

Petition: Remove the Pop Up Covid 19 Cycle Lanes

Briefing Note

Summary

In May 2020, the Government announced an opportunity to bid into the emergency active travel fund (EATF) for funds to provide temporary schemes that would facilitate walking or cycling in place of public transport in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

The County Council, in co-operation with district and borough councils, identified seven schemes that would fulfil the Government's criteria and was successful in securing funding for all of these. The schemes were implemented over eight weeks between July and September 2020. They are due for review and decision on next steps in October/November following a period of monitoring their use and impact.

A petition has been received that calls for the removal of all of the schemes but which specifically refers to the scheme in Crawley. A decision on the temporary scheme in Crawley is due to be taken on 2 November 2020.

Background and context

- 1** The national lockdown arising from the COVID-19 pandemic led to a reduction in vehicular traffic on the roads (up to around 70% reduction in West Sussex) and an even greater reduction (up to 90%) in bus and train use. Alongside this there was a noticeable increase in cycling and walking on the network.
- 2** On 9 May 2020 the Secretary of State (SoS) for Transport announced a £2bn package to quickly establish new schemes for cycling and walking as ways to help relieve the pressure on public transport. The aim was that pop-up lanes with protected space for cycling, wider pavements, safer junctions, and cycle and bus-only corridors would be created within weeks as part of a £250m emergency active travel fund - the first stage of a £2bn investment, as part of the £5bn in new funding announced for cycling and buses in February.
- 3** The idea was to encourage more people to choose alternatives to public transport, making healthier habits easier and helping make sure the road, bus and rail networks were ready to respond to future increases in demand.
- 4** [Fast tracked statutory guidance](#) empowered councils to reallocate road space for cyclists and pedestrians. The guidance was clear that schemes should provide "meaningful reallocation of road space" i.e. taking space from motor vehicles and allocating this to cycling and walking.
- 5** On 27th May 2020 the Department for Transport (DfT) wrote to all local transport authorities setting out the criteria for funding to be allocated from the emergency active travel fund. West Sussex County Council was given an indicative allocation of £784,000. Bids had to be submitted by 5 June - eight working days after the advice was received.
- 6** It was clear that failing to respond positively to the tranche 1 offer (a total of £45m) would impact upon the likelihood of receiving money in future tranches (totalling £2bn). As such it was important that the County Council responded positively to support future bids for more permanent active travel solutions.

- 7** In developing the schemes for the tranche 1 bid County Council officers worked closely with district and borough officers. Work already undertaken in districts and boroughs on local cycling and walking infrastructure plans was used to identify routes. Outline work was undertaken to determine the likely cost of the schemes. All were subject to a technical assessment and prioritisation to meet the DfT criteria, buildability in tight time scales, support from the district and boroughs and the results from the cycling infrastructure prioritisation toolkit – as recommended by the DfT. Due to the tight timescales for the process, public consultation, potential impact on traffic congestion and air quality could not be considered at this stage.
- 8** The final list of schemes to be included in the bid was supported by the Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure. Seven schemes were identified (one in each district/borough) with nearly all drawn from suggestions made by districts and boroughs.
- 9** Whilst the schemes had been prioritised and approved from a technical perspective at this outline stage no specific criteria were set for determining the impact of the schemes. Targets were not set in terms of usage or impact on the road network or public transport. Instead the plan was for the schemes to be reviewed after a period of time in operation, data on use and an overall technical assessment being used alongside feedback from the public.
- 10** The funding decision was received on 26 June and the County Council was successful in securing the full amount of its bid. The criteria for securing the money included that the programme of schemes be started within four weeks of the money being received and completed within eight weeks of starting the installations. Local members and district and borough officers were given the opportunity to comment on schemes once the designs had been completed.
- 11** Scheme implementation started on 27 July and the final scheme was opened in late September within the limits set as part of the award. These schemes were implemented as an emergency temporary measure, not as permanent routes – underlined by the speed at which they were delivered and the materials used.
- 12** The EATF schemes were implemented in response to a specific set of conditions driven by the lockdown associated with COVID-19. At the time of the funding announcement traffic conditions were very different and the government was actively discouraging use of public transport. The volume of traffic on the county's roads has now largely returned to that seen pre-pandemic whilst public transport usage remains greatly reduced.
- 13** Whilst a key driver to implementing the schemes was to relieve pressure on public transport routes, local transport has continued to operate. Passenger numbers are now beginning to recover and the Government continues to provide funding to support local public transport. Operators have learnt how to manage this capacity safely and so there is less need to find an alternative to public transport.
- 14** The emergency routes did fulfil the requirements of the Government's call to action and this will be a consideration when the County Council bids for money in future rounds of funding.
- 15** The schemes were an opportunity to understand how effectively the County Council could respond quickly to calls for change. They provided data on the

propensity for people to use these types of facility and their knock-on effect. They do provide safe routes for cycling and demonstrated the County Council's aspirations to promote sustainable travel – a key part of its climate change ambitions for air quality and healthier lifestyles. The routes have provided invaluable data for future travel planning that will support implementation of permanent cycle routes in line with the national vision for walking and cycling. This aligns with the County Council's ambition to support investment in sustainable travel. The data gathered and the experience of these facilities will help the County Council deliver schemes in future tranches of the funding.

- 16** It is not however being proposed that any of the schemes be considered as permanent. The reviews planned for late October/early November were arranged to take stock of the impact of the schemes and feedback from all stakeholders but mainly to assess their value in terms of generating useful information for future planning.

Matt Davey

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