

Sheffield City Region Mayoral Combined Authority
11 Broad Street West
Sheffield, S1 2BQ

5 May 2020

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

Dear Prime Minister,

Reimagining Travel Choices – Active Travel and Covid-19

Last week we had a productive discussion about the recovery plans from the Covid-19 pandemic. We welcome your commitment to work with Metro Mayors, in particular the importance transport must play in the renewal of our regions.

We believe walking and cycling should be at the heart of this. The coronavirus provides us a time-limited window to change habits for the better. Rather than return to business as usual, we must seize the opportunity to create a cleaner and greener environment, and healthier citizens. We are writing to set out how the Sheffield City Region stands ready to lead this change, and how support from your Government could unlock the transformation our environment and communities need to see.

The current Covid-19 crisis has taught us many things. The importance of good social networks, the resilience of local communities but also how influential people's travel choices are, in both helping to combat the spread of the virus while ensuring the best recovery for the country, both from an economic but also public health perspective.

The impact of Covid-19 on transport has been profound. Commuting by public transport is down as much as 90% in some of our urban areas. In addition, combined with the reduction in private car use, we have seen air quality levels measurably improve, with more and more people enjoying the benefits of walking and cycling for allowable trips, especially for exercise. Research shows that cleaner air and increasing exercise will increase the resilience of the population to all infections.

We welcome the Department for Transport's support to keep our public transport network operating during this difficult period. Given patronage levels will be unlikely to recover in the short term due to the need to continue with social distancing measures post lockdown, this is likely to mean restricted use of our public transport modes for some time. The risk is that this will drive more people back into cars as the only viable alternative. That is not a risk that we want to take.

We therefore urge you to lead a bold and ambitious expansion of active travel. With social distancing being a new way of life, it is crucial that we provide enough room for people to safely pass each other, and where necessary to quickly mobilise active travel infrastructure trials. We are proposing that there are several ways you could help to do this:

1. Allow more flexibility within existing funds, such as Transforming Cities Fund (TCF), to support infrastructure trials to increase space for active travel, with a view to making these changes permanent.
2. Bring forward the planned investment in cycling and walking infrastructure, announced earlier this year, as part of proactive Covid-19 recovery plans.
3. Encourage local authorities to identify and safeguard space for walking and cycling so that the health and well-being benefits of increased walking and cycling during lockdown will continue.
4. Provide appropriate levels of revenue support to sit alongside planned and announced capital funding for core infrastructure provision.

Just before the lockdown, we had a productive meeting with Andrew Gilligan, who shared our ambitions. As discussed at that meeting, we have recently completed work on our Active Travel Implementation Plan. It confirms our approach, informed by Andrew's advice, of a combination of low traffic neighbourhoods and active travel superhighways. We will make sure every pound of investment in active travel is backed up by the very highest standards.

We were also pleased to subsequently receive confirmation of the Sheffield City Region's £166m Transforming Cities Fund award, of which at least £80m will be spent on delivering our plan. However, this will only go so far in delivering our ambitions and helping to meet the Government's mode shift targets. The proposals set out here will enable us to go further and faster with your support.

Please take this letter as an open offer to support you deliver the Government's active travel aspirations. In the meantime, we are ready to lead the recovery, by taking bold steps to give more space for our new walkers and cyclists.

With our very best wishes,



Dan Jarvis MBE MP
Mayor, Sheffield City Region Mayoral Combined Authority



Dame Sarah Storey
Active Travel Commissioner

Cc Chris Heaton-Harris MP
Andrew Gilligan