

Transport Scotland Spaces for People Programme - Update

Committee Operations

Date of meeting 29 January 2021

Date of report 5 January 2021

Report by Chief Executive

1. Object of report

To provide an update on Transport Scotland's Spaces for People (SfP) programme.

2. Background

- 2.1 Across the world, as the Covid-19 pandemic emerged, the ability to physically distance to an appropriate level on pavements, streets and public transport quickly became a major concern, and led to many places taking action to address this. The accelerated delivery of planned walking and cycling schemes, "pop-up" pavement widening, or new initiatives such as closure of roads to general traffic except walking and cycling, quickly became a standard response for many towns and cities as they sought to alleviate pressure on services and facilitate physical distancing¹.
- 2.2 In line with that approach, Transport Scotland (TS) launched a £10 million Spaces for People programme in late April 2020² as part of its initial response to the impacts of the pandemic. Through funding of "pop-up" cycle lanes or pavement widening measures, or temporary improvements to existing active travel routes, TS said the SfP programme would help enable easier physical distancing while walking, wheeling or cycling, and help facilitate greater uptake of active travel during the crisis, thereby improving physical and mental health and wellbeing. SfP funding was to be made available to local authorities and other public bodies through a bidding process, with no match funding required.
- 2.3 The initial allocation of £10 million to the SfP programme was subsequently increased over coming months and by end August 2020 nearly £39 million³ had been awarded for SfP measures. It is worth highlighting that the funding for SfP came from existing sources, namely the Places for Everyone programme⁴ which Transport Scotland fund Sustrans to deliver in partnership with local authorities and others.
- 2.4 Although SPT did not apply for any funding through SfP while acknowledging that the funding was targeted at local roads authorities and are therefore not directly involved in the delivery of any SfP projects, officers sought where possible to ensure that any

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/18/cleaner-and-greener-covid-19-prompts-worlds-cities-to-free-public-space-of-cars>

² <https://www.transport.gov.scot/news/10-million-to-support-pop-up-active-travel-infrastructure/>

³ <https://www.transport.gov.scot/news/over-38-million-allocated-for-pop-up-active-travel-infrastructure/>

⁴ <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/our-blog/projects/2019/scotland/places-for-everyone>

measures delivered were complementary to existing public transport modes, such as bus services, which were maintained throughout periods of lockdown and beyond in order to serve key workers and other essential travellers. Progress on delivery of SfP was monitored through existing forums, such as the Glasgow City Region Transport Transition group, and there have been various national, regional and local discussions on good practice and experience in relation to the delivery of SfP measures.

3. Update

3.1 Strathclyde councils and other public bodies were awarded over £15 million of the available SfP funding, around 39% of the Scottish total. Many of the projects have now been delivered, and include:

- Widened footways;
- “Pop-up” cycle lanes;
- “Car free zones” at schools;
- Cycle parking;
- Temporary road closures;
- “No touch” pedestrian crossings;
- Improved links at transport hubs; and
- Covered waiting areas.

3.2 A key point to note is that, given the temporary nature of SfP projects, delivery bodies have been keen to be as responsive as possible when a scheme is particularly successful or otherwise, and this has ranged from removing the scheme, through to expanding or enhancing it.

3.3 Those organisations in receipt of funding have informally reported both benefits and challenges in the delivery and impact of their SfP projects, and these are summarised below, along with identified learning points for the future:

3.3.1 Benefits:

- SfP played an important part in helping people move about, thus being of particular benefit to many local communities across the region;
- Where there have been increases in walking and cycling⁵ rates, these were undoubtedly helped by SfP infrastructure;
- Positive feedback where measures are based on good design and engagement with the community and businesses;
- The ability to trial innovative schemes without the need for lengthy consultation and approval processes;
- Opportunity to reduce/remove on-street parking, discouraging car use and traffic;
- Significant increases in usage of some routes with new SfP measures; and
- Traffic-free, safer routes particularly helped encourage and support those who are not regular cyclists.

3.3.2 Challenges:

- Highly polarised local responses to some schemes;

⁵ Section 3.6 and Figure 5 in this report: http://www.spt.co.uk/documents/latest/p111220_Agenda8.pdf

- Limited staff resources to design and deliver projects at relatively short notice including implementing Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders, sourcing materials and scheme delivery;
- Complaint handling could be challenging, particularly where schemes have been fast-tracked, with limited resources to respond;
- Limited scope and time for public engagement and consultation;
- Bus operators highlighted SfP on-street works adversely impacting journey times, including instances of bus stops being blocked;
- Impacts on disabled people;
- Residential parking displacement;
- Delivery of SfP schemes taking focus away from delivery of other committed infrastructure projects e.g. SPT capital programme;
- Potential issues regarding funding of future maintenance of SfP infrastructure; and
- Procurement challenges.

3.3.3 Learning points:

- When potentially controversial projects are to be delivered in short timescales, even if temporary, the establishment of project liaison groups with partners including SPT, the local community, businesses and equality groups can be an effective way of addressing issues, achieving buy-in, and agreeing monitoring arrangements (success/failure criteria);
- The sharing of good practice, experience, knowledge and challenges between project delivery bodies is essential, especially if projects have to be delivered quickly;
- Greater awareness of the local context for schemes is essential; for example, altering parking arrangements remains a very sensitive issue across all areas;
- Effective communication, engagement, and management of these is essential in order to deal with often polarised views from complete opposition, through to calls to be bolder and gain public and business support;
- High quality design principles and greater understanding of impact on streetscape and “place”, can help promote scheme success; and
- The SfP process, from bidding to delivery, has proven a useful opportunity to collect data and evidence in relation to responses to the schemes, and through the monitoring in place to assess impact of SfP projects, this will assist in informing future thinking about encouraging longer-term positive changes in travel behaviours.

3.4 Following the introduction of the SfP process, further Transport Scotland measures in response to the impacts of the pandemic were introduced. These included, for example, the Bus Priority Rapid Deployment Fund (BPRDF). While developing bids for such initiatives as the BPRDF often proved challenging due to concurrently or retrospectively having to take account of emerging SfP measures, such forums as the Glasgow City Region Transport Transition group and regular liaison between councils, operators and SPT proved useful in addressing these issues. Notwithstanding this however, the experience reinforced the importance of taking a multi-modal, multi-partner complementary approach when developing and delivering complex transport interventions and this must remain a key consideration in any such future work.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 The impacts of the global pandemic are obviously significant and on-going, notwithstanding the positive news of vaccine roll-out through 2021. The need therefore, to continue to facilitate physical distancing and encouragement of active travel to alleviate pressure on the transport network, and encourage good physical and mental health remains very much a 'live' issue. Around the world, towns and cities continue to explore new ways of enabling this, and are sharing best practice and the knowledge and experience gained since early 2020 in that regard. The SfP process adopted by Transport Scotland aligns with that, and as can be seen from section 3 above, while the experience in the west of Scotland has resulted in both positives and negatives, it is worth emphasising our region is by no means unique in that, with similar results being experienced across the UK, Europe and beyond.
- 4.2 Notwithstanding that however, it is important that all partners across the transport industry and wider sectors in the west of Scotland learn from the events of the pandemic and our collective and individual responses to it: what has worked, what has not, what could be done better etc. The deep and fundamental negative consequences of the pandemic are many but insights gained from the experiences of responding to it, for example, encouraging behaviour change to more sustainable transport modes will prove hugely useful in addressing those issues which we will continue to face post-pandemic: climate change, a green economic recovery, poverty and deprivation, equality and others.
- 4.3 The SfP process has proved enormously useful in that regard and through the developing Regional Transport Strategy and our core operational activities, SPT will continue to advocate the multi-agency, multi-modal, integrated approach needed to successfully deliver future change required.

5. Committee action

The Committee is recommended to note the contents of this report.

6. Consequences

Policy consequences	<i>Knowledge gained from the SfP process will inform the development of the new RTS.</i>
Legal consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Financial consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Personnel consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Equalities consequences	<i>Positive and negative experiences for equality groups as a result of SfP projects.</i>
Risk consequences	<i>None at present.</i>

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