

Title: Active Travel

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Intended audience: Internal Partner organisation Public Confidential

Purpose of briefing

To inform the Panel on the importance to the City of Wolverhampton of promoting Active Travel, the opportunities for promotion of Active Travel and barriers that may deter it, and recommendations for action in respect of it.

Background and context

Active Travel is any journey made using a significant element of physical activity. Such activity can make a positive contribution to personal fitness, weight management and mental health, as well as enabling equitable access to employment, amenities and services and social opportunities¹. There is evidence to suggest that employees who undertake physical activity such as walking and cycling to work have less sickness absence and may perform better in the workplace. The wider benefits of Active Travel include reduced traffic congestion, air pollution and noise.

However, barely 38% of adults in Wolverhampton walk at least once a week for travel purposes, and only 3% cycle². Moreover, one third of adults in Wolverhampton are generally inactive, undertaking less than 30 minutes of physical activity per week, although 58% say they would like to be more active and 32% say they would like help to be more active. Wolverhampton's Public Health team is developing an Active City Strategy which seeks to make physical activity accessible to all at every stage of life, and Active Travel can play a key role in this.

Everyday journeys to such places as childcare, local amenities, education institutions, workplaces and leisure facilities present significant opportunity to engage in Active Travel, and so contribute to overall Public Health goals. Wolverhampton is built on a scale which suits cycling, with almost all of it lying within a 5-mile radius of the centre. However, car has become the default means of travel for many people, leading to growth in motor traffic, increasing the potential for congestion and poorer air quality. As a result, many people see walking and cycling as dangerous, particularly for children. For Active Travel to flourish, this situation has to be addressed.

Strategic Cycling Network Development

If cycling is to be seen as a normal mode of travel, there needs to be a visible, high-quality network which mirrors the existing highway network in terms of directness and connectivity. Typically cycle route development in the past has focused on off-road routes such as canal towpaths, which provide easy opportunities for improvement. These however often suffer from being isolated with concomitant personal safety concerns, being unlit, and not necessarily providing direct routes to popular destinations. Meanwhile, measures on the highway to improve cycling have sometimes been criticised for being discontinuous, not to a suitable standard, or compromised by the presence of pedestrians or parked cars.

It is now routine to consider in the development of major highways schemes the scope to include enhanced cycling facilities as part of a multi-modal approach to transport. The Gateway North

works currently in progress on the A449 Stafford Road have included shared use footpaths from Vine Island to M54 Junction 2, which contribute to the Wobaston Road/Bee Lane cycle route delivered as part of the i54 Development, connecting into a Managing Short Trips scheme from Bee Lane to the Science Park. Schemes under development for Gateway East (Willenhall Road) and the A4123 Birmingham New Road have been designed with cycling facilities included.

In addition, the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and constituent Authorities have developed a draft Strategic Cycling and Walking Investment Plan (LCWIP) focusing on other strategic routes particularly those that cross boundaries between Local Authorities. This Plan, anticipated to be published in January 2019, provides a basis for future funding bids for major projects.

Active Travel in Neighbourhoods

Away from the strategic network, there remain concerns about the suitability of the highway for active travellers. Although new residential areas are designed to moderate traffic speed, there remain areas where speed and volume of traffic give rise to safety concerns. In addition, localised problems such as parking around schools are deterrents to active travel. Measures such as traffic calming and reduced speed limits have been used in Wolverhampton for some years to improve the environment for active travel. A recently completed independent research study commissioned by the Department for Transport (DfT) ³ indicated that implementing 20mph speed limits without measures to reduce speed is not particularly effective in reducing traffic speed or road casualties, but may nonetheless encourage more active travel.

More radical measures have been used in a variety of locations nation-wide. These include severance of through-routes for motor traffic, redistribution of roadspace away from traffic lanes and car parking and towards active travel use, and enhancement of the public realm. In some areas, “no-drive” zones have been created around schools for the beginning and end of the school day. The Road Safety service has reviewed all school locations in Wolverhampton but concluded in a previous report to the Scrutiny Panel that only two schools meet the recommended criteria for implementing such zones and those would experience unacceptable risk to safety as a consequence. The campaigning group Living Streets offers annual awards for projects which engage with communities imaginatively to create the appropriate conditions for active travel.

To maximise the benefits of Active Travel, pedestrian and cycling networks must mesh with other travel modes including bus, rail and private car. In extending the Midland Metro to be part of the Transport Interchange, much effort has been made to ensure the Interchange remains accessible by bicycle linking in to the growing network of cycle routes around the City Centre. A cycle hub is envisaged for the Interchange, which should accommodate a significant number of private bikes, and may also include hire bikes and a repair tool station. Wolverhampton also has Park ‘n’ Ride car parks which may benefit from provision of hire bike docks to offer better connection to the City Centre.

Motorist Behaviour

As much as the physical environment, it is the behaviour of motorists which causes concern for people wishing to engage in active travel. This includes driving at excessive speed, close passing, and parking in an obstructive manner. Distraction, for example by smartphones, can also result in risk to active travellers, particularly at junctions.

West Midlands Police undertake enforcement of speeding and dangerous parking around schools in acting on casualty data and the advice of the Council’s Road Safety service. This supplements

parking enforcement carried out by the Council's Civil Enforcement Officers. Gathering intelligence to target this work is important. In a Birmingham-based pilot scheme called ParkSafe, Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and members of the public have been encouraged to gather evidence on dangerous parking which can then be used to support issue of penalty notices. The Police also developed the Close Pass campaign in which motorists detected passing cyclists without appropriate separation distance were stopped and required to participate in an educational demonstration and discussion advising them of the problem they were causing.

Encouraging Active Travel

The launch of West Midlands Bikeshare is imminent. This will put low-cost hire bikes on streets in prominent places selected as natural journey origin or destination points. The scheme will be promoted particularly to communities where disadvantage or cultural barriers may exist. Corporate memberships will be available which will support promotion of cycling to, from and at work.

A key opportunity for Bikeshare is to capitalise on the first/last mile of journeys. Often the reason given for commuting by car is that the public transport links are not close enough to people's homes or workplaces. However, with Bikeshare, a commuter arriving at a rail station may then take a hire bike and ride on to their destination.

Walking for Health has been in operation in Wolverhampton for a number of years, and is a good example of a part subsidised, volunteer led sustainable physical activity programme which takes place at various sites across the city. Similarly, Parkrun is a national movement with local weekly provision in West Park and is self-sustainable.

The Council continues to deliver the Bikeability cyclist training programme and has steadily increased the numbers of cyclists passing the Level 3 qualification, which equips cyclists to make safe commuter journeys. There is also currently a Cycle Co-ordinator from British Cycling working in the Black Country to establish community cycling groups. This has had some success in attracting people from underrepresented demographic groups to take up cycling, initially in a leisure context, with the aim of developing into utility cycling as confidence develops.

Businesses seeking planning permission are required to develop and enact their own travel plan, which includes measures to promote travel to work by means other than private car. Typically, businesses are expected to provide cycle parking, lockers and shower facilities for cyclists. On the i54 site there are regular events to promote health benefits of active travel and encourage employees to take up the Cycle to Work scheme, which enables them to buy bicycles for commuting at tax-free prices. New Cross Hospital promotes the use of public transport, necessitating some walking to complete journeys. Wolverhampton Council makes pool bikes available to staff and holds "Bikers' Breakfast" events on National Bike to Work days, where staff can bring their bikes for maintenance checks.

Monitoring

There are various potential data sources for monitoring trends in active travel. In order for data to be useful it needs to be recent, likely to continue being collected, and provide a realistic basis for comparison. The DfT's annual National Travel Survey provides detailed data on walking and cycling classified by individual Local Authorities, so can be used to make comparisons between local, regional and national data. In addition, the WMCA has commissioned Sustrans to produce a "BikeLife" report similar to that produced for Birmingham⁴, which will include a range of surveys into public attitudes to cycling across the region.

Recommendations

1. Close co-operation between Strategic Transport and Public Health services to ensure a co-ordinated approach to Active Travel
2. Continued co-operation with West Midlands Police over targeting enforcement campaigns on Active Travel priority routes
3. Use of selected data from the National Travel Survey to monitor aspects of Wolverhampton's Active Travel trends by comparison with other Local Authorities and the national picture.

¹Briefing Note 14 August 2018: Active City Strategic Framework

²National Travel Survey 2017, CW0301/2 (Department for Transport)

³Process and Impact Evaluation Headline Report November 2018 (Atkins, AECOM & Maher)

⁴Bike Life Birmingham 2017 Report (Sustrans)