

Appendix A—Response to the Active Travel Delivery Plan Consultation

General comments

We welcome publication of the Active Travel Delivery Plan (ATDP) consultation and the focus on delivering bold transformation for our communities across Northern Ireland. Active travel brings many social, economic and environmental benefits including health and well-being, improved air quality, reduced traffic and improved streets and places as well as tackling climate change and fostering a fair and just transition.

In line with Belfast City Council's submission the Belfast Cycle Network Delivery Plan, we continue to advocate for connected active travel infrastructure which encourages active travel as a means for commuting and leisure opportunities and wish to expedited delivery of the Plan. We have an ongoing collaboration with DfI regarding the delivery of both the BCN and greenways and, as appropriate, we would like to see further engagement as the regional plan is rolled out. We would like to stress that the delivery of the Active Travel Plan, in terms of budget and timing, cannot be to the detriment of the implementation of the Belfast Cycle Network Delivery Plan (2022) but would like to see a committed and funded delivery plan for active travel across all of Northern Ireland.

We understand that this plan is NI-wide but want to reinforce the importance of connections across council areas, particularly concerning design, materials, routes and maintenance. The maintenance of the network is vital to ensure its continual usage and safety and the removal of debris, blockages and treatment during winter to support the free flow of use, especially on cycle routes.

The Belfast Agenda (2024-2028) is the city's community plan and identified the following outcomes to be achieved by 2035:

- Everyone in Belfast experiences good health and wellbeing
- Belfast is a vibrant, attractive, connected and environmentally friendly.

As part of the Our Place theme there is a priority to create a liveable, connected, vibrant and competitive city. Focus on connectivity, active and sustainable travel (CAST) has been identified a key priority within the "Our Place" theme of the Belfast Agenda, with a collaborative action plan in place to help drive delivery towards those outcomes. It is proposed that the percentage of all journeys which are made by walking, wheeling, cycling or public transport and number of miles of cycle lanes, footways and footpaths will help measure progress towards the Belfast Agenda outcomes.

Central to this is the delivery of the Eastern Transport Plan, the Local Development Plan and projects that support people to use sustainable travel and behavioural change projects that replace car journeys with active travel. The Belfast Agenda's Our Planet theme also outlines our commitment to tackling climate change, with a strategic intent to support the production of sustainable forms of transport and low carbon innovation in transport solutions.

Prioritisation of Potential Active Travel Routes

Question: Do you agree that we have emphasised the right things?

Council supports active travel connections to local schools, public transport and town centres and would highlight that the routes may need vary in terms of potential users and the mix of travel modes. A mixed network of routes that offers choices for walking, wheeling, and cycling would cater to various abilities and provide options for commuting as well as leisure and recreation.

In addition to the different types of infrastructure needed, it is suggested that the network should provide a range of options, ensuring the highest level of safety is used along these routes. We encourage consideration of interventions designed to prioritise the most vulnerable road users.

We encourage the Department to focus on delivering routes which offer the greatest potential to increase active travel, particularly in areas experiencing population growth, and to build the necessary infrastructure in advance. As one of the strategic aims of the LDP, 'Building a smart, connected and resilient place' seeks to encourage travel by more sustainable modes of transport and reduce reliance on the private car, particularly for commuting purposes.

Given this policy position, we particularly welcome the prioritisation of schemes identified in the ATDP which provide connections to the public transport network, be it rail stations, bus stations or Park & Ride sites. The schemes should facilitate greater public transport uptake, as a more sustainable means of travel to and from Belfast in preference to the private car whilst also assisting in reducing the negative impacts associated with congestion caused by high car use.

Regarding proposals for routes in our neighbouring councils (Antrim and Newtownabbey; Ards and North Down; and Lisburn and Castlereagh) the majority of routes connecting into Belfast are identified as 'Future routes (10+ Years)'. Whilst we appreciate the need for prioritisation, we would see benefit in giving more weight to those routes which would connect into the established Belfast active travel network especially considering the significant potential user base that already exists in the populous Belfast Metropolitan Area.

We also support the prioritisation of routes that provide connections to local schools, as they can bring about meaningful behavioural change. As noted in the consultation report, this can "empower young people to adopt sustainable habits that can last a lifetime" causing a modal shift that potentially influences their travel choices if they live, study and work in Belfast.

We also welcome that the ATDP recognises the importance of the role that greenways play in the provision of an active travel network. This aligns with another of the LDP's strategic aims 'Promoting a green and active place' which supports developing an integrated and multi-functional green infrastructure network.

Designing the Network

Question: Do you agree with these principles?

We support a people-centred design approach that is welcoming, accessible, inclusive and safe. Active travel routes have a role in place making; they are not only transport corridors but also focal points for communities that can stimulate social interaction and encourage investment. We welcome the commitment to high quality infrastructure that is appropriate to the situation. We would encourage the Department to ensure that the design includes climate resilience, incorporating green and blue infrastructure as possible. Not only does green infrastructure provide an attractive environment that encourages active travel, but it also can absorb carbon emissions and offer biodiversity and habitat creation.

Referring to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Volume 1, "The Climate Change Team within DAERA: Northern Ireland Environment Agency noted that implication/opportunities for the Active Travel Plan of more frequent hot weather is not discussed. High temperature will make active modes of transport more difficult/uncomfortable without adequate shade and hydration points along the routes."

Building on this point, the design principles should reflect the changing climate and ensure that it responds to future risks to address flooding, urban heat islands, and air quality challenges.

We acknowledge that there is no one size fits all approach, but it would be helpful if the Department could issue guidance in terms of the design of cycle infrastructure and clarify the use of LTN 1/20 as best practice. We recognise that each scheme's design should prioritise the provision of high-quality, context-appropriate infrastructure, with safety as a core focus.

We request that design proposals be site-specific, carefully considering the unique needs of urban routes and proposing thoughtful interventions for recreational paths that protect and enhance the existing landscape character. Design proposals must be climate-responsive, integrating future climate models to address flooding, urban heat islands and air quality challenges. The preservation of existing trees is essential and supplementary tree planting are crucial for mitigating these issues, enhancing long-term functionality and sustainability of the routes.

Selected tree species should be resilient to climate change impacts, such as extended droughts and flooding, and resistant to climate-related tree diseases. This approach supports environmental and community well-being. Designs should respect the existing landscape character and habitats, ensuring the protection and enhancement of wildlife, such as considering wildlife corridors.

The use of sustainable materials, a site-specific planting palette reflecting the existing native planting, incorporation of SuDS, and the selection of appropriate lighting are essential to avoid light pollution and minimise negative impacts on wildlife habitats. Additionally, we welcome visual examples that highlight nature-based solutions for flood management solutions, including the integration of SuDS, swales, and tree planting in both rural and urban settings.

Road space allocation and traffic management

Question: Do you agree with these principles?

We agree that the key principles, of welcoming and accessible, people-centred design and high-quality infrastructure, are critical to delivering rebalanced road space and traffic management and this position is reflected in the Local Development Plan, the Belfast Agenda and A Bolder Vision for Belfast. These principles should enable flexibility while fundamentally placing people at the centre, supporting improved confidence in engaging in active travel through safe, connected, inclusive and well-designed infrastructure. We feel it would be helpful for the Department to produce a menu of potential options or guidance to rebalance the street, supporting future placemaking and mobility projects.