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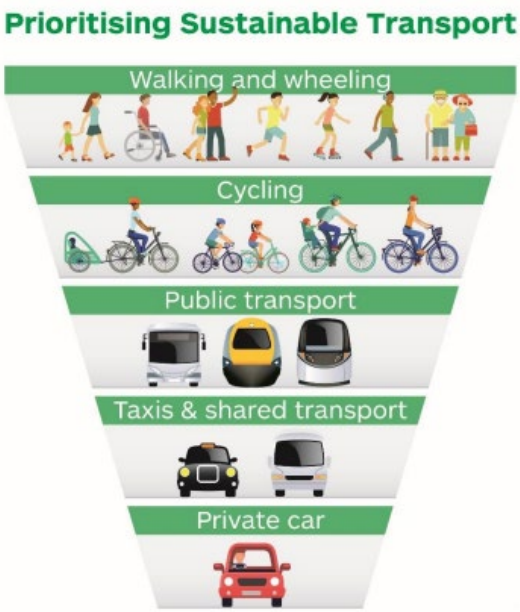
Cycling and public bike hire

Introduction

This paper provides background briefing and a summary of key points raised in written evidence to the committee on cycling matters.

Scottish cycling policy

Cycling is a crucial element of the second National Transport Strategy (NTS2), which includes a commitment that "We will design our transport system so that walking, cycling and public and shared transport take precedence ahead of private car use." To further emphasise the importance of cycling in decision making, NTS2 introduced a Sustainable Travel Hierarchy, copied below:



This is described in NTS2 as follows:

> "Importantly, overarching all the Policies, to address the challenges and achieve the Priorities we will embed the Sustainable Travel Hierarchy in decision making by promoting walking, wheeling, cycling, public transport and shared transport options in preference to single occupancy private car use for the movement of people."

Building on this commitment, Transport Scotland's Long Term Vision for Active Travel in Scotland 2030 aims to ensure that:

> "Scotland's communities are shaped around people, with walking or cycling the most popular choice for shorter everyday journeys.
>
> This helps people make healthy living choices and assists in delivering places that are happier, more inclusive and equal, and more prosperous. Travelling by foot or cycle, or with a personal mobility aid such as a mobility scooter, is a realistic option for all local journeys as individuals.
>
> People are confident to walk and cycle more often and they value and use their local transport networks (streets, roads and path networks), which offer safe, high quality, realistic and predictable journey options for active travel."

While its Cycling Framework for Active Travel - A Plan for Everyday Cycling states:

> "The top priority for the achievement of our vision is for the delivery of more dedicated, high quality, safe cycling infrastructure, effectively resourced, where fair access is ensured and uptake is supported with training and education."

More specifically, the Scottish Government identifies cycling as a priority for investment in the Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 (STPR2), which lists the following cycling focused projects and policies as investment priorities:

1. Connected neighbourhoods.
2. Active freeways and cycle parking hubs.
3. Village-town active travel connections.
4. Connecting towns by active travel.
5. Long-distance active travel network (also identified as a "national development" in National Planning Framework 4)
6. Behavioural change initiatives.
7. Changing road user behaviour.
8. Increasing active travel to schools.
9. Improving access to bikes.

Increasing the share of trips made by bike is not solely a transport policy goal, it also supports the delivery of a diverse range of policy objectives, featuring in Scottish Government strategies dealing with topics including inactivity, obesity, and the development of 20-minute neighbourhoods. Increased cycling is also an important

element of efforts to tackle climate change, transport being the sector responsible for the largest proportion of emissions. Research conducted by the University of Edinburgh to support the most recent Climate Change Plan estimated that increased physical activity from more walking, wheeling, and cycling could produce £4 billion in health-related benefits between 2025 and 2040, with additional benefits also accruing from noise reduction, reduced traffic congestion, and increased road safety.

Scottish cycling statistics

During 2024, bike was the main mode of transport for 1.3% of all trips in Scotland, at a more local level this ranged from an effective 0% in the Angus and Midlothian council areas up to 5% in Edinburgh. Across Scotland, 2.3% of people who worked outside of their home cycled as their usual method of travel to work, again this national figure hides significant variations across the country, with 10% of trips to work in Edinburgh being made by bike down to an effective 0% in several local authorities.

Increasing cycling uptake - what works?

SPICe previously undertook an extensive literature review into effective public sector cycling interventions. This found that cycle modal share can best be increased through the implementation of an integrated package of measures, including:

1. Long term, strong pro-cycling political and official leadership at a national and local level.

2. Cycling is seen as a legitimate transport choice and accorded appropriate status in decisions on physical infrastructure development, transport policy, and budgets.

3. Plans are in place for the development and maintenance of a comprehensive cycle network focused on facilitating everyday cycling.

4. Cycle networks are based on clear design standards aimed at ensuring direct, obstacle free travel.

5. There is a willingness to reallocate road and parking space to cycling infrastructure.

6. Driving is discouraged in city and town centres as a matter of policy.

7. Increasing cycling is part of an approach to reducing the modal share of private cars, integrating cycling with rail, bus and tram – rather than abstracting passengers from public transport.

8. Land use planning policies encourage compact towns and cities and mixed-use developments, which allow for shorter trips that are easily made by bike.

9. Cycle promotion is pursued in tandem with infrastructure development and is targeted at people from all parts of society over a sustained period.

Scottish Government funding

The Scottish Government's Active Travel Infrastructure Fund supports local authorities to develop cycling infrastructure. The fund has two "tiers", these are:

- **Tier 1** (previously known as the Walking, Cycling, and safer Routes budget) provides ring-fenced funding for active travel projects directly to each local authority.

- **'Tier 2'**, a replacement for the previous 'places for everyone' funding allocated via Sustrans, allows local authorities to bid to Transport Scotland for project funding, which can be provided for "construction" or "design".

The Scottish Government also provides revenue funding to support schemes that encourage children and adults to learn to cycle, the best known being the national Bikeability scheme provided through many schools, and to support access to bikes for those could not normally afford to buy one.

Scottish Government budget documents for the years 2020-21 to 2026-27 give the following allocations for investment in active travel, although some of these totals were subject to in-year reductions:

Year	Active travel allocation
2026-27	£226 million (including £55m for the Bus Infrastructure Fund).
2025-26	£188.7 million (includes roughly £23 million for 'sustainable travel' - largely accounted for by the £20 million bus infrastructure fund)
2024-25	£220.0 million
2023-24	£190.0 million
2022-23	£150.0 million
2021-22	£100.5 million
2020-21	£85.0 million

It is worth noting that this is not just cycling investment, it includes investment in walking and wheeling – such as new or improved pedestrian crossings, pavement, and footpath upgrades, and pedestrianisation projects.

Audit Scotland state on page 22 of their January 2025 report Sustainable travel: Reducing Car Use that "Although budget allocations for active travel and sustainable transport have increased since 2019/20, the actual amounts spent have reduced."

The now defunct 2021 Bute House Agreement included a commitment to "increase the proportion of Transport Scotland's budget spent on Active Travel initiatives so that by 2024-25 at least £320m or 10% of the total transport budget will be allocated to active travel." By way of comparison, the total Scottish Government transport

budget for 2026-27 was £4,381.5 million, of which £171 million was for active travel - roughly 3.9% of that total.

Creating cycle infrastructure

The regulatory processes used to authorise on-street cycle infrastructure date from the 1980's and were recommended for review in the final report of the Scottish Government's Active Travel Taskforce, published in 2018. No significant changes have been made to these processes in the intervening years, except a tweak to the Experimental Traffic Regulation Order process.

The Orders used to create on-street cycle infrastructure, and their authorisation processes are set out below:

Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs)

TROs exist to regulate how roads are used by all, or specific classes, of traffic. This includes creating one-way streets, and/or prohibiting loading or waiting, through traffic, or overtaking. The TRO making process requires a roads authority to consult with emergency services, public transport and freight operators. Proposals must be publicised in a local newspaper and by other means considered appropriate. There follows a 21-day period where objections can be lodged. The local authority will consider any objections when deciding whether to approve the Order. A public inquiry must be held where a TRO would prohibit loading at certain times, restrict bus access, or create one-way streets. An authority can choose to hold an inquiry in any other circumstances. The local authority is required to consider the inquiry Reporter's recommendations in making a final decision on the TRO, although in practice the recommendations are always followed.

Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders (TTROs)

TTROs are used to facilitate works on or near a road, to prevent danger or damage to a road or road users, or to facilitate litter clearance and cleaning. There is no requirement for a local authority to consult with the public or local residents prior to implementing a TTRO, although a notice must be published in a local newspaper advising when it will come into force.

TTROs have a maximum duration of 18 months, although this can be extended on application to Scottish Ministers in certain limited circumstances. TTROs were used during the Covid pandemic to quickly install temporary cycle lanes.

Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO)

ETROs allow a roads authority to introduce a new experimental traffic scheme for up to 18 months. An ETRO can be introduced following consultation with emergency services, bus and freight operators.

Comments and objections to the scheme authorised by the ETRO can be submitted to the local authority during the first six months of its operation. The local authority can amend the ETRO scheme at any point during its first 12 months of operation,

subject to a further six-month consultation period. Following the end of the consultation period, the local authority can choose to abandon the scheme or pursue a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) to make the scheme permanent. Comments and objections received during the ETRO consultation period(s) are used when deciding whether to approve or reject the TRO. If the TRO would prohibit loading or unloading at certain times, restrict the passage of buses, or create one-way streets, and there are outstanding objections to the scheme, the authority must convene a hearing led by an independent Reporter to consider these objections. The authority may opt to hold a hearing in other circumstances. The local authority is required to consider the Reporter's recommendations in making a final decision on the TRO.

Redetermination of Means of Public Right of Passage Orders (Redetermination Orders - RSOs)

RSOs are used to reallocate parts of a road to the exclusive use of particular users, most often this power is used to create bus lanes and on-street segregated cycle lanes. RSOs are unique to Scotland and their use by roads authorities appears fairly inconsistent, with some pursuing them for all bus and cycle lane schemes and others taking a more relaxed approach to their use.

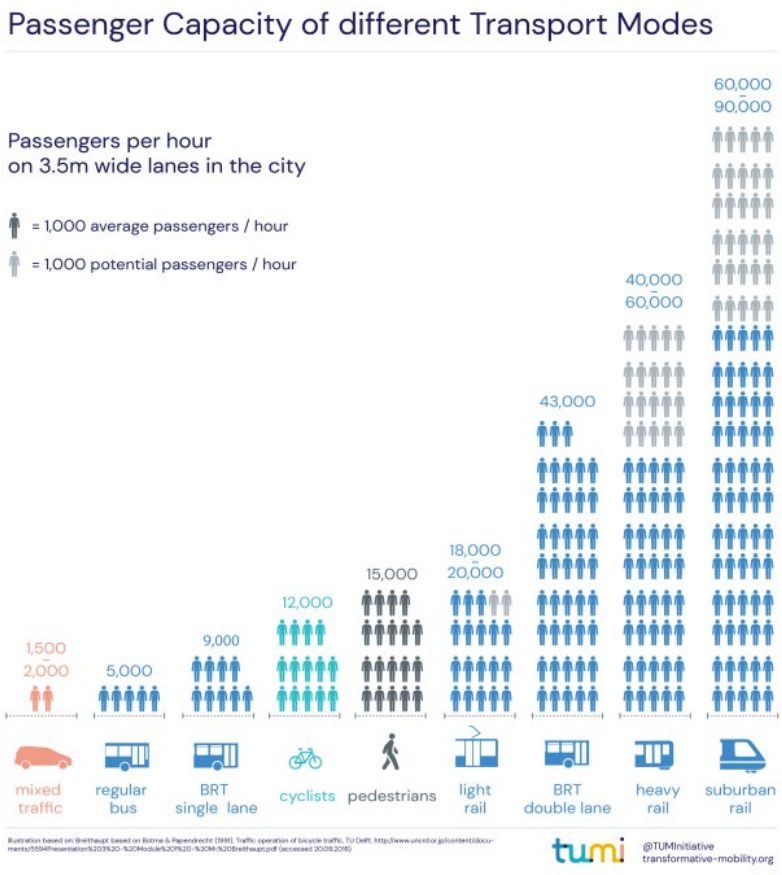
Regulations require a roads authority to advertise any proposed redetermination order, with a view to seeking comments and objections on the proposals. Where an objection is made and not subsequently withdrawn, the authority must pass the proposed order to Scottish Ministers for their decision. In practice, a Reporter employed by the Planning and Environmental Appeals Division will examine the case and produce a report with recommendations for Scottish Ministers, who will make the final decision.

Often, the creation of on-street segregated cycle lanes requires both a TRO and an RSO.

Cycle design guidance, road space reallocation, and bus stop bypasses

Cycle networks in places with a high level of cycling, such Copenhagen and towns and cities across The Netherlands, typically involve a coherent network of safe, direct, segregated cycle lanes running along busy arterial routes, and quieter, low speed, cycle streets shared with general traffic in residential areas. Such an approach informs Cycling by Design 2026, produced by Transport Scotland, the Walk Wheel Cycle Trust, and the Scottish Collaboration of Transport Specialists (SCOTS). This identifies six design principles for cycle networks – safety, coherence, directness, comfort, attractiveness, and adaptability, and provides advice to designers and engineers on all aspects of cycle infrastructure development.

It is a common misconception that adding segregated cycle lanes to existing roads automatically reduces their carrying capacity. However, as the infographic below (produced by TUMI – a research network funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development) shows, cycle lanes have a far higher carrying capacity than equivalent general carriageways.



Installing well planned and designed segregated cycle lanes will typically increase the number of people that can travel along a road over a given period of time. Scottish examples of new segregated cycle lanes encouraging cycling and increasing capacity without increasing traffic congestion, to the extent that bikes now outnumber cars at rush hour, can be found on Edinburgh's Leith Walk and Glasgow's Victoria Road.

One aspect of segregated cycle lanes that has been the subject of media attention, based on concerns raised about their safety by some campaign groups representing disabled or older people, is 'bus stop bypasses', also known as 'floating bus stops'. These are described in Cycling by Design as follows:

> "A bus stop bypass enables a protected cycle track to be continued as it passes a bus stop location, while remaining separated from the carriageway. It can improve accessibility to cycling, particularly for those less confident, and improve safety by eliminating interactions with road traffic.
>
> Bus stop bypasses provide an island between the cycle track and the road. The island is formed by widening the buffer between the cycle track and the carriageway, so that the island comfortably accommodates bus passengers waiting, boarding and alighting."



A bus stop bypass on Leith Street, Edinburgh (Image: Google Streetview)

Concerns about bus stop bypasses largely focus on the safety of pedestrians crossing the cycle lane to enter or leave the bus stop, which may also act as a disincentive for people with sight or mobility impairments to travel by bus.

UK research into the safety of bus stop bypasses has been led by Transport for London (TfL), which is responsible for both the largest bus and cycle lane networks in the UK. TfL published an updated version of its Bus stop bypass safety review in November 2026, which included an analysis of data at 192 bus stop bypasses, boarding data for older and disabled people, design audits, video monitoring of eight sites, and engagement with representative groups. This found that:

> "…the risk of pedestrians being injured at bus stop bypasses is very low. There were five pedestrian casualties involving cyclists and one involving an e-scooter rider on bus stop bypasses over a three-year period. One of these casualties appears to have happened on the zebra crossing, where the user of the cycle track must give way to the pedestrian.
>
> To put this in context, 11,400 pedestrians were injured in collisions with motor vehicle drivers over the same timeframe. The analysis of customer boarding patterns in 2023 found that bus stops with bypasses have more older and disabled people using them than other bus stops, likely due to their locations. When comparing boarding levels at bus stops before and after bypasses were constructed between 2019 and 2022, there is a slightly greater reduction in the number of older and disabled passengers at bus stops where bus stop bypasses were constructed (two to three per cent), but this is not statistically significant."

The findings of this report have been disputed by some groups, e.g. BBC London report that:

> "Erik Matthies, who has sight loss and is the Royal National Institute of Blind People's (RNIB) policy lead for travel and transport, said the group's research suggested that 40% of blind and partially sighted people avoided floating bus stops entirely.

> "Low injury reports don't tell the whole story - there is no safe and accessible way for people like me to cross the cycle lane to and from a bus stop, and today's review from TfL does not address that," he said."

Research by Dr Harrie Lamington Spencer focuses on how best to address these 'access frictions' (essentially the competing access needs of different groups) with a focus on bus stop bypasses, which concludes that:

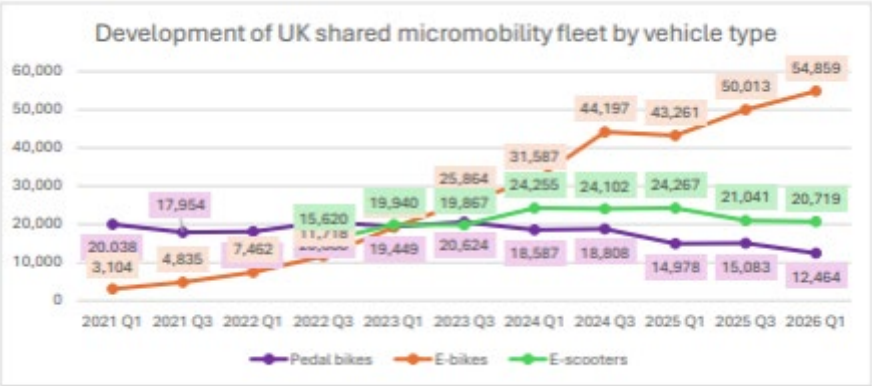
> "Disabled people are experts and designers of everyday life. Don't just consult us. Respect our skills and our knowledge and learn from us. Involve us from the beginning but remember that collective access making is a process. Be open and flexible (in mind but also in funding) to development and change, to ongoing insight and to improvements. As disabled people, and however frustrating it might be, we also need to respect the access needs of others that may not align with our own, and commit to "build[ing] a model of experimenting and seeing how it works out, then adjusting". When nobody is excluded and everybody has the best access experience possible, we are ensuring inclusion."

Public bike hire in Scotland

Public bike hire, also known as 'bike share', allows members of the public to rent standard bikes or e-bikes for short trips, either from docked stations or designated "geo-fenced" parking zones. Bikes are usually unlocked via a smartphone app or payment card.

CoMoUK state in written evidence that:

> "In 2026, Scotland's on-street bike share fleet is 100% electric with around 2,000 e-bikes across 6 locations [Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Elgin, Glasgow, Stirling, and Fort William]. This trend reflects the wider pattern of a growing number of e-bikes and a decreasing number of pedal bikes in the UK bike share fleet shown in the graph below.
>
> Operators report significantly higher utilisation numbers on e-bikes as compared to pedal bikes, increasing the viability of existing bike share schemes."



The launch of dockless public e-bike hire schemes, operated by Voi, in Aberdeen, Edinburgh, and Glasgow has produced some significant results, e.g. Glasgow City Council state in written evidence that there was 2,003,612 hires in the scheme's first 11 months, amongst 119,000 users and that use is accelerating, with:

> "The first million hires took eight months; the second million followed in just three months. August 2026 was the busiest month, with 333,015 hires."

Electric bikes

Electric bikes, technically known as Electrically Assisted Pedal Cycles (EAPCs), are regulated under the Electrically Assisted Pedal Cycles Regulations 1983, as amended. These require electric bikes and their riders to meet the following requirements:

- Electric assistance can only be provided to a maximum of 25 km/h (15.5 mph). This means the electric assistance cuts out when the bike reaches 15.5mph, a speed that many cyclists can reach on a pedal bike.

- The motor used must have a maximum continuous rated power output of 250 watts. 'Continuous rated power output' is not the maximum power output of a motor, but the maximum power it is designed to operate at for a continuous period of at least 30-minutes. For comparison, electric cars typically have motors with a maximum continuous rated power output of 50,000 watts or more.

- The electric bike's pedals must be in motion for electric assistance to be provided, although a throttle can be used to provide electric assistance up to 3.73mph. Any electric bike that allows throttle assistance to be provided above this speed must be approved by the Vehicle Certification Agency before it can be used. In practice, almost no electric bikes in use in Britain have such approval or are fitted with throttles.

- The rider must be 14 years of age or over.

Electric bikes must also meet additional requirements set out in the Pedal Cycles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1983, which deal with roadworthiness and design matters. These include the following electric bike specific requirements:

- The pedals must be capable of propelling the bike.
- The battery must not leak so as to be a source of danger.
- The power switch or control must default to off, requiring a constant intervention from the rider to maintain power assistance.
- The motor power output and the road speed at which it cuts out must not exceed the limits set out in the EAPC Regulations.

Anything that looks like an electric bike that does not meet the EAPC requirements set out above is likely to be classified as a powered cycle, moped, or motorcycle. None of these vehicles can be used on dedicated cycle infrastructure, including on-

street segregated cycle lanes and off-road cycle paths. Anyone riding one of these vehicles must hold an appropriate driving licence, insurance, and wear a motorcycle helmet. All these vehicles are subject to vehicle excise duty (often incorrectly referred to as 'road tax') and MoT testing. These vehicles must also be registered with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) and carry a number plate.

There are also a wide range of conversion kits available for sale, which allow anyone to add electric assistance to a standard pedal bike. Many of these kits allow people to convert their bike to an electric bike that meets EAPC requirements. However, the power output of some of these kits exceeds 250 watts maximum continuous output, and/or allows the rider to control full electric assistance by means of a throttle. Use of such a kit could result in any converted bike falling into one of the vehicle categories above. However, most pedal bikes are unlikely to have been designed and built to cope with the stresses that can be imposed by a high-power electric motor or to meet the roadworthiness requirements of mopeds or motorcycles.

Finally, it is possible to 'hack' an EAPC compliant electric bike to remove the 15.5mph cut-off for electric assistance or the need to pedal to activate the electric motor. Again, this could result in the vehicle entering one of the categories described above, although similar concerns arise about roadworthiness and rider compliance with the licensing, insurance, and registration requirements.

Enforcement of these rules falls to two organisations:

1. The **police** are responsible for enforcing requirements relating to roadworthiness, driver licensing, vehicle licensing, helmet wearing, and insurance.

2. The **Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency** are responsible for enforcement of vehicle excise duty. Electric vehicles are currently exempt from vehicle excise duty, although such vehicles must still be taxed despite no payment being due.

The Criminal Justice Committee is currently undertaking an inquiry into Crime and antisocial behaviour associated with e-bikes and e-scooters.

It is important not to let negative perceptions of e-bikes obscure their importance in achieving transport policy objectives. Research conducted by the Walk Wheel Cyle Trust for Transport Scotland lists the following benefits of e-bikes:

- **Replacing car journeys** (E-bike users substitute a significantly higher proportion of car trips than conventional cyclists, who often cycle in addition to driving). (Melia and Bartle, 2022)

- **Encouraging functional cycling**: E-bikes enable more people to use cycling for commuting, shopping, and other daily tasks, rather than just for leisure.

- **Extending travel distances**: The average e-bike trip is 1.5 times longer than a conventional bike trip, making cycling a viable alternative for more journeys. (Young & Whyte, 2020)

- **Supporting active lifestyles**: E-bikes enable users to maintain or increase their cycling activity levels, even if they would otherwise struggle with conventional cycling.

- **Broadening access to cycling**: E-bikes make cycling more accessible for individuals who may be deterred by distance, inclines, or perceived physical fitness limitations. (Young & Whyte, 2020)

Key issues raised in written evidence

The Committee received written evidence from CoMoUK, Glasgow City Council, the Walk Wheel Cycle Trust, Spokes (the Lothian cycle campaign), and the City of Edinburgh Council.

All witnesses emphasise the role of increased cycling in delivering Scottish Government and local authority policy priorities in areas such as increasing physical activity, reducing air pollution, tackling transport poverty and inequality, driving economic growth through access to jobs, services, and transport hubs, and improving neighbourhood amenity through safer streets.

Witnesses also highlight the success of individual projects and future plans, including Glasgow City Council highlighting the success of projects such the South City Way and East City Way in driving a 74% growth of cycling in the city, while the City of Edinburgh Council describes the success of the City Centre East West Link in increasing cycling, plus supporting a 20% increase in spending at adjacent businesses, and that there has been a significant uptick in support for the scheme post-implementation, including support from local businesses rising from 14% pre-construction to 60% afterwards.

Witnesses also highlight some concerns and suggest possible improvements to regulatory systems, budgets, and Scottish Government priorities for cycling, including:

- The move from multi-year funding (previously delivered through Walk Wheel Cyle Trust schemes, funded by the Scottish Government, such as Places for Everyone) to annual funding allocated by Transport Scotland is a significant concern, e.g. Glasgow City Council state that “The move from multi-year funding to annual and competitive allocations has introduced avoidable cost, delay and delivery risk to projects. This can compress consultation, disrupt procurement, fragment scope, weaken continuity and make statutory processes harder to programme.”

- There is a lack of revenue funding to maintain newly created or improved cycling infrastructure. This can act as a deterrent to capital investment, as authorities need to ensure that new infrastructure can be maintained without affecting existing maintenance programmes.

- Scottish Government budget documents should clearly set out planned capital and revenue expenditure on active travel, rather than rolling it into a wider "sustainable travel" budget line – making it difficult to track annual spending.

- The separate TRO and RSO systems are overly bureaucratic and involve significant overlap for no obvious public benefit. Particular concerns include the requirement to hold a public hearing in certain circumstances and the involvement of Scottish Ministers in decisions on RSOs, both of which add significant cost and time to the Order making process.

- Women are less likely to cycle than men, with the Walk Wheel Cycle Trust highlighting that physical safety, including road safety and personal safety, is the most significant factor in this difference. Cycling infrastructure needs to be planned and designed to maximise all aspects of safety – with well lit, on-street infrastructure along well used roads being preferable to remote, off-street paths with few entry and exit points.

- There needs to be a focus on creating safe cycling networks, which also serve hubs allowing transfers between bike and other modes, rather than creating stand-alone sections of cycle path, which are normally only used by those confident enough to cycle on the roads at either end.

- Consideration needs to be given to cycling in rural areas, including linking villages and towns with safe cycling infrastructure, plus funding for bike share schemes in rural locations.

- Consideration should be given to establishing a regulatory system allowing on-street car parking spaces to be easily converted into bike share parking spaces.

- The Scottish Government should work with UK government to create standards for the use of legal e-scooters on public roads.

- Local authorities should be given discretionary powers to implement road user charging and use vehicle mounted bus lane enforcement cameras, to improve cyclist safety, and generate revenue that can be used to support investment in active and sustainable travel.

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Date: 20/11/2026

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