

Active Travel Research Briefing

March 2022



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Active Travel

Research Briefing

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Improving and promoting active travel routes and facilities has been enshrined in law in Wales since 2013. The **Active Travel Wales Act 2013** places a duty on Welsh highways authorities to make annual improvements.

Our research briefing looks at what those duties are; how active travel is embedded in Welsh policy making, what the funding has been for active travel since the Act came into force and how many people actually travel actively in Wales. It also takes a look at examples of how active travel rates can be improved from infrastructural interventions to driver speed limits.



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Walking, cycling and wheeling

‘Active travel’ refers to everyday journeys made by walking, cycling or wheeling (using a wheelchair or mobility scooter). Promoting active travel in Wales is **enshrined in law**, which defines an active travel journey as a journey made to or from work or education or in order to access services like health appointments. It doesn’t include going out for a walk or bike ride as exercise.

Active travel is the cheapest and greenest form of travel making it the most accessible and climate-friendly mode. It is also a way for people to fit exercise into their daily routine when, in Wales, **only around half of adults** get the recommended 150 minutes of moderate exercise every week recommended by the **Chief Medical Officer**.

Traditionally, our urban infrastructure has been designed to accommodate the movement of vehicles, but the Welsh Government and other stakeholders argue the **continuing rise in private car ownership** has led to congested streets, poorly parked vehicles and often inaccessible walking and cycling infrastructure.

Despite a reduction in car use throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, it is beginning to **return to previous levels** leading to **concerns about a “car led recovery”**. Some temporary infrastructure schemes, such as pavement widening and road space reallocation, designed to make socially distanced walking and cycling easier, have also been removed.

The Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013

Since 2013, Welsh Government Ministers and local authorities in Wales have had a legal duty to continuously improve provision for people to walk and cycle for local journeys under the **Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013**.

The Act places a duty on the Welsh Government to report annually on active travel in Wales. It must also promote active travel journeys, secure new and improved active travel routes and related facilities, and enhance provision for walkers and cyclists when performing its functions under the **Highways Act 1980**.

The Act places a duty on local authorities to ‘secure’ new active travel routes and related facilities, and improvements to existing routes and facilities, in its area every year. Under the Act, local authorities must prepare revised Active Travel Network

Maps (ATNMs) every three years.

Active Travel Network Maps (ATNMs)

ATNMs show the existing active travel routes, alongside new proposed routes, which connect homes with key services, workplaces and schools within the local authority boundary. They are subject to several phases of public consultation and final maps must be approved by Welsh Government Ministers.

Only active travel routes proposed on approved maps will be funded by the Welsh Government. However, they do not have a guarantee of funding as the majority of funding streams are subject to competitive bids. Schemes must also comply with statutory **Active Travel Act Guidance**.

Funding active travel routes

The Welsh Government supports local authorities with annual funding to deliver active travel schemes.

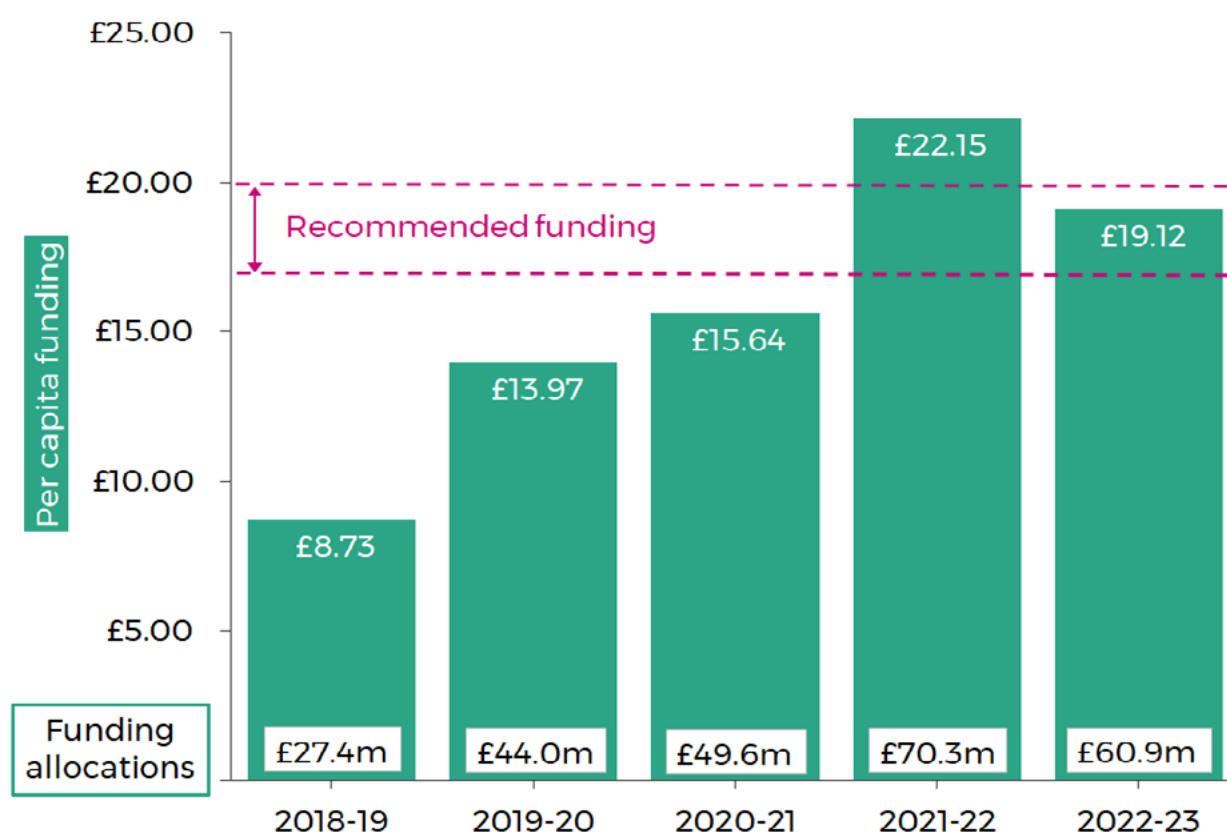
Prior to 2018 the Welsh Government funded active travel primarily through the Road Safety Grant, the Safe Routes in Communities Grant (previously Safe Routes to School) and the Local Transport Fund. However, the total amount of funds available was relatively small. Funding levels were enhanced in 2018 with the launch of the Active Travel Fund.

Total funding has increased over time with over **£70m allocated** during the year 2021/22. For 2022/23 this figure is expected to be around £60m but **latest budget indications** are that this could increase again to £80m per annum in both 2023/24 and 2024/25 to encourage larger schemes.

Following its 2018 inquiry, the fifth Senedd's Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee **recommended** that capital and resource funding combined should be set at £17-£20 per head per annum, as is now the case.

The graph below shows specific Welsh Government funding identified for active travel since 2018. The figures do not include active travel provision within wider project costs such as other road, public transport and multi-modal schemes, or active travel schemes funded from local authorities' own budgets.

Welsh Government active travel funding per capita 2018/19 to 2022/23



Source: **Paper from the Minister for Climate Change to the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee, 20th January 2022**

The majority of funding is distributed through the **Active Travel Fund**. This includes a core allocation which enables local authorities to make small scale continuous improvements as well as undertaking pre-work for main schemes. The remainder is competitive funding for larger, developed schemes, which can now include multi-year schemes to be delivered in phases. Transport for Wales administers the Active Travel Fund on behalf of Welsh Government.

The **Safe Routes in Communities Grant** aims to increase levels of active travel among families travelling to school and in the wider community. It is expected to distribute around £5m in capital in 2022/23 with guidance emphasising the encouragement of 'school street' schemes, which limit vehicle access at the school gate.

Road Safety Grants offer both capital and revenue streams with the aim of reducing the number of people killed or seriously injured on roads, improving community safety and promoting increased levels of active travel. For 2022/23 no new capital funding schemes are being considered as a proportion of funds have been diverted to the implementation of a new 20mph speed limit on restricted

roads across Wales.

The **Local Transport Fund** no longer accepts applications for active travel schemes, which should be submitted to the Active Travel Fund. However, the guidance is clear that schemes must comply with the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 and its supporting guidance. Schemes that include highway improvement, construction, or traffic management must show how they comply in particular with Section 9 of the Act (Provision for walkers and cyclists in the exercise of certain functions).

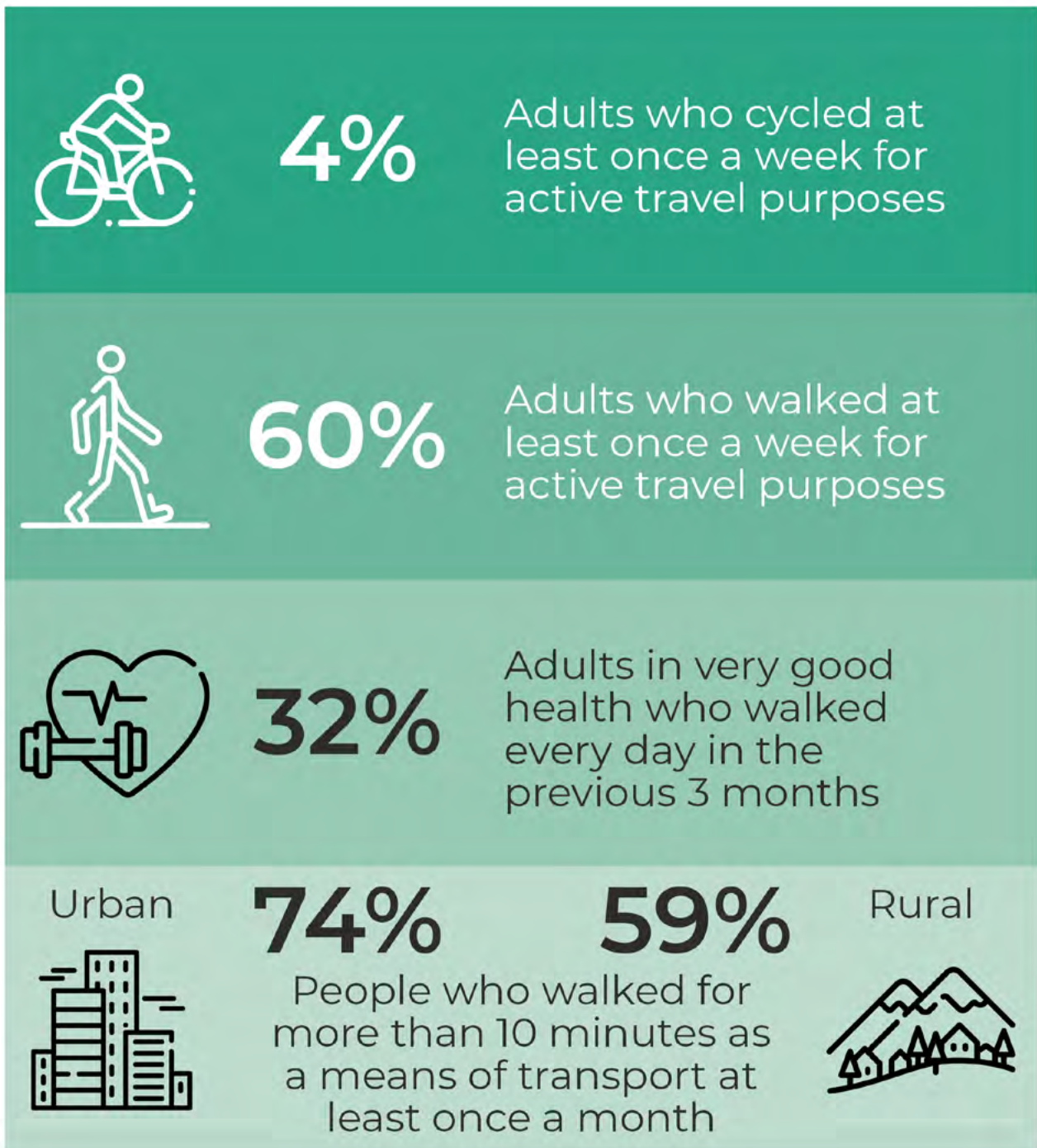
Funding allocations

The Welsh Government publishes annual grant awards for each local authority broken down by grant fund, for example:

- schemes funded in **2018/19**;
- funding allocations for **2019/20** and additional allocations made in **2019**;
- funding allocations for **2020/21** plus **£15m allocated** to schemes under the Transforming Towns approach for Covid-19 responses including things like pavement widening, road space reallocation and other measures to make it easier to walk and cycle;
- funding allocations for **2021/22** and these additional schemes funded in **2021/22**; and
- core allocation amounts for **2022/23** are included in the latest fund guidance.

How often people choose active travel

In Wales, active travel is measured as walking for at least 10 minutes or cycling as a means of transport to get to a particular destination. Data is collected through the **National Survey for Wales**. The **latest data** (pre-pandemic) shows that from April 2019 to March 2020:



It is not possible to present an accurate trend in active travel since the Act was introduced as data collection methods and sample sizes have not been consistent.

However, the data between 2013/14 and 2016/17 suggests there was no significant change in cycling and a slight reduction in walking. There was also no evidence of change in walking or cycling from 2017/18 to 2019/20.

Collectively, this data paints a picture of there being no evidence to suggest substantially increased active travel since 2013. However, the 2019/20 data suggests,

for the first time, an increase in the number of people walking at least once a week on the previous year at 60% (a 3 percentage point increase).

National Survey data on active travel between 2020 and 2022 is not yet published and the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on frequency and patterns of active travel are not yet understood. There is some **evidence** on wider transport trends.

Active travel to school

Fewer than half of children walk or cycle to school. The **latest information** from April 2018 to March 2019, suggests:



National Survey data suggests there has been little change in these percentages since 2014-15.

Research by active travel charities including **Sustrans**, **Living Streets** and **Cycling UK** suggests that the encouragement of active travel to school is hampered by issues such as cars parked on pavements, fast moving and congested traffic outside the school gates and poor air quality.

One approach being introduced across the UK, and increasingly in Wales, is **“School Streets”**. A school street is immediately outside the school gates and is closed to non-resident traffic during school drop-off and pick-up times. While there are several options for how to implement a school street, **Cardiff Council, for example**, uses cameras and permits.

Community interventions

Other initiatives take more of a community-wide approach, such as, **“Low-traffic neighbourhoods” (LTN)**. The focus of an LTN is to reduce the dominance of motor vehicles in the community and increase the appeal of walking and cycling. While local residents can still access their home by car, they reduce the incidence of traffic driving through the area at peak times, known as ‘rat-running’. Interventions might include filtered permeability with bollards or planters allowing only active travel modes to access one end of a street with a more pedestrian and cycle-friendly public realm including slower traffic speeds, cycle parking, seating and small, pocket parks.

“Twenty-minute neighbourhoods”, which might include an LTN, are places where everyday needs can all be met within a 20-minute walk, typically about a mile. It looks at things like the housing mix and the location of key services such as health, education, leisure, retail, arts and culture, plus connections to public transport for longer journeys.

Not all measures to introduce infrastructure of this type come without objection. This **news article** discusses some of those objections and counter arguments. This **article from Sustrans** also points to a wide range of studies and other evidence.

Welsh Government policy

The Wales Transport Strategy, **Llwybr Newydd** focuses on behaviour change and modal shift. This means enabling more people to change their mode of transport from being dependent on their own car towards more sustainable alternatives such as active travel and public transport. It sets a target for 45% of journeys to be made by public transport, walking and cycling by 2040 up from the 32% estimated in 2020.

It is intended to place “people and climate change at the front and centre” in line with the Welsh Government’s 2019 **declaration of a climate emergency**. The three priorities of the Strategy are to:

- bring services to people in order to reduce the need to travel;
- allow people and goods to move easily from door to door by accessible, sustainable and efficient transport services and infrastructure; and

- encourage people to make the change to more sustainable transport.

As an active and low carbon form of travel, commitments to improving walking and cycling rates are also found across a range of Welsh Government policies, for example **planning, health, clean air** and **decarbonisation. Net Zero Wales** encourages active travel as part of a plan to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Despite the introduction of the **Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013**, and various policy commitments since, data shows very little change in the numbers of people who use active travel.

Two Task Force Groups were formed in 2019 by then Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport, Lee Waters. One considered how to prevent pavement parking while the other looked at how to implement a change of speed limit from 30mph to 20mph on urban and residential roads. Their recommendations led to two new Welsh Government policy commitments on pavement parking and 20mph speed limits intended to encourage more people to use active travel modes by creating a more welcoming, accessible and safe environment.

Pavement Parking

Currently, local authorities in Wales **can only enforce** against parking on pavements where there are local parking restrictions or the vehicle is an HGV over 7.5t. They can ban pavement parking in defined areas using a **Traffic Regulation Order (TRO)** which can be a complex and costly process. The **police can enforce** against vehicles obstructing the highway, which includes the pavement. Obstructing the highway is a criminal offence.

The Wales Pavement Parking **Task Force Group report** recommended that the Senedd should pass subordinate legislation to enable local authorities to carry out civil enforcement of pavement parking. In response, the **Welsh Government stated** that its intention is to commence civil enforcement by July 2022, with a communications plan and promotion strategy to ensure the public are made aware that enforcement is being stepped up from this date. It is unclear whether the legislation is on target to meet this date.

20mph

Only around 1% of the urban road network in Wales is currently subject to 20mph limits, even though most roads only serve residential areas. Currently, changing a road to 20mph can be done by the highway authority using a TRO and requires the installation of repeater signage to indicate that there is a different limit on that road. The cost and complexity of this is identified by local authorities as a barrier to the introduction of 20mph limits.

The 20mph Task Force Group report proposes subordinate legislation to introduce a national default speed limit of 20mph on restricted roads, which are defined as roads with street lights at least every 200 yards. This would reverse the current situation so that 30mph zones would be introduced by TRO where a higher speed is justified.

The report suggests this simpler process would enable a highly cost-effective rapid and substantial expansion of 20mph limits. Transport for Wales has developed a Geographic Information System (GIS) tool to assist authorities and help to achieve a consistent approach to making exceptions to 20mph limits across Wales.

Following a debate in the Senedd in July 2020, there was cross party support for the Welsh Government's intention to commence the speed limit reform process, with 45 Members of the Senedd, a majority, in favour. Changes to legislation would be subject to the **affirmative procedure** requiring a vote in the Senedd. The announcement of the Welsh Government's legislative programme in July 2021 included a commitment to bring this legislation forward within the first year of the Senedd.

This policy is not universally supported. **While the Welsh Government found** support in survey data, and in focus groups, 53% of responses to its consultation on the proposals were opposed. The Senedd Petitions Committee is **considering a petition** which opposes the national approach to setting the default speed limit.

The sustainable transport hierarchy

From January 2022, people using active travel modes have priority status on the UK's roads. Revisions to **the Highway Code** aim to improve road safety for people walking, cycling and riding horses. The changes intend that those posing the greatest risk in the event of a collision have most responsibility to ensure the safety

of other road users. Pedestrians are considered most at risk, so other road users should give way to them at crossings and junctions. They must give way if the person has started crossing the road.

This transport hierarchy can also be seen in **Planning Policy Wales (PPW)** to inform transport planning decisions. Paragraph 4.1.31 of PPW states:

Planning authorities must support active travel by ensuring new development is fully accessible by walking and cycling. The aim should be to create walkable neighbourhoods, where a range of facilities are within walking distance of most residents, and the streets are safe, comfortable and enjoyable to walk and cycle.

Llwybr Newydd: the Wales Transport Strategy calls this the Sustainable Transport Hierarchy, prioritising more sustainable alternatives over car-dependent transport planning, with walking and cycling at the top.

The Active Travel Act (2013) under review

The fifth Senedd's Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee (EIS) report on its **post legislative scrutiny of the Act** in 2018 made a number of recommendations to which the **Welsh Government responded**.

Many of the recommendations have been actioned, for example, through increased funding, updates to the Design Guidance and to Planning Policy Wales, and the introduction of a consistent approach to consultation in the latest round of ATNM development. The Active Travel Board, whose purpose is to coordinate activity to support the effective implementation of the Act, has new Terms of Reference and an independent Chair. Other recommendations implemented include the promotion of active travel in the obesity strategy **Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales** and the commitment to **new regulations to prevent pavement parking**.

The **Cross-party Group on the Active Travel Act** is currently (spring 2022) undertaking a review of the Active Travel Act in conjunction with stakeholder organisations.

Sources of Further Information

[Active Travel \(Wales\) Act 2013](#)

[Active Travel Act Guidance](#)

[Planning Policy Wales](#)

[Llwybr Newydd: Wales Transport Strategy](#)

[The Highway Code](#)