

INFRASTRUCTURE FOR ACTIVE TRAVEL

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INTRODUCTION

Poor public health resulting from lack of exercise is a major problem. Active travel, particularly walking and cycling, is known to be the single most effective solution to ill health in UK cities. Unfortunately, it has been engineered out of daily life. As experience in the Netherlands has shown, turning the situation around requires a long-term, strategic effort.

streets and clean air, and government doubled down on the opportunity with the accelerated launch of a £2bn active travel programme, including emergency funding of £225m to create pop-up cycle lanes, wider pavements, and safer junctions. Regrettably, traffic levels in many cities have now returned to pre-covid-19 levels. Furthermore, some of the temporary active travel schemes hastily introduced during lockdown, without proper consultation, have not been well received. The local politics associated with urban travel is complex and car use is embedded in many people's lives. Criticism of active travel has a high profile in parts of the media, which threatens the reputation of the wider active travel programme.

£6.4BN

annual avoidable healthcare costs of inactivity in **Manchester**

lack of exercise contributes to

1 IN 6

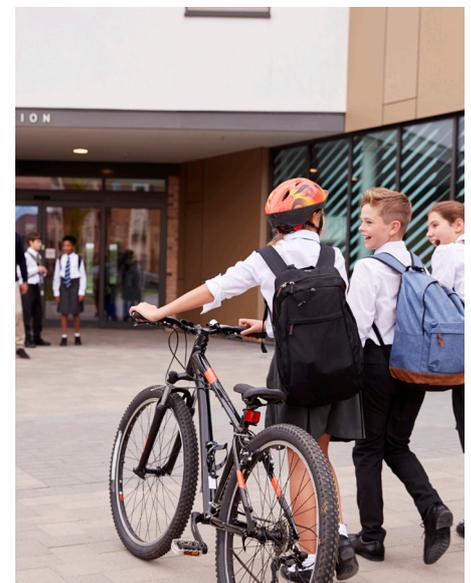
deaths

The momentum behind active travel, which includes use of public transport, has been building for a while. It is a key transport policy plank in cities such as London and Manchester as well as Scotland and Wales, where legislation was passed in 2013 to promote active travel. Existing high-profile schemes including the Mini-Holland projects in London have generated an evidence base for active travel investment. But high levels of congestion, noise and air pollution on streets are a huge turn-off for pedestrians and cyclists. Fixing problems associated with high volumes of traffic and unwelcoming streets is an important step in promoting active travel to deliver healthier cities.

Covid-19 turned out to be an unexpected ally of active transport. The first lockdown gave city residents an opportunity to experience traffic-free

The first lockdown gave us a vision of a low-traffic future, with walking and cycling gaining prominence. That promise could soon become a reality with accelerated investment in the infrastructure required for active travel, to engineer daily exercise back into our lives.

However, this will not mean the premature end of such initiatives. The government's Gear Change policy will tie future funding of road investment to active travel targets and require all local authorities to consider pedestrians and cyclists in their road planning. New schemes will have to investigate impacts





United Kingdom



11% of adults cycle once a week

The Netherlands



16% of road network comprises cycling paths

30% of all trips under 7.5km are cycled

WHAT IS ACTIVE TRAVEL?

Active travel describes a set of transport policies that give greater emphasis to the needs of pedestrians and cyclists over motorists. The aim is to make it easier to walk, ride or work remotely rather than travel by car. Active travel infrastructure includes segregated bike lanes, pavement extensions, controlled junctions, traffic filters and road calming. The best active travel schemes form part of a well-designed public realm that creates liveable neighbourhoods. Other measures designed specifically to support and encourage the uptake of cycling include investment in digital maps, better wayfinding and secure bike parking, all of which can make cycling more attractive for a wider range of people.

on the wider neighbourhood, and high-quality design, combined with effective consultation, will be needed to secure buy-in and address the concerns of all street users.

With a second tranche of the government's Emergency Active Travel funding due to be launched shortly, it is vital not only that local authorities learn the lessons of the first phase, but also that future plans are more joined up so as to make a real difference to street users.

THE ACTIVE TRAVEL APPROACH

Healthy Streets is an initiative first developed by Transport for London (TfL) in 2014. It is now embedded in the London Plan, and can be best used to describe the active travel approach. It uses 10 indicators, such as clean air, noise level, the ease of crossing, availability of shade and shelter and things to see and do, to understand what makes streets appealing, healthy and inclusive. While not a one-size-fits-all, it offers a consistent methodology and helps deliver a much-improved local experience. This has been evidenced by the major transport schemes such as Archway, Highbury, and Old Street.



Catching up with the best

European cities such as Amsterdam and Copenhagen have long-established active travel strategies, but experience elsewhere shows it is possible to catch up. Portland, Oregon, in the US, for example has seen a 20% reduction in car traffic since it started investing in provision for bikes in the 1990s, a change that has coincided with Portland's regeneration as a technology hub.

Recent low-traffic neighbourhood (LTN) projects in Lee Green, which falls within the London Boroughs of Lewisham and Greenwich, have been heavily criticised for not addressing boundary issues. Manchester's Bee Network strategy also aligns neatly with efforts to reduce traffic on residential roads, which is what led to the development of the LTN idea. The exponential growth in use of satnav in the past 10-15 years has resulted in traffic diverting from already congested main roads, creating "rat runs" on previously quiet residential streets. In many neighbourhoods, LTN campaigns are as much about reclaiming residential streets from the traffic that has grown in the past decade as they are about reallocating road space away from cars to pedestrians and cyclists.



THE BUSINESS CASE FOR ACTIVE TRAVEL

Improved health outcomes, including air quality, are the main driver behind active travel policies. Communities exposed to the worst quality air typically have a lower level of car ownership and are paying the price for the mobility of the others. Typically, schemes are meant to change the behaviour of car users and support existing cyclists and pedestrians, providing them with direct health and well-being benefits. At the same time, environment for a wider community is improved. There are also broader social and economic drivers, highlighted by the Healthy Streets strategy and accentuated by the Government's Gear Change policy. They include climate change, congestion, road safety and social and economic inequality.

Clarity of the benefits is essential for the schemes to be successful, especially among local residents, whose daily lives might be negatively affected by changes to road layouts or loss of parking. Findings from initiatives such as Mini-Hollands in London confirm that positive outcomes are compelling from both environmental and economic

point of view. Local businesses benefit from higher sales because of the extra journeys by pedestrians and cyclists. Traffic on local roads falls by about 50%, not because of the displacement to local neighbourhoods, but as a result of "evaporation" as more people choose to walk or cycle for short journeys. The Walthamstow Village Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN) is widely quoted as a scheme that reduced traffic levels and speeds on residential roads, and which resulted in only marginal traffic increases outside its boundary.

Over time, the use of active travel infrastructure gradually increases, and local support grows. The benefit/cost ratio is 13:1, which is four times higher than for most road schemes.

£22BN
annual social cost of
40,000
premature deaths caused
by poor air quality



ACTIVE TRAVEL POLICIES – WHAT IS BEING PROPOSED?

Active travel is largely a local authority issue, which means that there is a degree of variation in policies and prioritisation, for example the London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea has a much less extensive active travel network compared to other Inner London Boroughs. The Government’s Gear Change policy launched in July 2020 aims to kick-start a more consistent approach to active travel development. Importantly, the policy places active travel at the heart of all transport planning and makes compliance with it a prerequisite of any future scheme funding. Gear Change has four main pillars:



Better streets



Active travel at the heart of policy-making



Empowered local authorities



Enable and protect cyclists

Better streets. A much more proactive approach to the rebalancing of priorities between cars and other street users, exemplified by the commitment to fund only segregated bike lanes on busy roads. Painted bike lanes will no longer be funded, meaning that more road space will be reallocated to bikes and pedestrians.

Active travel at the heart of policy-making. In addition to a sixfold increase in funding, a new body, Active Travel England (ATE), will be established as a statutory consultee for local plans and transport schemes. Future transport investment business cases will take account of benefits to cyclists and pedestrians.

Empowered local authorities. With the long-term funding settlement, the support of ATE and the transfer of traffic management powers, local authorities will be held accountable by having their transport investment funding allocated against active travel performance.

Enable and protect cyclists. This strand includes the eye-catching policy of GPs prescribing cycling on the NHS as well as a much-expanded training and support package. Changes to the Highway Code will also provide greater protection to pedestrians and cyclists.

Many of the changes embedded in the strategy, such as long-term funding or devolved powers, reflect the priorities of authorities such as TfL and Transport for Greater Manchester. For once, it appears that the interests of central government and devolved regional administrations are properly aligned.

The agenda around active travel is ambitious and the lessons from the first lockdown can help local authorities make the best use of allocated funding:

- Ensure that communities that will be affected are consulted, support the scheme, and understand the impacts. Some of the LTN schemes implemented using the emergency funding left residents feeling excluded.
- Make sure the schemes are developed coherently and are given enough time to bed in.
- Avoid rushed implementation – if executed poorly, it may lead to the need for rapid withdrawal and cause confusion.
- Secure an additional support to be able to make the best use of the time-limited funding available.
- Build the specialist design resource capability required to deliver Dutch-quality active travel infrastructure.

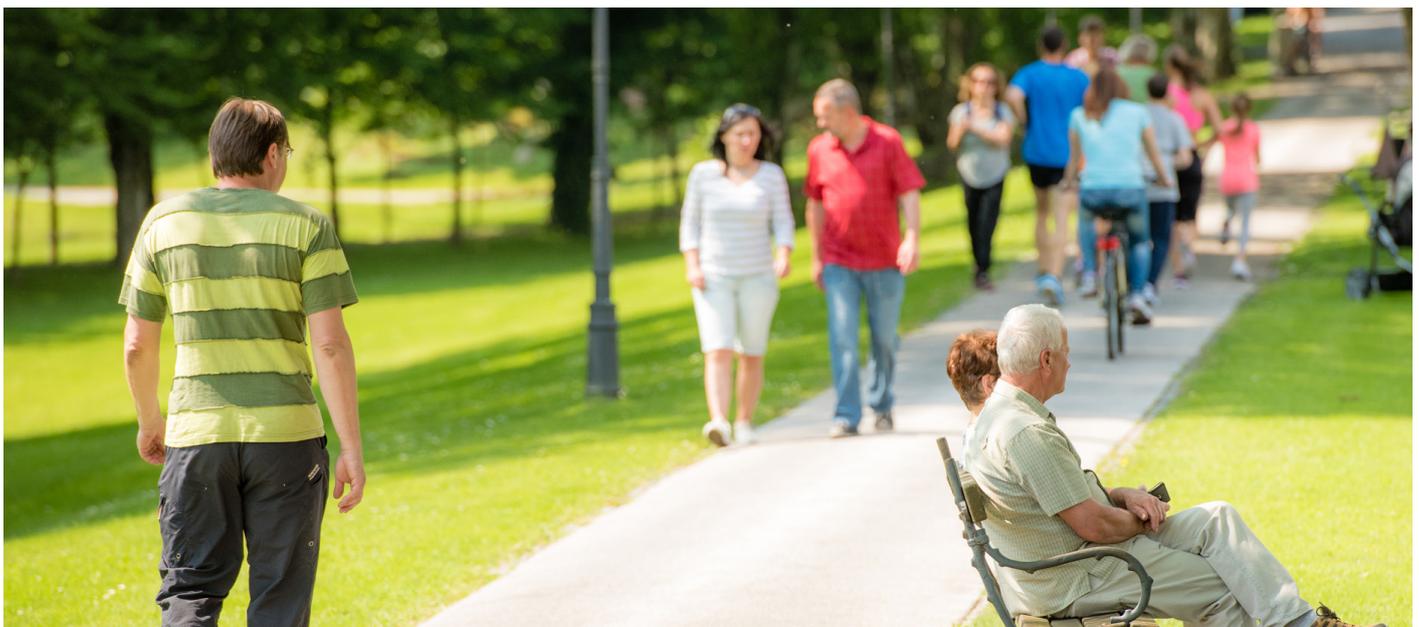
Mixed results coming from the first tranche of emergency active travel investments highlight the importance of high-quality design and consultation work. Local authorities that perform well in these areas are likely to secure more funding and to be able to deliver more ambitious plans on behalf of their citizens.

CONCLUSIONS

As traffic levels return to pre-pandemic levels, it is increasingly clear that current patterns of road use are unsustainable. However, interventions need to be carefully planned on a large-area basis and supported by proactive consultation, so that some of the challenges illustrated by the case studies (incomplete realisation of the investment benefits, lack of local community engagement) can be avoided.

With the launch of a well-funded £2bn active travel strategy, the UK is finally in a good position to start to make progress in this critical area of health and wellbeing. The new design guidance, LTN 1/20, clearly sets out improved design expectations and the newly established Active Travel England will have a crucial role to play as an Ofsted-type body to assure the quality of active travel proposals.

Prime minister Boris Johnson is personally invested in creating a UK cycling revolution but acutely aware of the need to navigate negative tabloid headlines. Change will require political will at a local level, which is best supported through a consistent, well-funded implementation plan. Looking forward, generous funding in 2021 ahead of a comprehensive spending settlement will be essential to maintain the momentum on the journey to “go Dutch”.



Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Keri Stewart and Matt Kitching of Arcadis and Desmond Bradley of ScotRail for their contributions to this article.



CASE STUDY: STATION TRAVEL PLANNING

Single occupancy car trips to railway stations have been a longstanding issue limiting the ability of Abellio ScotRail to implement Transport Scotland's Places for Everyone Strategy. Arcadis was commissioned to undertake a review of 18 station travel plans aimed at increasing sustainable travel to the rail network and reducing dependence on single-occupancy car journeys. The studies involved detailed site audits identifying opportunities and barriers to last-mile trips, as well as extensive stakeholder and user engagement, including the use of on-line surveys.

The study revealed that, although ScotRail has made a significant investment in improving the quality and quantity of bike parking at stations, the levels of take up of these new facilities varied between locations. A lack of joined-up and segregated cycle routes, caused for example by land ownership issues or exacerbated by local topography, was identified as the main barrier to increased cycling and walking to the station.

Arcadis updated STPs to include a range of improvements that emphasized the

need for an integrated approach to active travel planning. While isolated investments by individual organisations are a positive step forward, they rely on complementary programmes by partners such as the local authority.

The STP programme has expanded active travel knowledge base, highlighted the complex factors influencing active travel choices, analysed the reasons for car journeys being made and how to effect change. By doing so, it improved an understanding of the drivers behind a successful investment.



CASE STUDY: BOWES AREA LOW-TRAFFIC NEIGHBOURHOOD

The 2012 go-ahead of a journey time improvement scheme on the neighbouring North Circular Road displaced trunk road traffic onto residential roads near Bowes Park, leading to an increase in NO2 levels in local schools beyond the WHO guidelines. With support from a Better Streets campaign group, residents prepared initial suggestions for improvements. These were further developed by Enfield Council as part of its Cycle Enfield strategy and approved in Summer 2019. As a result, The Bowes Area LTN has recently been introduced as a trial scheme supported by emergency active travel funding.

While the proposals have been supported by a campaign by the local MP and a perception survey, wider consultation is being run in parallel with the trial. This is because in practice securing engagement is challenging, and the implementation of the scheme has been met by vocal opposition.

Experience from other schemes highlights that objection can be loud and uncomfortable, with support often drawn from outside groups that are hostile in principle to active travel measures. Local authorities such as Enfield will need to hold their nerve if

such changes are to realise their long-term health objectives.

The Bowes Area LTN proves that an area-based approach is essential to avoid one-off adjustments that displace the traffic from one residential road to another. It needs to extend across borough boundaries too, as this is where most challenging roads often are. By adopting a "no street left behind" approach, residents hope to be able to extend the scope of the scheme in the near future.