

LIVING STREETS

WRITTEN SUBMISSION

Living Streets Scotland welcomes the opportunity to provide written evidence to the Infrastructure and Capital Investment (ICI) Committee on the draft budget 2015/16. Living Streets Scotland is the leading charity working to create safe, attractive and enjoyable streets where people want to walk. We work with Schools and community groups to tackle the school run, poor infrastructure, low environmental quality and safety concerns that prevent everyday walking. It is in this context that we provide our comments on the draft budget to the Committee.

In 2013, 23% were made on foot. This is despite the fact that 50% of all trips were less than 3km (Transport Scotland, August 2014). The potential boost journeys by foot have been recognised in the Scottish Government's National Walking Strategy published in June. Resources will be need at both a national and local level to deliver the Scottish Governments vision for walking as part of a wider strategy to get Scotland active. Co-ordination of this work, including support for Paths for All and Living Streets Scotland, is funded from the Health Budget. This continued support and recognition that walking can help deliver progress on the national indicator for physical activity is particularly welcome. We believe that given the importance of infrastructure investment to the physical activity that the ICI committee should also scrutinise performance in this area, alongside climate change, air pollution and congestion.

Recommendation

The committee should also be concerned with progress on the national indicator for physical activity, given that good infrastructure will underpin successful delivery.

On investment, Living Streets Scotland welcomes the headline commitment to expand expenditure on support for sustainable and active travel by a further £10 million to £25 million. This commitment is somewhat buried within the Other Transport Policy, Projects and Agency Administration Level 2 Budget heading. Continuation of £8m of ring fences Cycling, Walking and Safer Routes is also welcome and vital to the delivery of walking projects by local authorities. Without this ring-fenced budget line many projects would be lost due short-term pressures on local authorities.

Whilst the direction of travel is positive, substantially more investment will be needed to reach the levels of walking in leading small countries such as Netherlands Norway and Switzerland (circa 30%). Reaching these levels will require substantial year on year increases across all active travel related headings. Failure to reach higher levels of walking will make it difficult to shift the national indicators in a positive direction. With respect to the key areas of interest to the committee we note that:

1. Scotland's carbon footprint increased 4% since 2009 and transport is a problem area;
2. Whilst traffic congestion is stable, and had has improved since the baseline year of 2006, this must in part be due to the recession;
3. The proportion of journeys to work by public or active travel was stable at around 30% in 2013. Nearly half this figure relates to walking. However, again the recession will to some degree have suppressed car journeys.

On the last point we note that 20% of traffic on the road during morning peak is taking children to school. This is despite the fact that the average primary school journey is less than 1.5 miles, which is easily manageable on foot or by bike by many pupils. Results from the 2013 Hands Up Scotland Survey show that 50.4% of pupils in Scotland said that they normally travel to school actively (compared with 49.7% in 2012) (Sustrans 2014). Living Streets Scotland's programmes have demonstrated that there is significant potential to tackle this issue, via a behaviour change approach. For instance, the Living Streets Walk Once a Week project boosted walking levels by 13% compared to the baseline. Ultimately there will be limits as to how far such improvements can be rolled out and built on without investment in local infrastructure such as safe routes to school.

Recommendation

Historically high levels funding for active travel are welcome. This trend must accelerate, year on year, to deliver progress on national indicators for climate change, congestion and air pollution and also physical activity. Investment in walking infrastructure should be seen as critical to delivering progress on each national indicators.

Value for Money

It should be noted however, that although investment in active travel, compares well to historic levels, it compares less well to other budgets promoting inactive travel (e.g. those with negative health outcomes). Neither are budgets proportionate to the overall level of ambition concerning climate change, air pollution and physical activity. In this respect, we argue that investment in walking tackles a number of national outcomes and offers excellent value for money. For instance the Scottish Government's Walking Strategy cites £8 benefit for every £1 spent in terms of a social return on investment. Living Streets Scotland, questions whether other areas of budgeted investment across this portfolio can match these returns, especially if negative externalities (e.g. costs of pollution) are properly factored into any calculation.

Living Streets Report "The Pedestrian Pound" demonstrated the particular value of investment in high streets. Research suggests that making places better for walking can boost footfall and trading by 40%. With this in mind the committee should be encouraging the Scottish Government to maximise investment in this area through the cities investment strategy where £30m is allocated in 2015-16: For instance supporting major pedestrianisation and streetscape projects to boost city growth.

Recommendation

The committee should request additional information on the cost benefits of different headings, to assess whether the budget offers value for money. Living Streets Scotland believes that an evidence based approach, focused on social and economic returns, would lead to substantially more of the available funding being made available for investment in active travel infrastructure.

Future scrutiny

Finally, we share the views of active travel organisations such as Sustran that the lack of clear line in level 2 about funding for active travel is unhelpful. Further detail is essential in order to accurately ascertain differences in the budget for active travel from one year to the next. In the interests of transparency we strongly encourage the Scottish Government to make this change to the draft budget. Now that the National Walking Strategy and Cycling Action Plan are in place, it is important to be able to see how they will be resourced. A level 2 budget line and level 3 breakdown covering funding for each strategy would aid future assessments.

Recommendation

The committee should request a specific level 2 budget line on active travel and a further breakdown of this expenditure at level 3.

Conclusion

The committee can be confident that the investment allocated in the budget will help towards the delivery of a wide range of national indicators. It should also be confident that active travel will deliver excellent value for money. Given that national indicators are flat lining there is a strong case for reviewing whether funding levels needs to increase further. With a National Walking Strategy is now in place it's important that this supported by adequate resources. Funding in this year's budget should be seen therefore as floor not a ceiling. Changes to presentation would help the committee consider whether the trends are moving in the right direction.

Living Streets

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