

# Active travel:

## Focus groups summary

February 2018

### Background

This report summarises the focus group findings conducted as part of the Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee's inquiry into Active Travel. Findings are based on five focus groups held across Wales, including Pembrokeshire, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Mountain Ash and Llanelli. Focus groups discussed perceived barriers to active travel, current good practice and areas for improvement.

Specific groups were sourced in order to obtain views from under 16s, over 60s, parents and disability groups

#### Focus groups participants

1. Amgueddfa Lechi Cymru. Blaenau Ffestiniog
2. Johnston Primary school. Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire
3. Pembrokeshire People First. Preseli, Pembrokeshire
4. Cynon Valley Church. Mountain Ash, Cynon Valley
5. Ysgol y Bynea, Llanelli

#### Discussion questions

Participants were asked to discuss the main barriers to cycling and walking and to consider what could be done to encourage people to cycle and walk more. Participants also took part in an interactive session to explain the work of the Committee, the inquiry and the Assembly.



## Focus group findings.

### What are the barriers to cycling and walking more?

Qualitative data analysis revealed nine overarching themes across the five focus groups.

#### Road safety

Participants agreed that road safety is the most significant barrier to becoming an active traveller. The speed and volume of traffic, along with fear of dangerous drivers, was cited as a concern by all focus groups. Many participants highlighted their concerns over dangerous drivers and perceived negative attitudes of drivers towards cyclists and walkers. Participants from rural areas agreed that rural roads are dangerous for cyclists and walkers as many rural roads, which link towns and villages, do not have pavements.

Road safety was the most significant concern for children and parents who took part. Young people discussed their parents' refusal to allow them to cycle to school due to concerns over road safety. Younger participants also felt that there aren't enough safe crossing areas, particularly in rural locations.

#### Johnston Primary School said:

- The roads are hard to cross because there are too many fast cars and there aren't enough zebra crossings for me to cross the busy roads
- Some people are really silly and drive their cars dangerously, there's too much road rage which doesn't make me feel safe when I'm on my bike
- The roads are really busy and the cars travel so fast, my parents don't want me to walk to school because they think it's too dangerous for me

**Cynon Valley Church said:**

- I rode my bike to work every day for seven years. But, it can be really dangerous. Lorries drive by so closely and I have been knocked off my bike by a car. Drivers just don't see cyclists
- When I'm out walking speeding cars are a bit of a concern to me, especially along the main road in Mountain Ash

**Ysgol y Bynea said:**

- The attitude of car drivers can be a barrier. Several pupils have been shouted at, sworn at and honked at when travelling on roads by bike.

## Infrastructure

Infrastructure was a key theme across all focus groups. Participants felt that, particularly in rural areas, cycle and walking routes were not effectively connected or not connected at all. Many participants described how they could not access a cycle or walking route from their home and needed to drive or take a bus to get to the nearest route. Participants also felt that there are not enough walking and cycling routes, particularly in rural areas.

Focus groups agreed that walking and cycling routes for leisure were of a very good standard, many made reference to coastal paths. However, all focus groups agreed that walking and cycling routes do not connect or do not exist, which hinders them from walking to work, shops or school.

**Johnston Primary School said:**

- There aren't many paths where I live. I can't walk along the main roads because there's only a grass banking and no pavement. There's not even a pavement outside my house

**Amgueddfa Lechi Cymru said:**

- The cycle paths aren't connected properly, especially in rural areas, there's no pavement, let alone cycle tracks, joining towns along country roads

**Pembrokeshire People First said:**

- There's a trampoline park in Haverfordwest which, if you haven't got a car, you have to walk half a mile along a road with no path to get to. It's the road that takes the lorries to Fishguard. It's the most scariest thing ever.
- Where I live there's no path and my house is right on the road, so we don't tend to do much walking. There's no footpaths in rural areas. There's not even footpaths between the bus stops

The Haverfordwest secondary schools, Sir Thomas Picton and Tasker Milward, are closing with the creation of a new 11-18 school. Johnston pupils will now attend Milford Comprehensive School from September 2018. The distance between Johnston and Milford is around 2 to 3 miles. A school bus won't be provided. Participants raised concerns over the busy road (especially during the times when children would be travelling to and from school) which does not have a pavement or cycle route.

**Johnston Primary School said:**

- By not having a path or cycle route for us when we go to our new comprehensive school, they are encouraging us to go in the car, going against the active travel scheme
- There won't be a bus for Milford and Haverfordwest children to get to school. That will have an impact on us especially when the road is too dangerous to walk or cycle on. How will we get to school?

## Time and distance

Participants from rural areas agreed that many destinations were simply too far away to walk to. Parents highlighted the difficulties of incorporating a school run into their work commute which would not allow for them to consider cycling or walking as an alternative.

**Johnston Primary School said:**

- My parents work and have to get to work in the morning so they drop me to school on the way so can't I walk or take my bike
- Some people live in the middle of nowhere and it's too far to walk to school. But some people who could and don't are just lazy.

**Amgueddfa Lechi Cymru said:**

- The distance to work makes it impossible for me to walk

**Pembrokeshire People First said:**

- The places that I want to walk to are too far away, like the town centre, shops and the doctors

**Cynon valley Church said:**

- It's so important, when you get older, to stay independent. When you live in the town you can walk anywhere. More walking paths would help. But the ability to walk somewhere depend on how far away you live from your local amenities, such as the shops or the doctor

## Weather

All participants cited poor weather conditions as a barrier to cycling or walking more. Focus groups discussed the dangers involved in cycling in heavy wind and rain. Several female participants agreed that they would never consider cycling or walking to work in the rain as the added time of showering afterwards was not practical.

**Johnston Primary School said:**

- Some people don't cycle because of the rain and bad weather. It can be really cold and if it's slippy you could fall onto the road
- The weather is terrible and if it's raining you don't want to walk because you get soaking wet and then are in your wet clothes all day on school

## Personal safety

A key theme throughout all focus groups was the fear of walking or cycling when dark and on poorly lit routes. Younger participants and parents highlighted their fears in relation to 'stranger danger', a term which was used several times to illustrate the children's perception of personal safety, especially if walking or cycling in the dark.

**Amgueddfa Lechi Cymru said:**

- Safety is an issue, especially walking somewhere on your own, I just don't feel safe

**Pembrokeshire People First said:**

- Street lighting is a big problem. I feel uncomfortable going out in the dark. I have trouble seeing in the day so night time is even worse and it scares me
- I like walking, but only when I've got a carer with me because I don't like walking on my own, it's a confidence thing

**Ysgol y Bynea said**

- Better lighting along walking and cycle routes is needed. We don't feel safe travelling on our own through poorly lit areas in the winter months.

## Unable

Participants with disabilities were very clear that cycling was not an option for them; many participants had disabilities which impaired their vision or balance. Several of the participants with disabilities also felt that being an active traveller wasn't an option for them as they were not confident to walk on their own.

Some of the older participants described how health problems, combined with living in rural and mountainous areas, meant that walking or cycling was not an option for them

**Pembrokeshire People First said:**

- I can't ride a bike because of my disabilities, I have balance issues which means I couldn't ride a bike even if I wanted to.
- I'm not confident but I want to get out more. When I'm walking at night, if I see a car coming I'll hide, that's my own personal demon.

**Cynon Valley Church said:**

- I don't own a bike and wouldn't want to ride. I'm just too old and I'm afraid of falling. I ride a static bike in the gym to keep fit but would never ride on the road

- There are too many big hills, if you come down you have to go back up!

Ysgol y Bynea said:

- In some situations, travelling actively involves navigating so many steep gradients that young people complained of being exhausted by the time they reached their destination.

## Pollution

The focus group from Mountain Ash discussed how traffic congestion and pollution was a significant barrier to cycling or walking more. Some participants described difficulty when breathing in fumes from large lorries.

Cynon Valley Church said:

- The fumes from the cars can get really bad, I wouldn't enjoy riding a bike as the fumes get on your lungs and makes it difficult to breath
- I can't walk along the main road at busy times, the pollution from the cars makes my eyes water and it can be difficult to breath

## Expense

Some focus groups discussed the cost of buying and maintaining a bike, along with the cost of repairing a broken bike. Younger participants discussed this in more detail explaining that some of them, and many children within the school, had a scooter rather than a bike as they were cheaper for parents to buy.

Amgueddfa Lechi Cymry said:

- Not everyone can buy a bike and it's a job to look after it too, it can be quite expensive, especially if it gets stolen.

## Route maintenance

Ysgol y Bynea was the only focus group which discussed route maintenance. The key issues raised included the upkeep of paths by removing litter, dog fouling and the upkeep of hedges. Participants also discussed uneven surfaces and impact that could have on safe cycling and walking.

## Focus group findings.

### What can be done to remove the main barriers to cycling and walking?

Qualitative data analysis revealed five overarching themes across the five focus groups.

#### Bike hire

All focus groups discussed accessible bike hire as a way to overcome barriers to cycling more and as a way to address the perceived cost in buying and maintaining a bike.

**Amgueddfa Iechi Cymru said:**

- What about a system where you can hire a bike for free, you could call it 'Beiciau Benthyc', like the 'Boris Bike' scheme?

**Johnston Primary School said:**

- I don't have a bike, I've got a scooter. Maybe schools and councils could hire or borrow bikes for kids to get to school.

#### Infrastructure

All focus groups discussed the need for more paths and improved connectivity, this issue was particularly prevalent in more rural areas. Participants, particularly younger participants, discussed their wish for designated routes which are separate to the road. Furthermore, improved transport links to enable people to get from their house to the walking routes was discussed., participants saw the potential to hire a bike once public transport had taken them to a bike hire station.

**Amgueddfa Lechi Cymru said:**

- A good cycling network. You could use a community bus to help people e.g. some special buses to travel during work hours e.g. 7am-8am and 5pm-6pm to connect the paths and collect people who don't want to cycle the whole way



**Johnston primary School said:**

- We should have separate cycle paths that aren't part of the main road. I'd feel safer on the roads if the cars weren't driving next to me.
- I would like it if we had more lollipop ladies to help us cross the busy roads and more zebra crossings
- We need pavement., Lots of our rural roads don't have pavements and you have to walk on the road. We could have bigger spaces between the road and the path with safer crossings and crossing patrols

**Pembrokeshire people First said:**

- People who live in rural villages need a cycle path that's not part of the road. Our infrastructure needs to be better connected so we can get from our house to town. I'd like to cycle around town but I couldn't cycle all the way there.

**Cynon Valley Church said:**

- It would be much safer if we had dedicated cycle paths that weren't part of the main road.

## Road safety

Parents and young people within the focus groups identified road safety as the most important issue to remedy in order to encourage people to cycle or walk more. All focus groups discussed how more road crossings, particularly in rural areas, slower speed limits and cycling safety classes at school could encourage more people to become active travellers.

**Johnston primary School said:**

- We get a week in school to learn about cycling safety, I don't think that's enough. I'd like help to get better at cycling. And schools should give out high-vis jackets to children who cycle to school as a prize for cycling
- The cycle paths are not obvious enough. We could have cats eyes along the path so cars could see us better

- I don't like walking on my own. Maybe parents and teachers could start a walk to school group. You would feel safer with your friends and a grown up to watch over you
- More lollypop ladies / gents to assist pupils crossing busy roads with more safe crossing places for pedestrians.

**Pembrokeshire people first said:**

- When I was a teenager I did a cycle safety course. I would like to ride a bike but I'd need help to learn how to cycle safely again

**Ysgol y Bynea said:**

- Bike maintenance lessons (several pupils were concerned about the roadworthiness of their bicycles.
- More walk / cycle to school schemes with designated meeting points so that pupils can travel actively together.
- High visibility vests should be made available to pupils who want to walk or cycle to school.
- More cycling safety lessons in school.
- Several pupils saw the need for some kind of buffer zone between pavements / cycle paths and the road, as they'd been in frightening situations where cars accidentally mounted pavements.

## Personal safety

When discussing how to remove barriers to personal safety when walking or cycling the idea which came out in every focus groups was improved route lighting.

**Amgueddfa Iechi Cymru said:**

- Put up lights on the path where possible. LED and environmentally friendly lights could be used
- Is there a way to ensure mobile phone signal on the paths, so that people feel safer?

**Johnston Primary School said:**

- We could have cats eyes along the walking and cycling routes, that way cars would be able to see us when we cycle to school.

## Route maintenance

Ysgol y Bynea suggested improved route maintenance with particular reference to clearing litter and dog fouling.

**Ysgol y Bynea said:**

- More dog poo bins. The current situation in the local area can make walking or cycling anywhere quite treacherous.
- More rubbish bins and rubbish clearing schemes. Cycling over empty cans and bottles can cause punctures, and high levels of rubbish make walking extremely unpleasant.

# Background and demographic of focus groups

## 1. Amgueddfa Lechi Cymru. Blaenau Ffestiniog

Of the 22 participants, 11 were female and 11 male. The group consisted of:

- Parents
- Young people
- Older people
- People with disabilities

Active and non-active travellers within the group:

4 members of the group regularly walk to work

2 members of the group occasionally cycle to work

5 members of the group own a bike

## 2. Johnston Primary school. Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire

Of the 27 participants, 13 were female and 14 male. 4 participants had learning disabilities and 2 were on the school council. The group consisted of::

- Young people
- People with disabilities

Active and non-active travellers within the group:

13 members of the group regularly walk to school

10 members of the group occasionally cycle to school

21 members of the group own a bike

19 members of the group go by car to school

## 3. Pembrokeshire People First. Preseli, Pembrokeshire

There were 9 participants. 5 female and 4 male, all of whom identified as disabled.

Active and non-active travellers within the group:

0 members of the group regularly walk

1 member of the group occasionally cycles

2 members of the group owned a bike

Because of discussion during the focus group, Pembrokeshire People First have decided to start a walking group to encourage walking and improve confidence

## 4. Cynon Valley Church. Mountain Ash, Cynon Valley

Of the 6 participants, 2 were female and 4 male. The group consisted of:

- Older people
- People with disabilities

Active and non-active travellers within the group:

0 Participants own a bike or cycle

5 Participants walk regularly

## 5. Ysgol y Bynea, Llanelli

33 pupils within the group. The group consisted of:

- Young people

Active and non-active travellers within the group:

33 pupils in the group

**14** claimed that they travelled to school by bike or on foot from time to time.

**31** stated they'd like to travel actively more often

This focus group was carried out by the school. A written account of the discussion was submitted