

SPOKES

The Lothian Cycle Campaign

St. Martins Church, 232 Dalry Road, Edinburgh EH11 2JG 0131.313.2114 [answerphone] spokes@spokes.org.uk www.spokes.org.uk

If replying by email, please use... DaveduFeuATgmail.com

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

Cc: Party transport representatives...

Stewart Stevenson, Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change
Des McNulty MSP, Labour
Alison McInnes MSP, LibDem
Alex Johnstone MSP, Conservative
Patrick Harvie MSP, Green Party

7 June 2009

Dear Mr Swinney

Scottish Government Cycling Investment

You will remember our previous correspondence on cycling investment at the time of the 09/10 Budget deliberations, and prior to that. You will also recall that a year ago Spokes predicted that cycling investment in Scotland would almost certainly fall under the policies and decisions of the new government.

We have now conducted our annual survey and analysis of cycling investment in Scotland for the year 2008/09, and I am sorry to say that our predictions have proved uncannily accurate. Compared to 2007/08 (the final year operating under the budgets of the previous administration) cycling investment in Scotland, from all major sources combined, has in our estimation fallen from £21.7m to £18.3m, and under current policies and decisions could fall to £16.4m this year 2009/10. That is a fall from a mere 0.93% of the total transport budget under the rules of the previous administration to 0.81% in 08/09, and possibly as low as 0.66% this year. Measured another way, it has fallen from 422p per head of population in 07/08 to 355p, and is on track for 317p this year.

We appreciate it was not the government's intention that cycling investment should fall, but that is the consequence of your policies and decisions – exactly as Spokes advised at the time was the likely outcome. Our 08/09 analysis and survey report is contained in Spokes Bulletin 104, which you may now have received. In any case, I attach the 3 relevant pages.

We fully accept that such an analysis is difficult, the finer points can be debated, and we certainly would not claim 100% accuracy – indeed that is impossible. Nonetheless the overall trend year on year looks reliable, and the areas in which we find that spending has risen and fallen tie in with what might be expected on the basis of your government's policies and decisions.

OTHER EXPERT VIEWS

Moreover, our analysis is fully compatible with the comments of virtually all other reputable sources familiar with this area.

First, page 4 of our Bulletin report includes extensive quotes from **local authority cycling officers** from across Scotland, pointing to declining investment, and the fear and expectation of a further decline.

Second, as you already know, the **Sustainable Development Commission's Review of Progress by the Scottish Government**, November 2008 stated, “*Transport is the poorest performing area in terms of sustainable development..*” and, even worse, within this badly performing area, “*Active travel is in relative decline..*”

Third, the **Scottish Government Climate Change Programme 2nd Annual Report, 2007-8**, concluded, “*It is imperative that overall emissions from this sector (transport) are driven down.*” Since then, you have substantially increased trunk road spending, whilst our analysis shows that overall cycling investment is not only very small but declining yet further.

Fourth, you will recall that at the time of the budget debate we forwarded you a letter in support of our proposal, from **academic experts** in the fields of public health, climate change and transport.

Finally, as you also know, the Parliament's all-party **Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee**, using our material both as a source of evidence and as a possible direction for a policy initiative, recommended that investment in active travel be increased.

THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT CYCLING TARGET

Speaking at the *Dreams on Wheels* government-sponsored cycling conference in March of this year, Transport Minister Stewart Stevenson announced a new government target of 10% of all trips to be by bicycle in the year 2020, and he repeated that at the recent Perth Active Travel conference. Such a target fits well with the SNP manifesto commitments to “*promote cycling ... to reduce carbon emissions and improve physical fitness*” and to “*make journeys greener, safer and easier.*” In principle, of course, we would hugely welcome such a target if we felt the government was serious about it.

Mr Stevenson and other Ministers refer to comparator European countries such as Denmark which have achieved well over such levels, suggesting that such a target is achievable. However, the difference is that such countries have invested in cycling substantially and consistently over many years, whereas investment in Scotland has hovered around or below 1%, around £3-£4 per head of population, and is now on a significant downward trend. In comparator towns and countries we often find £10-£20 per head, or 5%-10% of transport budgets (even more in some towns).

Your recent budget decisions, and the section on funding in the CAPS consultation, suggest that you intend to maintain your pattern of minimal cycling investment compared to European countries (a pattern which we also find to be declining) throughout the period of office of the present SNP government. You offer no prospect of increased investment until 2011/12 at the earliest, and even that is far from a commitment, just a possibility mentioned in the CAPS consultation to be considered in the next Spending Review.

Given that European comparator countries have only achieved their (to us) remarkable levels of cycle use through substantial investment over many years, compared to your intention not to do so for at least the next 2 years, I hope you will understand that we have to be very sceptical about how serious you are over the 10% target. To achieve the target starting now would be difficult enough – to put off any investment for at least 2 years, with no certainty even then, makes it seem that you have very little real intent to meet it. Indeed to announce such an incredibly ambitious target at all without a parallel *commitment* to *early* investment seems more like politics than serious policy making.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE NOW?

If the target is to be taken seriously, or even if the government is concerned that cycling investment is falling in contradiction to the aspirations of the SNP manifesto, then the decline in investment must be reversed in the current year, and serious investment towards the target must begin rapidly thereafter. We here propose how that could be achieved.

First, whilst we appreciate that the government's overall financial position is not easy, we note that you were able for 09/10 to budget an *additional* £134m, plus the bulk of the £25m accelerated transport capital spend, to trunk roads, and you are budgeting a further trunk roads *increase* for next year. In this context, the funding needed to reverse the decline in cycle spending this year, and to start investing towards the target next year, should be taken from existing transport spending – for example slippage on major projects this year, and a reallocation of some of the trunk road increase planned for next year.

Second, we appreciate that owing to the Concordat it is not possible for you to introduce a new funding stream directed specifically at local authorities – although that would anyway not necessarily be the most useful immediate approach.

We therefore propose the following...

For 2009/10 we suggest a £5m additional allocation to Sustrans (possibly from trunk roads underspend, but clearly not from other elements within the existing Sustainable and Active Travel budget line). This would reverse the decline in cycle investment, bringing the government back to marginally better than the position it inherited from the last administration. This would also follow the precedent set by the previous administration in 2006/07 when it looked as if cycling investment was about to fall substantially for reasons not entirely dissimilar to the present.

The reason why an allocation to Sustrans is the most appropriate investment channel for the current year is that we are already into the financial year, so any additional investment has to be used for projects which are already planned and virtually ready to go. Sustrans is in that position, with a large portfolio of available projects, working along with other bodies such as British Waterways, local authorities, etc. Furthermore, although no one would wish for projects to be rushed, Sustrans Scotland has a track record which a former Minister characterised as, "high standard, on budget, and in tight timescales."

For 2010/11 we suggest the exact same proposal as we put forward in this year's budget discussions. Namely, a new £20m cycle projects fund, additional to current initiatives, and so roughly doubling existing levels of cycle investment. The fund would be administered by the government's existing Sustainable Transport Team, and would be open to bids over a certain level (say £1m) by any relevant body – for example, Sustrans, local authorities, Transport Partnerships, First ScotRail, BWB, and so on. *The detailed rationale for this approach was explained in our budget submission.* At that time you kindly arranged for us to meet Diane McLafferty, then Head of Transport Strategy, and other officials, to discuss our submission; and we came away with the strong feeling that it was felt to be a practicable and sensible approach. Furthermore, as you know, the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee in its budget recommendations suggested that our proposal be considered.

This proposal, whilst doubling existing cycle investment, would still leave us well below European levels, and certainly not yet on track to meet your 2020 cycle use target. Consideration should be given as to whether the new fund should be £30m-£40m a year rather than the £20m we proposed, but we are not sure if in its first year there would yet be enough capacity and experience in Scotland to make full use of say an additional £40m.

From 2011/12 on cycling investment should be at a level commensurate with the 2020 cycle usage target and with comparator European countries. If investment has already been built up during 2010/11, as we suggest above, then the experience and skills to make full use of adequate resources should be becoming available. Consideration would need to be given to the most effective way to use the funding, although our feeling is that an important part of the mix should be a continuing fund on the above lines.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours Sincerely

Dave du Feu
for Spokes

Attached: Spokes 2008/09 Scottish cycling investment analysis, survey, and summary article - pages 1, 4 and 5 of Spokes Bulletin no.104.