

Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board

9th February 2022

Subject:	Emergency Active Travel Fund 2020
Director:	Director, Spatial Planning and Growth Tony McGovern
Contact Officer:	Strategic Planning and Transportation Manager Andy Miller – andy_miller@sandwell.gov.uk



1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Board notes, and where appropriate comments on, the content of the report.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 To enable the Board to have a greater understanding of the projects funded through the Government’s Emergency Active Travel Fund (EATF), their impact and the longer-term proposals.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p><i>People live well and age well</i> Generally - The provision of a safe and convenient network of walking and cycling routes helps address the health impacts of inactivity.</p> <p>Specifically – the EATF projects were aimed at assisting with social distancing and the need to provide safe active travel as part of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic.</p>
	<p><i>A connected and accessible Sandwell</i></p>



	<p>At every level; National, Metropolitan and Local, the cycling network contributes to the provision of a high-quality transport system linking homes and communities to jobs and facilities. More locally, improvements to pedestrian links and the general pedestrian environment assists with linking people to local facilities thus reducing the need for unnecessary car journeys.</p>
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4 Context and Key Issues

Background

- 4.1 The Emergency Active Travel Fund was announced by Government in May 2020 as part of its preparations for the lifting of the first period of Covid-19 restrictions later that year and to encourage a greener, more sustainable return to economic and social activity.
- 4.2 £250m was allocated nationally with the funding being channelled through Local Transport Authorities. The first tranche of funding was to be used to fully implement schemes by 7th September 2021. Proposals were to be submitted to DfT for appraisal in June 2021.
- 4.3 The Government stipulated that Tranche 1 of the fund had to be used for temporary measures only, such as the reallocation of parking bays to footway to enable social distancing, the provision of ‘pop up’ cycle lanes and temporary bus lanes.
- 4.4 In the West Midlands, the WMCA (through TfWM) was allocated £3.851m as part of Tranche 1. This funded 57 separate schemes across the seven metropolitan authorities of which four were in Sandwell. Combined the value of these projects amounted to £296,602 which included £55,000 (c£13k per project) of revenue to cover fees, surveys, operational monitoring, and evaluation etc.
- 4.5 Tranche 2 funding from what is now known as the Active Travel Fund or ATF was dependent on authorities being able to demonstrate successful delivery of DfT objectives using Tranche 1 funding.
- 4.6 Further projects in Bearwood, Blackheath, Wednesbury and a joint scheme with Dudley on the A4123 are included in Tranche 2. These projects are based on the Sandwell Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan



approved by Cabinet in January 2020. They will be permanent proposals with delivery underway by 31st March 2022.

The Projects

4.7 **SAN001 - Oldbury Town Centre to National Cycle Network Route (NCNR) 81**

A two-way cycle route with light segregation was implemented between Oldbury Town Centre and Sandwell and Dudley railway station using bolt-down NCLDD cycle lane defenders. This cycle route continues to NCNR 81 and canal access off Bromford Road. McKean Road was temporarily restricted to access only (except for pedestrian and cyclists) to provide space for pedestrians adjacent to the station entrance and to facilitate social distancing. A temporary crossing point on the southern side of the station was also installed.

Cost: £73,708

4.8 **SAN001A - Oldbury Town Centre**

A series of modifications were made in Oldbury Town Centre. Birmingham Street was re-designated as one-way with the other lane reallocated to pedestrians to widen the narrow lengths of footway outside retail businesses and bus stops using temporary barriers to allow social distancing. Parking spaces were temporarily suspended along some sections, crossing points improved which included the installation of a Tiger Crossing, and additional cycle parking was installed within Oldbury Town Centre. A new part permanent/part temporary (using water filled barriers) cycle route from the A457 into Oldbury Town Centre was created alongside new signage to communicate social distancing measures.

Cost: £91,104

4.9 **SAN002 - Smethwick Town Centre**

The High Street was re-designated as one-way between Fenton Street and the junction with lower High Street using Experimental Traffic Regulation Orders (ETRO's) with the other lane reallocated to pedestrians to widen the narrow lengths of footway outside retail businesses and bus stops using temporary barriers to allows social distancing. Bus shelters were suspended with replacement bus stops and an experimental bus



lane provided on Tollhouse Way instead to assist in bus journey times. Wide paths were provided from the bus stops to the High Street with additional signage installed to communicate social distancing measures.

Cost: £67,121

4.10 **SAN002A - Smethwick Rolfe St Station to Galton Bridge Station pop-up cycle lane A457**

A two-way pop-up cycle lane was implemented on the A457 Tollhouse Way from Smethwick Rolfe St Station to Smethwick Galton Bridge Station with new cycle parking installed adjacent to Rolfe St Station. This linked the two stations and to the Toucan crossing leading to Smethwick High Street.

Cost: £64,667

Consultation, Monitoring & Evaluation

- 4.11 The conditions attached to the EATF funding and the speed at which the works were required to be implemented meant that it was not possible to carry out the normal range of consultation activity usually associated with traffic management projects. The changes were authorised through Experimental Traffic Regulation Orders which allow for the schemes to be installed and then feedback sought on their operation.
- 4.12 The proposed measures were advertised in the Express and Star on Monday 29th June 2020 and in addition, over 1000 letters were delivered directly to residents and businesses on Friday 26th June 2020 regarding the proposals. To support this, Sandwell also ran a notification campaign regarding the measures on both its Twitter and Facebook social media pages as well as through communications via Transport for West Midlands (TfWM). This was over and above the minimum advertising requirements required as part of the new emergency regulations.
- 4.13 The locations were inspected regularly during their operation. Camera surveys were carried out to ascertain the impact on queue lengths, pedestrians and cycle movements, bus journey time information provided by bus operators, feedback from members of the public, residents and businesses through consultation letters and questionnaires k, feedback



from Sandwell MBC social media platforms and monitoring and evaluation information from stakeholders such as Transport for West Midlands and National Express West Midlands. In addition, posters were placed on local lighting columns inviting residents to ‘have your say’ using a designated email address.

- 4.14 The ‘pop-up’ cycle lane on Tollhouse saw little use. Traffic levels rose much higher and far more quickly than anticipated following the lifting of the first lockdown resulting in congestion on this section the A457. The cones used to segregate it were being regularly moved to enable emergency vehicle access and the general response to the initiative was negative. Therefore, the decision was taken in October 2020 to remove the lane and return the carriageway to normal operation.
- 4.15 In contrast to Smethwick, whilst there was some negative feedback in Oldbury to the way-way operation on Birmingham Street, there was little impact in terms of congestion.

Current situation

- 4.16 On 30th July 2021, Transport Minister Chris Heaton-Morris wrote to all local transport and highway authorities reminding them that active travel measures funded through EATF and the subsequent ATF should not be “*prematurely removed*” and that where removal is proposed this should only be done following robust consultation and with proper evidence as to why they are being removed. The letter went on to state that “*Premature removal of schemes carries implications for the management of the public money used in these schemes and for the Government's future funding relationship with the authorities responsible.*”
- 4.17 The temporary pop-up cycle lane (**SAN0002A**) on the A457 was removed prior to this letter in October 2020 for the reasons stated above. This was felt justified as Sandwell was successful in bidding for £4.62m of funding through the Government’s Towns Fund initiative to provide a high quality permanent off-road two-way cycle route adjacent to the A457 between Galton Bridge Station and the new Midland Metropolitan University Hospital at Grove Lane. This route forms part of the Sandwell Cycling & Walking Implementation Plan approved by Cabinet in January 2020. The first phase of this project, from Galton Bridge to Rolfe Street was completed in Summer 2021. Further phases will be delivered by 2024.



- 4.18 The experimental bus lane that formed part of **SAN002** was also removed on 1st December 2020 following discussions with National Express West Midlands who operate the services that used it. The relocated bus stops have remained on Tollhouse Way and bus services continued to operate on the A457 westbound throughout 2021. These bus stops have been accommodated in the permanent cycleway scheme implemented through the Smethwick Town Deal.
- 4.19 The remaining projects were kept in place until Autumn 2021 as concern remained over the need to enable social distancing in Smethwick High Street and Oldbury Town Centre and the uncertain direction that the ongoing pandemic would take and what measure around social distancing may still be required.
- 4.20 However, with the Government's removal of legal restrictions and the withdrawal of the requirement to implement social distancing measures on 19th July, discussions took place with the Cabinet Member for Environment over the future of the remaining EATF measures. A decision was taken to consult on their removal in line with the Transport Minister's letter. Letters and questionnaires were sent to all the relevant ward members and to John Spellar MP in early September. Around 2000 letters were then hand delivered across the two areas on 17th September to ensure everyone received the paperwork.
- 4.21 The results of the feedback in both locations indicated that there was a strong majority in favour of removing the experimental highway works. Consequently, the Cabinet Member for Environment made the decision to remove the experimental one-way systems and return High Street, Smethwick and Birmingham Street, Oldbury to their original two-way layouts. In addition, the temporary closure of McKean Road by Sandwell & Dudley station would also be removed. The cycle defenders in Bromford lane had previously been removed leaving a mandatory line-marked cycle lane in place.
- 4.22 The remaining measures were removed by contractors between 2nd and 8th November 2021.

Future arrangements

- 4.23 The projects in High Street, Smethwick and Birmingham Street, Oldbury were specifically aimed at creating space for social distancing by



temporarily reallocating carriageway as footways. This was a clear response to the pandemic and in accordance with Government advice at the time of their implementation. Both projects created inconvenience for motorists although the scheme in Smethwick resulted in a greater level of complaints, mainly from business owners who had previously been able to park immediately outside of their premises. It should however be recognised that the measures did not actually lead to a reduction in available parking; the biggest impact was on the regular illegal parking that takes place on the opposite side of the road which with the narrowed carriageway caused obstructions.

- 4.24 There remains a significant issue with narrow footways and regular footway obstruction on High Street, Smethwick. The need for further traffic management and pedestrian improvements in the town centre will be kept under review and options for permanent arrangements which may include some one-way operation will be presented to Cabinet for consultation in the future. These will be influenced by ongoing public health advice where appropriate.
- 4.25 It had been understood that NXWM would continue to operate its services eastbound on High Street and westbound on the A457 following the removal of one-way operation on High Street as this has been found to be beneficial for journey time reliability. However, towards the end of December 2021, NXWM indicated that it had reconsidered this and is now intended to revert to operating two-way on High Street.
- 4.26 With regards to the two projects aimed at encouraging cycling it is clear that these were of limited success. Both projects were on routes already identified, consulted on and approved as part of Sandwell's Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (SCWIP). The aim for all of the routes in the SCWIP is to create wherever possible, segregated cycle lanes.
- 4.27 Whilst there was no requirement to carry out counts as part of the funding agreement, the anecdotal evidence suggests that the pop-up lane in Smethwick did little to encourage new cyclists, whilst experienced cyclists were happy to use the normal carriageway. Had greater funding been available, it would have been possible to run the pop-up lane to Birmingham boundary which might have improved its appeal. The ongoing implementation of the segregated route from Oldbury town centre to Birmingham city centre which this section forms part of will provide a high



quality route fully in accordance with the Governments advice note LTN 1/20 which is now a condition of future funding allocations.

4.28 Unlike the A457, the project on Bromford Lane was designed to reinforce existing on-carriageway line-marked cycle lanes. The use of cycle defenders is common throughout the country but the regular damage experienced here suggests that their use in this location was inappropriate. Design work is currently underway to replace the line-marked cycle lanes on Bromford lane with a permanent, predominantly segregated and LTN 1/20 compliant, route which would link to the existing facilities on Kelvin way and through the Lyng linking to West Bromwich town centre. Funding for this will be sought from future rounds of the Government’s Active Travel Fund. Full consultation will take place with ward members, frontagers and cycle groups prior to implementation.

5 Implications

Resources:	<p>Funding for all EATF Trance 1 projects was provided by the Department for Transport to the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).</p> <p>Sandwell was allocated £0.297m (£0.242m Capital & £0.056m Revenue). This was fully spent.</p>
Legal and Governance:	<p>The measures were implemented to reallocate road space and provide sustainable transport routes under the Traffic Management Act 2004 and new statutory guidance, issued in May 2020, associated with network management in response to COVID-19.</p> <p>The new statutory guidance under the Traffic Management Act 2004 supports the Traffic Orders Procedure (Coronavirus) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2020 came into force on 23 May 2020 and amended the following regulations until the 30 April 2021;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Road Traffic (Temporary Restrictions) Procedure Regulations 1992 • The Local Authorities’ Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Secretary of State's Traffic Order (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1990 <p>The amendments speeded up making emergency traffic orders that may be needed to, for example, widen pavements or install cycle lanes. The main change was to the means of advertising the order, which could be via digital means. A second order was still needed to be published for information for 14 days later in a newspaper, where these were available, or via digital media.</p> <p>The public sector equality duty still applied, and in making any changes to their road networks, authorities must consider the needs of disabled people and those with other protected characteristics. Accessibility requirements apply to temporary measures as they do to permanent ones.</p> <p>The proposals were implemented using Experimental Traffic Orders made under section 9 and section 10 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984</p> <p>Experimental orders are used in situations that need monitoring and reviewing before deciding on whether a permanent traffic regulation order should be made. ETRO can last no more than eighteen months before they are abandoned or made permanent. There is no public consultation required prior to the making of an experimental order, however there is a 6-month public consultation period from the date of making the order, that allows representations to be submitted based on the experience of the traffic scheme in operation. After that period, the scheme may be modified or varied in which case there will be a further 6 months consultation period. The ETRO can be revoked if it fails to achieve its stated objective or can be made into a permanent traffic regulation order.</p>
Risk:	The measures were designed facilitate the observance of social distancing to mitigate the spread of the Covid-19 virus and save lives.



Equality:	The proposals benefited all communities and protected groups so do not raise any issues that would require an Equality Impact Assessment
Health and Wellbeing:	More space to facilitate social distancing for pedestrians on high streets helped limit the spread of the Covid-19 virus and save lives. The proposals also supported increased walking and cycling in preference to the use of the private car. An increase in the use of these active travel modes together with an associated improvement in air quality from reduced car use contributes to improved health and wellbeing.
Social Value	There were no Social Value implications arising from the implementation of these measures.

