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John Swinney MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth
Scottish Government

20 October 2014

Dear Mr Swinney

Draft Budget 2015/16 – Cycling and Walking Infrastructure

We were pleased to see, in your speech¹ introducing the draft budget, the following paragraph...

*Our overall investments in schools, digital infrastructure, energy efficiency, health and transport, including **an additional £10 million next year for cycling and walking infrastructure**, target projects that will make the economy more productive, with **assets** that deliver greater energy efficiency and better outcomes.*

The commitment to an additional £10m specifically for cycling and walking infrastructure, creating new assets, sounds very clear indeed and was widely reported in the media in those terms.

We naturally assumed this £10m was similar in intent to the £20m (over 2 years) which you included for cycling and walking infrastructure in last year's budget, and which was allocated by Sustrans to its work with local authorities and other partners (also enabling a welcome doubling-up of investment by requiring match-funding from partners).

To our surprise, it now appears that this year's £10m is very different and, if our understanding is correct, then the above quote from your speech does not appear to be justified in several respects.

Most importantly, we understand that £5m of the £10m is the £5m which you had already announced² from Forth Bridge underspending on 10 June, and which, as stated in your News Release at that time was specifically to *develop behaviour change*, i.e. *not* for infrastructure...

In addition, £5 million to develop behaviour change aspects of the Smarter Choices Smarter Places programme will be included in the draft Budget for 2015/16

1 <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=9570#.VETpOhY55Wq>

2 <http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/news/green-travel-boost>

Second, the other £5m making up the 15/16 draft budget's £10m is from 'Financial Transactions,' as stated in the draft budget document³. Whilst we are not entirely clear what this means, the Budget Spice Briefing⁴ [14/70] on page 9 gives the strong impression that these funds are to be used “beyond the public sector.” That, we imagine, means they cannot be used for the type of infrastructure work with local authorities and other public sector partners which Sustrans undertakes, but would have to be used on projects such as (perhaps) workplace cycling improvements – obviously valuable, but not the kind of thing one would take from your budget speech.

Thirdly, your speech refers to this funding as an 'additional' £10m. Whilst we fully accept that the £10m is additional to the sum indicated for 15/16 in last year's budget document, i.e. rising from £15m to £25m, it is certainly not additional to *actual* cycle infrastructure investment in 14/15. Our understanding is that actual infrastructure investment in 14/15 included £7m from the abovementioned June 10th Forth Bridge underspend, £4m allocated from February 2012 consequentials and £2.8m from the January 2013 money for 'shovel-ready' projects. Thus actual infrastructure investment in 14/15 included an additional £13.8m which is not applicable in 15/16, so that despite the 'additional' £10m for 15/16 we are in fact seeing a *drop* of perhaps nearly £4m in infrastructure investment in 15/16 as compared to 14/15 – or potentially an even bigger drop if indeed some or all of the £10m cannot be used for infrastructure, despite your speech.

In summary, it is far from clear that the 'additional' £10m for 'infrastructure' and the creation of 'assets' announced in your speech will in fact be available for infrastructure; and it is also arguable to what extent it can even be called 'additional.'

Given the expertise, enthusiasm and planning for the future now building up in local authorities and Sustrans as a result of the 14/15 funding boost, it would be tragic to see this retreating again instead of being built upon. In our own local authority area of Edinburgh there are bold plans for the future and, as you will know, the council is itself allocating currently 7% from its own transport budget towards cycling infrastructure (compared to under 2% by the Scottish Government). Unless the council can continue to match these sums with Sustrans capital (or some equivalent) then its plans will be badly set back. The same can be said, though at an earlier stage, in many other authorities.

Finally, you will of course be aware from past budget submissions of ourselves and others that the current levels of cycling investment have, in our view, little hope of achieving the government's aim of 10% of all trips to be by bike in 2020. We had hoped that the significant and very welcome boost which you did give to cycling infrastructure in 14/15 marked the start of a ramping-up of effort and investment towards meeting that aim. However, if we are to see infrastructure investment actually falling in 15/16, then clearly the government's 2020 ambition is hard to take seriously.

We look forward to hearing from you on these points and hope the draft budget will be amended to raise cycling/walking infrastructure investment significantly in view of your government's cycle-use ambition for 2020; but, at the very least, to ensure the additional infrastructure investment promised in your budget speech.

Yours Sincerely

Dave du Feu
for Spokes

3 http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefingsAndFactsheets/S4/SB_14-70.pdf

4 http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefingsAndFactsheets/S4/SB_14-70.pdf