



Active
Travel
England

Working with Strategic Authorities:

A Guide to Design Review Panels



August 2026

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1. Introduction

This document outlines the design assurance support offered by Active Travel England (ATE) to strategic authorities (SAs). It is intended as a guide for those SAs who may wish to establish a Design Review Panel (DRP) with support from ATE.

ATE's vision is for walking, wheeling and cycling to be an affordable, safe, and accessible choice for everyone. Raising standards in the design of streets and places, making everyday journeys easier, healthier and cheaper, is at the heart of ATE's work.

Across England, devolution means that more local authorities are choosing to work together as part of an SA. This enables more efficient strategic oversight of highways and transport, alongside planning and development, across administrative boundaries. SAs may also access a wider range of funding than individual local traffic authorities (LTAs).

Since 2024, ATE has offered SAs in England a package of ongoing support. This document outlines that offer.

Support is also available for local authorities outside of SAs – please see our [guide to design assurance with local authorities](#). All councils can also access guidance, training and examples through the [ATE website](#).

Nine SAs are currently working in regular formal partnership with ATE, as shown overleaf. This document also includes testimonials from SAs on their experience of using DRPs and working with ATE (see Appendix 3).

"ATE colleagues have exceptional technical knowledge on designing for walking, wheeling and cycling."



Existing or future SAs interested in partnering with ATE are encouraged to get in touch via their ATE regional manager or contact@activetravelengland.gov.uk

North East Combined Authority (NECA)

Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA)

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA)

West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA)

South Yorkshire Combined Authority (SYCA)

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA)

West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA)

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA)

West of England Combined Authority (WECA)

1.1 Objectives of working with SAs

By working closely with SAs, ATE aims to:

- help deliver local priorities for walking, wheeling and cycling, providing support so active travel capital projects across a range of programmes can be planned and delivered to a high standard
- create strong and effective working relationships between ATE and regional government
- assist SAs to plan a strong pipeline of future active travel improvements
- build SA capability to deliver a connected transport network integrating active travel
- facilitate strong partnership working for active travel between SAs and their constituent LTAs
- help strategic authorities deliver projects faster by supporting better design work and avoiding unnecessary costs

Effective partnership working between ATE and SAs will help to achieve the targets set by the government in the third [Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy](#). These include for 55% of all short stages in towns and cities to be walked and cycled by 2035, and for 60% of all children aged 5 to 16 to usually walk or cycle to school by the same year.

This will also support cross-government working on improving health, safer streets and economic growth, including:

- improving mental and physical health through getting more people physically active, supporting the government's 10-year health plan
- connecting an integrated transport network in line with Better Connected, this government's vision for domestic transport in England. This will enable transport to work well for people, for it to be safe, reliable, affordable and accessible so they can get on in life and make the journeys they need to easily
- supports economic growth through encouraging more people to use the high street, and increasing the attractiveness of new housing developments through the provision of safe and attractive active travel infrastructure



1.2 Design Review Panels

ATE's core offer to SAs is to support the establishment of, and to participate in, SA-owned DRPs.

DRPs are regular collaborative meetings to review designs of capital projects ('schemes') to ensure appropriate consideration of people travelling by active modes. This is mainly by testing designs against relevant national guidance using ATE's scheme review tools. DRPs are attended by a range of professionals who together appraise scheme designs and provide a recommendation, ensuring consideration of quality of design is factored into project or programme governance.

Where a DRP provides local design assurance, SAs can benefit from increased control over active travel and other capital programmes, especially in terms of the quality of design often undertaken externally by delivery partners. When well embedded in SA project and programme governance, DRPs can be used to help inform the outcome of formal project reviews (Stage Gate/ Gate Way). This ensures that design for active modes is appropriately considered alongside other indicators of the health of a project, and assurance can be provided to sponsors that a project will deliver the intended benefits and outcomes. Through a DRP, SAs have visibility of designs undertaken externally. This will offer the SA additional insight into the progress of delivery partners in developing and delivering projects.

ATE has a centralised knowledge base of innovation and good practice gathered from across the country. In supporting DRPs, ATE aims to share that knowledge with those delivering schemes.

Through them, ATE's inspectors can offer:

- expert advice and recommendations on how to improve scheme quality, accessibility and safety to better serve people who walk, wheel or cycle
- technical advice on active travel scheme design, such as identifying potential safety issues
- sharing of standard details, and signposting and interpretation of relevant national design guidance
- constructive guidance on applying [ATE scheme review tools](#), specifically the:
 - route check tool (designed for assessing linear routes)
 - area check tool (designed for assessing changes to areas or neighbourhoods)
- constructive guidance on using [ATE design assistance tools](#), specifically the:
 - crossing selector tool, which helps the selection of a crossing type appropriate to the context
 - route cross section tool, which helps show possible infrastructure on a highway corridor in terms of available width
- best practice case studies to illustrate potential design solutions

"Our Design Review Panel has been instrumental in elevating design assurance across the region. ATE's expert guidance has added real value – bringing clarity, rigour, and confidence to our design decisions and resulting in high quality infrastructure being delivered for residents."

**Cambridgeshire and
Peterborough Strategic Authority**

1.3 Design surgeries

Alongside DRPs, ATE also offers SAs design surgeries. These are short, informal workshops to discuss active travel scheme design issues, explore possible design solutions, and share ideas and examples. Design surgeries offer rapid feedback and can improve the efficiency of DRPs by allowing issues to be identified early. ATE recommends records are kept of design surgery discussions, as these are useful if the scheme is discussed again at a later DRP. Design surgeries for SAs and their constituent LTAs are typically held monthly, with specific frequencies agreed in individual terms of reference.

Design surgeries do not replace the more formal design assurance that is offered through DRPs.



2. Setting up a DRP

2.1 Support for establishing a DRP

For SAs setting up a new DRP, ATE can offer:

- **in-person training** on ATE scheme review tools, covering their theory and practical application. ATE can also provide ongoing refresher training as needed, as well as webinars and online training
- **template terms of reference.** Each SA's DRP has its own terms of reference, setting out agreed ways of working and collaboration. For example, terms of reference can include timelines for providing feedback, DRP invitees and frequency and notice periods required. See Appendix 1
- **template recordkeeping documents.** See Section 3.4 and Appendix 2
- **general support and advice.** For example, how to integrate the DRP into SA governance procedures, and introductions with contacts running DRPs at other SAs

2.2 Set-up stages

When setting up a DRP, SAs are likely to go through the following stages:

Stage	Notes
Development (lasts ~6 months)	ATE provides support and shares resources. SA works to establish DRP.
Trial (lasts 6–12 months)	ATE delivers in-person training on scheme review tools. Terms of reference are drafted and agreed. SA holds regular DRPs or surgeries. Learning and feedback used to inform refinements to process.
Established	DRP meets routinely and has a formally established role within project/programme governance. SA routinely applies ATE scheme review tools to schemes across all funding streams tabled at the DRP. SA clearly documents DRP discussion and decisions. SA plans long-term pipeline of schemes to be presented at future DRPs. SA uses accompanying ATE design surgeries to facilitate efficient DRPs.

2.3 Who should be involved

ATE recommends representatives of relevant specialist areas attend each DRP, and that their roles and responsibilities are clearly defined in the terms of reference. ATE recommends standard roles are:

- **chair** (SA officer) – sets the tone, ensures good timekeeping, maintains order, ensures discussion is relevant, ensures all attendees input and agrees points to be recorded in the minutes
- **secretary** (SA officer) – produces DRP reports to record recommendations
- **ATE inspector/senior inspector** – consistent points of contact for design assurance and provision of expert advice (see Section 1.2 above)
- **programme sponsor** (for SA-led active travel programmes)
- **scheme project manager** (usually an LTA or SA officer, or occasionally from elsewhere if the scheme is on third-party land)
- **scheme designer** (LTA officer or consultant on their behalf)

ATE also recommends that SAs invite people representing wider considerations to DRPs, as securing broad support from stakeholders at the early stages of an active travel project may avoid potential delays to the schedule and difficulties in delivery later. Depending on the nature of the scheme, this could include people specialising in:

- modelling and appraisal, value for money or business case approval (often from the SA)
- accessibility
- wider modes, including:
 - buses and bus network design, covering bus stop/route equipment and operations
 - train station design and associated interchanges
 - tram network design and operation, including tram network construction and interchanges
 - key route network managers
- traffic control (particularly where the scheme includes or will impact signals)
 - SA active travel team members as appropriate, including those covering network development, and ensuring representation of the overall SA active travel modal sponsor/programme director
 - urban design, for example sustainable urban drainage system design, public greening or social safety
 - environment or ecology



SAs should keep their ATE regional manager informed and consider inviting them where it may add value.

Local authorities play a central role in the planning, design and delivery of schemes. This guidance applies to SAs, but it should be read on the basis that their constituent LTAs remain the primary delivery bodies. SAs do not replace or replicate LTA responsibilities – they provide strategic oversight and coordination across their area.

LTAs are expected to be actively involved in the DRP. They may bring forward schemes for review, either individually or through programmes agreed with their SA. LTAs should be considered welcome participants in DRP activity. Their involvement will support constructive challenge, improve scheme quality, and ensure that local context is properly understood.

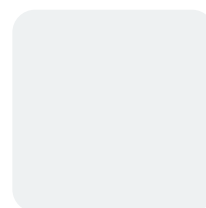
SAs are responsible for establishing and maintaining DRPs, including setting clear arrangements for how schemes are identified and prioritised. This should be done in collaboration with constituent LTAs. In most cases, SAs will liaise with LTAs to agree which schemes are brought forward for review, taking account of factors such as scheme scale, importance, and readiness.

LTAs may also be represented on DRPs where appropriate, for example as observers or contributors, while maintaining the independence of the panel. The precise model should be proportionate and clearly set out by the SA.

LTAs seeking support from ATE can do so either directly or via their SA. ATE will provide guidance, tools and, where appropriate, direct advice to help LTAs engage effectively with DRPs and deliver high-quality schemes.

2.4 Ownership of designs and decision-making

ATE's role in the DRP is to offer advice based on application of scheme review tools. This may be used to inform the chair's decision to endorse or not endorse the scheme designs presented. The chair and SA may choose to follow, or not follow, this advice, and ATE and their representatives at DRPs are not decision makers and carry no responsibility for the design itself.



3. Operating a DRP

3.1 DRP planning

SAs lead DRP planning and scheduling, including:

- **setting dates and times**
- **deciding on and inviting attendees**
- **setting DRP agendas** – deciding and sharing specific schemes for review. ATE recommends bringing schemes to a DRP at the following three key points, depending on their size, complexity and delivery challenges
 - strategic outline business case, or feasibility design
 - outline business case, or concept design
 - full business case, or final detailed design
- **pipeline planning** – collating future schemes for discussion and spacing work accordingly. SAs may get DRP review requests for schemes where the LTA rather than the SA holds the funding. ATE encourage these to be included, but inclusion is always at the SA's discretion

In periods of high demand, ATE will try to service additional requests for support (for example, additional DRPs and additional design surgeries) beyond the agreed terms of reference, but may not be able to service all requests. Prioritisation will be agreed with the SA on a case-by-case basis.



3.2 Ahead of a DRP

Detailed information shared by the SA for schemes ahead of their discussion at a DRP is likely to include:

- general arrangement drawings with a suitable level of detail, scale, north arrow and key
- scheme location with a Google Maps hyperlink
- current pedestrian and cycle counts, and expected pedestrian and cycle counts post-construction
- any Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans or committed developments that may relate to or impact the scheme
- completed ATE scheme review tools applied to the designs
- for schemes with highway interfaces – traffic speeds and volumes, including turning counts at side roads and junctions
- for signalised junctions – planned staging diagrams

ATE requests that this information is shared with us at least 15 working days before a DRP meeting to allow time for appropriate review and verification of tools application. Exact timelines for sharing information ahead of a DRP are agreed between SA and ATE and are set out in individual terms of reference.

It is often useful for ATE and SA officers to meet briefly following ATE's review or verification, and before the DRP to discuss findings from application of the scheme review tools.

3.3 DRP format

DRPs should be a supportive and collaborative environment.

ATE recommends that DRP are:

- held fully online, to remove the costs of travel and maximise attendance and efficiency
- a maximum of two and a half hours in duration, including breaks where needed

The total number of schemes covered in each DRP depends on their size and complexity. ATE recommends each scheme discussion starts with a 10-minute introduction from the responsible LTA responsible, summarising its strategic context, stage of development, funding stream and budget.



3.4 Recordkeeping

ATE recommends SAs keep a formal record of the meeting, including key decisions and discussion points. This is particularly helpful when schemes are revisited at a later design stage.

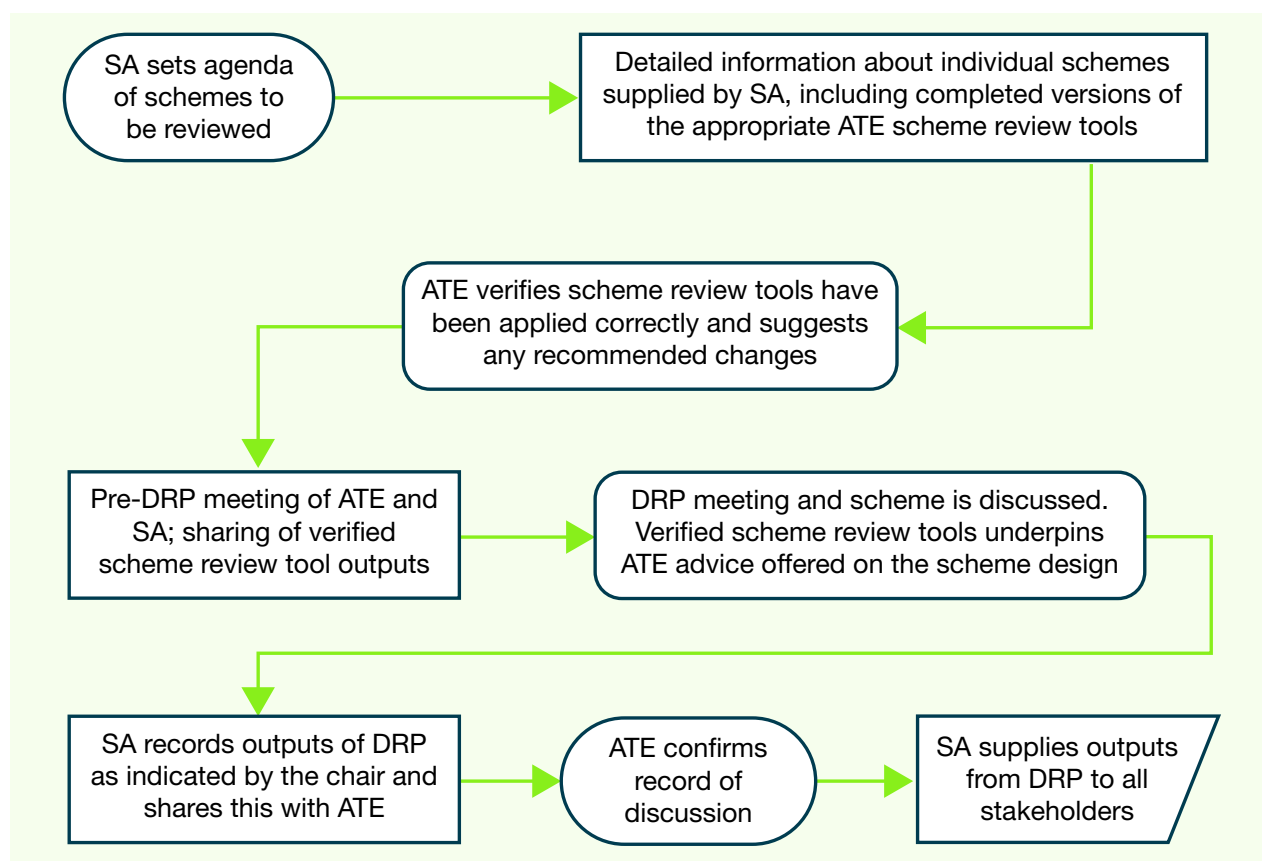
ATE offers a standard template DRP report to record panel discussions (see Appendix 2). This captures:

- ATE scheme review tools outputs
- advice and guidance from the DRP discussions
- chair's decision on the scheme

ATE will keep records of design assurance data which may be used to inform [capability assessments](#). Where there is no plan to resolve critical safety issues, following inspection of the completed scheme the critical safety issue will be confirmed as a record of non-compliance.

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

Figure 1: Design assurance process through a DRP.



Change controls

Where designs significantly change after being presented at a DRP, ATE recommends repeating the process to gain an up-to-date endorsement at the DRP before proceeding.

In some instances, where scheme funding is also provided by ATE, changing a design may trigger additional change control processes in relation to that funding.

Appendix 1: Links to example Terms of Reference

West of England Combined Authority Infrastructure Portfolio

Benefits & Outcomes Panel

Terms of Reference

1. Overview

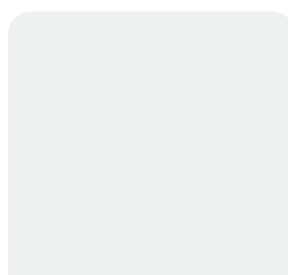
The purpose of the Benefits and Outcomes Panel (BOP) is to support the development and delivery of high-quality active travel schemes through review of project outputs against investment objectives, project requirements, and national and local guidance. This will provide better value for money and improved benefits/outcomes for residents, businesses and visitors to the region.

This will in turn provide confidence to external funders that the West of England has the assurance processes in place to ensure quality of infrastructure delivery and highlight where output issues are likely to be material to funding approvals. This will support the Mayoral Combined Authority's ability to secure future transport funding and aid the Unitary Authorities to accelerate delivery of transformational transport schemes.

The panel will apply to all transport projects where the Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) is the accountable body for the funding, with a priority given to projects funded by the:

- i. City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS)
- ii. Transport for City Regions (TCR)
- iii. Active Travel Fund (ATF)
- iv. Active Travel Capability Fund
- v. MCA Investment Fund

Schemes not funded by the MCA can request a review, which may be granted subject to capacity. The list of funds will be reviewed regularly, with funding streams added or removed as necessary subject to agreement by Infrastructure Directors.



The key design and policy criteria documents currently being considered by the BOP are:

- Joint Local Transport Plan 4
- Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan
- Bus Service Improvement Plan
- Climate and Ecological Strategy and Action Plan
- Local Transport Note 1/20 – Cycle Infrastructure Design
- Manual For Streets 2
- Local Transport Note 1/24 – Bus User Priority
- National Bus Strategy – Bus Back Better
- Gear Change
- Rail Station Accessibility Principles
- DfT Inclusive Mobility: A Guide to Best Practice on Access to Pedestrian and Transport Infrastructure

The role of this panel is to ensure that the full impact of design decisions is understood and articulated to decision makers and to provide endorsement statements as part of the governance on funding decisions. The outputs from the panel will be an input into the West of England Grant Assurance Framework providing guidance to decision makers on whether the designs meet stated benefits and outputs of the scheme.

The panel offers endorsement of designs (rather than approval). Highway authorities own their designs. The panel assesses if designs meet local/national design codes.



2. Panel Engagement in the Project Lifecycle

Projects must engage at the relevant project lifecycle gateways identified by the MCA as part of the approval of funding, or by exception at change events. There are 3 default stages at which a project will be required to engage:

Stage Gate	Typical Inputs	Typical outputs
Stage 0-1 Gateway Strategic Outline Case Initiation of project Design Requirements Review Feasibility & Development Funding Application Form	Feasibility Studies, Funding Application & Conditions, Project Initiation Documents, Requirements Document, Benefits Plan, ATE Design Review Tool outputs	Rating can be based on principle of design and options
Stage 2-3 Gateway Outline Business Case Final Concept Design Post consultation	Project Requirements, Preliminary Design, ATE Design Review Tool outputs, Design/Constraint/exception narrative Operational Plan Stakeholder/Comms Plan	Rating based on current designs
Stage 3-4 Gateway Full Business Case Final Layout Design Delivery Funding Submission	Final Preliminary Design, ATE Design Review Tool outputs	Rating of either endorsed or not endorsed based on current design, given that majority of schemes will have engaged with the BOP at least once by this point. Conditions will not be expected
By Exception Scope Change Request: Changes in the agreed approach to delivery, standards or quality, in advance of submission to Infrastructure Directors, CEOs or Committee	Updated Scope/ Requirements/Design/ Operational Documents Change Request, ATE Design Review Tool outputs	Rating based on updated designs

Change Requests: when submitted, these will be circulated to 4 panel members; representative from Transport Operations, Transport Strategy, Capital Delivery and ATE. They will review and inform the PM if the change is substantial enough to need to return to the BOP.

Post construction final inspections may be conducted by Active Travel England and these will be shared with the Panel for noting. Further information on the final inspection process can be found [here](#).

3. Inputs

A proforma must be completed and updated for each stage of review. This can be found in the first tab of this sheet: [BOP template v2.xlsx](#).

Required inputs alongside the proforma include:

- Location plan showing scheme boundary and road names
- Drawings that clearly reference the proposed change to the existing condition, including references to removed or changed infrastructure (such as bus lanes or crossings)
- Latest version of the relevant Active Travel England tools:
 - [Area Check](#)
 - [Route Check](#)

Except for the proforma, no other inputs or documents are specifically mandated for the project to provide. It is for the project team, Senior Responsible Owner and MCA sponsor to determine the relevant and appropriate design, requirements, stakeholder and funding information that is required to evidence to the panel to enable them to reach a rating.

Relevant information for each gate would typically constitute:

Stage/Supporting information	Stage 0-1 Gateway	Stage 2-3 Gateway	Stage 3-4 Gateway
Design requirements	X	-	-
Developed Drawings	-	X	-
Detail Design Drawings	-	-	X
Motor traffic flows/counts	X	X	X
Motor traffic speed data	X	X	X
Turning count data	X	X	X
Collision data	X	X	X
Walking and cycling flow data	X	X	X
Stakeholder Engagement Plan	X	X	X
Monitoring and Evaluation Plan	X	X	X
Operational Plan	X	X	X
Relevant Traffic Modelling Outputs	X	X	X
Equality Impact Assessment	X	X	X
Placemaking/Green Infrastructure/Biodiversity Net Gain Information	X	X	X



4. Outcomes & Outputs

The outcome of each project review will be recorded as one of 4 potential ratings:

a) **E:** Endorsed-

Has demonstrated the design delivers the stated benefits and outcomes for the scheme, with alignment with national and local policy or where departure from standards are acceptable, project requirements, funding objectives, stakeholder or operational requirements have been identified.

b) **EC:** Endorsed with conditions

Has demonstrated the design delivers on stated benefits and outcomes for the scheme, where isolated material contradictions or improvements have been highlighted that the project should be able to address. Progress to E may be obtained by correspondence with the Chair via the secretariat if fulfilment of these conditions is evidenced.

c) **NE:** Not endorsed

The design does not deliver the stated benefits and outcomes for the scheme, where fundamental and material contradictions have been highlighted. Progress to either E or EC will require a return to the panel.

d) **NR:** Not ready for endorsement

This is where the design is not at a stage when the panel can assess and provide a rating. This can be due to a number of reasons, including if there are multiple options which would deliver very different benefits, and the project manager is not able to confirm which will be progressed, or there is key information still being collated (such as the results of a trial scheme). Progress to either **E** or **EC** will require a return to the panel.

Ratings will be by consensus, with the final decision reserved to the Chair. These ratings will be provided as an output report containing key panel comments on the scheme.

Full Business Case exceptions: If a scheme is heading to Full Business Case submission and has previously been to the BOP, it is not eligible for an EC or NR rating. This is to avoid the panel providing conditions that are unable to be fulfilled, or for scheme to return without fulfilling previous conditions.

The rating provided is an advisory position only. No outcome of this panel will prevent a project seeking a stage gate, business case, change, or any other approval. However, projects that have been through this process, especially those that have received an E rating, will have a better chance of success at moving to the next stage in the assurance process, as these schemes will be able to effectively demonstrate compliance with grant conditions and policy to Grant Assurance.

Conditions

For schemes EC: Endorsed with conditions, PMs will be expected to provide a response to any conditions. This can be done in the 'Response to conditions' tab in the BOP Proforma. This should be used to either explain a change to the design as a result of the condition, or provide reasoning for why a change has not been possible. This will then be reviewed by the Chair, in consultation with Panel members as needed, and PMs will be informed if follow up action is required.

It is the responsibility of PMs and MCA Sponsors to ensure that a response to conditions has been recorded. They will be reviewed regularly by the BOP chair.

5. Membership

The panel membership is listed below.

Membership will be reviewed periodically and additional members can be co-opted as appropriate by the Chair to reflect changes in requirements.

Any other officer from the MCA or UAs may be invited to comment by discretion of the Chair. Deputies must be nominated to attend in cases of absence.

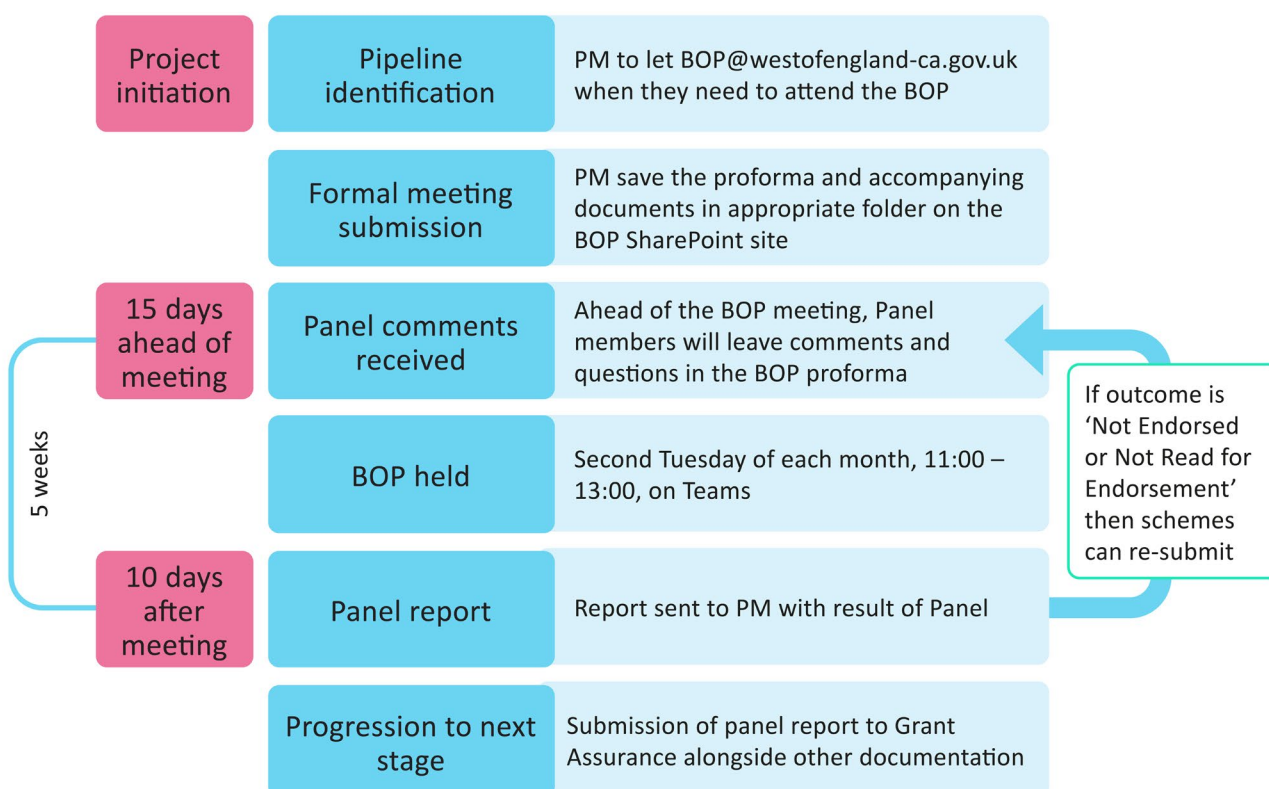
Role	Individual	Quorate
Chair	Head of Programme Management Office	X
Core Panel Member	Transport Strategy & Policy Manager	X
Core Panel Member	Senior Integrated Transport Operations Manager	X
Core Panel Member	Senior Environment Manager – Sustainable Transport	X
Core Panel Member	Head of Major Programmes	X
Core Panel Member	Active Travel England Representative	X
Core Panel Member	Head of Rail Delivery	
BCC Panel Member	Unitary Authority Technical Representative, can rotate between experts in the BCC	
SGC Panel Member	Unitary Authority Technical Representative, can rotate between experts in the SGC	
B&NES Panel Member	Unitary Authority Technical Representative, can rotate between experts in the B&NES	

6. Meeting Documents, Process, & Timings

The Panel will meet every second Wednesday of the month from 11:00 – 13:00, virtually. Additional meetings may be arranged at the discretion of the Chair if projects urgently require them.

For the Panel, the proforma must be completed for each submission and submitted alongside all relevant project design, requirements and stakeholder information to at least 15 working days in advance to BOP@westofengland-ca.gov.uk.

Output reports will be provided to the project lead within 10 working days after the BOP by Programme Management Office.



Appendix 2: Template DRP Report

Cover Sheet

Scheme Name					
Scheme Reference		Design Stage		Funding Stream	
Date of Meeting					
ATE scheme review tool(s) appended (use of one or more is mandatory)	Route Check Tool		Area Check Tool		Active Travel England scheme review tools – GOV.UK
ATE design assistance tool appended (optional)	Crossing Selector Tool		Route Cross Section Tool		Active Travel England design assistance tools – GOV.UK
Tools output verified by ATE			Date verified		

DRP Report Agreed as a True Record

Role	Name	Signature	Date
Chair			
ATE Representative			

Attendees

Present	
Apologies	
Notes	
Design Review Panel Recommendation	[Choose an item]

Issue	Policy conflict/critical issue reference ID <i>(from ATE route check or area check tool)</i>	Comment/Recommended Action	DRP Status
[Choose an item]			
[Choose an item]			
[Choose an item]			
[Choose an item]			
[Choose an item]			
[Additional row as required]			

Appendix 3: SA testimonials

This appendix sets out testimonials from SAs on the value of DRPs.

West Yorkshire Combined Authority

“Active Travel England (ATE) is a highly valued design assurance partner of West Yorkshire Combined Authority, sitting on their established design Quality Panel Board. ATE provides ad hoc design guidance on proposed schemes which face challenges around deliverability and full compliance to national design guidance from key documents such as Local Transport Note 1/20 (LTN 1/20). Their early input was instrumental in shaping the Quality Panel process in its inception and in its ongoing evolution as additional national design standards have been adopted.

“This has helped to ensure compliance of transport schemes to national design standards, delivering upon a key condition of the major funding programmes such as the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS).

“Outside of the Quality Panel process, ATE provides bespoke design steers on a case-by-case basis through their monthly design surgeries, or through collaborative meetings and site visits facilitated by the Combined Authority or one of the five District Councils which comprise West Yorkshire. This forum and open collaboration have been well utilised and have helped to inform the designs of many transport projects across the region, ranging from multi-million-pound corridor improvements to small-scale enhancements to canal towpaths over the last four years.

“ATE have also kindly hosted a series of interactive meetings and training sessions in relation to changes in national design guidance, such as floating bus stops, and on their design review tools with the Combined Authority and their District Council partners, including the Route Check tool which replaced the Cycle Level of Service tool. Use of their design review suite has proven to be highly effective throughout the various stages of a design’s evolution, from identifying the challenges with existing active travel provisions, reinforcing the ‘case for change’ for interventions as part of business case narrative, informing scheme optioneering and design iterations, assessing the delivered outputs on the ground, and comparing the before and after situation as part of scheme evaluation.”

Woodhouse Lane Gateway, Leeds

“Leeds City Council effectively engaged with West Yorkshire Combined Authority’s established Design Quality Panel process and liaised with Active Travel England (ATE) through their Design Surgery forum, and a series of collaborative meetings as part of the development of the ambitious Woodhouse Lane Gateway proposals. At its heart, Woodhouse Lane Gateway aims to deliver improvement to the pedestrian and cycling amenity between the Merrion Centre and the University of Leeds, near Clarendon Road. It will provide a segregated bi-directional cycle lane, wider and upgraded footways with public realm treatments, greening and seating, improved crossings facilities, bus stops, and bus priority features. Active Travel England’s design review suite including the Route Check tool were used to inform the optioneering and scheme design iterations, which addressed challenges identified through the initial review.

“The scheme was required to return to the Quality Panel process as the business case and designs evolved, and to resolve outstanding issues and safety concerns that had been raised by the quality panel reviewers and ATE, particularly following the Government’s July 2025 announcement to pause the rollout of floating bus stops. The scheme had originally included the provision of bus stop boarders at a pair of very busy bus stops by Leeds University, and cyclists being within the critical range on Blenheim Walk. Upon further detailed and productive discussions with ATE and the Combined Authority ahead of the January 2026 release of the Government’s floating bus stop provisions and design guidance, Leeds City Council used the feedback to further modify the proposals. The final design removed the provision of the bus stop boarders, which caused concerns regarding boarding/alighting conflicts between passengers and cyclists, and replaced these with bespoke bus stop bypasses. The critical range of cyclists on Blenheim Walk was resolved through changes to the lane widths. A revisit of the scheme through the Route Check tool showed an uplift of 40%, with the existing layout scoring 24% and the proposed design scoring 64%, indicating a great enhancement to the active travel provision in the Woodhouse Lane Gateway area. This scheme is often cited as a best practice example of collaborative working with ATE and effective use of its design review tools.”

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority

“The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority’s DRP is a relatively recent initiative, launched in Autumn 2025. As with the introduction of any new process, initial concerns were raised around its potential impact on development timelines and the resources required to manage it effectively. However, through close collaboration with ATE and by drawing on lessons learned from other Mayoral Combined Authorities, we have successfully shaped a DRP that is both proportionate and deliverable within our existing capacity.

“Ongoing engagement with our Local Authority partners has been central to this progress. Together, we have embedded a streamlined and effective process that is already adding tangible value to our growing programme of projects. The DRP is now formally integrated into the Transport Gateway process, reinforcing its role within the wider governance framework for transport schemes across the City Region.

“While still in its early stages, the DRP has established strong foundations. Our Local Authority partners have welcomed the opportunity to participate in early-stage design surgeries, creating space to openly discuss challenges and benefit from expert insight provided by ATE’s inspectorate. The panel operates as a collaborative forum, fully recognising the complexities and pressures faced by delivery partners. From our experience, it is not about scrutiny for its own sake, but about enabling access to expertise, sharing best practice, and championing high-quality design. Ultimately, it will help us deliver more effective schemes and achieve our ambition of increasing walking, wheeling, and cycling across the City Region.”

South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority

“South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority’s (SYMCA) DRP has been in place now for approximately two years. Over this period, DRP has developed from one of informal ad hoc reviews to being a formal component of SYMCA’s assurance process. To date, over 40 different schemes have gone through the DRP process. DRP has enabled the region to raise ambition and drive up the quality of walking, wheeling and cycling schemes across South Yorkshire, with ATE playing an essential and consistently supportive role in both the review of schemes and continuous improvement of the DRP process. An example of this success in driving up quality is that for one particular scheme, through the DRP process eight critical issues were resolved and this is now being delivered on site.

“We, at SYMCA, strongly feel that we would not have been able to establish and embed the process in its current form without ATE’s support. Over the last two years, ATE have worked closely with SYMCA officers to help shape the process itself, providing constructive feedback and ultimately ensure that the schemes that are delivered in South Yorkshire are of the highest standard. ATE colleagues have exceptional technical knowledge on designing for walking, wheeling and cycling.”

“ATE Design Assurance Tools are central to the DRP process and have been especially valuable for Local Authorities in providing clarity, structure and consistency particularly for some of the more innovative approaches. ATE’s willingness to provide clear, practical feedback on how these tools should be applied proportionately at different design stages has further reinforced this consistency. Local authorities also value when ATE share real world examples of best practice from elsewhere in the country, helping to demonstrate how similar constraints have been addressed. In addition, ATE has supported local capability building through bespoke sessions which have been very gratefully received and have helped to upskill engineers, as has the more formal sessions delivered by ATE on use of the Design Assurance tools.

“As DRP has developed, it has expanded its panel membership beyond just active travel. The significant benefit of this is that it has helped SYMCA to be more aligned, a key part of providing an integrated transport network of the future and one which ATE has been very supportive of.”

West Midlands Combined Authority – Transport for West Midlands (TfWM)

“Successful active travel delivery requires far more than simply allocating funding or reviewing designs in isolation. It requires a coordinated system that combines technical quality, programme governance, local authority confidence and practical delivery realism. Recognising this need, TfWM established integrated long-term active travel delivery partnership with ATE, bringing together regional programme leadership, specialist technical assurance and first-hand implementation support for all 7 West Midlands local authorities.

“The DRP process was initiated in 2023, followed up by a formal implementation of the process for Consolidated Active Travel Fund and Active Travel Fund schemes in April 2024. At the March 2024 meeting, the Strategic Transport Officers Group also requested that the process be extended to cover CRSTS schemes, due to the significant value it brings in helping authorities move walking and cycling schemes from concept to delivery.

“While still treated as a gateway to scheme approval, the process is currently under review, with the intention to reduce the lead-in time for formal reviews and increase the number of design surgeries throughout scheme development. It has proven beneficial over recent months that promoters are able to engage with TfWM and ATE earlier in the design development process, which has significantly reduced the queries and changes in the design after the formal meetings held.

“Having ATE inspectors present in the meetings held with our local authority partners has helped us emphasise the importance of how minor amendments can offer greater benefit for active travel users. The TfWM/ATE partnership is now considered a critical friend, where LAs are willing to engage with us earlier in the development of the schemes.

“One big advantage of the DRP is that the promoter has the opportunity to talk about the wider background of activity that may have led to certain design decisions that may not be otherwise obvious from a simple desktop review. This could be a planned redevelopment, other schemes that are committed, or how these proposals will tie into the wider or future network. It also gives the opportunity to highlight any political or public consultation history that may need to be taken into account. Discussing these issues around the table enables pragmatic design solutions to be considered or progressed, or gives clarity to the promoter that current proposals cannot be supported.

“The quality of scheme proposals has risen sharply since the implementation of the formal DRP process. Some of this is through formalising a process that ensures designs meet the Grant Conditions, but it has also enabled significantly more dialogue to take place between all parties, both earlier in the design development process and more regularly.”



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