Process Evaluation Stage 1

Report on the first stage of the process evaluation of the Active Travel Fund Tranche 2

On behalf of the Department for Transport

transport for quality of life

UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER

sustrans

UWE Bristol | University of the West of England

Version number

Final [v8.0]

Issued July 2023

Citation

Disclaimer

Acknowledgements

Contents

Tables

Glossary of specialist terms and acronyms

Term	Definition
Active Travel Fund or ATF	A funding stream through which Local Authorities in England have bid to support active travel infrastructure during 2020 onwards
Capability Fund	Supports English Local Authorities outside London to develop infrastructure plans and to carry out activities to enable higher levels of walking, wheeling and cycling, such as training and promotion
Capital Funding	Funding to create or purchase an asset, in this context referring to funding to build active travel infrastructure
Emergency Active Travel Fund or EATF	The first tranche of the Active Travel Fund, also referred to as ATF Tranche 1
ETRO or Experimental Traffic Regulation Order	A type of TRO used to trial new infrastructure, through a monitoring period of up to 18 months
Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan or LCWIP	A document produced by an English local authority incorporating a plan of the desired walking and cycling network and a programme of future improvements, over around a 10-year period
Local Transport Note 1/20 or LTN 1/20	England's national cycle infrastructure design guidance, used by Local Authorities to develop high quality schemes and used by government to assess funding bids
Local Transport Plan or LTP	A forward-looking statutory plan usually produced every five years by English transport authorities for the Department for Transport
Low Traffic Neighbourhood or LTN*	A type of transport scheme seeking to remove or substantially reduce through motor traffic from an area or neighbourhood
Protected characteristics	Nine characteristics (e.g. race) for which the Equality Act makes it illegal to discriminate, with further duties on public bodies to advance equality relating to these
Protected cycle track	A cycle track physically separated from motor traffic and from pedestrians, e.g. by a kerb
Revenue funding	Funding provided for costs that cannot be capitalised, for example employing public engagement officers, developing network plans, evidence collection.
School Street	A scheme restricting most motor traffic movements in the area immediately surrounding a school, at school opening and closing times during term time, often accompanied by infrastructure changes to support walking and cycling, e.g. safer road crossings
TRO or Traffic Regulation Order	A legal mechanism by which Local Authorities can make changes to how roads are designed and operated

*A note on terminology: In ATF tranche 2, traffic reduction schemes were often referred to as LTNs and this terminology continues to be used in some contexts, e.g. some London boroughs. In the current ATF tranche 4 scheme typologies, this term is not used. In ATF tranche 4, LTNs are termed a type of 'area-wide traffic management scheme' (the new terminology used by Active Travel England) which involve area-wide through traffic filtering at neighbourhood level, high street or urban centre. However, the schemes that are being discussed in this process evaluation predate this new terminology. They are locally referred to by different names, such as LTNs or active neighbourhoods.

1. Executive summary

1.1. Introduction

This report constitutes the first part of the Department for Transport's (DfT) Active Travel Fund (ATF) process evaluation, conducted as part of a wider evaluation of the ATF Tranche 1 (Emergency Active Travel Fund, or EATF) and Tranche 2 schemes (other and future rounds of funding will be evaluated separately). The ATF has provided grant funding to Local Authorities in England for active travel infrastructure schemes during 2020 onwards. At the time of researching and writing this report, funding had been allocated in 2 tranches. Tranche 1 supported the installation of temporary projects for the Covid-19 pandemic. Tranche 2 supported schemes to be installed on a more permanent basis (subject to consultation and monitoring). The EATF in total provided £42,102,451 and ATF2 £175,360,750.

The process evaluation studies the implementation of interventions, including the mechanisms through which they are perceived to work (or not), and the impact of contextual factors. This first stage (a second will follow in 2023) particularly explored the role of consultation and engagement, both because these are widely considered to be important and because many schemes had either not yet been implemented or were still relatively new. The research also explored other processes and issues that were relevant until soon after scheme implementation, while a second stage will focus more on later stages of scheme life cycle. DfT and Active Travel England will use the findings to evaluate and improve the delivery of interventions and funding, and the provision of support to authorities.

1.2. Methods

4 focus groups were conducted with 30 participants, who were officers representing 28 Authorities across England. Participants represented a variety of roles and seniorities involved in delivering Active Travel schemes and were delivering a range of intervention and scheme types. All English regions, tiers, and sizes of Authority were represented, including both urban and rural geographies. Participants thus held expert knowledge of success factors and challenges in a variety of governance and geographical contexts. They were generally supportive of the policy goals and principles of the ATF.

The focus groups had dedicated time set aside to explore the processes of engagement and consultation, and how these had worked as part of the ATF Tranches 1 and 2. They covered a range of other topics across scheme life cycles, from strategic network planning to monitoring and evaluation, alongside participant views on the ATF more widely.

1.3. Findings

Headline findings here are grouped under key issues identified by participants and the key enablers that participants felt in their view, had contributed most to successful scheme development.

Key issues

- **Ongoing resourcing challenges were exacerbated by bidding process and timeframes.** Most, if not all, participants saw capacity constraints and time pressures as crucial for Local Authorities in trying to manage ATF projects. Many had little core staff resource and struggled to develop schemes and recruit staff or consultants for short-term roles. This had knock-on impacts for managing important supporting processes such as engagement, maintenance, enforcement, and complementary measures, such as training or social marketing campaigns.

- **Uncertainty resulted from seeking to knit together patchworks of funding.** To build local sustainable transport infrastructure, participants felt Authorities were frequently dependent on multiple funding streams with short timeframes and uncertainty over when funding would be announced and how much it would be, making it hard to resource an integrated programme of interventions.

- **The pandemic exacerbated prior challenges.** Many related to public and stakeholder engagement. The pandemic exacerbated some of these challenges, such as engaging with businesses when premises were closed. Participants described having to quickly develop new ways of working in a difficult context. There were however some positives to new virtual ways of working and engaging the public.

- **There was a lack of clear frameworks for success.** Many participants felt challenged by a lack of consensus over how to gauge scheme success, such as whether success was related to outputs (e.g. amount of protected cycle track) or outcomes (e.g. change in levels of cycling). Indeed, one definition of success was simply being able to implement a scheme in challenging times. Participants said that they struggled to know how to judge outcomes, particularly when there was no easily comparable baseline data through the wider disruption of the pandemic. They were acutely aware that isolated schemes might not trigger the network effects needed for a step-change in usage, which could also depend on future schemes being funded and implemented.

- **Rural participants perceived additional barriers.** Participants from rural (and to some extent, smaller) Authorities felt they experienced greater challenges in accessing active travel funding, highlighting 3 examples. First, many felt that ways of appraising likely scheme benefits were stacked against more dispersed rural areas with lower levels of cycling than some urban areas. Second, there were suggestions that current cycle infrastructure guidance was less appropriate for rural contexts. Participants felt this guidance could be better tailored with more rural case studies of successful and compliant schemes.

- **Challenges varied more by perceived motor traffic impacts than by scheme type.** Exploring variation by the type of scheme was complicated but showed that challenges generally depended more on how significant the (perceived) motor traffic impacts were than on the specific type of scheme. Although low traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs) were generally seen as relatively hard to deliver and School Streets relatively easy. Schemes that could restrict motor traffic throughput or parking were seen as potentially both being more challenging to implement but also having greater active travel benefit. Some apparently low-cost schemes (e.g. LTNs or cycle tracks using temporary

measures to reallocate space) could hence require substantial resource for communication, engagement, and monitoring, so there should not be an assumption that such resource varies in line with capital spend.

Key enablers

- **Political support.** Local political leadership is crucial, with positive examples given of portfolio holders who sought to educate other members and key stakeholders about the need for, and benefits of, successful active travel schemes. Conversely, opposition from stakeholders without formal decision-making powers over schemes (such as District Councillors in a County Council or MPs) could cause substantial problems, as could schemes becoming a contested partisan issue in local elections.

- **Support and guidance can help overcome challenges in engagement and consultation.** Engagement and consultation were perceived as critical to success. Participants noted ongoing difficulties in obtaining views from a wide cross-section of the public as well as sometimes experiencing disruption from those opposed to schemes. Participants felt the need for additional capacity, skills, and/or knowledge to manage these challenges. Some commissioned outside expertise could help alongside peer-learning and guidance; while up-front, sustained investment in in-house staffing and skills could help to reduce risk of delay and costs incurred later.

- **New methods of engagement had advantages.** Participants looked forward to embedding lessons learnt from engagement during the pandemic. For instance, they wanted to continue or start using representative polling, computer-generated animations, and/or participatory mapping tools. Many wanted to combine online with in-person engagements; seeing the value of officers being visible around schemes or running walk- or wheel-around sessions with groups or individuals impacted by schemes. The opportunity to 'show rather than just tell' offered by experimental traffic orders was welcomed, even if it had sometimes been problematic.

- **Narratives helped to ground schemes within a broader framework.** Participants spoke of linking schemes to objectives established in agreed local frameworks such as Local Transport Plans. Some also spoke of the importance of developing a wider narrative around the need for change, which might incorporate climate emergency and/or health impacts of schemes, and involve health stakeholders in communication, such as the local Director of Public Health.

- **Well-developed strategies linked to network planning helped to deliver specific schemes.** Specifically, Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) helped Authorities to prioritise schemes as part of a wider vision for the local area, although in some cases LCWIPs were out of date or seen only to be aspirational, harming 'buy-in' where schemes were then proposed. Conversely, Authorities without LCWIPs found it harder to plan schemes as part of a wider network. Participants wanted more support for developing and updating LCWIPs to ensure that network benefits were realised, and schemes prioritised appropriately.

- **Core revenue support could help retain skills, knowledge and build strategic case, plans and delivery momentum.** While welcoming the ATF and its associated guidance, many participants felt that their overwhelming reliance on a patchwork of temporary, short-term funding schemes was

damaging active travel planning. Many participants described a lack of core transport planning capacity and spent a lot of time bidding or waiting for results of bids and scaling their plans down (or sometimes up) at short notice. This, they felt, damaged the quality of both individual schemes and network planning, as well as making it harder to develop meaningful engagement on a longer-term basis, threatening scheme acceptability. They wanted long-term ring-fenced funding to help with this, even if they accepted the need for oversight of scheme standards and some element of competition.

2. Introduction

The University of Westminster's Active Travel Academy was commissioned by the DfT to lead the first of two linked process evaluations of the ATF. This forms part of a wider evaluation of the ATF Tranches 1 (Emergency Active Travel Fund, or EATF) and 2, complementing the outcomes measured there. In a process evaluation, the focus is on implementation processes, mechanisms, and outcomes. Here the report explores Local Authority officers' views, perceptions, and experiences of how ATF funded schemes have worked in their area.

The ATF has provided grant funding to Local Authorities in England for active travel schemes from May 2020 onwards. This amounted to £42,102,451 under EATF and £175,360,750 under ATF2. Tranche 1 (EATF) supported temporary projects during the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic, while ATF Tranche 2 supports the creation of longer-term projects. Tranche 1 planning and implementation was atypical due to the Covid-19 context (e.g., necessitating/permitting change in consultation processes). Although ATF2 schemes might therefore be more typical of active travel schemes generally, the report covers both these and EATF schemes. This is partly because many Authorities had not yet progressed far with ATF2 schemes and hence could only talk about full pathways to implementation for their EATF projects; and because important lessons from the Covid-19 era had begun with EATF schemes (for instance, around the use of online tools for engagement).

The report is structured as follows. Firstly, it outlines the methods used, including the sample and the analytical approach. It then explores the various themes identified within the focus groups in relation to the Research Questions guiding the work. These Chapters cover: key issues in pathways to scheme development; experiences of engagement; how scheme characteristics affect success; variation by Authority; and issues related to ATF processes and more widely processes of funding active travel in England. Finally, it provides some key lessons based on what the participants said.

The research team would like to thank all the participants for giving up their time to participate in our groups. We would also like to thank the Department for Transport for providing funding, input, and advice on this research and the report. The findings represent a summary of the breadth of views from the focus groups. The lessons learned are suggestions from the research team based on the insights gathered.

3. Methods

With the aim of examining Authority experiences of developing and implementing ATF schemes, four focus groups were conducted during October and November 2021. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Westminster's University Research Ethics Committee on 7th September 2021 (ETH2122-0037).

3.1. Research Questions guiding the focus groups

Research Questions were developed to steer the focus groups. This focus on consultation and engagement was linked to the timing of this first stage of the process evaluation, while the second stage will focus more on post-implementation experiences.

Given the number of Research Questions and to avoid repetition, the findings here have been organised thematically rather than question-by-question, starting with A1-2 (pathways to scheme development, incorporating wider leadership and policy prioritisation), followed by B1-6 (consultation and engagement), C1 (variation by scheme and by Authority type), and finally D1 (ATF processes).

A. Scheme Development

A1. What aspects of scheme development (up to and including initial implementation) have proved particularly important or problematic? Why?

A2. What role does wider leadership and policy prioritisation within an Authority play in helping a scheme along its journey (or not)?

B. Consultation and engagement

B1. For schemes that have been more positively received (and are being successfully implemented), how has support been acquired amongst the community? For schemes negatively received, what (if anything) could have been done differently?

B2. What communication methods were used to engage with and consult communities; how helpful (or otherwise) did they find them?

B3. What consultation have Local Authorities done for different ATF schemes (digital platforms, face-to-face engagement, community groups etc.), why, and how does this differ?

B4. What have been some of the more successful aspects of the consultation process? Why have these aspects been successful?

B5. What have been some of the challenges involved in the consultation process? Was anyone not involved who should have been? Were these challenges overcome, and how, if so? To what extent and how have they acted as barriers to scheme implementation?

B6. If they are familiar with the DfT consultation guidance, what are their views on it?

C. Contextual factors shaping participant experiences

C1. How do the challenges and successes vary by type of Authority, size and scope of scheme, urban/rural nature and other contextual factors?

D. Active Travel Fund processes

D1. (Added after being spontaneously raised by all groups) How have officers experienced the process of bidding for, obtaining, and making use of ATF funding? What changes if any would they like to see to active travel funding and policy in future?

3.2. Focus group recruitment and sampling

4 focus groups were conducted during October and November 2021. Each contained 7-8 participants, all Local Authority officers closely involved in ATF schemes. The 30 participants represented 28 different Authorities.

The sample represented a diversity of organisations and contexts, including a mix of:

- English regions (minimum 2 participants per region)
- Rural-urban status (minimum 8 participants predominantly or partially rural)
- Authority type (minimum 3 participants per type).

Detailed information on the sampling procedure can be found in Appendix 10.1.

Participants had experience of a wide range of schemes, including those that are the focus of the wider ATF evaluation being led by the same research team (LTNs, new cycle tracks, and School Streets), but also other interventions funded under the ATF (such as footway widening, infrastructure improvements and upgrades, town centre schemes, etc.).

3.3. Focus group structure and reporting

Focus groups were 90 minutes long, semi-structured and run online via Microsoft Teams (see Appendix for the focus group topic guide developed based on the research questions). They followed the Chatham House Rule (participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed) and, as such, all reporting has been pseudonymised. The focus groups explored experiences of (and definitions of) more and less successful schemes and set time aside specifically to discuss engagement and consultation.

3.4. Coding and analysis

A thematic approach was followed, and the write-up indicates the extent to which views were shared where possible (bearing in mind that this was a qualitative process and participants' views cannot be assumed to be statistically representative of a wider sample). The focus group transcripts were initially corrected and anonymised by one researcher who was present in the focus groups. These transcripts were then coded in NVivo software by this and by another researcher, with regular meetings to discuss emerging codes and cross-checking of a sample of

transcripts coded by each. A third researcher was then involved in helping organise and analyse the coded data for organisation and presentation in the report, with one of the two initial researchers collaborating with this, again with regular meetings to discuss and decide upon interpretation and presentation of the data, including the presentation of findings within sections and sub-sections to highlight key themes. Some of these were present in the research questions while others emerged during the group discussions, for instance, local authority officer views on the organisation of active travel funding streams such as ATF Tranche 2.

3.5. Strengths and limitations

This research gathered data on perceptions of thirty English local authority transport officers working in a diverse set of organisations and local areas. This provided insight into the extent to which experiences were shared or not across a wider set of authorities (for instance, rural versus rural experiences). A major limitation is the inverse: these views only relate to the perceptions and experiences of local authority officers, and not, for instance, those of groups of residents, business representatives, or local authority councillors.

4. Pathways to scheme development

This Chapter outlines some wider issues raised related to pathways to scheme development. Consultation and engagement were major issues but aside from a Chapter on political support, are not discussed here (see Chapter 5 below).

Key lessons from this theme were generally shared experiences of struggling with limited capacity and time. Set out in the 2017 Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy (available at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cycling-and-walking-investment-strategy-active-travel-investment-models), LCWIPs are a strategic approach to identifying cycling and walking improvements required at local level. They enable a long-term approach to developing local cycling and walking networks. While specific LCWIPs were sometimes problematic if ambition had since moved on, having an LCWIP (or in some cases, another strategic document incorporating specific active travel plans) could help overcome some of the barriers to scheme development.

Local political support was even more important with portfolio holders crucial to schemes getting off the drawing board. Less commonly mentioned problems such as monitoring and evaluation are discussed at the end of the Chapter; given the exceptional nature of EATF schemes and the early stages of many ATF2 projects, these issues might become more salient in future years.

4.1. Key findings

- Most if not all participants said that **ongoing capacity constraints and time pressures** had severely affected their ability to successfully deliver schemes, and many expected this situation to worsen.
- Many participants said that the **changing justification for interventions** (from Covid-19 mitigation to more traditional sustainable transport goals) made it difficult for them to plan and implement schemes, some of which were new to an Authority.
- Participants generally felt it was helpful to have **Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs)**, but these could be constraining if not in line with increased levels of active travel ambition.
- Most if not all participants stressed the importance of **local political leadership**, particularly portfolio holders and council leadership, but also incorporating ward councillors and other key actors such as MPs or other tiers of local government without formal transport planning functions.

4.2. Capacity constraints and time pressures

Firstly, most if not all participants said their Local Authorities were facing ongoing capacity constraints, which many expected to worsen in the coming years. This created general problems with planning and resourcing, such that the availability of new funding could be experienced as a burden due to a lack of capacity to deal with it. Indeed, one participant said that their Authority had not put in a bid for EATF because they were not confident that the Authority would be able to deliver anything

to an acceptable standard. While specific challenges differed by Authority, the feeling expressed by one participant of being 'on the back foot' due to lack of resource was echoed by many.

> "We are going through another restructure now when we're potentially looking at losing 10% of Council staff on top of all the other cuts that we've had in recent years… [ATF] Tranche 3 asked for a pipeline of schemes, I mean, where's the revenue and the resource to even put that pipeline together? [...] We're always on the back foot." (Authority Y)

Conversely, one participant commented that as a smaller Authority, they had so little money generally to develop transport schemes, that any money was an 'absolute bonus' and otherwise virtually nothing might be spent on active travel.

Participants highlighted specific time pressures affecting ATF scheme development and implementation. The ATF has been comprised of a series of short-term funding tranches, with money allocated to be spent within months rather than years (this is discussed further in Chapter 8). A lack of time to plan and develop schemes was particularly acute during EATF, but also present during ATF2. Some participants expressed doubt that schemes would be implemented by the ATF2 March 2022 deadline.

> "They're just not realistic […] the short timescales for bidding and then actually consulting on and implementing them is far too short […] a lot of Authorities haven't had the money to develop walking and cycling schemes. You don't just have these things sitting on the shelf waiting to be put in." (Authority O)
>
> "We know what we want to do, but it's proving really difficult to get these schemes through the consultation which the DfT said we had to do. So we're not going to spend the money within the original time scales that were set down." (Authority CC)

A lack of time to plan had sometimes led to opportunism in choice of schemes, although the impacts of this varied. Sometimes an Authority was able to deliver schemes that they had long wanted to implement but which had been too difficult. However, participants did feel that it had been hard to develop schemes to such tight timeframes both in bidding and implementation, even for those who had not found scheme identification a challenge.

Time and resource pressures were aggravated by the need to justify schemes in terms of Covid-19 mitigation, and later changes over the importance of this versus other sustainable transport goals. With constantly changing evidence on Covid-19 transmission, and frequent changes in restrictions such as social distancing regulations, plans could become relatively quickly out of date.

> "Officers' mental health has definitely taken a bit of a battering [others nodding] through all this. It would have been nice if it hadn't really been badged as a reaction to the pandemic, and we'd actually had 2 years to plan and implement properly like we ordinarily would." (Authority R)

Lastly, the novelty of a scheme was seen to affect its development and delivery. When schemes were new to an Authority this meant a lack of experience within the Authority staff, and a challenge in explaining it to the public and elected members of the council (councillors). Participants described their learning curve:

"For us we actually haven't done that many low traffic neighbourhoods, and so it really has been a learning process in terms of the cameras and getting the signs right and so on. And that's obviously in turn led to a huge amount of correspondence from people sort of critiquing how we've gone about things. Throughout the year there's been sort of continual churn of updated guidance and information." (Authority D)

4.3. LCWIPs and network planning

Only some participants worked in Authorities that already had Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) which could inform their development of ATF schemes. (Some funding was allocated under the Capability Fund for LCWIP development in Summer 2021 and several Authorities were in the process of developing LCWIPs). Having an LCWIP was generally seen as positive, in helping to ensure specific schemes were seen as 'strategic' and hence more easily prioritised.

"Get the buy in to [the strategy] and then try and deliver schemes that are part of that strategy, because without that link, it just seems things are regarded as officers' whims that are then rubbished by the public." (Authority W)

By contrast, Authorities without an LCWIP often struggled to justify schemes that they had had to develop quickly.

"Our LCWIP is still being developed, so looking at that for 'shovel-ready' schemes was impossible. Instead, we were forced back to whatever we could find down the back of the filing cabinet that had been drawn up without LTN 1/20 and trying to bodge them into shape rather quickly." (Authority T)

One participant, who had previously worked at 2 other Authorities, contrasted the different situations, whereby one was well prepared in terms of having an LCWIP and stakeholder sign-up, while the other had been much less so. The participant felt the latter Authority struggled to deliver ATF schemes as a result.

"Authority N had the resources and the staff available to be able to canvass members and key stakeholders, and then put a prioritisation approach in for which schemes they were going to put ahead for the funding. Whereas Authority P didn't have that and didn't have an LCWIP in place either, so were really on the back foot to start with, without the staff resources and without an LCWIP." (Authority P)

In some cases, the lack of an overarching strategy with specific schemes meant that more ambitious plans had been abandoned, following challenges to schemes which were not easily defended by a wider narrative, plan, or data.

"We've had to adjust our approach and focus on 20 [mph] treatments and some reductions in parking when we can get away with it." (Authority F)

While LCWIPs were seen as important, in practice they were sometimes seen as limiting, largely because the lack of revenue or capital funding attached when they were drawn up had meant that they had not been prioritised. Even if LCWIPs were still then produced, the limited attention given to their production could have implications for scheme acceptance and/or scheme quality.

> "I always felt LCWIPs were undermined by the lack of funding that came along with them [nodding], generally speaking, and so they got significantly less focus at the time of development." (Authority G)

> "The local Town and Parish Councils and their members and the business associations were engaged with the LCWIP, but I think if I'm honest, [they] probably didn't think anything was gonna happen." (Authority K)

Other issues related to combined Authorities in some cases producing a combined LCWIP across the whole area. While this had positive impacts in ensuring schemes were joined-up across boundaries, one participant talked of how it had meant that each district had fewer schemes prepared, limiting what they could bid for and deliver through the ATF.

> Our [combined Authority] LCWIP was kind of a help, but also a hindrance […] it didn't really contain all the routes that we would have liked to have done. […] It helped with those 2 [ATF] routes: got them over the line quite smoothly. But we probably could have done with it on a few more key corridors to really help push on our active travel bid. (Authority AA)

Despite the patchy existence and quality of LCWIPs, participants generally welcomed the increasing encouragement from DfT to focus on schemes included within them. They saw this as not only a way of making schemes more network-led but also helping to prioritise LCWIPs themselves, i.e., network planning.

> "I think it's good that the government continues to say 'We want proper network schemes rather than your favourite thing which has been sitting in the door for the last 20 years'." (Authority U)

4.4. Local political leadership

Participants discussed in detail the political influence over their schemes, broadly agreeing that wide support (particularly from Mayors, council leaders, portfolio holders, and ward councillors) was a key enabler, especially for more controversial scheme types. It was important for key local decision makers to have a deep understanding of the need for and potential for transport behaviour change (such as concepts of induced traffic and traffic evaporation, referring to the tendency of new infrastructure to encourage more usage, and conversely, the tendency of a reduction in capacity to reduce demand). Participants highlighted resource and active stakeholders (typically, a highly engaged portfolio holder) in achieving the former and would welcome support from government and Active Travel England in achieving the latter. The later Chapter 5 highlights some methods of engagement with councillors used by participants, including frequent briefings (bi-weekly).

> "[Politicians] are absolutely fundamental to everything that's happened, and I think our role as officers often is to is to take a lot of the grief and enable them to be able to take the decisions that need to be taken, but without them, none of this would have happened." (Authority G)

Cabinet members for Transport were cited as being crucial, especially where they could play a role in communicating with ward members likely to have less expertise around transport and active travel.

"Having a cabinet member who is enthusiastic and interested in the programme helps; possibly more than that, he is front and centre giving interviews etc. It can be harder to bring ward councillors along, even in the same [party] group." (Authority R)

"The cabinet member support was really crucial, because of course we had to get [EATF schemes] in really quickly. What we did in Tranche 1 […] was all done without consulting ward members and some of the ward members weren't happy about it, but it was put in and we didn't actually remove any of them at all, despite some pressure, because the cabinet member at the time was in support." (Authority O)

"[To implement LTNs] you need your local councillors on board, completely on board, which sometimes can be quite complex because often there are several local councillors. I'm with the county: we just have one really main councillor. You need your cabinet member completely on board, then also you need your Chief Transport Planner on board [...] Plus, me pushing it from doing all the networking. If you haven't got those, I think you're not going to get anywhere basically." (Authority U)

Importantly, local political context mattered when it came to who carried greater influence over schemes and their success. In several cases participants felt the MP was more influential than the relevant council member who made the formal decision.

"I engaged with the [local MP] to ask about a point closure in their area, and they said that they didn't want it, so we didn't do it. So, whilst the County Council, politicians generally, are very supportive of it, there are various MPs […] who aren't necessarily as supportive as perhaps you would expect." (Authority Q)

"The local MP got involved […] he certainly was not supportive of the schemes […] and the decision therefore was, we took 2 schemes out." (Authority J)

Schemes varied in their political context and implications. Some were local and mainly affected people living in one ward (hence unlikely to get off the ground without the support of ward councillors), but larger and more complex schemes were perceived to require wider support, including ensuring that local MPs were supportive and expressed this support in a co-ordinated manner.

"The cycle route covered a large geographical area and included 3 MPs and 4/5 elected County Councillors. The MPs were supportive and needed coordination, but the Councillors were different [political] colours, and this has generated some political conflict." (Authority X)

One participant spoke about the importance of wider support from councillors across the Authority who were signed up to the overall climate change narrative supporting a proposed active travel route. This helped to mitigate opposition from some ward members local to the scheme around impacts on driveway access and resident parking.

"We've [some] ward members being very supportive. They have seen it as an opportunity to help […] tackle climate change. [But] ward members that are more specific to the area […] they've been receiving the complaints from the residents in

terms of knock-on impact on driveway access and the potential reduced parking. […] But I'd say the overall [political] feeling has been positive because the members as a whole see the project as providing multiple benefits for health, connectivity, access to schools, climate change." (Authority M)

By contrast, another participant commented that ward councillors had been very actively supportive in their Authority, to the extent that councillors from other areas started to ask for similar schemes and were perceived to be 'waiting in the wings' in case originally planned schemes did not go forward.

"[Ward Councillors have] really taken it in hand and kind of driven it so you know we did some quite intensive public engagement drop-in sessions and I think it really helped that that they were, you could say trusted leaders. I think the public found them a lot easier to engage with about the scheme, rather than a Council officer […] a whole lot of other members put their hands up to say well if it fails there, can we have [a low traffic neighbourhood]?" (Authority P)

Multi-level governance could complicate matters, even where the local politician in question did not formally have a role in scheme decision-making (just as MPs' opposition to schemes could put them at risk). For instance, while a County Council might have the transport planning powers, Districts can potentially block schemes if a key local leader is unsupportive.

"We've found another layer of politics is involved given the 2-tier system, we can't always bank on 'our side' having the right amount of support or clout to really impact views if there is a more well-regarded local representative, even if they've no direct mandate or authority over the County Council" (Authority N)

One participant from a County Council said in their view that District politicians can 'over-react' to perceived risks of traffic delay, meaning that schemes might be delayed or cancelled because of potentially unfounded fears. Conversely another participant referred to one Combined Authority as a 'good example' where a supportive Mayor could work together with a high-profile Walking and Cycling Commissioner to encourage local politicians to support such schemes.

Despite commitments to active travel across the political spectrum, this did not always translate into local support, where there was the opportunity to gain political capital from opposing a scheme.

"LTNs [low traffic neighbourhoods] became highly politicised, at first there was a cross-party consensus. When residents organised a campaign, opposition parties took a different line. Unfortunately, this wasn't helped by the timing of the local elections, which exacerbated political divisions." (Authority F)

"I don't think it started out particularly contentious, but of course, when you throw politicians into the mix and local elections […] And trying to consult just before purdah [pre-election period], it has been a bit of a bumpy road." (Authority Y)

Finally in this Chapter, some participants cited a general lack of understanding of transport systems and transport planning among some political decision-makers. Specifically, this involved a belief that any reallocation of road space would cause major problems (see also later Chapter 6). Participants also felt that councillors were

nervous about potential public opposition even in advance of planning interventions, especially if they felt EATF schemes had not been well received.

> "I always like the perception amongst the public and councillors alike that our transport network is so fragile that taking 4m out of a massively wide road would cause the collapse of everything. Doesn't bode well for us actually closing roads to traffic entirely." (Authority T)
>
> "I am certainly seeing with some of our councillors that negative feedback on the on EATF is, let's say, making some other councillors more reluctant to push forward with ATF 2 schemes." (Authority I)

4.5. Other factors

Various other factors were cited as challenging or important although not as frequently as those discussed above, perhaps partly because they were likely to become more salient with growing time since initial implementation. For instance, some participants spoke of struggling with monitoring and evaluation, while others cited a lack of revenue funding for maintenance or the inability to enforce schemes. Conversely, one participant spoke about the importance of data they had gathered on resident priorities and views about active travel infrastructure.

> "Because we've got such a robust piece of research, we can absolutely defend that, our members are absolutely and totally behind it." (Authority Q)

While many participants had relatively little involvement with scheme modelling and appraisal, several that did have such involvement commented that it could be a barrier to scheme development and progression. The quotes below (from one combined Authority member area and a metropolitan borough) highlight the problems that lower tier Authorities may experience when they seek to progress schemes through a higher level of governance. This was aggravated where baseline active travel levels were low, given that one scheme alone might not have a network effect (see Section 6.3 below). These participants said that the business case was unable to take account of likely later impacts on active travel from joining up the network, but all predicted delays would count against the scheme, even if a later joined up network would mitigate these.

> "We might wish to promote a scheme in Authority B which brings about active travel benefits. But because we're starting from a low base because we're not realistically able to get a network effect with drip feeding small amounts of funding and therefore, we're not gonna get a huge uplift. The benefits are there, but they're not that good to start with, and delays you have to account for all in one go." (Authority B)
>
> "Especially in London once you do a bigger scheme, so many more actors get involved like we are talking about it, in London: TfL, the bus routes, where it's like, OK, you might want to touch a boundary road, but you can't because it's a TfL Red Route. Or you wanna do some very good scheme, but actually it's too impactful on buses so you have to take that into account and that requires modelling and modelling can take 6 to 12 months." (Authority A)

Issues related to design quality were also raised, especially in the context of capacity and timing constraints, affecting schemes both small and large. Participants described the time pressure of trying to bring previously designed schemes up to a newer, higher standard resulting in significant resource burden or mistakes.

> "Having shelf ready schemes that were fully compliant schemes was an enormous challenge. We ended up having to design a £10 million scheme in 3-4 weeks which isn't sustainable." (Authority T)
>
> "Early on it's fair to say that we made mistakes due to the speed and resource constraints that we were under, and I bet most councils did this […] we didn't quite get it right and drivers were driving around the edge on the pavements and circumnavigating the restrictions." (Authority D)

Several participants voiced concerns about a lack of ongoing revenue funding for maintenance and complementary measures and the implications that this might have on usage and scheme acceptability. It is worth noting that many schemes were at relatively early stages so these needs may not yet have become apparent.

> "There's orcas and bollards [...] they do get nudged by HGVs and things and debris is in the cycle way and our resources are stretched as they are, so it's needing to, when we get this capital funding, we could do with additional revenue funding [others nodding], so with that we can actually maintain these to a standard that people expect." (Authority Z)
>
> "We're delivering this whole, this great new infrastructure but we need to be giving people the tools. Authority AA's quite deprived, low bike ownership, high cycle thefts, not many people taking up learn to ride or cycle safety courses that we put in." (Authority AA)

Particularly relevant to EATF or other 'experimentally' introduced schemes, while using temporary materials enabled schemes to be delivered quickly and at lower upfront cost, potentially over a wider area, it left schemes vulnerable to vandalism. One Authority mentioned that cones were repeatedly moved rendering the scheme ineffective.

> "Some side roads were shut off to try and stop motorists using it as a rat run and then the street was made temporarily for cyclists and pedestrians and coned off … lots of the cones got moved at night [...] I went out to observe it, and one of the bits where the road had been closed off just for cyclists, basically, the cars just ignored it and carried straight on and went down the side road that they'd always used to use, so that one there didn't really work." (Authority S)

Finally, several participants referred to a lack of enforcement powers or capacity. For instance, one participant said they looked forward to new enforcement powers which would mean that they did not have to rely on traffic wardens to enforce traffic orders in person but would be able to use more cost-effective traffic cameras.

> "One of our issues has been enforcement and obviously that is a key issue, and with very limited funds and doing something as a trial, we were unable to put in very robust enforcement measures. And actually through consultation, there was a lot of shouts about, you know, 'people aren't complying and you need more enforcement'. And obviously that's not the worst response that you want, but it has been a bit of a

challenge for us, so we are looking at the new powers that Local Authorities will potentially be able to access, to enforce moving traffic offences for the scheme moving forward." (Authority Q)

5. Experiences of engagement

This Chapter discusses participants' views of engagement and consultation. Here 'consultation' is used to refer to the more formal processes that Authorities must follow in seeking (primarily) the public's views on schemes. 'Engagement' is a wider umbrella term also incorporating the range of activities involving communication with different stakeholders, residents, and the public, before, during, and after scheme implementation.

As the focus groups were conducted in October and November 2021, participants were able to contrast 'normal' (pre-Covid-19) consultation and engagement with EATF experiences (where schemes were often implemented under experimental traffic orders, some of these ending around the time of the groups). Participants had some experience of consultation and engagement for ATF2 schemes, most of which were, however, not yet built.

Key lessons included the substantial variation in approaches to engagement, and the desire by at least some participants for DfT to take a more prescriptive approach. Approaches varied to using Experimental Traffic Regulation Orders (ETROs), a legal process which imposes traffic or parking restrictions over a maximum of 18 months while the effects are monitored and assessed. Several participants described using ETROs incrementally to evidence impacts (or lack of negative impacts) from small interventions which could then be built on. Another participant spoke of using them more holistically, as part of a wider approach to developing active travel infrastructure through trialling and testing.

Participants spoke of the importance of having a clear narrative around schemes and the problems they were trying to solve (for instance wider health goals), and the role of tools (for instance, mapping and visualisation) to help discuss the planned changes when conducted virtually. Covid-19 introduced difficulties and new ways of working, and many participants were keen to build on their use of new tools and approaches while maintaining a mix of engagement methods including online and in-person.

Many participants continued to struggle to get consultation responses from the entire community, with the typical respondent seen as a relatively affluent white, middle-aged to older man from a car owning household. Schools and young people had been especially hard to reach. Some participants were looking to polling or making use of existing, more representative survey panels to obtain a wider demographic and a less polarised mix of views. While the pandemic experience had been hard for everyone, in some cases participants felt their work stress had been increased by having to deal with aggressive responses, survey gaming, and even harassment of individual officers. Finally, one thread running through the groups was the resource, skills, and time needed to do engagement well, which participants felt was often lacking or sometimes only briefly secured.

5.1. Key findings

- Participants said that the **Covid-19 context** created major challenges for engagement, although many said that the new ways of working also had some benefits that they would try to retain in the coming years.
- Some said they welcomed the encouragement to make more use of **Experimental Traffic Regulation Orders**, allowing them to 'show' and not just 'tell' the impact of schemes, which often proved more positive or less severe than feared or predicted.
- Participants' description of the use of tools for engagement and consultation **varied substantially between Authorities**, and some said they would welcome more guidance and prescription on 'best practice' in this regard.
- Participants spoke of the importance of **creating a narrative** to explain why schemes were being proposed, which could speak to local and/or national goals and aspirations.
- Most if not all had struggled to get a **demographically representative mix of respondents** to traditional consultation methods, with some speaking highly of representative polling or the use of more diverse panels to gather feedback.
- Some participants spoke of experiencing unprecedented levels of **'gaming'**, such as the same individuals responding multiple times to consultation surveys, and even **harassment of officers** associated with controversial schemes.
- Most participants spoke of the need for **more and longer-term resourcing of engagement**, without which it was difficult to respond to concerns, deal appropriately with 'gaming' and harassment, and build trust in local government.

5.2. Covid-19 challenges

Covid-19 restrictions created many challenges for consultation and engagement, alongside opportunities to try out new methods, as well as providing encouragement (in EATF) to use long-standing ETRO processes allowing schemes to be trialled over a period of up to 18 months.

While a shift from postal services to online communications was not necessarily a problem, any new way of working (even without a pandemic) carries challenges and the risk that some people get left behind by new types of inaccessibility.

> "We had obviously quite significant problems at the start because of lack of postal services, right at the start of the pandemic. [If people are] used to receiving consultations in a certain way and responding to them on paper and then we're suddenly shifting everything online, there's obviously then problems from people who say that that's not the right format for them and setting up arrangements where we can post stuff out to people if they want, including the full consultation packs. That has just required quite a kind of dynamic shift." (Authority D)

Some participants reported that where schemes had affected local businesses (for instance, part-pedestrianisation of a local high street), unpredictable tightening or loosening of lockdown rules had aggravated initial disruption and left those business owners feeling that they had not been informed.

> "Letters were dropped in periods where the shops were closed. So, we have no idea whether people were checking their mail and if they weren't, we didn't have a means of informing people in advance of the scheme going in, which was within days of being able to reopen for the first time in months […] That timing was a bit of a perfect storm, which I think seriously aggravated the degree to which people, particularly businesses, weren't content with what we'd done." (Authority B)

The importance of social media during the pandemic could bring challenges, with some participants describing how their Authorities struggled to keep up with fast-moving media.

> "We've had even local celebrities diving in on Twitter to get involved in various schemes that's been really counter to all of the hard work in the engagement that we had undertaken on the Commonplace platform." (Authority V)

Other participants pointed to improvements that online working had brought. Online methods can be more inclusive for some people, particularly those who have limited spare time to travel to meetings or who might find this difficult due to disability, for instance.

> "In many ways [online meetings are] a much better and more accessible environment for many people and that's actually helped us to reach out to people who we might have struggled to reach previously." (Authority D)

> "We got a really good response rate compared with our more typical church hall in-person consultations: we've heard from a lot more people than I think we would have done otherwise." (Authority BB)

While online working could bring improvements for some aspects of engagement, participants were aware that it was not necessarily inclusive for everyone. Explaining that 'purely online engagement works for some groups, it doesn't work for others', one participant mentioned how being seen on the street was important, as residents could see that there were real people behind the schemes.

> "We are also trying to do some pop-up events. So, we've done 4 per LTN that we're now consulting on, and it's not there to convince anybody. It's more just saying like, hey, the consultation is live. Here's the leaflet with the survey link, if you want to fill it out right now, we've got iPads so we can fill it out with you in case you struggle with it or something else. And that has been quite successful, I'd say. There's been at least a lot of people that seem to appreciate that we're out there. We are on local spaces and we're contactable face to face once again." (Authority A)

There was a sense from some participants that they had learnt much about engagement and consultation, and/or planned to 'up their game' in this regard to make better use of tools and approaches that other Authorities had adopted.

> "We are probably slightly behind the curve. We've relied more traditionally on letter drops with social media. We've significantly enhanced our online offering, particularly, surrounding the concerns with Covid restrictions, we've put a lot of information on the website. We have made a clear statement of intent: we want to move towards a more interactive engagement exercise." (Authority X)

Finally, Covid-19 era ATF schemes have often been ambitious and in some cases represented an Authority's first use of, for instance, bollard separated cycle lanes, LTNs, or School Streets. In many cases they have generated a volume of correspondence and engagement that participants had not previously experienced, implying substantial additional work.

> "Our engagement was about 300% of what we normally receive on schemes, so it's really coloured how we're going to do this moving forward and going through that journey element and spending the money rather than just hoping that the outcome would be right." (Authority N)

5.3. Lessons from Experimental Traffic Regulation Orders (ETROs)

Participants described their experiences and lessons learnt from using ETROs as part of the EATF. For many the ability to show and test in real life and receive feedback based on public experience was a strength of the ETRO process – both in delivering quickly, but also in being able to 'show rather than tell' the results of schemes. This was however a steep learning curve for political decision-makers, to understand the process and reassure the public that there is scope for change and improvement once in.

> "Emergency traffic regulation orders and things, we've learnt an awful lot about. The reaction to the public, and comms that are needed, and the groundswell of support that we need to get from both local ward politicians and leadership as well. And there's been an awful lot of effort that's gone into the comms and addressing complaints. […] I think on the whole the legacy of it: it's going to be positive." (Authority C)

Getting it wrong could lead to further problems down the line with more traditionally introduced schemes, due to a lack of trust in engagement processes.

> "A lot of these [EATF] schemes were put in without adequate consultation, by the time Tranche 2 rolled around, people were like, 'Oh well, are you going to listen to us then because you put these schemes in without even telling us." (Authority P)

However, testing and trialling was seen as valuable. For instance, one Authority cited the use of ETROs as having helped both to fix a 'missing link' in the cycle network and then build on the perceived success of that intervention to improve junctions throughout a town centre. Testing the missing link itself could form part of the Authority's engagement in developing longer-term plans.

> "We had a section of highway in that was basically a missing link for the existing cycle network […] It had always been in the 'too difficult pile'. It had always been unlikely to garner any kind of popular support for the measures that we needed along there, but we were able to almost nip in overnight […] create a 3-metre-wide cycle lane, and from there we've been able to build it into now progressing through junctions and tying it into a wider town centre scheme. So just the ability to go in very quickly and be able to show people this is what will happen and avoid the fear element of 'if you do this it will break the city', was all the difference. Being able to show rather than just tell and hope." (Authority N)

> "Not having to go through full public consultation and potentially months or even a couple of years […] it's allowed us to basically put it in in-situ and have feedback while it's in, so people can see what the benefits are." (Authority H)

> "What that scheme has now done is demonstrated that there is space for a segregated cycle provision down that road and to the extent that in ATF3, if we are successful in our bid, we should hopefully be replacing [it] with a permanent segregated scheme […] it's been a real triumph in terms of that, demonstrating that there is the space, there is the demand, there is the capacity, and there is the public will for it." (Authority X)

Another participant highlighted that ETROs were not novel and would continue to be available for use by Authorities. However, they said that a shift in thinking was needed for stakeholders to understand that there would still be consultation, but it would take place after people had had a chance to see the scheme in action.

> "Experimental traffic orders have been a thing for decades now. They've not been used in this way, not really, or not to this scale, but they are a completely legal mechanism to work with. They are democratic. You just kind of flip it on its head. And I think that is very important to say, especially also the councillors and the political stakeholders in the local boroughs to be 'no, this is a democratic process. We are doing everything that's legal. We are just testing it before we consult on making it, whether to make it permanent or not'. And that is a shift in thinking that's really needed because a lot of people just kind of say like, oh, you did it without asking us, it's like, 'no, no, we're going to ask. We are just going to trial it first and that is completely legal and that's completely fine'." (Authority A)

5.4. Approaches and tools for engagement and consultation

Participants spoke of using a range of tools for engagement and consultation for both EATF schemes (already in place) and their newer ATF2 schemes (generally not yet built). Indeed, during focus group discussion it became clear to participants that they were often taking quite different approaches. Some participants felt that they would like DfT to be more prescriptive in laying out specifically what consultation is needed.

> "I know Appendix E [in DfT consultation guidance] does talk about [how to do consultation], but listening to the conversation: really useful, there's such a vast degree of difference about how we've gone about this purely because we're told to consult but not told how to do it." (Authority Q)

In the case of 'community stakeholders', often individual or small group discussions were held early in the planning process, to gather input and mitigate potential disbenefits.

> "Going to key stakeholders, emergency services, passenger transport executive, technical stakeholders as well, rather than the public or lobby groups or so on, was conducted in advance, basically by email." (Authority B)

> "We're also trying to reach out to what I would call community stakeholders, so TMOs [Tenant Management Organisations], TRAs [Tenants and Residents'

Associations] at estates, local ward councillors, emergency services, other groups that have an interest, like more like lobby groups, pro or against reaching out to them, having a conversation." (Authority A)

The role of 'early and regular engagement' with stakeholders, including ward councillors, and business groups was crucial, if sometimes challenging to resource.

"We certainly had one particular scheme which is a low traffic neighbourhood and we've had meetings every fortnight with ward councillors, just trying to reassure them what's going on, answer questions as things go along." (Authority R)

For some participants, online tools were in use pre-pandemic; for others it was more a case of using these online tools more, particularly at times of the pandemic when it was not possible to conduct any face-to-face activities, and/or when the postal service was severely disrupted. Participants spoke of using mapping tools such as 'Commonplace' or 'Story Mapper', which allow the public to leave comments that relate to specific places, either in response to scheme proposals or at earlier stages of engagement where people's views on their local streets are being gathered.

"[With Commonplace] you just get a map of your area and residents can just go and like drop a pin on the particular spot that they want to comment on, either in a consultation or across the city and then just type a comment about what they'd like to see and it has various selection boxes people can pick to give categories. Normally, it is 'what change would you like to see' is the most interesting comment." (Authority S)

"For Tranche 2, we had a mixed number of methods of collecting, but our most successful, single most successful use for the consultation was our application of the ArcGIS online storyboards, which can almost depict the story that the scheme is trying to achieve, and we have massive uptake on that. We have more uptake through that mechanism than we had in various other methods that we've applied, so that's really going to be sort of our focus moving forward on other schemes in the future." (Authority N)

Some participants had not previously been familiar with the use of computer-generated imagery (CGI) to present a picture of the scheme. They commented on the success of this in conveying the wider vision and the broader goals of the scheme, in a way that drawings and plans could not.

"We did the artist impressions where the more controversial parts of routes were, e.g., reducing parking, this was very helpful in explaining a wider vision." (Authority F)

"The one thing that we used that we hadn't expected such a strong support for was our consultant suggested using a CGI artist to do a before and after slide […] And that was surprisingly well received." (Authority N)

In other cases, walking or wheeling a route in person was described as a way of gathering rich site-specific information from specific groups, such as disabled people, some of whom might not find the online tools accessible or whose views are particularly sought.

> "We're really trying to home in on the additional requirement in the Equalities Act for disabled groups. So, trying to organise like focus groups, workshops, walkarounds, whatever you want to call them, with representatives of this protected characteristics group. To make sure we capture their experience and capture their feedback." (Authority A)

5.5. Communicating a narrative

Participants acknowledged that people may feel excluded by consultation processes if they feel a scheme is being imposed, rather than being something needed by the community. They talked about how they were trying to do more engagement to ensure that schemes were clearly relevant to local and/or wider problems, and to develop and communicate a narrative that explained clearly how the scheme sought to address these.

> "We've asked questions around, 'do you think people rat run through your local area? Do you think it is safe for kids to walk to school in your area?' […] And so, being able to say, 'do you think this [scheme] solves the problems that were identified by residents in your area?', makes it a bit more of a communal sort of element. It just gets people to think slightly outside of their own lived experience." (Authority T)

Participants reflected on how they tried to avoid scheme consultations becoming a polarised 'yes or no' but rather an opportunity for those consulted to feed into a decision-making process where schemes might be adapted or mitigated as well as removed or retained as is. This does leave open the potential to affect delivery timeframes and resource costs.

What was judged to be sufficient 'broad support' (as required in ATF2 schemes) varied by Authority and depending on the local political and policy context.

> "What we tried to avoid was turning [consultations] into referendums really and we tried to use the responses that we got as part of a decision-making process that considered the emerging local transport plan policies and the climate emergency, trying to get a balance." (Authority BB)

> "The approach has been: 'We're doing it, how would you like to shape it?' rather than being a referendum on 'do we do it at all?' Which is good, it is refreshing." (Authority R)

> "We are trying to shape the conversation like 'We've got very good reasons to do [schemes], there is a need to do them, but how do we do it, how exactly, where exactly?' That's kind of the conversation that we need to start." (Authority A)

One participant gave an example of a specific scheme which received some criticism alongside a positive response overall, and how making specific changes with expert input led to this scheme being improved and implemented successfully.

> "We had over 500 responses back to the engagement exercise and it was largely positive, and really useful feedback and we have made quite some considerable tweaks to it. I think the thing that helped us most was getting industry experts providing us with some input as there is a technical challenge as well, within that

process. But when we've launched the work which started a couple of weeks ago, it was really pleasing to see that the reception that the work received was really positive as a result of the work that we managed to, the tweaks that we've made, and the and the communications that we sought." (Authority X)

Participants spoke of referring to localised traffic-related problems (like 'rat-running') or goals in the local transport plan which had been endorsed by elected members. There was also some talk about using climate emergency and/or public health narratives to frame schemes, which could help contextualise schemes in relation to wider imperatives for change. For instance, in Section 4.4 this report cited a participant speaking about how the climate emergency had helped gather support for an active travel route. Elsewhere, another participant described trying to ensure that local active travel schemes were understood in terms of health challenges and health gains.

"I've built a very good relationship with our Director of Public Health, so when we have a public meeting, it's opened by the Director of Public Health, not the Director of Transport. They turn up and say, 'this is why we're doing it' and that was pre-Covid anyway, but it's very much about the design of cities […] Through this process and period, people like the Directors of Public Health have got a huge amount of trust from the public in relation to their communications. And […] generally speaking, those public health professionals are really big supporters of the types of measures that we're trying to put in place." (Authority G)

5.6. The 'public' in public engagement and consultation

Participants expressed concerns about the extent to which views they received represented the wider population; and within that, whether the feedback they were receiving from those within a sub-group of the population could be extrapolated to represent the whole sub-group; for example, the diverse needs of different disabled people. Specific examples were given as well as wider points about strong positive or negative reactions, which could then mislead officers into anticipating similar responses from other group members or the public more broadly. Participants described having difficulty distinguishing majority views from vocal minorities.

"Our trial has restricted blue badge holders, and obviously we've been looking at mitigations to support access, but if you get a handful of very loud or repeated complainants, it's quite hard to balance that up against: 'Well, are the other blue badge holders being silent on this? Do they support the scheme?' You know, what view can we take based on this small but loud number of complaints? So, I think that's a bit of a challenge for us." (Authority Y)

A broader point made about engagement and what to take from it was the extent to which some stakeholders might have views differing from the wider public; either more positive or more negative. One participant talked about how early engagement might reach the most optimistic or most pessimistic members of specific stakeholder groups; thus, while useful for identifying specific issues or benefits, this should not be taken as necessarily reflective of wider opinions. Conversely, another participant talked about having a more reactive approach, where those reacting strongly to the scheme were then brought in to be involved in the re-design process.

> "The initial EATF measures provoked a petition and a sort of quite vocal group, well not group, but somebody who led a group of views and so we got that petitioner on board and talked to them directly and worked quite closely with them. And then there's a set of residents, semi-organised, with some leading members as well from a local area, that's not quite land-locked, but close to the measures that we put in place. And again, we work very closely with them." (Authority C)

When it came to consultations, many participants described how their Authorities had struggled, despite trying hard, to get responses from a wider group of residents or respondents than the 'usual suspects'. Middle-aged and older people (this tended to mean those aged 40 to 70, rather than elderly people) were cited as being over-represented, with challenges involving both younger adults and children and young people. Some commented that more affluent people were more likely to respond, and to be more vocally active in lobby groups, whether for or against schemes. Strong awareness of the problem sat alongside a lack of knowledge, experience, and/or resource to address it.

> "It's the resource-intensive challenge of getting responses from a proportionate group of respondents. So, we know that in Authority D, where about 2/3 to 70% of households don't own a car, we're getting significant over representation in our consultation responses from car drivers and car owners, which has been alluded to. We're also getting significant under representation from our black and minority ethnic groups and again from young people. The last one in particular, whilst we've tried to do an awful lot to get young people's views, it's been really, really difficult, even with some of the more engaged schools, just getting in there at the start of the pandemic, it was obviously impossible, and since then it's been quite challenging as well." (Authority D)

Other participants had also struggled to engage schools and young people and concurred that there tended to be a limited age range of people responding, with young people's views tending not to be heard.

> "We found the demographic [responding to consultations] was sort of 50s age group. You know, 40 to 60 really, this is being a bit generic really, but lots of people had a certain mindset and what we seemed to fail to do was capture much response from younger people, and that's a real challenge for us going forward, particularly when we're asked to sort of demonstrate consent for a scheme. So, we're having to think going forward about how we consult to try and get a representative sample." [Authority W]

Conversely, one participant described experience of failing to reach elderly people (due to lack of engagement with online engagement methods) which by contrast had led to opposition towards a scheme from that group.

> "What we were accused of is that we left the elderly out, they got the leaflets but because a lot of them are not very internet savvy, they didn't know how to respond […] and they suggested that we needed to put ads out through the radio. So, we were accused by elderly people of wanting to not hear what they had to say. That was something that we've learnt for future engagement and for consultation is that we need to engage better with the elderly, and I think because we didn't engage so well it automatically put them on the back foot, you know, automatically they did just

not like the scheme because they thought that we were trying to purposely not engage with them." (Authority P)

Participants spoke about socio-economic bias in responses to consultations. As a participant from Authority G describes below, Authorities tended to hear more from car owners and from more affluent areas. In the case of schemes perceived to restrict car use, this may negatively bias responses.

"In the more affluent areas with higher car ownership, you get significantly more communication from people back than you do from other areas [others nodding]. That's generally something that we will all probably have experienced throughout our careers. But it's definitely been the case here." (Authority G)

Respondents pointed to challenges of dealing with responses where many came not just from the immediate area nor the wider town or city, but from other areas of the country (i.e., not directly living in the area in question). For many participants, they did not have the necessary expertise or experience to incorporate these differences in analysis. For instance, this might involve knowing how to 'balance the needs of the residents against the other respondents', whether living elsewhere in an area or outside it entirely, especially when there were clear differences in views between these groups as described by a participant from Authority Z:

"We've got some low traffic neighbourhoods going in in Authority Z, and one of the things that's been quite interesting is in one of the areas where mostly residents responded to the consultants, it's been about 85% popular. Everyone loved it, thought it was a really good idea. 'Can't wait for a stop to all this rat running, will be great'. And then in one of the other areas, the support was much lower, around 50%. And [decision-makers] went, well, you know 'it's still enough of an endorsement. Probably go with it anyway. But you know, let's try and dig into why'. And it was because, similar to I think what others have said elsewhere, was that suddenly the people who responded to the consultation weren't residents. They were people who drove through the area [others nodding] and therefore very anti it or indeed lived somewhere else randomly in the UK […] when you looked only at residents again it was 75% popular. But how do you balance the needs of the residents against the other respondents of the consultation?" (Authority Z)

Other participants had conducted surveys and questionnaires as part of a wider attempt to gather data on resident views, experiences, and travel behaviour. Participants highlighted how this could potentially both provide useful additional information for transport planning and provide more representative insight than can be gained from people who actively choose to respond to an individual scheme.

"We had quite a long questionnaire and we had a travel survey as well which is equally quite long and we genuinely thought that no one would do the travel survey, and 95% of people did both, which is a brilliant surprise; we've got back about 2 and a half thousand responses […] It's not cheap. It's quite intensive, but it's worth putting that effort in." (Authority F)

One participant provided a detailed example of how they had changed their approach to consultation. This involved paying both a professional company and respondents involved in the consultation, hence more expensive than a traditional approach. They felt it provided a much more robust basis for decision-making than

their traditional use of online platforms and pointed to the large number of 18–35-year-olds who participated, compared to their normally predominant age groups of 50+.

Rather than using only a passive online consultation, they used a mix of existing and newly created online and telephone panels of residents and local businesses. A panel is a set of individuals, often selected to be demographically representative, who have agreed to participate in an ongoing manner in a range of engagement and/or research exercises. As well as providing more responses than they would normally expect, using panels gave a much more diverse mix of respondents that might be open-minded about the benefits and disbenefits of individual schemes.

"We engaged a research agency who designed specific research for us and the scheme. We did a number of different things where we looked to target various demographics because normally, our consultations, we get the vast majority, almost 90%, is generally people 50 and above, because that's just kind of how it works.

[…] We used existing panels where people have said that they are interested in talking to us about various things. Our residents panel, but also other panels and we engaged with people, residents, and businesses within a radius of 2 kilometres from each scheme, as well as countywide. We took them through some online questions […] and we eventually get to 'what's your view of walking, cycling, and how would you feel about a scheme in your local area', etcetera? We also did telephone surveys, so we didn't necessarily cut off the people who don't have access to the Internet, and we did some traditional online surveys as well. So, we got about 2,500 responses and that was spread throughout the Holy Grail of 18 to 35. We got a really high response rate. We paid people […] what that enabled, is that we had huge amount of support for all our schemes, and we could rank our schemes. We also used [a third-party organisation] to carry out technical appraisal of our schemes so that we produced a report which shows the results of all our consultations.

[…] We've got broad support from lots of different demographics, both locally and from a countywide perspective, using this method. We did something very different […] And it's now the way we're going to consult on all our transportation projects.

[…] We've got such a robust piece of research, we can absolutely defend that, our members are absolutely and totally behind it. [We got] 2,500 people. In terms of responding on our onlines, we get 500 people probably, and sadly it's the same 500 people. With this way we've done something very different." (Authority Q)

5.7. Gaming and harassment

Two particularly negative challenges that participants spoke about included the 'gaming' of online surveys (to skew quantitative results) and the harassment of officers (to intimidate the officer into making changes). Not all participants said they had had this experience, with examples given here largely but not exclusively relating to LTNs or other traffic-reduction schemes that had become controversial. However, such situations could become extremely stressful, particularly at a time of stretched resources and little social contact. Lessons learnt included protecting personal contact information, protecting capacity for communication, and supporting staff mental health and wellbeing.

> "The amount of personal criticism, sniping, social media abuse, and things like that that staff take, often when they're struggling to even spend any time with their family has been pretty difficult to manage […] And it is, frankly, quite exhausting at times when you're getting emails arriving in your inbox, like every hour of every day, including overnight and things like that. And on one occasion one person even emailed us, mistakenly emailing me about me. It was supposed to be to somebody else but was basically outlining that their approach was going to be to bombard us into submission." (Authority G)
>
> "The ferocity of the debate - we had some town hall meetings, we actually even braved in person meetings during the summer, and we had to employ security because it was so aggressive, and it was almost a threat of violence - so that was something that we didn't anticipate." (Authority F)

Participants described receiving numerous consultation responses from the same IP address or having inboxes and phone lines flooded with complaints. A lesson learnt from this was the need to have proactive policies and processes in place early to manage high volume communication and set a point at which to cease to engage.

> "We've found ourselves with a campaign of people filling in the online survey to a point where numerous responses from the same IP address that said no to every single question we asked, and we threw in a couple of questions in our survey to say, would you like to be able to walk, would you improve crossings and improve crossing points etc, and the answers were no to everything, so we have that sort of thing to contend with. […] We even had a consultation event last week where a group of people protested outside saying 'we need to be listened to', which sounded really bizarre outside an event where we're listening to people." (Authority W)
>
> "One of the lessons there is to make sure that as Authorities that you're very tight when communicating internally about who's responding to these people about these matters. But also, I think, recognising that you need to draw a line under communications with some people earlier, and that vexatious correspondence on occasion, you need to implement these policies earlier than otherwise. We've had literally thousands of emails from some people. We had some people setting up fake accounts via foreign virtual private network servers to alter the way that the consultation was viewed by flooding it with duplicate responses and things like that." (Authority G)

5.8. Resourcing engagement

Linking to comments in Section 4.2, the need for resource to do engagement well was a major theme. From walking or wheeling tours with disability groups to ensure potential inaccessibility is minimised and improvements made, to running representative county-wide panel surveys with over-sampling in scheme areas, to having the analytical capacity to synthesise public feedback and to identify 'gaming', all these take much time and expertise. For small Authorities where one person must take on multiple roles this could be particularly challenging, but even larger or historically better resourced Authorities were struggling.

Participants described how communication and engagement resource or budget should be proportionate to the scheme's impact or benefits, rather than physical

implementation cost. For example, LTNs can be very low cost but require significant communication and engagement efforts because of the perceived impact on motor traffic. Therefore, participants felt they were not able to conduct proportionate engagement activity with the small budgets available.

Data may be gathered online relatively quickly (once appropriate platforms and recruitment strategies are in place), but cleaning, managing, analysing, and responding to it (whether responding directly to individuals and/or incorporating views within schemes going forward) is an expert and time intensive task. Ultimately, however, participants felt that investing in this work helps to support the success of schemes, by increasing local buy-in through enabling schemes to be adapted to incorporate local priorities.

"We found that schemes where we had minimal engagement before consultation were much less likely to succeed. [...] We quickly discovered that engagement, then consultation, and then a further round of engagement, where we'd say, 'well, you know, this is what you've told us, this is what going to do about that' led to a much more positive reception all the way through. And again, it's something we're hoping to embed moving forward." (Authority N)

"We were lucky we had a major project, where we had a comms and engagement officer, and I was able to pivot on that and ask her to come across to the wider programme. So, we effectively do have an in-house dedicated member of the team now and she's been excellent, but it's just one person. It's nowhere near enough for the amount of correspondence and volumes of stuff that's coming in." (Authority D)

Even with substantial effort put into engagement, participants still struggled with controversial interventions (typically those involving motor vehicle access restrictions or road space reallocation), and success was never guaranteed. One participant reflected on how they felt that in retrospect, they might have prioritised the wrong area in which to implement their first LTN. In the chosen area, loud opposition had derailed the scheme, whereas in another area with no LTNs planned, they had conversely had residents calling for such measures. However, this was now an uncertain future possibility dependent on future funding bids.

Another participant said that in their view, co-creation or co-design (developing designs in workshops with community and public representatives, or through more regular iterations of the design-feedback cycle from strategic case to detailed design) could increase inclusion for the majority but could alienate others who did not participate and felt excluded. Participants felt that there is not always a perfect solution, even (given the many potential challenges and contingencies from capacity to leadership to network planning) where a scheme may in principle be good.

"Co-creation and design hasn't really helped. I think that it's giving people a voice and it's helped a majority of people feel included and that they had a say, but then there's a whole other part of the community that just feel completely left out so it's opened a can of worms in some respects." (Authority V).

6. How scheme characteristics affect success

This Chapter considers participants' views on what characteristics of schemes were associated with success (or failure). This includes a discussion on 'what counts' in terms of success. To some extent struggles defining success related to the lack of data available, particularly for EATF schemes; to some extent they reflected the differing contexts and scheme types. A common thread throughout is the tension between acceptability (for example, their impacts and costs) and effectiveness (for example, the scale of benefit to walking, cycling and accessibility, respectively). Success for some, for example, is delivering an acceptable solution to local stakeholders, while for others it is, from their view, an effective solution.

The challenges over 'defining success' partly speak to a need to improve data, monitoring, and evaluation; yet also to challenges of incorporating in planning and appraisal network effects that may multiply over time the relatively small impacts of individual schemes. The discussions found differences of opinion or experience regarding which schemes were 'easy' or 'difficult', with a wider lesson that there is a trade-off between perceived difficulty and perceived effectiveness. For instance, LTNs were widely (if not always) seen as particularly challenging yet relatively impactful, whereas School Streets were seen as relatively easy (not always) yet potentially less impactful, affecting only a relatively small area for a relatively short period of time in comparison to LTNs.

6.1. Key findings

- Participants **struggled to define scheme 'success'**, some feeling that in such a challenging context that managing to take novel schemes through to implementation and monitoring was itself a major achievement.
- More specifically, participants felt that **a lack of data**, for instance on residential streets and about walking levels, meant that they struggled to measure and evaluate potential benefits of schemes.
- Some participants said that **schemes perceived as 'cycling measures'** were especially contentious, although others had different experiences and gave examples of cycling schemes attracting praise and support.
- Most felt that **School Streets** were a relatively uncontroversial type of scheme, which could often gain substantial support, although some participants believed they might have limited impact on wider mode shift.
- **Schemes involving roadspace reallocation from motor traffic** were perceived to be both most contentious and most impactful through enabling higher-quality schemes, alongside a 'stick' to change behaviour.

6.2. Issues defining success

During the focus groups participants were prompted to discuss schemes that had been more or less successful, and why. It became apparent that there was no clear agreed definition of scheme success or failure. Participants raised that it was not always easy to define and measure 'success', particularly in a context where comparable 'pre' data may not be available.

> "It's not quite black and white is it, as a successful scheme and an unsuccessful scheme. I mean, I think there's parts that have been successful and less successful." (Authority Y)

> "The initial reaction to [our schemes] was very strong, and so they got rolled back to some extent and I would say that we've probably managed to retain the effect of about 50% of what we initially put in. So I guess that's a positive in that we've still got something in. We've got a good piece of infrastructure that's justified on improving air quality, and it supports what's in our local plan already, so we had quite strong justification for it, it improves links to the neighbouring Authority and development areas. But we have had a lot of strength of feeling against it." (Authority C)

Success to participants could have meant – in a challenging context – being able to keep what was perceived as a good scheme in, despite noisy opposition, or being able to implement a type of scheme that had previously been too difficult to deliver.

> "I don't know if there's a universal agreement and you might not be able to have an agreement on what is a measure of success. I mean P24 talked about the effect of politics and members and what they see to be a measure of success [i.e., that politicians might judge successes by how popular or unpopular they appear to be], and whether that is about getting votes as it were, but effectively what we've done in Authority N is created a bit of a template to try and unpick these elements and the key, crucial thing is what is success? Is it just a pure increase in numbers which we would take from KPIs [key performance indicators], which would be like surveys, [pedestrian and cycle activity counting] cameras, on site surveys. Or would they be opinion-based surveys or, a combination? I suppose I'm not necessarily asking a question, but I'll be interested to hear how everyone's actually measuring that success, whether it is coordinated, or whether it depends on the scheme and the location and the circumstances, etc. [...] I think the DfT should ring fence allocation for monitoring and provide clear guidance way in advance." (Authority N)

Different schemes might have different key objectives: for instance, a School Street scheme may have different aspirations to a cycleway scheme. Relatedly, data collection for cycling is more routine than is data collection for walking: for instance, traffic counters would generally include cycling (even if poorly), but not walking. Active travel is seen as 'win-win' across a range of policy areas, as a result the perceived objectives may extend well beyond the traditional 'transport' sphere, although many of these wider objectives may not be easily measured and/or linked to scheme impacts, at least within the traditional resource envelope of Local Authority monitoring. Finally, as indicated in the opening quotes of Chapter 6, there may well be a trade-off between benefit/impact and the level of vocal opposition a scheme is likely to generate. Hence, success in terms of being able to implement a scheme and ensure it stays in may cut against success in terms of achieving measurable objectives (e.g. cycling uplift).

In addition to decisions participants were making on budget and resources for monitoring, they described being under time pressure to report impacts/benefits or how timing would affect the quality of data collected. For many temporary schemes, questions of assessing success or failure were becoming pressing, and one participant, for example, said that they were struggling with this.

"The thing about timeframe and support from DfT and how we determine what success is, is really quite a critical thing, isn't it? Because it's certainly what some of our members have been going on about for the best part of 12 months: how are you going to decide whether a temporary scheme becomes permanent and for a while we've been saying, well, we're looking for a bit of guidance from the DfT over this, and I'm not sure what we've received is that helpful." (Authority W)

6.3. Data issues and network effects

Participants described how delivering only parts of a route or network meant that benefits were likely suppressed and so the resulting business cases were weaker. For example, scheme funding may enable a degree of improvement but not cover the major barriers requiring greater expense.

"A number of these schemes, they will take quite a long time to show if they work or not. And also, for example, certain bits need to go across junctions and those can be incredibly expensive to convert just for cyclists' benefit and so quite often it might be having to wait for that junction to be done for motorists and then the cyclists' one can be built into it at the same time, because if you start doing a few junctions, you'll eat all your budget up straight away doing those […] so probably not rush to judgement too early on whether or not it's a success or a failure." (Authority S)

Participants felt that funding timeframes had precluded 'before' data gathering or hampered the quality of 'before' data. This lack of 'before' data led to difficulties in credibly attributing benefits and impacts to interventions. For example, participants might suspect that perceived negative impacts of a scheme were instead due to other factors, such as the background increase in motor traffic as lockdowns receded – but felt that without enough data, they had no clear way of attributing changes either way.

"Um, I think one of the issues really that's come back to bite us a lot, is that because of the time scales with the funding, there wasn't a lot of before scheme data done." (Authority R)

Similarly, if EATF schemes had been controversial locally, participants felt that this left a legacy of mistrust between the Local Authority and stakeholders (particularly groups that had opposed EATF schemes). This then fed through to ATF2. One Authority described this in relation to an EATF main road scheme.

"There was no baseline data done before they put in the EATF schemes. And this really affected the engagement process for the Tranche 2 schemes because there was a perception of a lot of displaced traffic … a lot of people were saying that it had caused displacement on 2 other A and B roads in the area. But there's no way of proving this because the baseline data wasn't there, and it's really put us on the back foot of moving forward with both the liveable neighbourhoods and permanentizing this scheme because we can't prove if there is displacement traffic there." (Authority P)

Even with Tranche 2 schemes, a lack of historic data for schemes in residential areas could cause additional problems for monitoring and evaluation. Main road

schemes, for example, might be able to draw on routine traffic monitoring that is not conducted for residential streets.

> "In residential areas and things like that, you don't always have the best data, and that's always going to trip us up. We've learned from that in terms of following-on schemes, but it's hard yards. Many of the reports that we are writing now that are signing off permanent implementation of schemes effectively, they match with lots of grey areas saying insufficient data to conclude because you can illustrate that the number of people using it since you put the measure in might have increased, but increased from what? And that's a problem that we've all got." (Authority G)

Even limited data could, however, be useful to communicate empirical evidence to local politicians rather than relying on anecdote or widely reported perceptions. For example, that people *were* cycling on a given piece of infrastructure, despite images of empty cycle lanes, and demonstrating that 'there is the demand' as well as the capacity.

> "We've either put in temporary automatic counters or commissioned enumerators to count on certain days and we did see quite a high usage, which was obviously really positive and something to go back to the ward members and our local politicians […] They were still very wary, especially around the reallocation of the road space." (Authority AA)

> "Usage has gone up, that there's still general acceptance that actually it's a good thing: it gets cyclists out of the way of motorists and all that kind of stuff. So it's been a real triumph in terms of that, demonstrating that there is the space, there is the demand, there is the capacity, and there is the public will for it." (Authority X)

However, when starting from a low base, increases in cycling might well be high in relative terms but low in absolute terms, for example a 50% increase might only mean an extra 25 cyclists.

> "[Creating a joined-up network] is taking some time and in the meantime, people are saying 'OK, well yeah, great you've got a 50% increase in cycling. That means 50 cyclists to 75, that's not really impressive, is it?' So we're really trying to manage expectations." (Authority A)

Participants described scheme monitoring gaps as including: a lack of data generally collected on walking, the use of controlled approaches (to adjust for background changes), and a lack of data for smaller roads and residential areas. This issue was compounded by Covid-19, which dramatically impacted both wider travel behaviour in a highly dynamic and changeable way, both suppressing travel and shifting what demand remained to very different modes to the pre-pandemic average. It also affected the ability of Authorities to deliver monitoring.

> "It's probably quite early to be coming out with whether it is positive or not in terms of the overall evaluation because of the context. I think everyone had the same with Covid, it made it difficult to get the pre-data together, so we were putting in the monitoring in most areas, it was new; so it was already in sort of lockdown. We could have done with, ideally, pre-lockdown figures as to what cycling and walking levels were like. And now we still haven't sort of returned anywhere near normal, and there still seems to be a reluctance to use public transport, so there's probably more people in cars than you'd expect." (Authority S)

Participants described difficulties where baseline active travel rates (especially cycling) were low, meaning that individual schemes might not demonstrate the hoped-for change in active travel. One participant describes below how network effects might not be expected until many schemes were in place. Therefore, introducing one lone LTN might well not have a measurable impact on cycling as alone it does not generate safe cycle routes to key destinations. This problem is compounded by Authorities frequently not measuring walking uplift, given evidence suggesting LTNs have a stronger impact on walking than cycling.

"When we're talking about effectiveness and measuring success, and I suppose also getting buy in, it's really important this kind of networking effect. You only get it when you do enough and there is this minimum amount that you need to do in order to do enough. Say that you've got 2 neighbourhoods and an A road in the middle, you can make one of them an LTN: that's great and you might cut through traffic, rat running whatever, but you're not necessarily going to get a modal shift towards cycling or reach your objectives towards active travel because nobody will be able to go into the LTN because there are still A roads to contend with that you can't cross without interventions. […] You have to do more to get this like critical mass of proper cycle infrastructure and proper walking infrastructure going, to actually see that change." (Authority A)

6.4. Framing: walking versus cycling

There were interesting differences in the perception of schemes as difficult or unpopular related to which modes they were seen to serve. There was a sense that schemes perceived as being 'for cycling' were harder to implement than those 'for walking.' Interestingly, though, what 'a cycling scheme' meant was not necessarily obvious, and there were counter-examples given where a cycling scheme was described as popular.

"I think when you add cycling schemes into the mix, I think it's where it gets nasty, is my perception." (Authority V)

"There isn't enough scope for walking zones in schemes, which is a huge opportunity and also can win over wider groups in terms of members of the public, in terms of their motivation and willingness to walk a bit more." (Authority F)

"Some of our most successful schemes so far have been the small schemes for improving, mainly walking and maybe a bit of cycling and scooting to schools, which are often schemes that are overlooked in funding. I've got one scheme which is a new footpath across a field and it's a nice wide one that's walking and cycling, and the schools really appreciated it. We haven't done the post monitoring yet, but that's all the general feedback we've been getting." (Authority Z)

While the above indicates experiences of walking schemes being popular, in some cases other participants *had* found walking schemes such as footway widening unpopular. This may have been where the widening significantly rather than marginally impacted motor-vehicle space (carriageway or parking). One particularly negative experience was described by a participant from Authority B with their EATF schemes, where the learning involved from these temporary measures related to lack of scheme success.

> "Our initial Emergency Active Travel Fund schemes were temporary social distancing measures, so all footway widening stuff. These were pretty universally unpopular [and] most of them had to be removed, basically due to local people interfering with them and it leading to unsafe situations, and it not being supported locally." (Authority B)

By contrast, another participant suggested that in their area, such small 'walking' schemes were much more popular than 'cycling schemes' (defined as being highway infrastructure, rather than cycle storage):

> "It's much easier to implement walking schemes than cycling schemes and what I mean by that is: footpath widening, or anything that is to do with sort of making places prettier, you know, like cycle storage with pretty plant pots: easy peasy, everybody likes those types of things." (Authority V)

Conversely, other participants used cycleway schemes as their 'good examples', which in some cases produced 'largely positive' responses. In the case of one Authority, this was a substantial and strategic scheme which had also, as described earlier, been amended in response to detailed consultation feedback and with input from external engineering experts.

> "Our cycleway is in the order of 6 miles of new infrastructure that we've just started installing. It's been I think it's been a hugely rewarding project. Initially when we went out to consultation, we had over 500 responses back to the engagement exercise and it was largely positive." (Authority X)

6.5. LTNs, reallocating roadspace, and restricting motor-vehicles

A general thread throughout comments was that schemes that had significant perceived or observed impacts on motorised traffic were harder to implement, regardless of cost, resourcing or time to deliver physically. This often related to LTNs, where part of the hoped-for scheme mechanism involves making driving slightly less convenient alongside making walking and cycling more attractive.

> "Our experience has been that the small-scale schemes [note: in terms of construction costs] are being the trickier ones because they've tended to be ones where we've looked at reallocating road space or closing roads off, creating LTNs, that sort of thing, and whilst those schemes are in financial terms a lot smaller than some of our cycle route schemes, they're proving a lot harder to get through." (Authority BB)

That participant went on to comment that schemes involving relatively low capital cost may need apparently disproportionate spending on engagement and promotion to be successful, as discussed in Section 5.8. Another participant commented that while 'bollards are cheap', doing traffic reduction schemes well may entail other more expensive infrastructure improvements, such as greening.

> "LTNs have been seen as a low-cost option from a lot of angles; in principle maybe (bollards are cheap!) but doing them well means expensive environment changes that tends to worry certain parts of the organisation." (Authority N)

One participant talked about having learnt that it was important to add public realm and beautification features, such as rain gardens, dropped kerbs, junction improvements and benches, to make the pedestrian experience more pleasant and inclusive, in addition to the motor-traffic restrictions that make the highway safer.

> "We want to make sure that we take into account the learnings, especially from the previous round of interventions that were done during Covid. So having a bigger focus on carrots as well as sticks as it were, so not just planters and cameras [to filter out motor traffic] but also rain gardens, dropped kerbs, interventions at junctions so that people feel safer while they're crossing. Apparently, there's a need for benches in the area because there's only one bus route, and it's quite hilly, so lots of older people have difficulty walking to the bus stop. So, there's things like that that we really want to shift our focus to as well." (Authority A)
>
> "I think the interesting question around 'low cost' LTNs (i.e. planters and whatnot) is that one of the main complaints we get is that they look awful and are 'crap' - but if we don't do them first, we can't go back and do the permanent scheme!" (Authority T)

In some cases, LTNs had attracted a strongly positive response. One participant mentioned that they were nervous about the scheme not meeting the very high expectations for its success.

> "We kicked off 2 [LTNs] at around the same time. […] One actually ended up the highest consulted positive engagement we've actually ever had for any scheme. We had over 80% positive engagement from that scheme, but we're under no illusions that that was because we had a very, very strong groundswell of support from some very vocal residents, including some ex-County Councillors that lived in the area and they very clearly latched onto the idea of the LTNs solving all kinds of problems." (Authority N)

One participant suggested that it was easiest where a clearly identified 'rat run' was being closed, as being a site-specific local problem that an LTN-type measure could fix. Interestingly, this to some extent cuts against the importance of having, for instance, a broader narrative about improving health through a wider area.

> "Low traffic neighbourhoods in whatever form way they come can either be very, very controversial, or not that much, like sometimes there are real rat running issues. People realise that and if you really focus on like 'it's a cut through, it shouldn't be a cut through', people tend to support that. It's obviously how do you manage the boundary roads as well, but that's a slightly separate conversation." (Authority A)

Some participants said that they felt the most successful schemes, in terms of ease of implementation, were those that had least impact on motorised road users. This relates to the discussion in Section 6.2.

> "The schemes which worked were the ones which had the least impact on other road users. And I don't just mean motorists, it is buses, goods vehicles, everything else." (Authority J).
>
> "The scheme is alongside a local distributor road with a lot of verge available therefore wasn't a contentious scheme (no road reallocation needed, and no residential frontage impacted). Other schemes in town centres and with less highway

available have been more difficult to get through." (Authority BB, commenting in the text chat about a scheme they had just described.)

"We're only doing one [scheme] in [ATF] phase two, which is a combination of improving existing and creating a new stretch. It backs onto people's houses. It links to the local school. It had the recipe to be quite difficult, but it is off-road so it didn't mess with the main route into town. And again, I think that's one of our key lessons learnt that improving our existing infrastructure does seem to go far better politically and with local residents and communities as well." (Authority K)

"We're finding success off road but not on road. It's really difficult. We've got politicians not interested in using highway space and taking parked cars away." (Authority E)

However, despite challenges involved in reallocating roadspace, other participants had found that such schemes could be popular (if not universally so) and perceived as successful. One participant pointed to a trade-off between effectiveness (high benefit) and acceptability (lower disruption). Those who had managed to reallocate roadspace to create routes for walking or cycling often felt that there were substantial benefits that could not be gained through less controversial measures.

"Like most Authorities, we are hugely challenged when we take road space away. We're talking about bad experiences, I've got loads. I'm sure like many people, particularly where car is king: taking away road on a dual carriage way -- goodness me, but actually people see it and now appreciate and understand why we did it and it's just that initial hump, isn't it? And that's the huge challenge. If you hold your will and your nerve, then it shows what we can do and that's a really good thing for us to point to, to say actually it can be done." (Authority Q)

"One [scheme] that was quite controversial but seems to have worked is [where] there had always been a through road through the park which was used by motorists to get to the other road on the other side. So, this was closed off for the emergency measures. Lots of angry comments about it. The [local] paper picked up on it and people said 'I used to be able to get through there to go here and now I've got to go around longer. It's so unfair on me', and everything, but then lots of other positive comments came through with people saying, 'it's so much more enjoyable to be in the park and not have to worry about a car coming down the road'. So that's one I put forward as quite a positive change that's happened." (Authority S)

6.6. School Streets

School Streets (restricting motor traffic around school entrances during pick-up and drop-off times) were discussed at length. They were generally seen as easier to implement than cycle routes or LTNs, because they were perceived as being directly about children's health and safety and their impacts were limited in time and space. Participants perceived their impacts to be limited, but felt they were a useful tool in advancing active travel and understanding among communities and politicians. The EATF in particular had enabled some Authorities to introduce School Streets where previously they had been seen as politically unpalatable.

Some participants questioned their value-for-money with regard to active travel benefit. For example, one participant pointed out that there may be a tension between easy implementation and benefits of a scheme.

> "One thing that does seem to work reasonably well is when we start talking about schools and School Streets and people's routes to school because we found a number of places where lots of pupils, particularly to high schools, do cycle, and they don't always have a sort of safe route to do so, etc. So actually, hanging possible schemes on the back of 'we're trying to make situations safer for pupils attending schools' seems to have a bit more political sway." (Authority W)

> "I think School Streets are the least controversial. But you could also make the argument that they're the least impactful because they only work 45 minutes, twice, 45 minutes on the day, and it's usually 1 or 2 streets. But there seems to be an argument there about OK, it's about the kids' safety. It's about the kids' health. That seems to work, and I think especially for boroughs and councils where there's a lot of animosity towards active travel schemes, like this is a good starter, but obviously you do need the school's buy-in and everything else." (Authority A)

Some participants said that the EATF enabled Authorities to review their policy toward School Streets. One participant described School Streets as being a previously difficult-to-implement policy (partly just because the Authority had not had any before) that was now being implemented, while two others spoke of implementation having been sped up with the help of ATF funding.

> "Our contextual success was simply that this was the first School Streets project in a borough that during EATF had been (mildly) resistant." (Authority V)

> "We only had about 3 School Streets before the start of the pandemic, and immediately as part of the Active Travel Fund, we doubled that, and we've since about quadrupled it. We were just able to pick off some of those schemes that we've been a bit nervous about and attack them with a bit of relish." (Authority D)

> "What this [ATF] has enabled us to do is do a pilot School Streets project. We had people asking about School Streets and we didn't really know what they were all about and we thought 'we are not going to touch those quite yet', and we might without this have taken another couple of years to have promoted a scheme of that nature. But what this fund allowed us to do was take a bit of a punt and work with the school that we had a good relationship with and one that had particular problems that we that we thought a School Street initiative might be able to address. So while the jury is still out as to whether the scheme has been a success, it has been put into force and they've got an experimental traffic order." (Authority CC)

However, as with other scheme types, School Streets were not universally perceived to have worked, particularly where camera enforcement was not permitted (outside London before mid-2022) meaning that large amounts of volunteer effort was needed to make closures effective. This chimes with other more general comments about the importance of ongoing ability to support measures, from regular cleaning, maintenance, and enforcement.

> "We have introduced 9 pilot [School Streets] schemes, but I've just actually done some monitoring of them just before half term and unfortunately the feedback we have been getting hasn't been particularly positive in terms of the schools'

acceptance of them and their support of the schemes, because when they were introduced we had our traffic wardens etcetera going out and manning the closures, but obviously that's not sustainable for the Council, so we were relying on the schools to do that. And as part of our monitoring, only 1 out of the 9 schools seems to have continued with that." (Authority Z)

7. Variation by type or tier of Authority

Participants from all types of Authorities referred to challenges around timeframes, resources, and engagement. For London boroughs, Transport for London's (TfL) financial situation meant that they were experiencing new levels of funding uncertainty, having previously been more protected from this. One positive enabler was higher levels of cycling at baseline, making it harder to deny the demand for cycling schemes. The biggest issue, however, related to specific challenges faced by rural or smaller Authorities. This included a perception of disproportionate consultation, perceived disadvantage by scoring or funding criteria, and challenges in seeing England's national cycle infrastructure design guidance (Local Transport Note or LTN 1/20, available at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cycle-infrastructure-design-ltn-120) as relevant to them. These issues are discussed before Section 7.3 which outlines other issues raised.

7.1. Key findings

- Participants from **rural or smaller Authorities** tended to feel that they experienced specific challenges that were currently not well supported through scheme guidance and appraisal processes.
- Participants spoke of other **specific challenges experienced in hilly areas**, at least pending more widespread take-up of e-bikes, currently seen as prohibitively expensive for many people.
- A few participants who came from Authorities with **relatively high levels of cycling** felt that this substantially helped with scheme implementation, by making it clear that people would be willing to cycle.

7.2. Specific challenges for rural or smaller Authorities

While participants shared many design challenges, those from rural Authorities did seem to find it more challenging to make their schemes 'fit' the template for what they perceived was expected of them by the DfT. Smaller Authorities felt the amount of consultation was disproportionate to their population size, with one participant from a small and rural Authority saying they felt as if they had had to jump through 'lots and lots of hoops'.

> "The consultation process that was kind of enforced on us seemed to be a bit overkill, especially for the smaller Authorities like ourselves, where we've got small amounts of money and we were asked to jump through lots of hoops, lots of hoops. Saying that, we did use the [DfT] guide, and we did use our stakeholders to help us with consultation, so we reached out to an organisation called [local cycle advocacy group] and the Ramblers of course and one of the Town Councils and business associations, so lessons learned from the first phase. […] but it did seem a little bit that it was like a one box fits all with the DfT asking us to jump through lots and lots of hoops." (Authority K)

Rural participants felt scoring criteria were weighted unfairly against sparser populations. They said that appraisals did not score positively for their schemes in

the first place, when distances between settlements and hence cycling potential was lower than it might be in denser urban areas.

> "When it comes to the calculations for bidding for the money in terms of the benefit calculations that we used when we submitted our [ATF] Tranche 2 bid, no matter what we did with the calculations, I could not get the benefit score to go up and it was simply because of the long length of most of the routes that we need because of the fact that our settlements are so dispersed, and the size of our population. I think the inbuilt calculations in whatever the tool was using just meant that Authority M would never score highly no matter what we do. Yet, in some sense we would argue that actually Authority M needs it more because we don't get these large amounts of funding. We don't have lots of internal funding that we can use to develop new routes, but there's no way that we can actually make these improvements without the external funding, but the calculations just don't show the benefits based on the calculations that are ingrained within it." (Authority M)

> "I think inevitably in a rural area, we seem to miss out, and then when we submit our bids, it's almost like well, regardless of what the cost is, you're gonna get what you're going to get, and I think the problem with that is of course expectations both nationally and locally and the wanting to seem keen to benefit from future rounds of funding: you're pushing your limits of what you can achieve within that budget. And it's not perhaps always realistic or doesn't provide much leeway. (Authority Y)

As discussed below in Chapter 8, long-term funding remained a common ask of participants. Several participants directly compared their situation with Mayoral Combined Authorities, also wanting access to what they saw as more reliable and predictable funding pathways, and more autonomy over its allocation.

> "Not being a Mayoral Combined Authority is also limiting what we can do because we aren't being trusted to be given pots of money that we can spend in allocating amongst the Authorities within an area and we are seeing lower levels of funding as a result of that as well." (Authority C)

> "The lack of a long-term funding settlement completely cripples Local Authorities in doing the best job that we could. It was a recommendation of the National Infrastructure Commission to provide it. We note that those things are being provided to Mayoral Combined Authorities, but what about the rest of the country?" (Authority G)

Many rural participants said they felt that LTN 1/20 was urban-focused, with some of them challenging the idea that currently defined minimum widths should apply to rural settings, for instance. They raised challenges related to lighting and surfacing paths, where they described meeting opposition. These challenges might not necessarily imply the need to change LTN 1/20, but perhaps to provide more evidence and examples of how it could be applied in rural areas, and policy support for measures such as removing car parking or land purchase that may be more important in those contexts to meet the standards.

> "We've got people coming back to us fundamentally disagreeing with what we're trying to do because they don't like it, when all we're trying to do is put in something that complies with LTN 1/20. And people just don't get it. People don't get the bus

stop bypasses for things like that which are quite common in Central London and in big cities." (Authority CC)

"We're lucky, in a way, we've got the public rights of way and [traffic free trail] that run pretty parallel to the town centre. So, we're managing to widen those to what LTN 1/20 wants. The only difficulty we have is we can't really light those sorts of areas, so it doesn't meet all the standards but basically, we are finding it really difficult to widen [on-road routes] to more than 3 metres. Even to get 3 metres is really difficult." (Authority E)

"Based on the LTN 1/20 guidance, we shouldn't really be doing shared cycleway footways. However, within Authority M, it would be so out of keeping to have a segregated pedestrian and cycle route: it just wouldn't get approval. It wouldn't work." (Authority M)

"Because we're particularly rural in Authority H, the new guidance is quite restrictive and probably more so for us. We don't have really large urban areas, conurbations where we've got really wide roads that we can plan long routes through, so we're really restricted in what we can actually apply the funding on and our bids for at the moment. So, it's probably the biggest thing which is affecting moving things forward for us at the moment." (Authority H)

"So one of our most challenging schemes is the conversion of an existing footpath to include or make it easier to cycle -- removal of steps, widen and change the surface to a tarmac surface -- and goodness me, we had residents mobilised significantly and we wanted to put lighting in in accordance with LTN 1/20, but the scheme is now changed significantly due to some feedback." (Authority Q)

By contrast, participants from urban areas were more positive about LTN 1/20, although one participant from an urban Authority said that they felt that LTN 1/20 was too rigid and encouraged 'picking fights for perfection' rather than allowing them to compromise.

"While it's an improvement on previous guidance, there is a culture and rhetoric about how it's described in some quarters, which I think is quite unhelpful, in that people are expecting we conduct ourselves and pick lots of fights for perfection rather than choose which fights we pick for what we need to do." (Authority B)

A participant from an urban Authority with significant rural areas pointed out that in much of the Authority, creating space for active travel would require removing car parking. This, they felt, had the potential to be even more politically challenging than removing a lane of motor traffic, even if most of the lost car parking could then be re-provided near to the scheme.

"Both of our schemes are removing a lot of on-street parking spaces. And on some of the side streets, we can take a few yellow lines away to find a few extra spaces here and there. These are the main reasons these 2 particular schemes are facing difficulties at the moment. The difficulty is putting in cycle infrastructure to LTN 1/20 in an urban area. If you're not a big city and you haven't got multi-lane roads where you can take a lane out, then you're gonna have to remove parking and I think it's a really big challenge." (Authority O)

Participants from rural or smaller urban Authorities pointed out that they did not have the specific Covid-19 era challenges that were highlighted in EATF. With low pre-Covid-19 public transport use, they did not have the same challenge arising from modal shift to private car from public transport that EATF was framed around.

> "It was about putting in active and sustainable transport measures in those areas where public transport ridership was quite high to try to give them the alternative." (Authority G)
>
> "We don't have those issues in the same way that some of the urban areas do because we have just 2 small county towns that don't have busy footways. Our roads are a lot quieter. We don't have quite the same issues that some of the cities face." (Authority M)
>
> "Certainly, the initial round or two, [the Active Travel Fund] seemed to be very much based, because it was supposed to be an emergency response, it was almost like 'well, we have to assume that people are being not advised to take public transport so therefore we are going to base the funding on the level of people using public transport'. In a rural Authority such as Authority Y, obviously we lost out quite significantly there." (Authority Y)

Finally in this Chapter, one participant felt that smaller Authorities had gone too far in losing all their in-house expertise, and that in the current context – where participants commented on shortages of both staff and consultants – this needed to be redressed, with funding for active travel officers (as in some larger Authorities), rather than outsourcing all aspects of planning and delivery.

> "As a smaller Authority, after many years of austerity and becoming a commissioning Authority and relying heavily on consultants to do things, we actually need to start building resource back in house again now. The days of dedicated walking and cycling officers and school travel plan officers etc., etc., unfortunately, in this Authority, are over, but we do need to recast and to be able to find resource and to start recruiting back into those sort of posts if this agenda is going to be taken seriously [others nodding]." (Authority J)

7.3. Other issues

While rurality stood out as the strongest factor in variation, other specific challenges included being a hilly Authority, or attempting to provide infrastructure for hilly areas within an Authority. One participant commented that they were waiting for e-bike prices to come down before routes in some parts of the district were to have much effect.

> "The South [of the Authority] is very hilly, especially compared to the North. So there we are also trying to find like, OK, so what are the right cycle routes that we want to promote and how do we actually convince people that to buy in to the active travel agenda before they just say, 'well, it's too hilly. I'm not going to cycle, I'm not going to walk, why are you taking my car freedom away from me?'" (Authority A)
>
> "We are seeing numbers slowly increase, but I think the hills will change when you get electric bikes come in in say 5, 10 years' time I think: that will knock the hills

argument out of the way. It's just costs have gotta come down for e-bikes of course." (Authority E)

Ambitions varied substantially across Authorities, but in all cases high existing cycling demand, or a strong advocacy voice was highlighted as being beneficial. For instance, one participant talked about plans to remove hundreds of car parking spaces from radial routes, whereas other participants had struggled even to remove small numbers of car parking spaces, after opposition from business and/or residents. One factor that had helped this Authority was it historically having relatively high levels of cycling in the place where the car parking spaces were being removed: the evidence that cyclists existed helped to create a context where car parking could be reallocated for cycling.

"[Our ATF cycle route plans require] removing 650 car parking spaces. […] And I was thinking, are we just gonna get away with it, are we gonna get a huge howl of protest? But weirdly, we've had about a thousand responses and it's actually going extremely smoothly, and I think that's, to a large extent, we've got a huge groundswell of cyclists saying yes, we want this. And so I think the point is, it's much easier to do cycling schemes if you've got cyclists, basically. If you haven't, and it's kind of the same with LTNs actually: the biggest support with the LTNs was among the cycle groups and the walking groups, but the cycling groups were at the top, so I think it's kind of this Catch-22 situation. If you haven't got the cyclists you can't do things for cycling, which means you don't have cyclists, but if you've got the cyclists you should start doing more for them." (Authority U)

Finally, London-borough based participants commented that Transport for London's financial situation meant that they could no longer assume that schemes would be funded as in the past, and this exacted a significant toll on staff and the supply chain.

"We've – through TfL – been getting these very short-term funding deals, a few months here, a few months there. We don't know what's happening up until pretty much the day before the next funding agreement expires, and then suddenly we have to deliver a batch of schemes within sort of 3 or 4 months to take us forward to the next period and the next funding round expires. It's totally unsustainable. It can't go on. I mentioned earlier the impacts on officers and the industry is absolutely overwhelming." (Authority D)

At the time of interview (and writing this report) it was not clear whether London Boroughs would receive the funding for their Local Implementation Plans. They had therefore paused some schemes that, while not directly funded through the ATF, might contain complementary or mitigating measures that might increase the acceptability and/or impact of more controversial ATF schemes.

8. ATF processes

Many participants commented on the wider processes surrounding the ATF, including welcoming the consultation guidance and advice, encountering difficulties as a result of the bidding processes and timeframes, and requesting support and training on areas where they felt they lacked skills or knowledge. There is some overlap with issues raised elsewhere, but also views shared by many participants, which would not be covered otherwise. Thus, a Research Question and Chapter are devoted to this.

While participants appreciated DfT support and guidance, and the funding provided through the ATF, most if not all said that it was not possible to create a large-scale step-change in active travel infrastructure based on reliance upon multiple short-term funding streams for which decisions were not infrequently delayed. They wanted more funding for active travel but at least as important was greater certainty about what would be available over the coming years, covering network planning, scheme design and implementation but also engagement and ongoing maintenance, enforcement, and complementary measures.

8.1. Key findings

- Those participants who had used it spoke highly of **DfT guidance on consultation**, asking for more advice on representative polling and other measures to gather views from more demographically diverse populations.
- Most if not all participants said that **a reliance on multiple short-term funding streams and on competitive bidding** created stress and uncertainty that militated against effective active transport planning.
- Participants shared a **vision of transformational change through iterative scheme roll-out and responsive engagement,** seeing this as dependent upon long-term availability of in-house resource and reliable funding.

8.2. Guidance and advice

Participants were asked about their use of the DfT guidance on consultation. While not all had, there was a general feeling among those who had used it that it had been helpful.

> "DfT Guidance was a very useful source as it informed data collection/research monitoring and evaluation inputs, as well as being helpful in executing the consultation itself." (Authority F)
>
> "Yes, we used it. My view is that it was useful in creating structure to engagement." (Authority V)

Participants who had used the guidance made suggestions for enhancing it. One area where further advice, support and guidance might be needed was around how to use representative polling, and other more active measures to engage, seek feedback and gauge opinion from a broadly representative sample of their communities. This was highlighted in contrast to a more typical approach of relying

on a passive consultation exercise (whereby the public must electively seek out information and take the time to complete online surveys or attend meetings). The latter methods were characterised as tending to be biased in favour of the more affluent, white, older, working age, car owners, as well as tending to accentuate the extent to which views are polarised. Potentially, the growing awareness of survey 'gaming' (as referenced above in Section 5.7) creates a need to use trusted forms of gathering attitude and perception data, where a sampling frame can be clearly identified, and multiple responses from the same individual avoided.

> "For me there is a key issue in terms of 'demonstrating support' - consultations tend to be better at revealing concerns or complaints, which is useful for scheme refinement, but not necessarily reflective of public opinion. Polling or similar would be better but feels disproportionate? Challenging for a small Authority to arrange especially with the very short delivery timescales insisted upon by DfT." (Authority B).
>
> "The DfT guidance has been updated a few times and now it has this public polling thing. But nobody really seems to know how exactly this should be done, or how, it's like, what kind of questions need to be asked? How many people constitute a representative sample? And I can see why they want to do it […] but it is quite a departure from consultation and engagement to do polling on the side as well. So, there's going to be questions about: OK, what is a good level of polling? What is a bad level of polling? What are the good questions to ask, and what are the not good questions to ask? What is the DfT exactly looking for? And for London as well, we know that TfL, the Mayor of London are doing polling, so is that good enough for us? Or do we really need to be more specific about it? So, there are still a lot of lingering questions about this new requirement to do polling." (Authority A)

Some participants felt that 'case studies' of schemes – how they were designed, what they featured, how much they cost, and what they achieved – would be a useful addition to DfT guidance, especially helping Authorities that were not used to designing to LTN 1/20 standards. There was specific demand for case studies of successful schemes in smaller town or rural contexts (as referenced above in Section 7.2).

> "It will help to have real life examples of LTN 1/20 standard schemes that have gone in across England." (Authority O)
>
> "One of the quick and easier things that DfT could do is within guidance, to have a lot more information on case studies and set pieces: how to do things. So LTN 1/20 is great and all that, but lots of people want to be able to pick up some examples and tailor them to their own situation and have something a bit more detailed." (Authority R)

Some participants asked for more peer support and advice from those with experience delivering similar schemes, on both network planning, appraisal, design, and communications. This was identified as a potential role for Active Travel England in facilitating support between Authorities or providing roving experts and resources, that Authorities could draw from to help them deliver national objectives with limited local resource.

> "The only other thing as well to bear in mind, and I think the DfT did this quite well around the Cycle City Ambition programme, was to plug in cities together a bit better so that we can share best experience and best practice with one another because we're all often so busy that you don't even get to look up as much as you'd like to and it would be great if things that are working could be shared more widely." (Authority G)

> "I do hope that DfT, and maybe this is going to be that Active Travel England organisation that people are talking about, have, I always call them like travelling transport planners, like travelling salesmen, but that there are experts available from the national level from Active Travel England or DfT level to help and assist Local Authorities to improve their schemes, to improve their engagement, to improve their policies and strategies because especially, I think County Councils and Shire Councils, have just been starved for cash for so long, they won't have necessarily the expertise to meet all of the DfT requirements, and I think the DfT or this Active Travel England agency needs to step in and be like, we're going to support you with officer time with other funds or resources so that you can comply with our standards as well, that you can actually get the money that you want to get." (Authority A).

> "It would be really useful if, when ATE [Active Travel England] comes in, it made a lot of noise about schemes that aren't active travel schemes (e.g. a generic highway scheme) that doesn't cater for LTN 1/20 and sets it back." (Authority T)

8.3. Competitive bidding and/or long-term funding

Participants had struggled to produce schemes to the tight timeframes required by bidding processes. In some cases, this had sparked innovation, for instance, where School Streets schemes were being introduced for the first time, or an Authority was able to put in temporary cycle tracks relatively quickly as a trial measure. But often, participants described lacking the time and existing resource to prioritise and plan as effectively as they might have liked, and to put in place longer-term supporting measures, monitoring, and engagement. For many, this exemplified the resourcing or budget constraints they were working under, while for others, it was a challenge within their existing council decision-making processes.

> "We need revenue spending - to design up schemes, consult, iterate and get involved over a multi-year period, rather than just random 1 year capital pots." (Authority T)

> "I'm going to kind of keep mentioning the broken record that is about long-term funding -- just really want to endorse that." (Authority D)

> "It's the limited time scales to come up with these packages for schemes to submit to the DfT, and you're so busy trying to deliver the scheme, we haven't actually got time to identify the new schemes and prioritise them, etcetera. We're pulling schemes out of our back pocket that we're aware of, rather than having a more systematic planning process behind the schemes." (Authority Z)

> "I appreciate everything is very last minute and urgent, but it is another stress on officers has been picked up already that we get the guidance from the DfT on these various grants and various schemes at very last minute and due to the way that

> "Authorities work we have the political processes that we have to follow: we have set timescales for cabinet etc." (Authority M)

> "I think the biggest challenge is probably, and I think lots of people will echo this, is time. Really, for ATF2, for many projects, needed to be a 2-year programme. So you do all the consultation and engagement year 1, and build stuff year 2." (Authority R)

Many Authorities reported developing an original bid in line with the expectation that the ATF would be delivered to them in one tranche, rather than as an amount spread over the course of the parliamentary term. Many participants reported that funding received did not match their expectations and the bid they had put together. They were thus not able to implement the original plan they had developed, which resulted in further work and political engagement to agree a smaller programme.

The reliance on short-term ad-hoc funding was felt to create uncertainty and further ad-hoc political decision making. If amounts of funding are to remain relatively small, participants generally felt that the best way to create impact would be to concentrate schemes in a small area (i.e. focus on quality of scheme), however, expectations with districts, towns or wards had been set and were politically difficult to row back on (resulting in quantity of schemes at lower quality).

> "We were able to do a very rough and ready exercise to estimate where active travel routes might be helpful [...] That all came to naught pretty much within the Active Travel Fund sphere, because that was all built for a hyped-up, in want of a better term, sum of money rather than the Tranche 1 funding that was actually released, which was an order of magnitude less and left us unable to deliver that type of activity, by the time you get down to divvying up to the size of a [lower tier Authority] the size of Authority B." (Authority B)

Many participants said they recognised that some element of competition was reasonable (and could help to spark interest in active travel), but that this should be additional to a long-term funding settlement for active travel. They felt that a funded core of expertise and resource was needed upon which to build, if additional funding became available, for example, to deliver more, more quickly. In practice with competitive bidding currently providing the main source of funding for active travel, a core of active travel expertise often simply did not exist.

> "An element of competition and an element of being provided funding based on your past performance is reasonable, but some long-term funding settlement around kind of revenue to actually pay for staff resource and things like that would be essential because for those of us who've been here long enough, you saw the same things happen after 2010, when DfT closed the door on any new schemes, and essentially everything paused for about a year and a half. Lots of people with experience and consultancy moved out of transport. Everything downsized and then all of a sudden there was a recognition that infrastructure investment [was] needed, the tap needed to be turned on, as they often called it and there was this rush to spend money. But the whole industry had paused for a second so there wasn't enough of us to go rushing towards where people wanted us to be." (Authority G)

> "Despite the great noise and news coming out of the central government around active travel, and [Gear Change] One Year On and things like that and £2 billion, our districts are still really reticent to hire new people on the basis of funding streams that can be turned off within a year, because then we're stuck with people without

any spend to support them, and that just means that all we end up doing is throwing money out the door on consultants rather than building up in house capacity." (Authority T)

Participants expressed their wider anxiety of feeling that they were operating precariously and did not have certainty about when bidding processes or results would be announced, or whether there might or might not be a change in approach. Competitive bidding can also create problems of co-ordination across Authority borders, where a route might depend on both Authorities being allocated all that they were bidding for (possibly from different funding schemes), particularly an issue for cycle routes which tend to be longer than walking routes.

"It would be nice to have an understanding of whether we're going to be looking at ATF2, whether or not there's going to be more of a structured approach to this, and whether and how it links through to LCWIPs we're delivering, or we are developing our LCWIPs across the county within 3 years, and that will give us a really strong position, this time without, with ATF3 we used our LCWIPs as a principle. Clearly, we were guided that way by DfT, but I think more clarity in terms of what the thinking is. We've got Gear Change and various other documents from DfT with our ambitions around a walking and cycling nation, but we're so piecemeal about this. Some sort of long term, or at least medium-term plan would be really helpful, because if we know that it's coming, we can plan for it and we can be a lot more joined up in terms of the infrastructure not only within the county but also cross border. So my plea would be can we have a bit of an understanding of what you [DfT] are thinking so that we can be a lot more prepared?" (Authority Q)

"We keep on being told about this mystical multi-year settlement that will enable us to do actual designs based on our LCWIP and all that, and if it comes that will make this a lot easier especially because, you're seeing this now in London, where you know LTNs meet up with LTNs and you suddenly got huge swathes of the city where you can nip to your friend next door, you can go and see your local shop, you can do all that stuff on a bike, on foot, and that becomes the default mode of doing it." (Authority T)

Participants talked of the difficulty in juggling funding streams, including internal legal deadlines (for example, planning obligations) and funded schemes in addition to ATF and other competitive funding streams, where awards did not have a clear programme, causing problems allocating scarce resources and planning. Often capital and revenue elements of active travel planning come from different schemes, making it difficult to effectively integrate them and ensure benefits from their combination are maximised.

"For me that it's been really difficult being the named contact on the [ATF] bid and just not hearing back at all in terms of any visibility on dates [...] it's just really difficult to plan around those really difficult constraints. (Authority X)

"We have bottlenecks in our service. We have a certain amount of resource to design schemes. We have a certain amount of resource to deliver schemes. And we have certain funding streams that also need to be done at the same time as this one. We've got Section 106. We've got [Community Infrastructure Levy] monies that have dates and times on for spending, and when we suddenly have to drop things and make room for potentially quite substantial schemes ahead or out of cycle, it really

has an impact on how much we can deliver and where we can deliver it." (Authority N)

"It's very difficult to do knee jerk planning when you're waiting for decisions and waiting for announcements … we've still got the Authority to run, so my message would be: if we can get that resource capital and revenue allocations to Local Authorities over a period of time, it allows us to plan and work with our partners better." (Authority K)

8.4. The future

Finally, while this was not a specific question asked, in all the focus groups participants talked about positive futures for active travel funding. This included a vision of long-term funding and an acceptance that schemes need to be built up year-on-year, as one scheme created the interest, desire, and need for more.

One participant from an Authority which did have an LCWIP in place, spoke of the need to constantly update it in line with new plans and higher levels of ambition. LCWIPs, for this participant, need to be a living document which is updated in line with changes to transport infrastructure, for instance.

"If we know that we are going to have a reliable funding stream every year, it's going to arrive and it's going to be roughly X amount, we can start planning for that. We can then also start going to our human resources people …. And therefore, we can start getting in consultation, enlarging our consultation team to look at some of these innovative things, we can start looking at growing our design team and our quality management processes." (Authority T)

"Long term funding for resource within Local Authorities for these areas that the government wants to see enhancements in so that we can have that resource and knowledge in-house as opposed to having to go out to consultants and I think that is essential." (Authority M)

"I think the DfT should really look to support incremental changes […] so say with the low traffic neighbourhoods, there's some sort of ongoing commitment, support, monitoring, as well, available so that in a year's time you can make it into a nicer permanent closure that really transforms the space [...] So it's like this building up, because like very often, one project breeds 3 other projects in terms of OK, we've done the closures, now we need to do the cycle route." (Authority A)

Wider highway management was also highlighted as needing change. Participants spoke of needing to embed active travel priority across the network, by making clear what level of service would be required on different types of streets and rethinking processes across a range of areas that can systematically work against active travel.

"DfT needs to look at how highway Authorities deal with their network management responsibilities and if they want to get a shift to make it more prescriptive that they've got to kind of reclassify the network, and the outcome of that classification is: 'this type of road should have that type of approach,' whether it's cycle tracks on main roads or LTNs in neighbourhoods, that kind of thing." (Authority R)

"We do need a whole scale review of existing transport legislation, it's far too weighted towards other things that aren't necessarily in line with people's climate change ambitions, and other such things, like the fact that we're finally being given part 6 Traffic Management Act powers potentially next year. We're finally being given something from 2004. The reality is, if you're looking at what we need to do in the next 10 years to address what people are talking about up in Glasgow [COP26] we need rapid scale legislative and regulatory changes to enable us to do so [...] There needs to be regulation, hand in hand with infrastructure investment." (Authority G)

9. Key lessons

In response to the themes raised by participants, the research team has drawn out ten proposed lessons for national and local policymakers, presented below.

For national policymakers

- Provide greater certainty over a longer period in funding timeframes and amounts, incorporating separate, staggered funding for i) scheme development and engagement, and ii) scheme delivery.
- Consider linking such ongoing funding to Highway Authority output, including LCWIPs as living documents that guide planning, and the timely production of high-quality infrastructure to LTN 1/20 and other relevant standards.
- Support officers through facilitated peer learning, expert support, guidance and case studies on topics including design, engagement (including representative polling) and setting appropriate evaluation objectives.
- Increase efforts to make the case nationally for the need and the benefits of networks of high-quality active travel infrastructure, including educating elected representatives at all levels across England.
- Further investigate the perception that funding disadvantages rural Authorities and provide more guidance on what LTN 1/20 quality schemes will need and will look like in rural contexts.

For local policymakers

- Produce LCWIPs to plan data-informed future walking and cycling networks, which should be live documents, with a process for updating them as needed.
- Consider engaging public health stakeholders early on. As a trusted third party, they can help make the case for the benefits of active travel infrastructure to other stakeholders and the wider public.
- Consider representative polling or use of panels to help gather views on active travel policies and schemes from more diverse groups of respondents than those who typically respond to consultations.
- Develop monitoring and evaluation plans that identify key desired outcomes for different scheme types and measures to judge these across appropriate timeframes.
- Engage widely on scheme objectives and how to achieve them throughout the development, design and delivery process, considering how to communicate evidence around the minimum level of change needed to increase active travel.

10. Appendix

10.1. Sample details and sampling processes

Participants were recruited via email sent to DfT's ATF contacts in a sampling frame of 42 Authorities (hence, a quite high participation rate of 67%, which had been anticipated in creating a sampling frame rather than contacting every possible Authority). The sampling frame was created from Authorities allocated ATF funding in Tranche 2, either directly or as part of a combined Authority/regional bid. It sought to represent a balanced mix of different regions, size, tier of Authority (metropolitan, county, unitary, combined) and scheme type. Indeed, while the sampling frame sought to ensure a good amount of experience in scheme types covered in the main ATF evaluation, participants had expertise covering a variety of scheme types, including LTNs, cycle tracks, other types of cycling and walking infrastructure, school streets, pedestrianisation and footway widening schemes.

Table 1 illustrates the regional breakdown both within the sampling frame and within the final sample. There was some variation in response rate, with organisations from the South East and Yorkshire and Humber most likely to participate. However, as planned, no region had fewer than 2 separate organisations represented, and most had 3 or more.

Table 1: Regional representation, sampling frame and final participants

	Organisations in sampling frame	Number of officers participating (organisations where different in brackets)
East Midlands	3	2
London	3	2
North East	4	2
North West	8	3
South West	5	3
East	4	3 (2)
West Midlands	4	4 (3)
South East	5	5
Yorkshire & Humber	6	6
Total	42	30 (28)

Table 2 below shows the mix of Authority types. Most participants came from County Councils, Metropolitan Districts, or Unitary Authorities, as might be expected. There were 3 Combined Authorities in the sample, and 2 London Boroughs. This is compared to the numbers of different Authority types across England, although note that as this is qualitative research, statistical generalisability is not sought. For instance, London is under-represented compared to other Metropolitan Districts, which may be seen as more 'typical' in English governance terms.

Table 2: Types of authority represented

	Number of participants (organisations)	Number of organisations in England
Combined Authority	3	10
County Council	7 (8)	24
London Borough	2	32 (33 with City)
Metropolitan District	9 (8)	36
Unitary Authority	9	58 (59 including Isles of Scilly)
Total	**30**	**162**

Table 3 shows the mix of Authorities by rural-urban status. In terms of participants, 2/3 came from urban Authorities and 1/3 were from areas that were either predominantly rural or had significant rural areas. Note that county councils (for instance) are not routinely classified in this way because they tend to contain a variety of types of area. However, England is heavily urban in population terms, with 83% living within a Lower Layer Super-Output Area classed as urban in 2020[1]. Hence, rural organisations were over-represented in the sample. This was a decision made in order to be able to explore those organisations' experiences more fully and have more confidence that the research could report views that were more widely shared than among only 1 or 2 rural Authorities.

---

[1]
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1028819/Rural_population__Oct_2021.pdf

Table 3: Mix of authorities by rural-urban status

	Number of participants (organisations)
Predominantly Rural	5 (5)
Predominantly Urban	20 (18)
Urban with Significant Rural	5 (5)
Total	**30 (28)**

With such a range of characteristics and only 4 groups, participants were not grouped according to the criteria above. Rather, diversity of representation in each focus group was sought to draw out differences and commonalities in experiences of which participants might not always have previously been aware. The following rules were used:

(i)   in the 2 cases where there were more than 1 participant per organisation, these were placed in different focus groups to avoid over-balancing the session and gather separate insights, and

(ii)   where there was representation from both an Authority and the combined Authority for their area, these were allocated to separate sessions, again to avoid over-balancing but perhaps to a greater extent to ensure that participants felt they could speak openly about any conflicts or problems they had experienced with their regional Authority or vice versa, if needed.

The original Research Questions were followed to code the themes covered. This enabled the identification of shared views and experiences (for example, representation in consultation participation, mentioned by many participants) and who they were shared by (for example, that participants from rural Authorities perceived the ATF as more problematic for them and easier for urban Authorities). During this process codes and sub-codes were reviewed, re-categorised or combined, as necessary. In the writing of the report, the data was revisited to ensure no points had been missed by coding too rigidly. There was substantial material about the wider process of applying for and using ATF funding, beyond processes specific to individual schemes. Thus, a Research Question specifically related to this was added.

Sessions ran for 90 minutes on Microsoft Teams and were recorded. Soon afterwards, the recordings and chat function were transcribed and anonymised, with names both of participants and their organisations replaced with pseudonyms. Details about specific schemes or events that might reveal a participant's identity have been redacted from quotes used here. Because sessions were video recorded, participant reactions were noted down where these seemed important: for instance, widespread nodding indicating that a view or experience was common, even where all participants did not independently verbalise this.

10.2.Focus Group Questions

Active Travel Fund: Process Evaluation

Timing and list of questions for focus groups (90 minutes)

00:00

Introduction to the group + introductions

00:10

Q1. For our first question we'd like you to think about an ATF/AT scheme that has been implemented or launched successfully. Could you tell us about the scheme and what you feel has contributed to its success?

00:30

Q2. Now thinking about a less successful scheme – maybe one that the Authority didn't proceed with, or one that launched but you don't feel was so successful. Could you tell us a bit more about this scheme and what you feel has contributed to it not being so successful?

00:50

Short comfort break.

00:55

Q3. Thinking now not just about formal consultation but also the whole range of engagement activities for those or other ATF schemes you've been involved in, what engagement and consultation has been carried out & with what methods?

1:15

Q4: We're coming to the end of the group, so we'd like to ask each of you for one thing you would like us and DfT to know about your experiences with ATF schemes, which we haven't already covered or which you would particularly like to highlight.

01:30

Thank everyone and close group, next steps.

10.3.Contributors to the Report

The report was drafted by Professor Rachel Aldred with Nicholas Sanderson, based on analysis of transcripts from online focus group discussions led by Rachel Aldred and Jacquetta Fewster, assisted by Dr. Jamie Furlong and Dawn Rahman. Rachel Aldred and Jacquetta Fewster were present at all 4 focus groups. Transcript correction was done by Jacquetta Fewster and coding by Jacquetta Fewster and Rachel Aldred.