



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE FOR THE
ENVIRONMENT**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

Cyclists (Protective Headgear) Bill

10 March 2011

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Cathal Boylan (Chairperson)
Mr Thomas Buchanan
Mr Willie Clarke
Mr John Dallat
Mr Alastair Ross
Mr Peter Weir

Witnesses:

Mr Pat Ramsey MLA
Ms Michelle Donnelly
Ms Orlaith Donnelly

Mr Peter McCabe) Headway NI
Mr Johny Turnbull)

Mr Derek Armstrong)
Mr Darren Boyle) Cyclists' Tourist Club/Sustrans
Mr Roger Geffen)
Mr Steven Patterson)

The Chairperson (Mr Boylan):

Pat, you are very welcome to the Committee. We have deigned to come up to the good part of the country, and we have found it to be very hospitable.

Mr Pat Ramsey MLA:

Thank you, and I warmly welcome the Committee to Derry. Wearing my other hat as a member of the Assembly Commission, along with Peter Weir, it is good to see the outreach work that is being done. It allows the Committee to be seen in different areas of Northern Ireland, and it is important that the public are aware of the issues that the Assembly is debating. I am very pleased to be here this morning. With me are Michelle Donnelly and her daughter Orlaith, who was seriously injured as a result of coming off her bicycle. I will not go into the details of that, but, at the appropriate time, I will invite Michelle to briefly give the Committee the background.

I thank the Committee for its co-operation. I know that it is under serious pressure with legislation. It did not have to take on the scrutiny of this Bill, and I acknowledge its kindness in doing so. I know that other Committees opted out of taking it, for whatever reason. Rather than have Michelle sit through and endure my briefing, I would much prefer that she talk for two or three minutes about what happened to Orlaith. That is important, because cases such as Orlaith's were part of the reason for my becoming involved in the campaign.

Ms Michelle Donnelly:

I am here to speak to the Committee about the Bill because, around six months ago, Orlaith fell off her bike. When she fell, her friends brought her into the house, and she seemed fine. If instinct had not taken me to get her looked about, she would not have been there the next morning. She had been opened from the top of her scalp right round to the back of her ear, and there was a bleed to the brain. It is practically a miracle that she is sitting with us today. We were told that she would never reach the hospital in Belfast and that, if she did, she would be severely brain damaged. She has ongoing pain and has to take tablets every day. No longer ago than yesterday, she could not lift her head off the pillow, and she suffers from back pain all the time. She still has to attend the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children.

Why would any responsible parent not want to prevent any of their family from going through what I went through? My other two children are boys, and, as recently as the weekend, one of them was crying because of what his sister has gone through. They go out to play in the street with their friends, so why would a responsible parent not want to protect their child?

Mr P Ramsey:

Thank you, Michelle. I will give some personal background to my reasons for introducing the Bill. Chairperson, you have worked with me on the all-party group on road safety, which is always trying to champion and advocate better road safety initiatives across Northern Ireland. All the all-party groups play such a role with their causes, and this cause is no different for me. From my perspective, the clear objective is to try to reduce deaths on the roads and, in this particular case, to reduce serious injuries among cyclists.

As you will recall, the proposal came from a detailed briefing that we received from Headway around 18 months ago. The briefing was about Headway's concern about the numbers of cyclists who were being injured. We heard from Sinead King about the serious injury that she suffered when she fell off her bike when she was six years of age. She appealed to us and asked whether we could, for heaven's sake, try to do something. This should not happen to children in Northern Ireland. Simple accidents such as that can occur. Michelle Donnelly's daughter, Orlaith, was not on a major road when she came off her bike, but she was quite close to her home.

I lost a brother and his wife, who were killed on the roads, so I have some personal experience of this. Therefore, I am trying to do what I can as a legislator to ensure that, in the future, families do not have to endure the trauma and awfulness of death on the roads.

I spoke with Michelle Donnelly as we were coming in. She said that she does not want any other family to have to endure the awful experience that she did. Her daughter was transferred by ambulance from Altnagelvin Area Hospital to the Royal Victoria Hospital for Sick Children and spent a lot of time there. Orlaith is still suffering and struggling, even with her schoolwork, because she had a considerable number of days off.

The aim of the Bill is to require cyclists of all ages to wear protective headgear when cycling on public roads and in public parks. I have heard the argument, and I think, Chairperson, that you said that purchasing a cycling helmet should be mandatory when purchasing a bicycle. I think that that is clear and obvious.

I proposed that the Police Service would be responsible for enforcing the provisions. There would be a fixed penalty fine of £50 for someone who was caught cycling without a helmet, unless it was a first offence and they presented at a police station with a receipt for the purchase of a helmet.

I made it clear in the Second Stage debate that police officers would have discretion on enforcement. I am not saying that police officers who are carrying out serious duties should have to run after somebody on a bicycle. That was certainly not my intention.

I conducted a wide consultation with relevant stakeholders in spring 2010. A number of written responses were received, most of which were very positive, particularly those from the medical profession. Cycling organisations had some reservations, which I understand and respect. Representatives from some of those organisations — Sustrans and the Cyclists' Tourist Club (CTC) — are here today. I have a lot of time for those organisations, and I work with them continually, even in my own constituency, to highlight other issues that we have in common. Those issues include introducing 20 mph zones in residential areas, which I think we would all support, and more cycle lanes across the city.

In response to a number of the concerns that were raised, a clause was included to delay the commencement of the Bill. That would mean that there would be a lead-in time for the Department of the Environment (DOE) to bring forward education and awareness programmes. I spent considerable time with departmental officials going through the Bill. At that time, I was getting very positive responses from them; I certainly did not get any resistance.

It was not my intention at any stage, nor is it now, for anyone to be criminalised for not wearing a cycle helmet. I would much prefer it if there were no need for any law to be enforced. However, the evidence that I have seen from Europe, America, Australia and Canada suggests to

me that such a law works. The initial effect would be a reduction in the number of people cycling, but that would balance itself out. However, I have no doubt that Sustrans and other organisations will make a different argument.

That is why I made the point at the Bill's Second Stage that the most important issue for me is that, in its scrutiny, the Committee brings together all the qualified evidence for and against the use of cycle helmets. I respectfully ask that that is done so that we have that evidence. It is on the record that there absolutely no chance of the Bill's being passed before the end of this mandate; it will be guillotined. However, it would be good to have that information banked for future reference, because it is an issue that will not go away.

Headway will talk in more graphic detail than I ever could about the range of debilitating conditions, personality disorders, physical and intellectual disabilities, loss of sight or hearing and speech disorders that people, particularly young children, suffer from as a result of coming off their bicycles. The British Medical Association (BMA) states that:

“while skull fractures can heal, injuries to the brain, unlike those to the rest of the body, generally do not and may sometimes have long-term consequences.”

According to a UK Department for Transport report of 2008, cyclists accounted for over 50% of all those killed on the road and 9% of those seriously injured in road traffic collisions. In addition, Department for Transport figures for 2009 show that 115 pedal cyclists were killed and 2,450 were seriously injured across Britain.

Approximately 40% of seriously injured pedal cyclists were admitted to hospital with serious head injuries. That is quite an alarming figure. However, I do not want to suggest that it is dangerous for cyclists to be on the roads. That would be very misleading, and I would be misrepresenting my position. However, those are the facts of what happens in real life.

According to the BMA, properly fitted helmets reduce the risk of head injury by 65% to 68% and injuries to the upper and mid-face by 60%. Those are not my figures; they show that the British Medical Association clearly took a scientific approach to the matter. Making the wearing of helmets compulsory is one thing that we can do to make a difference on the roads. Other

suggestions have been made. For example, John Dallat, in particular, brought forward motions to have 20 mph zones in residential areas. Other organisations that are giving evidence this morning are signing up to that.

I will repeat myself on this point: I would not have brought forward the Bill if I thought for one minute that it would result in a serious reduction in the number of cyclists. I spent a number of years on the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, and I know that the Programme for Government is trying to promote more active participation in sport. We know about the recent Health Committee report on obesity. It was never the case that I wanted a Bill that had an adverse effect on people participating in cycling.

The respected and rigorous Cochrane Collaboration, which is an independent body, produced evidence that showed that helmets provide a 63% to 88% reduction in the risk of head and severe brain injury for all ages of cyclists. That is a good figure that we should examine more. The Committee should get a summary of the Cochrane review, which stated that helmets provide equal levels of protection in crashes involving motor vehicles. Those figures are 69% and 68% respectively. Injuries to the upper- and mid-face areas are reduced by 65%.

We have all had injuries in the past. If someone breaks an arm, it is grand, and if they break a leg, it will mend. However, they may never come round from a brain injury. A UK Transport Research Centre review in 2009 concluded that up to 16% of fatalities could have been prevented had the cyclist worn an appropriate helmet.

The BMA's present position is that the wearing of cycle helmets should be made compulsory. The association recognises that voluntary wearing of helmets should increase before the law is enacted. Taking on board the submissions that I received, I would say that a three-year lead-in period is needed to ensure that adequate education and awareness programmes are brought forward, although I acknowledge the range of governing bodies, including CTC and others, that are involved in cycling racing. However, we should be clear that it is compulsory for cyclists to wear helmets in all the events that those organisations hold. Cycle helmets must also be worn during proficiency exercises or tests for children in schools. The children would not be allowed on the cycles without a helmet. Therefore, it is not a case of do as I say, not as I do. I say that

quite deliberately. I know of no organisation involved in group cycling that does not insist that its members wear helmets.

A 2010 Canadian study by Jessica Dennis found that the compulsory wearing of cycle helmets had no adverse impact on the number of cyclists. Others speaking after me will argue differently, and that comes back to the finer point, which is that we need to independently examine that assertion in the round and get more detailed information from the Governments of those regions.

When an accident happens, it often results in the state having an obligation to provide lifelong financial and other support to the now-disabled person. In other words, head injuries have a wider social impact. It is not just the injured person who suffers; carers also suffer, and hospitals have to meet costs. Given that we are talking about efficiency savings, as one would imagine, if the numbers of serious head injuries were reduced, particularly among children, that issue could be dealt with. When I originally brought the Bill forward, I considered that it should be introduced just for children, because that is who it is aimed at. Children on the road do not have the same maturity as one would expect. Someone at nine, 10 or 11 years of age does not have the same maturity as someone aged 17 or 18. They do not know the roads and how dangerous they are, and they are not aware of speed limits and other such matters. However, I thought that it would be unfair to bring forward a Bill that would mean that if a mother or father brought their child out on a bike, the parents would not have to wear a helmet but the child would. I thought that a more consistent approach would be better.

The British Medical Association is strongly in favour of mandatory helmet legislation. It has informed me that its policy on pro-helmet legislation is shared by the Royal College of Surgeons in London, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, the Royal College of Nursing, and Headway, the brain injuries association, some of whose representatives are here this morning.

I thank the Committee for taking time out on this issue. I appeal to it to carry out a very detailed and intensive written consultation that can be banked for future reference. If it is not banked for me, I am sure it will be useful for other Members who may take up the mantle and challenge of this issue under the new mandate. Thank you.

The Chairperson:

Thank you, Pat. Michelle and Orlaith, you are very welcome, and on behalf of the Committee, Orlaith, I wish you well for the future. I know you have been through a bad patch, and we sincerely hope that you get better and recover fully.

Pat, we are here now considering the legislation, and a child who has been involved in an accident is sitting in front of me. I have spoken on this before, and, although I am a member of the Committee, I should say that my party wants to try to reduce injuries and road deaths. That is part of my brief as the roads safety spokesperson for Sinn Féin, and I feel very strongly about it.

I have a couple of comments to make rather than questions to ask. You mentioned the costs of injuries, especially the health costs to, God forbid, young children. However, at the opposite end, there would also be a cost in enforcing the Bill. To be honest, I cannot see how the policing element would work out. I know that the party does not support it, but I wanted to give you an opportunity to bring something forward to the Committee. Indeed, in a future mandate, some work may be done on this matter.

My personal point of view is that this may be a stick, as opposed to an incentive. We always talk about the carrot and stick approach, and I think that this legislation is a stick approach. I do not know how it could be enforced, so I would not support it because of that.

I think that the way to go is down the route of the voluntary wearing of helmets. There should be a responsibility on the people who sell bicycles. I said that in the Chamber, and it would not be over-complicated to legislate for those people to provide helmets with the bicycles that they sell. I know that we are going to receive other presentations, and I will specifically ask questions about that to Sustrans and to Headway in particular, but I know that you feel that this is a very important subject, Pat, and that you wanted to bring it to our attention.

The Committee has scrutinised every single Bill that has come before it, and we take that role very seriously. We might have a bit of a laugh and a joke at times, but legislation is a very serious matter. I can speak only on behalf of Sinn Féin, but we would not support bringing forward legislation on this. We will work with you and look at other ways of bringing something

forward.

While I am on the record, I may as well tell you this straight, because there is no point in giving you the impression that we will support the Bill. Clearly, we will not. We will look for other ways to implement the wearing of cycle helmets, especially for young people. Those were comments rather than questions. If you want to say something on that, you may respond, and after that I will open things up to questions.

Mr P Ramsey:

I welcome your comments. It is for the Committee to get information from other regions, whether Europe or America, to determine the cost implications. Any evidence that I came across suggests that the costs would be seriously outweighed by the reduced loss of life, the deterrent factor and the ongoing cost to the Health Service as a result of serious injuries.

I brought in the idea that the PSNI should be the enforcement body. However, I was open to other proposals on bodies that could enforce penalties; for example, local authorities. I presented the Bill in a way that suggested that the PSNI would be the enforcement body, but I was open to any proposal, as long as it kept the principle of enforcing penalties.

Mr Ross:

Thank you for your presentation, and I am glad that you had to opportunity to give it. As you are aware, I voted against the Bill at Second Stage. However, given that the Assembly voted to allow it to go to Committee Stage, I argued in Committee that you should be afforded the opportunity to give evidence, and I am glad that you did.

As I said at that stage, although the legislation is well intentioned, I will not support it, and I have not changed my mind. It is important to put on record that the argument is not about whether people should wear cycle helmets, and Orlaith's case highlights that they make a difference and demonstrates the logic of wearing them. However, as Michelle correctly said, responsible parents would make their children wear helmets anyway, just as responsible cyclists are accountable for their own safety and should therefore wear a cycle helmet. I just disagree with making it a legal requirement for everybody to wear one. I do not think that it would be

good to have that type of legislation coming from the Assembly. Whether you call it the nanny state approach or big government, it is not good legislation.

The Chairperson mentioned some enforcement issues, and certainly, as a member of the Policing Board — I know that former members of the board are here — I am acutely aware of the pressures, including reduced budgets and so forth, that are on the police. I agree with the Chairperson. I do not think that the legislation is enforceable, and the police should not be spending time on what is a relatively safe pastime. Pat said that it is not about criminalising people, but I do not think that the public will see it that way when someone tries to issue a fixed penalty notice to a 10-year-old child who is out cycling or to a 70-year-old man cycling to his local shop without a helmet. I do not think that it would be in the greater public interest to prosecute those individuals. It would not be a good use of the courts' time, if those people were not to pay their fines because they felt that they were not appropriate and then had to go through the courts.

I am telling you of both the issues that I have, so you can respond to them. My second issue is with your evidence. If we look at European countries, such as Denmark and the Netherlands, where a higher proportion of the public cycles, we also find that they have the lowest proportion of people who wear cycle helmets and the fewest fatalities and road accidents. That is not to do with whether they wear cycle helmets; it is about how well trained they are and whether they know how to look after themselves and can cycle safely on the roads. Likewise, it is about ensuring that structures in towns and cities with high numbers of cyclists make pedestrians and drivers aware of cyclists and change their attitude to them.

Much like the Chairperson, I would argue that, rather than placing it in legislation, the emphasis should be on a road safety strategy and awareness campaigns. Over the past four years, the Committee, the Assembly and I have taken road safety very seriously. For example, we have considered 20 mph zones, graduated driver licensing and lowering the drink-drive limit, and we have achieved all-party support on those things.

I think that emphasising road safety is the way to go. I would prefer to see more emphasis on driver awareness of cyclists, rather than on trying to penalise people or taking the big government

approach. I know that those were opinions rather than direct questions, but I made a few points to which Pat may want to respond.

Mr P Ramsey:

I acknowledge, Alastair, that you made your concerns very clear in the Second Stage debate. You referred to other European countries, Holland in particular. However, those countries have invested hugely in a much safer infrastructure than we ever have. Compared with what has been done here, they have made huge investment in roads and cycle lanes.

We have done well in the city of Derry, and I worked with Sustrans on this during my time on the council to try to provide areas that are safe for families to cycle. Those measures are all about trying to create that environment. We have some good areas in the city, between the two bridges, that are clearly family zones. Mothers with daughters, sons and fathers are out cycling in those areas. That is what we are all trying to create, and we want to encourage young people to participate in some level of sport. Cycling is certainly one of those sports.

As to the scrutiny role, global models have looked at this in the same way and thought that the best route was to create legislation. As a result of bringing forward legislation, places that adopted those models have seen a significant reduction in deaths and serious injuries on the roads.

My attitude to this is very simple. I may be able to help one child to not suffer the injuries that young Orlaith has or those injuries of the other girl, who made the original presentation to the Committee and who came off a Barbie bike outside her home. She had five or six serious brain operations. She has now become a champion for the cause. I will not bore the Committee by reading out her story, but I will leave it with the Committee Clerk.

The Chairperson:

Members have it in their papers.

Mr P Ramsey:

That is just as well. As to Alastair's point, fixed penalties will never be brought against children. Parents will be responsible under this legislation. As I said, it is not my intention to criminalise

anyone. It would be the case that, in law, the parent would be responsible for children under 16.

Mr Weir:

Thank you Pat, Michelle and Orlaith, for your presentation.

Like other members, I will not follow the example of the Chairperson and Mr Ross and give you a lecture on my views. I want to ask three questions. I have mixed feelings on this. Ultimately, I voted against the Bill, and the main reason for that was my concern over its enforceability. That will be a very big obstacle. This session is almost like a dry run in obtaining evidence. Enforceability will be one of the biggest obstacles that either you or another Member in the future will face.

I will ask three questions, but you may not be able to answer all of them. Statistically, what is the estimated percentage of cyclists who, at present, wear helmets? Do you have robust figures on that? What is the gap that needs to be closed? Are there figures on that?

Mr P Ramsey:

I do not have evidence on the numbers of cyclists in Northern Ireland who do not use helmets, and I am not sure that it is readily to hand. I am sure that other organisations might be able to help you with that. In other areas where this law was introduced, careful studies were carried out, and we should get the evidence from those regions on what the situation was there before the legislation was introduced. There might be more definitive figures that could help in the round to accumulate the evidence that is required to form an objective opinion.

Mr Weir:

When people look at the merits of this, one of the key elements is the impact that it would have, one way or the other. I appreciate what you say in that, if it saves one person's life, it is worth it. However, in law, a balance must be struck on a range of matters. If, at present, 80% of cyclists wear helmets, the impact of a law may be minimal, because most of the remainder will ignore it. We have seen some evidence of people saying, more or less, that they will not be dictated to on this issue.

Pat, some of your colleagues may be in a better position to answer this, but do you have any

figures for the number of head injuries that occur in Northern Ireland each year as a direct result of cycling accidents?

Mr P Ramsey:

I have tabled a number of questions to the Health Minister about that, and they are on the record now. I used some of the figures in the Second Stage debate, and I am sure that you read the Hansard report of that. However, I do not have those with me now. The issue of enforceability is important, and it has exercised me and the Bill Office in bringing this forward. In the 1960s, the same age-old arguments were made about seat belts, and you, Alastair and the Chairperson were probably among those who made such arguments.

Mr Weir:

We are not all your age, Pat.

Mr P Ramsey:

I accept that.

However, the same arguments were being made then about how this is a nanny state and how the legislation will not have an effect. Some people wore their seat belts anyway, but others said that they did not care what was brought forward because they would not wear one. I heard that, too. I understand the fears of those who cycle for leisure. However, at some stage, we have to take this fundamental decision, because there will have to be impact on and a reduction in the number of injuries. The figures that I gave for the number of people who have lost their lives or who have been seriously injured on the roads are clear. For every Orlaith or Sinead, there are dozens of others in Northern Ireland.

I am always prepared to look at different levels of enforceability. I do not want a police officer who was going to the assistance of an old woman whose home has been broken into or a shop that has been robbed having to run after a wean on a bike. That was never the case; it was always my intention that a police officer would have discretion to act. Would the legislation in itself be a deterrent? Would people be forced to change their habits if educational programmes and school- and community-based activities were available showing them how to? Although I

accept Alastair's argument about enforceability, it would have taken a greater length of time and would have meant a change in mindsets.

Mr Weir:

The evidence elsewhere seems to show that the different jurisdictions that have adopted something of that nature have taken either one of two different routes. Some jurisdictions have made wearing helmets more or less compulsory for everyone who cycles, whereas other jurisdictions have focused purely on children. I suppose that some started off with taking the initial step of focusing on children and then moved on.

You indicated that you did not want to go down that route, because you felt that it may be unfair if mummy and daddy did not have to wear their helmets but their children did. However, given that a child has less cognisance of road safety awareness and that adults are, quite clearly, in a position to make a rational decision and can stand over that, some argue that there is a distinction between a child who is probably not in a position to make a full decision and an adult who can clearly take responsibility for themselves in deciding to wear a helmet. How do you deal with that sort of consideration? There may need to be an examination of the potential of having the legislation for children only. However, adults are generally big enough and ugly enough to make up their own minds.

Mr P Ramsey:

I thank Peter for his very reasonable question. For the record, I am open to making the legislation about children only. If the Bill were to proceed, I would respond appropriately by either proposing such an amendment myself or by supporting a Committee amendment. I take on board the reasonable and rational concerns that you rightly laid out, Peter. I am open to that.

Mr Dallat:

Chairperson, you mentioned your party's position. I think that it is important that the visitors know that we seldom, if ever, mention party politics at Committee meetings. It would maybe be wrong for people to go away with the impression that party politics dominates the Committee. I have to say that it does not.

It is very brave of Michelle and Orlaith to come here this morning. One thing that we sadly lack in Committees is the opportunity to meet at first hand people who have had personal experience of something as bad as Michelle and Orlaith suffered. While sitting here, my mind was wandering, and I can vividly see my own son Ronan riding past the house, down a bit of a hill, waving in at us, and going over the handlebar — I am sorry, I think I am upsetting Orlaith. He went off to the doctor, the doctor put the stitches in, and we were told to not let him sleep for a few hours. Why continue to live in that type of society? Why not change it? There is an expectation among the public — presumably that is why Michelle is here — that, because we have a local Assembly, we are not bound entirely by what might happen in some other selected part of the world where that law does not apply.

I will stop talking about my own family shortly. However, I have a niece called Clare who ranks among the top cyclists in the world. I am extremely proud of that. She lives in Australia, and she has a profile on Facebook. I asked her about this issue. She comes originally from Aghadowey, so she is fairly local. She cannot believe that we are having a debate on whether children — in fact, anybody — should wear helmets.

I know that Pat was encouraged not to give a history lesson. However, one of the advantages for anyone who has been about for a while is that they have seen these processes before. I remember ads on television that encouraged us to drink sensibly. Who in the name of God would not subscribe to that today? It was worse than that; the ad was financed by a wine company. I see the Committee Clerk laughing at that, but older people will remember that. It was Stewarts Wine or something. My adolescence was spent around a garage, and I can remember the great innovation of anchorage points being fitted for seat belts. However, there were no seat belts. Then, for years and years, there were seat belts, but nobody wore them. Then, when the law on seat belts came in, a few fundamentalists initially said that our human rights had been taken away. Would anybody in their right mind even think of driving without a seat belt today? Would anybody ever bum any more about not remembering driving the car home? I do not think so. I know that that is history, but this situation falls into the same category.

Public opinion is changing. To encourage me into a healthier lifestyle, my wife bought me a bicycle, and the helmet was part of the deal. I am not allowed to go out without a helmet. I am

old-fashioned, and it would be easier for me to wear that helmet if a law says that I must. I would maybe then feel less embarrassed in the same way as, initially, I maybe felt like a bit of a pansy for wearing a seat belt. I am embarrassed to say that today, because we are all well enlightened. However, anybody who has spent time in the Royal Victoria Hospital, which, unfortunately, I have had to, would do anything to keep anybody out of the ward where the surgeons work 24 hours a day in teams of 11 or 12 trying to save the lives of people with brain damage.

I do not have much more to say about this. I am not supporting the Bill only because Pat Ramsey belongs to the same party as me. I was not even going to mention that. However, as this mandate comes to an end, I would have been as proud as punch if the Bill had gone through. If it had, I could have said that we are different here in Northern Ireland.

We are not subservient to what happens elsewhere; we are not bothered if people think that we are a nanny state. I do not think that everything is lost. I do not want to go back to the history lesson, but the process has moved forward, and I do not think that anything will stop it. I want to say to Orlaith in particular that her suffering and experience have not been lost. The debate has taken place in the Assembly, we have had our discussion today, and sometime — hopefully sooner rather than later — there will be a law that people will respect, adhere to, and be amenable to if they are caught wanting. We can leave it at that.

I want to have a tongue-wag later with other people here about their approach. I feel passionately about the matter. Those of us who are parents want to do everything humanly possible to protect our children. That is what the Assembly is for. Perhaps we should look at it through eyes of a child to get the answers. I certainly believe that I have the answers.

Mr Ross:

I know that Mr Clarke wants to come in, but can I make one quick comment? We need to keep a sense of perspective. It is not fair to compare it with the laws that have been passed on drink-driving. Drunk drivers not only hurt themselves; they can kill other road users. I do not think that seatbelts are a fair comparison. We are talking about a car travelling at up to 100 mph, which is a severe risk not only to the driver but to other people. Cycling is a relatively low-risk pastime; it is not fair to compare driving a car with riding a bicycle. Is it fair to introduce legislation that

would make the wearing of cycle helmets compulsory based on the comparison with seat belts or drink-driving? It is not a fair comparison.

Mr Dallat:

I will make my point in 30 seconds or less. If I were driving a car and a child rode out in front of me, I would rather have that child wearing a helmet than not wearing one. Some motorists have been in that situation and have killed a child, and they have to live with that for the rest of their lives.

The Chairperson:

Just for clarification, it is seldom that I bring party politics into —

Mr Dallat:

I know, but you did. *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson:

I only said that because I did not want to mislead you. There is no point in my giving the impression that I will support the legislation. I have spoken clearly on the matter. I do not want you to think that Sinn Féin are the bad guys with regard to the legislation; we want to bring something forward. I cannot remember the advertisement — was there electricity in the days that John was talking about? It may have been before my time. *[Laughter.]* I want to clarify that point; I know that John mentioned it, but it is not about Sinn Féin or anything else. I did not support the legislation, but we are here. I said, Pat, that I would give you the opportunity to come to the Committee.

Before we move to the next member, I want to say that I will not be as liberal with my time to those who make presentations later. I gave the member more time than was expected.

Mr W Clarke:

Orlaith and Michelle, thank you for your contribution. Orlaith, you have been very brave today, and I wish you well in your recovery.

I commend Pat for introducing the Bill. He has raised awareness and by introducing the Bill has probably already saved children from serious injury. He has lifted the issue to a different level: it has been discussed and has received the attention of the media through the debates in the Assembly.

I want to pick up on the Chairperson's point about the legislation and whether it should be compulsory to buy a helmet when a bicycle is purchased. It should be the same for skateboarding and roller-skating. A way forward on that would be very welcome. If the helmet is there, there is an onus to ensure that a child wears it.

Mr Weir:

John Dallat will feel a lot better when he is out skateboarding if he is wearing his helmet.

Mr Dallat:

I can hardly walk, never mind skateboard. *[Laughter.]*

Mr W Clarke:

I see the rationale behind children wearing helmets. My seven-year-old daughter insists on wearing her helmet; it is pink and she loves it. We need to make it fashionable and cool to wear cycle helmets. My difficulty is with older citizens. There are 80-year-olds who have cycled all their lives wearing a flat cap; they will tell us to go to hell if we try to get them to wear cycling helmets. We have those characters in every town, and they will tell us to take a running jump if we tell them to wear a helmet.

The Chairperson:

There are some of them on this Committee by the sound of things. *[Laughter.]*

Mr W Clarke:

We might have to take such people to court, and that would attract negative media attention. Pat, will you expand on your thoughts about making the purchase of cycle helmets compulsory when purchasing bicycles?

Mr P Ramsey:

That would require a different form of legislation. Perhaps, as the Committee scrutinises the Bill, it could make recommendations, one of which would be to ensure that manufacturers or retailers of bicycles include helmets as part of a sale.

Willie, some of my friends who are of a similar age gave me a roasting over the Bill and asked how I dare introduce it. I accept that, and that is why in my response to Peter Weir I made it clear that, in the absence of anything else, I would have looked seriously at amending my own Bill so that it would apply only to children. I do not think that there is an appetite in the wider community to apply it to adults.

Passing the legislation would have been accompanied by a period of communication with the public. As Willie pointed out, discussions would have taken place, and we already created the awareness of the issue. People, particularly parents, would have understood that the state takes the issue seriously, and we would have encouraged them, as best we could, to take it just as seriously. The Bill would have required a major cultural change in the habitual wearing of cycling helmets.

I support cycling, safer roads, cycle paths and, in particular, properly constructed routes away from main roads. I want to see an increase in cycling and a reduction in the use of private transport, and I find it difficult to believe that people would use a car to travel to work instead of cycling because they must wear a helmet. I fundamentally believe, after listening to parents and children such as Orlaith, that accidents will continue to happen unless there is change. As other Members said, we are a legislative Assembly and it is important that we make that difference. We would have made a difference through the Bill, and I assure the Chairperson that, if I am returned in the next mandate, I will pursue the matter again.

The Chairperson:

Pat, Michelle and, in particular, Orlaith, thank you for coming along. Pat, I want to respond to what you said. You referred to the danger of children in housing developments and on roads cycling without helmets, and you raised awareness in the Assembly of the issue. You have committed to taking the issue forward in the next mandate. The Committee would like an

awareness and education programme to continue, and that will form part of our report. I do not think that any Committee member would oppose that.

As I said, however, enforcement is a major problem for the Committee. It is not just the problem of enforcing it on the open road; it would also need to be enforced on kids who are cycling without helmets in housing developments. Thank you again.

The Committee will now move on. As I said, we will not afford the same time to the other witnesses as we did to a fellow MLA. The next item on the agenda is a presentation from Headway NI, and I welcome Peter McCabe, chief executive, and Johny Turnbull, regional co-ordinator. You will have five to 10 minutes to make a presentation, after which I will open it up to members for questions.

Mr Peter McCabe (Headway NI):

Chairperson, I thank you and the Committee for giving us the opportunity to present to you on this issue. As some of you may know, Headway is a charity that works to improve life after brain injury; we also campaign to reduce the prevalence of brain injury. We have a network of groups and branches, including six in Northern Ireland. Some of you may have come into contact with them in your constituencies.

We support the Bill and request that the Committee support the compulsory wearing of cycle helmets for cyclists in Northern Ireland. All cyclists should wear helmets, especially vulnerable road users such as children, who do not possess the maturity or judgement to assess risks. The evidence is clear: cycle helmets save lives and prevent lifelong disability; that has been demonstrated by numerous peer reviews published in scientific studies. As Pat said, that view is shared by the World Health Organization, the British Medical Association, the Association of Paediatric Emergency Medicine and doctors and neurosurgeons across the country.

At Headway, we know at first-hand the devastating effects of brain injury: they can cause blindness and physical disability; they can be cognitive and impair memory, the ability to plan, process thought and execute plans; they can also be behavioural: damage to frontal-lobe function can cause lack of control over executive function and lead to disinhibition, which creates major

problems for people and their families. Several Headway service users sustained their head injury through cycle accidents; they face spending the rest of their lives dealing with the consequences. It affects not just the survivor but the family. In a sense, the statistics are meaningless to those people. They know, and doctors have told them, that their injuries could have been avoided if they had been wearing a helmet.

I do not want people to think that Headway thinks that cycling is unsafe; we know that it is safe. I am a cyclist. However, I never cycle — even to the shops or in the cul-de-sac where I live — without a helmet because I have seen too many families who have suffered the consequences of cycling without a helmet. I have had the privilege of being present during neurosurgery. One of the things that the neurosurgeon pointed out was just how thin the skull is, particularly at the sides and back and how easy it is to sustain an injury that will either end your life or change it for the rest of your days.

We have seen Orlaith and Michelle, and I believe that your packs contain the story of Sinéad King, who fell off her Barbie bike at the age of six. Thank God she has made a good recovery, but she had 13 operations between the ages of six and 20. She is now completing her teacher training; she is one of the fortunate ones. Sadly, there are people who do not do so well. I know a family whose son, at the age of 10, sustained an injury on a bike. He is now 31. His parents should be looking forward to the things that middle-aged parents do when their children are grown up and off their hands, but they cannot. They spend every day looking after Chris. They do not take him to and from work — he will never work — but to a place where he spends his days trying to do something useful. His life is very different from the one that his parents imagined. People are right that there are only a few accidents; however, preventing one death or disability is a prize worth having.

I recently met Olympic gold medal winner James Cracknell; he sustained a head injury last summer while cycling across the United States in a challenge event. His helmet split in two when a truck's wing mirror struck the back of his head as it passed him in the Arizona desert at 5.00 in the morning. His doctors told him that, without doubt, he would not be alive had he not been wearing a helmet. If you asked him whether this debate is worthwhile, you would get a very clear answer.

The evidence is clear. Pat referred to the Cochrane reviews, copies of which I have brought for the Committee. It demonstrates beyond doubt that cycle helmets have a major effect. Moreover, a report from the Transport Research Laboratory concluded, as Pat mentioned, that cycle helmets are effective in preventing head and brain injuries. That report states that cycle helmets would be expected to be particularly effective for children.

Some of you may ask why you should go out on a limb on this issue. That would not be the case: there are cycle helmet laws across the world. They have been introduced in Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Canada, Iceland and Sweden. Research demonstrates that those laws have, without question, significantly reduced the number of cyclists who sustain brain injuries.

About a year ago, Jersey became the first British jurisdiction to introduce legislation. Its Transport Minister is drafting legislation to make it compulsory for — I emphasise this — children to wear cycle helmets.

The wearing of cycle helmets is mandatory for children in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania, and the Northern Territory; in the rest of Australia, it is mandatory for all cyclists. You may hear that such legislation has decimated cycling in Australia; however, the Committee should find out the reality for itself and not take the word of people who do not know the facts. I have been in correspondence with Simon O'Brien, the former Transport Minister for Western Australia. He is no woolly minded liberal and represents a state that is known for being hard-headed and for being as far from a nanny state as you could get. I have correspondence from Mr O'Brien that states that legislation has worked in Western Australia and that there is no intention of repealing it. He believes that it has been beneficial to citizens. He states that although there was a decline in cycling for a short period, it subsequently picked up and the sales of bicycles in Western Australia have increased significantly over the past few years. It is the same in New Zealand.

In the US, 22 states with a combined population of more than 160 million have passed cycle helmet legislation. Again, they are not necessarily the woolly minded liberal states that you might expect. Yes, Massachusetts is one of them, but the list also includes states that have never

elected liberal representatives and never will. Those states span the political spectrum.

Headway is not anti-cyclist; it just wants to make cyclists safer. We know exactly how devastating brain injuries can be, so we want to avoid them. Some say that fewer people will cycle; however, I refer you to the experience of Western Australia. I have a letter from Simon O'Brien describing exactly what happened, which I am happy to provide.

Some people refer to the nanny state. We heard exactly the same arguments about seatbelts. We heard that people had the right to make their own decisions; that they are adults and that the state should not tell them what to do. However, no right-minded person would now say that that legislation has not saved lives and prevented disability. Interestingly, the same arguments were made when motorcyclists were forced to wear helmets. Many motorcyclists explained that they liked the feel of the breeze blowing through their hair as they rode along, but they too had to comply with the law. We never see motorcyclists without helmets. The law has saved lives and prevented disability.

Some members raised the issue of enforcement. I have spoken to people in the state of California where legislation exists to make it compulsory for all cyclists up to the age of 18 to wear helmets. I spoke to a senior police officer there, who told me that it has not been a problem. He said that it is not their number-one priority for policing, but they exercise common sense, judgement and discretion and that officers are more inclined to give a word of friendly advice than to start the process of prosecution. He also said that people in California generally respect the law. I think that that is true of the people of Northern Ireland.

Some people asked what percentage of cyclists wear helmets. I looked that up while I was waiting, and the study that I referred to from the Transport Research Laboratory — which I think deals with the UK, but it is as good as I have got — stated that 34% of cyclists wear helmets on major roads and 17% on minor roads. There is still a long way to go as a great many people do not wear helmets.

We have heard that the cost of implementation will be high. I refer to California: they do not spend a great deal of time and money enforcing the law because people respect it. One can look

at the costs to society. Sinéad King has had 13 operations since her initial neurosurgery; how much has that cost?

I have visited units where the annual cost of care for someone who suffered a severe brain injury in a road accident is £200,000. Survivors of brain injury often incur the injury in their early years when they are children, teenagers or young adults, but their life expectancy is the same as yours or mine. Multiply the cost of caring for one person at £200,000 per year by their life expectancy and you can see why, when the courts make awards in road-traffic accidents where people have been disabled as a consequence of someone's negligence, the awards can be from £8 million to £10 million. If somebody does not have insurance and a compensation claim, that cost falls on the state. The question of cost has to be addressed from the other end. The question has to be posed: can the state afford to continue to let young people suffer unnecessary injury and fund their care for the rest of their days?

The cost of helmets was mentioned. A wise man once said to me not very long ago that a way of tackling the issue could be for helmets to be part of the package: if a young person buys a bike, the retailer would be required to provide that essential piece of safety equipment as part of the deal. The person who first suggested that is very wise indeed. At some point, an amendment or some other legislation should be introduced to make that happen. That would make a difference.

People in Denmark and the Netherlands do not cycle in the numbers that they do because they do not have to wear helmets but because those countries have invested significantly in making cycling safer, by providing safe routes, safe cycling paths and so on.

We see far too much misery and too many families having to deal with awful situations. You have heard from just one of those families today, but there are many more. We want to stop that happening to other families. Thank you for listening.

The Chairperson:

Thank you very much for your presentation. Johnny, would you like to make a quick comment?

Mr Johnny Turnbull (Headway NI):

Between 2005 and 2010, more than 300 children and 100 adults presented to hospitals across Northern Ireland with head injuries caused by coming off their bicycles. Those figures may not be staggering, but they show that more than 500 people have been affected by a cycling accident, and some of them will have incurred a severe brain or head injury. As Peter said, that requires a further resource from our health and social care services.

Last summer, six children presented to the Royal Victoria Hospital and the regional acquired brain injury unit in Belfast. That is six families that require support both medically and through the voluntary and statutory sectors. That is an ongoing process, and one of those families is Michelle and Orlaith's. That is a snapshot of six families affected over the summer period, and there may be others that we are not aware of.

Highlighting the need for protective headgear and passing this Bill would be a fantastic achievement for the Assembly and the community.

The Chairperson:

Are you saying that all those people were not wearing helmets?

Mr Turnbull:

We do not have evidence that they were or were not wearing helmets, but they presented to A&E with cycling injuries.

The Chairperson:

Thank you very much for your presentation.

I take on board what you said, Peter, but there are other ways of doing this. It is not appropriate to introduce legislation to enforce something that is not a priority, and you referred to California in that context. For someone to say that it is enforceable but not top of their list does not make sense.

A better approach is going into schools to talk to children. I know that the Member is genuine

in introducing the Bill, and we understand what he is trying to achieve. However, let us go back to how I think we could achieve that, bearing in mind what you said about enforcement in other countries. There is a better way through education, going into schools and raising awareness. I suggested in the Chamber that it should be compulsory to give out a helmet with every bicycle sold. That is the major way to go.

You talked about enforcement. Money would be better spent in schools on education, and much is already being done. Everybody thinks that we are talking about kids on main roads. I am talking about children; that is my main concern. I know that other members mentioned older people in flat caps cycling to the shops. That is up to them; it is their responsibility.

To be honest: it comes down to responsibility. There is a responsibility on us all collectively and on parents. We should take it into the schools. Everybody, particularly parents, should have a role and responsibility.

It is an issue in housing estates mostly. I do not want to belittle the situation but, when the Bill was first presented, I thought of PSNI cars driving into housing estates and enforcing the law on children who are not wearing helmets while jumping on kerbs on their BMXs. I do not think that that would be a sensible approach. As I said to Pat, I would work along the lines of having an education system and making children more aware through programmes in school as opposed to going down the route of a stick approach.

Johny, you gave figures for the amount of injuries. We, as a Committee, do not want accidents to occur. We want to cut the figures to zero if we can. We need to look at education and increasing awareness, particularly among children, as opposed to the stick approach.

Mr Ross:

It is a worrying development, but, again, I find myself in total agreement with the Chairperson.

The Chairperson:

Will someone please record that comment? It comes at the second last meeting of the four-year term.

Mr Weir:

To be fair: I doubt whether either of you will put that in your election literature.

Mr Ross:

It was a bit disingenuous for Peter to claim that people are saying that lots of people in the Netherlands and Denmark cycle because they do not have to wear cycle helmets. That is not the point that I made, and I do not think that anyone is making that point. The point is that there is no requirement to wear a cycle helmet in the Netherlands and Denmark, yet the number of casualties and accidents caused by cyclists there is very low. The fact that there are fewer accidents in those countries is linked to driver attitude and awareness rather than the existence of any legislation. That is the important point that I made. It has nothing to do with what you suggested, Peter. I was also disappointed that you drew a comparison with wearing helmets on motorbikes, seat belts in cars, and so on. I do not think that that is a fair comparison.

That having been said, no one on the Committee is questioning the impact of head injuries, nor, as I said, is anyone questioning that responsible people should wear helmets and that responsible parents should ensure that their children wear helmets, knee pads or whatever else is important. That is a given.

You said in your presentation that very few accidents occur. Therefore, if we, as an Assembly and a Committee, are to be responsible, we have to look at whether legislation is a proportionate response, particularly given the issues that we, and other groups, have identified in respect of the difficulties with, and desirability of, enforcement of the legislation. There is quite a lot of evidence that, in places where the wearing of seat belts is compulsory, the law is simply ignored by enforcement agencies or individuals. That also has to be borne in mind.

Why have you decided that the legislative route is the right way to go? Why have you decided that it would be better to put the resources, energy and all the rest into creating legislation rather than into building an awareness campaign into the road safety strategy? In some of the areas in which legislation has been introduced, there was a drop-off in cycling for a short period, but it maybe balances out over time. The reason why a lot more people wear helmets when legislation

is introduced is not necessarily the law itself but the awareness campaign that surrounds it. I think that an awareness campaign, rather than legislation, would be a sensible first step. I would appreciate some comments on that.

Mr McCabe:

Chair, you asked what is the point of a law that is not enforced. The very simple answer is that, in countries that have introduced legislation, the numbers of people who are treated for head injuries in A&E departments and neuro departments has fallen significantly. Therefore, the point is to save lives and prevent disability.

The Chairperson:

I am talking about bringing something forward in legislation. There is a better way to educate. Mr Ross mentioned road safety, and that is the way to go. It is not acceptable to say that there is a power but it is not being used. It is like a big stick: you wear a helmet or you do not. This is about education and making people aware of their responsibilities as opposed to the other way. It should be more about incentivising rather than using a stick. That is how we usually deal with legislation. You spoke about California, and this issue not being a priority on the list. What, then, is the point of going through that process? I think there is a better way to go about this piece of work, especially for young people.

Mr McCabe:

To respond to Mr Ross's questions: it is not a question of having only legislation or education; it should be both. I would be happy to organise a programme of education in schools in Northern Ireland, and we would be delighted if the Committee supported funding for that. We could take head injury survivors into schools and nothing would make people sit up and take notice more than seeing somebody who had been through what we were describing. Maybe we can discuss that.

I do not believe that the law is ignored in those jurisdictions. The statistics for helmet wearing after legislation has been introduced show a huge increase from the very low levels that we have here up to very high levels because, generally speaking, people respect the law. People know there is a law whether or not somebody is chasing them round a housing estate.

I often hear parents say that a law would help them because they say to their kids, “We want you to put your helmet on.” The kids then say, “It’s not cool and not what all my mates do.” If the parents can say, “But it is the law and you will do it”, and the child asks, “Why do I have to wear a helmet?”, the parent can reply, “Because that is the law and we respect the law in this house.” How many parents have had the why-do-I-have-to-do-this question?

The Chairperson:

Mr Dallat, you want to come in no doubt on that point.

Mr Dallat:

I do not know, Chairman, why you use the term “no doubt”. I know that you are in a difficult position trying to remain impartial in this discussion but —

The Chairperson:

I am being impartial, I am trying to bring a wee bit of common sense to what we are trying to achieve.

Mr Dallat:

I will not rise to that one.

The Chairperson:

Just before Mr Dallat speaks, I will be honest: making the comparison between what we are discussing with seat belts, cars, being able to drive down the road at 100 mph and the idea of motorbikes and helmets should not be reflected in that respect.

Mr Dallat:

We have a small window of opportunity to put our case —

The Chairperson:

I agree, and I think there is another way.

Mr Dallat:

It is unfair to punctuate it with terms such as that. Anyway, we will not fall out over it.

Am I right in assuming that the vast majority of injuries to children happen on housing estates within a very short distance of where they live?

Mr McCabe:

I do not know whether there are statistics that show how far away from home accidents take place. However, we heard Michelle say that Orlaith's accident took place very close to home. Sinead's accident took place very close to her home in Newry. That is what I hear anecdotally.

Mr Dallat:

Sorry for cutting across you, Peter. I know that you cannot have all the information in your mind, but perhaps I should have declared that I am a former teacher of traffic studies and I know that the vast majority of accidents happen within a very short distance from home. The case made about children in their wee housing estate not having to wear helmets is wrong. That is where the risk is highest.

The Chairman talked about the armoured PSNI vehicle driving into an estate. We are getting to a normal society with community police officers in most parts of the North, thank God. Hopefully, that will continue. If there is legislation, it would make it a lot easier for a community police officer to tell a young person to wear their headgear because it is the law. If the law does not exist, that is a lot more difficult.

We have heard about education before, and we could apply the education concept to everything in life, but would any society rely on that? My local primary school comes top all the time in cycling proficiency tests and so on, and they all wear their headgear, but the trouble is that, when they go home in the evening, the same emphasis is not attached to the wearing of headgear. I think that is what Michelle and Orlaith were saying earlier.

People have talked about a nanny state, but thankfully, we are not a police state either. There will not be a situation where a police officer will bound out of a car with a notebook shouting,

“You are caught and you are for court.” It is not going to be that way.

The Chairperson:

You would be lucky to find a policeman in some areas, never mind find one bounding out of a car. Anyway, we will definitely go down that route today. Is that you finished Mr Dallat?

Mr Dallat:

We will keep routes out of it.

The Chairperson:

Mr Clarke, would you like to come in on that? You mentioned your daughter.

Mr W Clarke:

Yes. I am very proud to do so.

Following what John said, and as I said to the previous witnesses, the biggest issue is raising awareness. Bringing the Bill forward has achieved that, and that is why we are talking about it today. The subject of housing estates has been touched on. There is a greater public responsibility there, because, as has been said, the majority of accidents on housing estates are caused by residents of those estates. The majority of people who would be on the estate are from there, so they have that responsibility. Even if there is a non-enforced 20 mph speed limit, residents should be conscious that there are children at play in the area.

I also said that the voluntary route is the best. To bring legislation where the helmet comes with the bicycle may mean that government has to subsidise that so the helmet can be given free, and we would need to look at the resources that would involve.

Mr McCabe:

Can I quote you on that?

Mr W Clarke:

We could probably spend more on enforcement than on providing a subsidised helmet. To cut

the VAT on helmets to nothing in order to make them as cheap as possible is probably a very important thing to do. Also, as I said, to make it a fashion accessory and cool to wear one would be a good job of work. Obviously, we would need role models to do that, be it pop stars, footballers or whatever. We need to be able to make it fashionable, and for young children to look up to their role model and think that that is the thing to do and that they need to be like those people. That is where I see the situation, and I think Pat is willing to look at that as well. He has acknowledged that we need to target young people, they are the target audience.

Those are my broad comments. I did not take part in the debate in the Chamber, but I am encouraged by the awareness that the Bill has already raised. However, I think we need to go along the lines of people getting a helmet when purchasing a bike, awareness and look at making it popular to wear one.

The Chairperson:

You can read my comments on the Bill in the Hansard report of the debate. That is where I am coming from about purchasing helmets.

Mr Buchanan:

Many good comments have been made today. We can bring forward reams upon reams of legislation, but it will still not change the situation. There is a responsibility that has to be adhered to by all sections of society. No matter how much legislation we bring, it will not do anything. You get most resistance from a young person when you try to enforce something on them. It is best to look at a different way of trying to deal with this particular matter.

As John Dallat said earlier, we have cycling proficiency tests at schools. That is one way, and there are many other ways of looking at it. Therefore, it really is an educational matter, and we should educate children that they really need to wear helmets for their own safety. I think that is the way forward rather than seeking to enforce something on people. If we enforce something like that on elderly people in particular, they will turn away from it, as will younger children. There is a much better way of going about it, and that is the way we should go.

The Chairperson:

Are there any more comments?

Mr McCabe:

I think that we have explored it fully. Thank you, Chairperson and members of the Committee.

The Chairperson:

Thank you.

We will now receive a joint presentation from the Cyclists' Touring Club (CTC) and Sustrans. I welcome Steven Patterson, director of Sustrans; Roger Geffen, policy manager of CTC; Derek Armstrong from Bikedock; and Darren Boyle, manager of the 'da' Young Fathers Project. You have attended different Assembly Committees, so you know the process. I have two presentations left. I will try to allot as much time as I can, but you should try to keep to the point, and I will open it up to members for questions.

Mr Steven Patterson (Cyclists' Touring Club/Sustrans):

I thank the Committee for taking the time to come to see us today. I appreciate the distance that members have travelled from all arts and parts. I know that you were busy dealing with the Budget until late in the evening yesterday. So, I appreciate that a lot of work has gone into researching the issue over the past couple of months. Chairman, approximately how much time do we have in which to make a presentation?

The Chairperson:

It is normally five minutes to 10 minutes. I know that I allowed Mr Ramsey some time, but I want you to specifically stick to the proposals in the Bill and to the key points, after which I will open up the session for questions. We have another presentation and then some legislation to deal with, and I know that members need to get away. We are trying to balance it out, but I will watch the clock.

Mr Patterson:

That is a nice balanced approach. If it is all right, the four of us want to speak for a couple of minutes each. We will try to keep to the 10 minutes, because we each come to it from a slightly different angle. I will introduce the team. I am the regional director of Sustrans. I am accompanied by Roger Geffen, CTC policy and campaigns director, Derek Armstrong from Bikedock and Darren Boyle from the 'da' Young Fathers Project in the city of Derry/Londonderry.

The Committee has our paper. CTC and Sustrans object to all 17 clauses of the Bill. We also object to its principle. We came into the discussion quite late in the process. Mr Ramsey did not include us in his consultation process, so we heard about that only informally and got about a week's notice in advance of the Monday night committee. So, excuse us if we are fairly new to the process and want to talk about the principle of the Bill as well as the clauses. As we pointed out, that is the gist of the letter that we sent to the Committee a week ago.

There are five main reasons that we feel point to the Bill being a bad piece of legislation. We are not in any way anti-cycle helmet; we merely think that it should be a personal choice for young people or a parental choice. We are here today to discuss the principle and whether it should be a compulsory law. The first reason is that we think that the Bill will deter people from cycling and will result in a disbenefit to the economy, health and tourism. Northern Ireland has come quite far in the past 15 years in the development of sustainable travel. Cycling has done well, particularly in areas where there has been a focus on good infrastructure and good marketing campaigns. In the greater Belfast area, cycling has increased by 145% in the past 10 years. We worry that imposing a requirement to wear a cycle helmet, or even actively promoting that, will lead to a significant reduction in cycling. A study from New Zealand shows that 47,000 teenagers stopped cycling in the immediate aftermath of helmet legislation coming in there in 1994.

Secondly, we think that this law is disproportionate to what is a relatively safe activity. I extend sympathy to any parent or child who has been involved in a bicycle accident that has resulted in any injury. I extend that sympathy particularly to Orlaith and her mother, who are here today and from whom it was useful to hear. However, as some Committee members alluded

to, the implementation of laws or decisions on them should be based on a population-wide evidence base rather than on some individual case studies. We are glad that the Committee has recognised that. Cycling is a relatively low-risk activity. Among young people, cycling is the second most common form of physical activity, yet only 6% of head injuries that young people sustain come from cycling. The other 94% of head injuries that young people sustain come from other forms of activity. Making helmet use compulsory is therefore disproportionate.

Thirdly, there was a lot of talk about enforcement. We believe that the law would be difficult to enforce and that there are other issues for priority in the Police Service of Northern Ireland's budget. Darren will speak about the view that communities might prefer the police to work with them on other matters.

A number of questions were raised on enforcement, and two or three people discussed a quotation from the Cochrane review. The review looked at four studies on where helmet use has been made compulsory. It states:

“Many jurisdictions with helmet legislation impose monetary fines for non-compliance. Unfortunately, there was insufficient evidence available to determine the level at which legislation was enforced in four of the included studies. The study conducted in rural Georgia, however, clearly demonstrates the importance of police enforcement. Prior to the enforcement program, the existing helmet legislation had a negligible effect on actual helmet use with no children observed using a bicycle helmet despite the pre-existing law. The positive effect of the enforcement program in which police were instructed to impound the bicycle of non-helmeted child cyclists was still discernible two years later”.

The point is that the legislation will have to be rigorously enforced for it to work. The question then is: is that what the police should be doing? I apologise that that quotation is not in our paper submission, but we will include it in our submission for Monday.

Fourthly, the law would have a disproportionate impact on socially deprived children. It would apply more to children in those areas than to children in more affluent areas. I will give one example of that. For a number of years, Sustrans has been working with schools to promote cycling in Northern Ireland. Under a recent project called the Bike It project, we go in and empower kids to cycle. We motivate them, and a high-quality cycle training programme is also included in that. One of the conditions of government funding is that the children have to wear helmets when partaking in the cycling programme in the playground. If they do not have a helmet, we supply it. We found that, at an affluent, middle-class school in Newtownabbey, almost 100% of the kids came to the event with cycle helmets.

At a school in a poor housing estate in Belfast, 86 kids turned up on their bikes. We were delighted at that, because there is not a cycling culture there. Only five of them had helmets. Therefore, the Bill will have a disproportionately large effect on socially deprived communities, as well as on ethnic workers. Chinese and Polish people tend not to wear helmets.

I am delighted that the Committee is looking at alternatives as to how to encourage child safety and promote lifestyle physical activity. We have outlined the alternatives in our paper. We think that they all have to happen together. One of the things that has come up is how we work with young people. The debate is actually now focused on young people. The quality of cycle training is important. In Northern Ireland, it is basically playground-based cycle training. The new English model has recently been extended to Scotland and Wales. It is the Bikeability model, which includes an on-road element as well as a playground-based one. That may be something that we can explore later. That is the way to go, and the Ipsos MORI poll that independently advised it came out with the very strong figure that 87% of adults felt that their child was safer on the road. Half of the adults polled said their child was cycling more after that. Those are the five main points.

As I said before, we came to the discussion quite recently. We have been consulting with our supporters. We represent 40,000 supporters and the CTC has 67,000 supporters. We do not claim to represent all cyclists. We set up a petition linked to the issue last Tuesday. We had 1,400 sign-ups by last night, and today, I have just heard, that has increased to 1,650. Of those, 70% are from Northern Ireland, so we have already 1,200 people from Northern Ireland petitioning against the Bill.

We have just handed out an additional paper. We asked people to put comments on the website, and some of those comments reflect the public attitude to the Bill.

The Chairperson:

I am mindful of the fact that that took over 10 minutes. I must ask Roger not to go over the same points. I will give you an opportunity to speak, Roger, but, unfortunately, you have found yourself last on the list.

Mr Roger Geffen (Cyclists' Touring Club/Sustrans):

I will avoid duplication. I thank the Committee for inviting us to give evidence. I will give some facts and figures to amplify the points that Steve has made.

Cycling is an enormously healthy activity. Cycling in mid-adulthood gives one a level of fitness equivalent to being 10 years younger and a life expectancy of about two years above the average. That is a huge health benefit. By contrast, cycling is not a particularly risky activity. That point has been made. A person is less likely to be killed in a mile of cycling than in a mile of walking. As has already been mentioned, cycling accounts for 6% of children's injuries, whereas pedestrian injuries count for something between 35% and 40% and those of vehicle occupants for another substantial proportion. The following question needs to be raised: on what basis are we trying to legislate for helmet use for cycling when no one would even dream of saying that we should be encouraged to use helmets for all the other things that also cause head injuries. We have to get things in proportion.

Thanks to those extra life-years that I mentioned, the health benefits of cycling outweigh the risks involved by 20:1. That estimate is endorsed by the UK Department for Transport. Based simply on that ratio, it has been shown that we cannot achieve a public health benefit from a helmet law if we have more than a tiny reduction in cycle use. Even if helmets were 100% effective at preventing cyclists' injuries — all injuries, not just head injuries — we could not afford to lose more than one unit of cycle use for every 20 units that remain. Therefore, a 4% reduction in cycle use would mean that we had a negative health impact, regardless of the benefits of helmets, and those benefits are contested. I am not going to go through that evidence now, but it will be in our full paper.

The point here is that the number of cyclist injuries is mercifully low — between zero and two cycle fatalities a year.

On that basis, a helmet law would cause far more extra deaths and ill health due to people not —

Mr Weir:

You said that there are zero to two fatalities a year. Are those the figures for Northern Ireland?

Mr Geffen:

Yes; I can give you the GB figures as well if you want. In Northern Ireland there have been between zero and two cyclist fatalities in each of the past few years. A helmet law would cause far more extra deaths due to people not cycling, and therefore a helmet law would cause far more damage than helmets could possibly help to prevent, regardless of the debate about their effectiveness. Therefore although we have full sympathy with the promoter of the Bill, we urge the Committee to reject the Bill because it would do far more harm than it could possibly hope to do good.

Mr Darren Boyle (Cyclists' Touring Club/Sustrans):

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Darren Boyle, and I am the project co-ordinator of the Da Young Fathers project, which is based in the city. We work with young dads aged 14 to 25 from the Derry, Strabane and Limavady areas to put young fathers on the agenda, get them more involved in the lives of their children and encourage them to take responsibility.

We have three services: an advocacy service, for obvious reasons, and another two services directly linked to it. We have a programmes service, which delivers between 45 and 50 programmes a year to young fathers. A big programme that we are to launch in April is a cycling programme, for which we have secured almost £15,000 between Sport NI, Derry City Council and the Western Health and Social Care Trust. We have also established a Handymen Social Economy Service, which involves recycling bikes and promoting a bike maintenance programme to pass on the skills that are no longer passed on from father to son.

The young fathers we work with will be directly affected by this legislation, because we have more than 120 young fathers involved, a high proportion of whom are under 18. Our key messages are not just about the financial pressures on them as young people: 44% of our young fathers claim job seeker's allowance, only 6% are in full-time employment and 11% claim disability living allowance; 92% drink alcohol, and 39% started drinking between the ages of 14 and 16. Fifty-eight per cent have no academic qualifications, 30% have been diagnosed with

mental-health issues, 30% have been treated for such issues and 30% have felt suicidal. Those percentages do not necessarily represent the same young people.

Those young people are so used to taking risks that the wearing of a helmet will simply not enter their psyche. Most of our fathers come from working-class or very disadvantaged backgrounds, and their experiences of, and attitudes to, the police are not what could be expected in a normal society. I hasten to add that we are not in a normal society, although we are getting closer to one. The young men that we deal with do not see our society as a normal one in which the police are acceptable, because 58% of them have been arrested, 39% have been convicted of an offence, 14% are involved in criminal proceedings and two are in jail.

Therefore even if the Bill was passed, our young fathers would not see cycling safety as a critical factor in their lives. They may understand that there are safety aspects to consider, but they do not have the money to purchase cycle helmets. They will do everything possible to provide for their children, but the additional expense of buying a helmet at £20 or £25 — the next witness will be able to tell you the exact cost — is far down their list of priorities. If wearing a helmet was made a condition of purchasing a bike, given the number of bikes that are passed on between families or from brothers to sisters, I question the likelihood of a helmet also being passed on. I am not sure that it would work.

The Chairperson:

I think that he has taken up some of your time, Derek, but we will see how you go.

Mr Patterson:

One of the interesting things for Derek is how important his cycle programme will be in working with those young people.

Mr Derek Armstrong (Cyclists' Touring Club/Sustrans):

Thank you for this opportunity. My name is Derek Armstrong, and I run a bicycle retail business in Belfast called Bike Dock; we are one of the largest bike shops in Ireland. I want to begin by saying that I am not against the principle of using helmets; I am very much in favour of it. I spend a great deal of time and money on promoting safe cycling, and that includes the use of

helmets.

I am here today because I have a real concern that if cycling helmets are made compulsory in Northern Ireland, between 20% and 40% of my bike sales would disappear overnight. That would result in immediate redundancies and, for some smaller retailers, closing down altogether. At a time when retail viability is a growing problem, that would be another burden on society. In New Zealand, when the law was introduced in 1994, cycle trips dropped by 26% and continued to fall until 2006, when they had dropped to 51% below pre-law levels. That would be devastating for Northern Ireland, which has one of the poorest cycling cultures in the world.

Compulsory helmet use would also create a stigma suggesting that all — not just some — cycling activities are more dangerous than they really are. Enforcement practicalities and costs would make it unworkable. It would put pressure on community policing in Northern Ireland, because community police officers would be involved in pulling people into line.

I have a cycle-hire department that services tourists from countries all over the world that do not have cycle-helmet legislation. If those tourists were told that they had to wear a helmet, they would be deterred from coming, and that would be a serious blow to tourism, North and South. Tourists from Holland arriving in Dublin for a cycle touring holiday around Ireland might be unaware that they were breaking the law when they crossed the border. Prosecution of such tourists would mean very bad international public relations, and that would spread like wildfire.

Belfast is planning to install a public bike scheme similar to those in Dublin and Paris. In the first year of that scheme, Dublin experienced an uptake four times greater than expected and has deemed the scheme a positive and significant success for tourism and local businesses alike. There are plans to expand that facility. Compulsory helmet legislation here would make that newly planned scheme a non-starter.

There are fewer women cyclists than men in Northern Ireland, but their numbers are growing steadily. Many women do not wear helmets for reasons of vanity; helmet hair is not very attractive. The Bikedock Belles, a ladies' cycling group, has been working hard for years to attract ladies to cycling. Most of that hard work would be wasted, and their future efforts would

be in vain. On a point of information, cycle helmets are already VAT-free.

In summary, I strongly believe that helmet use in a healthy cycling society should continue to be voluntary and not made compulsory. Thank you for your time.

The Chairperson:

Thank you very much; we got through that rightly. I will make a few quick points before opening it up for members to ask questions. The report referred to the negative side of enforcement. Will you clarify that point?

Mr Patterson:

The Cochrane report, which referred to one area in rural Georgia —

The Chairperson:

It is an example.

Mr Patterson:

It states that laws to make helmet wearing compulsory are ignored unless the police enforce them by impounding children's bicycles. Only with that level of enforcement does compliance become a reality.

Mr Geffen:

The question was whether helmet laws necessarily reduce cycle use: the answer is that enforced helmet laws necessarily do. Cycle use remains depressed in places such as New Zealand and the state of Victoria, which issued 19,200 bicycle notices in the first year of the law alone. In places where enforcement has lapsed, cycle use has recovered, but that is because the people who do not wear helmets come back onto the streets. There is a relationship between a helmet law reducing cycle use and whether it is enforced; if it is enforced, it will reduce cycle use.

The Chairperson:

Therefore the drop in use was dramatic.

Mr Geffen:

Yes; certainly in the first years of a law when it is enforced rigorously, although if enforcement lapses cycle use might recover. However, in Canada, although cycle use has recovered in states that have helmet laws, the states with no helmet laws have seen a 30% increase, compared with just about recovering in places that have helmet laws, all of which begs the question: what would cycle use have been in states that have helmet laws if those laws had not been passed? Sorry, that was rather convoluted. I hope that it makes sense.

Mr D Armstrong:

Mr Ramsey said that the DOE's road safety department would be in charge of promoting the policy, with the police enforcing it. There would then be an issue with the priorities given to the ever-diminishing resources of the road safety department, and the Committee will be aware of that as much as us. What it does with its limited resources would have to be considered; there must be alternatives to enforcing compulsory helmet wear.

The Chairperson:

Derek, what percentage of people buy a helmet along with a bicycle?

Mr D Armstrong:

Our figures for helmet sales in the past 12 months show that 51% of people who bought a bike bought a helmet with it; three years ago, the figure was 32%, so it is improving all the time. Year-on-year bike sales, however, have gone up by 40%, which shows that cycle culture here is improving. Statistics show that we are in the top five in the world for bike ownership but in the lowest six for usage. We buy bikes only to put them in the garage and leave them there.

The Chairperson:

There are many garages full of bikes. It is important to encourage people who buy a bicycle to buy a helmet too. We could put pressure on manufacturers to include the cost of a helmet in the price, and, as I said in the Chamber, that is the road that I would like to go down.

Mr D Armstrong:

Dealing with customers every day, I get the feeling that obliging the average customer to take a

helmet with a bike would make him feel that he was being forced to do something. He would probably feel that although he was getting something for nothing it would really be costing him money, because, in life, nothing is free.

The Chairperson:

Responsible adults should be able to make that decision for themselves, but let us consider children. I would support that element.

Mr D Armstrong:

I work very closely with Steven, and we tackle the problem by sending two people to schools; indeed, this week, we sent them on two days. I do not charge anything for two of my staff to go into a school for a day to educate kids on safe cycling to school, how to look after their bikes and the use of a helmet, all of which is extremely important. Even though he had a very bad experience with one school, Steven will tell you that, on average, after we have been to a school, the use of cycle helmets increases, as does the use of bikes to get to school. It is a very worthwhile programme. Does that answer your question?

The Chairperson:

What is the price range for helmets?

Mr D Armstrong:

All helmets must reach a certain standard of quality. Children's cycling helmets cost just under £20. The ceiling for an adult helmet is whatever one wants to pay, but the average is about £30.

The Chairperson:

I do not think that there are any Lance Armstrongs on the Committee. *[Laughter.]* However, if there are, I stand corrected.

Mr Weir:

The last question was one of the two that I wanted to ask. I am not a cyclist, but we talked about the average price of helmets. Derek, you are dealing with your shop, but perhaps Steven or one of the others could answer from a statistical point of view. Do you have any idea of the total

volume of bicycles that are sold in Northern Ireland each year?

Mr Patterson:

I do not have a clue; perhaps the traders would know.

Mr D Armstrong:

That is difficult. We are the largest retailers and we sell 5,000 plus units a year. The average shop would probably sell between 500 and 1,000 units a year.

Mr Weir:

What is your market share each year?

Mr D Armstrong:

I do not really know.

Mr Weir:

You may not have exact figures, but I am trying to get a ballpark figure of whether 50,000 or 100,000 bicycles are sold here each year. What would be the total sold each year?

Mr D Armstrong:

We probably have 30% to 35% of the market share.

Mr Weir:

Therefore we are probably talking about 15,000 units being sold here each year.

Mr D Armstrong:

Yes; that would be a ballpark figure.

Mr Weir:

I appreciate that I was asking you to pluck a figure from the air. I was just trying to get — I was going to say a handle, but that might be misconstrued. Of the 5,000 that you sell — and this follows on to the issue of helmets, and you mentioned that children's helmets cost about £20 on

average and adult helmets cost £30 on average — what would be the rough breakdown of your sales between children's bikes that are sold to families of under-16s and adult bikes?

Mr D Armstrong:

If you are classifying children's bikes, they stop when a child reaches the age of 10. Once a child turns 11, they move on to an adult-sized bike with a very small frame, and the frame sizes go up —

Mr Weir:

Presumably, you would have parents buying bikes for teenage children. I appreciate that they will be buying an adult bike, but, and this might be very unscientific, can you give the Committee a rough estimate of how many of those 5,000 are for children —

Mr D Armstrong:

Aged 16 and under?

Mr Weir:

Yes, and how many would also be for adults?

Mr D Armstrong:

You are putting me on the spot, but, at a guess, 30% to 35% would be for kids. The thing to remember about children's bikes is that an adult buys a bicycle to last for a long time, whereas a bike for a three-year-old lasts only for two years before they have to get another one. There are a lot of repeat sales in children's bikes.

Mr Dallat:

It has been a long debate. Steven, there is no halfway house for you; you are totally against the Bill. Am I correct?

Mr Patterson:

I am totally against the compulsion aspect; I am not against cycling helmets, although the two issues sometimes get blurred.

Mr Dallat:

It is important to clear that up. Are you the chief executive of Sustrans?

Mr Patterson:

I am the Northern Ireland director.

Mr Dallat:

OK. We have to keep these things right. How many members —

Mr Patterson:

I am not on the salary of a chief executive. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Dallat:

How many members do you represent?

Mr Patterson:

We have 40,000 members across the UK.

Mr Dallat:

That is a lot. Are those 40,000 members totally against any law that would make cycling helmets compulsory?

Mr Patterson:

I would not say that all 40,000 members are, but I would say —

Mr Dallat:

That is important.

Mr Patterson:

Sorry, if I could just finish. I anticipate that a very significant majority of them would be against it.

Mr Dallat:

It is important to clarify that, because you are giving evidence to a Committee, and we must assume that your evidence is rock solid. We have established that not all the 40,000-odd members of Sustrans are against the Bill. If I sound harsh it is because you were quite robust. You were highly critical of the sponsor of the Bill, and you said that you had not been given enough notice. You had a whole series of complaints.

Mr Armstrong, you are from the commercial sector and your primary interest in this is the sales of your bicycles and the vanity of women.

Mr D Armstrong:

I am merely repeating what they tell me.

Mr Dallat:

I am trying to take in something serious for the future. I am sure, Chairman, that you are hopeful of getting back into the Assembly, as I am, and want to bring something forward from this morning's session that might bring some comfort to Michelle and Orlaith, who very bravely came here with no commercial interest and no concern for the vanity of women. Nor, indeed, do they claim to represent 40,000 people, which we have established you do not. On balance, we want to be sure that we get something valuable out of this. That is why the Committee does outreach work and has come to Derry to listen to people's view. However, it worries me a wee bit when commercial interests get roped into evidence sessions, as I do not think that that was helpful.

Darren, you mentioned young fathers and social deprivation. I am proud to come from that background. When I was a child, I had an old bicycle that was down to the canvas. I would have been grateful if somebody had recognised that.

In Newtownabbey you had 106 people, 103 of whom turned up with helmets. I can picture the scene. Those people came from affluent backgrounds and had top-of-the-range bicycles, supplied by Derek, and good headgear; the whole works. Then, we have Darren's group, coming from a background in which there are no helmets. Do you not think that the Assembly might have some

responsibility to protect the skulls of the children from the background that you are talking about? Do you accept that, until now, education might not have been the most powerful factor in getting children from socially deprived backgrounds to wear helmets?

Mr Boyle:

If I can just clarify, we are starting a programme and the bikes have, coincidentally, been supplied by Derek. That went out to tender, and he came in as the best. We are going to have 20 bikes and 10 kids' trailers, and the kids will have helmets supplied.

Yesterday, I was delivering child protection training to 12 young fathers. I asked them what they thought about the Bill. They said "Yeah, yeah, yeah, we understand it, but that's mad, that's crazy, because you're never going to get me to wear a helmet." I said that, as part of our programme, they would have to wear a helmet, and they said that that was fine because it was the Young Fathers project that was behind it. When we take them out on a programme as part of a project, they are more likely to buy into it. If things are imposed on that client group, they are much less likely to do it of their own volition. If they do not wear helmets when they are outside our influence, that is when they are likely to come to the attention of the police. That is when their experiences and attitudes towards the police will lead to a very negative outcome for them and, from our perspective, their children. It is about educating them in the benefits and safety aspects of wearing a helmet.

Mr Patterson:

I want to make a point about working in schools in socially deprived communities, as the Bill would disproportionately affect such communities. That is the only point that we are making on that. There are important alternatives, and we have practical ideas.

Last year, we worked with a school in the Shankill area, and we are now working with a school in a housing estate in Andersonstown in west Belfast. There was a drastic difference in the ownership and quality of bicycles in the schools in the Shankill area and in west Belfast from that in the more affluent schools. We engage with children in socially excluded schools; they are not engaged in cycle training, cycle proficiency or road safety programmes. The children are riding round on bicycles that are, generally, of a lesser quality and with dodgy brakes, etc, and

they are not engaged in cycle proficiency schemes. They get no support.

We went into Edenbrooke Primary School along with Belfast City Council and offered the children recycled bikes. However, as a condition of receiving that bike, they had to undergo on-road cycle training. We had a similar situation in west Belfast that involved playground-based activities. If I am wrong, I apologise, but I understand that if children do not have a helmet they cannot take part in the cycle proficiency scheme. Therefore we supply helmets; we are inclusive in our approach to children. Ultimately, however, whether they come to school with or without a helmet is the choice of their parents.

We recognise that there are different issues in different sectors of society. Cycling safety is not just about preventing people falling off their bike; it is about the wider health benefits. The teenage girls that we talked about in New Zealand, where there has been a dramatic fall-off, are the hardest to reach to encourage physical activity, and if they are worried about their vanity and their gelled hair, etc, that would be another barrier to getting them to cycle.

We work with children, we are not anti-helmet; in fact, we supply helmets for the playground-based activities. We also offer on-road cycle training, which builds on the good DOE scheme that teaches basic bike-handling skills in the playground. However, the DOE scheme does not teach children how to cycle in traffic. If children do the cycle proficiency training, what does that qualify them to do? Does it qualify them to cycle to school? If they have not trained on roads and dealt with traffic, there is a major gap.

As you know, Minister Poots will have a report at the end of March on the future of the road safety officer service. We have been working on that report with him, and we have corresponded with the Committee. We think that he will be very favourable to changing the cycling proficiency model in Northern Ireland to develop it from building on the playground-based bike-handling skills to include the on-road element. With limited DOE resources, such investment must be the way to go. That also includes general road-safety messages.

Mr Dallat:

Chairperson, I am conscious that I have used up far too much of your time. However, I want to

respond quickly to a point made by Darren, which was that a law might alienate people from socially deprived backgrounds. I do not accept that at all; my experience has been the opposite. Where there are good laws, and where young people recognise them as good laws, the opposite happens. You get respect. With that, I am finished.

Mr W Clarke:

I disagree. There is an impact on people in socially deprived areas: they can hardly afford the bike, never mind the helmet. In the working-class areas that I am involved in, large families find it difficult to provide helmets. I also disagree with John about the business input: it is very valuable. After all, we have to work with the industry.

Have you a breakdown of the number of children's helmets sold? Do 51% buy helmets?

Mr D Armstrong:

For every adult helmet sold, we sell two children's helmets.

Mr W Clarke:

Do you see a subsidy as being necessary for neighbourhood renewal areas, or should there even be a general subsidy for helmets for children? Is that economic driver required?

Mr Boyle:

It would be a factor in assisting, but attitudes to putting on a helmet still need to change. The big factor is to try to encourage young men and young mums to put on their helmets so that they are seen to be a good, positive role model for their child. It is not only about the safety of the child but about them being safe. That is the big barrier that we have to try to overcome. Parents want to keep their children safe, but my understanding of the Bill is that it would make it compulsory for everybody to wear a helmet. I do not want to get drawn into the enforcement aspect, but if the Bill becomes law and the police come into an area and see children on a bike without a helmet, it becomes a bit of craic for the children. Let us not forget about that: it is a bit of craic to get a chase. A child is quicker on a bike than when running, and running around Galliagh here in Derry on a bike is good craic.

Mr Geffen:

I will briefly add something on the social exclusion point. Children in the lowest 20% of the population in social deprivation terms are five times more likely to be injured on the roads — full stop. If police officers went into those areas and said, particularly to the young teenagers, that they should be wearing helmets, those teenagers would ask the police why they are not doing something about the speeding drivers in that neighbourhood. We are fully in favour of more road traffic policing, but it really needs to be targeted at the source of the problem rather than the symptoms.

Mr Ross:

I was not going to speak, but, after listening to John Dallat, I had to. From my current role and previously, when I worked as a researcher for Sammy Wilson, I know that some of the work that Sustrans does is very good, such as the Safe Routes to School project and all that sort of stuff. John said that you are not representative of your 40,000 members. There is no organisation anywhere in the world that has uniformity of opinion. It is ludicrous for John to have accused you of not speaking for 40,000 members. You are an organisation, and you are speaking on behalf of that organisation. I know for a fact that some SDLP members are opposed to this legislation. There is not uniformity in any grouping.

John also said that Derek's contribution was just about how much money he was making. That was grossly unfair. We want to see more people cycling for the health benefits and everything else. If fewer people are buying bicycles and cycling, it is totally relevant to what we are discussing today. I dissociate myself from John's comments.

I want to make two points, and I do not want huge answers. After the initial debate, I was contacted by around 50 different individuals who are cyclists. I am quite sure that it was the same for other members of the Committee. Almost all are opposed to the legislation and the compulsory wearing of helmets. If the people who cycle day in, day out for sport or recreation do not believe that the legislation is necessary because they do not believe that there is any inherent danger, that tells me an awful lot. If I were involved in an activity and I identified a risk, and if there were legislation to make that activity safer for me and other people who do that activity, I

would be the first to say that that should be looked at. The fact that almost nobody who cycles or who is in a cycling organisation is saying that speaks volumes.

The second issue is probably more political. The Assembly cannot take the role of having to legislate for every aspect of people's lives. We have to start trying to promote the idea of individual or parental responsibility. Whether that be through cycling proficiency tests in schools and teaching children, through having an overall road safety strategy, through TV commercials or through working with the community and voluntary sector, we have to try to promote the idea of individual responsibility — if folks are involved in an activity, they should be responsible for themselves and their safety. That is more the route that we should go down. I am not expecting a response. I just wanted to make those comments after listening to John.

Mr Patterson:

I appreciate that. We could have come here with four cycling campaigners, but we think that this issue is wider than just cyclists because it also affects potential cyclists. On John's point, I just want to clarify that everyone in this room, including Pat Ramsey, is interested in cyclist safety, and I thought that I had made it perfectly clear that we respect where Pat is coming from. The point that I made about not being consulted is a fact. The reason that I brought that up was simply to point out that we have come to this discussion late in the game and have, therefore, had only a couple of weeks to engage with our supporters. The petition with 1,600 signatures, 70% of which are from Northern Ireland, is the start, and we will keep the Committee informed. We asked for and received comments on the website, and those were very balanced. We would like to continue to engage with this Committee and its successor.

The Chairperson:

Thank God that I get the final say. However, Mr Ross summed up fairly well what I wanted to say. I want to dissociate myself from what was said, and it is pity that Mr Dallat is out of the room. I think that people from right across the board are contributing to the discussion on the legislation, and we want to hear about the prices and everything else to do with the business. I congratulate Cyclists' Touring Club and Sustrans on that work. Good luck with it.

Steven, the reason that I asked you about enforcement — Mr Clarke alluded to it — is that we

know that that would affect those in lower social-class areas. You are dealing with that day and daily, and we want to get totally away from that. I think that the legislation will provide the scope for police to go into those areas, and we have serious problems with that. I do not want to make a broader political issue out of this, but there are definitely problems with the legislation.

Like I say, Steven, I am delighted that you brought people from right across the board to make presentations here. We now have a clear indication and idea of exactly what is going on in the industry and of what people are genuinely trying to do on a daily basis. As Mr Ross said, I do not think that we need to legislate on every single issue, and this is one such issue. There needs to be more awareness, education and programmes on road safety and strategies. That is the way to go.

Mr Patterson:

I just want to make one comment and ask one question. If the successor Committee wants to come and see our work on the ground in socially deprived areas, we would be very happy to facilitate that very early in the next mandate.

I want to ask a question about the process from this point. Obviously, the Committee has another meeting or two, but where do you think that we are going with this?

The Chairperson:

Obviously, we will publish a Committee report when we are finished.

The Committee Clerk:

The Committee report will be based on a compilation of the evidence that we have heard today and the other oral and written evidence that we received. That report will go in front of members at the Committee's final meeting on 23 March. It will be up to members, but I doubt that there will be time for any opinions or recommendations on or amendments to the Bill.

Mr Weir:

There will be no further legislative stages, because the Bill will fall on 24 March.

Mr Patterson:

If the process is started again in the new mandate, will it have to start from scratch?

The Chairperson:

Yes.

Mr Patterson:

Thank you for qualifying that and thank you for your time.