Birmingham City Council

Active Travel Schemes

An Overview and Scrutiny Report
July 2024

Contents

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Reports that have been submitted to Council can be downloaded from www.birmingham.gov.uk/scrutiny

Chair's Foreword

Cllr. Lee Marsham, Chair of Sustainability and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee

All Councillors will be aware of residents' desire to improve pedestrian and road safety alongside more and better options to walk and cycle across our great city. The public health benefits are well known, whilst people choosing to undertake Active Travel also helps the Council reach our climate commitments.

However, in recent months and years there has been justifiable public pressure on all those in power to focus on road safety, as too many cyclists and pedestrians, both adults and children, have died or been seriously injured on our streets. At the same time there has also been criticism, rightly or wrongly, of the speed of delivery on active travel schemes.

With a new Road Harm Reduction Strategy being proposed and the Birmingham Transport Plan now being implemented, the Committee felt it was an appropriate time to explore how we can deliver Active Travel schemes quicker and make our roads safer for all users.

In doing this, the Task and Finish Group and Committee as a whole, looked at how Active Travel schemes are funded; how the Council designs, develops and delivers schemes; and its partnership work with partners such as the West Midlands Combined Authority. In addition, we investigated both the challenges and opportunities as we move forward and inspiration on how other Councils do it, because there are other ways of thinking in this area and good practice on offer.

Our 13 realistic recommendations provide the Council and the Cabinet with an opportunity to continue to do the things we do well, whilst improving and speeding up other areas. From internal Council systems to funding arrangements, enhanced governance and accountability, a review of resources, due diligence in design, and easier consultation to the tasking of delivery. Together these key findings can help our city deliver on Active Travel, improve road safety and help tackle the climate emergency.

We acknowledge that there are challenges in improving active travel options in some areas of the city due to factors such as limited road space, whilst at other times a complex system of governance and funding from regional and national government delayed progress, which we offer suggestions to solve. But challenges can be overcome with political focus and vigour, and as the old saying goes, where there's a will there's a way.

To conclude, I want to thank everyone who has contributed to this inquiry, from outside bodies and Council's, community witnesses who either provided written and/ or oral evidence, to all members of the committee for their contributions, and finally to Councillor Martin Brooks, Councillor Colins Green and Councillor Timothy Huxtable as members of the Task and Finish Group who all equally offered insight and advice with their inquisitive minds, passion and experience.

I would also like to thank the Scrutiny Officers team who have been beyond helpful in getting this inquiry done and to all the other council officers that have supported the work of this inquiry.

Thank you in advance for taking the time to read the report in full, which I believe offers practical recommendations for the Council to deliver Active Travel schemes quicker and better for the benefit of us all.

Summary of Recommendations

Ref	Recommendations to Cabinet Members	Responsibility	Completion Date
	Systems		
R01	**Recommendation:** Council asks the Deputy Leader to ensure the new Birmingham Local Plan is aligned to deliver on the Council's Active Travel Plans	Deputy Leader	April 2025 (9 months)
R02	**Recommendation:** Council asks the Deputy Leader to ensure the Council is working at an early stage with developers to incorporate Active Travel measures into their proposed schemes and minimise impact on walking and cycling routes during construction.	Deputy Leader	April 2025 (9 months)

Ref	Recommendations to Cabinet Members	Responsibility	Completion Date
	Funding		
R03	**Recommendation:** The Committee asks the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport to: A) Refresh all Active Travel schemes (in development and future schemes) and outline the key steps being undertaken and progress to date to achieve a pipeline of 'bid ready schemes B) Set up the 'bid ready' pipeline and ensure the information is available to the public to gauge feedback earlier. C) Provide a report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the progress of all schemes	Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport	October 2024 (3 months) – to be reported in January 2025 January 2025 (6 months) July 2025 (12 months)

Ref	Recommendation to Cabinet Members	Responsibility	Completion Date
	Governance and Accountability		
R04	**Recommendation:** Council asks the Leader, Cabinet Member for Finance and the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport to review internal governance pathways to achieve more streamlined and efficient approaches and thereby minimise duplication and delays. Specifically, this should focus on Finance, Highways, Legal and Procurement	Leader, Cabinet Member for Finance and Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport	April 2025 (9 months)
R05	**Recommendation:** Council asks the Leader to explore if the West Midlands Combined Authority will consider undertaking a review of how dual governance processes are impacting on the timely delivery of schemes in Birmingham to develop a robust but more efficient process in the future.	Leader	July 2025 (12 months)
R06	**Recommendation:** Council asks the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport to ensure more information is provided to all councillors on the progress of Active Travel Schemes in the best and most appropriate format.	Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport	October 2024 (3 months) – to be reported in January 2025

Ref	Recommendation to Cabinet Members	Responsibility	Completion Date
	Resources		
R07	**Recommendation:** Council asks the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport to provide a report on the impact of savings on Active Travel ambitions with specific regard to the workforce, and how this impact has been mitigated.	Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport	October 2024 (3 months) – to be reported in January 2025

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Ref	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R08	**Recommendation:** Council asks the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport to carry out a skills audit alongside the development of a Learning and Development Plan to address any identified gaps	Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport	April 2025 (9 months)
R09	**Recommendation:** Council asks the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport to explore pooling arrangements with partners including other councils, Combined Authorities and organisations providing technical expertise including around design and consultation, peer support and networking, and clarify roles and responsibilities across partners to ensure best use of available resource/ expertise.	Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport	April 2025 (9 months)

Ref	Recommendation to Cabinet Members	Responsibility	Completion Date
	Design		
R10	**Recommendation:** Council asks the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport to specifically request collaboration with partner organisations and the Highways and Infrastructure service to identify alternative ways to progress current challenging locations	Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport	October 2024 (3 months) – to be reported in January 2025

Ref	Recommendation to Cabinet Members	Responsibility	Completion Date
	Consultation and Information		
R11	**Recommendation:** Council asks the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport to review the Council website, specifically to ensure information is accessible to residents to view the progress of schemes in an easy-to-read format. This needs to show agreed timelines and a future service standard on how often this should be reviewed and refreshed	Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport	January 2025 (6 months)
R12	**Recommendation:** Council asks the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport to review the implementation of the new Powered by People toolkit and its impact including how all staff feel equipped to undertake consultation	Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport	April 2025 (9 months)

Ref	Recommendations to Cabinet Members	Responsibility	Completion Date
	Tracking		
R13	**Recommendation:** Council agrees that the Executive Member reports on progress towards achievement of these recommendations no later than January 2025. Subsequent progress reports will be scheduled by the Committee thereafter, in alignment with Birmingham Transport Plan and the Transportation and Highways Delivery Plan, until all recommendations are implemented	Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport	January 2025 (6 months)

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1. Introduction

1.1.1   The Sustainability and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee decided to undertake an Inquiry into Active Travel on 20 July 2023.

1.1.2   A cross party Inquiry Task and Finish Group was established comprising members from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Task and Finish Group were:

- Councillor Lee Marsham, Chair of the Sustainability and Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Councillor Martin Brooks
- Councillor Colin Green
- Councillor Timothy Huxtable

1.1.3   The key question the Inquiry Task and Finish Group asked was:

"How can Birmingham deliver Active Travel schemes quicker and make city roads safer for all users?"

1.1.4   In seeking to answer this the Task and Finish Group considered the following lines of inquiry:

- How are Active Travel schemes funded within the city?
- What is the current size, scale and scope of the activity under development and being delivered including joint projects with the West Midlands Combined Authority?
- What is the design, development and delivery process?
- How does the Council work together as a single organisation to develop and deliver Active Travel schemes?
- What are the current barriers and challenges the Council is facing to deliver these schemes?
- Where are the opportunities for acceleration and what would this require?
- How do other Local Authorities do it differently? What can we learn from their approaches?

1.1.5   A full copy of the Terms of Reference can be accessed here.

2 Background and Context

2.1 Active Travel

2.1.1 Active Travel refers to modes of travel which involve a level of physical activity. The term is often used interchangeably with walking and cycling but active travel can also include trips made by wheelchair, mobility scooters and e-scooters[1]. Longer journeys, especially those by public transport, will generally involve an element of active travel as part of them.

2.1.2 Local Authorities can play an important role in increasing walking, wheeling and cycling. Through influencing planning and taking a wider, strategic view of travel infrastructure across their area, authorities can ensure that active travel infrastructure connects residents to services[2]. It is important to note that Active Travel is about providing people with choices, not just delivering schemes.

2.1.3 The [Birmingham Transport Plan](#) (BTP) sets out Birmingham's ambitions to deliver this. The BTP was described as 'ambitious and in line with best urban practice worldwide' (Pushbikes). Birmingham City Council (Transport and Connectivity) highlighted that the BTP is aligned to the West Midlands Combined Authority's plan; this sets up a 'golden thread' from a regional to city level.

2.2 Why the Committee Decided to Look at Active Travel Schemes

2.2.1 Improving road safety is always a priority for communities across the city, however this has significantly increased in recent years. This follows several tragic incidents on Birmingham's streets where cyclists and pedestrians, both adults and children, have died or been seriously injured, resulting in strong public interest.

2.2.2 The Council has been criticised for the design of, and time taken to deliver Active Travel schemes in comparison to neighbouring Local Authorities. Delays in delivery mean Birmingham residents will wait longer to enjoy the benefits of better cycling and walking infrastructure. In turn, the city will take longer as a whole to realise its ambitions outlined in the [Birmingham Transport Plan](#) to shift to a low traffic city.

2.2.3 Through this inquiry, its Inquiry group intended to understand if there are different and better ways for the Council to deliver Active Travel schemes and make recommendations to achieve this.

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[1] Active Travel: Local Authority Toolkit, last updated 10 August 2022
[2] Active Travel: Local Authority Toolkit, last updated 10 August 2022

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2.3   Outcomes

2.3.1   The specific outcomes for this inquiry are:

- Make Birmingham roads safer for all users

- Enable more efficient development and delivery of Active Travel schemes

- Complement work on the Council's proposed new Road Harm Reduction Strategy

2.4   Evidence Gathering

2.4.1   Evidence gathering took place between August and October 2023 through a total of four different sessions. A schedule of the Inquiry's activities is provided in Appendix A1.

2.4.2   Appendix A2 lists the organisations who provided information to this Inquiry.

3   Key Findings

3.1   Overview

3.1.1   Active Travel encompasses walking, wheeling, cycling and access to public transport options. A successful Active Travel approach for the city will deliver long term public health benefits for citizens. This approach is not simply limited to the introduction of a new cycle lane. Instead, it brings together a variety of strands such as roads maintenance; the public transport offer and improving how safe people feel when walking, wheeling or cycling to create a positive and appealing choice for citizens.

3.1.2   Birmingham City Council's Transportation and Connectivity division advised that delivering upon Active Travel is an integral part of the Birmingham Transport Plan. To address this, there is a growing number of programmes. A Delivery Plan for schemes (aligned to the Birmingham Transport Plan) is about to be published with priorities up to 2031.

3.1.3   However, the service acknowledged that there needs to be more pace throughout the whole process. There had been an increase in staff to address resource challenges. A change in how each project is supported has also been introduced. For example, each project now reports into the relevant Project Board.

3.1.4   The Inquiry was advised that there is no dashboard in place to capture all schemes and to monitor delivery progress. Previously there had been a dashboard in place for Active Travel Fund schemes only. Birmingham City Council's Transportation and Connectivity division is in the process of improving its output and outcome reporting as part of the Birmingham Transport Plan delivery plan; this work is linked to the Improvement and Recovery Plan.

3.1.5   One of the community witnesses (Better Streets for Birmingham), expressed their concerns about the time taken to deliver Active Travel schemes and felt that other parts of the country and region were "far exceeding Birmingham in delivering Active Travel infrastructure"[3]. Better Streets for Birmingham noted that, at the time of providing their written evidence to the inquiry, there was only one long running scheme under construction – Dudley Road - within in the city: "Since 2021, schemes have moved at a glacial pace"[4].

3.1.6   One community witness (Pushbikes) acknowledged that there had been improvement and learning since 2012. However there remains "frequent delays in delivery, lack of

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[3] Written submission to the Inquiry from Better Streets for Birmingham, August 2023.
[4] Written submission to the Inquiry from Better Streets for Birmingham, August 2023.

attention to detail and some disappointing outcomes, lack of quality control and remedial action"[5].

3.1.7   Birmingham has been awarded £1.5M in Tranche 1 Active Travel Fund and a total of £6.5M across Tranches 2-4. However, it was suggested that there had been significant delays to Tranche 2 projects being delivered due to change and control process instigated by council officers and Transport for West Midlands. Some witnesses suggested that these delivery delays meant that the city was losing out on future funding opportunities.

3.1.8   Community witnesses also advised that coverage of Active Travel schemes across the whole of Birmingham is inconsistent, with particular regard to cycling. For example, Hagley Road corridor and East Birmingham. In the City Centre, Pushbikes observed that although walking has improved, cycling has become more difficult[6].

3.1.9   Further to this, there was concern that areas of the city with the highest inequalities did not have many, if any, Active Travel schemes.

3.1.10 A number of pinch points and challenges were identified across the witnesses as contributing towards the current pace of delivery:

- Limited road space
- Recruitment and retention challenges, particularly with the nature of the role in Local Government and comparable benefits in similar private sector roles.
- Projects have dual governance lines, both within the Council and the West Midlands Combined Authority. They are also relationships with the Department for Transport and Active Travel England.
- The Council is not operating as a 'single organisation'. There is silo working and the Council is lacking a joined up approach.
- Structure of Central Government funding.

3.1.11 Other Local Authorities (Waltham Forest, Hackney and Wolverhampton) highlighted critical success factors in how they had achieved progress around Active Travel schemes:

- Setting clear objectives and outcomes and refusal to 'water down' schemes if they will not result in substantial modal shift.
- An engaged community
- Political leadership

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[5] Written submission to the Inquiry from Pushbikes, August 2023.
[6] Written submission to the Inquiry from Pushbikes, August 2023.

- Deliver consistently and with a reputation to deliver

- Pipeline of projects in place to take advantage of funding opportunities

- Good relationships with contractors

3.1.12 **Key Finding:** Active Travel schemes deliver important benefits for residents across the city, especially on Public Health. We need to help residents to better understand this in these terms. This will, in turn, build support throughout different communities and neighbourhoods. There should also be more emphasis on how it will encourage more people to walk, cycle, and feel safer when doing so.

3.1.13 **Key Finding:** Schemes need to be delivered in a timely manner. Progress on schemes should be visible and accountable to the public and councillors.

3.2 Systems

3.2.1 There was concern that the Council is not working as a 'single organisation' to address Active Travel ambitions. The Council's Transportation and Connectivity division highlighted how 'collective ownership and leadership across the whole Council and its services working towards delivering these outcomes will also make a difference'.

3.2.2 They provided an example of a 'small scheme' currently taking about 12 months. However, they suggested that if the Legal, Finance and Procurement pathways and statutory requirements could work better, this could potentially be reduced to 6 months. The inquiry also identified whether there were opportunities to improve the coverage of Active Travel options through new developments.

3.2.3 The inquiry was also interested to hear about a best practice example from London where they had introduced controls around constructions works to minimise their impact on any Active Travel scheme. The inquiry queried whether a similar initiative could be implemented in Birmingham.

3.2.4 Numerous other transport schemes are being delivered across the city, not only by the Council but also partners such as Travel for West Midlands. For example, road safety, bus priority and public realm improvements – all of these incorporate active travel measures.

3.2.5 The inquiry questioned whether the Council and its partners are effectively packaging schemes. For example, road safety schemes and active travel schemes are delivered independently. By not taking a joined up approach, we may be causing additional disruption to local residents, however, are we also increasing overall costs?

3.2.6 **Key Finding:** There needs to be a whole Council approach towards supporting Active Travel outcomes. This cannot simply be delivered by a single team in Transportation

and Connectivity alone. Opportunities may be missed to deliver quicker and cheaper schemes through not packaging schemes effectively within different Council departments or by different organisations. This should be done from the very start rather than the end. This will prevent the need to 'retrofit' which is more expensive and complicated.

3.2.7 **Key Finding:** The Birmingham Local Plan needs to be fully aligned to deliver on the Council's Active Travel ambitions, both current and future. The Council needs to consider how this will be delivered both in the design of new developments but also in their construction and building controls.

Ref	Recommendation to Cabinet Members	Responsibility	Completion Date
R01	**Recommendation:** Council asks the Deputy Leader to ensure the new Birmingham Local Plan is aligned to deliver on the Council's Active Travel Plans	Deputy Leader	April 2025 (9 months)
R02	**Recommendation:** Council asks the Deputy Leader to ensure the Council is working at an early stage with developers to incorporate Active Travel measures into their proposed schemes and minimise impact on walking and cycling routes during construction.	Deputy Leader	April 2025 (9 months)

3.3　Funding

3.3.1　Birmingham City Council delivered schemes are generally funded from regionally administered government grant funding – [Active Travel Fund (ATF)](#) and City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS). These funds are administered via a competitive bid process against other Local Authorities and/or regions. In common with other grants, secured funding will be subject to conditions. These conditions may relate to restrictions on the use of the grant; deadlines for completion of the scheme, or match funding requirements.

3.3.2　Further to this, smaller schemes with Active Travel elements such as [School Streets](#) are funded from the Council's Local Network Improvement Plan (LNIP). This replaced the former Integrated Transport Block funding provided by government to support the delivery of Local Authorities Local Transport Plans. The inquiry was also advised that in Birmingham some Active Travel schemes are also currently being funded through the net income surplus from the [Clean Air Zone (CAZ)](#).

3.3.3　The inquiry was advised that current central government funding strategy is often to allocate monies on a mode specific basis. This is frequently through a complex competitive bidding process with relatively short timescales for bid submission. The Council highlighted that this limits their ability to implement a more holistic multi-modal approach to scheme delivery via corridor based interventions. A multi-modal approach would enable consideration of all road users and appropriate prioritisation of the road space at the same time. As an example of where this has not been possible, the recent introduction of the Sprint Bus Rapid Transit scheme on A45 Coventry Road will in certain places restrict proposals for a strategic cycle route.

3.3.4　Many witnesses, including the Council and other Local Authorities, highlighted the advance development of a programme of schemes in anticipation of future funding schemes would be a step forward. This could be described as 'bid ready' schemes. Council officers (and again, other Local Authorities) also suggested that a multi-year funding envelope from central government would also offer more opportunities and less challenges.

3.3.5　Council officers highlighted that they had previously had 'ready to go' schemes when they had a more resourced team to do this.

3.3.6　Further to this, it was noted that funds are not only required to design and deliver the schemes. Revenue streams also need to be considered to support the scheme's ongoing maintenance. This is often challenging to secure, in particular in the current climate.

3.3.7　**Key Finding:** The funding available to provide Active Travel schemes is piecemeal and ad hoc rather than set up to complement sustainable, long-term delivery. It is

therefore critical that the Council can maximise the grants available to deliver its Active Travel ambitions. Positive relationships and a reputation to deliver are key to this, as is the development of a publicly available pipeline of 'bid ready' projects.

Ref	Recommendation to Cabinet Members	Responsibility	Completion Date
R03	**Recommendation:** The Committee asks the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport to: D) Refresh all Active Travel schemes (in development and future schemes) and outline the key steps being undertaken and progress to date to achieve a pipeline of 'bid ready schemes E) Set up the 'bid ready' pipeline and ensure the information is available to the public to gauge feedback earlier. F) Provide a report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the progress of all schemes	Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport	October 2024 (3 months) – to be reported in January 2025 January 2025 (6 months) July 2025 (12 months)

3.4   Governance & Accountability

3.4.1   As stated in 3.3.1, Council delivered schemes are generally funded from regionally administered government grant funding – Active Travel Fund (ATF) and City Region

Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS). This is secured via a competitive bid process, and any secured funding will be subject to conditions.

3.4.2   Any funding bid for, or received by, the Council must go through relevant approval processes which takes time and may not be compatible with funding bidding cycles. Once in receipt of this funding, projects are then subject to the Council's own governance processes. Depending on the funding stream, many projects have dual governance lines, both within the Council and the West Midlands Combined Authority. Where this is relevant, project funding is also subject to the Combined Authority's [Single Assurance Framework (SAF)](#) governance process. This differs on value of work but can take up to 4 months at each governance stage for larger schemes. Also, it cannot always be undertaken in parallel with other processes.

3.4.3   Streamlining governance will be a step forward, in particular for smaller schemes. The Transportation and Connectivity division suggested that a sensible level of governance with appropriate levels of delegation was needed. They acknowledged that there were limitations on how much could be streamlined with larger projects, due to the required legal, financial and procurement compliances as part of this approach. The witness from Wolverhampton Council referenced how procurement regulations are becoming more complex, and a simplification would be welcomed. Further to this, the Combined Authority's [Single Assurance Framework](#) and the [Council's constitution](#) are incompatible in places.

3.4.4   However, the Transportation and Connectivity division suggested that there could potentially be improvements to the process for smaller schemes with the introduction of a SAF-lite process. This could be delivered at quicker pace and be more cost effective.

3.4.5   The Transportation and Connectivity division also acknowledged there is more information and visibility they can provide to Members about the progress and delivery of schemes. One proposal was to provide the quarterly report from the Cabinet Member to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

3.4.6   **Key Finding:** The governance in place to approve and deliver schemes needs to be streamlined, with schemes developed in collaboration between Department for Transport (DfT), West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and the Council. Good governance is critical but there appears to be duplication in processes. This contributes towards the length of time it takes for schemes to go live and increases costs.

Ref	Recommendation to Cabinet Members	Responsibility	Completion Date
R04	**Recommendation:** Council asks the Leader, Cabinet Member for Finance and the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport to review internal governance pathways to achieve more streamlined and efficient approaches and thereby minimise duplication and delays. Specifically, this should focus on Finance, Highways, Legal and Procurement	Leader, Cabinet Member for Finance, Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport	April 2025 (9 months)
R05	**Recommendation:** Council asks the Leader to explore if the West Midlands Combined Authority will consider undertaking a review of how dual governance processes are impacting on the timely delivery of schemes in Birmingham to develop a robust but more efficient process in the future.	Leader	July 2025 (12 months)
R06	**Recommendation:** Council asks the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport to ensure more information is provided to all councillors on the progress of Active Travel schemes in the best and most appropriate format	Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport	October 2024 (3 months) – to be reported in January 2025

3.5   Resources

3.5.1   Although the Council had recently had an investment in staff, there are fewer staff in the team than in previous years. As referenced in 3.3.5, this had meant that there was less capacity to be proactive. A community witness (Pushbikes) felt that the team has "never had sufficient resource based on our experience to confidently manage complex processes including consultation, commissioning, design and delivery". Beyond the Council's inhouse resource, there is use of external consultants to assist in the design and implementation of schemes.

3.5.2   In addition to the use of specialist external consultancies, a key thread of discussion which emerged across the evidence gathering sessions related to opportunities to better pool resources. This would mean harnessing technical expertise from an external organisation supporting the Council to get projects over the line. For example, the Council is exploring how to work with Active Travel England (ATE) to provide input into design through its technical advisors, in order to speed up the approval process.

3.5.3   The wider Local Government sector is facing recruitment and retention challenges for this area of professional expertise, particularly with comparable benefits in the private sector. Coupled with the local financial challenges facing the Council, this will make it difficult to attract grow and develop the team.

3.5.4   Considering these challenges therefore, it will be imperative for the Council to understand how it can work smarter within its existing resource envelope.

3.5.5   **Key Finding:** We need to ensure that we keep skills and knowledge within the workforce, and to upskill others. This may be at risk through the impact of the budget savings and financial recovery programme.

3.5.6   **Key Finding:** The Council needs to maximise the use of pooled resources. Given the regional nature of some schemes, for example, cross boundary corridors, the Council should explore pooling arrangements with neighbouring councils.

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R07	**Recommendation:** Council asks the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport to provide a report on the impact of savings on Active Travel ambitions with specific regard to the workforce, and how this impact has been mitigated.	Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport	October 2024 (3 months) – to be reported in January 2025
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R09	**Recommendation:** Council asks the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport to explore pooling arrangements with partners including other councils, Combined Authorities and organisations providing technical expertise including around design and consultation including around design and consultation, peer support and networking, and clarify roles and responsibilities across partners to ensure best use of available resource/ expertise.	Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport	April 2025 (9 months)

3.6   Design

3.6.1   Birmingham is significantly larger and more populous than other neighbouring Local Authorities. This impacts upon the available road space and results in competing road space demands (including forms of sustainable travel such as buses). The Transportation and Connectivity division highlighted how it was a challenge to meet the range of demands and the practical implementation of schemes, while balancing the needs of different users. They stated that limited road space was one of their biggest challenges. Limited road space, for example, makes it difficult to provide for continuous segregated cycling routes without significant detriment to pedestrians and public transport.

3.6.2   The city was the first in the region to deliver schemes to the required standard for segregated cycle lanes in the most appropriate and accessible locations, for example, the A38 and A34. Birmingham is now trying to deliver more challenging schemes.

3.6.3   There is a risk around developing an advanced pipeline of schemes, in the event of future available funding. By the time of designs, the details may have changed, and feasibility studies have to be restarted.

3.6.4   A community witness (Pushbikes) felt that cycle scheme delivery was "an add-on rather than integrated into the main scheme and much greater priority given to needs of Metro, motorists and developers".

3.6.5   Wolverhampton highlighted that they also had limited road space, so they had focused on reducing (and removing) cars and speed.

3.6.6   **Key Finding:** The Council is now trying to deliver schemes in more challenging locations with limited road space. However, the Council does need continue to identify ways to design and implement these schemes at pace.

Ref	Recommendation to Cabinet Members	Responsibility	Completion Date
R10	**Recommendation:** Council asks the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport to specifically request collaboration with partner organisations and the Highways and Infrastructure service to identify alternative ways to progress current challenging locations	Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport	October 2024 (3 months) – to be reported in January 2025

3.7 Consultation and Information

3.7.1 Pushbikes highlighted that they had held regular stakeholder meetings with the Council throughout the last decade. They had been kept well informed and able to input into plans and schemes.

3.7.2 Better Streets for Birmingham advised that there is no single platform where community stakeholders can visit to receive accurate and up to date updates on schemes. Any updates on the Council website are often out of date or missing, and it also has no information on the process to deliver a scheme.

3.7.3 Community witnesses felt that the question of whether schemes should happen has been answered, as the current administration has a democratic mandate to implement the Birmingham Transport Plan. They felt that the consultations should now be used to understand problems communities face and for feedback to iterate designs based on lived experience.

3.7.4 Community witnesses including Better Streets for Birmingham suggested that there was no prescribed method or approach for how the Council undertakes its consultations.

3.7.5 Better Streets for Birmingham noted that it seems to take longer to upload consultation responses on Be Heard than previously and in comparison, to other council consultations. At the time of providing evidence, they highlighted that consultation responses were still pending from 2021. They highlighted that it is important that consultation analysis is uploaded quickly so residents' responses have been acknowledged. They asked for a commitment that this is done within 3 months of consultation closing.

3.7.6 Better Streets for Birmingham also highlighted that responding to a consultation can be difficult as it required a level of knowledge to understand scheme drawings and associated standards such as the [Local Transport Note 1/20 (LTN 1/20)](#). They felt that schemes are usually poorly explained. This leads to confusion, rejection and face to face consultation sessions being taken up with basic questions. They referred to the Bournville and Cotteridge Places for People consultation where lots of people were confused about the scheme's aims. On this last point, Waltham Forest had identified that clear objectives and outcomes was one of their critical success factors.

3.7.7 There were also concerns that consultations take place too late in the process, and result in only minor changes. They felt that there should be earlier engagement with stakeholder groups to achieve meaningful co-design and better aligned with the design phase. There are planned co-design workshops coming up, but there were questions whether there will be an equitable balance between all stakeholders in the room.

3.7.8   The Transportation and Connectivity division acknowledged there were challenges around consultations, in particular how to support their staff to be confident and supported in carrying out consultation activity using suitable methods.

3.7.9   Suggestions for online and face to face consultations included:

- Information online should be on a single page covering design, development and delivery life cycle.

- Providing explanatory notes explaining why a design decision has been made.

- Staff available at Face to Face sessions who are able to speak for all elements of the scheme and familiar with the types of local issues which may arise.

- Better timing of face to face sessions so they can be attended by a wider range of people.

- Quicker start-to-finish on consultations including feedback

- Greater transparency on scheme progress, including future and timely updates on the consultation and its results to participants including reasons for any delays

- Clear information on aims, outcomes and benefits written in Plain English.

3.7.10   Community witnesses advised the Council to explore other consultation models such as the London Cycling Campaign Report, Greater Manchester's Beeline Network and representative opinion polling.

3.7.11   There was also a suggestion to deliver community led consultation. During the pandemic, the Council used an online map. Better Streets for Birmingham felt this approach had worked but understood it had closed as the Council wanted to manage expectations. However, they felt that this was a useful mass engagement tool, empowering residents to take ownership in their local area and assist Councillors in identifying improvements for any local funds. If reinstated, they felt that there should be a disclaimer from the Council that this is not a guarantee to implement.

3.7.12   **Key Finding:** Communities and Members have real time intelligence about their own neighbourhoods. This is not being captured or used in an effective way to inform the development of Active Travel schemes.

3.7.13   **Key Finding:** Accurate and up to date information should be available for residents to access to view the progress of schemes. This information should be provided in Plain English. Greater transparency will inform residents about what is happening in their neighbourhoods and to hold the Council to account.

3.7.14   **Key Finding**: The Council needs to get the 'basics' right and do them really well. The Council must ensure it is not missing opportunities to deliver effective consultation, and

it may need to maximise resources from other partners to make this happen. Residents should understand that Active Travel schemes are not just about cycling but encompass walking, wheeling and feelings of safety.

Ref	Recommendation to Cabinet Members	Responsibility	Completion Date
R11	**Recommendation:** Council asks the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport to review the Council website, specifically to ensure information is accessible to residents to view the progress of schemes in an easy-to-read format. This needs to show agreed timelines and a future service standard on how often this should be reviewed and refreshed.	Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport	January 2025 (6 months)
R12	**Recommendation:** Council asks the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport to review the implementation of the new Powered by People toolkit and its impact including how all staff feel equipped to undertake consultation.	Cabinet Member for Transport	April 2025 (9 months)

Appendix A1 – Inquiry Activities

Date	Session	Evidence
10 August 2023	Site visits	• Hosted by Birmingham City Council Transportation and Connectivity division • Sites visited: A38 Bristol Road, including part of the 'blue' cycle route in the vicinity of the university and the fire station; Selly Oak High Street and Birmingham City Centre Retail Core Public Realm
17 August 2023	Task and Finish Group Evidence Gathering Session	• Birmingham City Council – Transportation and Connectivity division
7 September 2023	Sustainability & Transport O&S Committee Meeting	• 20s Plenty for Birmingham • Active Travel England • Adam Tranter, Mayor's Cycling & Walking Commissioner, West Midlands Combined Authority • Better Streets for Birmingham • Birmingham Living Streets • Birmingham City Council Officers • Cabinet Member for Transport, Birmingham City Council • Living Streets • Pushbikes • Sustrans • Transport for West Midlands
26 October 2023	Task and Finish Group Evidence Gathering Session	• Waltham Forest • Wolverhampton Council • Transport for West Midlands

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Appendix A2: Contributors

Below is a list of all contributors to this inquiry:

20s Plenty for Birmingham

20's Plenty for Us is a 'not for profit' organisation and now have over 250 local campaigns around the country. It campaigns for 20mph to become the default speed limit on residential and urban streets. The campaign advises that this can be done on most streets without the need for any physical calming, but they also accept that on some streets it may be appropriate to have a higher limit based on the road, vulnerable road users' provision, etc. Any limit above 20mph should be a considered decision based on local circumstances.[7]

Active Travel England

Active Travel England is the government's executive agency responsible for making walking, wheeling and cycling the preferred choice for everyone to get around in England[8].

Birmingham City Council: Place, Prosperity and Sustainability Directorate

This directorate is responsible for services including Planning, Transport and Sustainability (including Route to Net Zero Carbon) Property and Investment, Development, Housing Development, Corporate Landlord and Place, Strategy and Performance.

Better Streets for Birmingham

Better Streets for Birmingham campaigns for changes to our travel and planning infrastructure to improve the sustainability, efficiency and safety of our streets. By identifying, supporting and advocating for changes to our environment that enable car-free journeys, they aim to make active travel and public transport the default options for trips around our city.[9]

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[7] https://www.20splenty.org/index.htm

[8] https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/active-travel-england

[9] https://betterstreetsforbirmingham.org/about-us/

Birmingham Living Streets

This is a group of local people who want our streets to be fit for walking. They work with others towards common goals that improve walking conditions including having an input to the planning process to improve the built environment and lobbying authorities for greater consideration of 'active travel'.[10]

Pushbikes

Push Bikes campaigns for better cycling in Birmingham and Solihull.[11]

Sustrans

It works for and with communities, helping them come to life by walking, wheeling and cycling to create healthier places and happier lives for everyone.[12]

Transport for West Midlands

Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) is part of the **West Midlands Combined Authority**. It works with bus and train operators to make sure that public transport is:

- safe
- reliable
- affordable
- accessible for everyone

It owns and runs West Midlands Metro, which is the region's tram service. It also runs the Swift smartcard. This flexible, cashless ticket is the most used outside London. It does not run the buses or trains, but it works on these services with bus and train operators.

It is part of the **West Midlands Rail Executive** and **West Midlands Bus Alliance**, and it is responsible for monitoring and improving road safety in the West Midlands. It also look after the 23 busiest routes in the region. This is called the **Key Route Network**. It manages the **Regional**

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[10] https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/get-involved/local-groups/birmingham-local-group/
[11] https://www.pushbikes.org.uk/section/about-us
[12] https://www.sustrans.org.uk/about-us/

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[Transport Coordination Centre for the West Midlands](#). The centre monitors our transport network.[13]

London Borough of Waltham Forest Council

The London Borough of Waltham Forest is an outer London borough formed in 1965 from the merger of the municipal boroughs of Leyton, Walthamstow and Chingford.[14]

City of Wolverhampton Council

City of Wolverhampton Council is the local authority for the city of Wolverhampton in the West Midlands, England. Wolverhampton has had an elected local authority since 1848, which has been reformed several times. Since 1974 the council has been a metropolitan borough council. It provides the majority of local government services in the city. The council has been a member of the West Midlands Combined Authority since 2016.[15]

West Midlands Mayor's Cycling & Walking Commissioner

Adam Tranter was the cycling and walking commissioner between 2021 and May 2024. His role was to work with Transport for West Midlands (TfWM), local council partners and the Department for Transport to steer the region's cycling and walking policies and plans.

[13] https://www.tfwm.org.uk/who-we-are/
[14] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Borough_of_Waltham_Forest
[15] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_of_Wolverhampton_Council