

Design Guidance for Delivery of Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013

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Background

Wheelrights was founded in 1995 to campaign for better safety and provision for cycling in the Swansea area. We have seen volumes of policy, strategy and action plans written by the local authorities and the Assembly but precious little progress over the years. Many local authorities have been found wanting in cycle provision, particularly regarding major planning applications and infrastructure proposals. It is still difficult bordering on dangerous to get about on a bicycle unless very experienced. The issues of Safety and Better Provision for cyclists are paramount if the benefits to Transport, the Environment, Health and the Economy are to be realised. We and doubtless other campaign groups (as primary users), would be pleased to be included as consultees in future deliberations.

We are very pleased to support this Active Travel (AT) initiative for something is clearly needed to force progress on this matter. The downside is this work will put a large burden on local authorities, with little promise of anything concrete for years. Notwithstanding this, the attention and technical expertise that will result from this work will doubtless be of real benefit.

We are unhappy that your definition of Active Travel does not embrace the whole spectrum of cycling, which it clearly should. The Act includes only some trip purposes whereas it should cover all trip purposes, especially so in areas where tourist and recreational demand is high, such as Swansea. Recreational cycling especially by families will lead to the cycling culture we all seek. We hope that this definition will not preclude many routes from improvement. The Action Plan (consulted on separately) seems to cover this wider definition but confuses the Active Travel Act description.

The layout, titles and referencing of the issued documents have caused me some confusion and there are many inconsistencies in the file references that appear on screen and documents that hopefully will be sorted.

An Executive Summary of each of the documents would be of real benefit.

General Questions

These are questions about the guidance as a whole document.

Question 1: *Do you support the approach to active travel routes and facilities that has been taken in the guidance?*

Yes, the existing provision needs assessing and new proposals and development planned including in the future programme and prioritised. An horizon of 15 years seems optimistic for most local authorities. There is too much detail required in the assessment and mapping that will prove onerous, of little value and could jeopardise scheme delivery.

It would have been of value if an example of typical maps you intend to be provided by local authorities were included.

Question 2: *What will be the impact of this guidance on you, your organization, and/or the people your organisation represents?*

We are encouraged that this initiative is taking place, wish to be involved in it and hope it will not be used as an excuse for delaying progress on schemes. It is a quite daunting duty for local government and the professionals involved (planners, engineers etc) who have not always shown enthusiasm in their work by providing for cycling...nuff said... We will use it to our advantage in reminding them of their duties under the act. We have seen schemes delayed and even abandoned because of land acquisition difficulties. We would welcome greater use of Compulsory Purchase when negotiations reach a stalemate. There is a need for the Planning Inspectorate to be clear about the intentions of this act.

Question 3: *Is there anything that you feel is missing from the guidance, or should not be included?*

I have mentioned the need for greater protection for cyclists in law and by the police and road safety elements who are often quite negative on cycling issues..We would hope this initiative will increase their involvement and enthusiasm for cycling provision in their work. How can this be included?

Question 4: *Is the status of the document clear and how it interacts with other guidance documents such as the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges?*

Yes it's a technical tome and doubtless any anomalies can be sorted to the benefit of cycling provision by the professions involved.

Question 5: *Does the design guidance clearly and fully define the needs of walkers and cyclists?*

This is perhaps the most difficult area as cyclists vary greatly in experience and threshold of pain regarding danger. The needs must be balanced against the utility of the trip as measured by time it takes, frequency and priority of road crossings encountered etc. Generally we prefer segregation from traffic and a scenic route, but this often comes with an unacceptable journey time.

Question 6: *Does the network planning section of the document clearly define the processes to be undertaken by local authorities to deliver the duties with the Active Travel (Wales) Act?*

Yes although it seems to require more investigation and qualification than ever, which might result in a lower output of facilities on the ground, which is of course what matters.

Question 7: *Is the process for designing active travel routes on links understandable? 6.13*

Yes generally and a very important consideration. The exclusion of roads with lane widths of the critical 3.2m-3.9m will I suspect preclude many existing roads currently used by many cyclists. The option of reducing traffic volumes is unlikely, so speed reduction or some novel solution such as removal of centreline will be needed, as you cannot depend on all drivers to wait for gaps in opposing traffic. Many traffic calming chicanes and pedestrian refuges put the cyclist in danger of being injured unless a very assertive stance is taken. The use of “false one way streets”... no entry at one end, is a simple application (not mentioned) and generally on side streets one way should allow contraflow by cyclists and none should be closed off to cyclists at the end.

Question 8: *Is the process for designing active travel routes at junctions understandable?*

Yes and broadly agreed. We prefer ramped crossings where possible with priority over side roads.

Question 9: *Is there any notable conflict in the Standard Details in the design guidance with current local authority design standards?*

Doubtless any will be resolved on particular application.

Question 10:

Do you have any concerns over the applicability of any of the Suggested or Possible Details?

We like to see innovation and there is a wealth of experience abroad that we can learn from. We would not want to see innovative solutions causing delay and can be used experimentally. The relevant professionals need to be brought up to speed on such matters.

Question 11: *What is your view of the decision not to provide a conventional roundabout standard detail for active travel routes within this document?*

Roundabouts present an enormous problem for cyclists who need to be protected by special provision or greatly reducing the merging speed of motor vehicles.

Question 12: *What is your view of the documents approach to the provision of active travel routes on high speed roads?*

These are sensible requirements if no off road provision is available or can be created.

Question 13: *Do you feel that inclusion of the Design Element details is helpful?*

Yes very but needs to be incorporated in the main body of the document.

Question 14: *Do three categories of Design Element (Standard Details, Suggested Details and Possible Details) strike the right balance, giving guidance on established practice while allowing for innovation?*

It's in the semantics, we must be prepared to depart from tried and tested and some form of transition must be accommodated. I leave it to the experts to determine when suggested and possible should become standard practice, but would like to be consulted for our opinion

Question 15: *Does the Cycling Route Audit Tool provide a workable means of defining an acceptable standard for cycling routes?*

Cycle Audit has been around for many years but largely ignored because it is complex. Safety audits have often resulted in inferior provision for cycling, so some form of cycle audit is desirable provided it gives a desired outcome of better provision and its purpose clearly understood

Question 16: *We have asked a number of general and specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them;*

We are impressed by and welcome this initiative which we applaud and hope our support where applicable will be helpful in this huge endeavour. It remains to be seen how well it is progressed and with what enthusiasm by those charged with its delivery.

It needs to be made much easier to digest both in referencing, cross referencing, indexing and layout. As stated earlier there are many text mistakes and I hope that these will be addressed following this consultation.

Responses to consultations may be made public – on the internet or in a report.....OK: