

Spending for emergency cycling and walking measures announced

For years now, campaigners have called for more spending on cycling and active travel. Today, suddenly, all their dreams came true at once.

As a result of Covid-19, walking and cycling in the towns and cities in Scotland should now become easier. It will be necessary for people to have an alternative to getting on a bus – and the days of those overcrowded buses are possibly over for the time being at least.

The Scottish Government is now offering 100 per cent funding for local authorities to put pop up cycle lanes and wider walkways in place, up to a total of £10 million. This will be administered by Sustrans, and councils will be able to use existing emergency powers to reallocate space on roads.

So the funding is available and the work can start as soon as possible. Edinburgh already has its City Centre Transformation plans well worked through, but it will be interesting to see what temporary measures are adopted.



Michael Matheson MSP Transport Secretary today at The Scottish Parliament Ministerial Statement: Transport in a COVID-19 world. PHOTO Fraser Bremner/Scottish DailyMail Tuesday 28 April 2020. Picture FRASER BREMNER

Transport Secretary, Michael Matheson addressed Holyrood today on the way that The Scottish Government will address these problems. The underlying message is that the government is putting a great deal of funding into providing infrastructure for active travel in Scotland.

Even if this is a temporary measure, it is difficult to see how it would be reversed any time soon. Mr Matheson said: "As we eventually move out of social distancing, some local authorities might consider the temporary infrastructure arrangements that they have put in place and choose to continue with them permanently, but that will very much be a

matter for local authorities.”

The Council Leader, Cllr Adm McVey welcomed the news on Twitter, although some opposition councillors said they would like to have more detail on the plans which they appeared to know nothing about.

Thanks [@MathesonMichael](#) for support & [@lmacinnessnp](#) for work on this.

We're looking to start implementing changes on the ground this week. These will help residents get around their neighbourhood & support [#PhysicalDistancing](#) during [#COVID19](#) <https://t.co/wDHJ73URiN>

– Cllr Adam McVey (@adamrmcvey) [April 28, 2020](#)

Sustrans Scotland Deputy CEO John Lauder said: “We welcome the Scottish Government’s package of support and we are ready to respond to local authorities’ needs through our [Spaces for People](#) fund.

“It’s clear that people across Scotland want to do the right thing during Coronavirus. They want to look after their physical and mental health.

“They also want to make sure that they are keeping to physical distancing guidelines while still being safe on our streets.

“With our local authority partners we have helped turn around this idea in less than two weeks and it’s great to work with a government that listens and engages so actively.

“We look forward to being able to support partners to help make essential travel and exercise safer during Coronavirus.”

Pedal on Parliament just launched their latest campaign a few days ago, and welcomed the announcement, but saying how

important it is that every council applies for funding.

We welcome this announcement from [@MathesonMichael](#) and we look forward to seeing the first [#SpaceForDistancing](#) schemes popping up within weeks. Which council will be first?

– Pedal On Parliament [#SpaceForDistancing](#) ♀
(@POPScotland) [April 28, 2020](#)

The pattern since the lockdown began has formed that according to the data, one person makes one trip per person per day. This is a third of what normally happens each day in Scotland. Only a quarter of car journeys are being made, and active travel has increased. Passenger numbers on public transport have fallen by 90 to 95%.

Essential public transport keeps running, mainly for key workers to reach their place of work, and the government is supporting the sector financially.

But it is clear that moving towards any recovery period, whenever that may happen, will mean change is necessary. The rules about physical distancing are not going to change any time soon, and to allow this the government has worked with Sustrans and local authorities on detailed plans.

During the debate Lothians MSP, Sarah Boyack commented: “I welcome the cabinet secretary’s announcement on speeding up the process of increasing space for walking and cycling in order to enable safe social distancing in the weeks and months to come.

“Will the investment be able to address the specific issues of poor surfaces on our pavements and potholes on our roads, which make walking unsafe—in particular for people with disabilities—and roads unsafe for cyclists? I welcome the fact that the process will be speedy, but will the cabinet

secretary monitor the speed at which the £10 million is invested?"

The Minister replied that local authorities already have funding for potholes, and the £10 million is specifically reserved for cycling and walking space.

Friends of the Earth Scotland's Air Pollution Campaigner Gavin Thomson said: "It's fantastic to see The Scottish Government giving councils the support they need to unlock much needed public space for social distancing. We support the Cabinet Secretary's ambition that we should build upon the recent increases in cycling and walking long after the risk from the coronavirus subsides. Hopefully these measures can help achieve that.

"Fundamentally, we need more space for people. Maintaining 2 metres social distancing can be difficult on our narrow pavements; people are walking on the road to ensure compliance with the guidance. Support from the Scottish Government will help all councils temporarily re-allocate road space, which recognises the drop in road traffic."

"There are great examples around the world of governments quickly unlocking space for distancing, such as expanded cycle lanes, space for pedestrians on roads, and parks closed to through-traffic. All 32 councils in Scotland now have support to introduce innovative, low-cost measures, and they must start introducing these measures as quickly as possible."

The Scottish Liberal Democrats transport spokesperson Mike Rumbles MSP commented: "Social distancing will see public transport limited to a fraction of its normal capacity for a long time. The transport system needs to be urgently re-configured so people can safely walk and cycle wherever possible.

"I discussed these opportunities with the Transport Secretary last week and I fully support moves to reset the transport

system to provide for the 2 metre rule and avoid accidents. This needs to involve a combination of measures, agreed locally, including widening pavements, creating cycling lanes and closing streets to vehicles except for residents and critical services.

“Local authorities now need to implement these changes quickly because we have seen cities around the world roll this out within days and to great effect, keeping people moving and safe. The Cabinet Secretary has promised action within a fortnight and Scottish Liberal Democrats will hold him to it.”

Scottish Greens Environment Spokesperson Mark Ruskell MSP said:

“Scottish Greens have been calling on the Scottish Government to seize the opportunity by supporting local councils to help make our towns and cities healthier places, so I warmly welcome the package of support outlined today.

“The response to the coronavirus emergency has changed how we go about our daily lives and it will continue to do so for some time. Streets that were once choking with cars are now largely empty, with more and more families walking or cycling.

“It’s vital that all local authorities make use of this important support as quickly as possible, looking at where pavements can be widened or pop up cycle routes can be installed, to ensure as many people as possible can travel by foot or by bike safely, and that necessary social distancing can take place.

“Communities know where the pinch points and problems are, councils must move quickly to access these funds, many of the measures to widen pavements or put in pop-up cycle lanes are low cost and can be put in quickly before traffic levels creep back up.

“While this support has been announced in response to a

national emergency, there are many places where it will be desirable for these initially temporary measures to become permanent. It is incumbent on us all to ensure that we make our towns and cities healthy places for the long term."



Michael Matheson MSP Transport Secretary today at the Scottish Parliament Holyrood Edinburgh Ministerial Statement: Transport in a COVID-19 world. PHOTO Fraser Bremner/Scottish DailyMail Tuesday 28 April 2020. Picture FRASER BREMNER