

Report to	Partnerships Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting	17th December 2020
Lead Member / Officer	Lead Member for Waste, Transport and the Environment/Head of Planning, Public Protection and Countryside
Report author	Traffic, Parking and Road Safety Manager
Title	COVID-19 Active Travel Plan Schemes

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1 The report is about the active travel schemes that have been implemented in some Denbighshire town centres and which have been funded by the Welsh Government's (WG) Covid-19 sustainable transport grant.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

- 2.1 To provide information to Scrutiny regarding the purpose of the grant, the rationale behind the schemes developed and early findings from their implementation.

3. What are the Recommendations?

- 3.1 That the Committee considers the contents of the report and provides observations on the process followed by the Council in identifying and developing projects, applying for the grant and implementing projects.

4. Report details

4.1 Background and purpose of the grant

- 4.1.1 In May 2020, the Welsh Government's Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport wrote to Council Leaders across Wales inviting Councils to submit expressions of interest for a special grant for "Local sustainable transport measures in response to Covid 19". A copy of this letter is provided in Appendix A.

- 4.1.2 The rationale behind the grant was twofold. The first reason was to build upon the increases in active travel (cycling and walking) that had been occurring during the first lockdown period. The second was to help facilitate social distancing in our town centres and other busy public areas such as routes to schools, bus stops and bus stations once non-essential retail and schools reopened.
- 4.1.3 The letter from the Deputy Minister provides examples of some of the types of measure that could be funded by the grant for creating more space for cyclists, pedestrians and at bus stops. These examples include footway widening, road closures, one way systems, lane closures, temporary parking removal and so on.
- 4.1.4 The WG stated that whilst they expected many of the measures would be temporary or experimental initially, their expectation was that some of these measures could be introduced on a permanent basis if they proved to be effective.

4.2 Actions undertaken by the Council

- 4.2.1 Once the letter had been received, officers from the Traffic, Parking and Road Safety Section met to develop initial ideas for proposals that could be implemented on a trial basis of 18 months. Given the limited time available, it was decided to concentrate on developing proposals for our five busiest town centres namely Rhyl, Llangollen, Prestatyn, Denbigh and Ruthin. Some additional proposals were also developed for some footpaths surrounding Ysbyty Glan Clwyd. After discussion with the Lead Member, officers contacted the relevant Member Area Groups (MAGs) to outline the proposals within their areas and to invite feedback. Based on this feedback, the proposals for Prestatyn were abandoned. Cost estimates were provided and the expressions of interest were then submitted to the WG on the 22nd May 2020. Details of the schemes for Llangollen, Rhyl and Ruthin as consulted upon are included within Appendix B.
- 4.2.2 WG wrote to the Council on the 19th June 2020 to confirm we'd been awarded funding for all of our active travel proposals except for Ysbyty Glan Clwyd. The total value of the grant for the active travel schemes was £825k.
- 4.2.3 As stated in the letter from the Deputy Minister, the WG's intention was that many of the schemes would be implemented in "early summer". This timescale was always going to be challenging to deliver given that the funding wasn't awarded until the 19th June 2020. Nonetheless, the expectation was that proposals would

be implemented quickly. To help this, the secondary legislation relating to emergency Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO) had been amended to include Covid-related highway works as a justification for making a temporary TRO. This meant that proposals to implement one way systems or remove on-street parking, for example, could be undertaken without any need to consult so as not to unnecessarily delay their implementation. In line with this, we developed an engagement strategy that outlined how we would inform residents and business of the proposals yet this wasn't planned to be a consultation process.

- 4.2.4 Local members were contacted to let them know about the funding award and WebEx meetings were arranged to discuss the proposals in further detail.
- 4.2.5 News of the proposals for Denbigh ended up in the public domain. This quickly generated many negative comments on social media. After discussions between senior officers and the Lead Member, it was decided to carry out a two week online consultation for each town centre scheme. It was also agreed that officers would then present a summary of the consultation feedback for each town to the relevant MAG, followed by the MAG making a recommendation of whether or not to proceed with the scheme. It was decided that the Lead Member would attend each of these meetings in an observational capacity and would subsequently make a decision whether each of the schemes should proceed.
- 4.2.6 Following the conclusion of this process; the decision was taken to proceed with the proposals for Rhyl, Llangollen and Ruthin, but to abandon the proposal for Denbigh. It was decided to develop an alternative proposal for Denbigh instead.
- 4.2.7 The proposed schemes for Llangollen, Rhyl and Ruthin have recently been implemented. Contracts for the construction works were not let until decisions had been made for each of the schemes.
- 4.2.8 Robust monitoring plans are in place for each of the town centre schemes. This will enable the impact of the proposals to be closely monitored through the 18 month trial period.
- 4.2.9 Some minor problems have occurred following the implementation of the schemes. These issues are being dealt with quickly by officers. Such issues aren't uncommon for schemes developed over typical timescales, but obviously are more likely for schemes delivered in a compressed timescale such as these.

4.3 Conclusions

- 4.3.1 Traffic engineering schemes are normally developed over 1-2 years as surveys are undertaken, designs and cost estimates produced and consultations carried out. These processes ensure problems and solutions are fully assessed whilst enabling stakeholders to provide their views before final decisions are taken.
- 4.3.2 For the reasons outlined in this report, there was very little time available to firstly identify proposals and develop these through to implementation.
- 4.3.3 The one-off nature of the grant and circumstances around it mean that it is difficult to compare with normal working practice. Officers quickly identified proposals and shared these with local members to gain their initial views before submitting an expression of interest to the Welsh Government. Further member engagement then followed as the schemes were developed.
- 4.3.4 The Regulations for making Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders (TTRO) was amended to include Covid-related highway works as justification for making a TTRO, meaning that no consultation was required. However, given the negative response to the Denbigh proposal in particular, it was decided to consult on all four schemes. This was arguably the correct decision given the amount of public concern, however it also substantially delayed the implementation of the projects which has also drawn a lot of criticism. On balance, however, it is considered that the correct approach was adopted.

5. How does the decision contribute to Corporate Priorities?

- 5.1 The active travel schemes contribute towards the Connected Communities priority.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

- 6.1 The total costs for all the works including staff costs incurred will be fully met from the grant award of £825,000.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

- 7.1 A Well-being Impact Assessment has not been undertaken as a decision isn't being sought from the Committee.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

- 8.1 Consultation was undertaken with the Lead Member and MAGs initially. This was then followed-up by a two-week on-line consultation exercise in July 2020.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

- 9.1 As the report is focused on processes there are no direct financial implications.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

- 10.1 Reputational damage owing to elements of the schemes being unpopular, such as where parking has been removed to enable pavements to be widened. Officers are actively meeting with affected parties to try and mitigate where possible. Robust monitoring of projects is also key.

11. Power to make the decision

- 11.1 Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000.
- 11.2 Section 7.4.2 of the Council's Constitution outlines Scrutiny's powers with respect to examining the impact of decisions and the application of policies.