Active Travel England

How we do design assurance with local authorities

June 2024

Contents

1. Introduction

This document has been prepared by Active Travel England (ATE) to help local authorities and delivery partners understand the design assurance process and services. This document sets out the services we provide and how authorities can access them.

For local authorities within a combined authority, the route for ATE's design assurance is via a design review panel or equivalent process held by the combined authority. Please contact your combined authority for more information.

ATE is working alongside authorities to make walking and cycling the preferred choice for short trips.

To make this a reality, we must ensure that cycling, wheeling and walking routes are safe and accessible. Our design assurance services help local authorities to do this in a way that can be used by all.

Design assurance services involve the application of tools, checks and other processes to ensure quality and safety are designed into new and existing infrastructure and comply with current guidance.

1.1. Design assurance objectives

The key objective of design assurance is to achieve better outcomes for active travel and accessibility by:

- ensuring the scheme complies with the latest policy and design guidance (referred to as policy conflicts in the ATE Route Check Tool)
- identifying and removing the occurrence of critical safety issues (referred to as critical safety issues in the ATE Route Check Tool)
- checking that the active travel design principles have been incorporated (referred to as summary principles in LTN 1/20 published 27 July 2020)
- signposting designers to guidance and good practice examples to offer practical solutions (our main reference points are Manual for Streets 1 and 2, Inclusive Mobility, CD 195 Designing for Cycle Traffic and LTN 1/20)
- delivering practical design recommendations that meet the objectives of the relevant funding streams

We understand local expertise plays a vital role in designing schemes that meet the needs of the community. That is why we are committed to working closely with authorities and delivery partners to share and understand the local context.

1.2. What are critical safety issues and policy conflicts?

The focus on identifying and working to resolve critical safety issues was introduced nationally in Local Transport Note 1/20 (LTN 1/20) for cycling and in some regions through guidance such as London's 'Healthy Streets Check' and Greater Manchester's 'Streets for All Check', which also include critical safety issues for walking and wheeling.

The concept of 'policy conflicts' was introduced in the ATE Route Check Tool to ensure compliance with government design policy. These may not be safety-related but may be related to new evidence or policy concerning accessibility, construction methods, material choice and so on.

- **A policy conflict is where a street layout or condition does not align with the government's active travel principles set out in Inclusive Mobility and LTN 1/20. The policy conflict checks are listed in the ATE Route Check Tool which covers all aspects of street design from links to junctions and placemaking. Area based traffic management schemes are also subject to these policy conflicts**
- **A critical safety issue is defined as a path or street layout or condition that is associated with an increased risk of collisions for people walking, wheeling or cycling. The critical safety issue checks are listed in the ATE Route Check Tool**

2. Design surgery

2.1. What is a design surgery?

A design surgery is a meeting between an ATE inspector and the scheme promoter to

- resolve an issue before a design review
- resolve an issue identified in a design review
- seek advice on a specific design issue outside of a review

2.2. What happens in a design surgery?

In a design surgery, the project team should present the design and the assurance lead (an ATE inspector) will respond with feedback in the form of questions, constructive challenges, and suggested improvements for consideration. Critical safety issues and policy conflicts may be identified but not recorded at this stage.

A design surgery session typically lasts between half an hour to two hours, depending on the complexity of the design.

2.3. Who should attend the design surgery session?

The authority project team should attend.

Attendance by elected members or stakeholders is at the discretion of the authority.

2.4. What schemes are eligible for a design surgery?

Any government-funded active travel and cross-modal schemes can use the design surgery approach.

2.5. How to request a design surgery

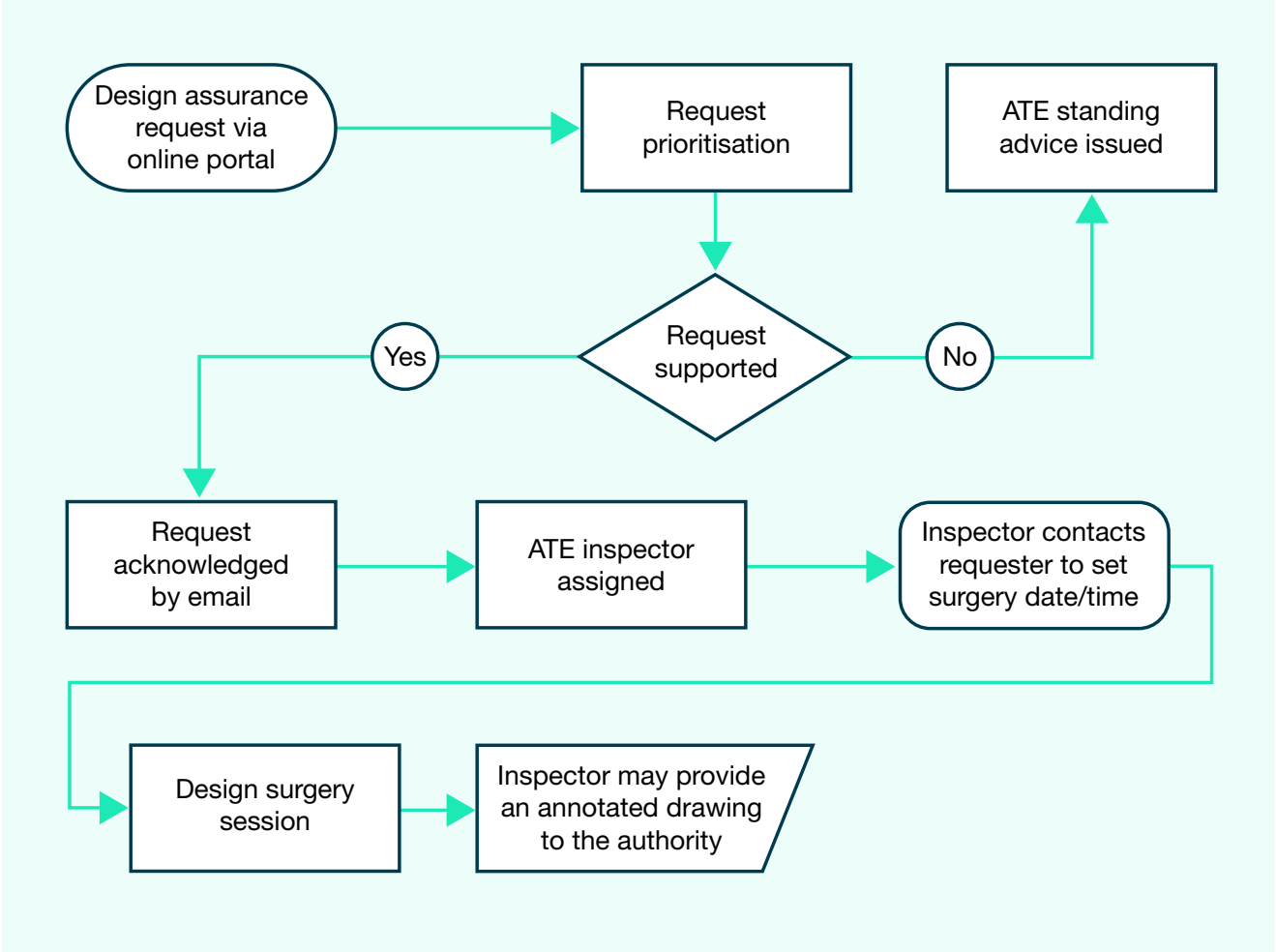
Authorities and delivery partners can request a design surgery using the online form.

Design surgery

Design surgeries are typically offered online as a quick method of finding a design solution to issues identified.

They may also take place in person via organised events such as roadshows or conferences or on-site if the issue is complex.

Figure 1. Design surgery process



3. Design review

3.1. What is a design review?

A design review is the process where an authority or delivery partner receives structured written feedback on a scheme design in a design review report.

3.2. What happens in a design review?

Using the information that has been provided by an authority via the online form, we will carry out a desktop design review of the scheme using the relevant scheme review tools. This process involves:

- determining whether to use the area-based or route-based tool
- carrying out policy compliance checks for the design
- identifying any critical safety issues that may affect the safety of active travel users or influence potential uptake
- identifying wider issues referenced in the scheme review tools such as placemaking, air quality impacts, approach to engagement or other design factors

Design reviews will be constructive and focus on issues within the scope of the funding award and the funding programme objectives, but on occasion, issues outside of the scope may be raised.

3.3. Why are design reviews useful?

Design reviews help authorities to make better-informed decisions and deliver higher quality outcomes for active travel. The review may identify issues and propose solutions in the current design ahead of construction which could save time and money.

3.4. When should a design review take place?

Design reviews carried out at early stages in the process offer the opportunity to make the biggest impact. They should ideally be undertaken at:

- developed design stage (sometimes referred to as feasibility stage) and before key approval points such as strategic, outline and full business cases
- at change control points, where change control requests relate to a change in scope, design or outputs for a scheme

3.5. Design review outcome

A design review report (see section 5 for details) will be issued to the requester and the secondary contact listed in the online form within 20 working days. If a longer review period is required, we will contact the authority to notify them.

The design review report will advise if:

- no policy conflicts or critical safety issues have been identified
- policy conflicts and/or critical safety issues have been identified

If policy conflicts or critical safety issues have been identified, these will be highlighted to the authority in the design review report and recorded in the ATE issues log.

3.6. What happens after a design review?

A post-design review session may be arranged to agree on the status of any policy conflicts or critical safety issues identified in the review. The authority then needs to return the design review report to confirm the status of the issues/conflicts.

3.7. What schemes are eligible for design review?

Any government-funded active travel and cross-modal schemes with active travel content can be subject to a design review.

If a request for a design review cannot be accommodated, then standing advice may be issued. Authorities are encouraged to assess scheme designs using the ATE scheme review tools or a design surgery and refer to key guidance documents such as Manual for Streets, Inclusive Mobility and LTN 1/20. These guidance documents act as standard advice. Supplementary advice may be provided for recurring issues.

3.8. How to request a design review

Authorities and delivery partners can request a design review using the online form.

3.9. Design review and surgery service level expectation

We will aim to meet the following service expectations:

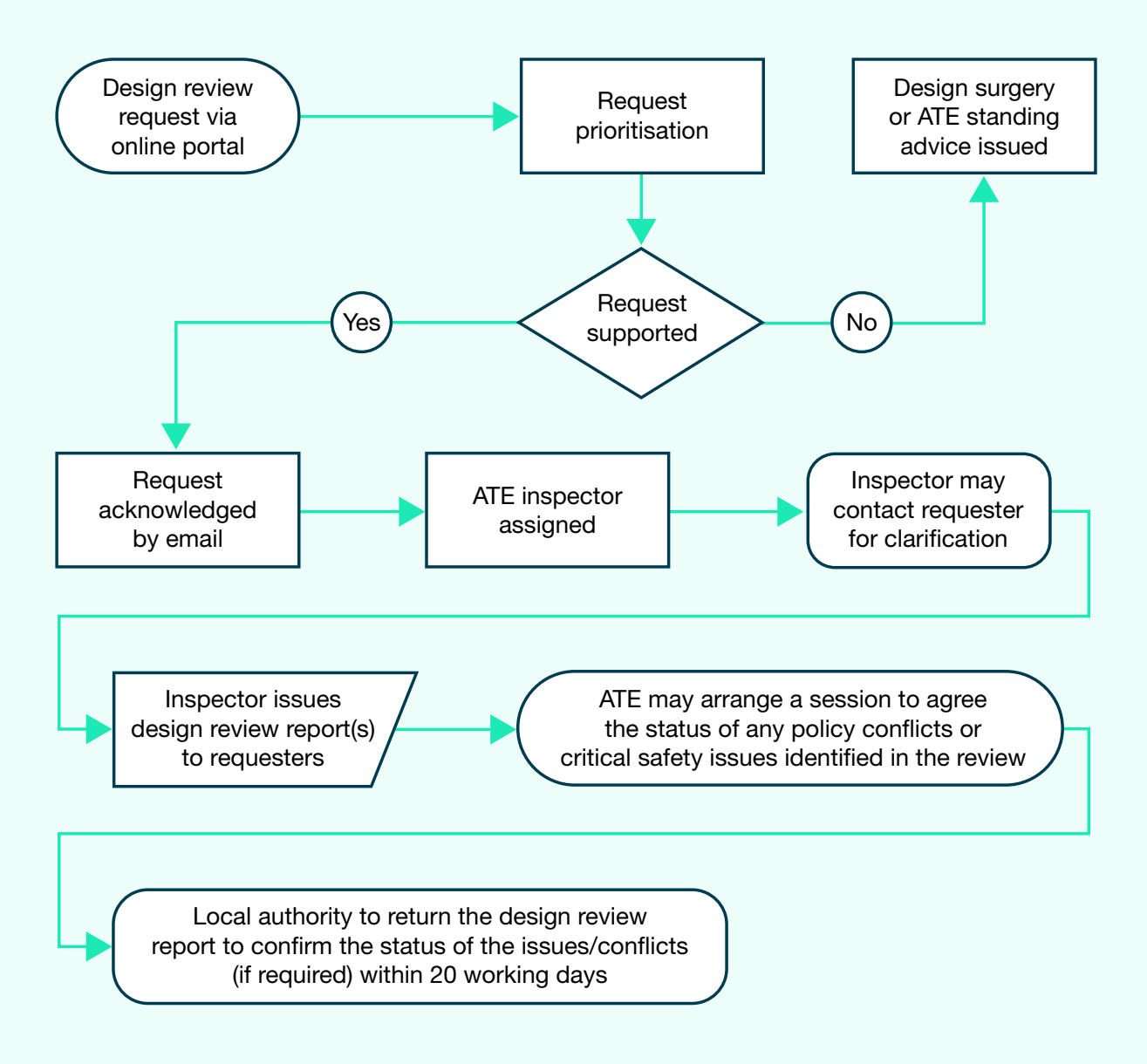
Service	How to request	Acknowledgement	Service level expectations
Design surgery	Online form	Requests will be acknowledged within five working days of receipt	Inspector to arrange a date for surgery within 10 working days of acknowledgement
Design review	Online form	ATE to assess request and determine whether standing advice, a review or surgery is most appropriate	Inspector to complete the review within 20 working days of acknowledgement

Design review

Design reviews use the scheme review tools to determine the level of service to active travel users.

A design review report is then produced.

Figure 2. Design review process



4. Accessing design assurance services

Our design assurance services take two forms. They are design surgeries and design reviews. A scheme may go through one or both.

ATE design assurance services should be requested via the online design assurance request form. Authorities and delivery partners are required to provide a minimum level of information, and this allows ATE to prioritise requests and provides inspectors with supporting information to carry out assurance services efficiently. In some instances, particularly during funding rounds, we may issue standing advice.

The authority is asked to provide the following information:

- the funding programme so that we can use the most appropriate approach to assurance and prioritisation
- contact details for two people in an organisation
- the design stage of the scheme. This is to ensure that we can frame responses based on how developed the scheme is. ATE's tools work best when applied early in the scheme lifecycle
- a plan showing the design and extent of the scheme
- supporting information – see section 4.2. Annotated drawings that clearly reference all changes to the existing condition work best for us. It is also useful for us if you highlight any specific issues that you are seeking advice on and provide supporting information. For example, if you are seeking advice on signal-controlled junctions then turning counts and staging diagrams are important
- other information for prioritising requests such as scheme value and dependencies

4.1. Prioritising requests

ATE need to prioritise how we use our resources so that we are pro-actively influencing the right schemes at the right time. The prioritisation criteria for design assurance services have been refined using learning from a pathfinder programme. This consists of four criteria for initial prioritisation:

- authority capability level
- estimated cost of active travel content
- stage of scheme development
- schemes with identified critical safety issues

4.2. What to include in a design assurance request

The following list is a guide as to the type of supporting information that is useful to be provided by an authority at each stage.

Stage/Supporting information	Feasibility stage/Strategic business case	Preliminary stage/Outline business case	Detailed stage/ Final business case
Location plan clearly showing scheme boundary and road names	✓	✓	✓
Drawings which clearly reference proposed changes to the existing condition and typical cross sections	✓	✓	✓
Developed drawings including cross-sections, speed limits, highway boundary, main dimensions and radii, approximate location of any trees and removed trees		✓	
Construction-ready drawings including kerb types, materials, tactile paving, traffic signs and road markings, street furniture, lighting, utility covers and gradients			✓
Placemaking and Green Infrastructure Plans relevant to the scheme	✓	✓	✓
Link flows and side road walking and cycling counts	✓	✓	✓
Traffic speed data	✓	✓	✓
Turning count data	✓	✓	✓
Relevant modelling information	✓	✓	✓
Signal staging diagrams and timings (if relevant to the scheme)	✓	✓	✓
Any other relevant supporting information. For example, planned or future schemes, Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP), and committed developments in the area	✓	✓	✓

5. Design review report

5.1. Design review report

Following a design review, the authority will receive a design review report summarising the findings.

5.2. Status of policy conflicts and or, critical safety issues

If a policy conflict and, or, a critical safety issue, each instance will be assigned a unique reference number in the design review report. The authority should return the report and provide evidence to demonstrate that the issue has been resolved or there is a plan to resolve the issue. The status of the policy conflict or critical safety issue can be amended throughout the lifespan of the scheme.

For both policy conflicts and critical safety issues, the following responses are available:

Status	Condition
Resolved	Where the critical safety issue or policy conflict condition has been addressed and the authority provides evidence to show this has been resolved. Example: A critical safety issue was identified relating to the distance between crossings on a busy urban road. As a result, a new pedestrian crossing was provided, and a photo submitted as evidence.
Resolution planned	Where the authority can provide evidence to show that the design will be changed to remove the critical safety issue or policy conflict. Example: As above but a design drawing is provided instead of a photo.
Resolution planned (funding to be identified)	Where the authority can provide evidence to show that the issue can be resolved but, due to financial constraints it cannot be resolved within the scope of the awarded funding. Example: A cycle route passes through one arm of a major junction in a controlled manner but controlled walking and cycling crossing provision is not in place on the other arms due to budgetary constraints. The authority has a willingness to add the other crossings later. Ideally, they have a design for the later upgrade or have it listed in their pipeline of schemes.
No resolution planned (potential Record of Non-Compliance)	The authority has no plans to adjust the design to remove the critical safety issue. When ATE undertakes an inspection of the completed scheme issues in this category they are likely to be recorded as records of non-compliance with government guidance. The final inspection process is covered in a separate note as it relates to performance rather than assurance. Example: As above but no plans or willingness to upgrade the other crossing arms are evident perhaps due to the impacts on other modes such as buses or to the smooth operation of the junction.
Outside scheme scope	The identified conflict or issue is not within the scope of the project, e.g. falls outside the area being adjusted. Example: The scheme is a maintenance-based upgrade of a stretch of the major road network. Footways are being widened and a new crossing is being installed. However, there is no space to add cycling provision or protected facilities as the road is a 60mph dual carriageway serving an industrial port.

5.3. Impact on capability rating

Design review outcomes may be used to inform Active Travel England's local authority capability assessments. This may in turn affect the level of funding that an authority receives.

As stated above, if there is no plan to resolve critical safety issues then following inspection of the completed scheme the critical safety issue will be confirmed as a record of non-compliance.

Your ATE regional manager will seek updates on any outstanding critical safety issues to ensure these are resolved where possible.