Ms Maureen Watt  
Convener  
Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee  
Scottish Parliament  
Holyrood  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

Dear Ms Watt  

Cycle Walking and Safer Street Fund - Sustainable and Active Travel  
Oban to Fort William cycle path – part of national cycle route 78  

I am one of the Councillors representing North Lorn in Argyll and it was with great concern I learned that the recently announced spending review proposals include the withdrawal of the capital budget allocated to Sustrans. The removal of this budget will result in the halting of further development of the Oban to Fort William cycle path, part of route 78, and part of the national network.

There have been plans over many years to create a cycle path, mainly utilizing the former railway line, between Oban and fort William, both major tourist destinations, and in 2004 this project was revisited and the steering group to take this development forward was set up. I have been a member of this steering group since the inaugural meeting, along with representatives from Sustrans, Transport Scotland, the local Authority, SNH, HiTrans and the Forestry who have all worked in partnership and have made significant progress in taking this project forward.

Much of the route has now been completed and plans are well advanced for the section, as yet undeveloped. The cycle path has been welcomed and embraced by the communities in North Lorn and Lochaber and, where completed, has provided a safe inter-connecting network and attractive environment for residents of all ages to enjoy. It has encouraged and attracted visitors and local people to be more active and participate in recreational physical and social activities. The children in the villages and the schools use the paths regularly and many people use them to cycle to work. Employment is
a major issue in this area and it has been appreciated that contracts by Sustrans have been won by local firms.

Tourism is a major economic driver in this area and local businesses have benefitted from the creation of this route and further business opportunities are emerging as the popularity of the route grows. The route runs through areas of outstanding beauty, natural history and historic events which attract people with a wide variety of interests. The Oban to Fort William cycle path has brought, and will bring, vital developments in tourism and employment. Employment is a major issue in this area and it has been appreciated that contracts by Sustrans have been won by local firms.

The cycle path also “sits well” and augments the Scottish Government’s Health and Wellbeing, Public Health and Educational flagship policies, the benefits of which can be audited, and given these benefits, this capital budget should be protected.

Renewable energy and the reduction of carbon emissions are high on the political agenda – it seems incongruous to me that huge sums are allocated to forward this agenda, while alternative means of reducing carbon emissions through active travel are being withdrawn.

I trust the committee will consider the numerous benefits of the Oban to Fort William project, and the wider cycle route network, worthy of your support, and the funding will be saved.

I look forward to learning of a positive outcome.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Councillor Elaine Robertson