



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Regional Development

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Inquiry into the Benefits of Cycling to the Economy:  
Department for Regional Development

11 June 2014

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Jimmy Spratt (Chairperson)  
Mrs Brenda Hale  
Mr Declan McAleer  
Mr Kieran McCarthy

**Witnesses:**

Dr Andrew Grieve	Department for Regional Development
Mr John Irvine	Department for Regional Development
Mr Tom Reid	Department for Regional Development

**The Chairperson:** I welcome Tom Reid, who is the director of transport policy, strategy and legislation in DRD; John Irvine, Transport NI, DRD; and Andrew Grieve, who is the head of the cycling unit in DRD. You are all very welcome, gentlemen. You are no strangers to the Committee, of course. I just ask you to make a presentation and then leave yourselves open to questions, please.

**Mr Tom Reid (Department for Regional Development):** Chair, thank you for the opportunity to come along today and provide oral evidence on your cycling inquiry. Obviously, this follows the written submission that we provided back in March. As you said, today I have John Irvine and Andrew Grieve with me, and we welcome the inquiry, particularly as it is making the link between cycling and the economy. Virtually everyone is able to readily understand the health benefits and even the environmental benefits of cycling, but there is a perception in some quarters that switching from the car to the bicycle undermines the local economy. That is a perception that we need to challenge if we are to see a transformation in attitudes towards cycling and build a cycling culture here in Northern Ireland.

The Department has been involved in a number of initiatives that have sought to raise the profile of cycling over the past 20 years, starting in 1995 with the launch of the national cycle network in Northern Ireland. That was followed in June 2000 with the first Northern Ireland cycling strategy. The regional development strategy in 2001 and the regional transportation strategy in 2002 subsequently sought to set out a policy framework to promote walking and cycling.

Last year the Minister set out a renewed focus with the publication of the active travel strategy and secured Executive approval for that strategy. The Executive also sought to underscore their commitment to active travel by including a target in the Programme for Government to increase the number of children walking and cycling to school. One of the key objectives of the active travel strategy was to build a cross-sectoral approach to addressing the barriers to cycling and to bring together a range of activities across Departments that have the potential, if better coordinated, to

begin to build a cycling culture in Northern Ireland. That is why we work very closely with local government representatives and key Departments such as DOE, DHSSPS, DCAL, DETI and DSD, as well as some of the key stakeholder groups like Sustrans, to develop the strategy.

A key focus of the work at that time was to set out the economic benefits of cycling to demonstrate that investment in cycling, while relatively moderate, had the potential for significant economic benefits, including, for example, our ability to attract high-value investment and talent into our urban areas in particular.

The strategy and the forum have been fairly successful in that regard, in that we can see a growing emphasis on cycling in other Departments, particularly Health. However, we need to build on that and begin to deliver transformative projects. To reflect that, the Minister recently set up a dedicated cycling unit, and the Committee's support for that unit has been very welcome. More importantly, that support has really helped the unit to engage key stakeholders and build momentum. I think that the outcome of this inquiry will be hugely beneficial in informing the unit's forward work programme, and we look forward to working with the Committee in that regard.

Slide 3 of the Department's submission summarises the work that we have carried out over the past 10 or so years and seeks to capture some of the things that we have been doing. The slide reflects the fact that there is, of course, no single solution that can apply to all circumstances. The existing guidance literature sets out preferred types of infrastructure, for example for main roads, residential streets and town centres, and a lot of it is really down to traffic speed. When we look at cycling investment, the focus is often on infrastructure, but it is important that we do not lose sight of the fact that the barriers that prevent people cycling are as much about information, attitudes and confidence. So it is important that we work with other Departments to address some of those wider issues. Having said that, and having highlighted examples of what we have done to date, we need to ask this question: does it feel like we have been investing in our cycling infrastructure?

The fourth slide sets out the national cycle network in Northern Ireland and some of the better cycling provision on that network. One of the criticisms levelled at the Department has been that much of the infrastructure is fragmented and needs to be joined up. We recognise that that is an issue, even in relation to the national cycling network, and that we need a more joined-up approach to cycling provision. That is a key aim of the cycling unit, as set out in the next slide.

Even within DRD, there is a need for a more integrated or joined-up approach; for example, cycling needs to be integrated into network planning and development. A balance also has to be sought between conflicting transport priorities. Cycling provision needs to be recognised as a key element in our strategy and delivery, and, indeed, in the wider strategies and initiatives across government, whether in health, urban regeneration or tourism. The promotion of active travel is, after all, an Executive commitment.

The next slide sets out some examples of the infrastructure in Copenhagen and Malmö. As you are aware, the Minister had a fact-finding study visit to those two cities quite recently. He was impressed by the fact that cycling societies were also economically successful cities, in these examples. Indeed, these two cities effectively revolve around cycling. That was not always the case; there was a very deliberate effort to achieve that. The features and characteristics of those cycling societies are set out in that slide.

One of the most impressive points was that the cycling infrastructure was highly visible. It was integrated throughout the city and had a safe feel to it. Cycle lanes were clearly identifiable; road space was shared; junctions were clearly marked to facilitate the passage of cyclists; and there was also extensive separate infrastructure, such as cycling bridges and high-volume off-road cycle networks, while the integration of active travel and public transport was also a high priority. You can see the result of that in the last picture on the slide. It shows the large number of people cycling in their everyday clothes. Cycling is as normal an activity there as driving or using public transport, and that is what we want to achieve here.

The next slide illustrates that, as we set out in our submission, we have to have a more holistic approach across government to the development and promotion of cycling generally. Just as the barriers to cycling go beyond the provision of infrastructure, the benefits of cycling are not simply transport benefits; they also relate to health, economic, social and environmental benefits, all of which are key aspects of the Executive's Programme for Government. Copenhagen, Malmö and many other cities worldwide have recognised that cycling is not an end in itself, but part of the answer to this question: what type of city do we want? Do you want a car-focused city or a people-focused city? By

planning their cities to promote a healthy and safe environment, Copenhagen and Malmö have given citizens a freedom of movement that is lacking in many other cities, together with town centres and open spaces that are inviting and heavily used. Cycling is a key and integral part of that, and the Department's ambition is that we in Northern Ireland work towards a similar holistic and integrated approach.

Turn to the last slide in the presentation. In seeking to harness the potential of cycling, the Department, as you are aware, is developing a vision for cycling and a bicycle strategy. We have disseminated an issues paper for comment and have begun to work on a draft of the strategy. We believe that the Committee's cycling inquiry can make a key contribution to that strategy, and we look forward to seeing the report. We hope that the strategy and the Committee's inquiry will make a difference in securing a real commitment to cycling across government so that we can start the job of implementing significant change. Once again, thanks for the opportunity to speak to you today; we will be very happy to take any questions you might have.

**The Chairperson:** Thanks, Tom. Since 2002, the Department has invested £10 million in cycling infrastructure. I do not expect you to be able to answer this question off the top of your head, but in relation to the same investment in roads over that period, what is the percentage spend of that £10 million? We want to see those figures for the report, but I suspect that you do not have them with you today.

**Mr Reid:** I do not have them with me, but if you are happy enough, we will come back to you on that.

**The Chairperson:** OK. I would like you to come back to us on that.

I want to take on another area. The investments that are going to happen over the next period, particularly on the A2, the A8, the A26 and the A31, are pretty major investments. Has cycling been considered in relation to those areas? What infrastructure has been put in place for cycling?

**Mr Reid:** It might be useful to ask Andrew to speak about the cycling unit's more general approach to identifying future projects, which I think picks up part of that.

**Dr Andrew Grieve (Department for Regional Development):** The A31 Magherafelt scheme was published before we got a look at it. The plan there is to look at cycling infrastructure through the town, rather than on the bypass. Another scheme in its early stages is the A24 Ballynahinch bypass. Again, we have been involved in looking at the very early outline plans to see whether cycling infrastructure can be incorporated there. The plan is that cycling infrastructure will be incorporated there.

We are in the process of setting up an understanding between the cycling unit and Transport NI to ensure that, as plans come forward, we have the opportunity to look at them from a cycling point of view to ensure that appropriate and adequate infrastructure is included in them from the concept stage. The unfortunate thing is that there are a number of schemes that are going to be delivered in the very near future that have got to the delivery stage before we have had an opportunity to look at them. Those will be schemes that do not appear to have been cycle-proofed. Is it right, John, to say that Transport NI, as a matter of course, considers cycling provision in its schemes?

**Mr John Irvine (Department for Regional Development):** Yes, we do. I am not quite sure about the A8, A2 and A6; I will come back to you on that, because I just do not know. If you look at the slide showing the national cycle network, you can see a photograph of Cherrymount Link in Enniskillen, which has two very good cycle lanes on either side of the road. That is an example of a brand new road scheme on a greenfield site, and cycle provision has been provided. So it is in our thinking. I do not know whether we are doing it on the other roads that you mentioned, but I will find that out for you. We always take account of all modes of transport in our thinking. I will come back to you on that one.

**The Chairperson:** We heard from the Chief Medical Officer this morning about the benefits of cycling for general things like obesity, which leads on to diabetes. We also heard about the tremendous amount of money that drips every day out of the health service in relation to some of these issues. The Public Health Agency was here with the Chief Medical Officer; as you know, the agency promotes good health, well-being, screening programmes and all the rest of it. They mentioned some committee, and they would be keen to be involved whenever new schemes come on board and to be consulted. Would you be open to that?

**Mr Reid:** Yes. It is important to point out that, when we set up the active travel forum back in 2010-11, we identified all the Departments that had a role to play in cycling. The Public Health Agency and DHSSPS were represented at that time. That group is coming to an end, and the Minister is setting up his cycling group. Andrew might want to pick up on the membership of that, but we are certainly open to it.

**Dr Grieve:** The Minister has written to various ministerial colleagues with the intention of setting up a cross-sectoral cycling group. In fact, we are in the process of setting that up now. The active travel forum has been very useful because it has been a very wide body — I think that there are members from about 30 different organisations. As we move towards trying to implement better cycling infrastructure, we are trying to focus the group down to the main players. That includes the PHA, DHSSPS and various other groups.

We are developing a regular meeting and liaison with the Public Health Agency on cycling infrastructure. We see it as a key partner in delivering cycling measures, because of the health benefits. We already work with them on the active schools travel programme, and we are trying to extend that even further.

**The Chairperson:** Is there any sort of a health impact assessment with new road schemes?

**Mr Irvine:** A health impact assessment?

**The Chairperson:** Is that done automatically? If not, is there maybe an opportunity to do that? I am quite happy for you to come back to us on that, John. I am not trying to put you in an awkward position.

**Mr Irvine:** When we look at the overall costs and benefits of a scheme, there is a box in the very high-level appraisal that deals with whether it is beneficial for health. I will come back to you on that.

**The Chairperson:** Maybe that is an area where the suggestion made by the Chief Medical Officer and the Department of Health this morning might be worth exploring.

**Mr Irvine:** Going back to the regional transportation strategy of 2002, which, I suppose, was the first major transportation strategy for Northern Ireland, there was an element called making it easier to cycle. If I recall correctly, all the initiatives were appraised against the Government's big objectives for transport. Health benefits would have been included at that very high level. I will come back and confirm just what we do with our road schemes and the cost/benefits.

**The Chairperson:** OK, John. Thanks for that. That leads me on to another area that I would like to cover before I open it up to members. In relation to European money — Mrs Hale was maybe going to ask a question about that. Were you?

**Mrs Hale:** I was, Chair.

**The Chairperson:** Go ahead, and I will come in afterwards. You were first to come in anyway. You go ahead.

**Mrs Hale:** Chair, thank you very much for your indulgence, and thank you, gentlemen, for coming.

Going through the slides, I see that it has taken the Department 12 long years and £10 million to provide cycle lanes and tracks on just over 1% of our road structure. In September 2013, the vice-president of the EU Commission stated that there would be money available for viable projects. There is up to £600 million of European money available. What proposals have you put forward in that respect?

**Mr Reid:** We set up a European team specifically to look at how we could bring in more European funding and access more funding. Where there are calls available that we can put forward cycling schemes to, we will do that. We have had recent meetings with local government to look at the potential of bringing in CIVITAS funding, which would provide opportunities for cycling. We have also worked quite extensively with local government and other stakeholders over the past few months to make the case for the inclusion of sustainable transport in the INTERREG V programme. We see that

as offering very significant opportunities for investment in cycle greenways across Ireland and Scotland if it is included in the final programme.

**Mrs Hale:** At this minute in time, have you submitted any proposals to the EU?

**Mr Reid:** We cannot actually submit proposals unless there is a call. That is the problem we have.

**The Chairperson:** Let me quote to you what the vice-president of the European Commission Siim Kallas said in September 2013. When addressing the Velo-city conference on cycling issues, he said:

*"We will find European money for cycling projects, if regions and Member States submit right proposals".*

So they will find the money if you submit the proposals. What research — I assume that the Department knows about that?

**Mr Reid:** We do. I think that there are a number of elements. There is European funding such as Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) funding, and we look at the calls and the potential. As you will be aware, there is an awful lot of engagement before those calls are put out where we make the case for the inclusion of area strands within that. We have engaged with the Commission to look at connectivity issues and sustainable transport issues, including cycling.

We also set out an argument for the inclusion of sustainable transport and the benefits that cycling offers locally in the INTERREG proposals. That allowed the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) to approach the Commission and ensure that sustainable transport could be included in that package of investment. So there has been work to try to influence in that regard.

**Dr Grieve:** I think that that might have been what Siim Kallas was referring to — the construction of the programmes. As I understood it, member states put forward proposals for kinds of activities to be included in the various programmes, and the Commission will look sympathetically towards those and will include them in the INTERREG programme, for example. When the call then goes out for projects, cycling projects can be put forward, as they are included in the programme.

**The Chairperson:** It is not just TEN-T. There are a number of actual projects. There are several funding streams available in Europe. Let me just run through them. There is the European regional development fund, Intelligent Energy Europe, the EU research framework programmes and programmes of community action in the field of health. There are opportunities with that funding. I suppose that that is what the Commissioner was saying. He was saying, "Come up with the projects, approach us and we will find streams to fund them." We have to be proactive in these things.

**Mr Reid:** Yes, and that is reflected to a certain degree in the success of having sustainable transport in INTERREG. We focus very much on building support across the three Administrations — Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Scotland — for the inclusion of sustainable transport and the identification of cycling infrastructure and greenways as part of that. If sustainable transport is included in the final programme following a consultation — you will be aware that the draft INTERREG programme is now out for consultation — it would make a significant amount of funding available for the development of greenways across Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Scotland.

We met the Commission, I think around Easter, and discussed the best approach to influence future programmes. The European team in the Department take that forward. We are aware that we have to be there to influence those programmes.

**Mrs Hale:** Mr Reid, you have alerted me to something. You said "if sustainable transport is included". Does that mean that it is not at the minute?

**Mr Reid:** It is included in the draft programme, but the draft programme is out for consultation. What we are essentially saying —

**Mrs Hale:** You actively encourage that it would be.

**Mr Reid:** Yes. We actively encourage anyone who is responding to the draft programme to make the case for sustainable transport to be maintained so that it is in the final programme.

**Mrs Hale:** OK.

**Mr McAleer:** I note from the correspondence from the Department that there has been a great deal of planning to promote healthy and safe environments in cities like Malmö and Copenhagen. Have you taken the opportunity to consult the Department of the Environment, or are you thinking of contacting the 11 new councils at an early stage to discuss how cycling can be incorporated into their corporate plans, targets and stuff like that?

**Mr Reid:** Yes. Part of the reason why the active travel forum was set up was that, when you look at how to encourage people to walk and cycle, quite often, cycle lanes are not the barriers. Is the right environment there to encourage people to use it? Is there good street lighting? Do people feel safe? Is it an attractive environment to engage in? Those are much wider issues than transport, and it brings in urban planning, DSD, urban regeneration and neighbourhood renewal schemes, for example. That engagement was encouraged as part of the active travel strategy, and a key aim was to ensure that, in all the Departments that had a role to play, our strategy and thinking was coming together, and we were starting to talk to each other. What Andrew talked about, the cycling unit and the work that will now go forward with the new cycling forum, is, essentially, to try to build on that with practical measures.

We worked very closely with Belfast City Council on its active travel strategy, and Andrew can talk more about that. We have also worked very closely with Derry City Council to look at the opportunities there with the work done for active travel in the city. We engaged closely with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) to look at how we can work more closely with local government, which reflects the fact that, ultimately, active travel is local. So you have to look at the local barriers and the local solutions, and the best way to do that is to work with local government. I think, John, it fair to say that Roads Service and now Transport NI work very closely with local government on transport issues.

**Mr Irvine:** As some members will be aware, we go to councils twice a year and present our programmes, within which are cycling measures, so we work closely with councils.

Planning is governed by planning policy and the various planning policy statements. From the first regional development strategy (RDS), in 2001, there came a number of changes to planning policy. A key one was planning policy statement (PPS) 13, which linked land use and transportation and really brought cycling into focus in planning policy. It required developers to think about cycling, whether it was cycle parking or providing cycling facilities in new developments. So planning policy is probably reasonably up to speed with the encouragement of sustainable modes of transport. The important documents are PPS 3, PPS 13 and a document that you may be aware of called 'Creating Places', which sets out the layout for all new housing areas. Within that, there is another element: developers, when submitting a planning application for a development, have to go through a transport assessment, which includes walking, cycling, car and public transport. Those policies will govern planning as it moves to councils, as it governs it now with planning sitting in central government.

**Mr McAleer:** My question follows on from what Brenda said. Here in the North, there are 30,000 km of road and only about 260 kilometres of cycle lanes or tracks, which is a proportion of just over 1%. Have you any idea, off the top of your head, how much of that lies outside the cities of Derry and Belfast?

**Mr Irvine:** The National Cycling Network is 1,300-odd km, and that is, effectively, a signed rural network outside the city. I cannot provide an analysis of the 30,000 km, but I can tell you that Belfast has 50-odd km of bus lanes, which are also cycle lanes. I am sure that we could probably come up with that figure. If you bear with me, I will come back to the Committee with a split of where all cycle lanes are, maybe by council area. Would that be helpful?

**Mr McAleer:** Yes.

**Mr Irvine:** I will see whether we can come up with that, but I cannot help you off the top of my head. It is probably a safe enough assumption that the majority lie in the greater Belfast metropolitan area.

**Mr McCarthy:** Thank you for your presentation. You say that you want a more joined-up approach to cycling. Who is preventing that joined-up approach? Let me take it further: the Department for Regional Development produced its briefing on the Government's ambitions for cycling in August

2013, in which the concept of cycle-proofing was introduced. To date, what discussions have you had with other Departments on introducing cycle-proofing into policy formation?

**Mr Reid:** It is not so much that anyone is holding up the joined-up approach; sometimes, each of us is engaged in various work, which, historically, we have not joined together as well as we could. When we set up the active travel forum, for example, one of the issues was that, in the Department, we had Travelwise, and part of its remit was to promote cycling. We did that by going out and engaging with schools and employers etc. Alongside that, the Department of Health was promoting cycling for physical activity reasons. The thought was that we were all trying to achieve broadly the same thing, so we should come together and try to make better use of the resources and use the same message.

The other issue was creating environments that are attractive for people to walk and cycle in, particularly in residential areas. The things that prevent us from walking or cycling in certain areas are, for example, the perception of safety, lack of information or physical blocks, for example. The question that we asked of ourselves was this: when taking forward work on urban regeneration, community safety and projects on cycling, are we joining them to make sure that we get the best return for our buck? That is what we mean by more joined-up thinking.

**Mr McCarthy:** Finally, your commitment to cycling is obvious, but what are the key targets for measuring your progress?

**Mr Reid:** We will have to set targets as part of the cycling strategy. The key lesson from places such as Malmo and Holland is that progress was not achieved overnight; it took at least two or three decades.

**Dr Grieve:** It took 40 years or 50 years.

**Mr Reid:** Yes, it took 40 years for the big, big changes. The key part is that, as you set out that vision, you have a commitment across government to start driving change and you gain the support of the key stakeholders. One of the challenges in Belfast, for example, is whether we have the support of the retailers and the private sector to transform the city centre. You saw the initial reaction to Belfast on the Move, so it is important that we build support. That is why this inquiry into the economic benefits is so important in helping us to build that support and show the political leadership needed to drive it forward.

**The Chairperson:** I am not sure that Kieran's question on cycle-proofing was answered.

**Mr Reid:** As John pointed out, there is, for example, PPS 13 for infrastructure or urban development. We have talked to DSD about better joined-up work with us to look at the impact that urban regeneration schemes or neighbourhood renewal schemes will have on cycling to make sure that they are cycling friendly. That is a key objective of the unit.

**Dr Grieve:** It is one of the things that we have in mind in getting the cross-sectoral cycling group together. It will bring DOE and DHSSPS together, and it will bring local authorities together, through NILGA, to promote cycling. If we have a strategy developed and agreed, it enables us to work with these Departments to ensure that the ethos of advancing cycling is included in all of their strategies and plans. That, in a sense, is what we mean by cycle-proofing: it is to ensure that the needs of pedestrians and cyclists are taken into account. So developers planning a residential development will think about making provision for people to cycle, and those involved in health promotion will also think about that.

**The Chairperson:** This question is more for you, John. This morning, one of the groups giving evidence suggested that it was much cheaper to put in cycling infrastructure in new road projects than trying to do so later. Do you agree with that?

**Mr Irvine:** That is probably a fair enough statement. Retrofitting is generally more expensive than doing something at the start. A difficulty with retrofitting is the limited road space into which cycle lanes can be fitted. The Cherrymount Link is a good example of how fitting cycle lanes into the envelope of the road gives better value for money.

**The Chairperson:** A complaint that we hear pretty regularly from groups giving evidence here is that, in Belfast, and probably other cities where cycling lanes are in place, vehicles park on them. Cycling

lanes are not clearways. A lot of good work can be done by the Department, but you cannot stop parking on all main thoroughfares. That problem will always be there and is, I guess, very difficult to resolve. Is it?

**Mr Irvine:** You have probably hit the nail on the head. It is a balance. Take the Ravenhill Road, for example, where there is an advisory cycle lane and an urban clearway. On the way into town in the morning, the cycle lane is clear because drivers would be in breach of an urban clearway and could be ticketed, but, during the rest of the day, people can park there. The balance is that people need to park to visit or go to the doctor, and, as the traffic is a bit quieter, it is safer to cycle on the road. The balance is to have something that pleases everybody. It is not always easy to retrofit a big city such as Belfast, which has a lot of people competing for kerb space. It is one of the big difficulties facing traffic engineers.

**The Chairperson:** The new rapid transit system is coming in. Where do you see cyclists fitting in with the rapid transit buses?

**Mr Reid:** Cyclists can use the rapid transit route. There are also proposals to look at cycle parking at the rapid transit routes. I do not think that there are proposals at this stage to take cycles on to the rapid transit system, but cyclists will be able to park their bike at halts and come into Belfast. By that stage, we hope that an integrated bike-hire scheme will be in place.

**The Chairperson:** Andrew, what finance has the Department promised you for the job that you are being asked to do?

**Dr Grieve:** The honest answer is none. We have bid in the June monitoring round for £2 million capital for this year. We have put in bids for the next four years — the next Budget period — for £3 million rising to £4.5 million in capital, and half those amounts in resource. We are not yet at the stage for the Budget to be agreed, and I have not been informed about the outcome of the June monitoring.

**Mr Reid:** In addition, there are bids for local transport and safety measures. The intention is to build cycling infrastructure and new schemes where possible. There is also potential in INTERREG funding for somewhere in the region of £20 million. If we secure that funding in the final INTERREG programme, it will be shared across the three Administrations to go into greenway-type projects.

**Mr Irvine:** You asked earlier what percentage was £10 million of the total cake. In local transport and safety measures, a family of things competes for capital funding. They are all in the same area: collision remedial schemes, traffic-calming measures, minor works schemes, pedestrian schemes, pedestrian crossings and cycling. There are competing demands, so it is a matter of getting the balance right. It changes over time, but the Department's baseline is in the region of £20 million a year for the family of measures, broadly speaking, against which cycling has to compete. As you will know, in roads, we get many competing demands for all sorts of things in that family, and we deliver according to priority as best we can.

**The Chairperson:** Andrew, you do not know exactly what budget you will have. Given the Minister and Department's high profiling of the setting up of your unit, does there not come a point at which, particularly with cycling, if you do not have finance available, it undermines your work and makes your Department ineffective? That is what the public will quickly perceive if you do not get some idea of funding. How will that be overcome? The last time that you were here, somebody described the cycling unit as being in a "beg, steal or borrow" situation. They said that your salaries were being paid but that you did not have much else. For all of the Minister's trumpeting of the great cycle unit, it has no teeth.

**Dr Grieve:** One of the early tasks that we are engaged in is to set out the long-term vision and strategy over a 25-year period, and that is going ahead. It is important that that strategy is agreed and set out so that any work that is done fits into a proper framework. Underneath that, we have begun work looking at particular schemes in Belfast and elsewhere in Northern Ireland, and they require scoping and design work. A fair amount of work needs to be done before they ever get on the ground. Even had I been given a certain amount at the start of the year, I would not have been in a position to know exactly where I would spend it.

We are working with Transport NI to look at particular schemes and get them designed, which is a job in itself. Depending on the scheme and its scale, that may well start this year or the following year.

You know how government finance works: you need to be ready to spend money when you get it. My hope is that, if we do not get money in the June monitoring round, the schemes will be advanced to such a stage that, if we get money later, we will be able to progress them. The Minister may be prepared to take money from another budget. I do not know. I cannot predict that, but I do not feel hamstrung in my current position. Give me another six or nine months, and it may well be that what you say is a real concern.

**The Chairperson:** The public will look for tangible benefits from cycling. Having a strategy is OK, but that does not deliver on the ground. Is that not another reason why you in particular should be proactive in chasing opportunities for European money? In the past, we have been told that such funds did not exist, yet, lo and behold, they were delivered. There was €600 million available between 2007 and 2013, and, for a local scheme, there is Heritage Lottery funding as well. The Connswater greenway is a fantastic scheme. All members of the Committee were very impressed by the cross-party support for the greenway. It cost some £48 million, funding that a voluntary body was able to bring in. Government in general, and you and the Department in particular, need to chase other funding streams.

Initially, we were told that TEN-T would not be available. It was not until Committee members started lobbying for TEN-T funding that the Department got its act together. I am not criticising you, but I am saying that there needs to be proactive work along those lines. You can have all the strategies in the world, but success requires you to bring in the finance. We hope that this will be a success because it is very important and it is cross-cutting — across health and many other areas — in how it affects the future for people who live here. I encourage, as would, I think, the Committee ongoing proactive work to try to get money from Europe, particularly given the comments of the Commission.

**Mr Reid:** It is important to note that, as Andrew says, we are pulling together a strategy that aims to set out that long-term direction. Alongside that, the team has been very active, working with councils, other Departments and some of the key stakeholders such as Sustrans to see where the early opportunities are so that we can start to focus investment and make a real difference. Some interesting ideas are coming out of that, and we can see that through the work of the Belfast Active Travel strategy.

In the past, there has been fairly significant investment in facilities such as the Connswater greenway. We have infrastructure there, but how do we join it up better and start to use that? The number of people using that infrastructure is increasing significantly, particularly the local communities. Where are the gaps? For fairly limited investment, you can transform that type of infrastructure. Belfast and Derry have significant active travel infrastructure, and, with fairly moderate investment, we could significantly increase the access to and use of it.

**The Chairperson:** Look at the money brought in through the rural development fund for the Comber greenway and Lagan Valley Regional Park beyond Lisburn. There is the possibility of it eventually joining with the canal, although that is a DCAL matter. There are major opportunities for its future use, and cycling takes people off main thoroughfares and cuts the risk of accidents and so on. There are opportunities, and you have to seek to realise those.

**Dr Grieve:** Your point is powerful, as is the argument for doing that. For INTERREG in particular, the European unit has been very proactive in ensuring, first, that sustainable transportation is included because, without it, we will never get money from that programme. The cycling unit has also been liaising with councils along the border and agencies such as the Blackwater Regional Partnership and the Border Regional Authority in the South to get the concept of the project together. So, when a call comes to apply for INTERREG funding, which will probably be some time next year, the design of the project will be in place for us to make the bid for funding. You are exactly right, Chairman, that it comes down to whether we have the money.

**The Chairperson:** You also need to be out in Europe chasing funding.

**Dr Grieve:** Our European people are there —

**The Chairperson:** I know that they and the Department have done good work, but there is more to be done.

**Mr Reid:** We would never say that the situation is perfect. We can always improve, which is the key point. You are right about budgets, in that it is about European and departmental funding. We are also looking right across government to find opportunities to take advantage of other Departments' spends to promote walking and cycling. That is a key element of what we are doing with the strategy and the cycling forum.

**Dr Grieve:** If you want to talk about European funding for a wee while longer, that is OK, but may I come back to the question on Belfast rapid transit at some stage?

**The Chairperson:** Yes.

**Dr Grieve:** We want to ensure that whatever infrastructure we put in place, it will encourage people who currently do not cycle to do so. A study in Portland a number of years ago found that less than 1% of people are ardent cyclists. About 7% are assured and confident and 33% will never cycle, no matter what the carrot. About 60% would like to cycle but do not feel that it is safe or accessible. If the figure is the same in Northern Ireland — I do not know whether it is, but it could well be — we need to put in place infrastructure, not for the 1% or the 7% but to encourage the 60% to take up cycling, because that is what will make the difference. Getting back to Belfast rapid transit, it is not always the best solution to put infrastructure on a busy transport route on the public road. It is not always the best solution to mix buses and cyclists, particularly not if they are large buses as the Belfast rapid transit will be. We have been investigating things such as quiet routes and greenways, such as the Comber greenway, which is a traffic-free route. We are trying to take forward a number of things, such as radial routes, but not necessarily on the radial road. We are trying to take forward quiet routes that are as direct but are not as trafficked or are not trafficked at all. The Belfast rapid transit link basically is that, where it makes sense for cyclists to be given access to those routes, we want to ensure that they are wide enough — 4.5 metres — to accommodate cyclists, but that might not always be the case. It might be sufficient, as Tom was saying earlier, to provide parking at particular strategic points along the Belfast rapid transit route and bring people to there to leave their bikes and make the rest of the journey on public transport.

**The Chairperson:** Thanks for that, Andrew, and thanks to all three of you for your presentation. I have to bring this session to a close. There are a number of questions outstanding, but the Committee Clerk's office will send them through for your answers. Thank you in the meantime, and no doubt we will talk in future.