

Spaces for People: lessons learned



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To find out more, please contact: spacesforpeople@sustrans.org.uk

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Cover photo credit: Julie Howden/Sustrans. Location: Candleriggs, Clackmannanshire. Intervention: Street closure.

2. Programme overview

Spaces for People was a temporary infrastructure programme funded by Transport Scotland and administered by Sustrans Scotland. The programme was an emergency response to provide space to physically distance and protect public health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There were three essential criteria for Spaces for People projects:

1. Projects must provide temporary walking, wheeling and cycling infrastructure that helps to **protect public health**. This includes enabling safe physical distancing for essential journeys and exercise for everyone, particularly where there are space constraints.
2. Projects should focus on **essential journeys**, including to and from hospitals and health services; to shops, pharmacies and schools for key workers; and for recommended exercise, for example, in neighbourhoods and local parks.
3. Projects should be delivered **quickly** and have an **immediate benefit**.

Measures delivered by programme partners across Scotland included:

- Pavement and path widenings
- Temporary cycle lanes and cycle lane upgrades
- Speed limit reduction measures
- Pedestrian crossing upgrades

2.2 Lessons learned

The Spaces for People programme was implemented rapidly in emergency circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic. This document provides an opportunity to learn from the rollout of temporary active travel infrastructure on a large scale in Scotland. These lessons are relevant for both Sustrans and partners delivering active travel infrastructure. Although some of the lessons are solely pertinent to future temporary infrastructure projects, some are also relevant for broader active travel programmes.

For information on the impact of the Spaces for People programme see [the main evaluation report](#).

3. Recommendations for future programmes

The Spaces for People programme was launched near the start of the COVID-19 pandemic with the key priority being to rapidly provide additional space for people to physically distance. It may not have been possible to carry out all recommendations and maintain rapid delivery in the case of Spaces for People. These recommendations are aimed towards future programmes, being delivered at pace, but not being delivered in an emergency situation such as in May 2020.

3.2 Ensure accessibility for all through high quality Equality Impact Assessments

Ensuring measures are accessible for everyone must be a consistent priority for any future programmes, including those with temporary infrastructure. Expectations around procedures and standards related to accessibility should be made clear, to ensure that Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) are conducted early in the process and kept live throughout. Thorough EqIAs must be conducted for both temporary and permanent infrastructure to ensure designs are fit for purpose and work for everyone.

3.3 Develop a robust communications strategy

Alongside local communication, future programmes should have an overarching communications strategy that shares the broad principles and intentions behind the programme and makes a case for why the changes being implemented are needed. If the programme involves trial infrastructure, communication about this needs to be clear, and should state the possibility of future improvements, alterations or removals.

3.4 Share information with communities prior to implementation

Even if a measure is temporary, communities should always be provided with information, ahead of time, about changes that are to be made in their local area. This should include reasons for the changes, clear timelines for delivery where possible, and information about mechanisms for providing feedback. This communication needs to be delivered via multiple channels to reach as many people as possible. This communication is distinct from engaging directly with communities about the measures.

3.5 Engage local communities

A minimum standard for engagement and consultation should be set and made clear at programme level. This should be an important step in future processes – even for

programmes delivered at pace. Some places or schemes might benefit from more thorough engagement based on past experiences of delivering infrastructure and working with communities.

The changes to Experimental Traffic Regulation Orders (ETROs) in Scotland in November 2021 could mean that more ETROs are used for future temporary and trial active travel infrastructure. Unlike Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders (TTROs), which were often used for implementing Spaces for People measures, ETROs include a set process for consultation that would need to be followed as a minimum standard.

3.6 Improve the appearance of temporary measures

The appearance of infrastructure matters to the local community. Future projects delivering temporary or trial measures should consider this alongside budgets, road safety standards and timeframes. Items like wooden and stone planters tended to be more popular than items similar to those used for roadworks, such as cones or red and white water-filled barriers.

3.7 Continue collaborative working

One of the positives coming out of the Spaces for People programme was the development of closer working relationships and increased collaboration within and between organisations. In many cases, colleagues from different teams came together to work on and deliver Spaces for People projects on time. This worked well, and collaborative ways of working should be adopted and encouraged for future projects to ensure best use of available expertise. Any future programmes should continue to provide mechanisms to support collaboration and shared learning between partner organisations.

4. Key successes

4.2 Collaboration and communication within and between organisations

Closer working relationships formed within and between partner organisations while delivering Spaces for People projects. Sustrans held online Spaces for People knowledge sharing events and facilitated ways for partners to share questions. Increased collaboration enabled decisions to be made quickly and relationships between organisations to form or improve. Online events were better attended than equivalent in-person events prior to the pandemic. Partner organisations were able to learn from one another when implementing similar schemes.

4.3 Using temporary measures as trials

Spaces for People measures were intended to be temporary in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some partners took the opportunity to deliver measures that both provided space to physically distance during COVID-19 and acted as trials ahead of installing future permanent active travel infrastructure in the area. Using the infrastructure as a trial was also a way of engaging the public in a conversation about the area. This has led to some measures being made permanent or has contributed ideas for future projects. Permanent projects will be managed by local authorities or delivered through the Scottish Government Places for Everyone permanent active travel infrastructure programme.

4.4 Rapid rollout

The Spaces for People funding gave partners the opportunity to quickly put in place measures to support essential active travel. Those receiving the funds could start work rapidly, which was a core requirement of the programme. Some partners that chose measures that were easily put in place – for example, the reallocation of street parking for pavement widening – were able to deliver changes within the first few months of the scheme opening.

The speed of delivery is presented here as a key success because a lot of infrastructure was put in place in a short period of time, and this was one of the core aims of the programme. However, the timeline was also a challenge in some places.

5. Challenges and limitations

5.2 Rapid rollout and limited implementation timeline

The urgent nature of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that the Spaces for People programme had to be rolled out rapidly in order to deal with the immediate risk of increasing viral transmission. However, in some cases the timescale for delivery was a challenge and impacted other elements, such as design ambition and levels of consultation.

5.3 Design ambition

The tight timescale of the programme meant some partners were unable to put together comprehensive designs and funding bids that matched their ambitions in the time available, and others, having been granted funding, struggled to deliver all of their planned measures within the timescale.

5.4 Consultation and communication

The need for rapid delivery affected the level and quality of consultation in many cases. Several partners that conducted more thorough consultation processes struggled to deliver changes within the programme timeframe, leading to interventions being cut back. Furthermore, some measures that were implemented after extensive engagement with the public seemed out of date or excessive because COVID-19 restrictions had been relaxed or lifted by the time projects were completed.

In other cases, due to the restricted timeframe, only a limited amount of public communication, consultation and engagement was carried out prior to and during the implementation of measures. Stakeholders, such as local residents and businesses, expected to be consulted.

In the circumstances, it is possible that the challenge was not primarily a lack of consultation but rather a low level of information and communication prior to some of the schemes being implemented, related to the rapid rollout of the programme. Temporary infrastructure has the potential to be used as a trial, with public consultation conducted once the infrastructure is in place. However, this approach requires clear communication to avoid the feeling that measures are being imposed upon communities. Local communities need to be informed about what is happening, why it is happening, and how they can give their views on the changes.

5.5 Procurement challenges

Construction materials and contractors were both in short supply because of the pandemic and this supply issue was compounded by high demand for such materials from many local authorities delivering active travel projects across the UK. Construction items such as wands¹, orcas², signs, poles, cycle lane defenders and black-and-white bollards sold out across the UK. The price of materials increased because of the shortages, and island locations faced higher delivery costs. There was limited choice of materials available at times during the pandemic, and some partners resorted to using traffic management infrastructure (such as cones) in the meantime. This had an impact on the appearance and overall public reception of some of these measures.

¹ Wands: Flexible highly visible plastic bollards which can be used to indicate a cycle lane to other users.

² Orcas: Rubber intermittent kerbs which can be used to mark out a cycle lane and allow for easy maintenance/ cycle access. Examples available at: <https://www.lambeth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Orcas-and-wands.pdf> [Accessed 6th September 2022]