

Professional briefing on Spaces for People

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Prepared by Public Health Scotland for Sustrans Scotland

Sustrans is the charity making it easier for people to walk and cycle.

We connect people and places, create liveable neighbourhoods, transform the school run and deliver a happier, healthier commute.

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Why is Spaces for People important for health and wellbeing?

Ensuring that **everyone** is equally able to move around their local area safely to meet their needs while adhering to physical distancing adjustments is important for the health and wellbeing of the population. ^{i ii iii} These health benefits extend beyond the reduction in the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

It increases opportunities for social interactions which are important in reducing social isolation and maintaining good mental health

It enables access to work, education and training as well as local resources that are essential to maintaining good health

It enables access to services including health and social care services

Where this involves walking, wheeling and cycling for all or part of a journey it also increases levels of physical activity and contributes to improved physical and mental health and wellbeing for adults and children. For example regular physical activities can reduce the risk

Challenges to moving safely

Increase in road traffic

There can be tensions and conflict between different transport modes. As restrictions are further relaxed, the number of people moving will continue to increase while the requirement to maintain physical distancing will remain. More people will return to work, education and training and people may want to access local facilities including shops and outdoor cafes.

This might help to reinvigorate the local economy but will also increase the pressure on local spaces.

Data from Transport Scotland collected during the lockdown and phase 1 of the transition, show that walking and cycling increased during this period. However there has also been a gradual increase in car journeys following an initial large reduction at the start of lockdown.^{viii}

There were early indications that on certain roads (some motorways and trunk roads) the proportion of vehicles recording over the speed limits had risen during the period of the lockdown although the actual number of vehicles observed speeding had fallen by approximately 50% compared with a typical weekday or weekend prior to COVID restrictions.^{ix}

An increasing volume of traffic on roads, some of which may be speeding, may impact on people's safety when walking, wheeling or cycling and it is important to act to maintain the initial increase in active travel levels in the medium and longer term.

Transport Inequalities

Transport options are more limited for some households. For example:

Around 29% of households don't have access to a car. This is more likely amongst low income and single pensioner households.^x

Those on low income are more likely to travel by bus and walk to work and have less access to bicycles.^{xi} This can determine access to services and facilities.

A higher proportion of those with long term conditions "affecting day to day living a lot" compared with those with no long term limiting health problems do not have access to a car.^{xii} Disabled people and those with long term health problems also experience significant transport barriers and often have more limited choices.^{xiii xiv}

In relation to walking, wheeling and cycling, these barriers include the

income, high car availability and low access to essential services by public transport.^{xv}

Current disruptions to and concern about the use of public transport ^{xvi} may reduce the ability of these groups to reach essential employment and services, socially interact and undertake exercise or recreation. This will be particularly challenging for those who do not have access to private vehicles.

Developing the active travel infrastructure can increase transport options, particularly for these groups.^{xvii xviii} This means considering for example targeting the measures at the most deprived areas as well as routes which are especially unsafe or dangerous, so more people from these areas feel that they have better environments in which they can walk, wheel and cycle safely in their local areas.

This should be accompanied locally by measures that will address the barriers to active travel including those that improve perceptions of personal safety such as maintenance and lighting, inclusive cycling initiatives, cycling training programmes and provision of bike storage facilities.

References

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- ^{vii} Scottish Government Transport Transition Plan 2020. www.transport.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/transport-transition-plan/assessing-demand-for-travel-and-making-decisions/
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- ^{ix} Parliamentary question on Covid

