Question 1 - What more can be done to encourage people to change their travelling habits and walk and cycle more?

Make walking and cycling safer and more pleasant.

The biggest obstacle for cycling is the perception of danger - in Aberdeen this perception is supported by recent statistics which document a significant rise of reported casualties amongst cyclists.

Concrete steps to take include:

(1) Investment in pedestrian and cycle infrastructure

(2) Reducing traffic volumes and speeds

(3) Provide better legal protection at national and local levels - such as a minimum distance for automobilists overtaking cyclists, or enforcing speed limits (in Aberdeen, Police admit that they do not enforce the existing 20mph speed limits - with the adverse effect of educating automobilists that it is safe to ignore traffic regulations)

Question 2 - Is enough progress being made in developing and delivering improvements in the uptake of walking and cycling?

Obviously not, otherwise the walking and cycling levels would not be so low. In and around Aberdeen, all major infrastructure projects are still centred around the use of automobiles (Berryden Corridor, Third Don Crossing, and the AWPR). It is curious that Aberdeen seems to get away with a project such as the Third Don Crossing in spite of the fact that this has been criticised by the reporter from the Scottish Executive. Effectively, the pressure in Aberdeen to leave the cycle for a car is relentless, and judging by the above mentioned plans for Aberdeen, this is not going to change for decades to come.

Question 3 - If not, what are the barriers to progress? (for example, lack of policy development, lack of political leadership, lack of funding/investment, the lack of prominence given to active travel in transport policy development, project planning and construction etc.)

Even in Aberdeen, the existing policies are not the main problem - in fact, Aberdeen's Local Transport Strategy does mention walking and cycling as a priority. The problem is the complete disconnect between policy documents and the ground reality - with the consequence, that Aberdeen keeps missing by a long way every one of its targets for modal change. Many intersections and roundabouts in Aberdeen have no pedestrian accommodation. The few 'bike lanes' that do exist in Aberdeen are typically not mandatory at most times (hence used as parking) and many of them are useless as all they do is leading from one horrible roundabout to another horrible roundabout. The initiative to encourage walking and cycling to school is considered by many parents as pure cynicism, putting the lives of their children at risk.

The Aberdeen City Council manages somehow to maintain the illusion that the City is supportive of walking and cycling (which has recently led a local newspaper to state in an unsigned editorial that too much money is spent on cycling, at the expense of social services) - when in reality the small budgets allocated to walking and cycling come mostly from the Scottish Government, NESTRANS or SUSTRANS. Anecdotal evidence consistently suggests that cyclists moving to Aberdeen from other cities or countries give up urban cycling.
Question 4 - Why do walking and cycling policies set out in national, regional and local transport plans not result in a greater modal share for walking and cycling?

As explained above, because they don’t make it beyond wishful thinking, due to the absence of proper budgets and political leadership which would enforce existing policies in a meaningful way.

Question 5 - What further action is required by the Scottish Government, local authorities and other bodies to ensure that significant progress is made in the development and implementation of walking and cycling, particularly if transport is to make a greater and more meaningful contribution to the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions?

Besides the points made under Question 1, there is one further signal sent to cyclists and pedestrians which suggests that their lives do not count, and that is the leniency towards automobilists who do kill a cyclist or pedestrian, corollary of a legal system that punishes the offence without regard for its consequences, no matter how catastrophic. As a result, typical sentences in Britain involve a small fine, possibly some community service and the loss of the driver's license for a short while, usually for less than two years. Worse, within this legal framework, killing a cyclist or pedestrian is not necessarily qualified as dangerous driving even in cases where it is established that the cyclist was not at fault. Custodial sentences are given only in extreme cases - and while it is indeed debatable whether they serve a purpose from a cycling safety perspective, it would seem obvious that causing permanent loss of life should normally result in the permanent loss of the driver's license. The reality is that even in conjunction with the most aggravating circumstances – drink driving, driving without insurance, repeat offences – causing death will not lead to a permanent loss of the driver's license.

Like in many other cities, in Aberdeen, the only traffic fatalities are pedestrians and cyclists, and they are nearly always killed by a motorised vehicle. Since these incidents tend to make the headlines, they send the unfortunate signal that our legal system sides with the perpetrators and not the victims.

Question 6 - What can Scotland learn from good practice/successful implementation in other countries?

The first thing to acknowledge is just how far behind Scotland is with respect to some other European countries, and even with respect to England, where at least a handful of cities have a cycling culture. Second, a cycling culture develops as a result of consistent investment in the appropriate infrastructure. Taking a slightly broader perspective, successful modal shift will be the result of an integrated approach with provisions for walking, cycling and public transportation. The percentage of cycling as part of the traffic in Groningen, Europe’s leader in this respect, is currently 40 percent - which demonstrates how big the potential demand for cycling is, if the circumstances are right. In that respect, being so far behind does have one advantage: one can find by now in Europe all the experience and expertise required for the successful planning of pedestrian zones, bicycle friendly infrastructure and integrated public transportation - no need to reinvent the wheel. All it takes is political initiative.