

New travel plan aspires to encourage residents out of their car

A new travel plan aims to improve opportunities to walk and cycle in West Lothian.

The latest Active Travel Plan aims to get people fitter by encouraging them out of their cars- and in turn improve the environment by cutting reliance on motor vehicle use for small journeys by providing safer walking and cycling routes in towns and villages.

It also aims to boost use of public transport through development of routes and services.

But the executive councillor for the environment issues a warning that any plans would fail if not adequately funded by Holyrood.

Elected members on the Council Executive have given their unanimous support to adopting the 2024 to 2029 Active Travel Plan for West Lothian at their recent meeting.

The plan details how the council, as the planning and transport authority, can deliver improvements to the network that will enable more residents to chose active travel modes that include physical activity.

It aims to connect people to the places they want to go, by delivering the required infrastructure and culture that makes walking, wheeling, and cycling more popular choices for short, everyday journeys. These can often link in with public

transport routes for longer journeys.

The plan provides a framework for identifying the interventions required to deliver a comprehensive and well-connected network of active travel routes in West Lothian going forward.

Some to the scheme are continuations of work which has already started, developing and improving existing pathways, such as the Foulshiels footpath around the eastern end of Stoneyburn and the N75 national cycle route which crosses the county east to west.

SNP depute group leader Pauline Stafford welcomed the high-level aspirations of the programme: "I think this a great report. its really welcome that this has come forward. I know there's been some resistance to it. council budgets under lot of pressure and a lot of competing priorities, but I think we've all got a duty to make the case that's there's a huge opportunity to markedly improve public health.

"Having a good active travel network would make a big difference to so many aspects of people's lives from their health and well-being to meeting climate target and meeting planning objectives and tackling inequality.

"Spend from active travel far from being a luxury is one of the most secure investments the government can make. These returns increase over time. Some road building schemes don't make any returns at all."

Lib Dem councillor Sally Pattie said: "It's really important for us elected members to get across to communities how much benefit a plan like this can bring to them in the long run."

She also urged greater coordination of active travel schemes to make meaningful regional connections.

Councillor Tom Conn issued a note of caution on national

support for the concept of Active Travel citing the lack of action in the Scottish Government's Fair Fares review which failed to deliver substantial improvements to bus services. He urged the Scottish Government need to "walk the walk" on financing Active travel programmes.

After the meeting councillor Conn, who is Executive councillor for the environment and sustainability said: "The 2024 to 2029 Active Travel Plan for West Lothian is a huge step forward in providing a strategic approach to improving active travel locally.

"It will take a collaborative effort with local communities, community organisations, other public sector partners, and services across the council all playing their part.

"By identifying the interventions required to deliver a comprehensive and well-connected network of active travel routes in West Lothian, many benefits for West Lothian residents will be achieved such as better health and wellbeing, reduced travel costs and reduced damage to our environment."

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter