Active travel projects	Allocation to cover various activities but including costs associated with the Active Travel Board and data mapping work.	125,000
	Active Travel Support	Covering the costs of the support from the Transport for Wales grants team that administers the Active Travel Fund, including claims and payment processing.  This sum also includes the VAT element associated with the capital Active Travel Support allocation.	125,000
	<b>Total (revenue)</b>		<b>1,435,000</b>
	<b>Overall total</b>		<b>65,284,338</b>

Source: Audit Wales summary, drawing on Welsh Government allocation data, contractual agreements, and other published information

- 2.3 **Exhibit 3** highlights that Sustrans is receiving funding from the Welsh Government and from Transport for Wales for a range of purposes. Overall, the sums involved amount to a 2024-25 allocation of £1.66 million relevant to active travel.
- 2.4 We have not explored these matters in detail, and the Welsh Government is satisfied that there is no duplication of funding between its allocations, for example in respect of schools. Both the Welsh Government and Transport for Wales have also confirmed that they are satisfied with value for money and the management of potential conflicts of interest.
- 2.5 Transport for Wales originally let its contract with Sustrans for 2021-22 through a wider procurement framework and then extended it on an annual basis. Although delayed doing so, it established a new but similarly scoped contract through this framework arrangement in June 2024. As part of the arrangements with Transport for Wales, Sustrans officers may support local authorities with their Active Travel Fund scheme development and be part of a wider three-person panel that appraises bids. Potential duplication of funding or conflict of interest risks therefore arise when Sustrans may also be contracting, or bidding, for work with individual local authorities.
- 2.6 We understand there are arrangements to ensure Sustrans staff working for Transport for Wales would not be involved in scheme appraisal if they had worked on the same scheme under any Sustrans contract with the relevant local authority. Transport for Wales has also emphasised that the risk of undue influence in scheme appraisal is mitigated by the involvement of its staff on the appraisal panel.
- 2.7 In our view it would be prudent for Transport for Wales to assess opportunities to further strengthen safeguards relating to Sustrans' involvement in the appraisal process. We also consider that, as part of this and wider risk management, both the Welsh Government and Transport for Wales should understand any work Sustrans may be involved with, or bidding for, at a local authority level that relates back to the Active Travel Fund.

## The fuller picture of Welsh Government and wider public services expenditure on active travel is not clear

- 2.8 Although **Exhibit 3** sets out the key active travel allocations for 2024-25, it has not been possible to arrive at a consistent picture of expenditure across a fuller range of programmes over time. This is also not something the Welsh Government has sought to routinely collate.
- 2.9 However, **paragraphs 2.12 to 2.22** provide further commentary for the Active Travel Fund. For Safe Routes in Communities, the second largest capital allocation in 2024-25, Welsh Government figures indicate that annual expenditure fluctuated between £4.2 million and £6.5 million between 2015-16 and 2023-24.
- 2.10 The Welsh Government also funds various activities or schemes potentially relevant to active travel through other transport budgets, such as its Strategic Road Network improvements and the Local Transport Fund. Examples reported to us by the Welsh Government highlight that some major road projects have included several million pounds worth of active travel related measures in their own right. Wider Welsh Government programmes can also support active travel, for example the schools and colleges buildings programme or health interventions including social prescribing.
- 2.11 Alongside this sits any spending by local authorities from their own budgets, including match funding for some Active Travel Fund projects and Welsh Government staff costs. The Welsh Government does not routinely collate wider expenditure data and we recognise that it might be difficult to disaggregate active travel specific expenditure in some cases. Nevertheless, this means that the overall position on public spending on active travel, relative to the outcomes achieved, including for active travel rates, is unclear.

## Active Travel Fund or equivalent spending has increased significantly over recent years and the Welsh Government is planning to develop a new assessment and funding framework

Building on its existing programme and delivery structure, the Welsh Government intends to develop a new assessment and funding framework

2.12 The Active Travel Fund combines a core allocation and competitive bidding for the main allocation (see **Exhibit 4**). For 2024-25, the overall core and main allocations are split 30/70 (£15 million and £35 million respectively).

### Exhibit 4: the Active Travel Fund

Topic	Features
Objectives	<p>Encourage modal shift from car to active travel in isolation or in combination with public transport.</p> <p>Improve active travel access to employment, education, and other key services.</p> <p>Increase levels of active travel.</p> <p>Connect communities.</p>
Core allocation	<p>Minimum local authority allocation of £500,000.</p> <p>Actual allocations formula based: 50/50 on population size and area covered by designated localities (see <b>paragraph 3.4</b>)</p> <p>Supports initial development of larger capital schemes or minor works improvements.</p> <p>Examples of minor works include dropped kerbs and tactile paving, widening and surfacing, junction improvements, barrier removal, cycle parking and installation of monitoring equipment.</p>
Main allocation	<p>Awarded on a competitive basis for larger schemes.</p> <p>These involve the construction of active travel routes generally within or linked to designated localities.</p> <p>Could include cycleways, walkways, or shared use active travel routes.</p> <p>Also covers package schemes involving works which tend to be within the same area or with common features.</p>

Source: Audit Wales summary based on Welsh Government Active Travel Fund Grant Guidance to Applicants 2024-25 published on the [Transport for Wales website](#)

- 2.13 The Welsh Government established the Fund in 2018. Since December 2020, Transport for Wales has administered the fund on behalf of the Welsh Government. Welsh Government officials are however involved in the groups that support the governance arrangements for the Fund<sup>23</sup> and Ministers approve local authority allocations.
- 2.14 Local authorities must develop schemes in line with WelTAG. Specific application requirements and assessment criteria differ for the main or core allocation. The main allocation criteria are weighted. Infrastructure quality is the largest single component, accounting for 27% of the overall score. Match funding is the smallest component, accounting for 3%<sup>24</sup>. There are limits on the number of bids local authorities can make. For 2024-25, local authorities could make up to four main scheme applications<sup>25</sup> and eight scheme development applications. There is no limit on the number of minor works applications.
- 2.15 Local authorities should include monitoring and evaluation plans and equality impact assessments with their applications. Bids are not automatically rejected if they do not include these things, although they would attract a lower score<sup>26</sup>. In September 2023, a Welsh Government internal audit highlighted as strengths the rigorous review and assessment of funding applications and claims, and effective client/contractor relationships building on the wider governance arrangements.

---

23 Transport for Wales coordinates an Active Travel Fund Steering Group and below it, until recently, sat an Active Travel Fund Delivery Group. Core membership of the steering group involves Welsh Government officials and Sustrans. The group has a role overseeing Transport for Wales's overall active travel programme and supporting administration of the Active Travel Fund. Transport for Wales also convenes a national active travel officers group for local authority officers which supports engagement and shared learning. Transport for Wales has recently been developing proposals to refresh these governance structures.

24 The criteria for main allocations concern: strategic fit – case for change; strategic fit – fit with grant objectives; transport case – impact assessment; infrastructure quality; monitoring and evaluation; community and engagement; deliverability; and match funding.

25 A bid could address measures across more than one route. Of the four bids, one could support the 'rural offer' with a focus on route improvements outside designated localities that support the Welsh Government's priority of connecting market towns and other significant local centres to surrounding villages and outlying developments.

26 We understand the overall value of local authority bids has been exceeding available funding.

2.16 In its active travel delivery plan the Welsh Government says that it will learn from [Active Travel England](#) and develop an assessment framework in Wales to understand how to create more effective delivery environments which prioritise active travel<sup>27</sup>. The Welsh Government considers that its programme and delivery structure are already more developed in Wales. However, the approach is likely to include a self-assessment by local authorities in areas such as leadership, ambition, capability, and performance. While still in early development, the Welsh Government has indicated that the approach will inform funding allocation criteria.

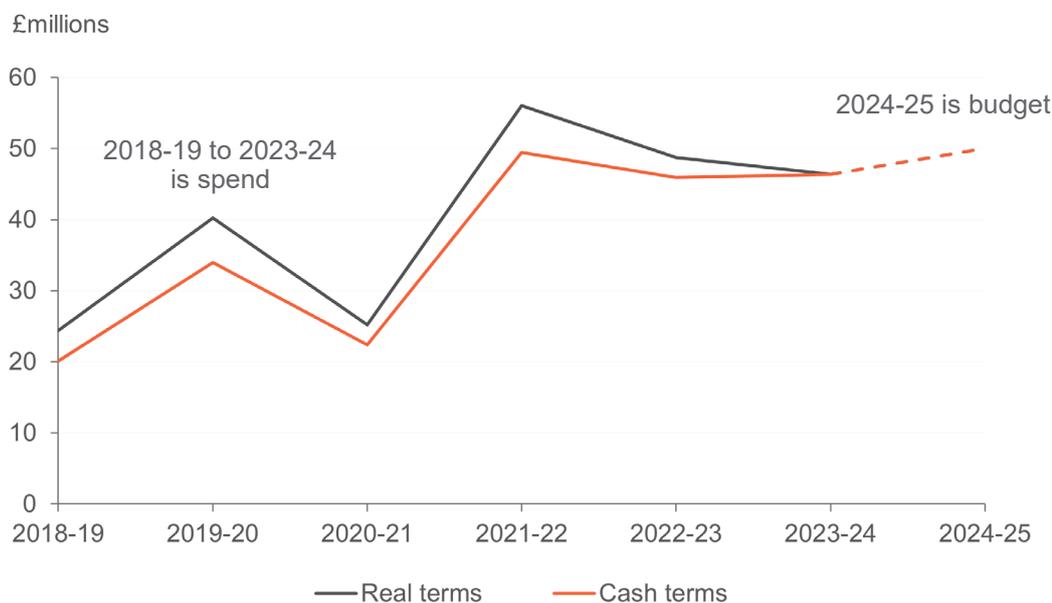
**Active Travel Fund or equivalent expenditure by local authorities increased from £20 million to £46 million between 2018-19 and 2023-24, but the annual funding cycle and uncertainty about future funding can make some local authorities reluctant to take on multi-year schemes**

2.17 **Exhibit 5** shows local authority Active Travel Fund expenditure since 2018-19. Before this, the Welsh Government supported specific active travel projects as part of the Local Transport Fund. This is no longer the case, although we have included legacy expenditure in 2018-19 and 2019-20. Overall, cash terms expenditure has increased significantly between 2018-19 and 2023-24 (from £20.1 million to £46.3 million). Total expenditure for the period was £218 million.

---

27 In June 2023, the National Audit Office reported on [Active Travel in England](#). The report described Active Travel England's approach to assessing local authority capability and ambition. More than half of English local authorities had been assessed at the lowest two of five levels.

**Exhibit 5: expenditure by local authorities from the Active Travel Fund or equivalent, 2018-19 to 2023-24, and allocation for 2024-25 (cash and real terms at 2023-24 prices)<sup>1, 2, 3</sup>**



Notes:

- 1 Real terms figures are adjusted to take account of inflation. We used HM Treasury GDP deflators at market prices and money for 2023-24, June 2024.
- 2 Excludes allocations to Transport for Wales to support its active travel work, including administration of the Fund (see **Exhibit 3**). Also excludes any local authority match funding.
- 3 During 2018-19 and 2019-20, some discrete active travel schemes continued to receive Local Transport Fund support. We have included that expenditure. In cash terms, legacy scheme expenditure amounted to £11.3 million (56%) of the £20.1 million total for 2018-19. It was £6.1 million (18%) of the £33.9 million for 2019-20.

Source: Audit Wales analysis of Welsh Government data

- 2.18 The annual expenditure peaked at £49.4 million in 2021-22 when there was also an additional in-year allocation although this was not spent in full. The allocation in 2024-25 is below 2021-22 expenditure in real terms<sup>28</sup>.
- 2.19 Some local authorities also contribute match funding to schemes, whether in direct financial contributions and/or the value of staff time. However, more often than not over the past two funding rounds, bids have not identified match funding. The match funding across all bids in those rounds amounted to less than 5% of the Active Travel Fund monies bid for. Figures for individual schemes include examples in the 10-20% range. One bid for 2024-25 was for a scheme where the match funding identified was around double that of the Active Travel Fund support bid for.
- 2.20 Local authorities send quarterly claims to Transport for Wales who assess whether scheme spending is on target. Transport for Wales then provides expenditure profiles to the Welsh Government. Where projected costs differ to estimates, local authorities prepare a contract variation form which is subject to Welsh Government approval but allows them to adjust estimates within their overall funding envelope.
- 2.21 We heard that processes for understanding and managing underspends have improved in recent years, supporting opportunities for re-allocation to other active travel initiatives. Nevertheless, Active Travel Fund expenditure by local authorities has been less than that allocated. Over the last five years the annual underspend has ranged from £2 million to £9 million. The £9 million underspend was in 2021-22 when there was an additional £8 million in-year allocation but, as noted in **paragraph 2.18**, this was not spent in full.
- 2.22 Over the past three financial years, local authorities completed 83 larger main infrastructure schemes and 81 minor works schemes costing over £100,000 (see **Exhibit 6**). Schemes can span more than one year. However, we heard that the annual funding cycle and uncertainty around future allocations can make some local authorities reluctant to build capacity and to take on multi-year schemes that may be more difficult to deliver but more impactful. There are also concerns about the cost of ongoing maintenance, which the Fund does not cover.

---

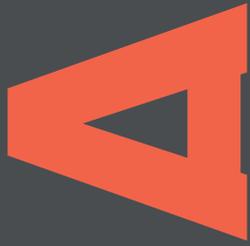
28 Our [data tool](#) provides local authority level data. The Welsh Government also publishes information on Active Travel Fund and other local authority transport grant awards. For example: Welsh Government, [Local authority transport grants awarded 2024 to 2025](#), April 2024.

**Exhibit 6: number of Active Travel Fund schemes completed by local authorities by type, 2021-22 to 2023-24**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of completed main infrastructure schemes</b>	<b>Number of completed minor works schemes (over £100,000)</b>
2021-22	24	38
2022-23	25	21
2023-24	34	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>81</b>

Note: delivery and expenditure on individual schemes may span more than one financial year.

Source: Transport for Wales data



## **Developing active travel networks and changing behaviour**

---

**03**

3.1 This part of our report is about the development of active travel networks.

**What we focused on:**

We looked for signs of an improved active travel network and processes that prioritise the development of routes to support modal shift. We also looked at whether there is sufficient focus on behaviour change alongside capital investment.

**It is difficult to assess the extent to which active travel networks have improved over time from the network maps alone, but the pace of change appears too slow currently to achieve the ambitions**

- 3.2 Local authorities have a duty to secure new and improved active travel routes. They must also produce maps of existing routes and related facilities, and those planned for the next 15 years. These Active Travel Network Maps are available via the [DataMapWales website](#).
- 3.3 The Act requires that maps are submitted to the Welsh Ministers for approval every three years or as directed by the Welsh Ministers. The second iterations of local authority maps were not published until late 2022 following extended deadlines due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors. The period for the next review cycle has been extended to December 2026.
- 3.4 These duties relate to more populous 'designated localities'<sup>29</sup>. The Welsh Government believes routes in these localities are likely to have greater impact. However, local authorities can develop network maps for other localities where there is high potential for use.

---

<sup>29</sup> Designated localities are settlements defined by direction by the Welsh Ministers and derived from Office for National Statistics built-up area statistics; Office for National Statistics, [Towns and cities, characteristics of built-up areas, England and Wales: Census 2021, August 2023](#).

- 3.5 Effective community involvement is likely to promote the use of routes. Active Travel Act guidance sets out related expectations as part of developing network maps and when routes are at the design stage. It notes that local authorities should involve delivery partners, elected members, children and young people, and people with protected characteristics<sup>30</sup>.
- 3.6 We have not examined the mapping process in detail. However, we heard concerns about skills and resources in local authorities to engage effectively, including with groups representing disabled people. Welsh Government commissioned research has also highlighted mixed views about local authority consultation<sup>31</sup>. We also heard about limited resources within organisations representing people with protected characteristics to enable them to input effectively with lived experiences.
- 3.7 As shown in **Exhibit 6**, there is evidence of progress with active travel infrastructure. However, the current pace of development suggests it is highly unlikely that local authorities will have implemented all planned routes within 15 years.
- 3.8 Our [data tool](#) illustrates this issue. Many local authorities have hundreds of future routes and are restricted in how many bids they can submit, albeit that bids can potentially address more than one route (see **paragraph 2.14**). Some local authorities have not been submitting bids on an annual basis or not up to the maximum number. Capacity issues could also be a constraint even if local authorities were able to submit more bids.

---

30 The Equality Act 2010 sets out nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

31 In May 2024, the Welsh Government published research from a survey of 1,000 Welsh adults (16+) in June 2022; Welsh Government, [Public Attitudes to Active Travel 2022](#), May 2024.

3.9 While the maps provide a planning tool, it is difficult to assess the extent that networks are improving simply by comparing them over time and they have limitations as a resource for the public<sup>32</sup>. This is because:

- to feature on the maps, existing active travel routes should meet the Welsh Government's design standards. The Welsh Government amended the standards in 2021 between the two most recent iterations of the maps available on the DataMapWales website. There are examples of older infrastructure previously defined and mapped as an active travel route that no longer meets the design standards and therefore no longer displayed on the maps.
- as the duty to map routes is specific to designated localities, this means some routes potentially well used for active travel are not officially recorded as routes and/or shown on the maps, although local authorities can include routes outside these localities if they wish. For example, the maps may not reflect routes on the National Cycle Network (see **Exhibit 3**). The maps published in 2022 record approximately 1,484 miles of active travel routes.
- where a route falls slightly short of the design standard there should be a statement explaining its limitations. We heard that there are inconsistencies in whether local authorities record these as existing routes or future routes, although we understand this relates to a small proportion of routes overall (less than 5%).
- the maps reflect a point in time position. With increased investment in recent years, not all routes developed will feature as existing routes although they may be identified as planned future routes.

---

32 The research described in **paragraph 3.6** found that only a third of respondents answered positively when asked if they knew where they could find information about walking and cycling routes in their local area.

**We heard that routes put forward for funding by local authorities are not always in the best areas, or adequately connected, to facilitate modal shift but Transport for Wales has developed a tool to improve prioritisation**

- 3.10 The Act's supporting guidance states, 'The parts of the network that potentially offer the greatest impact on increasing rates of active travel should be prioritised, but other local priorities may also be considered such as targeting areas of deprivation or poor public health.' We heard that routes put forward for funding are not always the ones with the biggest potential to generate modal shift.
- 3.11 Schemes that seek to maximise modal shift can be difficult to deliver, both in terms of time and the skills required. They can also be unpopular because they may require re-allocation of road space from private motor cars. We also heard that routes are often not well connected for door-to-door journeys, leaving gaps in the active travel network which is a key barrier for participation<sup>33</sup>.
- 3.12 Transport for Wales has developed a data-led tool that helps local authorities identify future routes with the highest potential impact. The tool covers potential for modal shift, access to services, deprivation, impact on health, and route safety. However, we are aware of issues that need working through, owing in part to limitations in available datasets. Local authorities may not need to demonstrate prioritisation based on the tool if they can provide other evidence supporting prioritisation.

---

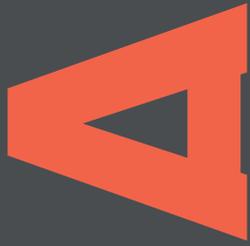
<sup>33</sup> Active travel routes can also be harder to implement to design requirements in certain areas because of terrain and topography. Longer journeys in rural areas and more limited public transport connections can also make it more difficult to travel actively.

## Building of physical infrastructure has not been accompanied by a strong enough focus on awareness raising and behaviour change

- 3.13 Infrastructure alone cannot generate modal shift. Although the Active Travel Fund guidance allows for promotional costs associated with the scheme, we heard consistently that capital investment in active travel must be backed up by a comprehensive approach to behaviour change. This has not been the case to date, notwithstanding a behaviour change emphasis in some of the Welsh Government's key active travel initiatives (see **Exhibit 3**).
- 3.14 Stakeholders told us of the need for nationally coordinated messaging to incentivise active travel and disincentivise car use. They suggested this should involve clear, consistent, and accessible information on the benefits of active travel, with a particular focus on the people who do not currently travel actively.
- 3.15 Research on behaviour change recommends a mix of soft and hard measures which address capability, opportunity, motivational, social, and environmental issues all at the same time. Survey findings on public attitudes (see **paragraph 3.6**) provide pointers about measures that may encourage active travel journeys.
- 3.16 The Welsh Government and Transport for Wales have been running some national campaigns which include a focus on travel behaviour<sup>34</sup>. It is also important that local authorities work with local communities to promote active travel. However, there are concerns about the skills and resources available to support local behaviour change and about the impact that they will have without being aligned with complementary national messaging.
- 3.17 Research has suggested that behaviour change approaches should focus on school runs and workplace communities and that joined up actions are most impactful. The Welsh Government plans to choose a 'demonstrator town' in 2024. It would then deliver a programme of infrastructure investment alongside complementary behaviour change interventions to understand and learn from what it is possible to achieve.
- 3.18 Transport for Wales has recently developed an [active travel promotional toolkit](#) to help local authorities promote active travel. Local authorities have called for this for several years and it was a commitment in the 2016 action plan (see **paragraph 1.8**). The new delivery plan also contains several other initiatives which may facilitate behaviour change.

---

<sup>34</sup> [Transport for Wales, The real social network](#) and [Welsh Government, Climate Action Wales](#).



## Monitoring and reporting

---

04

- 4.1 This part of our report is about monitoring and reporting on progress. In relation to active travel behaviour, we focus on official Welsh Government statistics. We recognise there is wider data available on active travel. **Appendix 1** references some of that material.

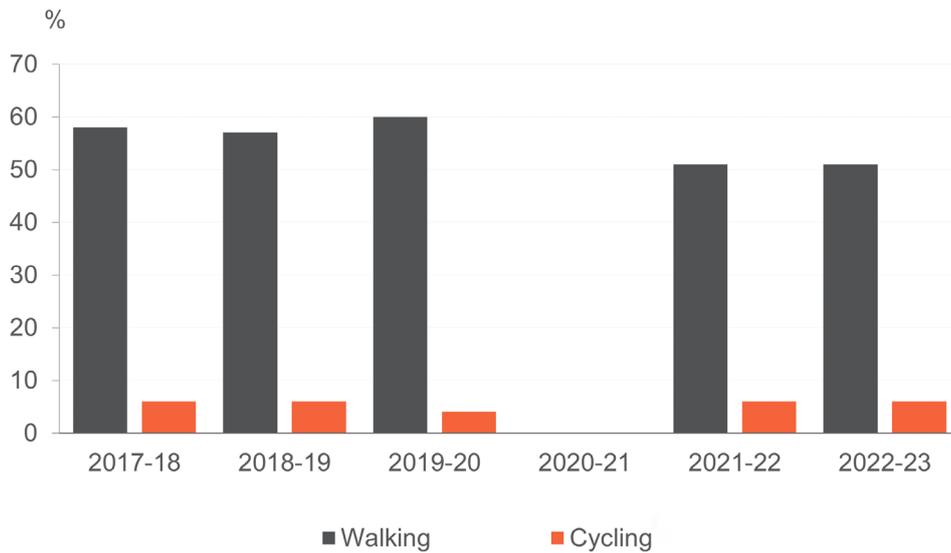
#### **What we focused on:**

We looked at whether there is a framework to record active travel data and what that data tells us about progress. We also considered whether reporting and review duties are being met and whether the Welsh Government has good arrangements for monitoring outcomes of the Active Travel Fund.

### **The limited information available suggests active travel rates have not improved in recent years, with headline walking rates below pre-pandemic levels**

- 4.2 The Welsh Government does not have robust, long-term data on how and why people travel and on wider outcomes from active travel. Data limitations are a barrier to accountability and the assessment of value for money from related expenditure.
- 4.3 The National Survey for Wales has asked active travel questions about walking and cycling for adults aged 16+ every year between 2013-14 and 2022-23. The survey did not run during 2023-24. In 2017-18 the questions changed, with a focus on walking for at least 10 minutes rather than 5 minutes. The change was intended to reflect the additional health benefit context of a period of walking of at least 10 minutes. There were also other changes to the wording of the walking and cycling questions before 2017-18, although there has never been a time threshold applied to the cycling questions.
- 4.4 Changes to the way the national survey data is collected since 2020-21 may also affect direct comparison with previous years. Nevertheless, the figures suggest active travel rates for cycling have remained broadly static since 2017-18. Walking rates are still below pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels (see **Exhibit 7**).

**Exhibit 7: percentage of adults aged 16+ reporting they walked for at least ten minutes or cycled at least once a week for active travel in the previous three months<sup>1</sup>, 2017-18 to 2022-23<sup>2</sup>**



Notes:

- 1 The Welsh Government uses the frequency of 'at least once a week' for its core measure of active travel rates. While respondents are asked about frequency over the previous three months, data is collected on a rolling basis through the year to allow for seasonal effects.
- 2 Full year data for 2020-21 is not publicly available due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the survey. Also, from 2020-21 onwards, the survey changed mode from face-to-face to telephone and online data collection. Care should be taken when making direct comparisons to earlier results.

Source: Welsh Government, [National Survey for Wales](#), various years

- 4.5 In 2022-23, 51% of people said they walked at least once a week for active travel purposes and 6% cycled. The figure for walking compares with 60% in 2019-20. The impact of changes to everyday travel patterns due to the pandemic, including increases in home-working or online shopping, is difficult to determine from the National Survey data alone but is a potentially relevant factor<sup>35</sup>.
- 4.6 The survey's sample size means it is difficult to track participation data and produce reliable statistics at a local authority level. The sample size in 2022-23 was 2,000. Also, although the national survey statistical bulletin periodically stratifies data by age, sex, and limiting long term illness, it is not possible to disaggregate data for groups with protected characteristics comprehensively. The Cross-Party Group also highlighted this.
- 4.7 In addition, the survey does not have data for other modes of transport. It has not therefore been possible for the Welsh Government to track patterns and rates of modal shift over this same period.

### **The Welsh Government and Transport for Wales are developing an overall monitoring and evaluation framework, but it has been a long time coming**

- 4.8 The Welsh Government and Transport for Wales are developing an overall monitoring and evaluation framework for active travel, something previously aspired to in the 2016 action plan. The framework will support the overarching Llwybr Newydd monitoring framework. The draft framework includes a range of active travel indicators, such as:
- % of people who walk or cycle at least once a week as a means of transport;
  - % of journeys by walking, cycling and public transport;
  - % of schools with active travel plans; and
  - kilometres of active travel infrastructure / overall length of active travel network that meets or exceeds standards.

---

<sup>35</sup> The Welsh Government's public attitudes research in June 2022 (see **paragraph 3.6**) included analysis of the impact on active travel behaviour from changes in work or education circumstances due to the pandemic.

- 4.9 There are still gaps in data to inform these indicators. Transport for Wales has commissioned the National Centre for Social Research to design a new Wales National Travel Survey which is intended to provide better data on active travel and modal shift. The survey was still in the development stage at the time of our fieldwork, with full results not expected until at least 2025. While the survey could provide insight into travel patterns in regions, it is not expected to provide robust annual local authority level data.
- 4.10 The Welsh Government is still to decide whether the National Travel Survey will supplement or replace the questions on active travel in the National Survey for Wales. We understand the National Travel Survey will collect data on the mode, purpose, and duration of journeys but that it will do so by asking respondents about the previous day. The National Travel Survey alone would not therefore provide data to track current active travel measures back to 2017-18.

### **The Act's reporting requirements are not being met consistently and a Welsh Government review of the operation of the Act is overdue**

#### **The quality of information reported by local authorities varies considerably, including baseline information against which to assess impact**

- 4.11 The Welsh Government has provided a template report to help local authorities discharge their annual reporting duty (see **Appendix 2**)<sup>36</sup>. The Welsh Government does not mandate its use and the Act does not include sanctions for non-compliance. There have been instances where local authorities have not submitted the required annual reports to the Welsh Government in the set timeframe. However, the Welsh Government has informed us that the position has improved over recent years.
- 4.12 In addition to the annual reporting requirement, local authorities must report on changes of levels of use of their active travel routes each time they submit their network maps (see **paragraphs 3.2 to 3.8**). Although not a requirement of the Act, the Welsh Government also expects local authorities to submit reports about the impact of individual Active Travel Fund schemes, which could in turn help inform annual reporting.
- 4.13 The information provided by local authorities across these different reporting mechanisms varies considerably. Some authorities provide limited data, particularly on baseline information, which makes it difficult to ascertain the impact that investment has had on active travel rates and to monitor progress over time.

**The Welsh Government’s annual reporting has been limited in scope and it has not completed a review of the operation of the Act within the expected timeframe**

- 4.14 The Act requires the Welsh Government to publish annual reports on the extent to which walkers and cyclists make active travel journeys. The Welsh Government considers that it has fulfilled its reporting duty by publishing annual active travel data in statistical bulletins derived from the National Survey for Wales (see **paragraphs 4.3 to 4.7**). The latest shows active travel rates for 2022-23. However, these bulletins are high-level and provide limited insight. In addition, there will be no equivalent data for 2023-24.
- 4.15 The Welsh Government last published a fuller annual report in 2017<sup>37</sup>, and before that in 2015. The Welsh Government cites competing pressures as the reason for not producing equivalent reports more recently. The 2017 report included information on active travel rates alongside wider commentary on relevant policy and programme delivery.
- 4.16 The absence of a broader annual report, which could draw on reporting by local authorities and reflect wider interventions beyond the Active Travel Fund, is a missed opportunity to increase awareness and support scrutiny. We also question whether reliance on statistical bulletins is in line with the spirit of the Act, considering the approach taken in the early years and the increased investment since (see **Exhibit 5**). An enhanced annual report could also help discharge duties regarding reporting on the steps taken to promote active travel as a way of reducing or limiting air pollution (see **Appendix 2**).
- 4.17 We heard from some local authorities that the reports they provide to the Welsh Government take time, and that the absence of any feedback on them or knowledge of how other authorities compare limits their value. That said, better national data and greater consistency in the information provided by local authorities (see **paragraph 4.13**) would also provide a stronger basis for national reporting.

---

37 Welsh Government, Active Travel Annual Report 2016/17, October 2017.

- 4.18 The Act also requires the Welsh Government to review the operation of the Act, 'with a view in particular to assessing its success in securing new active travel routes and related facilities and improvements of existing active travel routes and related facilities.' The timeframe for this review is linked to the first iteration of local authorities' network maps and, on this basis, the Cross-Party Group noted the review should have been completed by autumn 2022.
- 4.19 While the 2022 Cross-Party Group report provides important evidence, the Welsh Government is yet to complete its own review. The recent research on public attitudes to active travel (see **paragraph 3.6**) states that the Welsh Government commissioned the work to support the statutory review. We would not however consider that it entirely discharges the review duty. In November 2023, the then Minister for Climate Change committed the Welsh Government to a thorough review of the Act within five years and recognised shortcomings<sup>38</sup>.

### **Current arrangements for monitoring and evaluating Active Travel Fund expenditure do not enable an overall assessment of value for money**

- 4.20 Local authorities should submit certain information when they bid to the Active Travel Fund. This includes providing a monitoring and evaluation plan setting out planned inputs, outputs, outcomes, and methods of measurement.
- 4.21 Local authorities should complete an annual progress report with data on individual scheme outcomes for three years post-completion<sup>39</sup>. The same reporting requirements apply to other local transport grants. The reporting template includes, among other things, questions on:
- reasons for any variance between budgeted and actual costs;
  - how stakeholders were engaged and the impact of this engagement;
  - any changes to scheme design;
  - what outputs were delivered;
  - anticipated and realised outcomes; and
  - lessons for future schemes.

---

38 Welsh Parliament, [Plenary](#), 21 November 2023.

39 The Welsh Government did not require reports for 2022-23 to recognise demands on local authorities ahead of the introduction of the default 20mph speed limit. It is expecting information for 2022-23 in returns for 2023-24.

- 4.22 Monitoring and evaluation should be proportionate to the scale of the project. However, there is an expectation that it should include quantitative and qualitative data collection.
- 4.23 We heard some concerns from local authorities about capacity to support this activity and about their willingness to commit to the costs involved without greater certainty about future year allocations (see **paragraph 2.22**). There can also be practical issues, because monitoring tools such as pedestrian, cycle, and motor counters are unable to distinguish between active travel and leisure journeys without user surveys alongside.
- 4.24 Neither the Welsh Government nor Transport for Wales currently collates all the information they have received from local authorities on outcomes from funded schemes, due in part to the limited and inconsistent ways local authorities are reporting (see **paragraphs 4.11 to 4.13**). During 2024-25, Transport for Wales plans to start analysing information gathered since the start of 2021-22 to see what insights can be drawn from it.
- 4.25 Transport for Wales is developing further guidance on monitoring and evaluating active travel schemes. It notes that reporting on outcomes should follow up on the expected changes set out during earlier project appraisal. This should include outcomes that extend beyond walking or cycling rates, such as intended improvements in air quality or the safety of travellers. Transport for Wales issued draft guidance to local authorities for comment in June 2024. The final guidance is due for roll-out later in 2024. In the meantime, current arrangements do not enable an overall assessment of value for money from the Active Travel Fund.
- 4.26 Finally, the September 2023 internal audit report noted that the Welsh Government had not formally reviewed the cost of Transport for Wales managing the delivery of the Active Travel Fund from a value for money perspective<sup>40</sup>. However, the report also noted certain strengths in the arrangements for managing the Fund (see **paragraph 2.15**).
- 4.27 The Welsh Government intends to review Transport for Wales's grant management function by June 2026. It has decided to allow more time for Transport for Wales's services and management tools to continue to evolve and respond to local authority feedback before doing so.

---

40 Other 'significant' recommendations related to: formalising procedures for site visits Transport for Wales undertakes to ensure agreed routes have been built as required; and strengthening arrangements for capturing the outcomes of local authority audits of completed schemes that enable their inclusion on their network maps. Action in response to these recommendations is now complete.



# Appendices

---

- 1 About our work
- 2 Key duties in the  
Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013

# 1 About our work

## Audit question, scope, and criteria

Our work considered whether the Welsh Government is now well placed to lead a step change in active travel rates, as part of its wider approach to modal shift.

Active travel is a broad and complicated policy area that involves a wide range of public service interventions across transport, public health, education and more. We focused our examination on issues relating to the Welsh Government's overall strategic approach, progress with implementation, funding, governance, capacity and skills, and data and monitoring arrangements.

We developed audit criteria informed by a range of sources, including being mindful of the sustainable development principle and the five ways of working set out under the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#). At the start of each report section, we have summarised the key things we focus on in the report. We have not covered every aspect of our evidence base. The report focuses on what we consider to be the material themes and issues emerging from our work.

Our report builds on issues set out by the Senedd Cross-Party Group on the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013. The Group's June 2022 report considered overall progress on meeting the aims of the Act and why the Act has failed to increase active travel rates.

Our work considered the support the Welsh Government provides to local authorities, including through its Active Travel Fund and with a focus on whether the Welsh Government can demonstrate that the Fund is securing positive outcomes. Transport for Wales administers the Active Travel Fund on behalf of the Welsh Government although Welsh Government officials remain involved with its governance and Ministers approve funding allocations. We have not examined the delivery of active travel interventions by individual local authorities, although we recognise their important front-line role and reflect certain evidence about issues at a local level.

We have not looked at the specific area of promotion in schools, although we touch briefly on related expenditure. And we have not examined wider policy and funding interventions relevant to active travel, such as the introduction of default 20mph speed limits. Nor have we considered the role that wider public, private and third sector organisations can play to promote active travel as employers or otherwise in, for example, the case of the NHS.

## Audit methods

### Document review

We reviewed a large amount of documentation including the following:

- the review by the Senedd Cross-Party Group on the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 (see above).
- the fifth Senedd's Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee report on its post legislative scrutiny of the Act.
- Welsh Government's strategy, plans, guidance, and delivery documents relating to transport and active travel.
- other independent research articles and blogs, and research commissioned by the Welsh Government.
- minutes and papers from the Welsh Government's Active Travel Board, which involves various stakeholders.
- a Welsh Government internal audit report in September 2023 which reviewed processes and governance arrangements for supporting and managing delivery of active travel, in particular the Welsh Government's Active Travel Fund.
- the National Audit Office's June 2023 report on [Active Travel in England](#). That report highlighted some similar issues to those in the Cross-Party Group report on Wales and that we have identified through our own work.

### Observations

We attended the 27 July 2023 meeting of the Active Travel Board.

### Semi-structured interviews

We interviewed Welsh Government officials and Transport for Wales staff involved in active travel.

We also interviewed:

- officers from the Welsh Local Government Association and six local authorities
- third sector organisations including Sustrans Cymru, Living Streets, Disability Wales Guide Dogs Cymru, and Cycling UK
- members of the Active Travel Board
- officers from the Cross-Party Group on Active Travel

## Focus group

We ran a focus group discussion with representatives from the Cross-Party Group for the Active Travel Act to gather views on the key barriers to progress.

## Data analysis

We also analysed available performance and financial data. We have published a [data tool](#) alongside this report to provide further information about active travel routes, rates, and expenditure. In this report:

- we only show the overall participation rates among the adult population based on the National Survey for Wales figures but our data tool shows additional detail for other frequencies and by urban and rural classification; and
- we include high-level data on the Active Travel Fund and our data tool breaks this expenditure down by local authority.

We recognise there is wider data and research available on active travel behaviour that is collected on a different basis or relates to specific initiatives.

Examples include:

- Public Health Wales, [Travel to School Hands Up Survey 2023](#).
- School Health Research Network, [Student Health and Wellbeing in Wales: Report of the 2021/22 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Survey and School Health Research Network Student Health and Wellbeing Survey, April 2023](#).
- Sustrans and Cardiff Council, [Cardiff: Walking and Cycling Index 2021, May 2022](#).

We also considered data that supported the development of the Welsh Government's transport strategy: Welsh Government, [Llwybr Newydd, A New Wales Transport Strategy, Consultation Draft, Supporting information, Transport data and trends, February 2021](#).

## 2 Key duties in the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013

**Exhibit 8** summarises key duties. The general duties listed have applied since 2013. The [Environment \(Air Quality and Soundscapes\) \(Wales\) Act 2024](#) provided for extended duties in relation to air pollution.

For the purposes of the Act, an active travel route means that it is situated in a designated locality (see **paragraph 3.4**). The relevant local authority must also consider that it is appropriate to classify it as an active travel route, in the context for example of design standards (see **paragraph 3.8**).

### **Exhibit 8: summary of key duties under the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013**

#### **Local authorities**

---

- |                |   |
|----------------|---|
| General duties | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare and publish maps of existing active travel routes and related facilities and submit to the Welsh Ministers for approval.</li> <li>• Prepare and publish maps of the future and improved routes and facilities needed to create integrated active travel networks and submit to the Welsh Ministers for approval.</li> <li>• Have regard to the maps in preparing transport policies and to ensure there are new and improved active travel routes and related facilities.</li> <li>• When submitting an existing routes map for the second or subsequent time, submit a report to the Welsh Ministers specifying how the level of use of active travel routes and related facilities has changed since the previous version of the map.</li> <li>• In carrying out certain functions under the Highways Act 1980, take reasonable steps to enhance provision for walkers and cyclists and have regard to the needs of walkers and cyclists in the exercise of certain other functions.</li> <li>• Exercise their functions under the Act to promote active travel journeys and every year secure new active travel routes and related facilities, and improvements of existing active travel routes and related facilities.</li> <li>• Make a report to the Welsh Ministers specifying what it has done in each financial year to promote active travel journeys and to secure new active travel routes and related facilities and improvements in existing active travel routes and related facilities and specify the costs incurred.</li> </ul> |
|----------------|---|

## Local authorities

---

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| Promoting active travel as a way of reducing or limiting air pollution | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take steps to promote active travel in this way in their areas.</li> <li>• Alongside submitting active travel network maps, publish a report specifying the steps it has taken to promote active travel in this way during a given period.</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

## The Welsh Ministers

---

- |                |  |
|----------------|--|
| General duties | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make and publish annual reports on the extent to which walkers and cyclists make active travel journeys.</li> <li>• Review the operation of the Act – within a specified timeframe – with a view to assessing its success in securing new active travel routes and related facilities and improvements of existing active travel routes and related facilities.</li> <li>• In carrying out certain functions under the Highways Act 1980, to take reasonable steps to enhance provision for walkers and cyclists. And to have regard to the needs of walkers and cyclists in the exercise of certain other functions.</li> <li>• Exercise their functions under the Act to promote active travel journeys and secure new and improved active travel routes and related facilities.</li> </ul> |
|----------------|--|

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| Promoting active travel as a way of reducing or limiting air pollution | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publish and keep under a review a statement about the steps they propose to take to promote active travel in this way.</li> <li>• Report after the end of three-yearly reporting periods on the steps they have taken to promote active travel in this way, although they can choose to report more frequently.</li> <li>• Give guidance to local authorities regarding the discharge of local authority functions.</li> </ul> |
|--|---|

Source: Audit Wales summary from Welsh Government, [Active Travel Act Guidance](#), July 2021 and the Act itself



Audit Wales

1 Capital Quarter (ground & first)

Tyndall Street

Cardiff CF10 4BZ

Tel: 029 2032 0500

Textphone: 029 2032 0660

E-mail: [info@audit.wales](mailto:info@audit.wales)

Website: [www.audit.wales](http://www.audit.wales)

We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh and English.

Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg.