

**2023/24 Active Travel Progress Report**

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**1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1. This report provides an update to Members on the progress made in 2023/24 in relation to active travel projects in the Oban Lorn and the Isles (OLI) Area, informs Members of the significant changes in Scottish Government active travel funding and seeks continued support for the projects and wider active travel measures from Members.
- 1.2. Active travel encompasses accessible, everyday Walking, Mobility Assistance and child prams (sometime collectively termed “Wheeling”) and Cycling. The focus of active travel is on accessible provision including those with mobility impairments.
- 1.3. The Council’s Active Travel Team, 1.7 Full Time Equivalent employees, is part of the Strategic Transport Team within the Development and Economic Growth Service. No Council funding is currently received by the Active Travel Team. All project costs, including internal staff costs, have to be funded via successfully securing highly competitive external challenge funds.
- 1.4. The Active Travel Team work with communities, internal and external stakeholders across Argyll and Bute to develop and deliver active travel projects which provide new/improved accessible infrastructure (e.g. paths, cycle lanes) and behaviour change (e.g. access to bikes, walking/cycle training, promotional activities).
- 1.5. In 2023/24 to date, the Active Travel Team secured £2.56M external funding for the development and delivery of a total of 22 projects across Argyll and Bute. These include Argyll and Bute wide projects, valued at £95,000 in 23/24, and projects specific to the OLI area, with a 23/24 value of £130,000.
- 1.6. The Active Travel Team work to source and secure highly competitive funding from a range of sources, the main of which are Transport Scotland’s Places for Everyone (PFE) Programme (administered by Sustrans), the Scottish Government’s Cycling, Walking and Safer Routes (CWSR) fund and Delivery Resource Fund, Paths for All Smarter Choices Smarter Places (SCSP) programme, Transport Scotland’s Active Travel Transformation Fund (ATTF),

and HITRANS Regional Active Travel Fund. Further funding has been secured for some projects via local community organisations and from willing businesses. It is recognised at a national level that the Active Travel Team in Argyll and Bute Council secure significantly more funding, and subsequently deliver more projects, than similar staffed teams in other Local Authorities and/or local authorities with similar populations.

- 1.7. Transport Scotland have informed Officers that, as of 24/25, the funding model for active travel will change. The primary change will be the reallocation of the significant funding currently disbursed via third-sector organisations (such as Sustrans or Paths for All) and, to a lesser extent Transport Scotland (e.g. CWSR), to individual Local Authority block grants and a single Transport Scotland controlled Active Travel Infrastructure Fund (ATIF). This will be undertaken incrementally over a 2 year transition period.
- 1.8. Transitional arrangements for infrastructure design and construction are understood by Officers to be:
  - 24/25 a proportion of the Scottish Government's active travel funding will be allocated to Local Authority block grants with the remainder remaining as challenge funding, in particular in the PFE Programme (administered by Sustrans) and Transport Scotland's ATIF fund. Transport Scotland have stated that failure to expend the block grant allocation on appropriate active travel projects will negatively affect the Council's opportunity to secure additional funding from the ATIF. The Scottish Government's budget commits a total of £220M to active travel in 24/25.
  - 25/26, those Local Authorities which chose (in 24/25) to expend the full amount of active travel funding in their block grant on appropriate active travel projects will receive an increase in their block grant allowance for active travel, with a smaller percentage of the overall funding being available via challenge funds following the closure of the PFE programme (forecast for December 2025). The Scottish Government has set an objective of committing 10% of the 25/26 transport budget to active travel, estimated to be c.£320M.
  - 26/27 onwards the challenge funding available will be solely focused on assisting Local Authorities with the cost of delivering very highly ambitious active travel projects, as active travel infrastructure funding for smaller projects will be included within block grants of those Local Authorities which have chosen in 24/25 and 25/26 to dedicate it to active travel.
- 1.9. Transitional arrangement for behaviour change is understood by Officers to be the transfer of the majority of the Scottish Government's behaviour change funding in 24/25 onwards from third sector organisations to the Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs). This will enable the development and delivery of behaviour change programmes/activities which are tailored to the specific requirements of each RTP area. A small element of the Scottish Government's behaviour change funding will be retained to continue campaigns/cycle training

programmes which are deemed to be most effective when delivered at a national scale.

- 1.10. Separately, Officers are working to develop an Active Travel Strategy (ATS) for Argyll and Bute which will set out the policy and strategic context for the development and delivery of active travel across the whole of Argyll and Bute. Subsequent to this, an Active Travel Delivery Plan (ATDP) will be developed which will identify the specific projects to be developed in order to achieve the ambition set in the ATS.
- 1.11. Active Travel can offer significant benefits to the area:
  - Access to essential services and employment: In OLI 21% of households (1,873 households) do not have access to a motor vehicle and are reliant on public transport and active travel modes.
  - Health benefits: being more active reduces the risk of premature morbidity and death, particularly from diseases related to inactivity.
  - Economics: People who travel to shops by walking and/or cycling have a higher monthly spend than people who travel to shops by private car.
  - Improving safety: reduces injuries from car collisions.
- 1.12. A number of active travel projects link to schools, offering the opportunity to increase the numbers of pupils, parents and staff choosing to walk, cycle or wheel to school. While the main benefits are improved physical and mental health, where new active travel infrastructure creates a safe route to school where one did not previously exist it could reduce the requirement to provide school transport on safety grounds, thereby creating a revenue saving to the school transport budget.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1.13. It is recommended that the Oban Lorn and the Isles members:
  - 1.13.1. Welcome the progress made to date across a significant number of active travel projects by the small Active Travel Team.
  - 1.13.2. Support the continuation of the projects and the submission of future funding applications to external challenge funds (while these still exist) to continue to develop design and construction stages in order to deliver these projects.
  - 1.13.3. Support the allocation of the active travel funding element in the Council's 24/25 block grant to the development and delivery of appropriate active travel projects, including those already underway in OLI.

1.13.4. Instruct Officers to continue to identify and develop new active travel projects to benefit local residents, businesses and communities.

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**2.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1. This report provides an update to Members on the progress made in 2023/24 in relation to active travel projects in the OLI Area and seeks continued support for the projects from Members.
- 2.2. Active travel encompasses accessible, everyday Walking, Mobility Assistance and child prams (sometime collectively termed “Wheeling”) and Cycling. The focus of active travel is on accessible provision including those with mobility impairments.

**3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1. It is recommended that the Oban Lorn and the Isles members:
- 3.1.1. Welcome the progress made to date across a significant number of active travel projects by the small Active Travel Team.
  - 3.1.2. Support the continuation of the projects and the submission of future funding applications to external challenge funds (while these still exist) to continue to develop design and construction stages in order to deliver these projects.
  - 3.1.3. Support the allocation of the active travel funding element in the Council’s 24/25 block grant to the development and delivery of appropriate active travel projects, including those already underway in OLI.
  - 3.1.4. Instruct Officers to continue to identify and develop new active travel projects to benefit local residents, businesses and communities.

**4.0 DETAIL**

- 4.1. The Council’s Active Travel Team, 1.7 FTE (Full Time Equivalent employees), is part of the Strategic Transport Team within the Development and Economic Growth Service. No Council funding is currently received by the Active Travel

Team. All project costs, including internal staff costs, have to be funded via successfully securing highly competitive external challenge funds.

- 4.2. It is recognised at a national level that the Active Travel Team in Argyll and Bute Council secure significantly more funding, and subsequently deliver more projects, than similar staffed teams in other Local Authorities and/or local authorities with similar populations.
- 4.3. The Active Travel Team work with communities, internal and external stakeholders across Argyll and Bute to develop and deliver active travel projects which provide new/improved accessible infrastructure (e.g. paths, cycle lanes) and behaviour change (e.g. access to bikes, walking/cycle training, promotional activities).
- 4.4. In 2023/24 to date, the Active Travel Team secured £2.56M external funding for the development and delivery of a total of 22 projects across Argyll and Bute, including Argyll and Bute wide projects, valued at £95,000 in 23/24 and projects specific to the OLI area, with a 23/24 value of £130,000. Further details of these projects is presented in Appendix 1.

### **Future Funding Model**

- 4.5. Transport Scotland informed Officers on 23 January 2024 that, as of 24/25, the funding model for active travel will change. At the time of writing, Transport Scotland have stated that they are unable to confirm the value of specific funding streams for 24/25 as these are still subject to agreement with COSLA. It is understood the primary change will be the reallocation of the significant funding currently disbursed via third-sector organisations (such as Sustrans or Paths for All) and, to a lesser extent Transport Scotland (e.g. CWSR) to individual Local Authority block grants and a single Transport Scotland challenge fund, the Active Travel Infrastructure Fund (ATIF). This will be undertaken incrementally over a 2 year transition period.
- 4.6. Provisional transitional arrangements for infrastructure design and construction are understood by Officers to be:
  - 24/25 the allocation of a proportion of the Scottish Government's active travel funding to Local Authority block grants with the remainder remaining as challenge funding, in particular in the PFE Programme (administered by Sustrans) and Transport Scotland's ATIF. The split of allocation the funding is understood to still be in negotiation between Transport Scotland and COSLA with Transport Scotland expecting to confirm values in early 24/25. Transport Scotland have also stated that failure to expend the block grant allocation on appropriate active travel work will negatively affect the Council's opportunity to secure additional funding from the ATIF.
  - 25/26, those Local Authorities which chose (in 24/25) to expend the full amount of active travel funding in their block grant on appropriate active

travel projects will receive an increase in their block grant allowance for active travel, with a smaller percentage of the overall funding being available via challenge funds including the closure of the PFE programme (forecast for December 2025).

- From 26/27 onwards the challenge funding available (e.g. ATIF) will be solely focused on assisting Local Authorities with the cost of delivering very highly ambitious active travel projects, as the active travel infrastructure funding for smaller projects will be included within the block grants of those Local Authorities which chose to dedicate it to active travel in 24/25 and 25/26.

- 4.7. Behaviour change funding will be transferred from third sector organisations to the Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) in 24/25 onwards. This will enable the development and delivery of behaviour change programmes/activities which are tailored to the specific requirements of each RTP area. A small element of the Scottish Government's behaviour change funding will be retained to continue campaigns/programmes which are deemed to be most effective when delivered at a national scale. Officers have started to engage with our RTPs (HITRANS and SPT) in order to understand and influence the future plans for the delivery of behaviour change projects.

#### **Current (2023/24) Funding Model**

- 4.8. The Active Travel Team work to source and secure highly competitive funding from a range of sources, the main of which are Transport Scotland's Places for Everyone (PFE) Programme (administered by Sustrans), the Scottish Government's Cycling, Walking and Safer Routes (CWSR) fund and Delivery Resource Fund, Paths for All Smarter Choices Smarter Places (SCSP) programme, Transport Scotland's Active Travel Transformation Fund (ATTF), and HITRANS Regional Active Travel Fund. Further funding has been secured for some projects via local community organisations and from willing businesses. It is recognised at a national level that the Active Travel Team in Argyll and Bute Council secure significantly more funding, and subsequently delivery more projects, than similar staffed teams in other Local Authorities and/or local authorities with similar populations.
- 4.9. The primary external funding route for active travel infrastructure design is Transport Scotland's Places for Everyone (PFE) programme (which Sustrans are paid to administer). The PFE Programme is a competitive challenge fund structured around 8 project stages; with the 32 local authorities, 7 regional transport partnerships, two national parks and numerous community groups across Scotland competing against each other to secure the funding each project requires. In 23/24, the Active Travel Team secured £1.7M from the PFE Programme. It has been announced that the PFE Programme will be wound down with a final closure date of December 2025.

- 4.10. A minimum of three new competitive funding submissions are required to complete a project using PFE funding, with competitive applications required, as a minimum, prior to Stage 0 (Strategic Definition), Stage 3 (Developed Design) and Stage 5 (Construction). The full project stages are (0) Strategic Definition, (1) Preparation and Brief, (2) Concept Design, (3) Developed Design, (4) Technical Design, (5) Construction, (6) Handover & Close Out and (7) In Use.
- 4.11. The Scottish Government Cycling, Walking and Safer Routes (CWSR) fund is an annual ring-fenced fund which provides the opportunity for Local Authorities to identify and deliver lower value active travel infrastructure without the level of complexity and time required by the PFE route. In 23/24, the Active Travel Team secured £551,000 from the CWSR fund. It is understood by Officers that the CWSR fund will terminate in March 2024.
- 4.12. The Smarter Choices Smarter Places (SCSP) programme is run by Paths for All and provides funding for behaviour change projects. Behaviour change projects are designed to influence behaviour and choice, rather than provide new infrastructure. In 23/24, the Active Travel Team secured £80,000 from the SCSP programme. It has been announced that the SCSP programme will terminate in March 2024.
- 4.13. Transport Scotland's Active Travel Transformation Fund (ATTF) was launched in 23/24 and focuses on supporting Local Authorities, RTPs and National Parks with the additional cost of constructing very ambitious, high-quality active travel projects. Projects must be fully construction ready prior to submission to the ATTF. Officers submitted two applications to the 23/24 ATTF, including for the Bowmore – Bridgend Path on Islay, but, while these were shortlisted on the reserve list, were unsuccessful in securing funding in 23/24. The application deadline for 24/25 projects to ATTF is late January 2024 and, at the time of writing, Officers are developing submissions including resubmitting the Bowmore – Bridgend Path project.
- 4.14. HITRANS Regional Active Travel Fund has previously supported a number of projects in OLI, including £450,000 towards Phase 1 of the Ralston Road Cycleway project in Campbeltown (completed summer 2023). As HITRANS have a relatively small budget compared to the geographical area covered and require to support five local authorities, Argyll and Bute's 23/24 allocation was substantially lower than in previous years at £25,000.

### **Benefits of Active Travel**

- 4.15. 21% of households (1,873 households) in the OLI area do not have access to any motor vehicles (2011 census) and are therefore reliant on public transport and active travel methods to move around.



- 4.16. Transport poverty is defined as households and individuals who spend a significant percentage of their income to make the journeys they need (UK Government, 2019). In OLI, where a higher than Scottish average of the population have low incomes (SIMD, 2020), the cost of travel is a significant barrier to a substantial number of the community. This is highlighted by the higher than Scottish average number of households have multiple cars but shorter than Scottish average journey distances to work/study (2011 census), indicating that a significant number of households own multiple cars to travel short distances. Walking, wheeling (mobility aids/child prams) and cycling are much cheaper than running a car or using public transport, and improving opportunities to choose to walk/cycle for essential journeys can improve access to essential services, reduce social exclusion and increase opportunities to access education and employment.
- 4.17. Health benefits of enabling individuals and communities to choose to travel more actively are well documented and a significant body of research has identified that having active, healthy lifestyles helps to reduce fragility and reduce falls as individuals age, and increase social inclusion and accessibility. In particular, being more active reduces the risk of premature morbidity and death, particularly from diseases related to inactivity including cardiovascular disease, coronary heart disease, stroke, dementia, type 2 diabetes, hip fractures and cancer. Active travel also has significant mental health benefits including increasing social inclusion and reducing depression. This means those who choose to be more active are less likely to require social care services in later life which could result in a future saving to the Council or HSCP (DfT, 2014; CIHT, 2016; Centre for Mental Health, 2016; Scottish Government, 2018; Dunoon Shaping Places for Wellbeing, 2022; World Health Organisation, 2022; Public Health Scotland, 2022; Public Health Scotland, 2023).
- 4.18. Economics: People who travel to shops actively by walking and/or cycling, while they spend less per individual visit, make more visits a month and have a higher monthly spend than people who travel to shops by private car (Pedestrian Pound, 2018). Improving public realm and routes to shops for pedestrians and cyclists can increase trade by up to 40% (Pedestrian Pound, 2018).
- 4.19. Improving safety through good design, in particular to protect more vulnerable individuals, pedestrians and cyclists, reduces injuries from car collisions (Public Health Scotland, 2022). Where people choose to travel actively to make a journey instead of using a private car, this reduces the number of car movements which makes streets cleaner, improves air quality, reduces traffic congestion and reduces demand for space to park in key hotspots.
- 4.20. A number of the active travel projects link to schools, thereby offering the opportunity to increase the numbers of pupils, parents and staff choosing to walk, cycle or wheel to school. While the main benefits are improved physical

and mental health, such provision may also generate a saving on school transport provision. Argyll and Bute Council provide free school transport to some pupils on safety grounds. This is where pupils live less than the legislative minimum distance from school to qualify for free school transport provision, but where there is no safe active travel route to school. Where new active travel infrastructure creates a safe route to school where one did not previously exist it could reduce the requirement to provide school transport on safety grounds, thereby creating a revenue saving.

### **Design guidance**

- 4.21. It is understood that adherence to the latest design criteria for active travel (e.g. Cycle by Design for cycle projects) will continue to be a requirement. However, the removal of national third-sector organisations from control of the main active travel funding streams should enable Officers to apply the guidance in a more flexible and specific manner to local circumstances. Utilising adopted design guidance provides a clear framework for development of designs which are appropriate, accessible, attractive and safe.

### **Active Travel Strategy (ATS)**

- 4.22. Separately, Officers are working to develop an Active Travel Strategy (ATS) for Argyll and Bute which will set out the policy and strategic context for the development and delivery of active travel across the whole of Argyll and Bute. Subsequent to this, an Active Travel Delivery Plan (ATDP) will be developed which will identify the specific projects to be developed in order to achieve the ambition set in the ATS.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION**

- 5.1. Significant changes to the funding model in 2024/25 and 2025/26 will create opportunities for active travel projects to focus on local priorities, rather than projects which meet the aspirations and objectives of national organisations. However, continued delivery of new and improved active travel opportunities to the residents, businesses, communities and visitors in the OLI area will require Members to commit the additional active travel funding allocation in the 24/25 Council Block Grant to the development and delivery of active travel projects.

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1. **Policy** Completion of this project will support the Council's SOA outcomes 2: We have infrastructure that supports sustainable growth and 5: People live active, healthier and independent lives. The project also supports achievement of the Scottish Government's objectives set out in the Cycling Action Plan for Scotland (CAPS)

and Let's Get Scotland Walking - The National Walking Strategy.

**6.2. Financial**

The change in approach to the provision of active travel funding by the Scottish Government from external challenge funding to including it within the Council's block grant will require Members to decide to allocate the funding to develop and deliver active travel projects.

Improved active travel provision could reduce the requirement to provide school transport on safety grounds, thereby creating a revenue saving.

There is strong evidence that people who are more active, for example by walking or cycling, have better physical and mental health and are less likely to require social care services in later life which could result in a future saving to the Council or HSCP.

**6.3. Legal**

Continued input will be required from Legal Services to support any land acquisition required for the creation of active travel routes.

**6.4. HR**

None.

**6.5. Fairer Scotland Duty:**

**6.5.1 Equalities**

Provision of new and improved active travel infrastructure and behaviour change options will provide enhanced opportunities for residents and visitors to choose to travel more sustainably and actively by walking, wheeling and cycling.

All new active travel routes are designed to be accessible and DDA compliant to provide a safe and accessible route for those with mobility aids including wheelchairs and parents/guardians with a child's pram or buggy.

**6.5.2 Socio-economic Duty**

New and improved active travel routes will improve access to essential services, retail, leisure and employment opportunities for local residents, with studies demonstrating those who travelled actively had a higher monthly spend in local businesses than those who travel via motorised transport.

The routes will also offer opportunities for individuals to travel for leisure, again encouraging spend in local businesses connected by the routes.

**6.5.3 Islands**

A number of the active travel projects are based on islands, thereby providing the same opportunities for island residents/visitors to choose to travel actively as those on the mainland. Where visitors choose to travel actively in lieu of taking a motor vehicle this can

- help reduce demand for the overstretched vehicle capacity on the ferry services.
- 6.6. **Climate Change** Active Travel is the least carbon intensive mode of travel. Providing the opportunity for residents and visitors to consider an alternative to having to use a private car to travel will help lower Argyll and Bute's carbon footprint.
- 6.7. **Risk** There is a reputational risk to the Council if the projects are not completed within a reasonable timeframe.
- 6.8. **Customer Services** None.
- 6.9. **The Rights of the Child** Active travel is the most accessible mode of travel to young people, as it does not have any minimum age limits, does not require any form of licence, is free to use and is not tied to any fixed timetable. All new active travel infrastructure is designed to be utilised by an unaccompanied 12 year old. Engagement with school pupils indicates that the vast majority of pupils strongly support the provision of new active travel infrastructure, even where it would adversely impact other modes of transport

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**Appendix 1: 2024/25 Active Travel Projects**

## Appendix 1: 2024/25 Projects

- 1.1. **Active Travel Promotional Campaign**  
Creation of a new sustainable travel (walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport) promotional brand “Better Journeys” and develop a promotional campaign to raise awareness of opportunities to travel actively and sustainably across Argyll and Bute. External funding has been retained within the Council by working with the Council’s Communications Team to develop the brand, campaign materials including posters and social media clips and prepare to launch the campaign in spring 2024.
- 1.2. **Smart phone app promotion**  
Promotional campaign to raise awareness and use of the five existing active travel smartphone apps (Campbeltown, Dunoon, Helensburgh, Oban and Rothesay). The first year of the campaign in summer 2023 increased downloads of the free to access apps by 74%.
- 1.3. **Pedestrian and Cycle Counters**  
Argyll and Bute Council operate a network of automated pedestrian and cycle counters with 36 installed across the Council area. The data from these counters is used to monitor changes in pedestrian/cycle numbers, including from new routes, and by partners to support compilation of national statistics. The data is also publicly available via a dedicated website.
- 1.4. **Bikes back to the community**  
The Bikes back to the Community bike recycling scheme is delivered in partnership with local community group, ACT Now. While the Bikes back to the Community scheme has focused on Mid-Argyll, it has supported a number of Oban based pupils to access a free bicycle to enable them to learn to cycle. The bicycles provided are safe and suitable, and follow up support from ACT Now staff and volunteers is available to ensure the bicycle is fully utilised. The project returned 65 bikes to the community in 2022/23 and is forecast to exceed this in 2023/24.
- 1.5. **Oban Town Centre North Project**  
This project seeks to identify real and perceived barriers to walking, wheeling and cycling in a key area of Oban town centre that lies to the north of where the previous CHORD improvement works were carried out, and develop proposals that will address these barriers, and facilitate active travel as the most attractive and viable mode choice for everyday journeys in the town. The project focusses on George St and the Esplanade between North Pier and the Corran Halls, while also undertaking a strategic review to identify opportunities for wider active travel links throughout Oban with the aim of making walking, wheeling and cycling the preferred mode choice in Oban Town Centre, thereby increasing access to shops, leisure and essential services while retaining private car access for those who require it. The project will deliver strategies and interventions that reduce the impact of

the A85 in the study area by identifying opportunities, through traffic surveys and robust business analysis of travel patterns to create proposals that optimise traffic flow and have the potential to reduce local car journeys and non-essential travel through the study area. It will also safeguard Oban's strategic transport facilities and high street business operations through engagement with local businesses and the identification of intervention to support increase footfall in the town centre whilst ensuring access to Oban ferry Terminal.