Wales

10 YEARS OF THE ACTIVE TRAVEL ACT

While the UK Government is rowing back on active travel, Wales has something to celebrate, as Gwenda Owen reports

The Active Travel Act in Wales had its 10th anniversary on 4 October. To celebrate we ate cake, rode our bikes, applauded Wales’s politicians and discussed how we could ensure that the Active Act Travel delivers on its vision of walking and cycling becoming the normal choice for shorter journeys.

The Active Travel Act was and remains groundbreaking. It places a duty on every local authority to plan and prioritise improvements to walking and cycling routes, creating a network by which people of all ages and abilities can get about without always having to resort to using a car.

Many of us who work and campaign for active travel improvements do, however, feel a little frustrated because the promise of the act has not yet been delivered. Some local authorities are making more progress than others, with joined-up networks being seen here and there, but it’s patchy and progress seems so slow. Given the role that cycling has to play in addressing the climate emergency, pollution, transport poverty and pressures on our health services, it should be something that every local authority is prioritising.

The anniversary was a call to action as well as a celebration. We currently have cross-party support for active travel in the Senedd, and Lee Waters MS is a committed deputy minister who has driven through significant change. But politicians move on, priorities can change and, as we’ve seen in England recently, support for active travel can falter.

To keep walking and cycling high up on the agenda of our local and national politicians we need them to understand what a good active travel network offers. It’s not just about the bike – it provides better transport choices, cleaner air, nice places to live, work and play, easy access to shops and services, and it enables our children to move around their communities without fear.

We campaigners have a crucial role to play in trying to ensure that politicians in Wales continue to do the right thing. Political cycles and positioning being as it is, we can’t be complacent. Now more than ever we need to strengthen the call for continued investment and commitment to create an active travel network that works for all and that gives people real choices about how they travel.

This is why it’s so important that we grow grassroots support and develop a diverse network for people who feel able to advocate for cycling in all sorts of ways. See cyclinguk.org/cycle-advocacy-network-resources.