

Scottish Government Draft Budget 2016-17

Supplementary written submission to the Infrastructure and Capital investment Committee

Spokes

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Spokes has already provided evidenceⁱ to the Committee's pre-budget deliberations. The thrust of our evidence was that if the Committee is again minded to recommend higher funding for Active Travel [AT], then it needs to say where in the draft budget this should come from. Recommendations for higher AT funding by the Committee in previous years have been disregarded by the Finance Secretary because this was not done, and we fear the same happening yet again.

In this new submission we make a concrete proposal to the Committee, in the light of the actual draft budgetⁱⁱ, first discussing the impact of the draft budget on AT funding. Our proposal is designed to be politically realistic at this relatively advanced stage of the budget process. Furthermore, it would contribute to the Committee's stated focusⁱⁱⁱ for the 16/17 budget ... *"the Scottish Government's national performance indicator on reducing Scotland's carbon footprint. In particular, what further action might be necessary going forward to help meet the Scottish Government's climate change targets."*

1. Impact of the Draft Budget on AT Funding

In a welcome innovation, the draft budget [page 130] provides an estimate of total AT funding⁽ⁱ⁾, this being roughly £39m. Thus total AT funding in 16/17 is at approximately the same level as 15/16 – we estimate marginally less, but the difference is merely a quibble.

However despite total government AT funding remaining roughly level we are very concerned that the *structure of funding* will in fact result in a significant lessening of actual investment in AT infrastructure, the vast bulk of which happens at local authority level. Furthermore, under the draft budget it is likely that whilst AT investment will rise significantly in a very small number of councils it will fall in the great majority. The reasons for this are outlined below and in greater detail on our website^{iv}.

(i) Albeit the budget's confusing and rather arbitrary split into separate lines for *Sustainable and Active Travel* and for *Future Transport Fund* remains, with no indication what portion of each will go to AT.

1.1 The 25% cut in CWSS funding

CWSS, the *Cycling Walking & Safer Streets* fund, is distributed between all Scottish Councils on the basis of population, and has to be used for purposes reflecting its name. Our estimate is that in Scotland as a whole around 50% goes on cycling (including cycle/walk), 25% on pure walking and 25% on 'safer streets,' though the proportions vary drastically from one council to another. CWSS is the most basic form of AT funding, guaranteed to every council for that purpose, and the only significant cycling cash to go direct from government to councils.

Whilst overall cycle funding in the 16/17 budget is more or less static, the CWSS element is being slashed by 25% – from £8m in 15/16 to just £5.9m in 16/17, almost its lowest level ever under the two SNP governments, and way below the £9m in the last two years of the previous Lab/Lib government.

Crucially, most councils use CWSS to raise additional outside money through 'matched funding' projects, with bodies such as Sustrans, Scottish Canals, or EU schemes. **Thus a 25% cut in CWSS means councils are likely to lose the same amount again in lost match funds.**

1.2 The Community Links Plus scheme

In October, Transport Minister Derek Mackay MSP announced^v an exciting new competition for 'exemplar' on-road segregated cycling projects (probably limited to one or two councils). Later it was announced^{vi} that the competition would be run via the Sustrans Community Linksvii scheme and would be known as Community Links Plusviii.

The excellent existing Community Links scheme dispenses the bulk of the Scottish Budget's AT infrastructure funding and is currently the biggest source of cash in Scotland for cycling projects by local authorities and other eligible partners. Operating since 2010 it has funded over 500 projects so far, some in every council area. It provides a maximum of 50/50 matched funding, thus encouraging recipients to find more cash for cycling from other sources.

We had assumed that the Minister's announcement meant new funding for Community Links Plus, but now rumour has it that it will be funded by cutting back the basic Community Links project. The draft budget appears to confirm this, since total cycling cash is static (or falling slightly) – so there would appear to be no new money for Community Links Plus.

As a result, the one or two councils who win the competition will get some hopefully excellent major new infrastructure – **but the other 30 or so councils (and other bodies, such as Scottish Canals, who can also bid for Community Links cash) will have a significantly smaller pot to which to apply.** Additionally, with less Community Links cash available, councils will have less incentive to allocate or find match funding from other sources, so total investment is likely to fall further in most councils.

1.3 Potholes, road surfaces and lighting

Whilst not relevant to direct cycle funding, we must point out in passing that cycling conditions on local roads, and walking conditions on footways, will deteriorate as a result of the major cuts to general local authority funding in the draft budget, which we understand to be some 7% lower (apart from social care). Roads free of potholes are vital to safe cycling, so that the cyclist can concentrate on traffic rather than on the road surface. Similarly, well maintained footways are vital for fall-free walking.

It is ironic that, in this same budget, trunk road funding rises by 18% (to £820m). In effect the draft budget looks likely to mean more inter-city traffic heading along wider and faster trunk roads into villages, towns and cities in which there is reduced cash to maintain already fragile road surfaces.

2. Our Proposal to the ICI Committee

2.1 Background

First, we make it absolutely clear that we wholeheartedly support the calls, made with remarkable consistency at your pre-budget evidence session^{ix}, for substantially increased AT funding (as well as public transport). There is no need for us to repeat those arguments.

In particular, we strongly support the recommendation by Sustrans that a minimum 10% of the transport budget should be allocated to this purpose. This was originally proposed some years ago in *Action on Active Travel*^x by the **Association of Directors of Public Health**, a document endorsed by 110 transport, medical and other professional, expert and interested bodies^{xi} ranging from the **Institute of Highway Engineers** to the **British Heart Foundation**. The 10% figure was also adopted long ago by a range of Scottish national transport bodies in *Active Travel, Active Scotland*^{xii} and subsequently by other newer bodies such as Pedal on Parliament^{xiii} and Walk-Cycle-Vote^{xiv}.

The government has an ambition - indeed a 'commitment' according to the Infrastructure Investment Plan^{xv} [page 26] accompanying the draft budget – that “by 2020, 10% of everyday journeys will be undertaken by bike.”

We emphasise that this “10% by 2020” commitment appears in section 1.8, *Climate Change Objectives*, of the above document. **Its success or otherwise, therefore, is highly relevant to the Committee's focus on the extent to which the draft budget does or does not reduce Scotland's climate footprint.**

The recent drastic flooding in towns, cities and rural areas of Scotland and the UK, widely accepted to be exacerbated by climate change, emphasises in the most concrete terms how vital are the government's emissions targets (being our contribution to global action) if storms and flooding are not to continue rising in intensity and danger in Scotland and elsewhere.

Unfortunately we now enter 2016, just 4 years from 2020, with cycling at merely 1%-

2% of all trips, and with cycling investment static or likely to fall [1.1-1.3 above] in 16/17. It is the view of Spokes that the 10% by 2020 commitment is now unachievable – making it all the more important to increase efforts to reach it as soon as can now be done. Other European countries show that the target of 10% of trips being by bike is eminently achievable, given adequate political commitment and funding.

2.2 The Spokes Proposal

Although, as firmly emphasised above, 10% of the transport budget should be allocated to AT, there is now no politically realistic prospect of moving that distance in the 16/17 budget. The draft budget is already published, the government has a majority, previous years have only seen relatively minor adjustments, and furthermore parties are likely to be postponing any significant changes pending the 2016 Holyrood election and its manifestos.

Our proposal therefore is a very modest one, *aimed to be politically realistic*, and which we hope may be sufficiently modest that the Committee will consider recommending it as an interim 16/17 move, in advance hopefully of major changes after the election.

We ask the Committee to recommend explicitly to the Finance Committee and Finance Secretary that 1% of the £820m trunk roads 16/17 budget is transferred to active travel.

Given that in the draft budget trunk road funding is set to rise by a remarkable 18%, our proposed 1% reduction in the total (£8.2m from £820m) is surely achievable with relatively little pain. Indeed, local authorities are being asked to achieve vastly greater reductions on previous levels, let alone on an 18% increased level!

Within the trunk roads budget the line for “Capital Land and Works,” in particular, is to almost treble, from £102m in 15/16 to £285m in 16/17, and this line amongst others could be rejigged.

The £8.2m 'saved' would in contrast provide huge benefits in relation to the vastly smaller £39m AT budget. In particular, **it could be used to completely eliminate the threats outlined in 1.1 and 1.2 above**, as follows..

- ◆ £2.1m to maintain CWSS at its current level [the funding mechanism for the £2.1m might have to be different given that CWSS is part of the local authority settlement]
- ◆ £6.1m to fund the 16/17 element of the 3-year Community Links Plus scheme without impacting negatively on the 30 councils (and other bodies) who will not be awarded Plus funding - and perhaps even helping to support one or two more of the excellent Plus outline bids received by Sustrans.

Finally, we reiterate our initial point that if the Committee is again persuaded of the case to raise AT funding, then it must seize the nettle and indicate *how the budget can be modified*. If the Committee does not do so, then government will assuredly again dismiss any ICI recommendations, and again fail to match its transport investment with its active travel ambitions, its 2020 cycle-use ambitions, its climate change ambitions and its public health ambitions. **Our 1% proposal is a politically feasible way of starting to move in this direction, even at this late stage in the 16/17 budget process.**

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January 2016**

- i http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_InfrastructureandCapitalInvestmentCommittee/General%20Documents/SpokesNov2015.pdf
- ii <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/12/9056>
- iii <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/94664.aspx>
- iv <http://www.spokes.org.uk/2015/12/scottish-budget-councils-cycling-hit/>
- v <http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/news/investment-promises-delivered-inaugural-active-travel-summit>
- vi <http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/news/transport-minister-has-designs-continental-cycling-projects>
- vii <https://sustranscommunitylinks.wordpress.com/>
- viii <https://sustranscommunitylinks.wordpress.com/community-links-plus/>
- ix <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=10240>
- x *Action on Active Travel*, Association of Directors of Public Health, April 2008, and 2012 update <http://www.adph.org.uk/category/atpa/>
- xi http://www.adph.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Take_Action_on_Active_Travel_sigs_June_2010.pdf
- xii *Active Travel, Active Scotland*
http://www.pathsforall.org.uk/component/option,com_docman/Itemid,166/gid,784/task,doc_download/
- xiii <http://pedalonparliament.org/the-manifesto/>
- xiv <http://walkcyclevote.scot/how/>
- xv <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/12/5962>