

**Meeting:** Environment, Economy, Housing and Transport Board

**Date:** 21 March 2023



## Active Travel England

### Purpose of report

For information and discussion

### Summary

The Department for Transport (DfT) has created a new executive agency, Active Travel England (ATE). ATE's role is to manage the national active travel budget, approve and inspect schemes and will be a statutory consultee on major planning applications.

Chris Boardman presented his vision for ATE to the Board in June 2022, shortly after his appointment as National Active Travel Commissioner. Since then, ATE has appointed a chief executive, Danny Williams, and has been rapidly strengthening its team to fulfil its remit. ATE has also started to award active travel funding to councils and started its inspection activities. Danny Williams and Brian Deegan, Director of Inspections, have been invited to give an update on their activities with councils and to also provide a look ahead at future work and funding. This is also an opportunity for members to reflect on local ambitions for active travel and how ATE can provide support.

**Is this report confidential?** No

### Recommendation

That the EEHT Board:

1. Notes the report and engages with Chief Executive and Director for Inspections to discuss ATE's work programme and how it intends to work with and support local authorities.

### Action

As directed by the Board

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**Chairman:** Councillor James Jamieson OBE **Chief Executive:** Mark Lloyd CBE **President:** Baroness Grey-Thompson

# Active Travel England



## Background

1. The Department for Transport created a new executive agency, Active Travel England (ATE), with its headquarters in York. The Government [formally announced](#) ATE in January 2022. ATE will have 100 staff with over 60 outward facing roles including inspectors, planners and a regional engagement team. ATE aims to be at full capacity in the summer 2023.
2. ATE now manages the national active travel budget, awards funding for projects which meet the new national standards set out in 2020. It inspects finished schemes and may ask for funds to be returned for any which have not been completed as promised, or which have not started or finished by the stipulated times.
3. ATE has begun to inspect, and publish reports on, highway authorities for their performance on active travel and identify any particularly dangerous failings in their highways for cyclists and pedestrians.
4. As well as approving and inspecting schemes, ATE will help local authorities, training staff and spreading good practice in design, implementation and public engagement. It will be a statutory consultee on major planning applications to help ensure that the largest new developments properly cater for pedestrians and cyclists.
5. Active Travel England's Framework states: "The DfT and ATE share the common objective of delivering increases in active travel to 50% of all journeys in urban areas. To achieve this ATE and the DfT will work together in recognition of each other's roles and areas of expertise, providing an effective environment for ATE to achieve its objectives through the promotion of partnership and trust and ensuring that ATE also supports the strategic aims and objective of the DfT and wider government as a whole.

## Funding

6. ATE's establishment follows the government's commitment of £2 billion for cycling and walking over this parliament and will exist to support their national Gear Change strategy to transform active travel. This includes £710 million of new active travel funding announced at SR21 of which £200 million of capital funding (via competition) was [recently announced](#) , alongside [£32.9 million of revenue support](#).
7. Previous to this there were [three tranches of funding](#).
8. However, the LGA has sought clarification from Active Travel England as to the future funding available to councils. Following on from the [written ministerial statement](#) by the Secretary of State for Transport on 9<sup>th</sup> March, it appears that funding has been reduced by approximately £200 million from 2023/24 to 2024/25. This is likely to be a setback for councils who are trying to boost cycling and walking in their areas.

9. In response to a recent ministerial question on whether the DfT has made an assessment of the level of funding that will be required to meet its cycling targets for (a) 2025 and (b) 2030, the minister gave the following response:
- The Department estimates that a minimum of £4.4 billion is likely to be required to meet its cycling and walking objectives to 2025; and further, that a minimum of £5.5 billion is likely to be required to meet the objectives to 2030. The actual amount will depend on a wide variety of factors.
10. The Skidmore Independent Review of Net Zero ([para 915](#)), and Chief Medical Officer's Annual report on air pollution ([p 134](#)) recommend and discuss the need for long-term funding for active travel, to ensure that more people will benefit.
11. Councils have long argued for long-term certainty of funding and that funding announcements are timely to align with local priorities and scheduling of works. Delays can lead to inflation impacting on the viability of planned schemes. The recent funding announcements have come later than councils expected – it is hoped that ATE will be able to provide more timely and longer-term certainty of funding in future with regards to the remainder of the funding.
12. In terms of funding allocation, ATE says it will focus its resources on councils that have the 3 core ingredients to succeed: strong leadership, ambition and a track record of delivery. ATE has developed a 1-4 score 'capability rating' based on a 2-step process involving an initial self-assessment followed by a review by ATE. This is for the 79 transport authorities (combined authorities, unitary and county councils) outside of London. Ratings are used to guide the initial allocation of Active Travel and Capability Funding. The ratings will be reviewed annually although it may be possible to have them changed sooner. The first set of ratings were published on 10<sup>th</sup> March and can be found [here](#). 4 councils were given a rating of 0, 40 awarded 1, 30 awarded 2, 5 awarded 3 and none were awarded 4.
13. The LGA broadly welcomed Government's measures, as announced in its [Gear Change vision document](#), to boost cycling and walking but has said that councils should be given the freedom to work with their local communities to get on with planning active travel infrastructure such as cycling schemes. As with any new body with inspection or statutory consultee powers, we would expect them to be proportionate in undertaking them, reflecting the wider remit of councils and the resources available to them.

## Inspection

14. ATE's framework states that it will achieve its aims by:
- Holding the active travel budget, including for behaviour change and cycle training, and assessing all applications for active travel capital and revenue funding, including from wider funds such as the City Region Sustainable Transport Fund, the Levelling Up Fund and RIS2, and awarding funding to schemes only if they meet the standards and principles set out in Local

Transport Note 1/20, or any later national design standards (Gear Change was clear that to receive government funding for local highways investment where the main element is not walking or cycling improvements, there will be a presumption that all new schemes will deliver or improve cycling infrastructure to the new standards laid down, unless it can be shown that there is little or no need for cycling in that particular road scheme. ATE will also assess these schemes);

- Inspecting schemes on completion to ensure compliance with the design standards and withdrawing funding for any which have not started or finished within the stipulated timeframe;
- Delivering training, developing best practice and sharing knowledge to raise standards in scheme design and delivery including stakeholder management;
- Reviewing major planning applications as a statutory consultee and being a repository of expert advice on how walking and cycling provision can be improved, including through the planning system;
- Inspecting highway authorities on their performance on active travel which will influence funding it receives for other forms of transport;
- Increasing skills and capacity in local authorities, promoting best practice and enabling authorities to learn from each other and raising performance generally;
- Influencing key stakeholders, and the public debate, to see the value to society, individuals and business of active travel.

15. A local authority good practice [toolkit](#) was published last August.

16. Brian Deegan will be able to expand on how the inspection and support role is working in practice and provide some thoughts on dealing with common issues.

## Planning

17. ATE's statutory duties and functions are to be a statutory consultee on planning applications for major new developments and on land used for highways.

18. From 1 June 2023, ATE will become a statutory consultee on certain planning applications, as listed below. This will help to ensure that when new developments are being considered, the opportunity to build in active travel routes is fully maximised. To that end, after 1 June, local planning authorities will be required to consult ATE on planning applications where developments meet the following minimum thresholds:

- 150 residential units (dwellings)
- 7,500m<sup>2</sup> commercial area; or
- Site having an area of 5 hectares or more.

19. This will apply outside of London. Inside the capital current arrangements between the Boroughs, the GLA, and Transport for London will apply unless otherwise agreed on a case-by-case basis.
20. Over the course of March and April 2023, ATE will undertake a series of roadshow events across the country to engage directly with local stakeholders, and in particular, planning officials. These events will provide an opportunity to hear about how the agency is developing, how the planning team will assess planning applications and other functions, including inspections and investments. If your planning officers are interested in the workshops then they should contact [Contact@activetravelengland.gov.uk](mailto:Contact@activetravelengland.gov.uk).
21. Following the 'go-live' of its statutory consultee function, ATE will also look to provide advice in the preparation of local plans and supplementary planning documents, as well as encouraging prospective applicants to take advantage of pre-application advice.

## Implications for Wales

22. ATE does not cover Wales. Improving and promoting active travel routes and facilities has been enshrined in law in Wales since 2013. The Active Travel Wales Act 2013 places a duty on Welsh highways authorities to make annual improvements. Further information on funding and support in Wales can be found [here](#).

## Financial Implications

23. There are no financial implications

## Equalities Implications

24. The Government updated its cycle infrastructure design guidance in July 2020 (Local Transport Note 1/20). There will be an expectation that local authorities will demonstrate that they have given due consideration to this guidance when designing new cycling schemes and, in particular, when applying for Government funding that includes cycle infrastructure.
25. LTN 1/20 states:
- “Cycle infrastructure should be accessible to everyone from 8 to 80 and beyond: it should be planned and designed for everyone. The opportunity to cycle in our towns and cities should be universal.
  - The ability to deliver a right to cycle requires infrastructure and routes which are accessible to all regardless of age, gender, ethnicity or disability and does not create hazards for vulnerable pedestrians. Improvements to highways should always seek to enhance accessibility for all.”

## **Next Steps**

26. The LGA will continue to work closely with ATE at an officer level, with the aim of ensuring that ATE is able to undertake its work in an efficient and effective manner, and that its engagement with local authorities is as constructive and proportionate as possible.

## **Biography**

### **Danny Williams, Chief Executive, Active Travel England**

27. Danny Williams was appointed as CEO of Active Travel England in June 2022. Danny has spent over 25 years leading media businesses, including scaling a start-up and developing large and high-performing teams within global corporations. He was a member of the Mayor of London's 'Roads Task Force' and has been named by the Evening Standard as one of the top 1,000 most influential Londoners for several years running. In his spare time, Danny's passion project has been advocating for change in how villages, towns and cities approach walking and cycling.

### **Brian Deegan, Director of Inspections, Active Travel England**

28. Brian Deegan is the Director of Inspections at Active Travel England. Brian is one of the UK's leading experts in active travel design and helped write the 'Cycling Level of Service' and 'Healthy Street Check for Designers', as well as co-authoring 'London Cycling Design Standards' and the 'EU Cycling Strategy'. He is currently heading a team of inspectors ensuring design quality on several billion pounds of government investment in active travel infrastructure.