

**From the office of the Minister for Infrastructure
LIZ KIMMINS MLA**

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A copy of my Department's response to the recommendations contained within the NI Audit Office report, Active Travel in Northern Ireland, is deposited in the Assembly Library.

Should there be any follow on queries concerning the Deposited Report, you can contact my officials in the Active Travel Unit by email: activetravel@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk.



**LIZ KIMMINS MLA
Minister for Infrastructure**

Annex A

Northern Ireland Audit Office report – Active Travel in Northern Ireland

Recommendation 1

Effective governance arrangements are essential for the successful delivery of the Department’s active travel plans. The Department should, as a matter of urgency, finalise and implement appropriate programme governance arrangements for the active travel programme.

Once firmly embedded, the Department should undertake a review of the effectiveness of its new governance and management arrangements in improving project management.

The Department for Infrastructure **accepts** this recommendation.

Target Implementation Date: **May 2026**

Since the implementation of the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, the Department has taken a number of significant steps to support increased future investment in active travel. This includes the development of dedicated delivery and governance structures such as Active Travel Programme Board, forums for active travel stakeholders and local councils, and updated guidance for the governance of active travel projects.

We will be implementing updated governance arrangements for the active travel programme. The Department will also be establishing an Active Travel Programme Board and forums for active travel stakeholders and local councils. The department is working towards these arrangements being operational by May 2026.

In addition to the above, we are in the process of developing, testing, and refining updated guidance for the governance of active travel project delivery. This deliberate approach reflects our commitment to quality and good governance, ensuring that the procedures introduced are effective and enduring.

The Department plans will carry out ongoing review the effectiveness of the new arrangements once fully embedded, noting that active travel capital projects typically span several years from inception to construction. A first review will be carried out one year after introduction of the boards and guidance being introduced.

Recommendation 2

The Active Travel Stakeholders Engagement Forum provides an important opportunity to improve stakeholder confidence in the Department's ability to deliver against its active travel plans. The forum should be co-designed and set up with a focus on effectiveness of engagement, with key performance information clearly established and reported on a regular basis. The effectiveness of this forum should be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

The Department for Infrastructure **accepts** this recommendation.
Target Implementation Date: **May 2026**

Since the implementation of the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, the Department has invested significantly in improving engagement with key user groups and stakeholders.

The Department will ensure that work undertaken to finalise a co-designed Active Travel Stakeholders Engagement Forum will be in consultation with a representative range of stakeholders to ensure that its structure, remit, and operating arrangements are fit for purpose and conducive to meaningful engagement. The forum is expected to be operational by May 2026.

Once established, key performance information relating to active travel delivery will be agreed through engagement with the Forum and then reported on a regular basis. Once established, the effectiveness of the forum will be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Recommendation 3

We recommend that the Department produces an overarching strategy statement that clearly articulates to all stakeholders its objectives in relation to active travel, its timetable for achieving these, and the contribution that each major component of the active travel programme is intended to make. This should include clear linkages to strategies already in place where relevant.

The Department for Infrastructure **accepts** this recommendation.
Target Implementation Date: **September 2026**

The department will produce an overarching strategy statement, linking to strategies already in place, and cognisant of relevant strategies in development such as the Transport Strategy. This will articulate objectives relating to active travel, the respective timing for achieving these, and the contribution that each major component of the active travel programme is intended to make.

Recommendation 4

Linked to the overarching strategy identified in Recommendation 3, the Department should develop an overarching prioritisation framework that will provide a transparent structure for the allocation of funding both between and within the main strands of the overall active travel programme.

The Department for Infrastructure **accepts** this recommendation.

Target Implementation Date: **September 2026**

The Department will provide a transparent structure for the allocation of funding both between and within the main strands of the overall active travel programme.

While an overarching prioritisation framework will guide decision-making, it will be designed to maintain agility and flexibility between the strands and overall spend on active travel. This is essential to ensure the department can respond effectively to emerging opportunities, delivery challenges, and evolving priorities. Ministerial and Executive priorities will remain central to the process, and the framework will support informed decision-making without constraining the department's ability to exercise judgement or adapt to changing circumstances. This approach will balance transparency with responsiveness as the programme develops.

Recommendation 5

In order to deliver against its plans to significantly increase investment in active travel, the Department will need to closely monitor the build-up of its activity and spend to ensure that it is adequately progressing in line with its planned spending profiles and progressing towards compliance with the Act.

The Department should develop a high-level annual performance report, that brings together key financial and performance information (including the proportion of transport budget spend in active travel), to provide a clear statement of the impact that expenditure is having. This should incorporate the capture and reporting of information on the proportion of new segregated cycling infrastructure provided.

The Department for Infrastructure **accepts** this recommendation.

Target Implementation Date: **September 2026**

The Department has completed work to calculate the proportion of the overall transport budget spent on active travel for the period 2022/23–2024/25. Details of spend on active travel since the introduction of the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 is now published on the Department's website for this period.

Building on the work already undertaken, further work will be undertaken to publish a high-level annual Active Travel Performance Report commencing in the next financial year. This will consolidate key financial and performance information (including the proportion of new segregated cycling infrastructure provided) and will also provide clear evidence of impact.

Recommendation 6

As part of its annual performance reporting in line with Recommendation 5, the Department should ensure that it provides the Stakeholders Forum with appropriate detail about the composition of active travel costs, and discloses and takes the views of the Forum in respect of any material changes in methodology.

The Department for Infrastructure **accepts** this recommendation.

Target Implementation Date: **May 2026**

The Department will develop key financial and performance information in consultation with the Stakeholder Engagement Forum, which will include updates on overall spend on active travel. The information from 2022/23 until 2024/25 is currently published on the department's website.

Going forward, the Department will engage with the Stakeholder Engagement Forum to gather views should material changes to financial reporting methodologies arise. These views will help inform future reporting approaches, while ensuring the approaches remain aligned with normal financial and legal requirements.

Recommendation 7

To be successful, the active travel programme needs to be properly resourced. While it will need to keep its staffing resources under continuous review, in the absence of sufficient internal resources the Department will need to continue to work with its delivery partners to maximise the benefit of their input. Alongside its plans to recruit, the Department should consider how it can, and develop plans to, better harness the input of its other delivery partners.

The Department for Infrastructure **accepts** this recommendation.

Target Implementation Date: **2026/27**

The internal resourcing position remains extremely challenging.

To help strengthen internal capability and increase delivery capacity, the Department appointed an Active Travel Support Office in October 2024 to provide additional technical support and expertise to in-house teams developing the future delivery pipeline for active travel infrastructure. The Active Travel Support Office has already provided significant additional capacity and capability to the team across a range of priority areas of work. This arrangement will be kept under review to ensure that it remains responsive to programme needs and will develop plans to amend the scope of the commission if required.

In the short to medium term, the active travel programme will continue to be delivered through a blended model, drawing on expertise embedded within the Department, local councils, and external delivery partners appointed to support programme delivery. The effectiveness of this model will be kept under review.