STATUTORY GUIDANCE FOR THE DELIVERY OF THE ACTIVE TRAVEL (WALES) ACT 2013

Consultation by Welsh Government

Response from BMA Cymru Wales

INTRODUCTION

BMA Cymru Wales is pleased to respond to the Welsh Government’s consultation on draft Statutory Guidance for the Delivery of the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2103.

The British Medical Association represents doctors from all branches of medicine all over the UK; and has a total membership of over 150,000 including more than 3,000 members overseas and over 19,000 medical student members.

The BMA is the largest voluntary professional association of doctors in the UK, which speaks for doctors at home and abroad. It is also an independent trade union.

BMA Cymru Wales represents some 7,000 members in Wales from every branch of the medical profession.

RESPONSE

Given the technical nature of this consultation, BMA Cymru Wales does not offer a comprehensive response to the specific questions raised within the consultation document. We would nonetheless wish to make a number of points for consideration.

In our written response to the Stage 1 consultation on the then Active Travel (Wales) Bill in March 2013, we outlined the clear and positive health benefits that can be derived from enabling individuals to undertake more travel by active means. We therefore approach our assessment of this draft delivery guidance from that perspective. We are keen to see guidance adopted that will be as effective as possible in achieving this aim.

In relation to funding, we note that the guidance requires local authorities to direct existing spend on walking and cycling towards making improvements to the routes identified on the integrated route maps they will prepare. We also note that local authorities are encouraged to seek additional sources of funding to maximise the improvements they can make. We are concerned this wording is not strong enough and may fail to lead to the step change in active travel provision that BMA Cymru Wales would wish to see. For those local authorities that currently have a low level of spend on walking and cycling, there is no guarantee that the guidance will lead to this being increased to any significant extent, or even at all.

In our view, the wording should go further and direct a clear shift in existing spend on transport overall to ensure a defined minimum percentage is used for the delivery of active travel infrastructure in every Welsh local authority in future. We further believe that a similar stipulation should be contained within the guidance that would also apply to Welsh Government expenditure on transport.

We reiterate our previously expressed concerns that the level of improvement which local authorities and Welsh Government are expected to deliver needs to be defined in a way that will ensure a meaningful level of improvement is delivered, and not just a minimal level of improvement. For instance, we note that...
paragraph 2.6.5 refers to the need for “a measureable difference” to be achieved after three years to comply "with the duty to secure continuous improvement”. Paragraph 5.1.1 provides more detail and refers to the need for local authorities to deliver “year on year improvements”. However, because no minimum level of improvement is specified in either section of the guidance, we are concerned that this wording could potentially see such obligations fulfilled with only a very limited amount of improvement actually being made. As the wording stands, the requirements specified in the draft guidance could theoretically be met through the provision of nothing more than an extra metre of cycle lane each year across a local authority’s area. As such, we consider that the obligation for continuous improvement may in effect be meaningless unless it is more clearly defined.

In similar vein, we would also question the balance of detail within the guidance. We note that more emphasis is placed within it on the process for developing maps, and how they should be consulted upon, than on the extent to which improvements in active travel infrastructure should be delivered over a particular period of time.

Whilst we appreciate a key control element in securing an appropriate level of improvement will be the approval of integrated network maps by Welsh Ministers, we would nonetheless reiterate our concern that little detail is given as to the minimum level of proposed improvement those maps will be required to contain. In our view, this needs to be spelt out more clearly within this guidance.

On a related point, we are also concerned that the references in the guidance as to how monitoring will be undertaken of the overall effect of the Act and the delivery of specific schemes are somewhat vague. We therefore believe that the wording relating to how progress will be monitored should also be strengthened.

BMA Cymru Wales believes that active travel infrastructure should be considered and incorporated when any new roads are built, or when significant maintenance schemes of existing roads are undertaken. As such, we welcome the wording in paragraph 6.1.4 which seeks to ensure this will occur.

In relation to the section of the guidance which concerns the promotion of active travel, we feel that the wording here could also benefit from being strengthened. As it is written, it would appear to us to leave the extent to which active travel promotion is undertaken too much to local discretion. One way this section might be strengthened could be by requiring local authorities to work with local communities and local employers to encourage people on an individual basis to consider switching to undertaking more travel by active means, through approaches such as Sustrans’ Personalised Travel Planning scheme.1

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1 http://www.sustrans.org.uk/our-services/what-we-do/personalised-travel-planning