

Agenda Item	6
Report No	CIA/24/21

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: City of Inverness Area Committee

Date: 26 August 2021

Report Title: Spaces for People: Update and next steps

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Inverness finds itself at a pivotal moment where significant efforts are underway to transform the city centre into a vibrant, successful place where people and business can enjoy a revival, following the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and shifts in retail behaviours. Crucial to this change is how transport affects, positively or negatively, on the quality, safety and enjoyment of our streets.
- 1.2 At the outset of the pandemic The Highland Council secured £1.9M from the Scottish Government's 'Spaces for People' fund to deliver a Highland-wide active travel response to the crisis, measures remain in place.
- 1.3 This report provides Members with an update on the four major interventions and presents options for their future.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - i. consider the progress in implementing the project and to note the legacy the interventions have provided for transforming the city centre;
 - ii. agree to retain the Spaces for People intervention in Academy Street;
 - iii. agree to retain the Spaces for People intervention for the Riverside Way and promote a permanent Traffic Regulation Order;
 - iv. agree to retain the Spaces for People intervention for the Castle 1-way system and promote a permanent Traffic Regulation Order; and
 - v. agree to alter the Spaces for People intervention for Millburn Road.

3. Implications

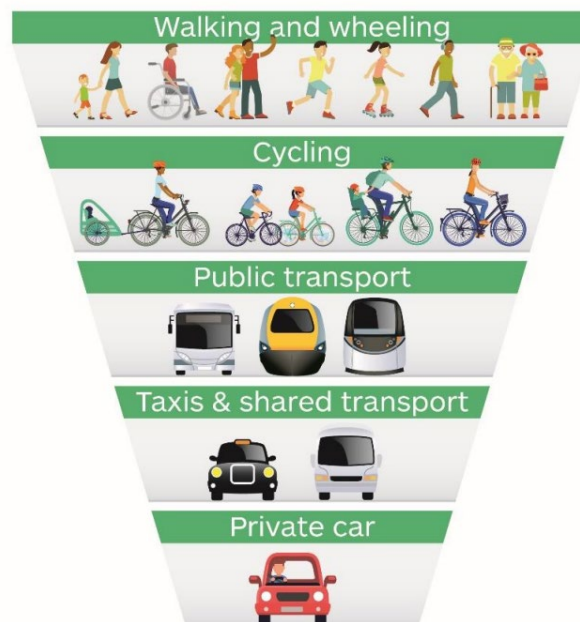
- 3.1 **Resource** - The project has been delivered by Officers from the Project Design Unit, Area Roads Teams, Road Safety, Transport Planning and Development Plans Teams. If options are selected to retain one or more of the interventions this will require a continuation of these resources to design, procure, implement and maintain improvements until such time as permanent schemes are installed.
- 3.2 **Legal** - The Castle one-way system and Riverside Way interventions required Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders (TTRO), which followed a statutory process. The changes made to Millburn Road and Academy Street did not require TTROs. A TTRO has a limited timescale of 18 months. If the Castle one-way and Riverside Way schemes are retained the Council will require to promote permanent Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO) for them and will follow the statutory process for doing so, including public consultation. Unresolved objections will require to be heard by committee and, in the case of the Castle one-way system, by an independent reporter.
- 3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)** - Improving active travel opportunities will contribute to tackling transport poverty by making active modes viable options for those on lower incomes or without access to a private car. The team has undertaken equalities impact assessment of the project, ensuring interventions accommodate those with protected characteristics. Any moves to alter measures beyond the pandemic will be subject to further consideration.
- 3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever** - These interventions, whilst temporary in nature and appearance, have supported behaviour change towards more sustainable travel modes (walking, wheeling and cycling) and therefore any retention of them will make a positive contribution to reducing the carbon footprint of travel in Highland, contributing to the Council's response to the Climate and Ecological Emergency.
- 3.5 **Risk** - Some disruption to road users has occurred following implementation of measures – it is inevitable that the reallocation of road space will disbenefit vehicular traffic, but it is considered the network performs acceptably with the measures in place. Given that there is a clear transport hierarchy focusing on active modes over cars set out in National Transport Strategy and the Council's Climate and Ecological Emergency declaration, there is a reputational risk to the Council of not retaining measures, given their clear improvement to sustainable transport infrastructure in the city. Risks of specific options are set out in section 6 below.
- 3.6 **Gaelic** – there are no implications.

4. Background

- 4.1 In response to the Covid-19 pandemic the Highland Council secured £1.9M from Scottish Government's 'Spaces for People' fund to implement immediate measures to ensure that people could walk, wheel or cycle whilst physically distancing and remaining safe from traffic in settlements across the Highland area.

- 4.2 A broad range of measures were implemented in Inverness, from simple vegetation clearance and path reinstatement on key routes, to installation of temporary bike lanes and paths in high footfall areas. There will remain a positive legacy for walking, wheeling and cycling as a result of the extensive minor interventions made, such as formalising footpaths and removing physical barriers to active travel. There is also a legacy of experience and evidence of temporary reallocation of road space that is discussed further below.
- 4.3 A consultation portal was created to enable stakeholders and the public to comment on interventions. This was regularly monitored and remained open for over a year, enabling officers to make amendments to temporary measures to ensure they were fit for purpose for all users.
- 4.4 During the implementation of the project, the Scottish Government published a new National Transport Strategy. This document sets out the national transport hierarchy, which prioritises active and sustainable modes:

Prioritising Sustainable Transport



It also explains how Scotland will tackle the Climate and Ecological Emergency through reducing carbon emissions from transport. The focus continues on transforming transport to healthier, more sustainable modes, such as the [recently published target](#) to reduce the number of kilometres travelled by car by 20% by 2030.

- 4.5 The City of Inverness Area Committee approved the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2: Main Issues Report for consultation in November 2020. This document sets out an ambitious new transport strategy for the Plan area that aligns with national policy and responds to the Climate and Ecological Emergency by transforming the transport network.
- 4.6 The Spaces for People project, whilst primarily a response to a public health crisis, has given the Council unprecedented experience of reallocating road space to a wider range of transport modes, beyond motor vehicles. This has enabled officers to test and measure the benefit and impact of interventions possible to support people in Highland to make healthier, more sustainable travel choices that respond to the Climate and Ecological Emergency.

4.7 Significant efforts are being made to transform the city centre into a vibrant, successful and mixed-use place, where people feel welcomed to live, work, enjoy and do business. Funding has been secured and work is underway to develop plans for city centre recovery from low carbon transport, built environment, placemaking and city marketing perspectives. These work streams point collectively towards the need for a high-quality, safe and attractive environment to support a broad mix of uses that will generate and sustain footfall. It is therefore important that the legacy of the Spaces for People project, and what it has contributed in terms of collective experience, is considered in this recovery context.

5. Progress on Spaces for People

5.1 Members will recall the Spaces for People report presented to the February 2021 meeting of this committee where the results of monitoring were presented in detail and demonstrated that overall, the project has supported low carbon travel without unacceptable impacts on motor vehicles. In summary:-


- data gathered demonstrated that, despite traffic volumes reaching typical levels, the city's transport network continued to function acceptably.
Update: traffic volumes remain at typical levels and there is no evidence of unacceptable impacts as a result of the measures;
- for interventions where monitoring was available, active travel had increased since spaces for people implementation, despite a lot of workplaces and other trip attractors remaining closed.
Update: Data from new transport sensors demonstrates consistency in high footfall, for example in Academy Street in the week beginning 19th July 55% of trips on Academy Street were made by people walking, wheeling or cycling, compared with only 45% of trips by motor vehicle;
- an objective measure of public opinion was gathered through the Consultation Portal and showed a majority support for the four main interventions in Inverness City Centre.
Update: the consultation portal was closed in March 2021, with final data showing majority support for the four-city centre interventions;
- a business survey showed more negative views compared to the wider public, with empirical evidence highlighting a difference between business views and customers' actual travel behaviour.
Update: Officers continue to respond to requests for changes to the interventions to accommodate businesses operational needs.

5.2 Since February measures have been taken to improve the measures to be more legible and less visually intrusive, including replacing red and white water-filled barriers with bolt-down rubber kerb and bollards, improved road markings and green surface treatment on the Millburn Road bike lane. Officers were made aware of trips and falls where rubber kerbs were installed and, as a result, additional road lining and reflective plates have been installed to increase their visibility.


6.0 Options for the future of the interventions

- 6.1 The measures in place have provided an important part of the Council's response to the ongoing pandemic. At this committee's February meeting Members agreed for the city centre interventions to remain in place as long as physical distancing remained government guidance.
- 6.2 At the same meeting Members agreed for Officers to develop design options for permanent street changes in Academy Street and the one-way system around Inverness Castle. Permanent designs were previously agreed to be progressed for the Riverside Way and Millburn Road projects as part of the Inverness City Active Travel Network (ICATN).
- 6.3 There is considerable potential for the four key interventions to contribute to delivering the significant transformational change that is required to support the city's recovery, alongside the smaller measures that also leave a positive legacy. Options for the future of the four measures in the city are presented below.
- 6.4 Should Members decide that one or more of the interventions requires to be removed, a lead-in time of approximately eight weeks will be necessary. This is to enable officers time to procure equipment, such as new signals and columns, and to arrange staff and specialist contractors to install and commission new equipment, as well as removing temporary kit such as bollards and barriers.


6.5

Intervention: Academy Street		
		<p>Description: Bolt-down lane defenders and bollards extend footway to maximise width for people. Two-way vehicular traffic maintained.</p> <p>Status: £800k external funding for permanent design secured; Potential for up to £7M external funding, subject to successful application No TRO required</p> <p>Estimated timescale to permanence: December 2024</p>
Option:	1: Retain measures until permanent scheme delivered, subject to consultation through ICATN project	2: Remove measures, revert to road
Benefits:	Provides improved space for people in one of city's busiest pedestrian streets Earmarks space for permanent improvements General support from business community	Reduced visual impact of temporary kit
Risks:	Temporary materials have aesthetic impacts	Increased traffic impacts from additional lane space: air and noise pollution, Reduced road safety Potential for reduced footfall due to narrow footways and poor pedestrian experience

6.6


Intervention: Riverside Way			
	<p>Description: One-way road system with contraflow bike lane.</p> <p>Status: £1.4M external funding secured for delivery of permanent scheme; Consultation and TRO process for permanent scheme underway by ICATN Team</p> <p>Estimated timescale to permanence: Consultation live now, analysis and committee reporting to follow, with further stage of consultation. ICATN funding deadline for completion: March 2024.</p>		
	<p>Option:</p>	<p>1: Retain measures until permanent scheme delivered</p>	<p>2: Remove measures, revert to two-way road</p>
<p>Benefits:</p>	<p>Provides safer space for all modes Earmarks space for permanent scheme</p>	<p>None</p>	
<p>Risks:</p>	<p>Perception of lack of consultation (currently being addressed by ICATN work)</p>	<p>Reduced road safety for all modes Encourages car travel, discourages active travel</p>	

6.7

Intervention: Castle 1-way system			
	<p>Description: One-way system with segregated bike lane over Ness Bridge, widened footpaths and shared paths around the perimeter of Inverness Castle</p> <p>Status: Initial draft design prepared Potential £50K to bolster temporary measures. Potential to make application for external funding for permanent scheme TTRO in place until 26 Dec 21, requires TRO which would trigger consultation with stakeholders</p> <p>Estimated timescale to permanence: Funding round opens early 2022 and, provided a bid is successful, estimate completion by December 2024</p>		
	<p>Option:</p>	<p>1: Retain measures until permanent scheme delivered, subject to consultation</p>	<p>2: Remove measures, revert to two-way road for Bridge Street, Castle Street and View Place and retain the one way on Castle Road</p>

Benefits:	Provides improved space for people at major and expanding tourist destination Earmarks space for permanent placemaking improvements Offers scope for increased on-street footfall-generating activities and ties in with the short, medium and long term aspirations for the Castle and Upper Bridge Street redevelopment,	Reduces visual impact of temporary materials on Bridge Street, Castle Road and View Place whilst retaining the advantage of more space adjacent to the River and over Ness Bridge.	Reduces visual impact of temporary materials
Risks:	Temporary materials have aesthetic impacts Timescale to permanence not certain Perception of lack of consultation with businesses and other stakeholders	Encourages through-traffic, increasing air and noise pollution, reducing road safety	Encourages through-traffic, increasing air and noise pollution, reducing road safety

6.8

Intervention: Millburn Road			
		<p>Description: City-bound lane provides two-way segregated bike lane from Chieftain Hotel to Eastgate underpass.</p> <p>Status: £6.5M external funding secured for delivery of permanent scheme and integration of bus priority measures</p> <p>Estimated timescale to permanence: December 2024</p>	
Option:	1: Retain measures until permanent scheme delivered, subject to consultation	2: Alter scheme: retain lane from Morrison's junction to Eastgate underpass, revert rest to road	3: Remove measures, revert to city-bound vehicle lane
Benefits:	Provides 2-way route for east-west desire line across city Earmarks space for planned future reallocation	Would increase space for vehicles to queue, addressing perception that bike lane is causing congestion, and will allow future decisions relating to priority bus lanes to be more effectively managed (through the Bus Partnership Fund).	Would increase space for vehicles to queue, addressing perception that bike lane is causing congestion

Risks:	None	Loss of space for safe cycling Increased conflict between pedestrians and cyclists on shared path, particularly post-covid restrictions	Loss of space for safe cycling Increased conflict between pedestrians and cyclists on shared path, particularly post-covid restrictions
---------------	------	--	--

6.8 Members are asked to consider the above options and recommendations from Officers, to allow decisions to be made on whether temporary measures should be retained or amended for the longer term, in line with the benefits set out in the report, or whether an alternative approach should be taken.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

Date: 9 August 2021

Authors: Craig Baxter, Planner
Neil Young, Senior Engineer
Colin Howell, Head of Roads & Infrastructure
Garry Smith, PDU Manager

Background Papers: Spaces for People [Report](#)
Spaces for People & Bus Priority Rapid Development Fund [Report](#)
Spaces for People [Report](#)
Consultation [portal](#)
Walking and Cycling – the economic benefits' Transport for London (TFL) (2018)