

# COVID 19 Emergency Active Travel Draft Strategy

Developing Active Travel Solutions to support COVID 19  
Response

Solihull MBC

May 2020



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Purpose of Technical Note

This technical note provides a summary of the temporary cycle and walking measures to be implemented across the borough. Following the Government's announcement of a phased approach to reopening businesses, schools, retail sites etc. to kickstart the economic recovery, we have developed a phased approach to implement changes to our road network. The following chapters provide an overview of the different levels of cycling and walking measures we will implement based on the various phases of the Government's Recovery Strategy

The technical note will consider a range of measures including temporary infrastructure, behavioural change programmes, working with local businesses, engaging with schools and considering the possible leisure and physical activity benefits of temporary measures. The final chapter of the technical note considers the potential long term benefits of increased cycling and walking journeys, including how we maximise on temporary solutions for the long term benefit of the borough's economic and environmental strategies.

## 1.2. Government's Active Travel Announcement

To ensure that people can travel safely and maintain social distancing when the UK leaves the current lockdown restrictions, it is imperative that a wide range of transport options are available. With reduced public transport capacity expected for some time, local authorities across England are expected to consider how cycling and walking can support remodelling of public transport journeys and ensure our local networks do not suffer severe congestion.

As part of the nation's response to COVID, we are seeing unprecedented levels of walking and cycling across the UK during the pandemic, improving cycling and walking provision will help encourage more people to choose alternatives to public transport when they need to travel, making healthier habits easier and helping make sure the road, bus and rail networks are ready to respond to future increases in demand.

The government will fund and work with local authorities across the country to help make it easier for people to use bikes to get around. To encourage cycling and walking journeys, the Department for Transport has announced a £2 billion pound investment in active travel. Pop-up bike lanes with protected space for cycling, wider pavements, safer junctions, and cycle and bus-only corridors will be created in England within weeks as part of a £250 million emergency active travel fund (first phase of the £2 billion pound investment)

Other measures to be implemented to support cycle and walking journeys include:

- Fast-tracked statutory guidance, published 9<sup>th</sup> May 2020 and effective immediately, tells councils to reallocate road space for significantly-increased numbers of cyclists and pedestrians;
- Vouchers will be issued for cycle repairs, to encourage people to get their old bikes out of the shed;
- Plans are being developed for greater provision of bike fixing facilities;
- Increased use bike to work scheme;

- National Cycling Plan and Cycling and Walking Ambassador;
- Higher standards for permanent infrastructure across England
- Long term National Cycling Funding Programme;

Whilst the initial focus is on temporary cycle and walking measures, the Government acknowledges this moment in time as the perfect opportunity to embed active travel as the most convenient form of travel for short distance journeys, As a borough, we are currently developing a Cycling and Walking Strategy and accompanying Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), which will be at the heart of transport policy in Solihull moving forward.

Through the Government COVID-19 recovery strategy, a planned timetable for lifting restrictions has been developed. The timetable has been developed to help people, business, schools etc to plan for the lifting of restrictions. The timetable also provides SMBC with an opportunity to plan changes to the transport network, including temporary and longer term active travel measures.

The following chapters provide a step by step approach to implementing cycling and walking provision in the borough based on the phased timetable outlined in the COVID-19 Recovery Strategy.

**A list of potential options can be found within Appendix A**

## 2. Step 1 – May 2020

### 2.1. Government Plan

The changes to policy in this step will apply from Wednesday 13 May in England, with some changes to the restrictions previously in place. Whilst some of the restrictions will be lifted, we are anticipating travel demand to be much lower than normal as people continue to work from home, furloughed etc.

Some of the key guidance for Step 1 include the following:

- For the foreseeable future, workers should continue to work from home rather than their normal physical workplace, wherever possible
- All workers who cannot work from home should travel to work if their workplace is open.
- There is a large societal benefit from vulnerable children, or the children of critical workers, attending school: local authorities and schools should therefore urge more children who would benefit from attending in person to do so.
- When travelling, everybody (including critical workers) should continue to avoid public transport wherever possible.
- It is important many more people can easily travel around by walking and cycling

### 2.2. SMBC Active Travel Response

Whilst we anticipate that travel demand will be lower than normal, we acknowledge that increased journeys will take place across the network as people return to work, school and increased leisure journeys. With public transport capacity reduced, it is imperative that we provide immediate active travel solutions to provide all users with convenient, safe and attractive cycling and walking

provision. Temporary active travel provision will help facilitate reduced public transport journeys and ensure the local road network can support essential workers with more cycling and walking journeys and less reliance on the car.

As part of Step 1, we propose the following immediate measures are implemented on the network. Such measures have the potential to be delivered in the coming weeks and will help facilitate future active travel measures as further journeys take place on the network. Typical examples of the measures being considered are as follows (See Action Plan for the full list of schemes).

- A34 Stratford Road, Shirley Town Centre – Temporary closure of service road and parking areas
- A4141 High Street, Knowle – Temporary road closure
- Homer Road – partial one-way traffic - Creates better walking / cycling connectivity to Station and Town Centre.
- Drury Lane and Mill Lane temporary closures - Displace disabled parking into multi-storey car parks; taxi rank to the start of Mill Lane to create extension to the Mell Square pedestrianised area
- Warwick Road reduce to single lane - Creates wider space for footway / cycling in already congestion location

## 3. Step 2 – June/July

### 3.1. Government Plan

To aid planning, the Government's current aim is that the second step will be made no earlier than Monday 1 June. The second stage will see significant changes to the current restrictions including the phased return of primary schools and non-essential retail outlets. It is at stage 2 where we see a more rapid increase in journeys, including short distance journeys to schools.

Some of the key guidance for Step 2 include the following:

- A phased return for early years settings and schools. Schools should prepare to begin to open for more children from 1 June;
- Opening non-essential retail when and where it is safe to do so;
- Re-opening more local public transport in urban areas, subject to strict measures;
- Government is also examining how to enable people to gather in slightly larger groups to better facilitate small weddings;
- Consider allowing people to expand their household group to include one other household in the same exclusive group
- It is also anticipated that more businesses including offices will begin to open at this stage, whilst operating at reduced capacity

### 3.2. SMBC Active Travel Response

During Step 2, we anticipate that a greater number of journeys will take place on the local network. Whilst many employees are likely to remain on Furlough and working from home, with journeys to

school and retail taking place, it is imperative that the local network can facilitate increased demand whilst enabling social distancing.

As the majority of school journeys are within walking and cycling distance, it is important that we encourage a far greater number of active travel journeys to school. Prioritising cycle and walking journeys to school will help create the space to enable social distancing and lock in healthy and active travel behaviour long term.

To support increased journeys to work, retail etc. it will be important at this stage to provide more dedicated cycle and walking provision to deter public transport use. At this stage, it is encouraged that pop up cycle lanes and further pedestrian footpath widening and/or pedestrian zones are implemented. The better standard of pop up measures implemented (including segregation from motorised vehicles), the greater chance of short distance journeys being undertaken by cycling and walking.

To support social distancing and alleviating pressure on the local road network, the following measures are proposed at Stage 2

- Existing advisory cycle lanes upgraded to temporary pop up cycle lanes (cones, orcas etc)
- New pop up cycle lanes on links to major employment, retail sites
- Consider further dedicated cycle and walking provision within the town centre
- Extension of School Streets programme
- Travel planning support to local schools
- Extensive cycle and walking promotional campaign to encourage active travel
- Travel plan advice to major businesses
- Work with businesses and major retail sites on changing/storage facilities

The precise detail of Phase 2 interventions will be developed by a working group of key officers across the council. The working group will meet throughout Phase 1 implementation and as/when further government advice is published (e.g. priority schools/additional cycle and walking guidance)

## 4. Step 3 – July/August

### 4.1. Government Plan

The Government's current planning assumption is that this step will be no earlier than 4 July. At this stage further restrictions will be lifted, particularly around the hospitality sector including restaurants and cafes. Further restrictions around leisure facilities such as cinemas and public places such as places of worship are expected to be lifted. A key aspect of step 3 is that the government wishes to open as many businesses and public places as the data and information at the time allows

Some of the key guidance for Step 2 includes the following:

- At least some of the remaining businesses and premises that have been required to close, including personal care (such as hairdressers and beauty salons)

- Hospitality including pubs, hotels and food providers can open if social distancing guidelines enforced
- In order to facilitate the fastest possible re-opening of these types of higher-risk businesses and public places, the Government will carefully phase and pilot re-openings to test their ability to adopt the new COVID-19 Secure guidelines.

## 4.2. SMBC Active Travel Response

At this stage, the Government will seek to open as much of the economy as possible. Whilst social distancing will remain in place, it is likely that an increase in commuter, retail and leisure journeys will take place during the summer months. With increasing commuter journeys, there is concern that the road network will not be able to facilitate increased car journeys due to reduced public transport numbers. It is therefore imperative that active travel journeys are further encouraged, particularly during peak commuter periods.

To support social distancing and alleviating pressure on the local road network, the following measures are proposed at Stage 3

- Further consideration of pop up cycle lanes based on monitoring of pop up cycle lanes through Step 2
- Cycle parking/storage and welfare facilities increased at key sites including Touchwood and major businesses
- Further school streets programme extension
- Improvements to existing pop up cycle lanes (cones to orcas for example)
- Further restrictions to car use – identify rat runs which could be restricted for car use and provide increase pedestrian/cycle space.
- Improve pedestrian access between Solihull Railway Station and Town Centre – particularly if public transport increases
- Measures to support leisure / recreational use.

The precise detail of Phase 3 interventions will be developed by a working group of key officers across the council. The working group will meet throughout Phase 2 implementation and as/when further government advice is published (e.g. priority schools/additional cycle and walking guidance)

## 5. Next Steps (Prioritisation)

As we move out of lockdown, we anticipate that demand on the local network will increase. As part of our COVID-19 response, it will be important to identify locations and/or zones where we expect a significant amount of journeys to take place. To support social distancing, we will look to implement measures across the borough, however in the first stage of easing out of lockdown it is vital that we prioritise the following:

- Locations which will enable economic recovery such as major employment sites;
- Support the safe return of local schools;
- Access to Solihull Town Centre and district centres where we anticipate high footfall

Whilst initial temporary measures are being implemented, an appraisal framework will be developed to determine sites and schemes that should be prioritised thereafter. The framework will continue to

consider retail centres, key employment sites and schools as a key priority, but will look to support leisure opportunities and build on the knowledge gained through developing the Council's emerging Cycling & Walking Strategy and Local Infrastructure Plan. It is likely that priorities will alter as we progress through the Government's phased approach to easing out of lockdown; the prioritisation framework will therefore be a live document and will consider criteria such as

- **Effectiveness** – the ability of the intervention to support cycle and walking journeys
- **Strategic importance** – Will the intervention support the long term aim of increased cycling and walking journeys, be that infrastructure, behavioural change measures or leisure opportunities
- **Deliverability** – Can the intervention be delivered quickly and to a suitable standard
- **Link to key attractors** – Does the intervention support links to schools, employment, retail etc. sites
- **Improve the A-B journey** – does the scheme support the user from start of journey to end destination
- **Impact on other road users** – level of disruption / impact that the scheme may have on other users

The framework will be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure the most appropriate interventions are being implemented to support the COVID-19 economic response and to engender longer term behavioural change.

## 6. Longer Term

As outlined in the COVID-19 Recovery Strategy, long term investment in cycling and walking will be required to support the NHS. It is therefore vital that the Solihull Cycling and Walking Strategy is adopted and the accompanying LCWIP is implemented to deliver higher standards of cycling and walking infrastructure.

The importance of active travel is outlined in the COVID 19 Recovery Strategy

*“Recognising that underlying health conditions and obesity are risk factors not just for COVID19 but also for other severe illnesses, the Government will invest in preventative and personalised solutions to ill-health, empowering individuals to live healthier and more active lives. This will involve expanding the infrastructure for active travel (cycling and walking)”*

It is therefore recommended that the following long term measures are implemented:

- Adoption of cycling and walking strategy
- Provide sustained funding to develop schemes as part of the Solihull LCWIP
- Study commissioned to consider how temporary measures can be turned permanent to West Midlands Cycle Design Guidance
- Deliver the top five priority cycle routes within the LCWIP by 2023 – (or alternatives following LCWIP review)
- Improve rural connectivity through further development of LCWIP
- Improve infrastructure to accommodate increased demand for leisure use in key locations

- Dedicated cycle and walking infrastructure within developments and connecting to key services
- Priority for pedestrians as part of major transport infrastructure projects
- Dedicated funding to continue Cycling and Walking Project Manager

The emerging Cycling and Walking Strategy and LCWIP will be amended to take into account lessons learnt through the COVID-19 recovery. The documents will consider the implications of pop-up temporary measures and changes to Government Strategy and Infrastructure plans, including opportunities that may be generated by the Government's Cycling National Plan that is to be adopted in June 2020.