

Introduction

The current [Active Travel Action Plan 2017-2021](#) (ATAP) is a five year plan which is due for renewal in 2021. It sits as a supplementary document to the Aberdeen Local Transport Strategy (LTS) to further develop the Active Travel aspirations of it. Many of the projects in the current plan have now been completed or are underway. Therefore, the time is right for a review of the current plan and a refresh to ensure that the ATAP is kept up to date and relevant as we move to the next five-year cycle.

With the publication of the updated National Transport Strategy (NTS2) in February 2020, the Scottish Government has signalled that encouraging active travel is one of their priorities. The Regional Transport Partnership for Aberdeen city and Aberdeenshire, Nestrans, is also currently updating its Regional Transport Strategy (RTS), which will help to shape regional transport policy through to 2040 and places a similar emphasis on active travel. The Council will therefore have a major role to play in driving forward this agenda, with a review of its Local Transport Strategy (LTS) in 2021 and indeed, the Aberdeen Local Outcome Improvement Plan has as one of its 15 stretch outcomes the target of 38% of people walking and 5% of people cycling as main mode of travel by 2026.

Active travel is therefore a major priority for the Council as it looks to provide a city where all citizens can prosper. As well as providing a place where people can work, live and play, it is also important to have a vibrant, sustainable economy and, as we embark on the road to recovery from Covid-19, the role that active travel can play in this, in terms of supporting the economy and especially the high street cannot be overestimated as shown in Figure 1.

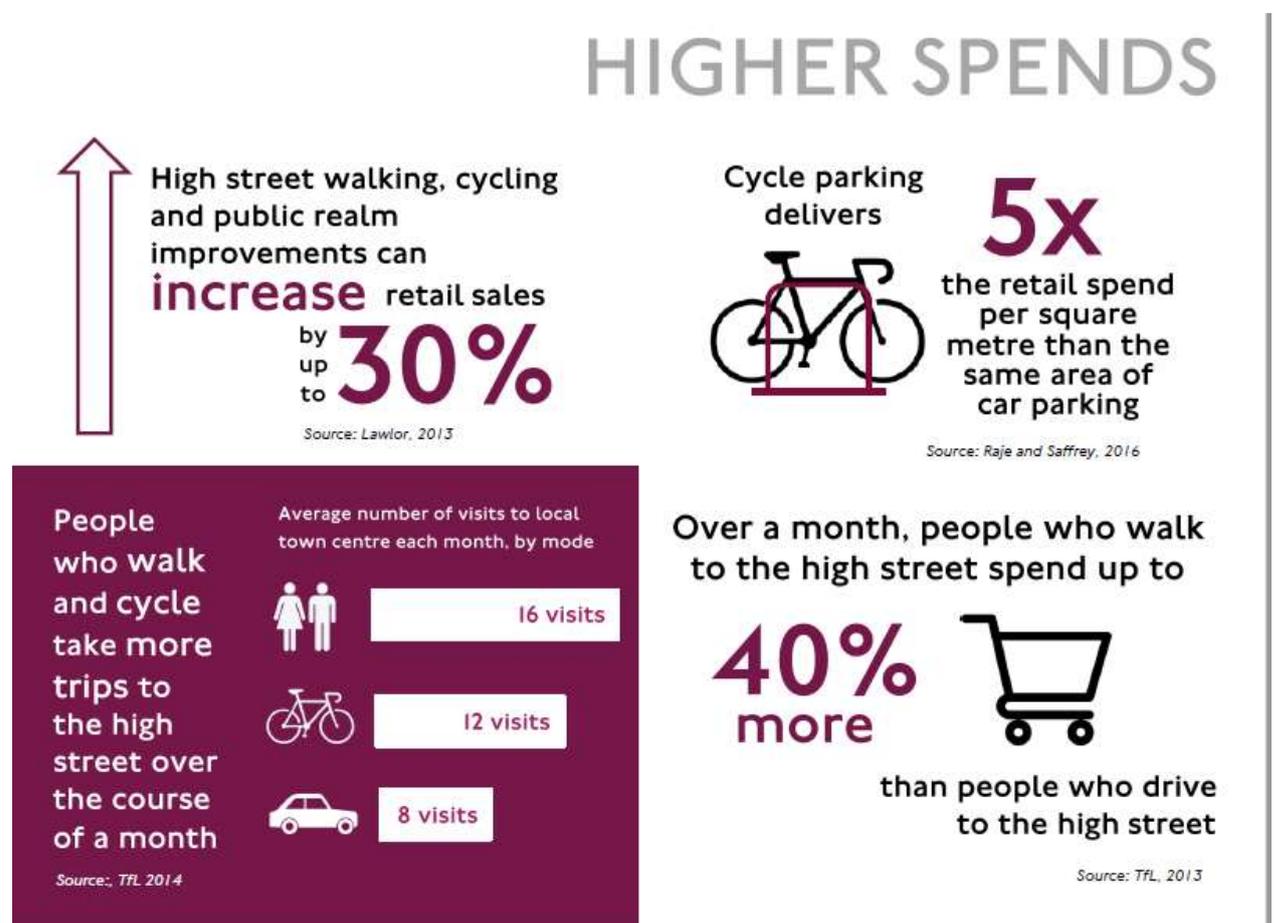


Figure 1 – Economic benefits of active travel to the High Street

It is also important in the current climate where resources are limited to ensure that the best value is obtained when undertaking any project. Figure 2 below illustrates the good value for money that investing in active travel projects brings to the economy.

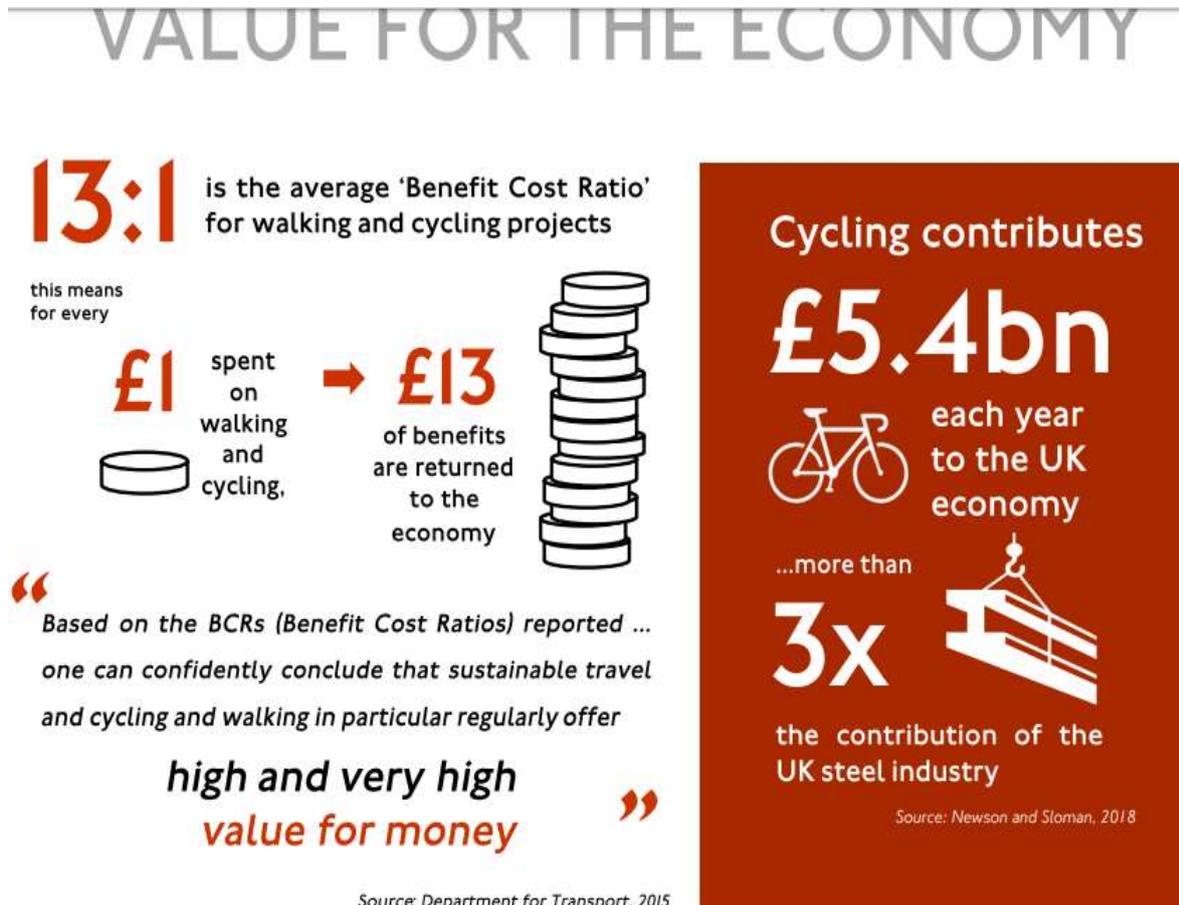


Figure 2 – Wider economic benefits of active travel

Ensuring the best use of scarce road space to ensure an equitable distribution for all users is of prime importance and again it can be seen from Figure 3 below that active travel is an efficient user of road space.

KEEPING STREETS MOVING

One car takes up the same space as...



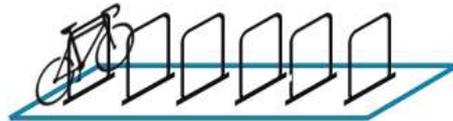
5 people cycling

or



20 people walking

or



12 cycle parking spaces

Figure 3 – Road space utilisation of active travel

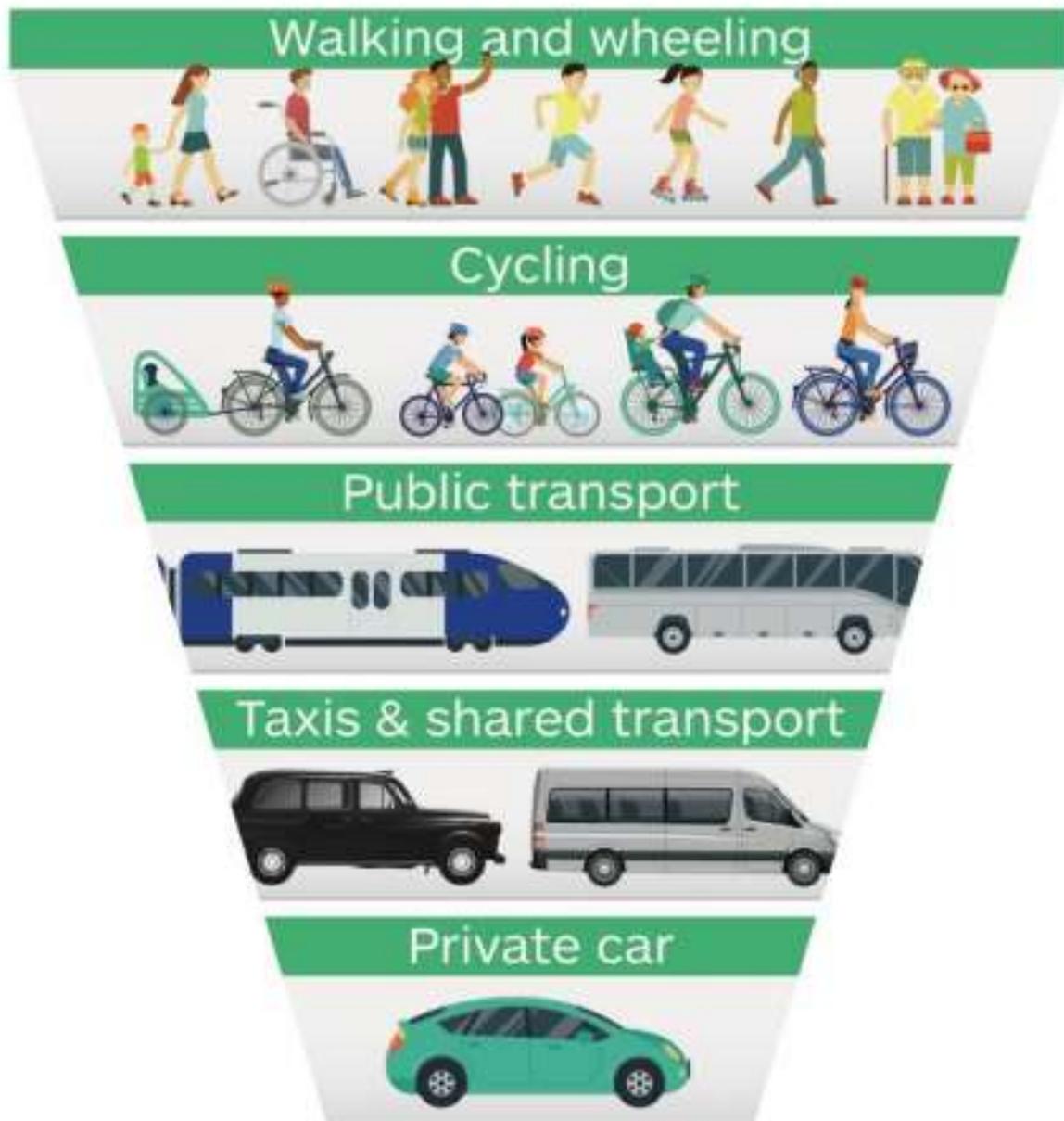
Policy Context

The main national policy document is the [National Transport Strategy](#) (NTS2) which was published by Transport Scotland on 05 February 2020. NTS2 sets out the Scottish Government's vision for transport for the next 20 years and has four main priorities as follows:

- Reduces inequalities.
- Takes climate action.
- Helps deliver inclusive economic growth.
- Improves our health and wellbeing.

NTS2 is supported by the Scottish Government's commitment to move towards a Net-Zero emissions target for greenhouse gases by 2045 as laid out in the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019 which enshrines the commitment in law. This will necessitate a move away from the unrestrained use of fossil fuels and private cars for all journeys towards more sustainable forms of transport. The diagram shown below in figure 4 illustrates the sustainable transport hierarchy which NTS2 re-affirms its commitment to, stating that all policy and investment decisions should be made in accordance with this hierarchy.

Prioritising Sustainable Transport



Source – National Transport Strategy 2

Figure 4 – Sustainable Transport Hierarchy

NTS 2 is supported at a regional level by the [Regional Transport Strategy](#) which is currently being refreshed by Nestrans the regional transport partnership for Aberdeen city and Aberdeenshire. This was the subject of public consultation in 2020 and it is intended to submit to Ministers early in 2021. This will then be supplemented locally by the Local Transport Strategy (LTS) which will be reviewed in 2021.

Active Travel Action Plan 2017-2021 – Progress Report

[The Aberdeen Active Travel Action Plan 2017-2021](#) (ATAP) committed the council to a series of infrastructure and behaviour change measures to help to promote, encourage and facilitate Active Travel. The current Action Plan further develops the Active Travel objectives set out in the Aberdeen Local Transport Strategy (LTS) 2016 and was very much aligned with the vision set out in the current Regional Active Travel Action Plan developed by Nestrans, the Regional Transport Partnership for the Aberdeen City and Shire region, which is:

‘To create an environment and culture in which walking and cycling are convenient, safe, comfortable, healthy and attractive choices of travel for everyday journeys.’

Many of the projects set out in the plan, together with other projects identified within the Roads Hierarchy review, City Centre Masterplan and the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan have been completed or have been substantially progressed during the lifespan of the current plan. A summary of the progress against the objectives set out in the Action Plan is shown in Table 1 below, with a full report on progress in terms of delivering on the actions of the previous Action Plan provided in Appendix 1.

THEME	PROGRESS
Walking	Whilst figures from the annual Hands Up School Surveys conducted by Sustrans suggest that the current rate of walking has remained constant, several schemes to improve walking facilities have been implemented across the city. Whilst walking to school as a mode of travel has decreased slightly from 51% in 2017 to 43% in 2019, this is still comparable with the national average and could be explained by the rise in children cycling to school.
Cycling	Cycling facilities have also been improved throughout the city during the lifetime of the Action Plan. The latest Cycling Scotland Annual Monitoring Figures for 2019 indicate that the number of people cycling to work regularly has increased to 5.5%, with 24 cycling friendly employers employing 9,990 staff currently within the city. 4.3% of primary school children and 1.6% of secondary school children regularly cycle to school ¹ The headline figures for Aberdeen can be seen in the following infographic .
Trunk Road Network	The A92/A96 Haudagain Junction scheme has recently commenced construction, and this will include Active Travel improvements at this junction. The improvement works are currently planned to be completed in 2021. The dualling of the A96 between Aberdeen and Inverness by 2030 will also encompass active travel improvements.

	The recent detrunking of roads within the AWPR boundary gives the council more power to improve conditions on strategic routes.
Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route	The Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route became fully operational in February 2019. Early indications are that traffic flows within the City have already been altered and there is now less congestion within the City which allows us to carry forward a number of projects to reshape traffic in the City in favour of Active Travel modes.
Road Carriageway and Footway Maintenance	The Council continues to invest in maintenance projects, with a prioritised annual maintenance programme.
Winter Maintenance	Winter maintenance continues to be carried out to ensure that main Active Travel corridors can be utilised with the minimum of delay during adverse weather incidents.
Traffic Management and Road Safety	The latest Scottish Transport statistics figures for 2019 show that there were 514 road traffic collisions in the City in 2008 and this had fallen to 135 in 2018, a reduction of 379, or 73%. This figure has been falling steadily since 2013. Accidents by all modes except motorbikes have also fallen between 2018 and 2019 as infographic A at the end of the report shows.
Enforcement	Effective enforcement measures continue to be taken to ensure that Active Travel corridors can function effectively.
Land Use Planning	All planning applications are routinely checked to ensure that Active Travel infrastructure is included or upgraded as appropriate in all new developments. A review of transport and accessibility policies and car and cycle parking standards also takes place regularly as part of the wider review of the Local Development Plan.
Travel Information and Awareness	Engagement activities have taken place throughout the City and with a number of organisations, and support has been provided for the Scottish Workplace Journey Challenge. Both the City Centre and Bridge of Don cycle maps have been updated and reprinted. The Getabout brand continues to be heavily promoted. It should also be noted that funding from the Smarter Choices, Smarter Places programme has also allowed for a raft of measures to be taken forward, both as discrete projects in their own right and under the Getabout brand.

School Travel and Young People	Ibike, Bikeability, Travel Tracker and Road Safety magic shows have continued to be funded/supported throughout the life of the Action plan while travel planning support has been available for schools who request it. There are currently 17 cycling friendly schools in the city reaching 5,164 pupils and 41.7% of primary schools are delivering Level 2 Bikeability Scotland training. ¹
Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation	Modelling work is being undertaken with SEPA to look at the difference in air quality and emissions since the opening of the AWPR as part of wider work on possible introduction of a LEZ.
Biodiversity and the Green Space Network	Work continues to progress on the improvements to core paths and the improvement and upgrading of existing paths as appropriate.
Public Realm and the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP)	A SUMP was adopted by Aberdeen City Council in 2019 to complement the CCMP and Roads Hierarchy review. Delivery of the transport elements of the CCMP has commenced with the part pedestrianisation of Broad Street outside Marischal College, urban realm improvements on Schoolhill and the commencement of the transformation of Union Terrace Gardens which includes new walking and cycling paths, with improved permeability and accessibility.

Table 1 Summary of Progress against LTS objectives

Questionnaire Response

The Active Travel Action Plan Refresh must be led by public and stakeholder involvement to be successful and therefore it is important that members of the public and both internal and external stakeholders are fully consulted throughout the process.

To facilitate this, a consultation questionnaire was drawn up and this went live, supported by both a press release and social media posts on the 10 January 2020 and closed on 14 February 2020. During this time, a total of 408 responses were received.

There was a total of 16 questions contained in the questionnaire, which consisted of a mixture of tick box answers and opportunities for respondents to provide comments and suggestions for possible improvements and actions regarding active travel infrastructure and initiatives in the city. The full list of questions (and analysis of responses) can be seen in appendix 2.

The main perceptions were that Aberdeen is only moderately pedestrian friendly, whereas it was rated as not being cycle friendly, which is disappointing given the investment in active travel that has been made within the city as part of the current Active Travel Action Plan, but clearly demonstrates that a further step change in active travel provision is required as we move into the next iteration of the Action Plan.

It was suggested that the current measures that have been implemented were a step in the right direction, but that there needed to be more pedestrianisation, segregated paths, more off-road cycling routes and better maintenance of the existing infrastructure to really encourage a greater take-up of active travel. It was also felt that the current network was too piecemeal and that there needed to be a more coordinated network of walking and cycling routes to encourage greater participation in active travel. It can also be inferred from the responses that the public are in favour of the ongoing delivery of the projects identified in the CCMP and SUMP, given that the city centre was seen as a priority area for improvement by most respondents. Figure 5 below summarises the main responses and suggestions to improve walking and cycling.

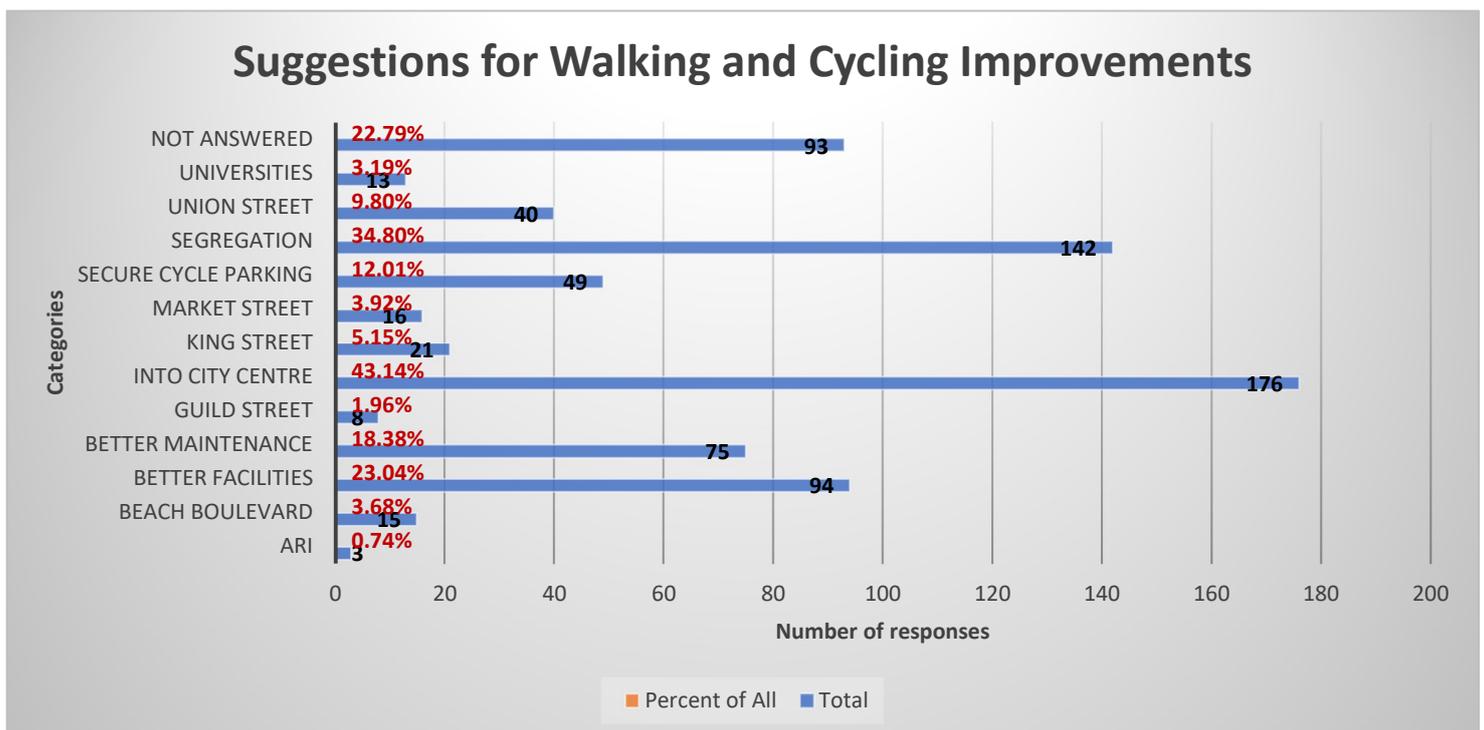


Figure 5 – Suggested Walking and Cycling improvements

Covid-19 Implications

Since the initial round of consultation, however, transport and travel has been disrupted in a way that could not have been foreseen at the start of the year. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, on the 23rd March 2020, the UK Government declared that the country would be placed in ‘lockdown’ with severe restrictions on peoples’ movements to tackle the spread of the virus. Shops, businesses, and offices were forced to close and social distancing measures were introduced, with many people being furloughed or working from home with virtual work meetings becoming the norm.

As part of the lockdown all but essential travel was discouraged, with public transport demand falling significantly and a significant decrease in car journeys. Figures from Transport Scotland show that demand for public transport nationally fell by around 85 to 95% from normal levels and that the demand for travel overall fell from an average of 2.7 trips per person per day pre Covid-19 to 0.9 trips per person per day during lockdown. At the same time, significant increases in walking and cycling trips were recorded. The figures below compare a week in May 2020, with a week in May 2019.



Figure 6 – May 2020 level of pedestrian activity



Figure 7 – May 2020 level of cycle activity



** Source data has been provided for NO₂ levels as it is a local pollutant from vehicles and is therefore suitable to demonstrate the impact of lockdown. PM₁₀ levels have not been provided as they are influenced by wider sources and gives a less accurate picture of local impact.*

Figure 8– May 2020 air quality levels in Aberdeen

As we emerge from this crisis, Active travel has a larger part to play than ever before in opening up society again, facilitating safe and healthy movements, and contributing to economic recovery. This is reflected in recent Government guidance that walking and cycling are the optimum forms of transport in terms of physical distancing and for making local journeys which support small businesses and the future prosperity of our town and city centres.

Consultation on Final Draft

The results of the initial consultation were analysed and used to draft up a final report that went out to further public consultation on 14 September 2020 and finished on 25 October 2020. A total of 100 responses were received for this consultation, with the majority of responses being from individuals. Overall, the consultation showed significant support for the vision, actions and priorities identified in the draft Plan.

In light of the current Covid-19 pandemic, respondents were asked how important they felt it was to take the effects of the pandemic into account when preparing the Action Plan. 27% thought it was important or very important with a further 26% stating they felt neutral on this matter. There was a roughly even split as to whether respondents felt that Covid-19 would change their travel behaviour with 36% stating it would and 43% stating it would have no effect.

There was a favourable response to the draft Action Plan with 50% of respondents stating they agreed with the objectives and 27% disagreeing. 41% agreed with the projects laid out in the Action Plan with 24% disagreeing and 65% agreed with the overall vision for the Action Plan, with only 22% disagreeing. Overall, 41% were content with the document overall, with 30% not being content.

The results of the consultation are therefore encouraging and demonstrate that there is public support for the aims and objectives of the proposed Active Travel Action Plan.

The full list of questions (and analysis of responses) can be found in appendix 3.

Active Travel Action Plan 2021-2026 - List of Projects

The Active Travel Action Plan must align with national, regional, and local strategies and policies. However, it is also important that the feedback and comments provided during the consultation process are also taken into consideration and are represented in the list of projects that will be taken forward during the lifetime of the action plan. A number of other sources of information and feedback have also been drawn upon to develop the list of projects within this Action Plan, namely an Origin-Destination study looking at the most common movements to, from and within Aberdeen for work and education and comments received in response to our Spaces for People engagement activities. A number of actions from the last Plan have also been carried forward.

The full list of projects can be found [here](#).

Conclusion

The Scottish Government signalled its continued commitment to Active Travel with the publication of the updated National Transport Strategy in February 2020. This is coupled with the commitment towards a net zero emissions target for greenhouse gases by 2045 as laid out in the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019 which enshrines the commitment in law. This will necessitate a move away from the unrestrained use of fossil fuels and private cars for all journeys towards more sustainable forms of transport.

Regionally, the forthcoming Regional Transport Strategy, Nestrans 2040, will also place an emphasis on Active Travel and the forthcoming review of the Local Transport Strategy in 2021, is also expected to place a greater emphasis on sustainable travel. It could therefore be argued that the business case for Active Travel, which has already been proven, will be strengthened by this renewed focus on Active Travel as a key component of creating a vibrant and sustainable economy and making Aberdeen a place where people want to work, live and play.

The current Active Travel Action Plan (2017-2021) is nearing the end of its cycle and the time is therefore right to refresh the plan to ensure that it aligns more with current policies and strategies. Much progress has been made on the current plan and projects identified within the revised Roads Hierarchy, City Centre Masterplan and the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan have been completed or have been substantially progressed during this period. However, perhaps one of the major achievements has been the completion of the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route which has altered traffic flows and patterns in and around the city and enabled the opportunity to allow for a major rethink of the city's transport network to better facilitate and encourage active travel.

A consultation exercise was carried out in early 2020 and demonstrated that a further step change in active travel provision is required as we move into the next iteration of the Action Plan.

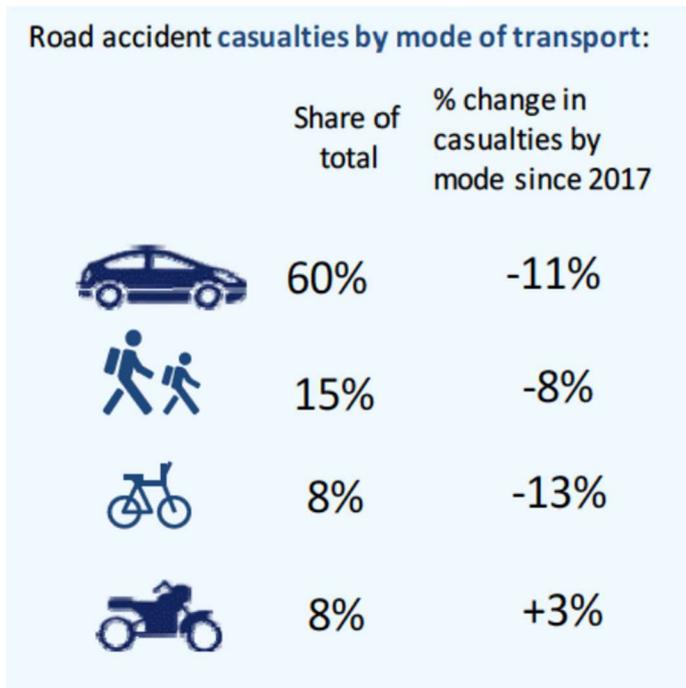
Covid-19 has also had a major impact on travel behaviour with the lockdown restrictions necessitating the widescale adoption of working from home and a rise in walking and cycling as all but essential travel was discouraged and social distancing measures were put in place.

The revised draft Active Travel Action Plan 2021 therefore takes account of the progress made on delivering the previous plan, changes to the transport network since the last plan was adopted, the

new policy context and the undoubted impact that Covid-19 has had on travel behaviour and is likely to have into the future. It also reflects the wishes of all stakeholders and members of the public identified during previous consultation activities.

Ultimately, the new Active Travel Action Plan (2021-2026), must take forward the considerable work already undertaken to encourage and facilitate active travel with even more ambitious projects if the vision for Aberdeen contained in the current Local Outcome Improvement Plan of making Aberdeen a place where its citizens can prosper is to be fully realised.

Infographic A – Road Casualty Accidents by Mode



Footnotes

1 Cycling Scotland Annual Cycling Monitoring Report 2019 <https://www.cycling.scot/mediaLibrary/other/english/6353.pdf>