



How roads can be put to better use

The Government's 'avoid public transport' advice prompted a large spike in cycling and walking. The reduction in car use and public transport journeys during the Covid lockdown has encouraged many councils to consider permanent or temporary reallocation of road space to cycling, walking and other uses, writes **Beate Kubitz**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Beate Kubitz is a writer, researcher and consultant in new mobility. She is the author of the *Annual Survey of Mobility as a Service in the UK*, as well as reports on car clubs, bike-share, open data and transport innovation. She is director of policy and communications for TravelSpirit and previously worked for CoMoUK.

To say the coronavirus pandemic has had profound consequences is an understatement. Perhaps none of us could have anticipated quite how much and how quickly it has reshaped the way we travel.

At the same time as NHS workers were dealing with the health emergency, the non-medical interventions to reduce Covid-19's health impacts were, basically, to prevent contagion by staying at home, distancing people and reducing the time they spend in proximity to each other.

The initial impact of 'stay home, save lives' on transport was to reduce the need for travel dramatically. There was an almost unimaginable decline in trips as people locked down in their homes in March – with a strong upsurge in people walking and cycling locally for daily exercise.

While patterns have evolved through May and June as some people have returned to work and businesses have reopened, travel demand is still reduced. Many people continue to work from home, fewer children attend school and the requirements of limiting contact has also deeply affected those journeys we are making.

Walking, cycling are the advised means of transport followed by driving – with people recommended to avoid public transport where possible.

The impact of this has been unprecedented. The Department for Transport (DfT) has noted record levels of bicycle use – peaking at a 250% increase in early June.

Public transport use dropped to around 10% of previous year's volumes and cars to around 30% by early April. Public transport use has crept back a few percentage points while advice remains to avoid it.

Although car use is no longer at quite such suppressed levels as at the start of lockdown, it remains around 75% of previous years' use.

The rapidly shifting transport landscape has been met with equally rapid adaptation at local authority and operator level to support social distancing. The spontaneous rise in walking and cycling at the outset of lockdown was rapidly met with ▶

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CASE STUDY: BIKE SHARE IN LONDON

Transport for London has set out plans to expand the Santander Cycles scheme to keep up with unprecedented demand. Data shows that cycling in the capital increased significantly during lockdown, with thousands of Londoners using bikes more often for both leisure and essential travel.

May 2020 was the best May in London's cycle hire scheme's 10-year history, with 1,120,620 hires. It also saw the highest ever number of hires in a single week - with 362,925 hires made between May 25 and 31 - and the highest ever number of hires in a weekend, with 132,979 hires made on May 30-31.

The free Santander Cycles hire scheme for NHS staff has also fuelled demand, with 30,000 free journeys made since the offer was made available in March.



PICTURE: D. BUCKLEY

◀ supportive measures from several local authorities.

High profile road closures, such as Deansgate in Manchester, signalled that authorities were enthusiastic about creating more space for people to walk and ride bikes.

Images of closed roads, pop-up bike lanes, widened pavements and pedestrianised streets to allow people to queue in a socially distanced manner and pass each other with two metres' clearance have been shared across the internet. Some were unimaginably simple and effective - simply moving the double red lines of the red route road markings to outside the parking zone in Brixton doubled pavement space.

Such measures were in response to demand and need and were supported by people's behaviour and their expectations.

A Transport Scotland attitudes survey showed people remaining at home, using their cars much less and walk-



ing more for exercise and to get to work than previously throughout the first three months of lockdown. Public attitudes to future travel indicated that more than 60% of people in Scotland expect to walk and cycle more as lockdown lifts.

Birmingham cycling statistics reflect the changes in use as people in lockdown moved to leisure cycling and are now returning to work.

Claire Williams, cycling and walking manager at Transport for West Midlands (TfWM), says: "We can roughly say there is a 200% increase in usage of cycle lanes along leisure routes between March (before lockdown) and May.

"There was a decline [about 45%] over on-road or commuting routes immediately after lockdown, but these seem to be bouncing back as well. We're not quite at pre-lockdown levels, but have seen an increase of 56% between April and May."

Londoners, too, expect to return to using public transport relatively slowly, according to a Centre for London survey, with in excess of 25% expecting to walk more and around 7% expecting to cycle more. Capitalising on these expectations with good infrastructure to enable active travel is important when, simultaneously, up to 15% of people are expecting to drive more.

Journey modes, patterns and travel experiences have changed from the beginning of the crisis. Initially, travel patterns reduced to essential worker commutes, deliveries and daily exercise - and

measures were concentrated on access to hospitals and pharmacies.

With the gradual addition of more discretionary leisure trips and increasing commutes as workplaces open, the requirements are more widespread and more routes and infrastructure is needed.

Kate Morris head of consulting, Transportation, AECOM, says: "Some schemes were put in at short notice and were quite basic - just traffic cones and street signs. We've also seen a national shortage of bollards, so local authorities have had to improvise in some cases."

As the realisation has sunk in that recommending that people avoid public transport had the potential to switch those beginning to return to work to cars - and, thereby, create chaotic traffic situations - active travel has climbed the agenda at national level.

By May 12, the DfT announced a £250 million fund to provide more space for walking and cycling. These monies were offered for measures to reallocate road space through schemes such as rapid temporary pedestrianisation, wider pavements, temporary cycle lanes, rerouting traffic and measures like pop-up park and ride, bike parking facilities, e-cargobikes, and supporting communications. In Scotland, Transport Scotland has launched the 'Spaces for People' £30m fund aimed at creating safe walking and cycling routes for key workers and essential journeys.

In addition, the DfT instigated emergency powers to enable rapid implementation of schemes, including fast-tracking the Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) process by normalising the use of experimental TROs which do not require consultation periods before implementation. This enables authorities to trial and review schemes.

Morris says: "I think the initial reflex reaction is giving way to a more considered approach, with more human and aesthetic ideas as authorities realise there isn't going to be a fast return to the old normal. We're looking more at general public realm improvements, parklets and slimmer bollards to make them less utilitarian."

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Scotland's 'Spaces for People' project aims to create safe walking and cycling routes for key workers and essential journeys

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AECOM is working collaboratively with a number of local authorities in the design and implementation of 'pop-up' infrastructure to reallocate road space for pedestrians and cyclists. Clients include the city councils of Newcastle, Liverpool, Salford, Dublin and East Renfrewshire Council and Transport for London (TfL).

What has been particularly exciting is that new powers and the urgency of the crisis have allowed local and national government to make some changes that would normally take months or even years.

LONDON CONGESTION CHARGE

The London Congestion Charge will be increased in an effort to reduce any shift to private cars. The increase is temporary, but it represents a huge change in a short time period. The timeframe for the consultation and policy development process would usually be nine-12 months as a minimum. The changes increase the cost of the congestion charge to £15 (from £11.50) and its operating hours to 7:00 to 22:00 (previously

07:00 to 18:00). It also operates daily instead of five days a week. In addition, it will remove the residents' discount to new applications from August 1. The latter represents a significant shift as these are some of the "non-essential" trips that have been hardest to reduce since the congestion charge started.

BIKE LANES

In a striking departure from previous practice, the DfT has announced that English local authorities have been given new powers to use CCTV to issue penalty charge notices to drivers who park or load illegally in mandatory cycle lanes, putting cyclists at risk of a serious accident.

With approved camera devices, it will be easier for those local authorities with civil parking enforcement powers to take action against cars illegally parked on mandatory cycle lanes, allowing cyclists to complete journeys without deviating from their path.

As we've moved into a 'new normal' with increasing traffic, there have been conflicts. There have been some high profile ▶▶

CASE STUDY: KENT PARK AND PEDAL

There are three park-and-ride sites in Canterbury. Prior to Covid-19, motorists paid to park and then used the free bus into the town centre.

Canterbury City Council (CCC) introduced a park and pedal scheme at the Wincheap park-and-ride in June 2018 (part-funded by Kent County Council) with a capacity of 28. This offered free, secure parking for subscribers to leave their own bikes overnight to enable them to cycle the last mile into Canterbury. Although it was oversubscribed initially, it was consistently used at about 50% capacity.

Users registered their car number plates and were added to the white list for the ANPR camera enforcement for the car park, so they could park for free.

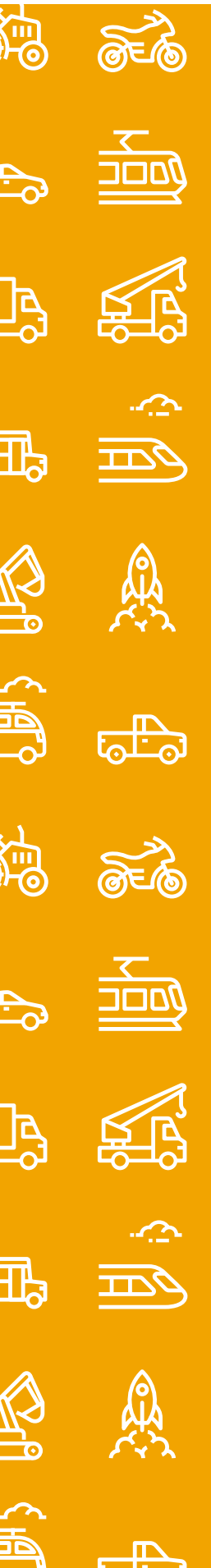
Although there were teething troubles with vandalism, the county council planned a bigger scheme with new features, having learned from the Canterbury site. This was ready to launch just as lockdown hit.

Park-and-ride sites were initially closed, but they reopened on Monday, June 15, as long-stay car parks only, without a dedicated bus service.

Motorists pay 50p/day and CCC has identified walking and cycling routes to the city centre or the location of the nearest bus stop where they can catch a scheduled bus.

The two cycle compounds are open to all without needing to pay or register, and without the doors being locked.





TfL's London Cycle Infrastructure Database contains details of all cycle routes in the capital. Its aim is to help plan routes to reduce journey times

◀ removals of temporary cycle lanes as pressure has built from motorists. Trafford Council built a temporary protected cycle lane to extend the route from Manchester city centre to Altrincham and provide a safe travel option for students at Trafford College. Within 12 hours, the cones marking out the lane had been removed and the lane had been shortened to end in Sale town centre.

Pressure in the opposite direction has come from social distancing space required by reopening pubs and restaurants being encouraged to spread out – with licensing bodies asked to look favourably on extension of seating onto pavements.

Café culture is spilling out onto closed roads in city centres – an extraordinary sight in central Manchester.

First starts are being pulled down and reconfigured and the second wave – generally funded from the emergency active travel fund – are more inviting with plenty of closed roads and pedestrianisation.

There is also a recognition that no one body can make the response to the pandemic and the measures to limit its spread work.

In Leeds, a network of 80 key employers have discussed how to collaborate on the response. There's an acknowledgement that responding to the crisis has been a massive, resource intensive, undertaking for local authorities and they cannot do it on their own. With a degree of collective

responsibility, employers prepared to share best practice on 'working differently to work safely' can help to spread the load. For instance, organisations are considering different working patterns to reduce the peak surge of people arriving in the city centre and reduce the pressure on infrastructure.

Overall, the realisation is sinking in that this is a long haul. The current phase is one of reassessing. As plans develop, local authorities are looking at the wholesale public realm design. Consideration of broader issues such as entrances and exits – the pinchpoints – has risen up the agenda (for instance park entrances). Designing in more secure parking for the increased numbers of bikes and e-bikes is also an issue. Bike theft has been widely reported during lockdown and security is a major issue for people using bikes regularly.

A NEW PERSPECTIVE

The measures highlight that lockdown has given people a different perspective on traffic. The measurable difference in air quality and calm during lockdown has led some to question whether traffic should be ever allowed to return to its former levels.

A YouGov poll of residents in five UK cities found overwhelming support for

measures to protect health by tackling air pollution emissions from cars.

Four-in-five residents (81%) in London, Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds and Glasgow are in favour of measures to reduce car emissions and use, with fewer than one-in-10 (8%) rejecting action. A similarly high level of support is observed across all the cities, between men and women, and among different age and income groups.

The survey, with supporting analysis by transport think-tank Transport & Environment, finds that reallocating road space to create more room for pedestrians as one of the measures to control air pollution is supported by 76% of respondents (just 8% opposed).

Additional cycle lanes are supported by 63% (19% against), with more support in younger age groups, and additional bus lanes are supported by 59% (18% against). The introduction of Zero Emission Zones (ZEVs) that ban polluting cars from cities received support from 71% of respondents and opposition from just 12%.

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offs in people – that they have experienced the trade-off of air quality against 'I want to get in my car'. We have had these debates before, and arguments about pedestrianisation and parking – in transport we know that the impacts are positive, but people are opposed to them. This time, people can actually see what happens – and the eventuality is not what they expect. Until people see it, they can be really siloed."

DATA AND MAPPING

In some instances, the pandemic has highlighted issues that were just beginning to emerge. The lack of digital maps of pavement and cycle lane widths hampers both creating safe infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclist and also the provision of digital route-finding for them.

TfL's London Cycle Infrastructure Database (CID) is unique – and contains comprehensive details of cycling infrastructure in the capital. The CID is intended to address barriers to cycling by providing Londoners with clear and accurate information about cycling infrastructure, helping them plan bike journeys with confidence. There is nothing of similar quality elsewhere in the UK for either cycling or walking. Even the ubiquitous Google maps warns those choosing a walking route to 'use caution – walking directions may not always reflect real-world conditions'.

Giuseppe Sollazzo, the DfT head of data, Analytics and Data Division, says : "It's

become clear that data is not just a 'nice to have' when it comes to active travel infrastructure.

"The past three months has highlighted that there's a need for the data to be discovered, and discovered quickly. We need to be able to see where active travel – walking and cycling – routes are possible and the actual width of pavements or cycleways as well as the quality of infrastructure. Of course, for the longer term, there's an interesting overlap between the social distancing angle – having wide enough pavements – and enabling active travel."

The need to create more active travel and socially distanced routes has raised the stakes for the development of the National Access Point dataset which should help fill the data gap in the long term. At present, however, local authorities are looking for data which is not always there.

THE LOCKDOWN LEGACY

The current crisis has been a call to arms to accelerate many developments which are in the pipeline. It has provided tools and funding for authorities to try out schemes that are hard to introduce under normal circumstances – pedestrianising high streets, introducing parklets, blocking through traffic with planters to create quiet ways, pop-up cycle lanes and space for walking.

This is a moment of opportunity, while people are reflecting on the peace of lockdown and many are continuing to work from home, travel less and shop locally. Bike sales are booming and people are intent on changing their behaviour. With support, there is real potential to have a lasting, positive impact.

The legacy of lockdown is that there is among the general public, greater experience and understanding of the impacts of reducing car numbers and increasing active travel and a professed appetite for not returning to previous patterns.

However, alongside this optimism there is an emerging economic reality. To counter its impacts we need to support cheap sustainable travel. The power of bikes (and e-bikes) is that they provide freedom – free trips to access opportunities, broaden horizons and clear minds. In the coming months, they will be invaluable.

Active travel has been catapulted up the agenda, this opportunity for a paradigm shift is not to be missed. **ST**

CASE STUDY: TfWM

Authorities across the West Midlands have taken measures to improve active travel infrastructure. These include temporarily reducing the speed limit on the Wolverhampton city ring road to 30mph from late May and pedestrianising some city centre roads, increasing cycle parking in Walsall and increasing the space for pedestrians on high streets across Dudley and Smethwick.

In Birmingham, measures include the creation of pop-up cycle lanes on seven priority cycle routes, a Park and Pedal programme to provide park and cycle options at rail station car parks and the creation of low-traffic neighbourhoods using bollards or planters to close off roads to through traffic.

Some of the measures accelerate plans that were already contemplated. The City Centre Traffic Cells Initiative, proposed in the draft Birmingham Transport Plan, will be brought forward, with the aim of creating a less traffic-dominated environment.

This will include the introduction of bus gates, banning some turning manoeuvres, and introducing contraflow cycling on one-way streets. The scheme will be implemented as a trial and will seek feedback – in a reversal of the traditional 'consult first, implement after' model.

TfWM already has plans for a car scrappage scheme in Coventry under the Future Transport Zone funding which will be launched later in the year and will exchange vehicles for a package of mobility credits on public transport, bikes and car club membership.

"Some are accelerating long-term plans, and there is ambition for these changes to remain long-term, but it does depend on data and the impact of these schemes," says Claire Williams, TfWM cycling and walking manager.



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TURN OVER FOR THE PEER REVIEWS

