



Mark Isherwood MS  
Chair  
Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee  
Senedd Cymru  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1NA

20 May 2025

Dear Chair

## ACTIVE TRAVEL

In advance of the evidence session with the Committee on 5 June about Active Travel in Wales, I thought it would be useful to provide some context and briefly set out how we have responded to the recommendations in the Auditor General's report on the subject.

When we refer to active travel, we mean walking, wheeling and cycling as modes of transport. Together with public transport, these modes are fundamental building blocks of our transport system that help make it equitable, healthy and environmentally sustainable. This is reflected in 'Llywbr Newydd' and many other government policies and strategies. Whilst walking is the oldest transport mode, and cycling for transport used to be commonplace, both modes had for decades been largely disregarded in transport policy, whilst our towns and cities were comprehensively shaped by the expansion of car use. As a result, even where we have existing infrastructure such as our footways, these are disjointed, and too often not accessible or obstructed. Against this backdrop, it is unsurprising that the investment in improving active travel infrastructure over the last six years to start to redress this imbalance has not yet had a transformative impact.

Public investment in Active Travel was stepped up with the introduction of the Active Travel Fund in 2018, and in recent years the amount allocated to active modes represents around 5% of the transport budget. The £218 million expenditure over the last six years represents around £70 per head of population. Whilst current levels of investment are significant, they

are still small in view of the scale of investment needed to realise local authorities' network plans and create coherent improvements that enable safe and convenient end-to-end journeys.

Aside from the available budget, local capacity to deliver schemes is another important factor in respect of making faster progress. Few local authorities have the capacity to deliver ambitious programmes, consisting of quick, small improvements as well as major schemes. Much of our focus has been on building capacity and capability within Transport for Wales to help address this and to support local authorities and develop resources, training and tools, to avoid duplication and effort.

The Auditor General's report notes a lack of available data but suggests that active travel usage data from the National Survey for Wales indicates there has not been an increase and that the latest walking rates from 2022-23 were lower than before the pandemic. The backdrop to this is a change in travel and working patterns because of the Covid emergency, which has affected all transport modes. Bus patronage and weekday rail use were hugely impacted and have not returned to pre-pandemic levels. We recognise however that a lack of reliable, high quality national data on transport use in Wales has been limiting our ability to set realistic targets, track progress and evaluate, not just on active travel but for all modes. This is now changing – with the roll-out of our first Wales National Travel Survey, we will start to build up a picture of travel use patterns and over time be able to measure change and see trends.

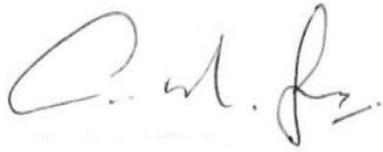
I would also like to use this opportunity to provide you with an update on the Welsh Government's response to the ten recommendations made by Audit Wales ahead of the meeting.

We have taken action in response to all the recommendations and made significant progress relating to data collection and monitoring. In addition to the roll-out of the Wales National Travel Survey, which paves the way for progress on Recommendations 1, 2 and 3, in February this year Transport for Wales published data against the national Active Travel Monitoring Framework indicators. In relation to Recommendation 4, the local Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit was issued this month after feedback from local authorities and consideration of current reporting practices. We will publish an annual report shortly and our review of the Active Travel Act during the summer, which relates to Recommendations 5 and 10 respectively. Our approach to the Auditor's recommendations about the longer-term allocation and administration of grant funding (Recommendations 6 and 8) is impacted by wider work we are undertaking to move away from a large number of single purpose grants for local authorities to a unified regional grant funding model. Finally, we have already completed work on Recommendations 7 and 9 which cover more immediate changes to grant processes.

As I have already indicated, for logistical reasons, colleagues and I are unable to join the session in person next month, but we look forward to joining a hybrid meeting of the Committee online.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Slade', written in a cursive style.

**Andrew Slade**  
Director General  
Economy, Energy and Transport