

Dear Julie Harrison,

I refer to your letter of 14 November sent to Andrew Muir MLA as Chair of the All-Party Group on Cycling, in response to a series of questions raised in his letter to you of 1 November.

I am writing to request some clarification and further information, as some questions were not fully answered, and some answers don't seem to accord with the department's stated aspirations to shift more journeys to walking and cycling.

1. 10% spend of the transport budget on walking and cycling:

You were asked what progress had been made towards allocating 10% of the transport budget to walking and cycling, in accordance with the legal commitment set out within the Climate Change Act. In response, you stated that:

"The Department is currently working with DAERA and its advisors to establish how this obligation will work in practice as part of the wider approach to the implementation of the Climate Change Act."

Given the Act received Queens Assent on the 6th of June, and the department was aware of the 10% amendment in January, we would have expected a more concrete answer on the timescale for implementation, and what the 10% represents currently as an annual figure.

Presumably you should be able to provide a figure for total transport spending in the last financial year, and an estimate for total spending this year. Can you please provide both figures and clarify which transport costs are included within those figures or estimates, so that the scale of the increase in active travel funding required is more transparent?

I am also confused about the reference to work with DAERA to establish how this obligation will work in practice as part of a wider approach. The legal obligation is clear, and it binds the department now, regardless of the absence of a Minister. Can you therefore please confirm what meetings have taken place with DAERA and what progress has been made?

To comply with the 10% requirement the department is going to have to rapidly increase the active travel budget year on year. Can you please indicate the timescale for confirming those plans?

Given this is a statutory obligation and has been since June, can you additionally outline what additional resources the Active Travel Branch has been given since June to scale up active travel delivery?

2. Delays over multiple projects

Your letter was unclear on the timescales for various urgent projects, which repeatedly seem to drift. For example, in response to earlier correspondence from Cycling UK regarding the consultation on the **Limestone/Cavehill Road cycle lane**, we were told by your department in August that:

“Officials advise that they hope to be in a position to commence this new consultation this autumn”

However, in your last letter, you state that:

“It is anticipated that formal consultation will take place early 2023”

Can you please explain why it is taking so long to run a third consultation on an already delayed project, and provide a definitive target date for commencing that consultation rather than referencing a season or time of year?

Another delayed project is the lighting of the **Comber Greenway** which was originally due to be completed by the end of August, and you have indicated that:

“It is hoped that the lights on the Comber Greenway will be switched on in the coming weeks”

Again, can you please explain the reason for the delay on this project, which impacts on whether residents choose to continue cycling over winter, and also please provide a definitive date for the lights to be turned on?

There are various projects, decisions and consultations which impact upon active travel and seem to be subject to inordinate delay, including but not limited to:

- Making the pop-up cycle lanes permanent (and therefore enabling parking restrictions to be enforced).
- The outcome of the pavement parking consultation.
- The outcome of the Fixed Penalty Notice consultation.

Can you please provide some timescales for progression and action, because currently the active travel agenda does not appear to figure prominently in departmental priorities?

3. Belfast Bicycle Network

We were disappointed to read your response to Mr Muir’s question on the Belfast Bicycle Network, which didn’t provide any assurance that the required level of commitment, resource or priority was being given to this project. Given the size of this project and its potential we would have expected the department to create a ‘Delivery Team’ much like the Glider project.

The BBN consultation began in 2017, over 5 years ago, and we have seen little to no progress since then with no delivery team, almost zero separated cycle paths built, and no legislation to make it safer for people cycling in urban and residential areas of Belfast. Additionally, the budget outlined in your response doesn’t appear to add up, as you state that the BBN Delivery Plan is:

“Representing a proposed capital investment of over £100 million over a ten-year period”

You then outline the initial spend and the increase:

“From a spend of around £1 million in 2021/22 it is proposed, subject to budget availability and budget decisions, an annual increase of the order of £2 million each year until the final year of the programme when capital spend could be around £19 million. (Over £90million in total).”

This plan will leave the project over 10% short of completion, before the impact of inflation is even taken into account. Will this shortfall be represented in a reduction in the proposed network or otherwise?

4. Meeting between Finance, Communities, and the Department for Infrastructure

We welcome the collaboration announced between DfI, DoF and DfC, and your confirmation that:

“The Ministers agreed to set up a cross-departmental working group where officials can work together to identify and maximise opportunities for active travel and greenway development “

Are you able to give any more information on when this working group will be set up and whether they will seek involvement from public bodies and individuals? Additionally, can you confirm this working group will form despite the absence of Ministers and an Assembly?

Many thanks for your consideration of our follow up questions. I hope to receive your response within the next 21 days.

Yours faithfully,

Duncan Dollimore,

Head of Campaigns,

Cycling UK