



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Regional Development

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into the Benefits of Cycling to the Economy:
Sustrans

14 May 2014

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Jimmy Spratt (Chairperson)
Mr Seán Lynch (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr John Dallat
Mr Alex Easton
Mr Ross Hussey
Mr Kieran McCarthy
Mr Cathal Ó hOisín

Witnesses:

Mr Gordon Clarke	Sustrans
Dr Andy Cope	Sustrans
Mr Steven Patterson	Sustrans

The Chairperson: We welcome Gordon Clarke, national director of Sustrans; Steven Patterson, deputy director; and Andy Cope, head of research and monitoring. You are all very welcome; some of you are no strangers to the Committee. I ask you to make a short presentation and then leave yourselves open to questions. Perhaps, when it comes to questions, one person as opposed to three could answer, because we have another briefing immediately after yours as part of the inquiry.

Mr Gordon Clarke (Sustrans): Thank you very much, Chairperson, for your welcome. I was listening to the previous presentation. When I was a student in 1970, my project was the Connswater linear park, and it is great to see it actually happening after all these years. It really is exciting and it fits into what we are saying.

We sent you a very comprehensive report. There is an awful lot of information in it. We do not think that we can summarise that in 10 minutes. We would like to focus on where we are with respect to cycling and the economy; say little bit about the potential; and maybe focus on one or two aspects of our suggestions for the future. So we will give an edited version of the report. I am sure that there will be questions in due course. As with the previous submission, cycling, walking and public transport play a part in all that we say. So, although we are talking about cycling, walking and public transport are also part of it. I will ask Dr Andy Cope, head of monitoring and research, to introduce our presentation. His team of 30 are internationally recognised and do work for the World Health Organization and so on. It is a very important group in Sustrans, which builds the evidence to make our case.

Dr Andy Cope (Sustrans): Thank you. I am sorry about the slide equipment. We will use the paper version.

We simply do not know the present value of cycling to the economy in Northern Ireland. The best estimate that we can make is based on a London School of Economics study, which came up with a figure of £2.9 billion for the whole of the UK. On a pro rata or per capita basis, that equates to about £87 million in Northern Ireland, which we suspect may be an underestimation for reasons that I will come to.

The direct benefits are fairly obvious. There are retail impacts, many examples of which we have listed in the report. We have many more examples; it is an emerging area. There are lots of better and more interesting examples from elsewhere in Europe. Then there is the leisure and tourism component, which was estimated to be worth £167 million in the Republic of Ireland in 2011. In the previous session, you mentioned the impact of the Great Western Greenway in Mayo. Of course, the job creation element is really important as well, and a part of that is to do with construction. Investment in cycling and walking is evidenced to be more efficient in stimulating the local economy than investment in bigger road-type schemes.

There are also indirect benefits, which are less obvious. Those are in health, tackling obesity, mortality, absenteeism — well-being components, which also have a value — and traffic decongestion. We found a study that estimates that congestion costs businesses in Northern Ireland £250 million a year, which is about 1.5% of the economic productivity of the region. Of course, there is also the issue of carbon emissions. I note that you have four air quality management areas in Belfast, and there is the possibility of carbon emissions fines from the European Union.

I will move on to the next slide entitled "Investing in cycling — value for money". We used the example of the Comber greenway, which links to the Titanic Quarter. I think that the figures speak for themselves. The most striking figure for those of you who are familiar with benefit-to-cost ratios is that we have a ratio of £32.50 for every £1 of investment, which is close to unprecedented in transport terms. That is the exception rather than the rule. The greenway is part of the Connect2 cohort of schemes. Overall, the programme has a benefit-to-cost ratio of 6.3:1. The fact is that it is a relatively low-cost investment. It is exactly the type of scenario that you were talking about in the previous session in that it has a relatively low cost but a high deliverable impact.

I will move on to the next slide entitled "The potential". This is just a very simple modelling exercise and a simple form of expression. Two thirds of trips are less than five miles, and 1% of those are currently made by bicycle. If we could treble the amount of cycling in Belfast alone, we would end up with something like 5,000 new cyclists, each worth about £600 a head, based on a study by SQW for Cycling England. That amounts to about £3 million worth of additional benefit. We have other examples from elsewhere in the UK on favourable benefit-to-cost ratios.

The next slide on potential looks at tourism. I mentioned the Irish economy figure earlier. Spend on cycling tourism is very considerable and is possibly higher than that for golf, horse riding, angling and those kinds of things. Again, we have numerous examples, the most striking of which is the value of cycle tourism in Scotland, which is estimated to be possibly upwards of £600 million a year. We are potentially talking about some very large figures. I will hand over to Gordon.

Mr G Clarke: The next slide is entitled, "A vision for the future". Andy highlighted the fact that cycling delivers and is delivering substantial economic benefit. The potential in urban and rural areas is huge. It is just incredible what can be delivered. We feel that, going forward, the Committee should consider a vision for cycling in urban and rural areas in the Province. It touches on all aspects of governmental objectives. It delivers improved health and quality of life for all; it delivers a stronger economy — Andy indicated some of those potential opportunities — and it significantly enhances the environment.

We need a collective vision that everyone can sign up to. It is not just cyclists; the whole community needs to sign up to it because, as we heard about Connswater, it is a community engagement. It is not just cyclists who need to be involved. It needs to be owned by health, tourism, the voluntary sector and all parties, and it is a long-term commitment. We need a vision that is not just for the next five years but is probably for the next 30 years, and it should embrace good transport, good public space and a general safe and high-quality environment. We need a shared vision.

On our vision for 2020, we have set out some suggested targets for the Programme for Government such as increasing commuting by bicycle to 10% in Belfast, 5% in Derry/Londonderry, and 3% regionally. There is quite an imbalance in the age group in cycling and a differential between males and females. There are inequalities that need to be addressed.

Obviously, the starting point for all our work is in schools, and we want to see 50% of primary school pupils and 25% of post-primary pupils cycling and walking to school. We also want to see 75% of them receive on-road cycle training, and that is an ongoing issue in the Department of the Environment. It is reviewing that at the moment, but on-road cycle training is a key element of developing cycling. At the moment, it is very much playground based but it needs to be out in the real world to give people experience. Feedback from Bikeability, which is the on-road cycle training initiative, demonstrates great confidence from parents and children through that programme. It is also about doubling the economic benefits, and Andy has alluded to those. We do not have a proper baseline at the moment. We need to try to quantify exactly what the baseline is at the moment and then set targets against it. We have extrapolated figures, but we need to have a baseline to work from. Obviously, we suggest a commitment to expenditure to deliver that. I will come to that in a minute.

How do we achieve the vision? There is a slide on joined-up actions. In that, we say that you need to provide infrastructure but that infrastructure alone is not enough. Alongside that, you need to work with communities. We call it behavioural change. It is about working with schools, workplaces and communities to give them the information and the motivation to switch from their current mode of transport to walking and cycling.

You need to have infrastructure, but you also need behavioural change and you need policies, such as those on active travel, in government to help to deliver that. The Welsh Government recently introduced the Active Travel Bill, which obliges statutory planning process to incorporate walking and cycling routes. We are at a timely point to do that with the reorganisation of local government and new planning processes coming in. As well as that, you need marketing and monitoring. Feedback from communities was mentioned. An essential part of any vision for cycling, going forward, is that you measure it and count the number of people cycling but, more importantly, seek opinions. DRD has signed up to a UK-wide initiative called the Bicycle Account, which is biannual report that will produce statistics on cycling and give people a summary and a chance to say what they think needs to happen. Therefore, it is about a vision for going forward, infrastructure, behavioural change, policy, marketing and monitoring.

You asked for an action plan, and we have given you that. A key issue in that is delivery and who will lead on cycling, going forward. We suggest that DRD be the lead Department but that every other Department should have the opportunity to contribute because cycling, if you think about it, deals with health, education, arts, culture, leisure etc. Therefore, there is need for a coordinated approach in government to deliver and maximise the benefits. We have indicated the level of funding that is required. We looked across the UK at other cities to see what they are putting into the development of cycling. We have some figures for that. We are suggesting — this is money directed solely towards the development of cycling — funding of £10 million in urban areas and £2.6 million in rural areas. That comes from looking at the figures for Edinburgh, London and other cities across the UK. As other projects develop, such as road projects, there should be associated expenditure that relates to cycling. Obviously, for new developments, planning represents another opportunity to get investment in cycling.

I move on to communities, which represent the building block for cycling in the future. We are particularly focused on schoolchildren. We have to get them motivated and cycling. At the moment, the school active travel programme, which DRD co-funds with the Public Health Agency, delivers motivational work in 60 schools. That will rise to 180 schools over the next three years. We would like to see that programme developed; it is really important work. Equally, going back to my three elements, we need infrastructure, so we need to be investing in infrastructure in and around schools. There are ongoing discussions about that. The Department of Education should provide cycle parking within schools, with DRD supporting the infrastructure of safe routes to schools that parents require to give them the confidence to get their children cycling to school. So, there is behavioural change, the school active travel programme, the infrastructure that goes with it, and on-road cycle training, which is the policy element. All those things need to happen and, when they do, they will start delivering significantly for the economy. That will take the school run off the roads and start decongesting roads. There will be air quality benefits and health benefits, particularly for children, for whom obesity is a number one issue. If we get children active, we begin to deal with that problem before it becomes a serious issue for the health service. Developing communities is crucial to the future of cycling and the development of economic benefits that go with it.

At another level, it also brings in social enterprise. In working with some schools, we have found that children have difficulty affording and looking after bikes. In one or two places, local communities have developed social enterprises that help to service the bikes, provide them, recycle them and so on.

Therefore, a lot of interrelated things can happen when you start to develop cycling at the community level. You develop links to schools and then you link into shops, places of employment, leisure centres and so on. That is the building block. Whether it is a rural town, a city or a small village, that approach, around schools, for delivering cycling is crucial.

On commuting in and out of town, again, we need to invest. We heard mention of routes such as the Comber greenway. As it is situated in Belfast, the number of people cycling in the wards along that route is substantial. When you establish good infrastructure, people will take up cycling. Routes into the cities and main towns are really important. In continental Europe, they now call them cycling superhighways, where the volume of cyclists, rather than the number of cars, changes the traffic lights. We have a long way to go, but there is a vision in our document for communities, commuting and links into the city.

The final point in our summary — I am really just scratching the surface of our report, in which there is a lot of detail — is on investment in long-distance routes. You mentioned the Great Western Greenway in County Mayo, which I understand you visited. I was challenged to cycle it from end to end in March this year, when the wind was blowing and the rain was coming down.

Mr McCarthy: No excuses. You are not Sean Kelly. *[Laughter.]*

Mr G Clarke: I completed it. It is a really good example for what we can do here on long-distance routes and rural regeneration. I am not sure whether you have the map of Northern Ireland in front of you that shows potential routes equivalent to the Great Western Greenway but on our own doorstep. The old railway line from Derry/Londonderry to Burtonport is a perfect example. The route from Enniskillen to Manorhamilton and on towards Sligo is another. The Ulster canal along the Blackwater, through Cavan, Clones, Monaghan and on towards Lough Erne is another wonderful potential cycle route.

Newry to Carlingford is another potential route. The Comber greenway could go on in one direction to Donaghadee but on to Saintfield, Ballynahinch, Downpatrick and Newcastle along the old railway line there. That could become the "great eastern greenway". The north Down coastal path around the shores of Belfast lough could be developed. There is also Lisburn to Lough Neagh. There is fantastic potential to have our own versions of the Great Western Greenway.

There is huge potential economic benefit to the farming community, businesses along the routes and new operators who hire out bikes. One route that we have not shown on the map is the EuroVelo route. There is a European map with a route that comes from northern Scandinavia right down through Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Republic, across to Wales and on down through France, Spain and Portugal. We are on that route and that needs to be thought through at another level. However, that EuroVelo route could be developed.

I have run through a presentation that perhaps you have not been able to see, which makes things difficult for you. However, there is an awful lot of information in our report.

The Chairperson: Members have the report.

Mr G Clarke: That was a quick summary of the key highlights, but there is a lot more. We welcome questions.

The Chairperson: Thank you. You estimate that cycling contributes £87 million to the economy of Northern Ireland. How current is that figure and what proportion is direct economic benefit?

Dr Cope: That work was done in 2011, so it is based on 2010 data. It is current-ish. In terms of what is direct, I cannot break it down by proportion. As I said, the work was done by the London School of Economics; it is not our own material. However, it includes a calculation of health benefits, which is not direct spend but savings on healthcare costs. I cannot give you a precise answer, I am afraid.

The Chairperson: I am thinking of the clear economic benefits to the business of providing the equipment and parts required for cycling. When you look at the Comber greenway, for example, I regularly hear about substantial economic benefits for businesses, for instance in Comber, Dundonald and now coming through to the Titanic Quarter and other areas in the city. There are very substantial economic benefits, and I suspect that that figure is actually a lot higher.

Mr G Clarke: I agree with you, Chairman. One of our recommendations is that we need a baseline and need to do work to measure that. No figures were available to us. Chain Reaction is the biggest online cycling retailer in the world. It is based in the Province, and that alone would probably make a substantial difference to the figures. We need to measure it. I am a Comber greenway person, and I put a lot of money into the local economy at the coffee shop in Comber and the one in Dundonald.

The Chairperson: That must be where I have seen you. *[Laughter.]*

Mr G Clarke: We need a baseline to work from, because that is how we can set targets for ourselves to double those figures. The potential is incredible.

The Chairperson: You mentioned the Copenhagen cycling vision in your report. I will ask you a question, although I am not sure that you will want to answer it. Are you prepared to say how you would rate the Executive and the Department for Regional Development's cycling vision?

Mr G Clarke: First, setting up the cycling unit is a fantastic step forward; it is hugely important. I know that the Minister visited Copenhagen recently, in March. Anybody who goes there will be really blown away when they see the infrastructure. I was criticised for standing out because I was wearing a high-visibility jacket. I started to put on a helmet, and a guy said to me, "Do you not think that this is safe?" There is a different culture there. However, they have been working at it for 30 years, and that is why we say in our report that you are not going to get there quickly; it is going to take a long-term commitment, and that is a real challenge. It goes beyond the five-year term of a Government; it goes on and on. It has been embedded into the culture of Denmark — Copenhagen in particular — and that is the benchmark that we should be aiming towards. However, it requires a commitment that everybody is signed up to so that it is not a debating issue; this is where we are going, and this is the sort of city that we want.

You can see the vibrancy of the centre of Copenhagen. My wife, who was with me and who did not cycle, was going round the shops, and she said that she did not see a single vacant shop in the centre of Copenhagen. Do not take that as an accurate survey, but the point is that it was really vibrant. The majority of retail sales in Copenhagen are made by cyclists; that is where it has got to.

Mr Steven Patterson (Sustrans): With regard to the current Northern Ireland situation, page 18 of our report points out that a range of permanent bicycle counters have been installed on the routes in Northern Ireland over the past 15 years. That shows quite clearly that, where the Department and others have invested in high-quality routes, the usage has been very good. The Department, along with Sustrans and others, has built very high-quality greenways right across Derry/Londonderry and along the Newry canal. However, there was a really good route and quite progressive work in Belfast during 1996 to 2000, when four traffic lights were installed on the bridges across the river at the Ormeau bridge, the Albert bridge etc, to build a really high-quality greenway. The figures are highly impressive for the route right through the middle of the town; over 10 years, usage went up by 226%. Where high-quality routes have been built, they are being really well used.

The Committee visited the active school travel project a few years ago. Now that there is a commitment in the Programme for Government, there has been reasonable investment from two Departments and that project is starting to get to a good scale. We need to add infrastructure to it and more cycle training etc. There have been good examples in Northern Ireland over the past 15 years. However, I think we would all agree that there needs to be a step change with the infrastructure of our road network, in part so that we can get away from the position where 85% of cyclists are male and only 15% are female. There have been good examples in the past, and there will be good examples in the future. Nevertheless, the cycling unit is very encouraging, and one of the key challenges is developing the infrastructure and the behavioural change together.

The Chairperson: On your comments about the setting up of the cycling unit, I have to say that the Department set up the unit after the Committee announced an inquiry into cycling, so we take the credit. Pressure from us made the Department wake up and smell the coffee. I will not ask you to comment on that. It is strange that it happened all of a sudden.

Mr Patterson: The Committee was supportive during the discussions on whether active school travel would end up in the Programme for Government, and it came to Gilnahirk Primary School and listened to the pupils and the teacher. I think that that had an influence on progressing the cycling unit.

The Chairperson: Steven, parents still have issues about road safety and kids using cycles. I regularly pass the school that you mentioned, and there are cars parked in the middle of roundabouts and every place. They are abandoned, basically, in the mornings. It does not enhance children's safety in using cycles, and perhaps some gentle, persuasive enforcement measures may need to be taken to encourage more people to use cycles.

Mr G Clarke: This year's Sustrans campaign is about safe journeys to school for children, and we are very keen to push that. The issue is that the Department of the Environment is responsible for road safety. It has had a review of its cycle training. The cycle proficiency scheme is largely playground based, and we have found that you can take Bikeability out onto the roads and give children on-road cycle training. Andy can back up the point that that happens in England. That gives children confidence, and the feedback is that it also gives parents confidence. We are engaged in a consultative process with the Department of the Environment to encourage it to take this step and develop on-road cycle training. That is an issue, and, unless it is cracked, there will always be that difficulty and parents saying that it is not safe for their child. The Committee can certainly pick up that issue and talk to the DOE about it.

Mr Lynch: You said that, by 2020, you will achieve 50% of primary school pupils and 25% of post-primary school pupils cycling and walking to school. Are those figures realistic, and is that doable? What progress has been made over recent years on those figures?

Mr Patterson: Between 2008 and 2010, we ran a project in 18 rural primary schools. The project was co-funded by DARD, DRD and DE, and, in a way, that was a model project for the way that we would like the active school travel programme to go forward. Of a £1.3 million project, roughly £1 million was for infrastructure such as cycle tracks, pedestrian crossings, 20 mph zones and for school infrastructure such as cycle parking and improved pathways. There was £250,000 for behavioural change programmes and for officers to support pupils, teachers and parents. It was a joined-up model, and it also piloted the on-road cycling training. The project was run mostly in villages within 30 mph zones. It saw a reduction in car use, and the combined walking and cycling figures rose from 25% to 40%.

As for hitting the 50% target for walking and cycling, that depends on the amount of investment and support that the active school travel programme gets. When you go into schools and support and encourage pupils, you get results. We know that, when you ask pupils how they would like to get to school, 46% of them say that they want to cycle to school but that only about 1% or 2% do cycle to school. If the investment is made, there is huge potential. The programmes that we have run in partnership with government and others prove that they work, so I think that there is the ability to get modal shift. In rural areas, we are talking about combination journeys, which might involve a drive to the edge of a village and letting the kids walk the last half-mile on a pavement. We are being realistic about it. With the right level of investment, we could achieve that. The level of investment would have to be higher than it currently is. Our vision of every child being offered on-road cycle training would need considerably more investment from the DOE or whichever Department.

Mr Lynch: Are you saying that it depends on the level of investment?

Mr Patterson: Yes.

Mr Ó hOisín: Thanks for your presentation, gentlemen. It was fairly breathless — not unlike the peloton going by last Saturday. I want to go back to what Steven said. Perhaps part of the problem is one that we have right across the board, which is that, because cycling is such a Broad Church, it is multi-departmental: there is the DOE, DETI, DCAL, DRD and DE. That is just the nature of the sport or activity.

Sustrans looks at cycle routes, roads and greenways, and I know that the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure has looked at the delivery of a velodrome. I listened to a radio discussion yesterday morning about the value of a velodrome; this was after our visits to a number of other ones. We were looking at delivery costs of anything between £3 million and £14 million. Like all sports, you need heroes as well. You need your Martyn Irvines and your Nicolas Roches. Then, of course, we saw the value of the Giro last weekend. I do not know how you square that circle. We have looked at the Great Western Greenway, which was delivered at a cost of €5.3 million and is now worth an annual €7.1 million to the local economy. I know that not everything has a price on it, but how do you square the economics of that? What is the best way forward? Are we getting value-for-money delivery in

developing cycle routes on roads, or should we concentrate more on greenways, where people are safer?

Mr G Clarke: That is a very big question. I was part of that debate yesterday, although I did not get a chance to say very much. As far as we are concerned, we need heroes, and we need to invest in elite sport, but our position is that we should invest in the greatest number of people. We have suggested that that should be at community and school level, the reason being that that is an investment in the future. Some of those people might ultimately become track cyclists. Our schools programme needs to progress up through to post-primary level, and we need to get young people engaged in sport and to develop in that way. That is our position, and that is where we want to invest. Any investment in cycling, however, as Andy has, hopefully, demonstrated, has a significantly better economic return than any other type of investment.

Mr Ó hOisín: I know that people might not believe it, but, when I was at school in Maghera, which is on the other side of the Glenshane Pass, I cycled it on a number of occasions. However, I would not trust my son at the same age now even to go to his local school. The cycling proficiency test, or cycling training — it is not a proficiency test now but it was in our day — is incredibly important. How much do you envisage being invested in that across the board?

Mr Patterson: There are 23,000 pupils in six programmes on average for the year in Northern Ireland. It costs about £35 a head to give them the training. We envisage, for example, an opportunity for the private sector to be brought in for appropriate sponsorship. We think that it would be very attractive for sponsors to be seen on high-vis jackets going into every house in the North. It is an exciting time at the moment. It is very timely that the Committee is having this inquiry because DOE's road safety branch published a review of Northern Ireland's cycling proficiency in January 2014, which recommends that the current cycling proficiency test be changed to be more in line with the English, Welsh and Scottish model of Bikeability. It keeps teachers involved in the background and teaches basic bike-handling skills, but then it goes onto the roads. It is a very important time, but there is an issue about resources because the DOE, under current budgets, does not seem to have the resources to roll it out that widely. The DOE needs more resources. There is interdepartmental potential with DRD and Health, and also the potential of the private sector coming in. It is a timely project.

I will go back to your point about where we start. Each of the six or eight Departments that can play a role needs to have its own plan. DRD is developing its plan under the cycling unit, and the Health Department is well engaged with the schools and communities programme. There are opportunities for DETI and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to look at the route product, marketing and promotion, and there could be private sector involvement in current and future routes. Departments should join up. DSD does a lot of urban regeneration work in villages and towns, but it is not designing in cycle routes. For minimal extra money, through the cycle audit principle, if DSD designed in cycle routes, joined-up government could genuinely do it.

Mr Ó hOisín: On behalf of the Committee, I attended that conference in Clifden in March. One of the subjects touched on was the EuroVelo route and the huge amount of disposable income that cyclists have, particularly those who do that type of touring. How much work has been done on that?

Dr Cope: We have specific examples from other routes in the UK. We have data, for instance, from the Way of the Roses route, which is one of the routes that crosses from Lancashire to Yorkshire. It is a relatively new route and has been open for only a couple of years. It is worth about £3 million a year and is already supporting some 60 jobs, whereas a more well-established route, the C2C, or coast-to-coast, route, which crosses from Cumbria to Tyne and Wear and has been in place for about 15 years, is worth over £10 million a year and supports about 173 full-time-equivalent posts. There are some very good precedents.

Mr Easton: Thank you for your presentation, and I agree with everything you say. How did you figure out that cycling is worth £87 million to the economy of Northern Ireland?

Dr Cope: That is a direct derivative from a London School of Economics report. We have simply taken a per capita of the £2.9 billion that it estimates across the UK economy. It is a very rough and ready figure.

Mr Easton: The figure could be more, or it could be less.

Dr Cope: Yes. My feeling is that it is an underestimation, based on a knowledge of what is going on in the rest of the UK and, in particular, having businesses such as Chain Reaction based here. We would love to know about the situation here in more detail.

The Chairperson: Ross Hussey had to leave the meeting as he has another appointment. You mentioned a pilot, and he wanted to know about the 18 rural villages that were involved. I am not asking you for the 18 names now, but would you let the Committee Clerk know where those villages are throughout the Province?

Mr Patterson: We have a concise 10-page report, and I will forward a PDF to you.

The Chairperson: That was the point that Ross wanted to make before he left the meeting.

Mr Patterson: DARD did an independent post-project evaluation on that project, which may also be of interest.

The Chairperson: That might be worthwhile. If you forward it to the Committee Clerk's office, all Committee members will get it.

Mr McCarthy: Your submission states:

"Higher average spend than golf, equestrian, angling or walking".

That is a tremendous statement. What value can you put on that? It seems unthinkable that cycling would be higher than those.

Dr Cope: I think that that is based on data from Fáilte.

Mr G Clarke: Fáilte Ireland.

Dr Cope: Yes, Fáilte Ireland. I do not know the ins and outs as we did not generate the material ourselves. The supposition is that, if you are a cycling tourist and are making a longer stay of your visit — perhaps playing golf for a long weekend or something like that — the spend is cumulative over the period that people are in the vicinity.

Mr Patterson: Those are Fáilte Ireland's figures, and it is the average spend for each trip. The average spend for overseas visitors to the Republic of Ireland as a whole is £391 — that figure is in sterling, so I assume that it was converted — and the average spend for cyclists is £966 a trip.

Mr McCarthy: There is certainly a bit of a difference.

Finally, I congratulate you on the Comber greenway. It is a fantastic facility. However, I have complained about one thing previously. When the bridge was put across the Ballyrainey Road at Comber, it blocked off the access; there is a park on the main road where you park your car, but you cannot get onto the greenway for a walk. When are you going to get that sorted? I have been promised it before.

Mr Patterson: We were in discussions with the Department about that on Monday afternoon, and we are meeting the Department again this afternoon on a different issue, so I will relay your interest in that. It was a mistake.

Mr McCarthy: You can get onto the greenway, but you have to struggle over a bank, and you put yourself at risk.

Mr Patterson: It was certainly not the intention for the ramp to have been taken away. We are looking at that, and we are also looking at the potential to link it into the town centre by a traffic-free route to tie in with the end of the river path.

Mr McCarthy: Good, excellent.

The Chairperson: I was going to say that jumping over a fence is nothing to a man who can cycle 26 kilometres.

Mr McCarthy: Absolutely, but there is the potential for danger if one were to slip.

The Chairperson: I have one or two points. We will send further questions to you to answer for the report in due course, and those will come from the Committee Clerk's office. I want to go back to one of your points, Gordon, about the use of old railways, and you had all sorts of fancy names for them. Are you aware of any discussions that have taken place with the Department or with Northern Ireland Railways? It is the long-term vision of the Committee that some of the rail network in rural areas of Northern Ireland should be re-established. I know that it is about money and all the rest of it. However, close consultation is needed with the Department and with Northern Ireland Railways. Members have voiced their support for an increase in the rail network in the Province. That needs to be borne in mind in any discussions. One could complement the other.

Mr Patterson: I understand that. When that was raised previously, ownership of that type of project has been problematic. No one Department has said that it would develop those long-distance routes. In Mayo, it was the local authority, Mayo County Council, within one administrative area. It was able, through the county manager, to deliver something, because it dealt with planning, the environment, and so on. When we raised the matter before, questions were asked as to whether it was a tourism project and whether tourism should take the lead, whether it was a DRD project or a DOE project. We are recommending an immediate look at all those routes and factoring in the possibility that they might become transport routes in the future. However, that has to be brought together, and one Department needs to take ownership and say that it is not solely responsible, but it will lead it. There is the feasibility of looking at the potential and factoring in long-term use. They are looking at a route in the South that is frozen and not totally abandoned, and they are putting in a greenway over the tracks. I cannot remember what it is called. However, the track is there, and they are filling stones over the top of it and putting in a greenway so that, should the rail route be reopened at some point, they can do that. Our recommendation is that one Department takes ownership, and it should probably be DRD.

The Chairperson: We will leave it there. Thank you for your evidence. I am sure that we will speak to you again in the not-too-distant future.