

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 17th September 2020

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director Enterprise, Community and Resources

PORTFOLIO: Transportation

SUBJECT: Local Transport Responses to Pandemic

WARDS: Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Board of the programme of works undertaken to support the local economy and protect public health. This report provides information on the acceleration local measures, to help support the safe and sustainable movement of people in the 'new normal'.
- 1.2 Guidance issued by the Department for Transport and Department for Education on the restart of the transport network¹ forms the basis of the measures implemented. This highlights the critical importance of walking and cycling, and the allocation of public space to allow people to travel and access services in a way that aids the ongoing need for social distancing. The following extracts are salient:-

"The government therefore expects local authorities to make significant changes to their road layouts to give more space to cyclists and pedestrians."...

..."Measures should be taken as swiftly as possible, and in any event within weeks, given the urgent need to change travel habits before the restart takes full effect. None of these measures are new – they are interventions that are a standard part of the traffic management toolkit, but a step-change in their roll-out is needed to ensure a green restart"...

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1) the interventions undertaken so far be noted; and**
- 2) the Board be kept up-to-date with developments in this area**

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reallocating-road-space-in-response-to-covid-19-statutory-guidance-for-local-authorities>

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 On 9th May a £250 million national fund was announced by the Department for Transport (DfT) to support walking and cycling schemes, it was hoped there would reduce reliance on public transport. As part of announcement, the Government proposed a longer-term investment programme of £2billion over the next 5 years outside of London. The Liverpool City Region (LCR) was initially awarded £2.1m for tranche 1 works, and there is a budget of £45million nationally for tranche 2 with an indicative £8m anticipated for the Liverpool City Region. There will be a number of further tranches and the LCR will be expected to manage programmes in a strategic, efficient and joined-up way, and also to align monies with other devolved funding sources. Halton has been awarded £208k for tranche 1 works. These works have included the following areas:

3.2 Gathering local Intelligence

Research into key transport corridors, using a transport model and bus data to establish where the most impacted routes were. Impacted routes are where there is evidence of 10 or more bus passengers using the same bus service at the same time, with a risk of not being able to get to their destination due to social distancing measures on the bus, and will potentially need to find an alternative method of travel.

3.3 Temporary widening of footpaths to enable social distancing (using cones and barriers). In tranche 1 areas (temporary measures for quick delivery) 'pop up' cycle routes are located in:

- i) Hough Green-Liverpool Road,
- ii) Widnes Town Centre and
- iii) Halton Lea-Murdishaw

These use a mix of temporary barriers to allocate additional road space, forming segregated cycle routes, routes on existing paths and Experimental Traffic Order to allow cyclists to use part of the Busway. These are described further in Appendix 1, which also includes Tranche 2/3 proposed areas of intervention for more permanent future schemes.

3.4 General Social Distancing:

Proactive stencilling undertaken to support the re-opening of local centres and town centres. Over a two week period in May all three Town Centres and over 30 Local Centres were stencilled. This was welcomed by the business community, and gave the staff a good opportunity to engage (at a safe distance) with those businesses who had continued to operate and those preparing to re-open.

3.5 Engagement and Communication

In partnership with the Combined Authority, HBC have created a consultation portal to gather and share information with local businesses and residents seeking transport-planning advice. The team have engaged with local businesses via consultation to understand new work patterns and travel and transport concerns as they re-open.

3.6 To promote cycle and walking, a live cycle map for residents and visitors to view. The cycle map has a number of basic features such as road designation eg: quiet road, off road route etc. This will allow the team to update the map quicker as schemes and improvements progress. A particular feature will demonstrate the pop up cycleways as they are implemented. The cycle map will also be available to view on mobile devices.

3.7 Public Transport

Local bus services are currently operating at approximately 90% of pre-covid levels although, passenger numbers remain extremely low with operators reporting only 30% of passengers travelling compared to pre-covid levels.

3.8 Stencilling at bus stops to remind passengers of the two metre social distancing guidelines, together with notices reminding passenger of the mandatory use of face coverings whilst travelling have been put in place. Bus operators have posted information on vehicles relating to the recently published guidance informing passengers what is required to enable them to carry out a journey on their services. Changes have also been made to boarding and alighting arrangements at the major bus interchanges in the Borough to allow for social distancing.

3.9 Commercial bus journeys that accommodate schools

Recent discussions with operators have identified that commercially operated service levels will return to pre-covid levels by the end of August to co-inside with the re-opening of schools and colleges within the Borough.

3.10 Most recent discussions with Arriva raise two issues:

3.11 Arriva have a driver shortage, due to age profiles, with drivers choosing to retire rather than return to furlough.

3.12 Arriva receive Covid bus support grant from Government, this acts as disincentive to engage in activities that would draw additional funding e.g. additional tendering for services may take income over the covid bus support grant, thereby making Arriva ineligible for the Covid bus support grant.

3.13 Despite the above, capacity is expected to be available on these services, even with mixing with general bus passengers.

3.14 Education

HBC have written to all schools located in the Borough. Engagement has taken place with local schools to offer support and guidance as they re-accept pupils into their premises. Five schools have engaged with the Team currently, and due to the nature of location and highway

infrastructure a bespoke package of options are being discussed with each school to find the most appropriate solution.

3.15 Options include stencilling, barriers, cones to temporary closure of roads eg: 45 minutes before and after school hours to enable safe disbursement. It is important that Schools in the Borough are proactive in working with the Highways team as equipment such as Cones, Barriers and signage are nationally in short supply and where a temporary road closure is required 4 weeks' notice is required. It has been very difficult to gain an indication from schools whether they are going to stagger start and finish times. Where short term road closures were proposed in Farnworth, there was resistance from local ward members who felt this intervention would just displace parking issues to surrounding streets leading to complaints from residents. It is expected that school journeys by private car will increase as parents decide to drop their children at school rather than use buses.

3.16 Dedicated school buses

Transport Coordination are using 'the Chest' for the procurement of 3 additional buses to add capacity to school service routes as follows:

- 1) Moore / Sandymoor / via busway to Bollingbrook, the Heath school & Grangeway;
- 2) West bank via Town Centre to Peter & Paul and Wade Deacon and Rainhill High.
- 3) Weates Close via Halton View to Town Centre to terminate Ormiston Chadwick (bankfield).

Anecdotally, Merseytravel seeking to procuring 130 buses for the 5 districts who subscribe to them.

3.17 Although there is no current budget funding currently for these 3 additional services, funding has been announced by DfT and has been provided to LCR CA for allocation to districts. HBC Officers are seeking to establish the level of allocation expected for Halton.

3.18 Funding Expected

Anecdotally, the CA is to receive £1.2m to be disaggregated on a student population basis. No district allocations made as yet (19 Aug).

On 4 Aug CA stated they had received notification of £150k grant support towards travel demand management. Based on population, HBC could be expected to receive £12,450, however this has yet to be confirmed by the CA.

3.19 Home to School Travel (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities)

Specialist transport is provided for approximately 400 pupils with special educational needs and disabilities. Currently, this involves circa 130 taxi and minibus routes to in-borough and out-of-borough placements. Over recent weeks, transport has been provided for a maximum of 120 pupils with limited numbers of pupils in vehicles to adhere to social distancing measures. Route planning from September, when the vast majority of pupils are expected to return to school, will be based on tendered routes

with social distancing measures not being required as per DfE guidance dated 2nd July. Drivers and passenger assistants will be expected to wear face coverings at all times and have clear guidelines around vehicle cleaning regimes. Children over 11 will be asked to wear face coverings whilst on transport however realistically the majority of pupils will be exempt due to being medically vulnerable and having high anxiety levels. Hand cleaning for children will be required when entering transport therefore hand sanitiser will be available on all vehicles. Additionally, paid mileage will be offered to parents of eligible pupils, where requested, to transport their own children to school over a short-term period. Pupils who have been travel trained will be expected to travel independently on public transport, additional training and support will be provided to facilitate this.

3.20 Advice for Schools and Parents for School Transport:

The following advice is recommended for release to schools and parents:

1. Face Covering recommended even on dedicated school transport and to be worn throughout the journey.
2. Schools should have a process for children and young people to remove face coverings which enables them to wash their hands immediately on arrival (as is the case for all pupils), dispose of temporary face coverings in a covered bin or place reusable face coverings in a plastic bag they can take home with them, and then wash their hands again.
3. Home to School transport pre-COVID accepted general public passengers. This is to end.
4. School will organise queuing arrangements with older children allocated to the rear of the vehicle.
5. Social distancing should be practiced in the morning at bus stops.
6. Records of children using school transport kept to aid Test and Trace.
7. Dedicated SEN transport letter to parents on what steps in place to minimise transmission, e.g., dedicated travel assistants, fewer children on bus and maintaining social distancing.
8. To note: no schools have informed us that they are implementing staggered starts that impact on transport.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 All proposed works support Halton Local Transport Plan 3, Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, whilst following Government policy guidance.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.2 Halton has secured funding via the LCR and Central Government to Deliver Tranche 1 schemes. A further application will be made for Tranche 2 schemes in Mid-August.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

Supports Children and Young people back into education after Covid Pandemic closures.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

Supports residents and visitors to Halton back to places of Education and Employment by providing social distancing Measures where appropriate within Halton's Transport Network.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Supports residents and visitors to Halton by increased access to cycle Walking routes by recognising congested areas and implementing pop up infrastructure where possible.

6.4 A Safer Halton

As part of the Pop Up cycle routes a number of key corridors will have vegetation maintenance, which will increase confidence in using fore mentioned routes.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

These schemes support regeneration in the following areas;

Astmoor
West Runcorn
Palacefields and
Murdishaw

The scheme in North Widnes supports the existing and proposed new sites as identified in the DALP.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

Lack of commitment to deliver tranche 1 temporary pop up schemes could be perceived to be high risk by not following government guidance to support the public in returning to work and education. The financial risk is also high as the lack of timely delivery of these phases could impact future funding opportunities Halton could apply for in the future tranches.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

Best practice will be followed wherever possible to ensure equality and diversity issues are addressed in any of the proposed schemes.

Appendix 1

Tranche 1 schemes

P1. Halton Lea – East Lane, Crown Gate, -Halton Hospital, Busway. Works will include barriers, speed reductions for Buses, signage, road markings and vegetation removal, with use of the Busway by cyclists proposed between Halton Lea and Murdishaw. The pilot scheme would operate in daylight hours only. If scheme needs to continue into the autumn/winter months temporary lighting would be installed. (start on site late July)

P1. Hough Green – Liverpool Road (Co-op area) towards Hale Road linking up to the existing cycle route at Chesnut Lodge Local centre, cones and signage, cyclists on this route would be positioned in the middle of the road on the right turns.

P1. Widnes Town Centre - Marzahn Way (DW sports area) to Gerrard Street (Aldi area) work for this project will commence on the 20/7/20 and will take approximately 2weeks. The works includes surfacing, stenciling, signage and barriers to create safe corridor.

P1. Local Centres & Town Centres work with local businesses to stencil shop frontages to encourage 2m social distancing. (completed)

P1. Bus Interchanges and Key Bus Corridors. Create safe waiting areas using barriers/cones where appropriate, stencils and advertisements to promote 2m social distancing and safe travel advice.

P1. Live Cycle Map of the Borough. Supporting government guidance to promote cycle and walking the map will be available as of the 28 July 2020 to the public.

Tranche 2 Schemes- In development.

P2. Runcorn- Link - Clifton Road(Busway Interchange) to Malpas Road (connects to Heath School /Railway cycle route) review and improvement of existing route down Heath Road to Union Street, then connect into existing cycle network leading to Town Centre and SJB.

P2 North Widnes – improve cycle corridor from Cronton College to Moorfield Rd/Barrows Green Lane, by providing a combination of segregated and on road stenciled routes. Some junction improvements will be required and a reduction in speed on Derby Road and potentially Lunts Heath Road. Connection along Birchfield Road to Widnes Station (potentially off carriageway footway cycleway)

P2. Astmoor business connections - The creation of new cycle paths to connect commuters from the cycle network running alongside the busway in Astmoor to Arkwright, Brindley and Chadwick Roads.

Highway verge on the East would be replaced with surfacing to allow improved cycle and walking facilities.

P2. Halton Hospital – Murdishaw Local Centre. Create permanent segregated cycle route (as per Astmoor and Castlefield) in verge alongside busway.

P3. Cow Hey Lane Link - Formalise cycle /walk links between J12 /Frodsham and Heath Business Park via Runcorn Rowing Club and Cow Hey Lane to Rocksavage, connecting commuters and visitors to key employment areas and places of interest.

P3. Weston point Expressway – Super cycle Highway - The introduction of a segregated cycle corridor from Rocksavage to Runcorn Station Quarter. This would require a speed reduction on that section of road. The loss of the hard shoulder and the introduction of black and white wands to segregate cyclists from vehicles.