



Department
for Transport

Emma Ward
Director General - Roads, Places and
Environment

Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

Tel: 0300 330 3000
E-Mail : emma.ward@dft.gov.uk

Web site: www.gov.uk/dft

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**To all Combined, Local Transport and Local
Highway Authorities in England, outside
London**

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LOCAL TRANSPORT RESTART

I would like to thank you and your teams for the exceptional work you have been undertaking during this unprecedented period to keep the local transport network operating. This has been absolutely critical for all those who have continued to need to get to work and are on the frontline of the fight against the virus.

On Sunday 10 May, the Prime Minister made a statement outlining a roadmap for gradual easing of the lockdown restrictions and setting out the next stage in the Government's response to Covid-19. It is essential that authorities now take the necessary measures required to ensure that local areas are prepared for this next phase. This letter sets out some of the key issues which need to be considered for local transport restart, including in response to the green and active travel package announced by the Secretary of State on Saturday 9 May.

Collaborative approach

The local transport network is an important enabler, with impacts beyond local authority boundaries and on a wide range of people, businesses, and services. It will therefore be important to take a collaborative approach to planning. Please ensure that your authority liaises closely and shares assumptions and planning with:

- other relevant local authorities;
- bus, rail, light rail, and other transport operators;
- major employers;
- business groups;
- the NHS;
- emergency services;

- schools;
- Highways England;
- Network Rail; and
- Local Resilience Forums.

The Department for Transport is looking to upper tier local highway/Combined Authorities to lead the overall transport planning working across their area, bringing the most important local partners together on a very regular basis to drive forward work at pace. We also expect lower tier authorities to co-operate fully with, and respond rapidly to, the area-wide planning, particularly where their action is required – for example to re-allocate road space or manage pedestrian movements. We are exploring the potential for linking local highway and transport authorities with volunteers who may be able to help with giving information and guidance to the travelling public.

Green Transport Restart and Recovery

It will be vital to provide more space for walking and cycling, both to shift capacity from public transport and to enable social distancing – particularly in urban areas. There will also be significant public health and other benefits to this approach. To support this change in approach, the Secretary of State announced a new £250 million emergency active travel fund on 9 May¹ to support implementation of pop-up bike lanes, widened pavements, and cycle and bus-only corridors. This represents the first part of a longer-term cycling and walking programme for the next Spending Review period, announced through the £5 billion buses, cycling, and walking package on 11 February. My team will be in touch shortly to agree the scope, delivery arrangements, and allocations for the funding.

Alongside the announcement of this funding, new statutory guidance under the Traffic Management Act 2004 was also published² highlighting the immediate and potentially widespread changes that will be needed to reallocate road space to walking and cycling. The guidance says that authorities with high levels of public transport use should make such changes swiftly, and that authorities where public transport use is low should consider making them.

Such changes should include:

- reallocating road space for active travel – for example, by rapidly introducing temporary measures using cones, safety barriers, or road

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/2-billion-package-to-create-new-era-for-cycling-and-walking>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reallocating-road-space-in-response-to-covid-19-statutory-guidance-for-local-authorities>

closures to motor traffic (for part or all of the day). In making such changes, access for bus and essential freight movements and access for Blue Badge holders will also need to be considered. Measures to create space for cyclists and pedestrians should have a minimum level of physical separation from volume traffic. Measures indicated by road markings only are very unlikely to be sufficient to deliver the level of change needed;

- actively routing car traffic away from congested areas through measures such as employer communications, travel planning, and variable message signs;
- engaging with employers to seek to ensure that additional cycling facilities, such as storage and parking, are available;
- encouraging walking and cycling to school, through measures such as 'school streets,' where traffic is restricted at pick-up and drop-off times.
- reducing speed limits. 20 mph limits alone will not be sufficient to meet the needs of active travel, but in association with other measures, reducing the speed limit can provide a more attractive and safer environment for walking and cycling;
- closing roads or residential neighbourhoods to through motor traffic or restricting access for motor vehicles to specific streets or networks of streets. Access should always still be possible;
- plan, coordinate and continue to provide access for street and road works in a way that minimises disruption to road users. The new street manager digital service will be going live on 1 July 2020 and all utility companies and authorities will be able to use it to plan and coordinate works. Open data on live works will also be available;
- work with businesses and community groups to open other under-used facilities in town and city centres for changing or cycle storage; and
- maximise use of, and create new “pop up”, park and ride, walking and cycling facilities on the outskirts of urban areas – so people can use their cars without creating congestion or preventing active travel in town and city centres.

The Department for Transport has already taken action to provide guidance on making Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs)³, and is considering what further measures may be needed to support this approach – including action to provide more options for local authorities in making traffic orders, such as a new type of order specifically for implementing Covid-19 response measures and alternative publicity arrangements for all other types of order.

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/traffic-orders-advertising-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

To help with current shortages in supply of materials for street works, we are publishing a new technical specification for utility reinstatements. These new specifications for materials can be used with agreement from the local authority. It will become statutory guidance in May next year.

We are also working closely with MHCLG on how to ensure safer places in the wider public realm. The guidance will be available shortly on GOV.UK and I would encourage you to consider this when developing your plans.

Electric Scooters

The Department has also announced the fast tracking of e-scooter rental trials, which were originally planned to take place next year within Future Transport Zones. Under an expedited process, all local areas can now look to participate and trials should commence as soon as June this year. Officials will arrange a full online briefing session for interested local areas in the next two weeks.

Data and evidence

It is important that your authority recognises the use of different travel modes in your area by different people, and by workers in different sectors of the economy, at different times during the day. This will enable you to respond quickly to likely travel patterns and pinch points on the network and to seek to manage demand actively. This should include a detailed understanding of school travel patterns and how employees at major sites and for your most significant businesses travel to work.

In many places much of this information will be available from existing local models and data sets. If it is not, your Area Lead within the Department for Transport will be able to assist in providing access to any relevant recent data from the Department's analysis which may aid your planning.

Public transport

The Government has published guidance⁴ for passengers and transport operators to help them keep themselves and their staff safe, including how social distancing rules should be interpreted to do this. This guidance will be kept up-to-date as restrictions on travel change.

Because many public transport services have been operating at reduced service levels in recent weeks, there will be some lead times in increasing services. Due to this and in line with the guidance on social distancing, public

transport vehicles will not be able to operate at their full capacity. The range of possible impacts will vary across and within transport modes.

Your authority will need to engage, if it has not done so already, with your local bus, rail, light rail, and other transport operators to understand the capacity that they expect to be able to provide in different circumstances. These scenarios should include consideration of capacity constraints based on the social distancing guidelines, wherever they can. It will also be important for you to work with operators and other partners, including the local police and your respective Local Resilience Forum, with respect to crowd management and queuing.

Based on this information, please support operators to plan the services that will be required - ensuring that available capacity is prioritised to meet the most important transport needs and that, where relevant, planning is joined up with other modes. In doing so, consideration should be given to all those users along the routes, including the potential for any limited capacity to be used at an early stage in the journey.

You must also consider whether there is a need to provide dedicated services for some users (such as school children), add additional services that start halfway through a normal route and/or to bring in additional capacity from the coach sector where needed.

Travel planning

Even with these measures, the local transport network in some areas will continue to experience pressure, given potential continued social distancing requirements, particularly at peak periods. If this is likely your authority should engage urgently with major employers and business groups to seek to spread transport demand across peak periods, plan effectively for freight deliveries and reduce the need for travel.

This will normally include travel planning, such as potentially employer-recommended travel routes for employees for the “last mile” of their journeys to work, and co-ordination of flexible/staggered working hours across businesses. Experience from the 2012 Olympics, and elsewhere, suggests that this can have significant impacts on reducing underlying demand but requires focussed engagement and a detailed understanding of employees’ travel patterns.

Role of the car

The car will have a central role to play in restart and will be particularly important for access to some workplaces (such as out of town manufacturing, warehousing and construction sites) which are not well served by public

transport. It will also be especially important for travel by late night and early morning shift workers.

However, because of the unique circumstances at present, there is a significant risk that increased use of cars (even at below normal levels) will create pinch points and congestion at some locations particularly in towns, cities and sub-urban high streets during peak periods. The measures recommended above are designed both to enable active travel and to allow those people who need to use their car to do so whilst experiencing as little congestion as possible.

Transport users

The importance of planning for strong and real-time communications with all transport users cannot be underestimated. Your authority should work with transport operators, other local authorities, and major employers now to seek to ensure that people have the best possible information available to them as quickly as possible. This will involve agreeing clear roles and responsibilities and planning for common messaging and communication channels wherever possible.

Throughout your planning you should consider the needs of the full range of transport users, particularly those with protected characteristics under the Public-Sector Equality Duty. This will be especially important in ensuring that any temporary public realm works are designed in an inclusive manner which considers the needs of all.

Resources and next steps

As transport capacity will be central to local economic recovery you will need to ensure that sufficient resources are mobilised quickly to undertake this work and ensure that the network in your areas is as ready as possible for lockdown restrictions to be lifted.

The Department's Area Leads are already engaging with many of you on your plans to identify any concerns, challenges or local issues. This work will intensify to allow the Department to understand what further advice, assistance or support may be necessary - either nationally or in particular places.

Yours faithfully,

Emma Ward

**Director General - Roads, Places and Environment
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