



Scottish Government
Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee

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Dear Sir/Madam,

**Scottish Government, Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee, Pre-Budget/Financial scrutiny
on roads maintenance in Scotland**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this topic. GoBike, as a group that campaigns for good cycle infrastructure, is particularly affected not only by the lack of road maintenance but also by poor road maintenance. We are very concerned at the lack of political commitment to the aim of achieving 10% of journeys by bike by 2020. Had there been commitment far more of us would be cycling rather than driving, we would have had more cycle-specific infrastructure and the wear and tear on our roads would have been much reduced.

As it is, those of us who choose to cycle, have to share some or all of our journeys with the vehicles that are causing most damage to our roads, ie those that are heavy and those that are ill-maintained.

The majority of cycles are two-wheelers and perhaps to a lesser extent than tricycles, are very susceptible to surface imperfections and this is reflected in our responses to your questions below:

- *How have recent spending decisions on roads maintenance affected the quality of Scotland's roads, road users, businesses, public services and the economy?*
- Local roads have suffered because the roads budget, including the maintenance budget, has concentrated on the large projects, such as the M74 and the Aberdeen bypass. As in our introduction, the political will has not been there to provide cycle infrastructure and bike users are particularly affected by the decreasing spend on road maintenance. Bikes are very susceptible to the "tram lines", the 10cm or so channels that are left after narrow trenches have been dug for services and the fill has either settled or been washed out. Similarly if the joints between adjacent runs of road surfacing are not well-sealed, water ingress can cause these to open up and bike wheels can become stuck in the groove or tram line created. Coming off a bike in such a situation can cause serious injury and possibly a collision if a motor vehicle is close, resulting in the rider being hospitalised and losing time off work.

Currently roads maintenance is generally done by fencing off the lanes/areas affected and since much of this work is carried out by sub-contractors (apparently cheaper than direct labour) the width remaining for traffic is usually only wide enough for motor vehicles. Should someone wish to cycle through, they are at the mercy of drivers vying for the space, which has the potential of causing an accident and certainly does not encourage a novice to take up cycling for their commute to work. Cutting the roads maintenance budget has led to a lack of control over what happens on the ground.

Poor control, particularly of service installations, leads to poor work and an uneven road surface. Those of us who cycle will try to find the smoother surface and this could easily inadvertently take us into the path of a motor vehicle, particularly if the driver doesn't watch out for bikes or is otherwise engaged (eg on a mobile phone).

In all these points, it must be remembered that cycling is not simply an optional leisure activity, but is how people commute to their place of work and an increasing number of businesses are now using cycles for deliveries.

- *If spending on roads maintenance continues at current levels, what could be the likely effects on the above groups?*
- Road traffic accidents involving bikes will increase and fewer people will be encouraged to cycle. Thus the pollution on our roads will not diminish as it should, even a low target for increasing active travel will be missed and the population's health will continue to be poor.
- *How could any negative effects of reduced road spending best be addressed?*
- By ensuring that the most vulnerable are protected and that all non-segregated cycle lanes on major roads are well maintained. This will at least try to protect those of us who do choose to cycle.

By ensuring that all the tram line gaps in our roads are repaired to prevent injury to people cycling.

By ensuring that segregated cycle routes are well-maintained. These are the routes that will encourage people to cycle and must be fit for purpose.

By ensuring that the kerbside edges of our roads, as well as all cycle facilities are kept clear of rubbish, gravel, leaves and ice. If people have good cycling conditions they will choose to cycle, keeping pollution and the need for road maintenance from car use down.

By ensuring that any work done is done well. Short-term, cheap fixes might suit departments with an annual budget to meet but do not last out for the longer term. The overall cost of a good repair must be compared with returning time and time again to carry out a short-term fix.

- *Is the current model of funding and delivering roads maintenance, which is split between Transport Scotland and local authorities, the most economic and efficient option?*
- That might not be the prime issue since Transport Scotland deals with the major, strategic routes and local authorities cover the local routes. However, some local authorities work together to deliver roads maintenance and while this might not be applicable everywhere some sharing of resources could lead to economies. The use of private sub-contractors leads to a weakening of control over quality. This is particularly so since local authorities have had their funding reduced and there are not sufficient staff to monitor quality and ensure work is done to specification. There is a good argument to be made that private contractors should only be used for specialist work, particularly since they could be working across Scotland, both for Transport Scotland and local authorities. Routine work would be better done by in-house staff who have more commitment to their local area, are more accountable and whose training and expertise may be controlled.
- There has been discussion, if not promises made, that the overall method of funding local government through the Council Tax would be reviewed and replaced with a more equitable system. This needs to be brought back to the table, as does the need to increase local government funding overall. We cannot have good roads and services if we do not pay for them.

GoBike is concerned at the lack of political will and ambition to increase cycling and walking and to continue to allow the private motor car to be the first choice when it comes to transport. If the words that are spoken on improving levels of public transport usage, of improving the nation's health, of reducing private car use and getting more of us to walk and cycle were put into practice, Scotland would be richer not only financially but environmentally. It would be a better place to be.

Yours sincerely



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