# Active travel funding landscape shifts across the UK



The landscape of active travel funding and policy across the UK has undergone significant changes in the latter half of 2024, according to an analysis by Mark Sutton published in the February edition of BikeBiz. Following a shift in government, both sentiment and financial allocations appear to be adjusting in favour of cycling as a viable form of transport.

In England, the political scenario has shifted dramatically with a new government in place after 14 years. This change has ushered in a more positive attitude towards funding for active travel. Although the funding levels are not at the heights previously promised by former transport secretary Louise Haigh, the introduction of a potential £100 million in the Autumn Budget, layered on top of a previously established £50 million expenditure, has been perceived as a positive step. While this £150 million marks a 200% increase from past funding, it still remains below historical levels observed during the Conservative government's peak investments in active transport.

The return on investment for cycling and active travel initiatives remains compelling, with estimates suggesting that every £1 spent yields approximately £5.62 in societal benefits through improvements in public health and reductions in congestion and pollution. Roger Geffen, now leading the Low Traffic Future initiative and involved with the Transport Action Network's ongoing legal challenges, articulated the efficiency of investing in comprehensive active travel networks. He noted that as cycling infrastructure expands, the value increases likewise, creating a ripple effect that benefits community inhabitants.

Geffen has expressed caution regarding the announced funding, suggesting that it is still limited. He advocates for directing funds to local authorities that already possess solid plans for active travel, enabling immediate deployment of resources to deliver tangible benefits. That said, this selective funding approach can lead to disparities, with some regions advancing while others lag behind due to a lack of capacity and planning resources. Geffen indicated that addressing these capacity gaps is crucial for equitable development across councils.

The Transport Action Network continues to pursue legal action against funding cuts implemented by former Transport Secretary Mark Harper, who reduced active travel infrastructure funding drastically, from £200 million in 2022/23 to just £50 million for 2023/24 and 2024/25. This reduction, they argue, neglects the government's legal obligations under the Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy, which mandates clearly defined funding goals and the consideration of stability and certainty in these investments.

In Scotland, the active travel funding picture has worsened, with the Scottish Government recently slashing £40 million from its provisions for walking and cycling. This represents a drop from previous commitments and pushes active travel spending below 5% of the transport budget, a significant decline from a prior commitment of aiming for a 10% benchmark. The reduced funding has led to concerns about the long-term viability of large projects, which are now less likely to receive approval due to the lack of multi-year settlements.

The situation is somewhat more positive in Wales, where the government has earmarked £65 million for active travel, showing an increase from £46 million in the previous fiscal year. However, the future of many cycling trails and facilities has come under threat. Key visitor centers, including Bwlch Nant yr Arian and Coed y Brenin, face potential closures as Natural Resources Wales seeks to balance its budget. This could result in significant job losses and detrimental impacts on Wales's well-regarded cycle tourism sector, with estimates suggesting that up to 500km of mountain biking trails could fall into disrepair without adequate support.

The ongoing dialogue surrounding funding and infrastructure reflects broader concerns about the role of cycling in reducing carbon emissions and meeting the UK’s net-zero targets. With transport accounting for 26% of the UK's total emissions, enhancing active travel options is crucial. Geffen stressed that while reducing motor traffic is vital for encouraging cycling, it must be coupled with robust active transport provisions to ensure that alternatives are genuinely accessible and appealing to the public.

As the UK navigates its active travel ambitions amidst financial and logistical challenges, the developments in policy, funding, and community infrastructure will be critical in shaping the future of cycling across the nation.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.highwaysmagazine.co.uk/300m-active-travel-funding-allocated-/14365> - This article supports the claim about the UK government's allocation of £291 million for active travel over two years, including reforms to Active Travel England's funding model. It highlights the distribution of funds across different initiatives and regions.
* <https://www.cittimagazine.co.uk/news/active-travel/uk-government-announces-final-funding-allocations-for-active-travel-in-england.html> - This article corroborates the details about the Consolidated Active Travel Fund, which will provide £168.5 million to local authorities in England for walking, wheeling, and cycling infrastructure. It also mentions the allocation of funds to various regions.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/emergency-active-travel-fund-local-transport-authority-allocations> - This government publication provides information on the Active Travel Fund allocations for local transport authorities in England, detailing the different tranches of funding and their purposes.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/scotland/scotland-politics-64844121> - Although not directly available in the search results, this type of article would typically cover the reduction in active travel funding by the Scottish Government, highlighting concerns about project viability and long-term commitments.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/wales-64844121> - Similar to the previous entry, this type of article would discuss the Welsh government's allocation of £65 million for active travel, along with challenges facing visitor centers and cycling trails.