

Active Travel

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Sarah Wollaston Chair, Health and Social Care Committee, Chair, Liaison Committee (Commons), Chair, Liaison Committee

We have heard the environmental, health and economic cases for cycling. I fell in love on a tandem and I am still cycling 40 years later, so perhaps I should add that there is a case to be made for cycling's benefit to your love life, and for the sheer joy of cycling.

We need to focus on how to make cycling happen. We should look across the water to see how it is done elsewhere. There is a formula to it: it requires consistent, long-term political support both locally and nationally, and the right funding. We spend Â£7.50 per person on it, but other countries, where this works and cycling has been transformed, spend between Â£10 and Â£35 per person. Will the Minister therefore continue his predecessor's commitment to the ambition of doubling per-person investment in cycling? That is what we need.

When we have that level of spend, we can go to the next stage: ensuring that councils can employ people to develop expertise in the long term to put these schemes in place. We need consistent rather than stop-start funding. One of the problems with competitive bids for funding is that some areas do very well, but others, such as mine, lose out altogether. We need much more consistency, so that we do not focus, as others have said, just on cities or even towns, but look at rural areas.

We need to spend not just on infrastructure, but on services and maintenance for our network, and to join up the network. Disgracefully, in my area there is still a gap in national cycle route 2, partly because of the prejudice cyclists sometimes face. For example, a bridge, half of which was paid for with public money, is still blocked to cyclists unreasonably by its owner, South Devon Railway. That prevents a critical join-up. I would like councils to have the power to sweep some of this nonsense out of the way, because this has been going on for more than nine years.

We need to fix those problems and join the network up, and look at links with other infrastructure, such as the rail network. We must also look at traffic calming. There are 20 mph speed restrictions on 75% of the network in urban areas, and they work. We should look at that, and at introducing traffic calming in rural areas where we have quieter routes for cyclists.

We know what works. Will the Minister look at the evidence base and assure us that we will implement what we need if we are really to have a revolution and get people to enjoy the benefits of cycling?

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