

Cabinet

15 June 2020

Wards: All

Merton's Active & Healthy Travel Response to Covid-19

Lead officer: Chris Lee. Director for Environment & Regeneration

Lead member: Cllr Martin Whelton. Member for Regeneration, Housing and Transport

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Recommendations:

- A. That Cabinet endorse Merton's Active & Healthy Travel Response to Covid-19
 - B. That Cabinet note the submission of funding bids to Department for Transport and Transport for London and that the extent of projects delivered will be dependent on the funding made available to the Council
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. Merton Council has prepared an emergency transport response to the Coronavirus pandemic and to aid social distancing in the borough. The plan is focused on making changes to roads and pavements in the borough to improve road safety, support social distancing and provide more space for walking and cycling.
- 1.2. Pavements will be extended into the road at some of the busiest parts of the borough such as town centres and local shopping parades.
- 1.3. The emergency changes will be followed by longer term work to improve walking and cycling routes throughout the borough. The plans will also look to keep Merton moving safely as travel patterns change and restrictions ease through the promotion of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods and School Streets.
- 1.4. The plan sets out the Council's priorities for action, as a framework for funding bids to DFT and TFL to deliver the programme.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. The natural desire in many policy areas may be to seek a return to the status-quo pre-Covid19. Whilst this may be true for health, education and the economy this is not necessarily the case for environment and transport objectives.
- 2.2. Pre-covid-19, our borough, and London as a whole, was suffering from poor air quality and traffic congestion. We had ambitious but challenging objectives across a number of Council strategies aimed at reducing emissions and promoting active travel;

- Merton’s Air Quality Action Plan
- Merton’s Public Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Merton’s Climate Emergency Action Plan
- Merton’s Transport Strategy

2.3. Whilst the aims and objectives of these strategies remain sound, the context in which the actions sit has changed significantly

2.4. Transport for London have launched the London Streetspace plan to radically overhaul London’s streets to accommodate a possible ten-fold increase in cycling and fivefold increase in walking as lockdown eases.

2.5. Merton is fortunate to have good public transport accessibility; but with London’s public transport capacity potentially running at a fifth of pre-covid levels, thousands of journeys a day will need to be made by other means. If Merton’s residents switch only a fraction of these journeys to cars, our borough risks grinding to a halt, air quality will worsen, and road danger will increase.

2.6. To respond to this situation, Merton Council will repurpose some of our borough’s streets and key locations to serve this unprecedented demand for walking and cycling in a major strategic shift to meet our long terms sustainability and active travel goals.

2.7. Our priorities are as follows:

Short term: pavement widening to support local business and high streets

Medium term: supporting schools and developing a range of school streets for September re-opening.

Medium-long term: developing strategic cycle infrastructure and Low-Traffic Neighbourhood interventions utilising TFL and Government funding.

	SHORT TERM <i>Emergency</i>	MEDIUM TERM <i>Recovery</i>	LONG TERM <i>Transformation</i>
High Streets and social distancing	Widen pavements in high footfall locations to support businesses reopening. This will involve reallocation of on-street parking bays.		
Commuting / Cycling	Create space for cyclists along key routes in the borough.	Plan with public transport providers, space to queue at rail and underground stations to support social distancing. Identify and fill gaps in Merton’s cycle network and install temporary cycle priority schemes.	In supporting the modal shift to walking and cycling, seek to make permanent, wider footways and cycle lanes to achieve the objectives of the transport strategy
Low traffic neighbourhoods and School Streets	Support Schools with on-site social distancing measures.	Plan for pupils returning to school, promote measures for greater walking and cycling routes to school	Supporting modal shift and improving road safety through low traffic neighbourhood

- 2.8. Priorities for funding concentrate on three key areas:
- Quickly building a strategic cycling network, using temporary materials and including new routes, to help reduce crowding on the Tube and trains and on busy bus routes
 - Changing town centres so local journeys can be safely walked and cycled where possible, for example with wider pavements on high streets to give space for queues outside shops as people safely walk past while socially distancing
 - Reducing traffic on residential streets, creating low-traffic corridors right across London so more people can walk and cycle as part of their daily routine
- 2.9. Some of the temporary changes we're making could become permanent in the longer term subject to funding.

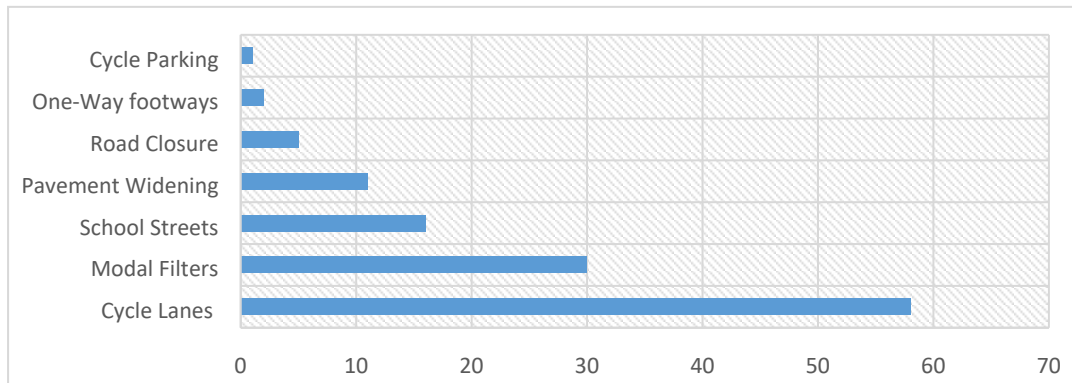
3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. Road safety and active travel measures are normally funded via TFL LIP which has now been suspended by TFL for 2020/21.
- 3.2. This plan sets out a strategy to maximise funding opportunities to deliver on measures that will support social distancing and mitigate the impact of covid-19 on local transport services.
- 3.3. The alternative of not providing social distancing or active travel measures to alleviate pressure on public transport could lead to failure in mitigating the spread of Covid-19.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. A draft of this plan was published online on 7th May 2020 and promoted via the Council's social media channels where the council invited comments and suggestions for locations where we could deliver changes to our streets.
- 4.2. Officers and councillors have held regular online with the Merton Residents Transport Group (newly formed to input to this issue) as well as key stakeholders such as Merton Cycling Campaign, local business groups, schools and the Sustainable Communities Transport Partnership.
- 4.3. Since the draft was first published, the council received over 100 representations containing over 350 projects and actions.
- 4.4. The greatest demand is for cycle lanes and low traffic neighbourhoods (modal filters) followed by school streets.
- 4.5. Officers have compiled the responses into a long-list of potential schemes (removing duplicates where the same idea was suggested multiple times). The long-list of responses is in Appendix D of this report.

4.6. The graph below shows the interventions with the greatest level of interest.



4.7. The Council will continue to meet legal requirements relating to statutory consultation and will engage with key local stakeholders, but it will be necessary to accelerate this process since it is an emergency response to Covid-19 and 'in depth' engagement will not be possible without prolonging timescales.

4.8. The initial phase of intervention locations has been developed through a combination of officer observations, feedback from business groups, local councillors and engaging digitally with residents. We will be launching a web-based mapping portal to enhance our digital engagement with residents as the projects develop.

4.9. Street trials and experimental measures may be used as part of an ongoing engagement process. Emergency services and Waste collection providers will be key stakeholder who will be closely involved in the development of schemes and consulted with as part of the statutory process.

5 TIMETABLE

5.1. 5th June Bid pro-forma to be submitted to DFT
 15th June Cabinet to endorse the updated plan.
 19th June Bids to be submitted to TFL
 24th June Merton Overview & Scrutiny Panel

5.2. Ongoing delivery of TFL funded schemes is dependent on when TFL allocates funding. Roll out of medium-long terms projects is expected to be from July-August 2020 and the rest of the financial year.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

6.1. The Council has set aside £80,000 from existing Highway budgets for immediate pavement widening schemes.

6.2. Merton has been allocated from the government, with the first £100,000 tranche available to be bid for on 5th June.

6.3. TFL have launched a £45m fund for Streetspace for London programme. Bids are to be submitted by 19th June. Merton will be using the Active & Healthy Travel Response to Covid-19 document and the input received from community engagement to form our bids to TFL.

- 6.4. The estimated cost of delivering the programme for the next 6 months is c£490,000 including the cost of equipment, engineering and design resources, making Experimental Traffic Orders, managing the communications and consultation throughout and maintaining the temporary measures on-site.
- 6.5. It is proposed that this is funded initially from the Council's existing Highway budget, pending further funding from TFL, DFT or Community Infrastructure Levy.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. Any measures, particularly changes to the highway, must be carefully considered and sit within the existing policy framework and legislations, including our approach to road safety and in response to the Covid-19 public health emergency.
- 7.2. Although the various highway and traffic legislations continue to apply, certain alternatives are being permitted to enable speedy implementations of the necessary social distancing measures.
- 7.3. The use of Experimental Orders, temporary Orders and emergency Orders are recommended. Additionally, in terms of how the Council can communicate its intentions during the statutory consultation, publications in the local newspapers will continue as well as the erection of notices on lamp columns in affected areas.
- 7.4. However, since Deposited documents cannot be inspected at libraries and at the civic centre, the Council is now permitted to have the Deposited documents available on the Council's website.
- 7.5. There is no legal requirement for door to door newsletters. The Council is still responsible to consult all statutory bodies such as emergency services.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. COVID-19 has disproportionately affected vulnerable populations, including those living in more deprived areas. Those living in more deprived areas are already more likely to be impacted by exposure to higher levels of air pollution and road danger.
- 8.2. Low-income households are also more likely to work in frontline key-worker roles, which mean they cannot work from home and are less likely to be car-owners, so will be most affected by the reduced capacity on public transport.
- 8.3. This plan seeks to provide safe space for walking and cycling and enables social distancing on public transport for those who need to use it most. Providing additional space for walking and cycling will help support those who are less mobile and those who may be new to cycling.
- 8.4. Any interventions to support walking and cycling are designed holistically to ensure that everyone can move around in safety. When making any changes to street layouts, officers will use existing guidance and best

practice to ensure that these changes don't detract from current accessibility levels and enhance them wherever possible.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act both TfL and boroughs are to consider how to reduce the risk of crime, including acts of terrorism, in their plans, projects and activities. Design of temporary measures will have regard to protecting people in public space and mitigating risks of danger.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. None for the purpose of this report

11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

- Appendix A: Merton's Active & Healthy Travel Response to Covid-19
- Appendix B: Schemes in delivery by Merton Council
- Appendix C: Schemes prioritised for funding bids
- Appendix D: List of suggestions received through community engagement.

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 12.1. Merton's adopted Transport Strategy (TFL LIP3) Local Implementation Plan
<https://www.merton.gov.uk/streets-parking-transport/lip3>