



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Infrastructure

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Active Travel:
Department for Infrastructure; Sustrans

18 November 2020

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Miss Michelle McIlveen (Chairperson)
Mr David Hilditch (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Martina Anderson
Mr Roy Beggs
Mr Cathal Boylan
Mrs Dolores Kelly
Ms Liz Kimmins
Mr Andrew Muir

Witnesses:

Ms Liz Loughran	Department for Infrastructure
Ms Claire Mulvenna	Department for Infrastructure
Ms Caroline Bloomfield	Sustrans
Ms Anne Madden	Sustrans

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): I welcome Caroline Bloomfield, director of Sustrans; Anne Madden, policy and media adviser with Sustrans; Liz Loughran, director of transport policy in the Department for Infrastructure; and Claire Mulvenna from the active travel branch in the Department for Infrastructure. You are all very welcome to the Committee. It is really good to see you. If you would like to start off with an opening statement, members will follow up with some questions.

Ms Liz Loughran (Department for Infrastructure): Thank you, Chair. I will open for the Department. The Minister has indicated on a number of occasions that she is very keen to change the way that we live and is very keen to improve walking and cycling infrastructure for health reasons, particularly mental health reasons, and for air quality reasons. Obviously, during the pandemic, we have seen a big change in the way that a lot of people seem to have rediscovered walking and cycling. The Minister had already been talking about a green recovery and was very focused on dealing with the climate crisis, but, given the current crisis, she has asked the Department to accelerate a number of issues to make sure that, as we emerge from this, we take a green approach to it.

We have made progress on a number of fronts. In May, the Minister created the position of a walking and cycling champion, and I am the walking and cycling champion for the Department. The reason that it sits with me and within transport policy is to make sure that everything that we do on transport policy refers to walking and cycling and that walking and cycling are thought about when we make any form of transport policy. It is about embedding the needs of people who walk and people who cycle within general transport policy and within the transport plans that we are developing at the moment. It is about making sure that it is at the heart of the Department.

To help me in that role, the Minister established a walking and cycling advisory group, the role of which is to discuss areas of interest and to offer advice to me and to challenge me on walking and cycling as we move forward. The Minister also created a blue/green infrastructure fund, and that is £20 million of capital that is intended to promote active travel, to help to reshape places and to transform communities. So far, some of that has been allocated to greenway projects and to pilots and, in partnership with DFC, to the COVID revitalisation fund. We are also using some of it to do work on footpaths and cycle paths with our Roads colleagues, and there are a number of other initiatives that I am working on at the moment that the Minister will advise the Committee of in due course.

We have also written to councils to ask them to bring forward ideas. We have had quite intensive engagement with a number of councils, talking to them about things that might help and things that they want to try and want to do. It is a really fruitful approach to build those partnerships and for the councils to work with their stakeholders, but it is quite an intensive process. Given what is coming out of that already, it is a very worthwhile process.

The Minister has also looked at some of our work with schools, which Caroline will talk about later. We have a partnership with Sustrans on the Active School Travel programme. We also provide a range of road safety teaching resources, and the Minister is also rolling out 100 20 mph safe zones at schools that are intended to make sure that children can walk to school and can be safer, and that complements our efforts to make sure that they feel confident to walk, wheel, cycle or scoot.

Earlier in the year, we put out a Great Things Happen campaign, which is an advertising campaign to encourage people to walk for shorter journeys, where possible. About a third of all journeys in Northern Ireland are shorter than two miles, so there is clearly a real untapped resource for walking. Another third are between two and five miles, so cycling comes to the fore there. It is about trying to capitalise on well-being benefits — improve mental health and encourage physical exercise — but it is also about tackling childhood obesity and addressing the detrimental effects that current traffic patterns have on air quality and on our places, as they become car-dominated.

My final point is on the Belfast bicycle network, which is a much-delayed piece of work. We started to develop the network in 2015, and we consulted in 2017. In the absence of Ministers, work was paused, but we are putting together the final version of the Belfast bicycle network at the moment. Hopefully, that will be the first of many. The work on the transport plans and the analysis for them has shown us that, in a number of market towns, there are significant cycling opportunities and cycling network opportunities, so I very much hope that the Belfast one is the first of many.

Those are my opening comments, Madam Chair.

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): Thank you.

Ms Caroline Bloomfield (Sustrans): Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to you this morning. I would like to take you through some of the slides that we sent in advance and to talk a little bit about why we believe that active travel is so vital today and as part of our green recovery. I will say a little bit about some of the things that, we think, are important if we really want to see change here.

Sustrans is a UK-wide organisation that has been in existence for about 40 years. I joined just four months ago from the Public Health Agency, so I am relatively new. Sustrans' vision really resonates with me: the way that we choose to travel creates healthier places and happier lives for everyone. We want to make it easier for people to walk and cycle. We have two key priorities: paths for everyone, so that there are greenways and safe routes that a sensible 12-year-old could use on their own; and liveable cities and towns for everyone, so that people are supported and enabled to walk or cycle for everyday journeys. We really want to see a shift away from a focus on moving cars to a focus on moving people in and through our towns and cities.

Why is any of this important? Liz has alluded to some of the reasons. We know that active travel is very good for physical health. Being physically active dramatically reduces a person's risk of serious health conditions such as heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and so on. We also know that it reduces anxiety and depression and promotes well-being. It reduces congestion and, importantly, reduces air and noise pollution, which we certainly noticed during lockdown. It can also bring economic benefits and real tourism potential, particularly around greenways.

We know that making it easier for everyone is really important, because there are under-represented groups. The 'Belfast Bike Life' report that was published earlier this year showed that, in Belfast, 19% of men cycle once a week or more and only 5% of women do. The reasons that were cited for that

were safety and poor weather. We cannot do much about the weather, and I agree that it was challenging to cycle this morning [*Laughter*] but we absolutely can and should do something about the safety issue and the infrastructure. When I cycle on local greenways, I see all ages and abilities. I see small children, children cycling to school and older people walking dogs. However, when I cycle on roads, I see few women and even fewer children. I think that, if we want to be inclusive, we really need to see a much greater focus on providing safe, dedicated infrastructure.

Across the UK and in Ireland, there is a vast differential in spending. It is estimated to be £7 per head in England, rising to £10 per head in Wales and £25 per head in Scotland. A massive £66 per head in the Republic of Ireland has been announced. In Northern Ireland, it has traditionally been about £2 per head, so it has been much lower here. We have the Gear Change plan in England, which is a very ambitious programme for England. The Republic of Ireland has committed to investing 20% of its entire transport budget on this. You can see that we have a massive differential. There is a possibility that Northern Ireland gets left behind in the green recovery.

There is positive news, as £20 million has been awarded this year for blue/green infrastructure. That is really welcome, but that is a small percentage of the overall transport budget. We need to see a long-term, strategic approach to funding active travel, so that we can really build on this. I appreciate that funding is not infinite, but we have money, and we need to reprioritise how we spend that money. There is a strong economic case. The Department for Transport (DfT) in England reckons that, for every £1 that is spent, there are £5-50 of economic benefits back, which is much higher than road and rail schemes.

When COVID-19 hit, how much space we devote to cars became more obvious than ever. There are pictures on slide 7 that show that. There is a much greater recognition that we need more space for socially distanced walking and cycling. At that time, it was great to see the rapid progress that the Department made in pop-up infrastructure. We saw that on the Dublin Road and Grosvenor Road in Belfast, at the quay in Londonderry and with some pedestrianisation in the Cathedral Quarter. That was all really positive, and it happened really fast. It also showed what can happen when the political will is there, because they went up in a matter of weeks, and I know that some of the ones in Belfast have taken years to construct. However, things have slowed dramatically since then. I am not here to criticise Liz and her colleagues, because I know that they are doing really good work, and I think that they are under-resourced to do it. I would like to see the Department shaken up a bit, with more alignments between divisions, especially with the Roads Service being more integrated around active travel, to help to close the gap between the Minister's stated vision and ambition for active travel and what is actually being delivered.

There is a slide that shows our space-to-move app, which is where we have put in all the programmes for pop-up infrastructure that have happened around the UK. You can see that a lot has happened around the UK. Although we started well, ours has been relatively small.

There are four key things that, we believe, could make a significant difference in boosting active travel levels. The first is safe routes to school, and Liz mentioned that briefly. We believe that every child has the right to a safe and sustainable journey to school. Fifty per cent of primary-school children in Northern Ireland live under a mile from school, yet two thirds of primary-school children are driven to school. That is a shocking statistic. We have an Active School Travel programme, which has been really successful. Through that, we work with schools to support and enable more children to walk and cycle to school, but we know that it could have so much more impact if it was married with a programme of infrastructure improvements. As part of that, we would like to see School Streets piloted here. That is where streets close to through traffic at school start and finish times. A number of such pilots are happening in GB, and they seem to be very successful and popular.

How safe are our routes to school? I have a slide on that. Every year, we do a basic audit of all the schools that we work with, and, of the 30 schools that just joined — it is normally 60 a year, but there are fewer this year because of COVID — none had 20 mph limits outside, a third had 50 mph or 60 mph speed limits outside the gates, 17% had no footpaths, 93% had no traffic calming, 93% had no cycle paths and 83% had no road crossing within walking distance of the school. Really, what chance is there of those schools encouraging more parents to allow their children to walk and cycle to school? We have broadly similar statistics for every year that we have run the programme in the last six years. I think that five of those schools are in your Strangford constituency, Madam Chairperson. For example, Millennium Integrated Primary School in Saintfield has a 50 mph or 60 mph speed limit outside, no traffic calming and no road crossing. Carr Primary School in Lisburn is even worse. It has no footpaths either. It is really challenging in those schools. I think that we sent round the full audit report, if members want to look at schools in their constituencies.

Secondly, we would really like to see more greenways and protected paths. We have seen the huge success of the Connswater Community Greenway and the Comber greenway, where they have been constructed, and you can see on the slide a picture of the Sam Thompson bridge. That has revolutionised my cycle to work. I used to have to go along the Sydenham bypass, which is hideous, but I now go through a park with trees and swans, which is lovely. I was on the Waterford greenway during the summer, and I was blown away by the hundreds of people cycling there. I think that we are missing a massive trick around tourism with greenways. The cafes were buzzing. The towns were heaving. Cafes and bike hire had sprung up all along the routes. There is massive tourism potential in that, but we also need safer infrastructure where people live and work, so that they can commute, shop or just go about everyday life. The picture at the bottom of that slide on page 12 is London. The mayor's transport strategy in London prioritises the role of streets to improve health and well-being, creating low-traffic neighbourhoods, to include walking and cycling.

The third action that we would like to see is active travel hubs to support behaviour change. We have seen really good success at the CS Lewis Square active travel hub. We have been able to run programmes for families, for women returning to cycling, for workplaces and for many others. Infrastructure is great, absolutely, but many people will require a bit of support and encouragement to start cycling again, and we know that the biggest benefit and impact comes when we can marry infrastructure and behaviour change.

The last thing that I want to touch on is the idea of multimodal journeys. That is where you walk or cycle to a railway station or bus station, get on public transport and then walk or cycle at the other end. It is not just about cycle parking, although I put in a couple of pictures of that. We have a lot like the one on the left, where there is not much infrastructure, and we would love to get to a position where we have really good cycling provision. It is also about safe routes to stations and some behaviour change support. That could be a much-needed boost to public transport, and we might have a lot fewer cars trying to drive into Belfast if more people are using the trains from Lisburn, Bangor and other places.

We know that there is support for change. We did a survey last year in a number of cities across the UK, and 78% of people said that they support taking space away from cars and creating space for walkers and people on bicycles, and 67% of people in Belfast said that. That is not what you usually see reported in the 'Belfast Telegraph'. That survey was conducted last year before COVID, and I think that there is increased support now for creating space for walking and cycling. We need to take bold decisions, but they can be taken in the knowledge that the majority of people support them.

That is a quick run through some of what, we believe, is important. I am happy to answer any questions, and thank you very much for your time.

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): Thank you. The level of support has increased, particularly during COVID-19. We were also blessed with the weather at that time, so there was a substantial increase in walkers and cyclists. This is a topic that we will get parochial about. From my office in Comber, I see a lot of cyclists, by virtue of the Comber greenway, and people coming into the town. That has been well-sustained even though we are moving into the winter, which is encouraging. It is about improving infrastructure to allow that behavioural change.

I am interested in Liz's perspective. You came into a role that is new, and I suppose that it has lots of challenges. For you, there are lots of competing priorities in the Department. I suppose that it is difficult for you to be critical of other divisions, but for you, personally, what are your challenges?

Ms Loughran: My main challenge is culture change, not just in the Department but for all of us. For years, traffic progression has been seen as the most important thing and it has been seen as your right to have a car and drive everywhere. That has been seen as a given. We are now saying, "You know, actually, that is not a terribly good idea in all cases, and, where we can change, we really should be changing". However, given the set-up, every time that you try to take something away — that is how it feels; you are taking a car parking space or a lane away — motorists feel that they are losing something, so it becomes difficult. My biggest challenge is to see that culture change, and part of that is building consensus and coalitions.

I spent the summer doing a lot of work with councils to try to get into a space where we are bringing stakeholders together. That is a much easier task in some councils than in others, not because of anything that a council is doing but because, in areas where public transport is good and population density is high, it becomes much easier. In other areas, it is a much harder ask. It is not practical for a

lot of people to go the whole hog and trade in the car for a bike, but there are smaller things that we can do.

Caroline pointed out that the Department has a constrained budget, but there are priorities, and it is much cheaper to provide cycling and walking infrastructure than roads infrastructure. However, there is political consensus that a lot of the big road projects that we are doing are important for the economy. This is about leadership, consensus and partnership.

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): Of course, none of what you are suggesting is revolutionary. Those things are best practice in so many towns and cities across the United Kingdom and into Europe. There is the piece around multimodal journeys, in particular. If you have a bike, it makes sense that you can park it safely for the day. As you say, there are challenges, particularly in rural areas, where that is not possible. Given the issues of parking, particularly around Belfast — the challenge associated with that is as much financial as anything else — and pollution, it makes sense that we provide for such journeys.

The greenway projects have driven councils over the past number of years, and people have really taken to them, particularly where you have excellent models, such as at Connswater, and we are looking to improve the Comber greenway. It is encouraging to see some of the people whom you meet. Yesterday morning, I met Gordon Clarke in the square in Comber with his wife. She had walked the Comber greenway, and he had cycled it. To see that is really encouraging, but there are challenges around greenways too. You will know of the challenges around landownership. I suppose that the approach that some councils have taken has probably been better than the approach taken by others. It is about bringing people along with you. In hindsight, is there a better approach that you can see in order to have a realisation of some of these projects?

Ms Loughran: In hindsight and in looking at some of the issues around land acquisition for some of the councils, one of the things that we have learned, certainly from looking at the way that they have gone ahead with the Waterford greenway, is that you have to bank what you can. So, if you cannot get a full route, you should take it a piece at a time and do it a bit at a time. You will often find what they found in Waterford. Once they had completed certain sections, people who had been more reticent about other sections saw the success of a section, and that kind of brought them along. It is a long-term, relationship-building programme. It is time-consuming, and people are impatient to see change and to see it now.

The Connswater greenway is incredibly successful, and the council and all its partners did a brilliant job in delivering that, but it took more than 10 years. I think that the project's success is because they built those relationships, particularly with the community, as they went along. On what the councils have done so far, it is really a case of taking the easy wins first and working on the basis that, if you show success, the other bits are more likely to follow.

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): From speaking to some landowners, I know that they feel that there is a fait accompli when a project is being developed and they maybe have not been brought along. There is always the threat of vesting, and, particularly if you have a farm and it has been in your family for generations, that can be very difficult.

Ms Loughran: We have never vested for a greenway. Obviously, that is there, but the biggest success elsewhere has been through permissive agreements. So, it is not even necessarily about transferring landownership but is getting an agreement that the land can be used. That gives a bit more security to the landowner in that, if it is a real disaster, they can back away from it.

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): Thank you. Finally from me, on the issue of safe schools, the information that you provided us with is quite stark and really, really worrying. We will all have various examples of schools around our areas. While the 20 mph speed limit is a start, it is not the only thing that will make a difference. So much more is required in and around that. I have seen the School Streets initiative for safe streets around schools, and it would be interesting if you could share a bit of information on that and on how that could possibly be achieved.

Ms Bloomfield: We would really like to align that with the Active School Travel programme and have a more joined-up approach between infrastructure and behaviour change. You could pilot the School Streets initiative, obviously with some schools that are interested and willing to do that. I understand that a number of schools already work with the school community and with the local community. The idea is for traffic calming at either end of the street. There are signs up, for instance in planters, that

restrict access, but they do not restrict access completely. Residents can still move through, and the emergency services can still move through, but the idea is that it cuts school through traffic for people who are just using it as a rat run to get through or to drop off their children. It becomes a much more pleasant place to be, where it is safe and there is limited traffic that moves very slowly. It is for 45 minutes, roughly between 8.30 am and 9.15 am and from 3.00 pm until 3.45 pm. There are pilots happening at the moment, and we can certainly feed back the results of those when we have them.

Although there is always some initial resistance when anything like this is set up, it seems that, after a few weeks, people get used to it and it works well. It is aligned to the idea of low-traffic neighbourhoods, which are also being piloted. That is more permanent and is not just at school times, but the idea is that only local residents are able to drive through the areas. At the beginning, people were saying, "This is terrible", but we find that, when we go back and survey a few months later, nobody wants to return to the way that it was before because it is working very well. School Streets, in particular, could be piloted quite easily. That scheme does not need many resources, and we can certainly provide more information on how it might work in practice.

We would like to see a greater alignment. Some infrastructure improvements happen at schools, but they are not aligned to the Active School Travel programme. Also, from what I understand, they are decided on based on whether children have been killed or seriously injured rather than by looking at the opportunity to change and how we can promote that. If nobody has died at a site, it is regarded as fine. Maybe nobody has died there because nobody in their right mind would consider crossing the road. It is about change and looking at our opportunity to change and what we can do proactively to boost walking and cycling and to have more focus on that. Maybe we can do it by looking at a cluster of schools, and Liz and I have discussed the idea of taking a place and looking to work with a cluster of schools to see whether we can have a greater impact by doing it like that. We would certainly like to trial new approaches. Behaviour change is great and makes a big difference, but, if you have no footpath to your school, what are the chances of families walking to school? They are very low.

Mr Boylan: Thank you very much for the presentations. You are very welcome. Caroline, I will have to take you out of those big urban settings and back to rural areas. There is a great opportunity with the Smithborough to Middletown greenway in my constituency. It is 22 kilometres long — 13.2 miles in old money — and there is a good opportunity there. It is not only about the greenway and active travel but about helping to enhance the village itself. Through the likes of community plans in councils and area plans, there is an opportunity to develop the whole village. That is a key point, and that is why I am keen on that greenway. Other members will talk about their areas, but there is an opportunity there now. That is ongoing, and I am keen on it. I would like your support for that in any way you can.

Liz, I want to go back to what we have learned from lockdown, because there was a key opportunity there. People took it upon themselves, no matter how much encouragement. Have we utilised that? What have we learned from it? What can we bank from it? How do we move forward? Could more have been done? Where are we at? I ask the question across the board, including to Caroline, but what is the Department's view?

Ms Loughran: Before I come on to that, I will say that the key to the success of the Middletown greenway will be getting the link to the village right, because, in terms of greenway development, it is not coming right into the heart of the village. If we can crack that, it becomes really important to tourism for the village.

What did we learn from lockdown? In some way, there was a sense of, "Just do it". One example that I always use is the stretch of cycleway at Middlepath Street, and it took us three years to design, consult, consult again, design again, consult again, build and then correct the deficiencies. The section at the Dublin Road took us three weeks. What we did on the Dublin Road is not without opposition, but I suspect that, if we had taken three years to deliver it, we would still have the same issues. We need to be targeted about consultation, and we need to talk to people. If you have invested three years in a scheme, you become stuck in it, but, with something like the Dublin Road section, which took three weeks, you are in a position simply to move it if it does not work and the community hates it. Sometimes, it is a case of saying, "We've tried this. It was a mistake", albeit I am not saying that the Dublin Road scheme was a mistake. It is about trying things, being open to things and saying, "Let's give it a go. If it doesn't work, we'll stop it".

As we move forward into the next phase, we are looking at extending. We had originally intended to extend out to the City Hospital, but that was delayed because Phoenix was doing some work. Although that delay was frustrating at the time, it has been useful for me because it has allowed me to look at whether we can do anything better, in light of what happened on the Dublin Road and how

people felt about various bits of it. On the Donegall Road, we have put in what I think will be an uncontroversial section, and a section with which, I know, shopkeepers, in particular, might have issues. We have looked at that and said that maybe there is a slightly different solution, and that it will be a better job. The learning has been not to be afraid to try something and step away from it if it is not working.

Ms Bloomfield: I will go back to what you said about greenways. You are absolutely right: they can bring a boost to local towns and villages. I witnessed that this summer. I was on my holidays and chose to go to the Waterford to Dungarvan greenway. Dungarvan was buzzing: new restaurants and B&Bs had opened. All the little villages along that route have felt the boost. There were cafes and bike hire. Loads of families had made an effort to go there for a trip. As Liz pointed out, the village should be included, and it is critical that there are links from the greenways to other points of interest. Greenways can be an anchor for renewed tourism and economic growth. It is also important that we have a strategic and network approach to greenway development across Northern Ireland. My only concern with it being devolved to councils is that it might be piecemeal and fragmented, and they will not necessarily join up and get a cross-council boundary and, subsequently, not deliver the strategic network that the Department is looking for.

Mr Boylan: I appreciate what you say about Middletown. We need to be creative and more ambitious. The community and area plans give a big opportunity. Community plans have been developed, but those things should be looked at. I have two further points. People, especially cyclists, are concerned about safety. The old system was a white line painted on the road. Nowadays, more robust measures have been introduced. Are those old white lines a thing of the past? Are we moving forward to more secure measures to encourage people, especially cyclists? I saw some on the slides.

Ms Loughran: Advisory cycle lanes and white lines do not work in most places now. Our preference is for segregated cycle lanes. There are very few places where you might do that, but they are permissible within the guidance. It is like shared paths. Generally, we are against shared paths because they do not work for cyclists or pedestrians, but, in areas where there is low pedestrian footfall and no alternative to provide a cycle path, we tend to say that a shared path is better than no path. The same applies to advisory cycle lanes. They might be the only option in a very few circumstances, but, generally, we work hard to make sure that there is a proper segregated path.

Ms Bloomfield: It is important that they are joined up and do not just stop when you need them at junctions and roundabouts, which is usually what happens. New design standards have been brought in for cycling infrastructure, and I would very much like to see those being adopted. It should not just be seen as something that is nice to do if you have loads of space; it should be given priority. It should also not always be an add-on; it should be an integral part of any new road route, reappraisal or roadworks. Also, we should make some difficult decisions and maybe take a bit of space away from cars to give more space to walkers and cyclists.

Mr Boylan: Finally, many people have been talking about active travel legislation. What is your assessment of that and of how it could help, bearing in mind what you have had to say about cycle lanes?

Ms Loughran: OK. We did some preparatory work on an active travel Bill in 2016. The Minister has asked me to look at that and for a range of information about that. She is looking at options for policy change and at the potential for legislative change. She is looking at that actively.

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): Has any consideration been given to setting up a dedicated greenways unit in the Department? Taking on board the fragmented approach of the councils to greenways, such a unit would oversee projects from start to finish rather than leaving it to the councils to deliver them.

Ms Loughran: There is a greenways team in the active travel branch, but, given the size of that branch, it is very small. Do you mean that the Department should deliver greenways rather than councils delivering them?

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): Someone needs to take it all in and have oversight rather than it being left to councils. There should be a consultative relationship with the Department rather than the Department driving it. We are not seeing delivery on greenways, but, if someone took charge of them, you might see the transformation that everybody is looking for.

Ms Loughran: OK. As Caroline said, we have a greenways strategy that gives strategic direction. I have spoken to representatives from nearly every council and their greenways officers, so I am trying to bring that focus to them. As you said, we have a strategic view, but there is a gap because the councils' priorities do not always match exactly with that strategic view.

Mr Boylan: That is a budgetary issue, Chair. That is why I mentioned the need for it to be more joined up. If we are serious about greenways, there can be big benefits. I know that there are differences among councils.

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): I am not sure that every council sees greenways as a priority.

Mr Boylan: That is because of funding.

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): They are seen as luxury items rather than necessities. The Assembly thinks that greenways are important, and we have all bought into them. There would be a much more positive message if they were driven more centrally.

Ms Loughran: Yes. We have not looked at that at all, beyond the conversations that we have had with the councils. Most of the councils that are talking to me about greenways are very interested in greenways, but that in itself is a circular argument.

DFI was ready to go with a greenways support programme, but then we had the hiatus with no Assembly or Ministers in place for three years. That meant that councils took their foot off the gas on greenways development. Now, when I have been speaking to the councils and told them that we have the money and are ready to go, some of them have been slower than they might have been. They seem to be working to catch up, but I accept your point entirely that not all councils are in the same place or have the same view.

Mr Muir: At the outset, I declare that I was previously a member of Ards and North Down Borough Council. I also volunteer with Sustrans. I have got that out of the way.

There are a couple of things. I will touch on the engagement with councils to develop greenways. That is really important. Two of the previous contributors have teased that out, and I welcome the fact that you have engaged with them.

I understand that you are the walking and cycling champion, Liz.

Ms Loughran: Yes.

Mr Muir: The public perception is that you are a bit of an enigma, because a lot of people have been asking, "Who is the walking and cycling champion?", so we can unveil you today. How much of your job do you dedicate to that role? I am conscious of the need to put resources to the position.

Ms Loughran: That is quite a difficult question, to be honest. To me, the role of the walking and cycling champion is about making sure that it is at the heart of everything else that I do. When I am working on transport plans, am I acting as the walking and cycling champion? To me, yes, I am.

The outward-facing role of the walking and cycling champion, plus the blue/green infrastructure, probably takes up about 75% of my time. However, I would argue that the way in which the Minister has conceived of the role of walking and cycling champion means that everything that I do now is with that role in mind.

Mr Muir: It is important to put that focus on it because the slide from Caroline on the level of investment in active travel in Northern Ireland makes for quite stark reading. In your professional opinion, why have we got into such a situation where it is so low compared with the rest of the UK and Ireland? That is holding back an awful lot that needs to be done.

Ms Loughran: Honestly, I think that a number of choices were made over a number of years, and walking and cycling was not as high a priority as spending money in other areas. Budgets are limited. It is about priorities, as Caroline said.

Mr Muir: In the Republic of Ireland, for example, £66 is spent per person. From Caroline's perspective, why has it managed to get to such a level?

Ms Bloomfield: Their Government have decided that 20% of their entire transport budget will be devoted to active travel. My understanding is that, a couple of years ago, our transport budget was £437 million.

Ms Loughran: We got less than £4 million of that.

Ms Bloomfield: We are a very small percentage. The Government in the Republic of Ireland have been able to do it because they made a political choice that they will do 20%. We could make that decision as well if the political will were there.

Ms Loughran: That is brilliant, but of the transport budget that has already been spent, which 20% becomes the active travel budget?

Mr Muir: It is an important issue, and a political decision needs to be made. We need to show leadership. I welcome the blue/green fund, but it is a drop in the ocean compared with what needs to be done.

I have two other issues. In life before the pandemic in February, I visited the new transport hub in Derry. Part of that is meant to have an active travel centre. I would like an update on that. Are there plans to roll that out to other areas? I was in C S Lewis Square a few weeks ago, and it was very busy. I am interested to know whether more of those can be rolled out across Northern Ireland.

Ms Loughran: I have not been closely involved, but I will say where I think that the Department is on that. The Department had made an application to the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) for funding for the Derry hub. As far as I am aware, no decision has been taken, but I will check that. If I am incorrect, I will write to the Committee with more information. The next hub after Derry will be the new Belfast travel hub.

Ms Bloomfield: We are keen to see the hub in Derry being used. The facility has been built. The revenue funding is needed to run it as an information centre, running led rides, behaviour change programmes, bike maintenance and all that. We are really keen to be able to do that. We would love to see that in all railway stations. Some of the other hubs, such as the one at C S Lewis Square, are at the centre of a community. They are linked to local community organisations and employers. They can be multifaceted. Having them at transport nodes is a really good way in which to promote that end-to-end, multimodal journey concept. We would love to see more of those being developed.

Mr Muir: I am keen to see the one in Derry brought to fruition. Yesterday, I read in the newspapers about the official opening of the transport hub, but without the active travel centre. It is a key part of the jigsaw that needs to be there. A greenway links all the way down to it. I understand about the transport hub — as I have declared previously, I am a former employee of Translink — but that is a couple of years away. There is a real need to bring that out beyond C S Lewis Square, Derry and Belfast. It needs to be actively explored.

Lastly, just briefly, with regard to the safer schools initiative and so on, an announcement was made about the 20 mph zones. There is real annoyance in North Down that none of its schools was included in that. There really needs to be greater focus not only, as the Chair has said, on the 20 mph limits but on greater investment in those issues. Parents are contacting me and are really concerned that children will be knocked down outside schools. They want tangible action on that. It will be interesting to see whether any further funding will come forward for those schemes.

Ms Kimmins: Thanks to Liz and Caroline. Many of the issues have been discussed at length. I have a couple of questions, particularly about the 20 mph limit outside schools. I see that 17% of schools have 50 mph or 60 mph limits right outside their gates. That is really not ideal. As Caroline mentioned, the fact that action is taken only when someone is killed is really disappointing. I had heard that in the past. It is shocking that it has to come to that before action is taken. Obviously, as Liz mentioned, the Minister has started the roll-out of 100 20 mph zones. Has that put a dent in the statistic for 50 mph or 60 mph zones outside schools? Is that having an impact? We have been lobbying hard to have that extended to all schools so that they all have a 20 mph zone outside their gates to try to improve safety.

Ms Loughran: I am sorry: I did not catch the actual question. Was it about rolling that out to more schools, or about 50 mph and 60 mph zones?

Ms Kimmins: You are OK. The question was about whether the roll-out of 20 mph zones to 100 schools that has been announced will make an impact on the number of schools that currently have a 50 mph or 60 mph zone outside their gates. Will it bring that figure down?

Ms Loughran: Thank you. In some cases, yes, but it will not pick up every school that has a 50 mph or 60 mph limit outside. I suppose that two things are happening. First, with regard to the 100 20 mph zones, the Minister is keen that that will be rolled out to more schools next year, so that is the first 100. Secondly, there are the things that Caroline and I have been talking about. The 20 mph zones are a first step, but, if you do not have the proper infrastructure, they do not really matter. They make a bit of a difference but not enough. Putting infrastructure in will help. In conjunction with that, behavioural change work will be needed if we want kids to walk and cycle to school. I see this as the first step of what is pretty much a multistep programme, and the longer-term aim has to be getting cars away from school gates altogether.

Ms Kimmins: That is fair enough, and I agree with you. I consistently raise the issue of national speed limit roads outside rural schools. It is not as straightforward as just putting in a 20 mph zone. I have been raising that with the Department.

As you said, Liz, one of the issues is having the proper infrastructure, and the report mentions St Moninna's Primary School — formerly Cloughoge Primary School — in my constituency. There were moves to reduce the speed limit there, but road linkages and footpaths are missing, and there are other examples of that in the area. Is the Department looking at putting in road crossings? Some 73% of schools have no road crossing within walking distance, and 35% are in urgent need of road crossings. Is the Department looking at that in conjunction with the 20 mph zones? Should we be looking at that for all schools?

Ms Loughran: I do not know about that specific school but, in general, yes. We look at improving walking and crossings. It is not always linked directly to the school, so, again, in some of the work that Caroline and I are doing, we are trying to find a way to pull all that together and potentially pilot something before looking more widely.

Ms Bloomfield: One of the criticisms has been that such a small number of schools get improvements each year — three or four, I think — and we really need that to be rolled out at a much higher level.

Ms Kimmins: My experience of raising issues and trying to get traffic calming and things like that at schools is that the criteria sometimes do not enable it. The approach should be looking at active travel as opposed to how many cars are on a particular road. We should improve active travel rather than, as you said earlier, looking at whether there have been any deaths. That is the way forward. Would it be possible, Liz, to get a list of the schools that are classified as being in urgent need of a road crossing?

Ms Loughran: I will certainly ask my Roads colleagues. I am not sure in what form they hold the list, but I will see what we can produce and then write to the Committee, Madam Chair.

Ms Kimmins: That is fair enough. You mentioned the rural safe routes to school programme. Can we get a wee bit more detail on that? As I mentioned, I have been lobbying for rural schools in my constituency, so I would be interested to know a bit more about that.

Ms Bloomfield: That was a programme that Sustrans delivered for the Department over 10 years ago. It looked at the very issue of how we get children to school safely. The programme was specifically for rural areas, and it showed significant improvements and good results. It also highlighted the benefit of marrying infrastructure and behaviour change. The evaluation of the programme was that it had been successful, but it was not continued when the funding ended. We would love it to be reinvigorated.

Ms Kimmins: Would it be possible to get some information on what that entailed? Maybe, as a Committee, we could speak to the Department about that.

Ms Bloomfield: We can certainly forward you a copy of the evaluation report.

Ms Kimmins: That would be great, yes. Thank you. I have finished my questions, Chair.

Mr Hilditch: You are very welcome. Thanks for your presentation. We were not as lucky in east Antrim. There was a proposed greenway between Greenisland and Monkstown a couple of years back, but, unfortunately, a local councillor spoke to all the residents along that route and told them that there would be break-ins, drinking and all sorts of things. There was a public meeting, and the officers nearly got bate at it. There was a pretty negative response, unfortunately. I hear that it might come back to the table, but I am not sure about that. That was a bad experience, to be honest. We thought that we were getting something.

On the 20 mph zones at the schools and whatnot, we have been successful in getting one in Carrick, with lights and all, but the Education Authority seems to be systematically doing away with lollipop men. You are trying to create a proper, safe route to school for kids. At one end, you are doing something good; at the other, it is taking away the benefit and diluting the whole thing. Have you had any discussion with the Education Authority about its input into the whole thing? To be honest, that is a negative.

Ms Loughran: I am not aware of any discussion. I will check with my colleagues in road safety and add what I find to the response to the Committee.

Mr Hilditch: I think that the Education Authority thought that you were taking advantage of the good work that other folk are doing, and, for the sake of £9,000 or £10,000, taking away lollipop men.

Ms Loughran: Yes.

Mr Hilditch: You mentioned multimodal journeys, where you link up with trains and whatnot. Maybe Andrew will be able to answer this question: was it the case that you could not get a bicycle on a train coming to Belfast until after 10.00 am?

Mr Muir: It was after 9.30 am.

Mr Hilditch: That does not really work. People are looking to get on their bike at the other end and go to wherever they work, and the stations are not always located near to their workplace. Have you had any discussions with Translink about that?

Ms Loughran: Yes, I have had discussions with Translink about that, particularly during the first lockdown, when there was a lot of space on trains. Translink's current preferred approach is to provide cycle parking at stations: you cycle to the station and leave your bike in a secure lock-up; you take the train or bus; and then you either walk or pick up a hire cycle or a second owned cycle at the other side.

Mr Hilditch: It starts to become a bit expensive at that point.

Ms Loughran: Yes. I would be keen to at least try a pilot, just something small, maybe on one route, to see what happens. I am talking to Translink about that. Again, it is a matter of saying, "Let's try it. If it's a disaster, we can stop it".

Ms Bloomfield: I think that Scotland is looking at having additional carriages on trains specifically for bicycles. We would love there to be capacity for more bicycles to be carried and at an earlier time.

Mr Hilditch: That would be great.

You mentioned £20 million in the budget for a blue/green strategy. Do you know what that will be spent on or where it is earmarked for?

Ms Loughran: Some of it is already earmarked. We are still developing some of it. Very roughly, £5 million has gone into the partnership with DFC and DAERA on COVID revitalisation. That has gone to the councils. Letters of offer have issued, and councils are working on their plans.

Mr Hilditch: What will that be used for?

Ms Loughran: The DFC element of the fund is focused on town centres and helping businesses to recover from the pandemic. Some has gone into grant funding and some to public realm improvements. The DFI contribution that matches that is more about trying to create connections: providing more space for walking and cycling, turning parking spaces into parklets and improving accessibility for disabled people. It is also looks at connections outside town centres between, say, local shops and houses and at improving pathways or lighting pathways. There is a whole range of things in that space at the moment. Some of it is about providing cycle parking. Each council has its own mini plan. It is DFI's money plus either DFC or DAERA money, depending on whether it is a rural town or an urban town. An awful lot of work is going on in councils at the moment on that.

So far, we have allocated £3.735 million to greenways. Not all of that will be spent this year. There is nearly £4 million for small walking and cycling schemes. That is the work that our Roads colleagues do on footpath improvements or providing new cycling infrastructure. Also, there are a number of pilots. About £1 million is currently allocated to support pilots with councils. Some of that has already been spent on things like pop-up cycle lanes. A fair number of other things are under consideration. The Minister is considering some stuff that we are developing, and she has said that she will update you in due course as those come forward.

Mr Hilditch: I look forward to that.

Mr Beggs: Liz, you mentioned the success of the Belfast cycling network, and I concur that it is great to be able to cycle from Jordanstown to Belfast city centre and along the Lagan towpath to Lisburn, having to cross the road only occasionally. However, there are some gaps when you try to link to the other urban centres in the greater Belfast area. What efforts are being made to connect the likes of Carrickfergus with the network, where a relatively short restriction as a result of insufficient road width is stopping there being a linkage right from the town centre of Carrickfergus to Belfast and beyond?

Ms Loughran: I do not know the specific link. I wonder whether I can bring in my colleague Claire, who may know the detail. Is that OK, Chair?

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): Of course.

Ms Claire Mulvenna (Department for Infrastructure): Some of the work that we are doing on the Belfast bicycle network will reach out some distance, but maybe not as far as Carrick. Every year, we look to identify linkages, and, over the past number of years, we have been working to connect the end of the foreshore on out towards Carrick. I cannot say off the top of my head, but I can certainly find out for sure, and we can write to the Committee to update it on that. My colleagues in Roads have been working to improve the linkage in that direction. It is not quite there yet, but they are working on that.

Mr Beggs: With area planning, the planners look at the main motorway developments, the spine roads and so on, but are you looking at where there are opportunities to develop cycling and walking routes, particularly to ensure that, where there are developer-led new roads, those are developed with walking and cycling routes in mind?

Ms Loughran: At the moment, as part of the local development plan process, we provide councils with transport studies, which look at their growth aspirations and set out the evidence on what impact those would have on the transport network. They also include active travel, public transport, car and freight movements. The next step will be that, as they produce their planned strategy on that basis, they should use active travel to address some of the issues that come up within that evidence base. That will all be tested as part of the planning process at independent examination (IE). It becomes a bit of an iterative process, in that we will be both providing the evidence for and pushing through the IE to make sure that councils pick up active travel opportunities. The detail on specific routes may not come in until the final stage, which is when they do their local plan policies, but, as I said, it is a bit of an iterative process because there is no point waiting for that to come out if we can see things that need to be done now.

Mr Beggs: The slide that Caroline from Sustrans provided to us is helpful. It shows that, in Northern Ireland, a derisory £2 per head of population is spent on active travel, compared with £7 in England, £10 in Wales, £25 in Scotland and £66 in the Republic of Ireland. Why is it so low, Liz?

Ms Loughran: It is because the political priorities over the past 30, 40, 50 years here have been on spending the transport budget on things other than active travel.

Mr Beggs: Do you accept that, with COVID, there has been a reawakening when it comes to taking a variety of travel options and an increase in the general willingness of the public to improve their health, not just because of COVID? My son, who lives in London, had not cycled a great deal but now cycles regularly into the City of London, and there has been a remarkable increase in the number who do the same. I take it that the same is happening on cycle routes into Belfast.

Ms Loughran: I do not just accept it; like the Minister, I absolutely welcome it. With the opportunities that now exist, and with people prepared to think about doing things differently, we have a window of opportunity to build on that and make sure that we do not slip back to the automatic way of doing things.

Mr Beggs: The behaviour learned in early years is important. As such, do you accept that improving pedestrian access to all primary schools and making it safer — for communities, that could be improving access even to their local shops — should be a priority so that, from an early age, children, and their parents, benefit from walking and do not think automatically of jumping into a car?

Ms Loughran: Getting in at an early age and encouraging people to make healthier choices at the start is key.

Mr Beggs: When will funding go beyond the first 100 schools that benefited from the recent announcement?

Ms Loughran: The 100 schools are for this year. That is the Department's capacity to deliver within a year. That is the first announcement. We do not yet know what our budgets will be next year, but the Minister is keen to continue on that path.

Ms Bloomfield: It is about how you make the healthier choice the easier choice. Your question about Carrickfergus was interesting because we have been looking at a Carrickfergus Castle to Bangor Castle cycle route, which would be a wonderful tourist route right along the shore. Cooperation from a number of councils is needed to make that happen, but it could be a wonderful achievement.

Mr Beggs: It is also important to develop a network in towns. Carrickfergus is ripe for developing such a network, with multiple rights of way perpendicular to the coast, along which farmers used to haul seaweed to their fields. There are those rights of way, along with a couple of intersections parallel to the coast.

Ms Anderson: Thank you, Liz and Caroline. I am interested in what you say, but I think that all of us are quite disappointed when we see the spend per head of population. When you compare the North with the South of Ireland, the difference is stark.

I want to ask about improving multimodal journeys. My understanding is that bike sheds are crucial, as well as changing facilities and getting bikes on to trains. What discussions have you had with Translink on that?

Ms Loughran: Translink is already starting to provide secure travel hubs, particularly at railway stations. I want to see it provide more. Some councils will provide secure cycle hubs with the money that we are providing to them through the revitalisation fund. The Minister will fund them directly for park-and-ride sites. Secure cycle parking is key to encourage people to make multimodal journeys. With regard to bikes on trains, as I mentioned earlier, I have said to Translink, "Look, let's just try a pilot. If it's a disaster, we can stop it."

Ms Anderson: It happens all over Europe, and it is not a disaster.

Ms Loughran: Yes. Caroline mentioned extra train carriages being bought for some of the trains in the Highlands to help with touring. That will make a massive difference to tourism there. We would like to see more work going on there. We are also thinking about the active travel hubs, which we talked about earlier. You get to the railway or bus station, but where do you go from there? It would make a big difference if there was somebody there to signpost you to greenways or safe networks, or to help with bike maintenance and fixing any issues.

Ms Bloomfield: We are having discussions with Translink on the idea of piloting a couple of towns and looking at what happens at stations, as well as at how routes to stations can be improved — be that through crossings or better walking and cycling infrastructure — and what is required to encourage people who live close by to walk or cycle to the station. It is not just about the cycle parking once you get there but about how to improve the routes to the stations.

Ms Anderson: I am aware, as are others, of the active travel hub in east Belfast and its success. Mr Muir mentioned the transport hub in Derry. I am an MLA for Derry, so I am acutely aware of the north-west transport hub, which has, as you mentioned, an active travel hub. There is an opportunity to have an information point, training facility and secure bike parking, but you have to go to the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) for revenue. That might be connected to the meagre £2 per head of population that you outlined. I think that Chris Hazzard was the Minister who secured the £23 million for greenways from the EU in 2016, but we are getting to the point at which we cannot go to the EU in search of funding. It would be good to get an update, because I am aware of the application that has gone to the SEUPB. What is your role in trying to take that forward? The Department put in the application, but were you involved in that? I am conscious of not being aware of where that is. Are you leaving it to the Department to seek that revenue? Is it up to the Department? Have you been trying to push for the revenue? There is no point in having a hub if you do not have the revenue to make it operational. It will be considered another white elephant.

Ms Bloomfield: As project partners, we have been pushing to find out what is happening. I emailed the Department earlier this week for an update. The building is there, and it seems crazy that it is not being utilised. Yes, we are pushing to get a result. I am hopeful that it needs just a little more of a push to get it over the line. Any political support will certainly make a difference. I do not fully understand all of the issues and why we are at this impasse, but it is a wonderful facility, so let us start using it.

Ms Anderson: Chair, perhaps, given that Sustrans is a partner and is trying to get that information, the Committee will agree to write to the Department on that. Perhaps, one way to get the information is for the Committee to seek it in writing. Obviously, we can offer letters of support to the SEUPB and do anything else that we need to do.

Mrs D Kelly: Thanks very much for your presentation. At this point, there is not much more to add. I could go through the issue of greenways and talk about the lamentable situation around rural schools, which Cathal and Liz touched on earlier.

At the outset of your presentation, when talking about the strategic way forward, you mentioned some of the disadvantages for councils with regard to whether active travel was a priority and what funding was available. In some areas, small clusters of people do not want to see additional traffic, even cyclists, passing through their area.

In the past, councils and DAERA used EU funding to develop village enhancement plans, and work takes place in TEO on urban regeneration. How are all those things taken account of, and how do they come together? What sort of cross-cutting work is being done by you and others to ensure that projects can come together cohesively and move along a bit more quickly, because other funding opportunities are available?

Ms Loughran: I have a copy of the relevant parts of all the village enhancement plans in which they discuss improving walking and cycling, particularly where there are greenway links. Those plans are very useful in my conversations with councils because they show where consultation has taken place and where we know that there is community support and buy-in for those suggestions. Relying on those ideas will, I hope, move things forward a bit faster because many of the agreements are already in place.

Mrs D Kelly: Liz, you may be aware of the campaign to build a bridge between Bannfoot and Maghery.

Ms Loughran: Yes.

Mrs D Kelly: It has elements of controversy. From my experience and the lobbying that I, as well as colleagues on the council, have received, many who support the bridge and who live in the area are frightened to speak out because they do not want to fall out with some of their neighbours. That is, arguably, a strategic network, and you touched on the tourism value of additional products that some

greenways and bicycle routes etc would bring. What weight is given to a small number of people opposing something, as opposed to a greater campaign by people from across the wider area and, indeed, the potential users, who are not only from Northern Ireland? You will be aware of the Tour of Lough Neagh cycle — I think that it is a competition. I live on the lough shore, and we call it the "Tour de Neagh". That has huge potential, and people come from across the world to participate in it.

Ms Loughran: That bridge has the potential to deliver much for tourism as well as other benefits. As you know, it is not without controversy. The Minister and my team have asked the council to speak to us about it on a number of occasions and to come forward with a view. It is not a scheme that is universally supported, although we have received views from both sides. I am keen for the council to come forward with its view on that.

Mrs D Kelly: We have pushed for that at a local level and asked for a consultation exercise to be carried out by the community relations department. That would provide a level of confidentiality for those who support it but do not necessarily want their identity to be known in the public arena.

The only other thing that I wanted to ask about was the tourism product, which one of you mentioned. Post COVID, people will look to diversify their business or get a new business up and running. If there are good products and examples that could be supported by councils' economic development departments or the Department for the Economy's tourism end, how can we reach out to areas that are struggling and to our business people and entrepreneurs? How can we put together a brochure of great ideas that have worked well and let people decide whether there are good business cases that could be supported? That could also inform the policy of the Department for the Economy. Indeed, it could inform DAERA on rural development grants that would enable people to get that wee bit of start-up funding that might add a great deal of value to the overall tourism product.

Ms Loughran: I represent the Minister on the tourism recovery steering group. That group is dealing with a huge number of issues at the moment, but one of the things that I raised with it is the potential for green tourism and active travel tourism. When you look at other European countries, you see the opportunities that exist to bring people here. The Committee approved the legislation on e-bikes earlier this year. Things like that are key to bringing in tourists from other European countries, particularly those where that sort of tourism has a really big market.

Mrs D Kelly: Thank you. Perhaps, Chairperson, we could support the inclusion of some of those ideas and express a view on the potential for such a development in writing to the Minister or the tourism recovery steering group.

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): OK. Thank you. Do members have any other supplementary questions?

Can I just get some clarification? You talked about looking at cycling opportunities in and around market towns. The Belfast bike scheme has been successful. I was not sure whether you were suggesting that such a scheme might be looked at in some of those towns.

Ms Loughran: I would not rule it out, but it would depend very much on the council's appetite for it. I think that the Department put some capital start-up money into the Belfast scheme. I cannot remember how much, but it was not a huge amount. The council contracts somebody to run the scheme for it.

You need a reasonable population density to run those schemes. Derry is clearly ripe for one, particularly if you could manage to use e-bikes in the scheme. Other towns, yes, could run one. Certainly, Lisburn would be a good choice. There are definitely opportunities there, but you need a certain economy of scale to make it work financially for the council.

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): OK. So it has not really developed too much to the point where we could look at or have a conversation about specific towns.

Ms Loughran: I have not had any conversations with specific towns about it. I do not know whether you have had any.

Ms Bloomfield: No, we have not done so yet, but it is certainly worth looking at. The success in Belfast has shown that it can really work and is really embraced by local people.

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): Thank you very much. We very much appreciate your time.

Mr Muir: Chair, I have just one point. We talked an awful lot about engagement with councils on, for example, the cycle hire scheme and the greenways. You will all be very conscious that the councils are in a very difficult financial position, and I am just worried that an awful lot of focus has been placed on the councils bringing forward schemes, potential partnership funding and stuff like that. That has — I think that you said this — to be taken into account. We are putting a lot of responsibility on the councils' to take things forward. I worry that that will mean that we will not see the progress that we need. The Department really needs to consider that.

Ms Loughran: To me, the value of the relationship with the councils comes through partnership and local consultation. I understand the financial position of a number of councils. We have not ruled anything out in finance terms at the moment. The greenways are a 50:50 split, but, on other projects, we have picked up more than 50% of the cost. In fact, on a number of them, we have picked up 100% of the cost.

Ms Anne Madden (Sustrans): I just want to add that an e-bike share scheme was considered by Derry council. It did a feasibility study, but I do not know what happened to that. I think that, due to budget constraints, it was shelved, at least for the time being. Certainly, an e-bike share scheme is of great interest, given that there is hilly terrain there.

Mr Muir: Getting up Shipquay *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): Thank you all very much for your time this morning. That was a good session.

Mr Hilditch: You should put an invite in for members for next week for cycling activities *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): There you go.

Mr Hilditch: Next Thursday.

The Chairperson (Miss McIlveen): Thank you very much.

Ms Bloomfield: Thank you. I look forward to seeing you all out on your bicycles and on foot *[Laughter.]*