

18 November 2014

LGA response to the DfT Cycling Delivery Plan

The Local Government Association (LGA) is a voluntary membership body and our member authorities cover every part of England and Wales. Together they represent over 50 million people and spend around £113 billion a year on local services. They include county councils, metropolitan district councils, English unitary authorities, London boroughs and shire district councils, along with fire authorities, police authorities, national park authorities and passenger transport authorities. The LGA welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

Key Points:

The plan's vision of ring fenced funding with conditions attached is out-dated and at odds with emerging national policy on devolution from all main political parties' – councils are best placed to decide what role cycling can play on local economic, transport and health strategies. Furthermore, the need for localism is more evident in relation to cycling than almost any other area of policy, because the attractions of cycling and the possibility to promote it vary greatly on local circumstances.

Councils could do much more to support cycling and walking, for example as part of local economic and health strategies, if they were given more freedoms over transport spending and if there was greater consistency across Government policies.

The report makes some helpful suggestions on infrastructure and safety but councils, communities and developers are looking for stability with the planning system, not further changes.

Theme 1: Vision, leadership and ambition

1. A key problem with this strategy is that it seeks to direct councils and impose a one-size-fits-all approach to cycling, while ignoring the work councils are already doing to successfully promote cycling.
2. Councils do not need central government to explain the importance of cycling.
3. Councils have already put forward some ambitious cycling plans via the Local Sustainable Transport Fund, some of which were not successful in obtaining funding. These bids show councils already see cycling as having an important role to play in connecting people to jobs and services.

4. Councils have doubled their spend on physical activity (part of the ring-fenced public health grant) and some have used that money to promote cycling and walking as locally agreed priorities become embedded within the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. For example, 2014 was the Hertfordshire Year of Cycling and next year will be Hertfordshire Year of walking.
5. The strategy has little to say on how the work of Health and Wellbeing Boards and the transfer of Public Health to local government provide an opportunity to see active travel impact on areas such as air quality, community safety, social inclusion, road safety etc. There is an extensive evidence base for effective action on active travel. The most relevant and recent review has been conducted by NICE, looking specifically at local measures to promote active transport. Joint strategic needs assessments (JSNAs), joint health and wellbeing strategies, community strategies and other local strategies and needs assessments provide opportunities to consider the roles of walking and cycling.
6. Cycling needs to be integral to the design of place and the provision of transport and not treated in a silo. Councils across the country are taking a cross-departmental approach to the promotion of active travel allowing for better outcomes at better value for money. It would greatly help if Government could adopt a similar approach. However, while the report recognises this and seeks to oblige councils to do so, one of the main barriers to this behaviour is the lack of freedom given to councils over transport spending. Creating separate funds and policies for cycling will marginalise it. Councils need the freedom to incorporate cycling in bus priority schemes and other highways improvements without having to jump through a succession of Whitehall hoops to 'prove' their commitment to cycling. Moreover pro-cycling policies will not work in every town. Depending on geography and demography some towns (e.g. those with flatter landscapes and younger populations) will find cycling more appropriate than those with older populations and steep hills. The tone of this document is at odds, in our view, with the principles of the Localism Act (2011), where councils are able to work with their communities to provide the services they need
7. There are also inconsistencies in Government policy that hamper councils' ability to do more:
 - a. The absorption of the local sustainable transport fund into the local growth fund (LGF) was welcome in as much as it reduced the plethora of funding streams for transport but the LGF prioritised transport schemes that government saw as promoting growth and this has tended to mean road schemes. The Government now wants LEPs and councils to recognise the benefits of cycling and sites their willingness to jump through the hoops required under the LGF process as evidence that they now need to be given a different set of priorities and another separate fund.
 - b. The strategy treats cycling as first and foremost about healthy lifestyles, having little economic role, no part to play in improving air quality and is not automatically part of a wider transport policy but which needs special promotion. The report barely mentions walking and is a missed opportunity to promote walking as a free, sustainable and non-polluting form of transport.

- c. The strategy says little about the National Planning Policy Framework which already requires councils to 'actively manage patterns of growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling,'
8. We do not support the suggestion that a local cycling champion should be appointed or that a cycling and walking plan should be devised. Councils have cabinet members for transport and local transport plans so cycling and walking should be integrated into these not separated out. It is up to councils and local partners to decide whether a local cycling champion is appropriate.
9. The proposals in the plan offer priority access to funding to cooperative councils, but the plan does not say which funds or how much they are worth.
10. The LGA is doubtful as to whether the offer of 'support' for councils will prove effective, given the conditions attached for accessing this support and the lack of clarity over the sums involved.

Theme 2 funding

11. The LGF has likely reduced the incentive to spend money on cycling because it has prioritised a particular aspect of transport investment that promotes growth.
12. With regards to highways maintenance, rather than creating another ring-fenced stream of funding for cycling the government could adequately fund local highways authority maintenance enabling all road users, including cyclists and pedestrians, to benefit. Cyclists are at least as seriously impacted as motorists by the £12bn backlog in road maintenance and years of potholes damage on local roads. The LGA has previously drawn attention to the gulf between spending on the Strategic Roads Network and local roads, which are where the overwhelming majority of cycle journeys are made.
13. The plan recognises the burden of bidding for funds and refers to work to reduce that burden. Yet the burden could be completely removed by devolving transport funding to councils without recourse to competition or incorporating agreed cycling and wider transport outcomes in city deals or local growth deals.
14. Finally the government needs to consider the wider implications of local transport policy and investment before devising such proposals. Increasing funding for cyclists at the same time as cutting local authority core and bus funding has led to bus services being significantly reduced. While cycling is an option for a limited proportion of former bus passengers for the elderly and the disabled or for those transporting children it is not usually an alternative.

Themes 3 and 4. Infrastructure and planning/Safety

15. There are several welcome initiatives in this section of the plan, which recognises the advantages of seeking to make progress by publicising and disseminating best practice and improving professional knowledge. Councils will look forward to working with government in these positive areas.

16. Given the plan's recognition that safety or perceptions of danger play a significant role in discouraging cycling, we call on the Government to give councils the powers in part 6 of the Traffic Management Act to enforce moving traffic offences. This would protect cyclists by allowing councils to enforce banned turns, yellow box junction offences and cycle lane violations (these powers are of course available in London and in Wales). The government's attempt to make it harder to enforce parking restrictions by banning CCTV enforcement – in particular at dangerous junctions – also mitigates against cyclist safety and calls into question the Government's commitment to cycling safety.
17. The report refers to a review of planning to see how well the planning system supports cycling and walking provision. The NPPF has helped consolidate planning policy, reducing duplication and contradiction, while providing councils an incentive to get local plans in place. Councils are making good progress, with 80 per cent having published a plan. We now need certainty across planning policy to allow the reforms to take full effect and provide confidence to communities, councils and developers.

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