



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Development Committee
<b>Date:</b>	21 February 2012
<b>Subject:</b>	Transport Issues
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Keith Sutherland, Planning and Transport Policy Manager

<b>1.</b>	<b>Relevant Background Information</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update Elected Members on the Department for Regional Development issues relating to current transport policy public consultation and ongoing/upcoming transport initiatives.
1.2	<u>Public consultation 'Building An Active Travel Future for Northern Ireland'</u> The Department for Regional Development (DRD) published an Active Travel Strategy for Northern Ireland called 'Building An Active Travel Future for Northern Ireland' for consultation in December 2011. An Active Travel Forum was established by DRD in March 2010 to oversee the development of the Active Travel Strategy.
1.3	The principal aim of the strategy is to support more sustainable and active transport choices such as walking and cycling, for shorter everyday journeys, linked to public transport for longer trips. DRD aim to build upon programmes that are already in place such as 'Safer Routes to Schools' and Car Sharing.
1.4	<u>Active Travel Demonstration Projects</u> The Active Travel Forum was also responsible for drawing up guidelines and criteria to assist in the selection of potential active travel demonstration projects in Northern Ireland. The aim of the demonstration projects is to support active travel and highlight how it can benefit people and communities through improvements to well being, quality of life, the environment and the economy. DRD intend to make capital funding available to local councils for active travel demonstration projects through a bid process.
1.5	<u>Belfast On The Move (BOTM) update</u> DRD Roads Service carried out consultations on proposals for Sustainable Transport Enabling Measures (STEM) in Belfast City Centre during August 2010. The STEM proposals are part of the overall 'Belfast On The Move' Transport Masterplan for Belfast City.

1.6	The main aim of the proposals is to reconfigure the city centre traffic management arrangements to encourage walking, cycling and public transport use and to reduce general traffic volumes. The Council generally supported the 'Belfast On The Move' proposals that sought to promote sustainable transport options for the city. The Council response did not support the longer-term proposal for the completion of the southern section of the City Centre Ring (Bankmore Link).
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<b>2.</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
2.1	<p>Public consultation 'Building An Active Travel Future for Northern Ireland'</p> <p>The key objectives of the draft strategy are to bring distances travelled and trips into alignment with UK averages by 2020 through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increases in the average distance walked;</li> <li>- Increases in the average distance cycled; and</li> <li>- Increasing the percentage of trips taken by cycling.</li> </ul> <p>There is also a specific objective relating to encouragement of active travel for journeys to schools.</p>
2.2	<p>The vision of the strategy is "to put walking and cycling at the heart of local transport, public health and well being and wider government strategies for the benefit of society, the environment and the economy as a whole". The aims are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improve the health and well being of individuals and communities through more active lifestyles, increase access to jobs, training and key services, particularly for those without access to a car;</li> <li>- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transport and support our climate change targets;</li> <li>- Reduce harmful emissions and improve local air quality;</li> <li>- Realise more attractive, inclusive, safer streets and communities and ensure greater access to local services and opportunities;</li> <li>- Promote enhanced mobility and independence for vulnerable groups such as older people and those with disabilities or limiting long term conditions.</li> </ul>
2.3	<p>The development of an Active Travel Strategy for Northern Ireland supports the Council's Transport Policy aspirations that seek to "<i>influence the development of transportation policies and proposals which improve connectivity and encourage modal shift away from the private car to more sustainable forms of travel, such as walking, cycling and public transport</i>". A proposed draft response to the consultation questions is attached in Appendix 1 for consideration by Committee as the basis of a suggested submission to DRD.</p>
2.4	<p><u>Active Travel Demonstration Projects</u></p> <p>The Department have invited applications from Councils in Northern Ireland to bid for capital resources to implement active travel demonstration projects in their area. The Department has indicated that a budget of approximately £3 million will be available over three years (2012 to 2015) to support between 3 and 6 projects. To be eligible the projects should demonstrate innovation in sustainable travel through the implementation of a programme of measures to increase active travel. The funding is for capital works and cannot be used for revenue or support costs. A cross departmental internal steering group has been established to consider possible bids which could meet the criteria outlined in the Active Travel Demonstration Projects Guidance document. A report outlining potential project submission will be brought before committee for consideration in March 2012.</p>

2.5	<p><b>Belfast On The Move (BOTM) Update</b></p> <p>The 'Belfast On The Move' Transport Masterplan implementation will result in significant changes to the road layout and traffic management arrangements for the city centre over the next two years. Work is already underway at the junctions of Grosvenor Road/Durham Street and Hope Street/Great Victoria Street having commenced in January 2012.</p>
2.6	<p>The Department for Regional Development have requested an opportunity to present an update on the 'Belfast On The Move' proposals to highlight the key components and ensure Members are fully aware of the proposed works programme.</p>

<b>3</b>	<b>Equality and Good Relations Considerations</b>
3.1	There are no Equality and Good Relations considerations attached to this report.

<b>4.</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
4.1	<p>It is recommended that Members:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Consider the proposed response to the Public consultation on 'Building An Active Travel Future for Northern Ireland' and if appropriate agree a response to be submitted to the Department for Regional Development by the 9<sup>th</sup> March 2012 consultation deadline.</li> <li>2. Note the opportunity for Council to make Active Travel Demonstration projects fund bid, in advance of more detailed report being bought back to Committee for consideration.</li> <li>3. Consider the request by DRD to present an update on BOTM and if appropriate agree a date to receive the presentation.</li> </ol>

<b>6.</b>	<b>Decision Tracking</b>
Submit response to DRD by 9 March 2012	
Timeframe:	March 2012
Reporting Officer:	Keith Sutherland

<b>7.</b>	<b>Key to Abbreviations</b>
DRD - Department for Regional Development	
BOTM – Belfast On The Move	
STEM – Sustainable Transport Enabling Measures	

<b>8.</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>
Appendix 1 Draft Response	

## Appendix 1

### **Draft Council response to Public consultation 'Building An Active Travel Future for Northern Ireland'**

#### **Q1. What are your views about the draft Active Travel Vision?**

The Council welcomes the draft Active Travel vision which supports the Council's Transport Policy aspirations that seek to *"influence the development of transportation policies and proposals which improve connectivity and encourage modal shift away from the private car to more sustainable forms of travel, such as walking, cycling and public transport"*.

There is a need to ensure that walking and cycling can make an appropriate contribution towards transportation across Northern Ireland and the commitment to place it at the heart of local transport, public health and other government strategies and policies is strongly supported by the Council.

The Council assume that the principal drivers for delivering this commitment will continue to be the Regional Development and Transportation Strategies. By way of example, the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) for Northern Ireland 2025 introduced Strategic Planning Guideline TRAN 4 with the objective of changing the regional travel culture and contributing to healthier lifestyles. Specifically, the RDS identifies a major transport challenge, in all parts of Northern Ireland and amongst all age groups, of reviving healthy habits of walking and cycling, particularly for relatively short journeys of less than two miles. The Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS) goes beyond this statement by identifying that walking constitutes the first and last stage of almost all journeys and is an important travel alternative in its own right to bus or car in urban areas. In addition, the RTS highlights that cycling and walking networks can be created that will be well-used, safe and enjoyable, and which will contribute to a healthy lifestyle and give access to services and transport interchanges.

The Council would be concerned that relatively little progress has been made in encouraging significant and sustained levels of modal shift towards active travel modes across Northern Ireland, particularly when compared to levels achieved in other regions of the United Kingdom and given the relatively high proportion of local journeys of 5 miles or less. Unfortunately, the 'Regional Transportation Strategy 2011 - A Sustainable Transport Future Public Consultation Document' confirms that although there has been some increase in the number of people walking in Belfast, the trend across the region is downward. Also, uptake data for cycling indicates that although the 2002 RTS had aimed for a 100% increase in cycling by 2005 and a 400% increase by 2015, the actual recorded increase was 56.7% in 2008. As this data has been expressed in percentage form, it is not immediately clear how this data translates into actual trip numbers.

The new Active Travel Strategy for Northern Ireland states that targets for improving active travel in Northern Ireland are long-term and aspirational with key objectives of increasing walking and cycling distance and increasing the percentage of cycling journeys. It is recommended that if the Department intends to deliver on its vision for the Strategy, then objectives need to be formed around relevant performance criteria and underpinned by appropriate levels of investment, promotion and communication. Furthermore, it is recommended that those organisations that have a role in delivering the active travel vision for Northern Ireland should have their

responsibilities clearly outlined so as they can contribute appropriately to the process.

**Q2. Given the low numbers of people currently walking and cycling in Northern Ireland, what contribution do you believe an active travel strategy can make to increasing those numbers?**

The Council recommends the active travel strategy sets ambitious targets for a growth in walking and cycling and a clear action plan to ensure they are met. The strategy should outline clear roles of other government departments and other partners. The Department should seek to secure investment at a realistic level to meet the target levels

The Council also considers that to make an appropriate contribution to increasing numbers of walking and cycling, the Northern Ireland Strategy and associated Action Plan should seek to mirror successful initiatives that have already been introduced in Great Britain, supported by appropriate financial resources that are deployed on an invest to save basis.

The Department for Transport (DfT) has provided detailed information regarding the activities that it has undertaken in order to reduce congestion, improve local environments and encourage healthier and safer lifestyles in Great Britain. Although many of these initiatives form part of a broader cross-government agenda for creating safer, greener communities, the Department's actions for fostering greater levels of cycling nonetheless include cycle safety, and maintenance training, cycle to work schemes for employees and cycle route planning. In addition, the Secretary for State for Transport has announced the introduction of a Local Sustainable Transport Fund in the order of £560 million covering the period 2011-2015. Projects eligible for funding include measures to promote walking and cycling, encourage modal shift, manage effectively demands on the road network, secure better traffic management, improve road safety and improve access and mobility for local communities. The fund also supports Bikeability training in each of the project years and the following projects in the first year in order to maintain momentum on sustainable travel whilst local authorities prepare their proposals: £13 million for Links to Schools, Bike Club and walking to school initiatives; £1 million for the Transport Direct cycle journey planner; and £250,000 to take forward business to business initiatives on alternatives to car-based travel. In addition, DfT is supporting the development of travel plans by employers which can include car sharing schemes, a commitment to improve cycling facilities, dedicated bus services or restricted car parking allocations and flexible-working practices such as remote access and video conferencing.

Smarter choices are techniques for influencing peoples' travel behaviour towards more sustainable options such as encouraging school, workplace and individualised travel planning. The 'Effects of Smarter Choice Programmes in the Sustainable Travel Towns Summary Report' indicates that, as a result of the initiative, car trips reduced and trips by more sustainable modes increased as follows: bus trips per person grew substantially by 10%~22%, the number of cycle trips per head grew substantially by 26%~30 and the number of walking trips per head grew substantially, by 10%~13%, compared to a national decline in similar towns.

In quantifying the success of this Smarter Choices programme, DfT concluded that the implied benefit-cost ratio of the achieved outcome, allowing only for congestion effects, is in the order of 4.5. Including environmental, consumer-benefit and wider health effects, recent Department for Transport modelling suggests that the overall benefit-cost ratio could be as high as 9.0.

**Q3. What do you see as the most important benefits of active travel at both an individual and collective level?**

The Council considers that a wide range of benefits arise from active travel in terms of economic, social, health and environmental benefits. The consequences of excessive car use and dependency are evident in urban areas in terms of congestion, community severance and poor air quality. An improved travel system for Belfast based on sustainable principles is a key priority for the Council and supports a number of the Council corporate plan strategic themes in particular “better care for Belfast’s environment – a clean, green city now and for the future”.

The Council also considers the promotion of active travel in Belfast could support sustainable economic development and improve access to jobs and services to all by offering a safe and reliable choice through walking and cycling. A recent survey indicated that 43% of households in Belfast do not have access to a car therefore are dependent on other means of transport.

From health and environment specific perspectives, Part III of the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 places a duty upon district councils to periodically review and assess air quality within their districts. Where the outcome of a review and assessment identifies that either European or national health-based or environmental air quality standards are not, or are unlikely to be achieved, then the local authority is required to declare an Air Quality Management Area and develop a supporting Air Quality Action Plan in collaboration with relevant authorities in pursuit of the standards. Relevant authorities are prescribed in the Air Quality Standards Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 and these Regulations also require Northern Ireland departments to ensure that levels of air pollution do not exceed European air quality standards.

Belfast City Council has already declared four Air Quality Management Areas for nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter across the city, associated principally with road transport emissions. In 2006, the Council published an Air Quality Action Plan for the city, which comprised substantially actions provided by the Department for Regional Development and its Agencies. These actions included walking and cycling initiatives, intended to encourage members of the public to consider either walking or cycling instead of using their car. Unfortunately, the Air Quality Action Plan has failed to deliver the required air quality improvements in all parts of the city and consequently, DoENI and Defra have recently jointly applied to the European Commission for a 5 year time extension for achieving the limit values for nitrogen dioxide across the Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area. If this application is accepted by the Commission, then the limit values for nitrogen dioxide must be achieved by 1 January 2015 and maintained thereafter.

In Belfast, elevated levels of nitrogen dioxide air pollution tend to be associated with congested or slow moving road traffic and consequently, the introduction of an Active Travel Strategy has the potential to contribute directly towards improving air quality and correspondingly, the lives of all residents of the city and, in particular, those persons living within the Air Quality Management Areas. For this reason, the Council would welcome the opportunity to continue to work closely with the Department in order to characterise the beneficial impacts of the Active Travel Strategy upon local air quality and to integrate relevant measures within the updated Air Quality Action Plan.

**Q4. What do you consider to be the main barriers to a higher level of active travel in Northern Ireland?**

Prior to introducing its cycle to work scheme, Belfast City Council conducted a limited staff survey in order to assess employees' attitudes towards walking and cycling. In common with other large employers, the survey revealed that the majority of staff travel to work by car, either as a driver or passenger. However, a substantial number of employees indicated that they would be prepared to consider walking and cycling as alternatives to the private car. When asked about barriers to cycling, employees indicated that improved cycling routes and better cycling facilities were the key barriers to cycling whereas the capacity for walking tended to be determined by how far the employee lived from their workplace, although it is accepted that walking can form a component of multi-modal journeys.

However, there are several other levers to consider in encouraging greater levels of walking and cycling including for example the Department's parking policy for the Belfast City centre. The Road Service 'Belfast City Centre Car Parking' leaflet indicates that the Roads Service provides over 2,100 parking spaces within approximately 10 minutes walking time of the city centre. It is unclear whether this substantial number of parking spaces conveys an appropriate message regarding the need to consider alternatives to the private car.

Moreover, the Planning Service has published Parking Standards for residential and other developments related to the provisions of Planning Policy Statement 3 on Access, Movement and Parking. Essentially, the Standards require that developers demonstrate there is adequate provision of space within a site, for parking, manoeuvring, loading and unloading to fulfil the operational requirements of the proposed development although they also require that secure cycle parking is provided as an integral part of new development.

By way of amplification, the Standards specify the total number of parking spaces per dwelling required for apartments and houses that have only communal parking provision must range from 1.25 unassigned parking spaces for apartments with 1 bed to 2 parking spaces for a terraced house with 3 beds. For parking spaces per dwelling required for houses that have in-curtilage parking provision, this can range from 1.75 parking spaces for a 1 bed terrace house to 4.5 parking spaces for 5 bed detached house. As previously, it is unclear whether standards of this nature are aligned to the aspirations of the Active Travel Strategy or contribute meaningfully towards the achievement of its objectives.

Therefore, in conclusion, the Council consider it important that the Strategy is placed at the heart of local transport, public health and well-being and wider government strategies for the benefit of society, the environment and the economy as a whole.

**Q5. Do you consider individual attitudes to active travel to be a greater barrier or a lack of adequate infrastructure?**

The Council considers the creation of safe, attractive walking and cycling conditions, with coherent high quality networks linking all everyday destinations, so that walking and cycling are faster and more convenient than car travel is essential for the city.

It is considered that a lack of adequate infrastructure closely coupled to personal safety issues have been the primary barriers to the uptake of active travel in Belfast, although these issues are beginning to be addressed for the city through Department for Regional Development infrastructure initiatives such as Belfast on the Move. The infrastructure position is confirmed broadly by the Department for Transport Local

Transport Note 2/08 on Cycle Infrastructure Design, which states that the road network is the most basic and important cycling facility available, and the preferred way of providing for cyclists is to create conditions on the carriageway where cyclists are content to use it, particularly in urban areas, accepting that some cyclists are more able and willing to mix with motor traffic than others. In relation to cyclists' safety, the Transport Note recommends that traffic volumes and speeds should be reduced where possible to create safer conditions for cycling and walking. Also, opportunities for redistributing space within the highway should be explored, including moving kerb lines and street furniture, providing right turn refuges for cyclists and separating conflicting movements by using traffic signals. Surface defects should not be allowed to develop to the extent that they become a hazard, and the potential for conflict between pedestrians and cyclists should be minimised. Although there is provision for recreational cycling within some of the council's parks, it is noted that the National Cycle Network within Belfast is restricted to Route 99 which follows the Comber Greenway, Route 9 from Lisburn City to Belfast City Centre and Route 93 from Belfast towards Newtownabbey. Accordingly, travelling by bike across other parts of the city necessitates utilising a mixture of off and on road cycle tracks and bus/cycle lanes. Walking across the city also necessitates traversing some significant arterial roads.

**Q6. What evidence could you provide in support of your views?**

As part of the development of its 2006 Air Quality Action Plan, Belfast City Council undertook a Health Impact Assessment of the Action Plan proposals. When questioned, residents living in the vicinity of the Air Quality Management Areas indicated that offering or providing safety training for both cyclists and motorists would encourage greater levels of cycling. Residents commented also that developing both dedicated and integrated cycle routes that are safe and provide appropriate facilities would also serve as a means of encouraging people to cycle.

As mentioned previously, Belfast City Council conducted a limited staff survey in order to assess employees' attitudes towards walking and cycling. When asked about barriers to cycling, employees indicated that improved cycling routes and better cycling facilities were the key barriers to cycling whereas the capacity for walking tended to be determined by how far the employee lived from their workplace, although it is accepted that walking can form a component of multi-modal journeys.

**Q7. What are the main challenges facing us in encouraging and facilitating an increase in active travel in Northern Ireland?**

The Council considers that the main challenge in encouraging and facilitating an increase in active travel is to transform the attitude and choice of those commuters that automatically choose to use their car irrespective of the distance, duration or function of their journey. In essence, it is important to understand why people do not walk and cycle anymore. It is accepted, however, that encouraging sustained modal shift towards more sustainable forms of transport will be difficult, since having purchased, taxed and insured a vehicle, it is challenging to encourage commuters to choose public transport combined with walking and cycling as an alternative. Moreover, sustainable forms of transport will not be able to replace the private car in all situations and therefore, a car will still be required by the majority of commuters.

Personal safety is also a key consideration and therefore, it is important that the built environment is constructed in a manner which supports walking and cycling. Unfortunately, in the urban environment, many streets and urban spaces have been given over to road traffic, at the expense of pedestrians and cyclists. Actions need to be taken to restore the balance in order for town centres to prosper. Accordingly,



actions for walking and cycling need to be articulated in planning policy guidance and supported by appropriate enforcement by the Planners.

Successive European mobility management projects such as Civitas also emphasise the need to influence travel behaviour through mobility management, which includes marketing, communication, education and information campaigns. It is considered that campaigns of this nature could serve to begin to reorient Northern Ireland commuter attitudes.

The council would suggest a health check on every transport and land use decision focusing on the potential impact on levels of walking and cycling and other aspects of health. A decision should then be taken to invest public money to the benefit of public health, and reject proposals whose impact on walking and cycling will not be positive.

There is also need to tackle poor practice for car drivers in relation to cyclists and pedestrians; through improved driver training and awareness campaigns this could be addressed. Cyclist proficiency training is also necessary.

**Q8. What objectives would you suggest are most important in an active travel programme?**

Given the greater travel range available to those who cycle, it is considered that increasing the percentage of journeys undertaken by bicycle should be the primary objective for the active travel strategy. Annual cycle distance is also a useful metric, however, this statistic can be distorted by commuters undertaking longer but not necessarily more frequent journeys. Other activity data that could prove useful in informing the objectives of the Strategy include trip modal share for car travel, public transport and walking and cycling, and car driver, bus, cycle and walking trips per commuter. Monitoring levels of cycle ownership, attitudes towards walking and cycling and accident levels could also help to inform the focus of promotional initiatives.

**Q9. How would you prioritise these objectives?**

It is considered that Strategy objectives do not need to be prioritised; rather projects and measures that are likely to form components of the supporting Action Plan should be prioritised on the basis of cost, impact and timescale.

**Q10. Do you agree with the concept of encouraging active travel demonstration projects? If so, what do you think they should focus on?**

The Council considers that active travel demonstration projects are extremely useful in establishing that modal shift towards more sustainable forms of transport can be effected and maintained. Also, the views and perspectives of those who have participated in pilot or demonstration projects are invaluable in encouraging others that active travel is both beneficial and practicable.

The Department's Travelwise Unit should seek to extend its initiatives around walking and cycling to school and encouraging greater levels of car sharing. In addition, cycle proficiency and cycle maintenance training could be provided to the wider community in order to encourage them back into cycling. It is suggested that personal travel planning programmes and travel awareness campaigns could be trialled alongside engagement with key destinations, to include significant employers, in order to promote walking and cycling.

**Q11. How important do you think adopting a cross-sectoral approach is?**

The Council considers essential that Active Travel initiatives are underpinned by cross-sectoral support and actions. The action plan should outline clear roles of other government departments and other partners.

A cursory review of central government Departments suggests that the Department for Regional Development, Department of Environment, Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister all have fundamental roles to play in promoting and delivering active travel. Moreover, although local authorities do not have a statutory role in transport planning, a range of councils have been involved in helping to develop the draft Active Travel Strategy along with the invitation to local councils to take the lead in developing bids to put in place active travel demonstration projects. As indicated in our response to Question 3, we would welcome the opportunity to reflect the impact of any Belfast focused projects within an updated Air Quality Action Plan.

**Q12. What specific actions would you like to see in an action plan?**

The Council would suggest the following initiatives for consideration in the action plan:

- active travel demonstration projects that promote modal shift towards more sustainable forms of transport can be effected and maintained;
- initiatives around walking and cycling to school and encouraging greater levels of car sharing;
- cycle proficiency and cycle maintenance training could be provided to the wider community in order to encourage them back into cycling;
- personal travel planning programmes; and
- travel awareness campaigns could be trialled alongside engagement with key destinations, to include significant employers, in order to promote walking and cycling.

**Q13. What ideas do you have on monitoring progress on the strategy? What information could you provide that would help to do this?**

The Council consider that increasing the percentage of journeys undertaken by bicycle should be the primary tool for monitoring the active travel strategy. Other activity data that could prove useful in informing the objectives of the Strategy include trip modal share for car travel, public transport and walking and cycling, and car driver, bus, cycle and walking trips per commuter. Monitoring levels of cycle ownership, increases in cycle lane and supporting infrastructure provision, introduction of workplace and school travel plans, attitudes towards walking and cycling and accident levels could also provide useful monitoring tools.

**Q14. How would the success of these actions be evaluated?**

As the strategy is given to have an operational lifespan until 2020, it is suggested that performance data for individual projects should be collated and reviewed periodically throughout this period. This approach will enable the Department robustly to determine progress towards its stated objectives and to identify those projects that are not delivering in the manner anticipated. In addition, the Council will work with the Department to better understand the beneficial impacts of the Active Travel Strategy upon local air quality.