

transform
scotland

PUTTING DOWN ROUTES

BUILDING SCOTLAND'S
ACTIVE FREEWAY NETWORK

October 2021



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1

**AN ACTIVE
FREEWAYS
PROGRAMME
FOR SCOTLAND**

AN ACTIVE FREEWAYS PROGRAMME FOR SCOTLAND



Scotland needs a network of active travel routes that connects communities, places of interest, and public transport links. To enable the carbon reductions in transport that Scotland must achieve, this network must be built as a matter of urgency. The network should include direct, convenient routes between places, as well as scenic and leisure alternatives where appropriate. This will provide sustainable, safe, and inclusive travel choices for everyone, and enable people to access their destinations by the method of their choosing, without being dissuaded by hostile environments or fear of injury.

Transform Scotland is encouraged to see that the shared policy programme “Working together to build a greener, fairer, independent Scotland” of the Scottish Government and the Scottish Green Party commits to building an “active freeway network”.¹ Our report provides a blueprint for developing the strategic network of Active Freeways that Scotland needs, and draws on UK and continental European experience to identify aspects that will be important to successful design and implementation. It also looks at how an active freeway network will support existing policies and the wider benefits it will provide.

Active Freeways will provide safe connections between cities and outlying settlements, and connections between towns and villages that share amenities and services, where distances could be easily covered by walking, wheeling or cycling. Active Freeways will connect communities with their places of work and education, local services and leisure facilities and open up opportunities for many more people

across the country to make short and medium distance every day trips by walking, wheeling and cycling. The Active Freeway network the Scottish Government has committed to should:

- Be planned and built as a strategic network to current design standards, with Transport Scotland responsible for delivery.
- Be developed as an Active Freeway Programme by Transport Scotland, analogous to the roads programme, and be built and planned with urgency and commitment.
- Incorporate existing paths and routes where appropriate.
- Be provided with sufficient and secure funding for construction and maintenance.
- Be provided with a legal basis that ensures ongoing maintenance and adaptation of the network.
- Use consistent, unified signage, branding, and waymarking so it is easy to follow routes without pre-planning.

This would build on the existing *National Cycle Network*, long distance walking and cycling routes, local active travel routes, the *Places for Everyone* programme, canal towpaths, core path plans, and the proposed STPR2 intervention to deliver *Active Freeways*.² Transform Scotland believes that the Active Freeways programme should provide the structure to ensure high quality active travel routes cover the whole of

Scotland, including both urban and rural areas; and the identity and signage necessary to make it recognised and useful for all types of people. Developing the network will identify gaps in the existing network of active travel routes that need filling, determine which existing sections require upgrade or repair, provide consistent signage, branding and waymarking, and ensure ongoing maintenance and adaptation as areas develop.

Quality active travel routes must be planned and built systematically, not on an ad hoc or opportunistic basis. This will ensure Scotland realises the considerable benefits of making walking, wheeling, and cycling viable and attractive travel options. The Active Freeway network will be a strategic asset for the country and must be managed as such, just as the trunk road and rail networks already are. What is needed is the vision, political commitment, and financial backing to design and build a national network that will transform the opportunities for people to move around without a car. High quality, direct active travel routes connecting communities will unlock pent-up demand. Active journeys that were previously considered unattractive will become the most desirable way to travel for many people, by creating convenient local routes that also connect into a wider network for access to designations further afield. In rural areas, Active Freeways will provide local people with safe options for travelling around and between communities without a car, as well as opportunities for increased tourism. Walking, wheeling and cycling will become inviting ways to travel for all ages and abilities, and not just the preserve of enthusiasts. The rise in cycling after installation of pop-up cycle lanes in many cities in Scotland and across Europe in 2020 and 2021 has clearly demonstrated the pent-up demand for safe cycling infrastructure.³

The network of Active Freeways must be a strategic asset managed by the Scottish Government through Transport Scotland, but working in combination with Regional Transport Partnerships, Local Authorities, and local initiatives to develop and build the network. To ensure that people can rely on the network, the Scottish Government needs to work with experts in the sector to establish:

- Design guidance and minimum standards – such as width and surfacing for off-road paths (based on and referencing *Cycling by Design*), maximum traffic speeds and volume for on-road sections, and signage, branding and waymarking;⁴
- A legal basis for the Active Freeway network so it is a core part of Scotland’s transport infrastructure;
- Transport Scotland as the responsible body for delivery of the network, similar to its existing remits for road and rail.

The current proposal for *Active Freeways* (“Intervention 1” in the *Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 – Phase 1 Recommendations*) is an excellent start, but the Active Freeways programme needs to be broader and more ambitious in scope.⁵ In concert with Intervention 1, Scottish Ministers should instruct Transport Scotland to start the strategic planning for the whole network and develop an intervention programme for rural areas so that they will also benefit from the opportunities provided by Active Freeways. No area of Scotland should be left behind as we provide a step change to the mobility opportunities for all ages and abilities to move around their communities.

A close-up photograph of a traffic light against a blue sky with light clouds. The traffic light has three circular lenses. The top lens is dark. The middle lens on the left shows a glowing green pedestrian symbol. The right lens shows a glowing green bicycle symbol. A white box with a blue number '2' is in the top right corner. A blue banner with white text is at the bottom left, and a blue diagonal striped pattern is at the bottom left and top right.

2

**SUPPORTING
EXISTING
POLICY AND
COMMITMENTS**

SUPPORTING EXISTING POLICY AND COMMITMENTS

In 2014, the Scottish Government set out its vision for active travel in Scotland in 2030 which supports their strategic objectives to:

- Cut carbon emissions and other pollution
- Deliver liveable, more pleasant communities
- Provide better health and safer travel for all
- Reduce inequalities
- Support delivery of sustainable economic growth

To deliver on its plans, the Government envisions an active travel network that “ensures continuity of routes and linking of key destinations, encouraging people to travel safely on foot or by bicycle within and between settlements.” This vision contains several important elements:

“ Comprehensive active travel networks are available for walking and cycling. The walking network is much improved, with better maintenance and greater provision, particularly in rural areas. A comprehensive cycling network has been created, made up of on road segregated facilities, well signed quiet minor roads with reduced speed and off road paths.

[...]

Together the networks have increased opportunities for active travel, leisure and recreational cycling.

[...]

Pedestrian and cycle ways are maintained to a fit-for-purpose standard for users of all abilities and given equal priority to carriageways.

[...]

Implementation is consistent across the whole of Scotland through such measures as signposting, route marketing, mapping, accessible information, so that networks are easily understood for residents, visitors and tourists.

[...]

Safer rural routes promote both everyday active travel and recreational and sport cycling, with the associated economic benefits from having a network that makes Scotland a great destination for walking and cycling tourism. ”

—The Scottish Government: A Long-Term Vision For Active Travel In Scotland 2030 6

Our proposal would address all of these issues. The Active Freeway network will allow the Scottish Government to put its vision into practice, and realise its ambitions for Scotland in 2030 to be a place “shaped around people, with walking or cycling the most popular choice for shorter everyday journeys.”

In 2010, the Scottish Government also set out a vision that, “By 2020, 10% of all journeys taken in Scotland will be by bike.”⁷ This was later revised to “10% of everyday journeys to be made by bike, by 2020.”⁸ Unfortunately, neither goal was achieved, which is sadly unsurprising given the lack of extensive development and construction of infrastructure to provide safe and convenient active travel routes. The latest Scottish Transport Statistics show that only 1% of all journeys and 3% of commutes in 2019 were made by bicycle.⁹ Even though this wasn’t achieved by 2020, the Government’s ambition to significantly raise cycling rates remains, and based on international experience it is hard to imagine that this will happen without the development of comprehensive infrastructure such as a network of Active Freeways.¹⁰

Looking at the bigger picture, Scotland has committed to addressing the Climate Emergency through a commitment to ‘net zero’ by 2045, with a 75% emissions reduction by 2030; all Government policy must be developed within this framework. Transport is a particular challenge, currently the biggest emitting sector by far, responsible for 35.6% of all Scotland’s emissions.¹¹ Recognising the scale of the issue, the Scottish Government has committed to reducing car kilometres by 20% by 2032, and ensuring “sustainable transport will be the instinctive first choice for people.” They will reduce reliance on cars in Scotland and create “a society which has embraced more walking, wheeling, cycling, public transport and shared transport options.”

Securing a green recovery on a path to net zero specifically singles out the predominance of car use and its impact on emissions as an issue that must be tackled – not just through technological advances, but through changing people’s behaviour. Recent research confirms that increasing active travel is far more important than electric vehicles in addressing the climate crisis in an appropriate time scale.¹² The Scottish Government has therefore pledged to de-prioritise single-occupancy car use and support a shift to active travel, including by accepting the Committee on Climate Change’s recommendation to invest in active travel infrastructure.

“ [It is critical] for climate policies to be firmly embedded within the transport system to enable people to access jobs, services and opportunities with less need to travel or, when they do, to have easily-accessible sustainable options. ”

—*The Scottish Government: Securing a green recovery on a path to net zero*

Rapid implementation of the Active Freeways programme would provide the fundamental change that Scotland’s transport system needs, firmly embedding zero carbon options for people across the country, including walking, wheeling and cycling links from public transport hubs. A significant investment in active travel infrastructure across the country is a crucial element for Scotland to meet its climate obligations, reduce inequalities, and improve people’s health.



CASE STUDY: FLANDERS, BELGIUM: FIETSSNELWEGEN

WHAT:

A network of cycle highways connecting towns and cities in Flanders, allowing easy travel to work, schools, railway stations, and other points of interest.

SIZE:

2,400km (1,400km currently operational) – 110 numbered routes.

WHO:

Design and delivery of the Fietssnelwegen network was achieved through cooperation between the five Flemish provinces, collaboration with and funding for municipalities, and working with other partners as needed.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

The Fietssnelwegen network allows the 6.5 million people in the region to travel medium and long distances by active travel, using direct routes that avoid traffic. It connects with local active travel routes in built up areas, providing convenient access and also includes indirect, quieter, and scenic alternative routes.

An important element of the network is a strong branding element with clear and consistent signage. This ensures that “at every moment and on every part of the cycle highway [a person] is capable to intuitively recognise and use the cycle highway to achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction.”¹³ A website provides an interactive map with a location finder and all routes, and information on each one, including length and connections to other routes.¹⁴



3

THE NEED FOR THE NETWORK

THE NEED FOR THE NETWORK

The majority of journeys in Scotland – 54% – are under 3 miles. Half of these short journeys are made by car or van, and only 2% by bike.¹⁵ Yet these are distances that are easy to complete by active travel modes for many, provided safe and convenient infrastructure is in place. This represents a huge opportunity to easily increase sustainable travel in Scotland by providing a network that makes these journeys attractive. The opportunity is there, and the benefits will be significant.

INSPIRATION

Capitalising on existing projects and addressing local gaps and problematic sections to make early progress will build momentum and raise expectations. By inspiring people with the vision and initial projects of Active Freeways, new ideas will be generated, and attitudes to travel will start to shift. It is through action and changes that impact people's lives that we will set in motion what the Scottish Government recognises as vitally important: "embedding behaviour change."¹⁶

IMPROVING PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

The Scottish Government has recognised that an increasing reliance on cars has led to the population as a whole becoming less active. The Preventing Overweight and Obesity in Scotland Strategy states that changing the means of everyday travel to walking and cycling is one of the most effective ways of ensuring people get their required 30 minutes per day of moderate exercise.¹⁷ Research has shown that this level of activity can reduce heart and circulatory disease risk by up to 35%, and the risk of early death by 30%.¹⁸ Walking, wheeling, and cycling is widely recognised as having significant benefits for mental health and general wellbeing, too. Benefits even include long-term ones such as a reduced risk of dementia.¹⁹

“ The potential benefits of physical activity to health are huge. If a

medication existed which had a similar effect, it would be regarded as a 'wonder drug' or 'miracle cure'. ”

— Sir Liam Donaldson, Chief Medical Officer for England (2010)²⁰

A recent study from the University of Edinburgh and the Glasgow Centre for Population Health found that active travel has resulted in substantial health and economic benefits for Scotland.²¹ It calculated that, considering only commuting trips and using extremely conservative assumptions, the economic value of active commuting over the past 10 years was likely over £5 billion. This was the result of preventing almost 200 deaths a year, but does not include the significant economic value that accrued from improved health and a reduction in accidents.

And of course there are far more short, local trips people walk, wheel, and cycle for other than the daily commute. So the actual value of active travel to Scotland's economy over the past 10 years will have been substantially higher. The scale of the economic benefit of active travel is not surprising – previous Transform Scotland research, using the same tool as this study, found that modest increases in Scottish cycling rates would result in an economic benefit of £1–£4 billion per year.²² As significant as these figures are, the number of people commuting by walking or cycling over the study period was only 14% of total commutes. Although not directly comparable figures, the latest Scottish

Transport Statistics indicate that active commuting levels have not shifted much from the study period, being about 15% in 2019.²³ This gives an indication of the immense economic value of developing Active Freeways. Doing so and achieving the significant gains in active travel rates that the Scottish Government has committed to would result in annual savings of billions of pounds currently lost to the economy through poor health, injury, and death. Of course, it would not only result in a population-level benefit: the substantial increase in active travel will also prevent hundreds of individual tragedies.

BENEFITING ALL OF SCOTLAND

The study discussed above also found that active commuting was significantly higher in urban than in rural areas: 25% in the main cities compared with a 14% average for the country. This pattern is confirmed by the most recent Scottish Transport Statistics which show a 20% active commute rate in urban areas compared with 15% in rural ones.²⁴ Developing the Active Freeway network as a strategic asset for the whole country will ensure that it is not only urban areas that will benefit from the opportunity to walk, wheel, and cycle for everyday journeys and when on holiday. To see the necessary step change in travel opportunities across the country, we don't just need 'more' cycling and walking routes, but a network with an overall strategy and regulation. Rural areas do not have the same population density as urban ones, but there are still many opportunities for shorter and local journeys. The health, economic, inclusion, and recreational benefits should not be limited to urban Scotland. Visiting neighbours, social and community events, going to local shops, and recreation and tourism activities can all be transformed into attractive active journeys if there are options other than, at best, a narrow verge alongside a 40–60mph road.

UNLOCKED POTENTIAL

There are potential Active Freeway projects across the country, in both urban and rural areas, where some of the groundwork has already been done. Often local groups have established where key routes should go and are at varying stages of feasibility studies. With the commitment and funding the Active Freeways programme would provide, these projects can be accelerated and help to quickly build out the Network. For instance, the proposed Skye Cycle Network could be implemented using former main roads and tracks connected by new infrastructure.²⁵ The local expertise and infrastructure can be unlocked and transform both local travel and tourism opportunities, and rapidly add a large area of the Highlands & Islands to the network of Active Freeways. At a national level, there are also projects that will be useful in developing the Active Freeways programme. The 'National Walking and Cycling Network' being developed by NatureScot, Scottish Canals and Sustrans Scotland as part of NPF3 will be a useful component which builds on existing longer-distance and leisure routes.²⁶ And the Ramblers Scotland 'Mapping Scotland's Paths' project is creating a free database of most paths in Scotland.²⁷ This database can be used to identify existing routes as well as gaps, and will help to promote the Active Freeway network, increasing use as the project develops and people become more aware of the opportunities.

Studies have found that a lack of alternatives to the car in rural areas leads to social exclusion, particularly amongst low-income households and young people, and hindered their ability to participate in activities, shop, and find jobs.²⁸ Communities in rural areas are often dispersed along such roads, and

enabling easy and safe point-to-point active journeys along them will result in massive quality of life improvements. Furthermore, it is rural areas that will be key to making "Scotland a great destination for walking and cycling tourism."²⁹

RELIABILITY AND PREDICTABILITY

For walking, wheeling, and cycling to be a default option, people need confidence that they will be able to get where they want to go safely and comfortably without needing to plan ahead. Going somewhere new by car does not usually require research into whether there are roads that can be safely driven on to get there. It is assumed there will be, and a driver can simply plan their route based on a map (whether this is done automatically or manually). This is not true for active travel. If going somewhere new, especially outside of city centres, it is often necessary to confirm that there is a safe and pleasant way to do so. Worse, there is no standard or easy way to do this, as many popular apps do not reliably provide the most convenient and safest route for walking, wheeling or cycling, or give any indication as to whether there is a safe path or dangerous traffic.

By creating the Active Freeway network – with its local and regional routes linked into longer-distance paths and clear signage – accessing a destination by active means will be as straightforward as driving there. From any point in Scotland, and whether it's a new journey or one that has been taken many times, the person travelling will have confidence that they can walk, wheel, or cycle. As well as safe, high quality paths, consistent waymarking and coherent branding are vital to ensure navigation is easy, and this is discussed in detail below. To make "walking or cycling the most popular choice for shorter everyday journeys," it is critical that people don't

have to think twice about travelling by these means.³⁰ The included case studies of extensive active travel networks in Europe show what this could look like.

QUALITY

Transport Scotland has already developed the best practice *Cycling by Design* reference document, which provides an excellent set of guidance and technical standards.³¹ There is also a national guide to path grading which can help set standards for promotion of paths.³² These should be the starting point for a set of minimum standards for Active Freeway routes, which should be developed through consultation with walking, wheeling, and cycling groups. Using the wealth of existing expertise in active travel infrastructure design will ensure the network is of high quality.



4

**A STRATEGIC
ASSET**

A STRATEGIC ASSET



The Active Freeway network must be approached as any other strategically important transport asset would be. It cannot be a single, one-off project or programme. The Scottish Government must consider the best way to deliver and then manage the network so that it becomes a core part of the nation's infrastructure.

FUNDING

Sustrans Scotland has calculated that building a network of active travel routes connecting every town of 10,000 or more residents would cost £2–£3 billion.³³ The Active Freeway network will connect even more communities, and includes local rural connections, but this figure gives a good indication as to the scale of investment that is needed.³⁴ This would of course be over several years, but is important to make significant progress as quickly as possible. To put the cost in context, the current project to create a fully dualled A96 will cost at least £3 billion, is for the benefit of a small minority of Scotland's population (an average of 11,674 vehicles per day, or the equivalent of 0.2% of the people in Scotland).³⁵ In contrast, building Active Freeways will transform the opportunities for everyday journeys for nearly the entire Scottish population.

As well as construction, the network will need funding for maintenance in the same way that the road network requires annual maintenance. For both construction and maintenance, there will likely be a mix of trunk routes that are the responsibility of central government and local routes that are the responsibility of local authorities and Regional Transport Partnerships.

When designing the network of Active Freeways, the Government must consider where both construction and maintenance funding will be allocated from, and who will be responsible for delivering which parts.

Funding for behaviour change initiatives must also be maintained, as they provide support to overcome social and financial barriers to active travel, ensuring all parts of society are included. Backing up this work with high quality active travel routes will increase its effectiveness. It is much easier to convince people to try something new if what they are trying is attractive and safe.

BUILDING RIGHT

The current requirements and procedures around road orders that are needed to build active travel infrastructure introduce a significant amount of inefficiency. This must be addressed if we are to build the Active Freeway network at the pace that is needed. Too often the current process is used by individuals or small groups of people to introduce spurious objections which will never succeed, but can hold up projects for years. For instance, in a scheme to build a city centre cycling connection Edinburgh, the TRO and RSO process alone caused a delay of two years.³⁶ The current system is too far out of balance, and prevents efficient implementation of active travel improvements that will enhance the lives of the majority. The months and years currently needed to build single sections of a route would destroy the ambition of building the national network that Scotland needs. As a matter of urgency, the Scottish Government must streamline the process around road orders, and the more efficient process in England and Wales could provide inspiration for a fit-for-purpose process in Scotland.

Transport links need to take a route that is as convenient to their users as possible (in terms of distance, travel time, and ease of use). In the case of major transport projects, this often involves purchasing land either through voluntary agreements or through legal tools such as Compulsory Purchase Orders. It can also require engineering such as significant earthworks to reduce gradients. Designing and building Active Freeways needs to be approached from the same perspective. Of course costs, environmental impacts, and land take should not be increased unnecessarily. But all legal tools and engineering approaches that are part of major transport infrastructure projects should be used to ensure the Network provides convenient and direct routes. Currently, even simple routes which command popular support can be delayed for years due to the difficulties in identifying suitable options.

ENGAGEMENT

Developing the Active Freeways programme will be an opportunity for people across Scotland to address the frustrations they have when trying to undertake everyday journeys. It is a chance to gain from the wealth of local knowledge that individuals, community groups, and walking and cycling campaigns have built up over years. As Transport Scotland and public bodies develop the Network, including local expertise will result in the best routes and generate enthusiasm and support. Councillors and MSPs should be involved in the process, too, as they will have heard from constituents about the problem areas for active travel over many years.

Path Orders under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 are another tool which can be used where landowners refuse permission for new paths to be created. The fact that only a handful have ever been considered since 2003 demonstrates the need for full political support and leadership for the Network. There will also be many Active Freeway routes that require existing road space to be reallocated, reducing the space for motor vehicles. This can be necessary both to provide the space for active travel and to reduce traffic speeds. Whilst local concerns should be considered, strong leadership will be important here as well to make sure the process is not derailed by a vocal minority. Experience from European comparator cities shows that visionary political leadership led to investment, and once the changes were in place, there was great support for further investment, as detailed in Transform Scotland's report *Civilising the Streets*. Most recently, Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo built transformational active travel infrastructure in her first term and then successfully staked her 2020 re-election campaign on further increasing walking and cycling opportunities.³⁷ Building infrastructure like the Active Freeway network will lead to improvements in people's day-to-day life: through increased safety, less car congestion, recreation opportunities, and air quality.³⁸

SIGNAGE

As well as the physical surfaces, signage and waymarking are crucial components of transport routes. The Active Freeways programme should build on the National Cycle Network signage and provide route numbers, key destinations, distances, and directions in a similar way to the road network. For active travel to be convenient and the default choice even in unfamiliar areas, people need confidence that they will be able to find the way to their destination. This signage should be designed with a large variety of network users in mind and accommodate varying abilities, including users with sensory or learning disabilities. There is significant experience in Europe with signage standards, branding, and their importance to the network.

The Active Freeways programme should draw on the expertise of the cycle networks in Flanders (Belgium), North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany), and the Cycle Highway Manual from the European Interreg programme.^{39, 40, 41}

“ A route can only be said to have continuity if its users are able to get to a selected destination by following the cycle signs along the route. ”⁴²

Signage must be considered as a key part of a route and so included in development of the minimum standards, as well as being part of the maintenance regime once routes are built.



CASE STUDY: NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA, GERMANY: RADVERKEHRSNETZ NRW

WHAT:

A comprehensive network of bicycle-friendly routes between all communities in the Federal State of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), connecting all population centres with one another and with railway stations, by the shortest and most direct routes.

SIZE:

29,500km.

WHO:

The network was designed by the NRW government in collaboration with the 427 communities in the state. The NRW government funded all design and consultancy fees, as well as paying for production and installation of signage across the network and funding path improvements.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

The Radverkehrsnetz NRW prioritises direct and safe connections between town and city centres and destinations of interest such as railway stations and tourist attractions. Routes are on cycle paths or quiet streets that might not allow the fast cycling speeds,

but are attractive options to a wide range of the 18 million people in Germany's most populous state. An online route planner is also available that allows mapping point-to-point routes, as well as discovering themed and named scenic tourist routes. The key realisation in the creation of the Radverkehrsnetz NRW was that cycle route signage in different parts of the state were of varying quality and condition. A lack of high quality, consistent signage that people could rely on to get directions at key junctions prevented many people from using the paths and quiet roads that existed. A unified signposting system was developed which had clear principles for where signs should be placed, and what information they contained. Importantly, for the first time in Germany, the Radverkehrsnetz NRW signposts were given the same legal status as signposting for motor vehicles. This meant that once signs are installed, the respective roads authority is responsible for them, and by law must replace and repair missing and damaged signposts, regularly clean and inspect them, keep them clear of vegetation, and updating them as necessary. The NRW government also established a telephone hotline and website for reporting damaged signs, each of which has a unique number.⁴³

STATUS

The Active Freeway network cannot simply be a collection of ad hoc routes, it must be a recognised piece of transport infrastructure like the trunk road network. This would ensure it has an asset management strategy with regular maintenance, repair, and evolution as settlements, housing, and local amenities change. Transport Scotland's 'Major Projects' directorate is not fit for the purpose of developing and implementing a strategic active transport network, with its remit exclusively limited to the development and delivery of trunk roads projects. Therefore, Scottish Ministers should instruct Transport Scotland to reorganise its 'Major Projects' directorate into 'Strategic Projects' with a specific responsibility for designing,

delivering, and maintaining the Active Freeway network, and a duty to protect routes and promote their use.

Once work is underway, the Scottish Government should also consider if the network will require further legal status in the future. Further evaluation of both the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 and the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 will be required in order to understand what aspects of these legislative approaches might be beneficial.^{44, 45} Ministers should work with industry and third sector experts to determine whether legislation is needed to support the Active Freeway network in the long-term, and bring forward appropriate legislation if so.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Creating a nationwide, strategic active travel asset will deliver a high return on investment. In terms of economic value, the benefit-to-cost ratio of active travel infrastructure is an order of magnitude higher than that for motorised transport. Whilst major road projects often struggle to reach a BCR of 1:1, the average for walking and cycling projects in the UK is 19:1, meaning that for every pound spent, £19 is returned to the economy.⁴⁶ Active travel infrastructure is both less expensive to build, and generates higher economic returns. This is partly because it enables people to get around easily, but active travel's other benefits are economically beneficial too:^{47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52}

HEALTH:

results in hundreds of millions of pounds in savings to the NHS

SAFETY:

reduced economic loss due to accidents

URBAN ENVIRONMENT:

public realm improvements to prioritise people over cars can generate up to 40% increase in retail earnings and 17% decrease in retail vacancy

SOCIAL INCLUSION:

60% of people in the lowest income group and 25%–50% of people in the middle income groups have no access to a car – providing active travel infrastructure allows them to better participate in the economy

MANUFACTURING, RETAIL AND TOURISM:

people who walk and cycle to shops spend up to 40% more than those who drive; even at its current low levels cycling contributed up to £775 million to the Scottish economy in 2015; walking tourism alone contributes £1.26 billion per year to the economy, mainly in rural areas; and the value of recreation by Scottish residents is estimated at £2.6 billion annually

It's important to note that those who continue to drive stand to benefit too. A study in the Netherlands concluded that Active Freeways there could result in savings of €40 million per year through reducing congestion. Reducing delays for the motor traffic that is unavoidable will result in further economic benefits from building Active Freeways. The Active Freeway network will also be a boon for local civil engineering and create hundreds of 'green jobs' in communities across Scotland.⁵³ Active travel infrastructure construction makes use of local firms and local authority teams. The kind of investment required to build the Active Travel Network results in much larger local multiplier effects than mega-projects like motorways and bridges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To provide opportunity and jobs across Scotland, meet their climate change obligations, and realise their own vision for active travel in Scotland in 2030, Scottish Ministers must:

- 1.** Show strong leadership on active travel through setting out an ambitious and inspiring vision for the Active Freeways programme, and giving it the backing and momentum to see quick progress that will benefit the whole country.
- 2.** Instruct Transport Scotland to work in partnership with and draw on the extensive experience of third sector active travel organisations (particularly Sustrans) and local authorities to specify a standard and help deliver a high quality, comprehensive Active Freeway network that:
 - Provides safe connections between cities and outlying settlements and connections between towns and villages that share amenities and services, where distances could be easily covered by walking, wheeling or cycling.
 - Includes alternative scenic 'tourist' routes where appropriate, particularly 'quiet road' sections and incomplete routes in the National Cycle Network.
 - Is a single 'mobility product' recognised by locals and visitors alike (as with ScotRail).
 - Uses consistent, unified signage, branding, and waymarking across the country so it is easy to travel to a destination with certainty and ease.
 - Work towards including the network in popular mapping and route planning applications.
- 3.** Instruct Transport Scotland to reorganise its 'Major Projects' directorate into 'Strategic Projects' with specific responsibility for leading the partnerships needed to realise the strategic planning, design, delivery, and maintenance of an Active Freeway network, ensuring the attention and importance given to it is on par with Transport Scotland's existing responsibilities for rail and road.
- 4.** Instruct Transport Scotland to work closely with third sector, local and regional partners in delivering Active Freeways, while using its strategic remit and established funding mechanisms to ensure consistent delivery across the country.
- 5.** Streamline the process around road orders for implementing active travel infrastructure, to prevent unnecessary delays in the delivery of Active Freeways.
- 6.** Once development and delivery is underway, work with stakeholders and third sector experts to determine whether legislation is needed to support the Active Freeway network in the long-term, and bring forward appropriate legislation if required.

CONCLUSION



The Active Freeways programme represents an opportunity to improve the lives and everyday experiences of millions of people across Scotland. Now is the time to commit to a project of this scale and strategic importance. Active Freeways present the opportunity of developing the necessary infrastructure that will allow people to make short and medium distance trips by walking, wheeling and cycling, with the potential of connecting all of Scotland by safe active travel infrastructure in the future.

For the sake of people's health, social inclusion, the economy, and the climate, we cannot afford to wait any longer. The Active Freeways programme will deliver on the Scottish Government's commitment in its co-operation agreement with the Scottish Green Party, as well as its existing vision for active travel in 2030. It will facilitate the shifts in our approach to transport which are necessary to meet Scotland's climate commitments.

The time for experimentation and piecemeal development of active travel routes is over. We have the experience, evidence, and expertise to know what needs to be done. The Scottish Government should be commended for committing to the establishment of a national Active Freeway network. Building it right and with urgency will provide Scotland with a vital new transport asset which will invigorate the country and transform the lives of people all over the nation.

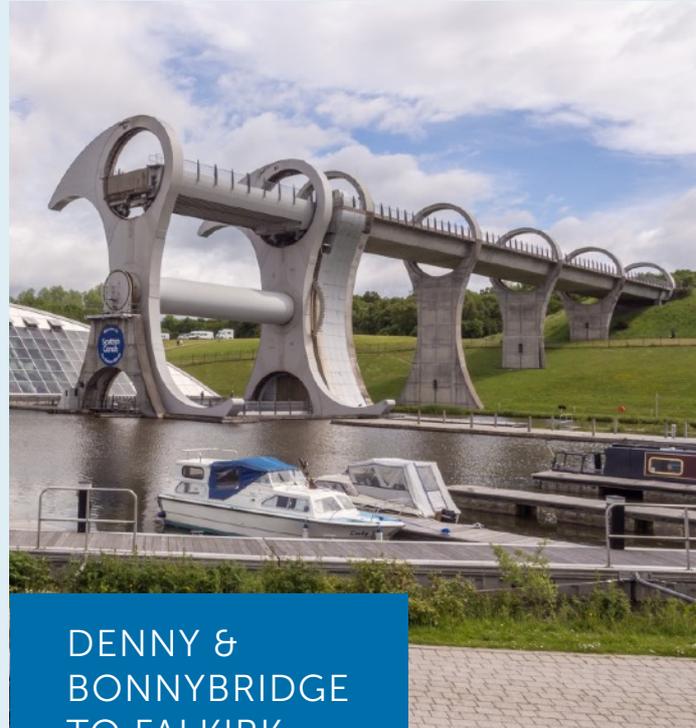
SCOTTISH INFRASTRUCTURE WITH ACTIVE FREEWAY POTENTIAL



Photo by Chris Scott

SHAWFAIR & DANDERHALL TO LASSWADE, LOANHEAD, AND ROSLIN

A high quality cycle route has been constructed from the communities of Shawfair and Danderhall towards Lasswade, Loanhead, and Roslin in Midlothian. At the Shawfair end, this includes a segregated path along the road in a new development before crossing fields along the route of a disused railway line. The route has been planned to complement planned housing developments, and will mean that as the community along the route expands they will have convenient and attractive walking, wheeling, and cycling connections to local amenities including shops, schools, and the train station. The path carries on off-road under the Edinburgh bypass, through the centre of Loanhead, and on to Roslin. Convenient routes such as this will be important components of the Active Freeway network, providing easy options for local journeys, as well as forming a section of medium- and long-distance routes.



DENNY & BONNYBRIDGE TO FALKIRK

Falkirk Council is in the process of linking Denny and Bonnybridge to Falkirk via the Falkirk Wheel and the Forth and Union Canal with a new walking, wheeling and cycling link. This will involve building 5.5km of paths including a bridge over the M876, and repairs to another bridge and a viaduct. The result will be a high quality, convenient, and direct link between the communities allowing easy access to shops, jobs, attractions, the railway station, and the wider active travel network in central Scotland. This will provide immediate opportunities to the residents of Denny and Bonnybridge, and in the future can be a key part of the Active Freeway network in this part of the country.

NOTES



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