

Agenda Item	12
Report No	ECI/21/20

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Economy and Infrastructure

Date: 2 September 2020

Report Title: Spaces for People and Bus Priority Rapid Development Fund

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Highland Council has secured £1,968,560 from the Scottish Government's 'Spaces for People' fund from two successful bids to deliver rapid active travel interventions in response to the Coronavirus pandemic.
- 1.2 This report provides Members with an update on progress, including proposed next steps and a summary of engagement activity.
- 1.3 The report details the successful award of £170,000 to the Smarter Choices Smarter Places fund, to provide camera and traffic pedestrian and cycle flows at key locations to augment the data collection information underway as part of the Spaces for People project, to provide objective information on the experimental changes made.
- 1.4 The report also details the successful grant award of £443,000 for two bus priority measures in Inverness from the Bus Priority Rapid Development Fund

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - i. consider the progress made to implement the Spaces for People Highland project;
 - ii. approve the roll out of improvement measures at four key interventions in Inverness,
 - iii. note the funding success and approve the roll out of data capture measures; and
 - iv. note the funding success in respect of the Bus Priority Rapid Development fund.

3. Implications

- 3.1 **Resource:** The delivery team, labour, materials, plant and contractors will be funded from the grant allocation.
- 3.2 **Legal:** Some of the interventions require Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders (TTRO), which follow a statutory process, noting that a TTRO does not require consultation and has no objection process. A TTRO has a maximum life of 18 months.
- 3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural):** The work is being undertaken with online public engagement through the Council's consultation portal. The nature of the interventions means the project team can respond / react to comments, where appropriate. It is intended that improving active travel opportunities and bus provision will contribute to tackling transport poverty by making active modes and bus travel viable options for those on lower incomes or without access to a private car. Relevant guidance, where available, will be referenced to ensure interventions that are implemented consider those with protected characteristics. The portal allows comments on the interventions and importantly comments on the rolled out interventions which is encouraged, so that any layout can be optimised in use.
- 3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever:** It is intended that these interventions will facilitate behaviour change towards more sustainable travel modes (walking, wheeling and cycling) and therefore make a positive contribution to reducing the carbon footprint of travel in Highland. The bus interventions will shorten bus routes and provide public transport alternatives to car use.
- 3.5 **Risk:** Due to the pace of delivery and the lack of the usual levels of consultation, it is accepted that issues will and have arisen. Given the temporary nature of the interventions, any alterations up to full removal can be implemented quickly, which is an ongoing process. Some disruption to road users has occurred following roll out – it is inevitable that the reallocation of road space will disbenefit vehicular traffic. There is a risk that the grant level will be exceeded – but financial monitoring shall occur so that that delivery can be influenced by available budget.
- 3.6 **Gaelic:** There are no implications.

4. Background

- 4.1 In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity announced the 'Spaces for People' fund on the **28 April 2020**. This fund is administered by Sustrans and is available to support local authorities to implement immediate measures to ensure that people can walk, wheel or cycle, whilst physically distancing and remaining safe from traffic. The fund available across Scotland was £30m; and this has to all intents and purposes been allocated. Further bids from a local authority will not be considered until 75% of awarded bids has been expended.
- 4.2 Administration is undertaken by Sustrans with continual consultation regarding the interventions, variations, alterations and additions going through a full review process, as is award of grant following such expenditure.
- 4.3 A small taskforce was established, led by the Head of Infrastructure and comprises of officers from the Project Design Unit, Area Roads Teams, and Transport Planning

and Development Plans Teams. Work on the ground is being undertaken predominantly by The Highland Council's DLO organisation – with contractors being used for specialist operations or where resources do not permit rapid roll out.

- 4.4 The phase 2 bid majored on the creation of town wide 20mph limits (Dingwall being successfully funded in bid 1), following consultation with members at local ward meetings. 20mph limit roll out requires to be delivered in accordance with guidance and it is important to capture existing speed data to inform the design. Design works and promotion of the temporary traffic regulation orders will require to be finalised prior to roll out. It is of note that the proposals include elements of the trunk road, and Transport Scotland are supporting such interventions, but their requirements and approval process will take time to work through.
- 4.5 It should be noted that guidance on the design of 20mph limits can rely on signing alone where observed vehicle speeds are less than 24mph. Where observed vehicle speeds are greater than 24mph the signage needs to be augmented with traffic calming measures. It is of note that the roll out of the 20mph limit within Dingwall has generally been well received, but the traffic calming measures have drawn criticism. It must be recognised that such traffic calming is a key feature in 20mph limit projects, and members attention is drawn to this. A paper to review the 20mph speed limit measures, with particular consideration of the traffic calming measures in Dingwall will be taken to the Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth Committee in October.

5. Progress on Spaces for People

- 5.1 Following the announcement of the successful bids progress has been made on all the interventions included in the first bid.
- 5.2 The major interventions at Academy Street, Millburn Road, Castle one way and Ness Walk have now all been introduced (Members will recall that the intervention at Inshes was not progressed due to feedback from the emergency services).
- 5.3 Highland wide interventions are being progressed by the local roads teams in consultation with the local members.
- 5.4 All interventions are being monitored and consultation continues, this has led to changes to react to issues and concerns, and this process will continue.
- 5.5 Comment has been received regarding the visual look of the interventions and also that it can be confusing for users. It is apparent that it is very difficult to provide the same level of clarity using temporary traffic management measures as compared to permanent features.
- 5.6 The grant bid also allowed for monitoring of the in-use interventions (given their temporary nature). It does give the opportunity, through such monitoring, to see how effective they are and if they are changing people's travel habits. This will allow consideration of whether there is an appetite for some measures to be considered for future permanent construction at a later date – as we move to encourage active travel.

6. Public engagement

- 6.1 The first application for funding was submitted on Friday 15 May and, in parallel, a public consultation was launched using the Council's consultation portal. This portal

shows all the proposed interventions as submitted. It enables people to consider each intervention and provide their feedback. It also provides a map that people can use to suggest other places where interventions should be considered.

- 6.2 As mentioned above, the comments received are being regularly reviewed by the team to ensure any pertinent issues are addressed. The suggestions for other interventions to be considered are being reviewed as part of the work to allocate contingency funding and consideration given to future bids.
- 6.3 Comments have been submitted to the portal and at the 8 August 2020, 65% of comments received are in support of the interventions proposed, whilst 23% are opposed and 8% give no response. It is of note that amongst the comments opposed to the proposals, some are seeking more ambitious measures to improve walking, wheeling and cycling in the region.
- 6.4 The portal will remain open and will be regularly monitored. This will ensure that, as interventions are implemented, people are able to share their feedback, enabling the Council to respond and amend as necessary. Signage along routes provides the Council's web address to encourage feedback on the interventions.
- 6.5 Members are asked to recognise the extraordinary nature of the pandemic – and the desire to carry out swift interventions has meant that normal consultations and communications have not been possible. It is hoped that this paper will inform Members and also encourage more engagement as the stage 2 bids works are rolled out.

7 Improvement Measures

- 7.1 Four interventions in Inverness reallocate road space from vehicular traffic to walking, wheeling and cycling. To enable rapid roll out, this has been achieved by the use of signing, road markings, cones and water filled barriers. These measures have the advantage that they can be moved and adjusted very rapidly to address issues and concerns.
- 7.2 It is apparent that the use of what is effectively traffic management measures whilst being flexible has unintended impacts, the measures appear as roadworks with no associated construction activity, have a detrimental visual impact, and can lack clarity for users.
- 7.3 In more permanent schemes, demarcation is achieved by the use of coloured surfacing and longer-term street furniture. Discussions are ongoing with Sustrans, who are supportive of such measures now that the proposals have had a chance to mature, to rationalise the layouts and bring more clarity to a situation that is expected to continue for the foreseeable future, as social distancing measures are required.
- 7.4 Members are asked to support these ongoing discussions and subsequent roll out – on the understanding that the costs can be contained within the grant allocation, the measures have the support and ratification as eligible funding from Sustrans, and such measures will not compromise the re-establishment of the existing layout at some point in the future.

8. Monitoring

- 8.1 The Council is working with Sustrans to monitor the temporary infrastructure through the implementation of automatic counters, video counts, online engagement portal and questionnaire / survey with the general public and businesses owners.
- 8.2 The Highland Council has also been successful in securing £170,000 from the Transport Scotland Smarter Choices Smarter Places (SCSP) fund to further monitor active travel usage in Inverness, Fort William and Aviemore during the Covid-19 pandemic recovery phase, which will allow us to better understand the positive travel behaviour impact of the Spaces for People interventions in the short term.
- 8.3 New technology offers us an innovative and accessible means of capturing all modes of travel (walking, wheeling, cycling and motor vehicles) on the network which will give us the baseline to target and consider future Active Travel interventions in order to maximise opportunities for modal shift to more sustainable travel.
- 8.4 This funding will enable the Council to roll out a network of c40 permanent sensors to obtain detailed travel patterns, for the short, medium and longer term.

9 Bus Priority Rapid Development Fund

- 9.1 Scottish Government opened a £10M fund for rapid implantation of measures across Scotland. Highland Council submitted its bid on the 6 August 2020, following internal and external consultations including Hitrans and local bus operators. This application sought to obtain funding to deliver rapid, transformational change for bus travel in Inverness through the delivery of a bus link at Rose Street and a bus gateway at Raigmore that will maximise permeability on the transport network and make travelling by bus more attractive than by car.
- 9.2 Confirmation was received on the 11 August 2020 from Transport Scotland of an offer of award of £442,855. Work will now commence with stakeholders to deliver these bus priority measures.
- 9.3 **Rose Street Bus Link:**
- 9.3.1 Academy Street is a major city centre destination with a broad range of uses accessed immediately from the street. These uses combine to create a high-footfall city centre place. Simultaneously the street is used by vehicles accessing the city centre, by through-traffic, and by a large number of bus services, accessing stops in various city centre locations, as well as using the bus station at Farraline Park. Spaces for People has delivered footpath widening along Academy Street to enable people to physically distance safely. This, combined with increases in vehicle flows since the relaxation of the pandemic lockdown measures, has combined to make it more challenging for buses to move through Academy Street, particularly to and from Farraline Park. The existing Inverness Bus Station was constructed in the 1950s to accommodate smaller vehicle sizes in a largely Victorian street environment. The modern fleet of buses accessing the station are therefore constrained by the surrounding built environment as well as higher traffic volumes. These factors combine to create conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians, and impact on reliability and journey times for various services.
- 9.3.2 Therefore, improving the permeability of Farraline Park for buses through the creation of a link to Rose Street and reconfiguration of the existing westernmost bus stances would provide significant benefits including:

- All buses that operate North over the Kessock Bridge would be able to avoid Academy Street entirely, removing around 7-8 buses per hour from this street.
- Long distance coaches would be able to exit the Bus Station through the Longman Industrial Estate, reducing bus movements on Academy Street by around 2 buses per hour.
- Buses operating West could also make use of a bus link through Rose Street further reducing the use of Academy Street by a further 2 buses per hour.

9.3.3 As well as creating improved journey times and service reliability, this temporary intervention will reduce the potential for conflict with temporary Spaces for People measures in Academy Street and would contribute to improving the active travel and place function of this city centre destination. It is anticipated that, due to services being rerouted away from congestion hot spots, time savings of between 3 and 5 minutes per journey are likely to be achieved as a result of this temporary intervention.

9.4 **Raigmore Bus Gate**

9.4.1 The Raigmore Hospital site is adjacent to Inshes roundabout, which is one of the busiest parts of the local transport network. At present there are no public transport priorities at Raigmore Hospital, which results in journey time delays for buses of up to 12 minutes. This is particularly pronounced in the evening peak, but Stagecoach has observed that delays are now causing problems throughout the day. Stagecoach has also previously noted that whilst 21% of passenger traffic on services 2, 3 and 4 are generated by the Hospital, and delays due to congestion can impact on up to 79% of all passengers using these services. There is therefore a risk in future that, with limited options to mitigate impacts of these delays, Stagecoach may implement a range of measures that could include omitting Raigmore Hospital on a number of services, and/ or reducing or withdrawing a number of other services from the city network, including some evening and Sunday services.

9.4.2 The construction of a temporary bus gate could deliver rapid and transformational change to connect city services on routes that avoid major congestion hot spots. This provides the opportunity to improve reliability and journey times and would reduce bus movements in the hospital site by around 50%. It is anticipated that, due to services being exclusively rerouted through a significantly less congested part of the network, that journey time savings of up to 12 minutes could be achieved. Moreover, it could provide new public transport connections for adjacent neighbourhoods that have a greater reliance on public transport.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment

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Background Papers:

Economy and Infrastructure Committee 1 July – Spaces for People (ECI/67/20)

Consultation portal available at

<https://consult.highland.gov.uk/kse/event/35394/section/>