

# Policy position statement: Active Travel

March 2022





# Contents

Context	4
Challenges	6
Role of Transport for the North	8
Links to other TfN workstreams	10
TfN’s suggested role in active travel	12
Next steps	18

# Context

Active travel is becoming increasingly prominent in UK transport policy, and in public and media discourse. This rise has been driven by the UK's commitments to decarbonisation in the transport sector, by concerns over the public health impacts of a lack of everyday physical activity, and by pressures on existing transport infrastructure – particularly in densely populated urban areas. Reflecting this, the UK Government,<sup>1</sup> devolved administrations,<sup>2</sup> and a number of Local Authorities have produced strategies to increase the level of active travel.

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have accelerated these existing trends in the prominence of active travel. Data from the National Travel Attitudes Survey, for example, indicate that nearly 40% of respondents walked and cycled more during the period of restrictions from March to May 2020 than before the pandemic, and at the time that vast majority intended to continue to do so after travel restrictions are lifted.<sup>4</sup> These trends were particularly evident in the levels of cycling, with usage levels double or triple the level of equivalent weeks at numerous times during April and May 2020.<sup>5</sup>

To capitalise on the growth in active travel evident during the period of England-wide COVID-19 restrictions, the UK Government launched the Emergency Active Travel Fund (EATF) in May 2020. The first tranche of this fund allocated £42.1 million for temporary projects specific to the pandemic, and the second tranche allocated £175.4 million to longer term active travel projects.<sup>6</sup> This formed part of part of the £5 billion in new funding announced for cycling and buses in February 2020. Alongside this funding, fast-tracked statutory guidance was also published which allowed Local Authorities to reallocate road space to accommodate increased numbers of cyclists and pedestrians.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department for Transport (2020) Gear change: A Bold vision for cycling and walking. [Available here.](#)

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Transport Scotland (2021) Active Travel Framework. [Available here.](#)

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Transport for Greater Manchester (2018) Greater Manchester's cycling and walking infrastructure proposal. [Available here.](#)

<sup>4</sup> Department for Transport (2020) National Travel Attitudes Survey (NTAS): Wave 4 provisional report. [Available here.](#) [Accessed 7th December 2020]

<sup>5</sup> Department for Transport (2021) Transport use during the coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic. [Available here.](#)

<sup>6</sup> Department for Transport (2020) Active travel fund: Final allocations. [Available here.](#)

<sup>7</sup> Department for Transport (2020) Reallocating road space in response to COVID-19: Statutory guidance for local authorities. [Available here.](#)



Alongside the EATF, in July 2020, the Department for Transport (DfT) published Gear Change: A bold vision for Cycling and Walking.<sup>8</sup> This plan set out the Government's vision for improved health, wellbeing, and local economic growth through active travel, with the COVID-19 pandemic creating a moment for transformational change. This was accompanied by updated Cycle Infrastructure Design guidance (LTN/20). LTN/20 sets out comprehensive new standards for cycle design, along with an expectation that improvements for cycling and walking are included in other transport schemes. In both regards, LTN/20 significantly exceeds previous design guidance.

The growth in uptake of active travel during the COVID-19 restrictions in 2020 and the policy context surrounding this indicates a significant potential for future growth. However, the window to act to embed these changes is limited. In particular, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on attitudes to public transport have led to increases in vehicle traffic volumes as legal restrictions eased in 2021. Alongside this, the nature and extent of schemes under the EATF has been highly varied across areas of England. This combination means that, in some areas, it is reasonable to expect the levels of walking and cycling may fall below levels observed before the COVID-19 pandemic, and that the inequality in active travel uptake between areas may rise. This has implications for transport, decarbonisation, social inequality, and for public health.

<sup>8</sup> Department for Transport (2020) Gear Change: A bold vision for cycling and walking. [Available here.](#)



# Challenges

There are several challenges with regards to delivering active travel schemes and raising participation levels in the North of England and nationally.

**A lack of clear and consistent active travel infrastructure standards across the North and nationally.**

A historical lack of national guidelines on standards, monitoring and incentives for active travel schemes has led to large inconsistencies in the standard of provision across the country. Many areas are also starting from a low base when implementing active travel schemes - particularly cycling schemes. This combination often means that active travel infrastructure does not offer safe, direct, and coherent journey options.

**Methods of estimating benefits of active travel schemes are less developed and embedded than those for other transport interventions.**

Methods for valuing the economic, health, wellbeing, and quality of life impacts of active travel interventions are becoming more established, and a number of Local Authorities are working with DfT to enhance the models in order to better assess benefits. However, further work is required to improve the robustness of these estimates, including evaluation of existing schemes, and to embed these tools in decision-making processes.

**Funding for active travel is often given in short cycles, with a requirement to bid. This does not allow for long term planning of programmes and schemes; and leads to inconsistencies.**

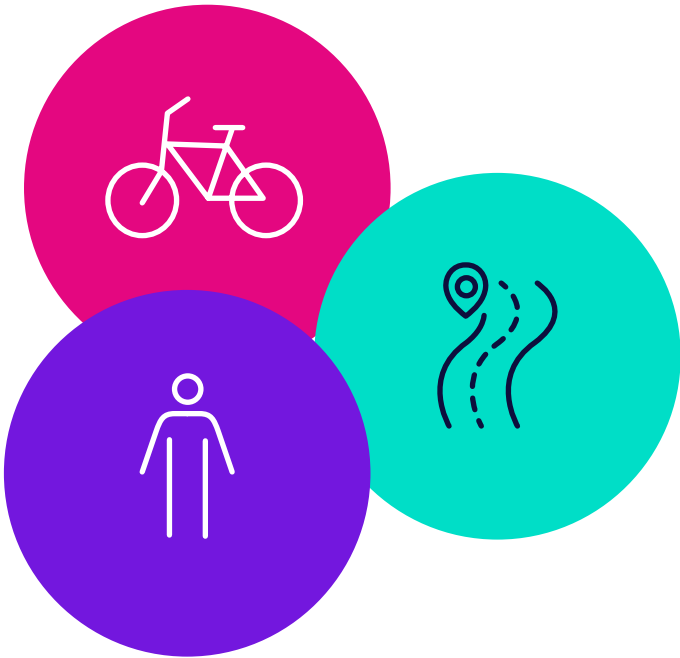
In addition, the preparation of funding bids is resource intensive for Local Authorities, and often requires authorities to have 'on the shelf' studies/schemes, that can be readily included in bids due to the timescales. This approach to funding for active travel has a disproportionate impact on those authorities without the resources to prepare schemes for future funding allocations, and to prepare bids.

**While the majority of active travel journeys are short, integration with the Strategic Road Network (SRN), Major Road Network (MRN) and rail is key to enable multimodal journeys.**

There is often a lack of infrastructure that would enable active travel to be part of a longer journey. This includes sufficient secure cycle parking at transport interchanges, the ability to carry bikes on trains, suitable routes for walking, and clear and reliable information on active travel route planning. Alongside this, the development of other forms of transport infrastructure has increasingly created severance in active travel journeys which would previously have been possible. The widening of roads and junctions, increases in traffic volumes and speeds, and the use of barriers are common manifestations of this.

**Local spatial and transport planning policy often does not enable the use of active travel for short trips and incentivises car use.**

Currently, developments in housing, leisure, and retail facilities typically do not ensure that access by active modes is as safe, convenient, and attractive as using a car for the same journey. Indeed, it is common for new developments to prioritise car access over active modes, both in terms of their design and through decisions to locate new facilities in 'out of town' locations, where access by public transport and active modes is inherently more difficult.



# Role of Transport for the North

As a Sub-national Transport Body (STB), Transport for the North's (TfN) role is to set the overall transport vision, and to provide statutory advice on planning and priorities for large scale transport investment. Within this context, TfN supports the ambition to make cycling and walking a natural choice for shorter journeys and will work with Local Transport Authority partners who have responsibility for local transport strategies and managing their local transport infrastructure.

## 2019 Strategic Transport Plan policy position

In the Strategic Transport Plan (STP), which was adopted in 2019, the following statements are made in relation to our role in supporting active travel:

- Continue to work with partners to support the development and implementation of local plans and strategies, to deliver packages of improvements that support a more seamless, integrated end-to-end experience. By targeting short trips that could be taken on public transport or active travel, collaboratively we could encourage a modal shift and promote active transport, and further develop public transport networks as important sustainable modes of travel. Work with partners to ensure that

future strategic housing, commercial and industrial developments are well connected, and have high expectations on developers to provide access to public transport facilities, high levels of cycle parking and storage, wide, attractive and safely-lit walking routes, and provide electric charging facilities to support a greener and cleaner road network as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.

- Work to identify and deliver interventions which improve sustainable transport access to the North's key public transport hubs, including better walking and cycling provision and improved local bus access.
- Support partners to develop and promote measures that improve local sustainable travel options, such as strategic cycle networks, and encourage their use to make best use of the North's existing and future strategic transport networks

Supporting this vision are four pan-Northern transport objectives, which shape TfN's work programmes:

- Support the UK in meeting commitments under the Climate Change Act 2008 by collaborating with partners and stakeholders to deliver on Government's commitment of a net zero transport network by 2050.
- Ensure that transport interventions that TfN is promoting or supporting enhance the North's natural, historic and built environment in order to deliver a net gain in biodiversity.
- Work with partners to identify transport interventions that deliver inclusive economic growth by improving access to employment and skills opportunities for all, as well as interventions that deliver health benefits.
- Support a rapid increase in the number of public and private electric vehicle (EV) charging points.
- Explore options for reducing the impact of road-based travel on the environment, air quality and carbon emissions, including exploring how National Highway's Air Quality Strategy could be expanded to cover the Major Road Network through future investment on the network.





# Links to other TfN workstreams

Active travel also sits across several other TfN workstreams:

- Economic Recovery Plan - Active travel schemes are traditionally quicker to implement and can also ease pressure on transport networks within towns and cities. A number of these have been put forward by partners as part of recent competitive funding rounds, but a number remain unfunded.
- Future Travel Scenarios and Decarbonisation Pathways – Active travel features in all scenarios, but particularly ‘Prioritised Places’ and ‘Urban Zero Carbon.’
- Decarbonisation - Policy measures to achieve increases in active travel are highlighted as supporting transport decarbonisation (and improved health outcomes).
- Through the Major Road Network Regional Evidence Base TfN is promoting the delivery of a number of improvement schemes, including significant upgrades to cycling and walking infrastructure.
- Stations Strategy – TfN’s Strategic Rail team is currently developing a stations strategy that will recognise the interaction between all of the elements which constitute the passenger experience, and how improving active mode access to a cluster of stations could (in conjunction with other enhancements) generate transformational improvements in the attractiveness of rail to local communities.



- Transport-Related Social Exclusion (TRSE) research in the North of England will include the effects of severance and other aspects of the built environment on active travel and will produce recommendations on the mitigation of TRSE through low and zero carbon transport modes.
- Clean Mobility Visions – This research will review and collate evidence on the policies necessary to achieve a transition away from private car use and towards other modes, including active travel. It will also consider the evidence on the wider impacts of these policies, including for local economies, accessibility, health, and inclusion. This will result in a series of evidence-based policy options tailored to the diverse area types in the North of England.

Transport and health research – Research on the links between transportation and health in the North of England will expand the evidence base for active travel interventions, including where active travel is incorporated as part of public transport journeys. This research identifies evidence gaps surrounding the interaction of transport with mental health and wellbeing, and on the effects of incidental activity.



# TfN's suggested role in active travel

TfN will promote and support sustained investment in active travel at local level, to enable partners to plan and implement more ambitious and longer-term schemes. TfN will ensure that the pan-Northern schemes in the Investment Programme embed and prioritise active travel within the design and development process.

Following discussion at TfN's Strategic Oversight Group, it is clear that long term, sustained investment (both revenue and capital) in active travel is vital to enable adequate planning and implementation of whole schemes, rather than the current 'piecemeal' approach. LTN1/20 states that consideration of the opportunities to improve provision for cycling will be an expectation of any future local highway scheme funded by Government, a much stronger position than previously.

The system of Local Authorities having to bid for funds disadvantages those who do not have the resource or funds to put into preparing bids, or studies/high level schemes that can be used as part of bids. A longer term committed fund would enable authorities to plan more cohesively for active travel across their network, rather than the detrimental current stop/start nature of funding.

In addition to the physical infrastructure, revenue funding is also essential to ensure activities can be undertaken which will support active travel. These can include access to bike schemes, improved information for multimodal journeys, maintenance of infrastructure, training schemes, audits of existing provision, and identification of gaps.

The creation of Active Travel England, a national body, will examine all applications for funding, and refuse any that are not compliant with the new national standards. It is unclear presently whether this means that authorities will have to still bid for funds through this new body.

The Cycle Infrastructure Design document published in 2020 specifically requires active travel elements alongside any new transport schemes: Furthermore, to receive Government funding for local highways investment where the main element is not cycling or walking, there will be a presumption that schemes must deliver or improve cycling infrastructure to the standards in this Local Transport Note, unless it can be shown that there is little or no need for cycling in the particular highway scheme.

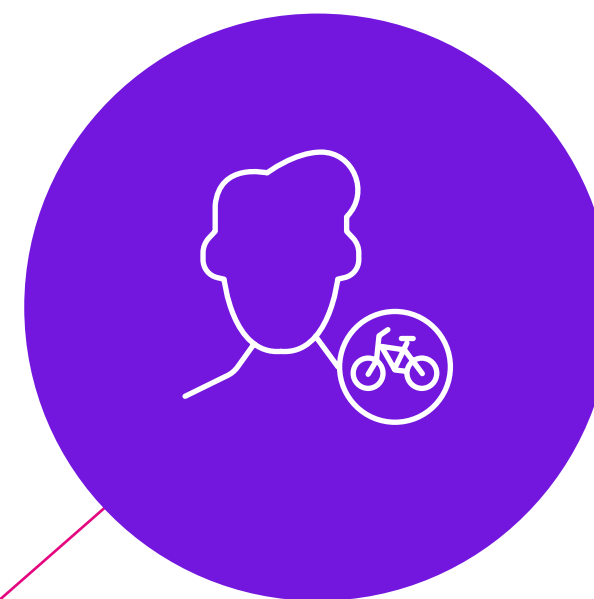
Active Travel England's assessment of an authority's performance on active travel will influence the funding it receives for other forms of transport. Since active and sustainable travel will be at the heart of our policy, Active Travel England's assessment of an authority's performance with respect to sustainable travel outcomes, particularly cycling and walking, will be taken into account when considering funding allocations for local transport schemes. We will consult on introducing new criteria to measure local highway authorities' performance in respect of sustainable travel outcomes, particularly cycling and walking, when considering funding allocations for local transport schemes.

## Action: Build links with Active Travel England in order to discuss how the need for schemes is evidenced, funding, and how this is allocated.

TfN may have a role in demonstrating potential latent demand for cycling and walking, as well as identifying links to major transport hubs.

## Action: prioritise and embed active travel within pan-Northern schemes.

TfN will ensure that, in its own scheme development activity (for example Northern Powerhouse Rail), and in acting as a stakeholder or sponsor on behalf of Northern partners, active travel is an integral element of the design and approach to pan-Northern schemes.





# TfN's suggested role in active travel

(continued)

## Support partners and continue to raise the profile of active travel generally.

TfN has its own All-Party Parliamentary Group, and an event can be organised at this to discuss active travel.

Suggested areas for discussion could be the new guidance and standards, its application, and what this means for authorities. Other suggestions could include the role of active travel in reducing carbon emissions and/or improving health.

(Strategic Rail is also looking to use their own resources in this area and could include active travel in access to stations).

When discussed at SOG on 6 August 2020, the general partner view was that this is already been done well by Urban Transport Group (UTG), and any further efforts would be duplication. This area should also be covered by the new funding body Active Travel England, which will be set up over the coming months. As well as funding, it will also be a repository of expertise in scheme design, and have an extensive role in promoting best practice, advising local authorities, training staff and contractors and allowing local authorities to learn from each other. TfN can support partners if required in signposting best practice, if they are not all active in the UTG.

**Action: Organise an APPG event**  
Collate and promote examples of 'best practice' and innovation across the North from partners, that can be used by partners and exert our influence to improve the skillsets and expertise of the sector to ensure appropriate considerations are made for active travel in future planning.

**Action: Build relationship with Active Travel England, primarily with regards to longevity of funding, given that UTG and ATE's remit will include best practice and scheme design. Signpost those partners who require it to best practice.**

**Action: Build relationships with training and education providers to explore opportunities to improve the skillsets of planning professionals to ensure they fully understand and can plan appropriately for future active travel needs.**





# TfN's suggested role in active travel

(continued)

**Evidence: Outline how the TfN Analytical Framework can support partners with analysis of active travel and make these tools and data available to partners where possible. For example, based on locally specific evidence highlighting the potential for increases in active travel within specific localities.**

Active Mode Appraisal is a rapidly evolving area where DfT and Local Authorities are developing new evidence and approaches to support decision-making on new investments. The DfT's Active Mode Appraisal Toolkit (AMAT) enables stakeholders and decision-makers to assess the value for money of proposed cycling and walking interventions, quantifying a wide range of potential benefits from active travel including health improvements from increased levels of physical activity; identifying transport decarbonisation impacts; and air quality and climate benefits associated with modal shift. The following impacts can now be quantified:

- Physical activity impacts
- Absenteeism impacts
- Journey quality impacts
- Accident impacts
- Environmental impacts
- Decongestion and indirect tax impacts
- Time-saving impacts on active mode users



TfN is not actively developing new appraisal approaches, given its more indirect role in promotion of active travel, but the Technical Assurance, Modelling and Economics (TAME) team is looking to showcase and promote the work of TfN partners in this area through:

- Application of existing tools and techniques to show the co-benefits of active travel increases as part of wider TfN workstreams, such as TfN's Decarbonisation Pathways.
- Use of the TfN Analytical Advisory Group to showcase appraisal techniques, and as a platform for TfN partners to promote their work within the North and to national stakeholders.

Partners are supportive of the active travel work to be incorporated into TfN's plans for a Northern Evidence Hub. Partners requested further evidence on the impact of active travel on local shopping policies, and whether Northern towns could look together at the evidence for this. Partners are supportive of the active mode strategy

appraisal. In addition to this, Executive Board has also asked for TfN to give more specific thought to how we brand our technical tools more broadly so more people are aware of and have access to the assets. An example of how this could be branded is the concept of a Northern data laboratory.

- **TAME to apply existing tools and techniques to show the co-benefits of active travel increases as part of wider TfN workstreams.**
- **Consider how TfN brands its technical tools more broadly so more people are aware of and have access to the assets.**
- **AAG to showcase appraisal techniques.**
- **Inclusion of active travel in TfN's Northern Evidence Hub.**

# Next steps

The next steps revolve primarily around Active Travel England, and it is suggested that a meeting is held with the new body to discuss funding of active travel, and the need for this to be long term, and sustained, as well as moving away from the historical 'bid for funds' system, which was also used for the EATF this year.

In addition, TfN will also explore the possibility of an APPG event, possibly to cover the new guidance launched last year, or the emergency guidance.

Lastly, TAME will apply existing tools and techniques to show the co-benefits of active travel in wider TfN workstreams, showcase appraisal techniques through the AAG, and include Active Travel in the Northern Evidence Hub.

At this stage, it is not proposed that TfN gets involved in sharing examples of best practice and scheme design other than to signpost partners who require it, as this is already covered well by Urban Transport Group and will also be picked up by Active Travel England.





**Transport for the North**

2nd Floor  
4 Piccadilly Place  
Manchester  
M1 3BN

**Transport for the North**

Ground Floor  
West Gate  
Grace Street  
Leeds  
LS1 2RP

---

0161 244 0888  
[info@transportfornorth.com](mailto:info@transportfornorth.com)

---

