



Active Travel Network Maps – Local Authority Public Consultations Autumn 2021 - *Walking and cycling in have your say*

Local authorities across Wales have issued public consultation documents and online tools for the public to engage with proposals for making improvements in villages, towns, and cities to promote walking, cycling and use of public transport. The consultation includes publishing proposed Active Travel Network Maps (ATNMs).

The Design Commission for Wales urges all local authorities, Transport for Wales and Sustrans Cymru to consider their approach to active travel and the response to the consultations. The Commission also notes several characteristics common to current ATNMs as they are presented for the public via the use of Commonplace.

The ATNMs

Several Active Travel Network Maps (ATNMS) have been developed and are proposed to take account of:

- Proposals to improve routes for walking and cycling, including in some cases, networks of segregated Cycleway routes
- Routes required to connect strategic development sites to existing communities and key destinations.
- Routes required to access important local destinations, including schools and local shops
- Analysis of the feedback received from previous Commonplace engagement exercises, which in some cases, identified additional locations where improvements for walking and/or cycling are needed and/or desired.

The consultation questions asked are similar and include:

- Have we identified the correct routes for improvement (proposed routes)?
- Are we correct in our assessment of routes that already meet the agreed standards (existing routes)?
- Have we identified all the appropriate new routes?

- Are the proposals in the schedule of schemes appropriate for developing the proposed routes?

The plans commonly divide areas into specific priority locations and/or districts with a detailed ATNM for each area. Each plan includes a map of the area annotated with a legend setting out:

- Existing routes walking
- Proposed routes walking
- Existing routes walking and cycling
- Proposed routes walking and cycling

The consultation document also includes schedules setting out the proposed improvements to the walking and cycling infrastructure/routes in each plan area/district.

The consultation exercise fulfils the requirement under the Active Travel Act for local authorities to undertake a statutory 12week consultation on the Active Travel Network Map.

Our position on the public consultations

We consider active travel opportunities to be of considerable importance because they:

- increase convenient active routes
- provide greater attractive choice of walking, cycling or public transport alternatives to private vehicle use
- can contribute to emissions reductions and improved air quality
- offer physical and mental health benefits
- provide greater opportunities for social interaction

We include walking, cycling, manual scooting and public transport use in our definition of active travel, as well as the consideration of the choices and needs of disabled people, family groups and children.

We emphasise the need for active travel to be the accepted, normal and usual way to move around. Facilities, infrastructure and behaviour need to change in order for this to happen. We therefore expect active travel plans to be accompanied by positive promotional campaigns that communicate active travel benefits.

We welcome all initiatives from local authorities and key agencies in Wales to promote walking and cycling in all areas. The careful consideration of the current arrangements on an area by area, street-by-street basis is also welcomed as is the identification of many, often modest scale, modifications that can make a substantial difference to the attractiveness of streets and spaces for walking and cycling.

Making active travel choices easier, safer and more attractive requires long term commitment to making sustained continuous improvements to places and street networks over a long time period. The approach by the local authorities in Wales to developing clear Active Travel Network Maps (ATNMs) provides a useful starting point for this necessary long-term commitment.

Reviewing the various maps in the consultation documents has raised some questions and observations:

- What is the criteria by which routes are identified as existing walking routes? Several maps for instance suggest that none of the streets in some areas are currently walking routes.
- What is the criteria by which proposed walking routes are identified? Few parts of the current networks appear to be identified for improvement. All streets should be designed and managed so as to be suitable for safe, pleasant and convenient and attractive walking.
- What is the criteria by which routes are identified as existing cycling routes? Several maps, for example, suggest that none of the streets in this area are currently cycling routes. This does not seem to be an accurate description of the current situation and status.
- What is the criteria by which proposed cycling routes are identified? Few parts of the current network are identified for improvement. All streets should be designed and managed so as to be suitable for safe, pleasant and convenient cycling.

There is some risk that the development of the ATNMs can treat active travel opportunities as 'special' or selective, appropriate only to certain routes and users. This suggests that active travel options are still viewed as exceptions to the dominance of private vehicle use on public roads and routes. There is a risk that this approach may not adequately address the needs of people, or groups including families, who may use 'cargo' or trailer bikes, or others who use wheels independently or with assistance, such as disabled people, older members of our communities or children.

We urge all local authorities to ensure they avoid a selective approach that risks treating active travel options as a lower priority, coming behind the car and private vehicle choices which in turn contributes to outmoded approaches to street design and infrastructure. Whether or not this is intentional, it has the effect of diminishing active travel choices as safe, attractive and convenient modes. We encourage all initiatives to appropriately consider and accommodate all modes.

Clarification of terms and graphic improvements to the materials would assist with the consultation process, making it easier for members of the public to engage by making the materials more accessible for the public.

End.