



Department
for Transport

From the Minister of State
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To: Leaders of all combined, transport and highway authorities in England

Dear Council Leader,

Active travel schemes supported by Government funding

Over the last year, cycling has risen by 46%. In 2020, we saw the highest level of cycling on the public highway since the 1960s, and the greatest year-on-year increase in post-war history. Many people have started cycling for shorter journeys, saving appreciable amounts of pollution, noise, CO2 and traffic danger. In some cities the delivery bike has become as normal a sight as the delivery van. Even after these remarkable rises, according to one leading retailer, a further 37 per cent of the population now wants to buy a bike.

These things have been made possible, in part, by hundreds of school streets, pop-up cycle lanes, and Low Traffic Neighbourhoods implemented under the Government's Emergency Active Travel Fund (EATF) and under statutory Network Management Duty guidance. For all the controversy these schemes can sometimes cause, there is strong and growing evidence that they command public support.

I do know that a few councils have removed, or are proposing to remove, cycle schemes installed under the fund, or to water them down. Of course I understand not every scheme is perfect and a minority will not stand the test of time, but if these schemes are not given that time to make a difference, then taxpayers' monies have been wasted. Schemes need time to be allowed to bed in; must be tested against more normal traffic conditions; and must be in place long enough for their benefits and disbenefits to be properly evaluated and understood. We have no interest in requiring councils to keep schemes which are proven not to work, but that proof must be presented. Schemes must not be removed prematurely, or without proper evidence and too soon to collect proper evidence about their effects.

As the Secretary of State stated in a letter to all local authorities in November 2020, since the peak of the emergency had passed, we now expected local

authorities to consult more thoroughly. We revised our Network Management Duty (NMD) guidance to state that measures should be "taken as swiftly as possible, but not at the expense of consulting local communities" and that "local residents and businesses should... be given an opportunity to comment on proposed changes" to schemes. Please note these requirements also apply as much to the removal or modification of existing schemes as to the installation of new ones. In many cases where schemes have been removed or modified, there appears to have been little or no consultation.

The Secretary of State also stated in his November letter that consultation should include objective tests of public opinion, such as professional polling, to gather a truly representative picture of local views. Obviously the views of the local Member of Parliament should be taken into account.

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. The Department will continue to assess authorities' performance in delivering schemes and, following the precedent we have already set, those which have prematurely removed or weakened such schemes should expect to receive a reduced level of funding.

We are also publishing updated Network Management Duty guidance on this subject, describing in more detail the obligations of authorities to allow adequate time to evaluate schemes and to engage with local people and protected groups using professional opinion surveys, including on any proposed removal. Authorities which are proposing to remove or weaken schemes should not proceed with their plans unless they are satisfied that they have had regard to the guidance.



CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS

MINISTER OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT