

**From the Permanent Secretary
Dr Julie Harrison**

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Dear Andrew

APG ON CYCLING QUESTIONS

Thank you for updating me at our recent meeting. I would like to take this opportunity to recognise the good work of the APG on cycling in highlighting that increased levels of cycling as a sustainable form of transport will mean less noise, less pollution, healthier, happier people, making this region a more attractive place to live, work, shop, visit and invest.

My Department has adapted delivery standards, such as LTN 1/20, which favours segregation of cycle routes where that can be accommodated. In addition, the Department is considering taking on a greater role in the delivery of greenways going forward and a new delivery model is under development, with Councils continuing to have a lead role.

While budgets continue to be extremely challenging, I want to assure you that the Department is committed to supporting the delivery of safe sustainable infrastructure.

I have provided an update against each of your questions.

1. ***What measures has the Department taken to support and encourage people to cycle as a cheap, affordable means of travel in the context of Cost of Living crisis? Has consideration been given for a discount to be provided to those who don't qualify for the Cycle to Work Scheme?***

1.1. Promotion of cycling

The Department regularly delivers messages on social media promoting the benefits of choosing more sustainable modes of travel, including cycling. The messages encourage people to consider cycling for their journey as it is better for the environment, our health and financially.

1.2. Active School Travel (AST)

There is significant potential to increase the number of children walking or cycling to school and the Department wants to create safer conditions that allow children to replace the daily school run by an active and sustainable method of travel where possible.

DfI has supported various initiatives that help support parents, teachers and children to make a healthier choice for their mode of travel to school, such as the Active School Travel Programme, the Cycling Proficiency Scheme and the Practical Child Pedestrian Safety Training.

1.3. The Walking and Cycling Index (WACI) for Belfast

The '*Walking and Cycling Index 2021*' report, which the Department part funded, provides a valuable source of information as we undertake the important work of making Belfast a more walking and cycling-friendly city, connecting us to each other and to what we need.

The information within this report will help inform policy decisions and provide the evidence base for investment in active travel infrastructure, especially in the light of the climate emergency. Infrastructure that is inviting and safe for everyone who chooses a sustainable mode of transport.

1.4. Voucher / Discount for those who don't qualify for the Cycle to Work Scheme

I am aware of the Department for Transport '*Fix Your Bike*' voucher scheme in England. I understand that this scheme was introduced in 2021 to encourage more people to embrace cycling, boost the number of commuting and leisure trips and to help reduce the number of short journeys made by private cars.

However, a similar scheme in Northern Ireland could cost around £700,000 and, given the current resource pressures upon my Department, would be unaffordable without additional budget.

The Department has awarded £100,000 to the Turn Around Project – ***Big Loop Bikes*** to further develop the Big Loop Bikes project which provides a low-cost sustainable travel option for university students and staff, and hopes to extend that to other employers in due course and to provide affordable access to children's bikes for families.

2. *Has there been consideration for giving greater flexibility to District Councils for funding spend as part of the Blue Green Fund?*

In line with public expenditure requirements, Departments cannot carry forward unspent budget into a new financial year.

3. *What progress is being made on the 10-year Belfast Cycling Network Plan? It is noted a further consultation is happening on one small section in North Belfast.*

The Belfast Cycling Network (BCN) Delivery Plan aims to join up the existing cycle infrastructure and develop new safe routes across the city to encourage more people to choose active travel modes of transport. Subject to budget availability, over 50 individual schemes are planned for delivery including trialling new routes, representing a proposed capital investment of over £100 million over a ten year period.

The BCN Delivery Plan is not a static plan. It needs to be dynamic, responding to changes in the needs of the people of this city. It should not be the limits of our ambition, but the framework within which ambitions for active travel can grow.

The short term schemes proposed include a dedicated cycle path from the Riverside Path, which runs along Dunbar Link and connects to the University at the Fredrick Street / York Street junction. The West Belfast Greenway route options are being considered, which could create a shared cycling and walking route of approximately 10 kilometres from the Bog Meadows to the Lagan Tow Path close to Dunmurry.

Medium term proposed schemes include a dedicated cycle lane along the Inner Ring (from the Belfast Transport Hub to Ulster University); North Queen Street – Grove Park; and a scheme along York Street linking to Yorkgate Station.

The Department (Eastern Division) is currently working up designs to change the pop up cycle lane proposal, using delineators & road marking to a fully segregated design using kerbs. This work is currently ongoing and will cover Limestone Road (York Street to Antrim Road) and Cavehill Road (Antrim Road to Westland Road).

Once design work is completed, the Department will commence informal consultation with all interested parties before taking the design to formal consultation. In the interim, work will be undertaken to restore the road markings / islands that were removed as part of the pop up cycle lane construction. It is anticipated that formal consultation will take place early 2023.

As part of decisions made on 2022/23 capital allocations, £2m has been allocated for the Belfast Cycle Network. 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.)

- 4. *It is noted poles have been erected on Comber Greenway but no lights, what are the timescales for erection of lights and completion of the scheme?***

It is hoped that the lights on the Comber Greenway will be switched on in the coming weeks. This pilot scheme will be of benefit to those who choose to travel actively in the winter months during the hours of darkness, but they will turn off from 10:30pm - 6:00am.

- 5. *Further to passage of the Climate Change Act 10% of Transport Budget must be spent on walking and cycling. What progress has been made on allocating this? What has spend been in previous Financial Years in monetary terms and as percentage of Transport budgets.***

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.

- 6. *Can an update be provided on Northern Ireland adopting the GB Highway code changes. What is the rationale for waiting till other matters such as eScooters resolved when Road Safety could be improved by swift update in the near future?***

I take my responsibility for road safety very seriously but I have to consider the best way to use available resources to meet the needs of all road users.

Possible updates to the Code first need to be considered to ensure they reflect local needs. Any changes then need to be implemented safely, supported by clear communications to ensure they are understood by the wide range of road users, including pedestrians. I am unable to give a timescale for the update of the Highway Code at this point.

- 7. *Are any plans afoot for an education campaign concerning Road Safety for cyclists including close pass awareness?***

Currently, the Department has an annual programme of safety measures aimed at improving road safety generally, including for those who choose to walk or cycle.

In 2019, the Department developed a new cycling safety campaign which has two objectives. The campaign encourages drivers to give extra consideration to people who cycle. It also encourages those who cycle to give consideration to others; and to take measures to keep themselves safe on the road. It communicates the fact that we all have equal right to use the road; as quite often vehicle drivers consider themselves to be the priority road user. As with the earlier campaign the core message is "*Respect Everyone's Journey*"

The Department also has road safety and active travel social media channels. Messages here include frequently encouraging people to cycle, and

to do so safely. Many posts remind drivers to look out for those cycling and to give them time and space on their journey.

You can view the channels here: [Facebook Share the Road to Zero](#) and [Twitter @roadtozero](#)

8. In new Road Safety Strategy what is rationale for ‘shared responsibility’ as opposed to ‘hierarchy of responsibility’ which other nations use?

‘Shared responsibility’ is a core principle of the Safe System approach to road safety which the draft Road Safety Strategy for NI to 2030 embraces. The Safe Systems approach is internationally recognised as the optimal, best practice approach to achieving significant reductions in road user fatalities and serious injuries. It is based on well-established safety principles and requires a shared responsibility between all those who use the road transport network. It is applied internationally as well as in Ireland and Scotland.

My understanding is the ‘hierarchy of responsibility’ was introduced as part of the GB Highway Code changes and I am not aware of what other nations have adopted this approach.

9. What is the latest situation concerning review of Special Events Road Closure legislation?

Cycle Racing on Roads Regulations (NI) 1986, which are made under Article 45(1) of the Road Traffic (NI) Order 1995, provide the power to hold cycle races on roads here. The holding of cycle races on roads is administered by the PSNI.

As part of the recent review of the operation of the special events legislation it has been suggested that cycle races be included under the special events provisions. The review report is currently under consideration.

10. The role of the Walking & Cycling Champion within the Department is a part-time position. This time commitment is clearly inadequate. What consideration has been given to making this a full-time post, with the potential for an external appointment?

The Department is implementing an internal review in relation to a number of areas of work, one of which is the Active Travel Branch. When all staff are in place I will advise of the role of the Active Travel Champion

11. The Walking and Cycling Group within the Department is clearly under resourced in terms of staff and funding. Does the Department intend to review with a view to properly resourcing the Group?

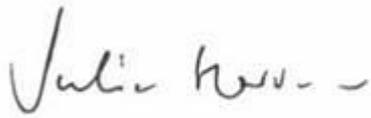
As per question 10.

- 12. The Department set up a Walking and Cycling Advisory Group to better engage with wider community interests both individuals and organizations. This Group meets infrequently, and its full, potential contribution has not been realised. Do plans exist to review the role and purpose of this group and improve communications with the Department?**

The work of the Walking and Cycling Advisory Group will be considered under the new roles following reorganisation.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Harrison". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

JULIE HARRISON