

Edinburgh is awarded half of the Spaces for People funding by The Scottish Government

In an exciting piece of news today, The City of Edinburgh Council has been awarded half of the Scottish Government's £10 million budget to introduce temporary measures on our roads and streets.

These measures will deal with the social distancing requirements that dealing with Covid-19 will require.

They will allow the council to put many of its already thought through plans for active travel in place. The process will however include discussion with community councils and local ward councillors for a period of up to five days before being rubber stamped in terms of the emergency powers by the council's senior management team.

The Scottish Government confirmed last month it would fully fund a new infrastructure programme for pop-up walking and cycling routes or temporary improvements to existing routes. This is being managed by Sustrans.

Every year, Transport Scotland and Sustrans Scotland run the 'Places for Everyone' active travel infrastructure initiative – saying that they know the impact of Covid-19 means that local authorities will not have the capacity to design and apply for complex multi-year infrastructure programmes due to the necessary focus on responding to the outbreak. So they awarded up to £10 million from the 'Places for Everyone'

budget to deliver the new 'Spaces for People' initiative with no match funding from local authorities required, while continuing to support previously committed projects.

At present the council has closed four roads in the capital to vehicles, but with funding of this nature, it will mean a step change in active travel measures.



Councillor Lesley Macinnes, Transport Convener. Photo: Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com

We spoke to Transport Convener Lesley Macinnes just ahead of the announcement. She said: "This news is a clear indication of the ambition of what we're doing here in Edinburgh, and a recognition of the validity of our approach.

"We have done some work already, but it's essentially been fairly easy road closure measures.

"It's about the bigger picture of the resurgence of car travel. I have been lying awake worrying about the possibility that we will lose all the ground that we have already gained here. It's happening in cities all over the place, and we need to work out how to combat that right from the word go. Well clearly active travel has to be one of those routes, and I am anxious to get as much on the ground as quickly as possible.

"We can say today that the next schemes will be on Warriston Road and on Stanley Road. This again is about road closure and it's about ease of passage, in particular in relation to to leisure and exercise. The next two are Old Dalkeith Road and Crewe Road South, those are both about access to hospitals. That is about a very real need which these measures represent. It's partly about key workers and partly about exercise and free passage for other people, and also social distancing."

The council's transport officers prepared a list of short, medium term and long term goals in relation to active travel measures in the city. Cllr Macinnes recognised that this

emanated from officer knowledge, but she says that will be coupled with the real and extensive body of suggestions from the public. She said: "We have also got all the situations that have been coming in. The suggestions have been phenomenal. We've had an enormous response from Community Councils, and from individuals demonstrating a kind of latent desire that's been stirred into action by the conditions they're under at the moment. So, we are at the moment trying to combine those two bits of thinking, the stuff that's coming in from the communities with what we already knew might be good possibilities."

And the Transport Convener promises there will be more in the way of news about specific streets and schemes by the end of this week.

The Scottish Government has also tripled the amount awarded in the Spaces for People programme available to all 32 local authorities in Scotland to £30 million.

Transport and Environment Vice Convener Councillor Karen Doran said: "This is fantastic news. Our close working relationship with funding administrators Sustrans, who have supported us to develop innovative, effective projects to enable active travel, has helped pave a smoother path to funding, which will be extremely beneficial to the city long-term.

"In line with national policies to drive down carbon emissions and encourage healthy, sustainable transport choices, we are already 100% committed to delivering a people-friendly, accessible city. Our existing plans for Edinburgh City Centre Transformation, the City Mobility Plan and Low Emission Zones envision a city where pedestrians, cyclists and public transport is prioritised, and the temporary measures made possible by this funding will help us build towards this."

Transport officers have been working to prioritise areas where supportive measures are most-needed, and the next phase of

improvements will be:

- The partial closure of Stanley Street and Hope Lane between Stanley Street and Christian Grove to provide a low-traffic corridor for people to walk and cycle and access nearby green spaces like Figgate Park for exercise, from 2 June.
- The closure of Warriston Road to through traffic to provide a wide pedestrian and cyclist-friendly space leading to access to the North Edinburgh path Network, from 2 June. Access to the allotment and Warriston Crematorium will be maintained via Ferry Road.
- The implementation of a temporary segregated cycleway on Old Dalkeith Road, between Cameron Toll and the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary.
- The introduction of an advisory cycle lane on Crewe Road South, between the Orchard Brae roundabout and Crewe Toll roundabout. Both this and the cycle lane on Old Dalkeith Road will allow safer travel by bike for key workers and service users, from early June.

From this week, the council will also be prioritising pedestrians at 150 junctions by removing the need to press the button to call the green man during the daytime and evening. Those with visual impairments will be able to continue using crossings as before.

The Council's overall strategy will be implemented to support the Scottish Government's phased approach to lifting lockdown. The proposed partial pedestrianisation of Waverley Bridge, for example, aims to create more space at a key transport hub, while the measures in the city's eight local high streets will support local shops, pubs and cafes to re-open in safe environments. Space will be created on the main routes into the city to support people coming back to workplaces by walking where possible, and by bike, where there has been a surge in popularity.

All measures that are introduced will be closely monitored and refined or adapted in response to any issues, where necessary. A dedicated webpage will also be set up listing schemes that have been implemented, those that are under consideration and any which have been discounted.