

Reallocating road space in response to COVID-19: statutory guidance for local authorities

Department for Transport

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Foreword by the Secretary of State for Transport

The coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis has had a terrible impact on the lives and health of many UK citizens, as well as severe economic consequences. But it has also resulted in cleaner air and quieter streets, transforming the environment in many of our towns and cities.

And millions of people have discovered, or rediscovered, cycling and walking. In some places, there's been a 70% rise in the number of people on bikes - for exercise, or for safe, socially distanced travel.

When the country gets back to work, we need them to carry on cycling, and to be joined by millions more. With public transport capacity reduced, the roads in our largest cities, in particular, may not be able to cope without it.

We also know that in the new world, pedestrians will need more space. Indications are that there is a significant link between COVID-19 recovery and fitness. Active travel can help us become more resilient.

That is why towns and cities in the UK and around the world are making or proposing radical changes to their roads to accommodate active travel.

We recognise this moment for what it is: a once in a generation opportunity to deliver a lasting transformative change in how we make short journeys in our towns and cities. According to the [National Travel Survey](#), in 2017-18 over 40% of urban journeys were under 2 miles – perfectly suited to walking and cycling.

Active travel is affordable, delivers significant health benefits, has been shown to improve wellbeing, mitigates congestion, improves air quality and has no carbon emissions at the point of use. Towns and cities based around active travel will have happier and healthier citizens as well as lasting local economic benefits.

The government therefore expects local authorities to make significant changes to their road layouts to give more space to cyclists and pedestrians. Such changes will help embed altered behaviours and demonstrate the positive effects of active travel. I'm pleased to see that many authorities have already begun to do this, and I urge you all to consider how you can begin to make use of the tools in this guidance, to make sure you do what is necessary to ensure transport networks support recovery from the COVID-19 emergency and provide a lasting legacy of greener, safer transport.

Grant Shapps
Secretary of State for Transport

Network management duty guidance

This guidance is additional statutory guidance issued by the Secretary of State for Transport under Section 18 of the [Traffic Management Act 2004](#) (“the act”). It applies to all highway authorities in England, who shall have regard to this guidance to deliver their network management duty under the act. It is effective from the date of publication.

It does not replace the original [Network Management Duty Guidance](#) published in November 2004, but provides additional advice on techniques for managing roads to deal with COVID-19 response related issues. It will be reviewed 3 months after publication.

The guidance sets out high-level principles to help local authorities to manage their roads and what actions they should take. Updates to this document or further guidance on related subjects may be published as the need is identified.

Reallocating road space: measures

Local authorities in areas with high levels of public transport use should take measures to reallocate road space to people walking and cycling, both to encourage active travel and to enable social distancing during restart ([social distancing in this context primarily refers to the need for people to stay 2 metres apart where possible when outdoors](#)). Local authorities where public transport use is low should be considering all possible measures.

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. They include:

- Installing ‘pop-up’ cycle facilities with a minimum level of physical separation from volume traffic; for example, mandatory cycle lanes, using light segregation features such as flexible plastic wands; or quickly converting traffic lanes into temporary cycle lanes (suspending parking bays where necessary); widening existing cycle lanes to enable cyclists to maintain distancing. Facilities should be segregated as far as possible, i.e. with physical measures separating cyclists and other traffic. Lanes indicated by road markings only are very unlikely to be sufficient to deliver the level of change needed, especially in the longer term.
- Using cones and barriers: to widen footways along lengths of road, particularly outside shops and transport hubs; to provide more space at bus stops to allow people to queue and socially distance; to widen pedestrian refuges and crossings (both formal and informal) to enable people to cross roads safely and at a distance.
- Encouraging walking and cycling to school, for example through the introduction of more ‘school streets’. Pioneered in London, these are areas around schools where motor traffic is restricted at pick-up and drop-off times, during term-time. They can be effective in encouraging more walking and cycling, particularly where good facilities exist on routes to the school and where the parents, children and school are involved as part of the scheme development.
- Reducing speed limits: 20mph speed limits are being more widely adopted as an appropriate speed limit for residential roads, and many through streets in built-up areas. 20mph 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.
- Introducing pedestrian and cycle zones: restricting access for motor vehicles at certain times (or at all times) to specific streets, or networks of streets, particularly town centres and high streets. This will enable active travel but also social distancing in places where people are likely to gather.
- Modal filters (also known as filtered permeability); closing roads to motor traffic, for example by using planters or large barriers. Often used in residential areas, this can create neighbourhoods that are low-traffic or traffic free, creating a more pleasant environment that encourages people to walk and cycle, and improving safety.

- Providing additional cycle parking facilities at key locations, such as outside stations and in high streets, to accommodate an increase in cycling, for example by repurposing parking bays to accommodate cycle racks.
- Changes to junction design to accommodate more cyclists – for example, extending Advanced Stop Lines at traffic lights to the maximum permitted depth of 7.5 metres where possible.
- ‘Whole-route’ approaches to create corridors for buses, cycles and access only on key routes into town and city centres.
- Identifying and bringing forward permanent schemes already planned, for example under Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans, and that can be constructed relatively quickly.

Other considerations

All these measures can be introduced temporarily, either in isolation or as a combined package of measures. Some interventions, including new lightly-segregated cycle lanes, will not require Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs). Others will require TROs, of which there are different types. The main ones are:

- **Permanent:** this process includes prior consultation on the proposed scheme design, a 21-day notice period for statutory consultees and others who can log objections; there can be a public inquiry in some circumstances.
- **Experimental:** these are used to trial schemes that may then be made permanent. Authorities may put in place monitoring arrangements, and carry out ongoing consultation once the measure is built. Although the initial implementation period can be quick, the need for extra monitoring and consultation afterwards makes them a more onerous process overall.
- **Temporary:** these can be in place for up to 18 months. There is a 7-day notice period prior to making the TRO and a 14-day notification requirement after it is made, plus publicity requirements. These are most suitable for putting in place temporary measures and road closures.

The department’s [temporary guidance on making TROs](#) should be consulted for help in making orders during the COVID-19 crisis.

Traffic signs may be needed to inform pedestrians, cyclists and drivers of changes to road layouts, particularly where temporary widening is in place. Advice on [using existing signing, and some new temporary designs](#), will be published alongside this guidance. These are covered by the provisions of the [Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2016](#) and as such do not need special signs authorisation from the department.

Authorities should monitor and evaluate any temporary measures they install, with a view to making them permanent, and embedding a long-term shift to active travel as we move from restart to recovery.

Access will still be required for other activities in the road, particularly street works, maintenance and other highway works, which will need to be balanced with work to reallocate road space to active travel. Street works and maintenance activity should carry on, as they will be essential to getting the economy going again. Use of the Street Manager digital service will help to plan and co-ordinate works.

Depending on the measures they are installing, authorities will also need to consider access for Blue Badge holders, deliveries and other essential services as appropriate.

Authorities should consult with the local chiefs of police and emergency services to ensure access is maintained where needed, for example to roads that are closed to motor traffic. They should also work with local businesses to ensure changes reflect their needs, particularly around access to premises.

The public sector equality duty still applies, 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.