

Response to the **Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee** (“the Committee”) consultation on determining its priorities for the Sixth Senedd (2021-2026).

The closing date for submissions is **Friday 10th September 2021**.

About Living Streets Cymru

We are Living Streets Cymru, part of the UK charity for everyday walking.

We want to create a nation where walking is the natural choice for everyday, local journeys; free from congested roads and pollution, reducing the risk of preventable illnesses and social isolation. We want to achieve a better walking environment and to inspire people of all generations to enjoy the benefits the simple act of walking brings.

For over 90 years we've been a beacon for walking. In our early days our campaigning led to the UK's first zebra crossings and speed limits. Now our campaigns and local projects deliver real change to overcome barriers to walking and our groundbreaking initiatives such as the world's biggest Walk to School campaign encourage millions of people to walk.

Living Streets' view on the Minister and Deputy Minister's priorities for the next 12-18 months

The portfolio of the Minister and Deputy Minister for Climate Change reflects a bold and encouraging approach to addressing the climate emergency. It is a wide remit from which we would expect to see a coherent, cross-cutting policy direction. The action that is now needed to halt and reverse the damage to our environment, our health and the wellbeing of communities and biodiverse habitats worldwide should not be underestimated. The recent sixth report of the IPCCⁱ sets this out in no uncertain terms and swift action is necessary.

The Welsh Government is also committed to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act which takes an integrated and longer-term view of policy making. It is therefore right that the priorities of the Minister and Deputy Minister address some of the broader social inequalities stemming from transport poverty and living in the most polluted areas. These are challenges that can and should be addressed in Wales which have the potential to achieve sustainable and lasting change in how we live, influencing the decisions that we make day-to-day.

Our mobility is one such behaviour that must be addressed without delay. A 2020 report by Transport for Quality of Lifeⁱⁱ sets out how *“Transport is now the UK's biggest contributor to climate change that threatens deeply problematic environmental, social and economic consequences, and the need for a change in the trajectory of transport policymaking is urgent”*.

Furthermore, in the Welsh policy context, the report goes on to say that *“achieving the wellbeing goals enshrined in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015) cannot be achieved without tackling transport as the rogue sector that is performing worst in reducing climate damaging emissions”*. This description of transport in Wales as the ‘rogue’ sector stems from the study’s finding that every other sector of the Welsh economy has significantly cut carbon, while transport continues with many types of activity that make things worse.

Living Streets is clear that our cities, towns and villages must be reimagined so that we reduce car dominance and enable everyone to walk or cycle for their everyday journeys. Meaningful reductions in carbon emissions, and improvements in air quality and road safety will be achieved with a significant shift from car journeys to active forms of travel such as walking and cycling; the successful integration of active travel with public transport modes for longer journeys; and the decarbonisation of freight, including adopting active travel modes for urban deliveries which itself could remove 7.5 percent of urban vehicle mileageⁱⁱⁱ. Transport, and in particular, decarbonising transport, will play a significant role across the Ministers’ portfolio, impacting on Welsh Government’s goals for Net Zero, Town Centre Regeneration, Housing, the Environment and Energy, for example.

It is disappointing that despite the positive changes we saw to our street environment throughout the lockdown period, as more people discovered the joy of walking locally, traffic levels have now returned to the same levels as they were in the weeks and months before Covid restrictions came into force^{iv}. It is timely that understanding our travel behaviours is prioritised as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic which exposed barriers to low carbon forms of transport. There are clear challenges to walking, as people have struggled with narrow, uneven pavements, unsafe crossings and growing numbers of private vehicles. Walking often goes hand in hand with public transport yet there are further challenges to public transport use as people have been deterred from travelling on public transport due to safety fears combined with a reduced capacity and increased waiting times. All of this has the potential to tip the balance back in favour of private car use which must not be allowed to happen under any circumstances if we are to see a green and healthy recovery in Wales.

It is also important to recognise that the pandemic has both highlighted inequalities and made them worse. Some people on low incomes of Black, Asian and minority ethnic heritage have been disproportionately affected because they live in areas of high air pollution. The social isolation of older people and those living with disabilities has become worse despite the fact that the number of people who reported feeling lonely in Wales was already 84% in 2019-2020^v, before lockdown restrictions even began.

Transport must be viewed through a much wider lens than simply enabling our movements between point A and B. In Wales, one third of adults do no physical activity at all^{vi}, only one in six 11-16-year-olds meet the Chief Medical Officer’s target of 60 minutes of activity every day and childhood obesity is rising^{vii}. In 2019, 227 people were killed or seriously injured^{viii} on roads in Wales, up from 208 in 2015.

And, an estimated 1,000 to 1,400 deaths each year are attributable to human-made air pollution^{ix}. We must take the perspective of the impact of transport infrastructure on our communities and way of life. It is about the bigger picture of creating places to live, work and spend time that offer wellbeing, health and environmental benefit now and for future generations.

Which of these priorities the Committee should be focusing on over the next year or so?

Living Streets welcomed the Wales Transport Strategy published by the previous Welsh Government which puts walking at the top of the transport hierarchy and introduced some strategic commitments including a ban on pavement parking and a change to national default speed limits, with one of the aims being to encourage more active travel. We are further encouraged to see these commitments within the new Programme for Government. Living Streets would welcome the Climate Change Committee's scrutiny of this Strategy and its implementation to ensure the best outcomes for our climate and public health.

A Clean Air Act for Wales is discussed in the letter which outlines the priorities of the Ministers (under Environment), however, it remains that there is no sense of urgency behind the tabling of this Bill. Living Streets calls on the Climate Change Committee to challenge this and bring this Bill forward in the Legislative Programme. In Wales, an estimated 1,000 to 1,400 deaths each year are attributable to human-made air pollution^x. Whilst a Clean Air Act for Wales was a commitment of the previous Welsh Government, we alongside our colleagues in the Healthy Air Cymru coalition, are disappointed that no such Bill was laid during that term. The Clean Air Bill White Paper published by the previous Welsh Government proposed to do so in the sixth Senedd term, however, given the known health implications of air pollution on all sectors of the community, there is a real urgency to move forward with this.

In 2020, in a world-first ruling, a coroner confirmed that excessive air pollution made a material contribution to the death of 9-year-old Ella Kissi-Debrah. This young girl died in February 2013 after suffering a fatal asthma attack. She had previously suffered seizures and made almost 30 hospital visits. Air pollution will now be listed as Ella's cause of death, the first time this has happened in the world. Young children, such as Ella, do not have the luxury of waiting several more years, potentially into the seventh Senedd term, before we see policy making an impact on the ground.

It is Living Streets' view that in bringing all of this work together, the over-arching focus of the Committee in the immediate term should be the focus on achieving Net Zero with the proposed publication of a Welsh Government Low Carbon Plan to be published coinciding with COP26 in Glasgow later this year. Decarbonisation of transport has a big part to play in this, particularly through behaviour change and modal shift. Ambitious goals such as car-free towns and cities, car-free housing developments, a decarbonised public transport system and ease of walking and cycling in both urban and rural settings must be acted on now to ensure we are

where we want to be, or better, in 2050. Across the portfolio, there must be a focus on creating healthy neighbourhoods with fewer cars, vans and lorries on the road, cleaner air and more urban green spaces and green corridors where people can walk and cycle.

Any other subject we think should be prioritised over the next 12-18 months and why

No comment.

ⁱ The Working Group I contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report, Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis [Sixth Assessment Report — IPCC](#)

ⁱⁱ [200619_A Wales Transport Policy fit for the Climate Emergency_v5_FINAL-FINAL-FINAL.pdf \(transportforqualityoflife.com\)](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [Potential-for-e-cargo-bikes-to-reduce-congestion-and-pollution-from-vans-FINAL.pdf \(bicycleassociation.org.uk\)](#)

^{iv} [Transport use during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

^v [consultaton-document_0.pdf \(gov.wales\)](#)

^{vi} [consultation-a-clean-air-plan-for-wales.pdf \(gov.wales\)](#)

^{vii} [North Wales Regional Partnership Board Annual Report \(gov.wales\)](#)

^{viii} [Casualties by Local Authority, vehicle type, severity \(gov.wales\)](#)

^{ix} [consultation-a-clean-air-plan-for-wales.pdf \(gov.wales\)](#)

^x <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2019-12/consultation-a-clean-air-plan-for-wales.pdf>