

PHIRST Fusion: Evaluation of COVID-19 Emergency Active Travel Schemes in South Gloucestershire Council

October 2022

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About the research

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, South Gloucestershire Council implemented a number of emergency travel schemes (ETS) including:

- Cycle lanes – road lanes that segregate cyclists from car users
- Low traffic neighbourhoods (LTN) –restricting car access through residential streets
- School streets - the closure of roads near schools during drop-off/pick-up times.
- Widened pavements - the widening of pavements along busy roads

This project offers a formative evaluation of the ETS impact on travel behaviour and local communities.

Methodology

Since little pre-pandemic baseline data was available, a variety of primary and secondary data was used to evaluate the impact of the ETS.

Primary data: an **Attitude Survey** (a representative telephone survey with a weighted sample to explore perceptions of the ETS and their impact on travel behaviour); **Intercept Surveys** (targeted surveys to collect perceptions and experiences at travel scheme locations; **Local Authority Officer Interviews** (with officers involved in the decision making, design and delivery of the ETS); and, a **Citizens Panel Focus Group** (an online group interview with South Gloucestershire residents to discuss perceptions of the ETS).

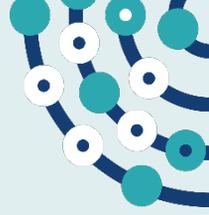
Secondary data: the **Travel to Work survey** (an annually commissioned survey which provides insight into commuting patterns across the South Gloucestershire region); the **Space to Move consultation survey** (targeted at ETS intervention sites to explore people’s experience of the ETS); **contextual data from the 2011 census** (to gain an insight into the number and proportion of residents in South Gloucestershire who used active means of travel); and, **air quality data from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)**.

Research implications

- It is important to have **baseline data before the implementation of future schemes** to make comparisons and to enable change in travel behaviour to be more robustly estimated.
- The **use of traffic and cycle counters and air quality monitors at sites and locations near schemes** would highlight direct and indirect impacts of schemes, and enrich the conclusions that could be drawn on impacts of future schemes.
- Local Authorities should **identify a team to collate necessary data and lead the monitoring and management** of all future travel schemes.
- To increase scheme fidelity, **better signage around scheme locations** could be used to advertise and increase scheme awareness, and highlight how the schemes should be used.
- **A flexible approach to consultation**, including allowing schemes to be co-designed with local communities can help ensure adjustments to increase schemes’ acceptability more broadly to users and local populations.
- Future schemes could be **located in areas where active travel is relatively low**, to encourage uptake.



A Cycle lane scheme in South Gloucestershire



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Key findings

- Whilst there have been changes in commuting and travel to work practices throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, there is **limited evidence of the ETS changing active travel behaviour** at a population level in South Gloucestershire.
- There is, however, **some evidence of increases in reported active travel behaviour locally where the schemes were used.**
- There were **mixed perceptions around the design** and experienced outcomes of all schemes. But there were generally **high levels of satisfaction** with the ETS from those who were aware of and using them.
- There was a suggestion from some respondents that the travel schemes in South Gloucestershire had a **positive impact upon their perceptions of their local area** (e.g., more pleasant and friendly, and creating a sense of community), **and their travel behaviour.**
- **Scheme fidelity** (i.e., how schemes worked in practice, and if ETS were used as intended) **influenced perceived satisfaction and safety** from respondents.
- Limited **consultation** (due to the required speed of the ETS implementation) **may have had a role in perceptions of, and the use of, the ETS.** Greater public consultation may have facilitated a clearer framing of the purpose and potential benefits of the ETS, and better exploration of the trade-offs and potential issues involved.
- Given the small-scale and localised nature of the ETS, and the limited granularity of the DEFRA air quality data, **it is difficult to assess the impact of the individual travel schemes upon air quality.**
- Due to the **lack of baseline data on active travel behaviours, much of the primary data is based on recollections and interpretations of behaviour change.** Thus, **it is difficult to make robust inferences about actual behaviour change in the population.** It is also important to appreciate our findings in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, as it is challenging to isolate the impacts of the built environment changes on active travel beyond those of the pandemic itself.

'It is a lot safer for our children and pets and quieter since they introduced the scheme. It's easier to chat to neighbours. More sense of community, more connecting.'

(Respondent – perception of Low Traffic Neighbourhood scheme)



A low traffic neighbourhood Scheme in South Gloucestershire

Further Information

For further information please contact Professor Frank Kee
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Also, please see:

[Project Report](#)

[Project Website](#)

[Project Story Map](#)

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PHIRST Fusion

The project was undertaken by PHIRST Fusion.

The PHIRST Fusion team is led from Fuse (the Centre for Translational Research in Public Health in North East England) in collaboration with PaRC (the Public Health Practice and Research Collaborative for Yorkshire & Humber); the Centre of Excellence for Public Health in Northern Ireland; the Scottish Collaboration for Public Health Research and Policy and the MRC/CSO Social & Public Health Sciences Unit.