



University of
Salford
MANCHESTER



**Healthy
Active
Cities**

Active Neighbourhoods in Greater Manchester

Summary and Recommendations

Harriet Larrington-Spencer
Graeme Sherriff
Alan Price



Transport for
Greater Manchester

Executive Summary

Active neighbourhoods are being introduced across Greater Manchester as part of the Bee Network. These are places where people are prioritised over vehicles and are part of a policy landscape that seeks to connect people, place and mobility and to develop local neighbourhoods where people can enjoy walking and cycling with confidence. They are intended to support a shift away from high levels of private car use and a dependence on car ownership. Supporting active travel will have cross-benefits in terms of tackling climate change, reducing air pollution, cutting congestion, boosting social inclusion, and fostering physical and mental health benefits of physical activity in the population.

In this research, active neighbourhoods are a lens through which to understand the implementation of walking and cycling interventions from the perspectives of diverse communities; develop a qualitative baseline of perceptions of active neighbourhoods and behaviours relating to them; and add to the evidence base on effective strategies for increasing rates of active travel.

For this research four case study active neighbourhoods were selected, reflecting implementation in different districts, different funding sources and different timescales and processes. These were Trinity and Islington Active Neighbourhood (Salford), Levenshulme Active Neighbourhood (Manchester), Garside Hey Road Low Traffic Neighbourhood (Bury) and Cheadle Heath Active Neighbourhood (Stockport). Fieldwork was conducted from January to June 2021 and incorporated a number of methods, including walkalong interviews, conducted both in person and virtually, and focus group and reference group discussions. As the research was undertaken within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, methods were adapted to ensure that they adhered to relevant rules regarding in-person contact and social distancing. In total, 22 resident walkalongs were conducted across the four case study active neighbourhoods, as well as focus groups with older people and reference groups with active neighbourhood and public health professionals. Findings in relation to this research are discussed in terms of resident experiences (Chapter 5) and perceptions of active neighbourhoods (Chapter 6), processes of implementation (Chapter 7), monitoring and evaluation (Chapter 8) and processes of communication (Chapter 9).

Experiences

The experiences of walkalong participants of their active neighbourhoods were discussed in terms of both active travel and the neighbourhoods themselves, contextualised within the context of Covid-19 and the sequential

lockdowns that occurred within Greater Manchester. What became apparent through these discussions is that, unlike the division that is portrayed within news and social media of a 'war' between a supportive cycling community and an unsupportive car lobby in active neighbourhood or low traffic neighbourhood (LTN) interventions, the reality is much more nuanced. For whilst people who participated in the walkalongs who both cycle and walk for local journeys were commonly supportive of active neighbourhoods, people who walk for their local journeys tended to be unsupportive or more ambivalent towards active neighbourhood interventions. Unlike the position that is purported on social media and elsewhere that people who are unsupportive of active neighbourhoods want to drive for local journeys, walkalong participants in this research who were unsupportive commonly did not own a car or had specifically moved to an area because of its walkability and did not use a vehicle for short journeys. This indicates either that there may be more recognisable benefits of active neighbourhood interventions – in their current form within Greater Manchester – to people who cycle or that people who cycle can more easily see benefits of active neighbourhoods to themselves and, potentially, to their neighbours.

Perceptions

When discussing perceptions of active neighbourhoods, participants expressed a range of concerns in relation to potential inequalities. These included spatial inequalities related to the impact of active neighbourhoods on their boundary roads and specifically on air quality on these roads. The research also demonstrated the extent to which residents placed different values on the installation of planters and the implications for feelings of gentrification and ghettoisation. The contrast between these two perspectives was interesting and may reflect the extent to which residents engage with wider discussions on active neighbourhoods and LTNs using social media.

Disabled and older people reflected on mobility challenges and emphasised that active neighbourhoods in their current form do not necessarily improve pedestrian conditions. Concerns relating to this perception were compounded by the perception that active neighbourhoods are interventions that benefit those who cycle, rather than people who are interested in active travel in a broader sense. A further inequality discussed by participants was that the current approach to School Streets, which relies upon parent and guardian volunteers, will result in uneven implementation due to the social capital required to navigate the administrative processes, as well as the likelihood that volunteer labour would be

gendered, since women are commonly responsible for the school run. Concerns regarding inequalities were expressed across the participant group, irrespective of whether participants were supportive, unsupportive or ambivalent. Those who were supportive of schemes and identified inequalities tended to understand active neighbourhoods as a small part of an overall approach to supporting modal shift within Greater Manchester, with interventions necessitating an iterative and reactive approach. Monitoring and evaluation were considered particularly integral to this process.

Processes of Implementation

Frustrations with processes of the implementation of active neighbourhoods across the case study areas were common to the walkalongs, irrespective of the participants' positions on the schemes. In general, participants expressed frustration with regard to what they perceived as poor implementation of active neighbourhood infrastructure, such as positioning that enabled vehicle drivers to use pavements to bypass filters, signage type (using 'Road Closed' rather than 'No Through Road', for example) or missing signage, or schemes undertaken despite the fact that navigation systems had not been updated. A related issue was authorities being slow or unresponsive in resolving issues that were resulting from the processes of implementation. An additional frustration was that, whilst participants recognised that statutory processes of consultation with emergency services were happening, emergency service personnel on the ground did not seem to know about the changes. Whilst wider evidence from London shows that LTNs do not necessarily extend emergency service response times, it should be recognised that many people rely upon swift responses from emergency services to stay alive and well and better communication is necessary to allay their fears. Frustrations with processes of implementation not only impacted upon resident experiences of active neighbourhoods but also influenced perceptions of active neighbourhoods beyond the area of each scheme. Additionally, they led to concerns amongst residents that the implementing authorities do not have the capacity or the commitment to successfully implement the schemes.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The monitoring and evaluation of the active neighbourhoods within Greater Manchester was a concern raised by participants during almost all resident walkalongs across all four case study areas, irrespective of whether walkalong participants supported the implementation of their respective active neighbourhoods. Participants were interested in the impacts of active neighbourhoods, positive and negative, and sought data that would aid an understanding of the potential inequalities arising from their implementation and could be utilised to support iterative design processes to refine and improve interventions. What participants perceived as inadequacies in monitoring and evaluation, particularly

when they compared measurement methods with those undertaken for LTNs in London, further undermined trust in the capacity of councils and highways teams to both successfully implement active neighbourhoods and be able to assess whether they were a positive intervention for their local community.

Communication

Processes of communication on active neighbourhoods within Greater Manchester have involved formal communications by teams implementing the schemes – through mechanisms that include mailouts and social media – as well as informal communications, whereby residents have communicated among themselves, largely, within the Covid-19 context, through social media and a limited number of community engagement events. Resident communication on social media, particularly Twitter, has transcended the individual schemes: the use of Twitter has enabled discussions of experiences between and across the areas. With regard to formal communications, participants expressed concerns with their provision, particularly in terms of online methods, in relation to a lack of accessibility and processes of digital exclusion. Social media was seen by research participants to play a role in developing informal networks, in either support or opposition. However, many participants, particularly those who were ambivalent towards the implementation of active neighbourhoods, found the online environment 'toxic', and this both put them off using social media as a tool for accessing information and also led to drawbacks for active neighbourhoods as a result of seeing them, in a more general sense, as divisive interventions.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations for the development and implementation of active neighbourhoods have been developed in relation to the research findings:

- Inclusive design
 - Engage with disabled and older people's groups
 - Prohibit pavement parking
 - Conduct inclusive walking audits
 - Provide School Streets as a local authority service
- Communication and engagement
 - Ensure consistent communication and engagement
 - Provide training for community groups on effective and inclusive engagement
 - Ensure information is inclusive and accessible
- Monitoring and evaluation
 - Develop and clearly communicate monitoring and evaluation plans
 - Create an active neighbourhood professionals' forum
 - Develop a research portfolio to support implementation and evaluation

Recommendations

■ Inclusive design

- Engage with disabled and older people's groups
- Prohibit pavement parking
- Conduct inclusive walking audits
- Provide School Streets as a local authority service

■ Communication and engagement

- Ensure consistent communication and engagement
- Provide training for community groups on effective and inclusive engagement
- Ensure information is inclusive and accessible

■ Monitoring and evaluation

- Develop and clearly communicate monitoring and evaluation plans
- Create an active neighbourhood professionals' forum
- Develop a research portfolio to support implementation and evaluation

Inclusive active neighbourhood design

Engage with disabled and older people's groups

Active neighbourhoods within Greater Manchester offer an opportunity to build – from the neighbourhood scale up – inclusive environments for living, moving and being. The deployment of modal filters incorporates the use of a time tax to disincentivise particular journeys. Recognising that this can compound pre-existing time burdens that many people already experience due to disability, illness or age, the needs of disabled and older people must be more centrally positioned within the development of active neighbourhoods. Doing so also recognises that many disabled and older people want to access their local areas actively but that the current urban environment is often not conducive to this (see recommendations 1.1.2 and 1.1.3). Groups and organisations made up of and representing older people and disabled people should be engaged with throughout the development of active neighbourhoods, recognising that inclusive and accessible active neighbourhood design will benefit all residents and society more broadly.

Example: A collaborative project in Whalley Range, Manchester, between residents, the [Age-Friendly Whalley Range and Chorlton Forum](#) and the City Council saw the installation of 12 benches. The locations of the benches were chosen in consultation with older people to ensure that they are in locations that both support activity and provide social seating.

Prohibit pavement parking

Walkalongs and focus group discussions highlighted the continued importance of pavements for walking within active neighbourhoods, including on filtered roads. The importance of pavements was particularly central to the mobility needs of disabled, mobility impaired and older people. However, the continued presence of pavement parking creates obstructions and reduces the viability of active neighbourhoods for making local journeys on foot. A lack of action on pavement parking also contributed to perceptions that active neighbourhoods are cycling interventions, with many participants perceiving them to improve road conditions for people cycling but not pavement conditions for people walking. Pavement parking should be prohibited within active neighbourhoods in order to ensure that all forms of active travel are supported.

Example: Pavement parking is prohibited across the 32 London boroughs, and the City of London and all councils in London can enforce this. When enforced, this ensures that pavements within active neighbourhoods/LTNs retain their role as a walking infrastructure. Traffic regulation orders (TROs) can be implemented by local authorities within Greater Manchester – from street level up to the city-region scale – to prohibit pavement parking.

Conduct inclusive walking audits

The vision behind active neighbourhoods was often well received by participants, with the local neighbourhood considered to be an essential space not only to access services but also to exercise and socialise. However, many participants, particularly older people and disabled people, reported that walking infrastructures – including poor

pavement conditions and a lack of dropped kerbs – were physically preventing them from safely accessing their local area. This reduced their ability to benefit from active neighbourhoods and further contributed to perceptions that active neighbourhoods are cycling interventions. Implementing authorities need to integrate a robust process of auditing into active neighbourhood design that takes account of the diverse challenges that existing walking infrastructures pose to residents and seeks to resolve accessibility issues within design and intervention.

Example: Transport for All – a pan-impairment organisation focusing on the right of disabled and older people to travel with freedom and independence – is working with Living Streets to audit **Footways**, a network of quiet and interesting streets for walking in London. Accessibility audits establish how well a particular environment works in terms of access and use by a wide range of potential users, such as disabled and visually impaired people.

Provide School Streets as a local authority service

School Streets have had demonstrable success in supporting parents and children to undertake journeys to and from school actively. Supporting children to be active will have positive outcomes for their current and future health and wellbeing. School Streets can be an element of an active neighbourhood, as well as a conceivable stepping-stone within their development, since they allow

residents to experience road space reallocations and street closures. Current approaches to School Streets, both within active neighbourhoods and across Greater Manchester, are limited in scope and risk inequalities in provision when emphasis is placed on voluntary efforts by parents and schools. Local authorities and transport authorities need to work with schools to develop a programme of School Streets as council-run services.

Example: **The Waltham Forest School Streets project** has 10 School Street zones covering 43 roads. Waltham Forest Council has committed to only introducing School Streets when they use automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) camera enforcement. Whilst this increases the cost of scheme implementation, it reduces reliance on volunteers and school staff to manually implement schemes using barriers. **Granted from December 2021**, Greater Manchester authorities now have the power to use ANPR to enforce School Streets, and there is potential, if School Streets are provided at an area level, to reduce costs by moving ANPR cameras between streets.



Communication and engagement

Ensure consistent communication and engagement

The climate crisis, air pollution and declining levels of physical activity are growing challenges within the city-region, and current levels of car use across Greater Manchester cannot therefore be sustained. Active neighbourhoods have a significant role within Greater Manchester's Bee Network and Transport Strategy 2040 in moving towards the goal that 50% of all journeys are made by walking, cycling and public transport by 2040. Current processes across Greater Manchester, however, do not adequately connect active neighbourhoods to these wider challenges or to the physical infrastructures across the region that will support these changes, for example, protected and networked cycle lanes or upcoming bus franchising. Additionally, as road space reallocations necessitate changing the way people use space and our confidence in doing this intersects with experiences, opportunities and multiple forms of privilege, this needs to be accounted for in processes of communication about, and visioning of, what active neighbourhoods will look like.

TfGM, local authorities, council officers and local councillors need to ensure consistent communication and engagement across Greater Manchester on the vision of active neighbourhoods and their importance for walking, cycling, health and placemaking. This should also include understanding and responding to the concerns of residents, an example being working with emergency services to ensure that TROs and official positions relating to active neighbourhoods – and road space reallocations more broadly – filter down to people-facing staff and responders.

Example: **Our Streets Chorlton** worked with residents on two streets in Chorlton, Manchester, to create a week of open streets in which a full programme of activities was developed in order to gain support from local residents and communities by supporting people with reimagining alternatives that could be achieved if streets were closed to through traffic.

Provide training for community groups on effective and inclusive engagement

Community groups within Greater Manchester have a significant role in the development and communication of active neighbourhoods across the region. Recognising this role, TfGM and relevant partners should work with communication and engagement professionals to develop a training workshop that can be used to empower community groups to inclusively engage with their local communities across all stages of active neighbourhoods, from conception to post-implementation. This workshop should include training in social media, considering the role that it has in facilitating the dissemination of information by implementing authorities and providing a space for community engagement and discussion. Such training

would also be of value to local authorities, transport authorities and other delivery organisations.

Ensure information is inclusive and accessible

Access to information on active neighbourhoods is important for engagement in consultation processes, as well as enabling residents to understand interventions in a timely and comprehensive manner so that they can plan and manage any changes that are necessary. The central focus upon online resources – recognising that this has been an outcome of the Covid-19 pandemic and reflects the necessity of limiting non-essential contact – excludes those who do not have digital access or are not digitally literate. Online resources that were provided, however, were commonly considered by research participants as problematic for multiple reasons, including being limited in scope, not being updated, the use of technical language, not being accessible in terms of use with screen readers, and the provision of scheme maps without written descriptions. Implementing authorities and organisations need to recognise the existence of digital exclusion and ensure that information is provided offline. Online resources will continue to be important, but these need to be comprehensive, timely and accessible.

Example: **Scope** is a disability equality charity in England and Wales, and website accessibility is embedded within the charity's everyday equality strategy. Scope's website has been developed taking into account best-practice web accessibility guidelines – **WCAG 2.0**, **WCAG 2.1** and **BS 8878** – and is tested for accessibility every three months. Additionally, clear instructions are given to support users with how to adapt their own technology settings to better access the website, provide an overview of known accessibility issues that are in the process of being resolved and give updates on recent accessibility problems and their resolution. A contact form is also provided to support user feedback on accessibility.

Monitoring and evaluation

Develop and clearly communicate monitoring and evaluation plans

Monitoring and evaluation of active neighbourhood trials is important in order to demonstrate the impacts of interventions, as well as to provide insights into what is and is not working in order to develop and refine interventions. Concerns regarding the monitoring and evaluation of active neighbourhood schemes within Greater Manchester were raised by participants irrespective of their position on these interventions, with perceptions of uncoordinated and insufficient implementation of monitoring methods and an absence of objectives considered central to these concerns. Moving forward, active neighbourhoods need to have timely, clear and well-communicated monitoring and evaluation plans that are consistent across Greater Manchester. The approach to monitoring should be expanded to incorporate more experience-based perspectives, as

discussed within the Active Neighbourhood Working Group, recognising the tendency of current methods to focus upon vehicles rather than human-centred experiences of the neighbourhoods.

Example: The Inclusive Transport Strategy was launched by the Department for Transport in 2018 with a **framework for monitoring and evaluation**. The framework was established recognising that monitoring and evaluation is essential to learn lessons, understand changes and demonstrate results. The framework consists of metrics and methods of measurement and evaluation. The framework itself is publicly available to ensure understanding of, and accountability to, monitoring and evaluation processes.

Create an active neighbourhood professionals' forum

Within Greater Manchester, active neighbourhoods are a neighbourhood-level intervention that will contribute to the Bee Network, as well as working towards the goal of the Transport Strategy 2040 that 50% of journeys in Greater Manchester will be made using sustainable travel modes by 2040. Whilst active neighbourhoods are being implemented by their respective local authorities, their success is connected to being part of a networked approach to supporting active travel. A Greater Manchester-wide active neighbourhood professionals' forum should be established that will allow the development of best-practice approaches to interventions.

Example: Within this research a small active neighbourhood reference group was established to share learnings and experiences between those working on active neighbourhood interventions. This group should be continued, and its membership extended as appropriate.

Develop a research portfolio to support implementation and evaluation

Research is important not only for understanding the impacts of active neighbourhoods but also for understanding processes involved in consultation and implementation. In developing such insights, research can contribute to the iterative development of interventions to ensure they meet the needs of residents and contribute to wider active travel goals and healthy placemaking. Moving forward, research should seek to understand not only experiences of the active neighbourhoods themselves but also those of any complementary infrastructures that may be introduced: for example, side road zebras. Research should also follow interventions that seek to support people to be active within their local neighbourhood, recognising that the provision of infrastructures to support this is just one element in getting people walking and cycling for transport. Such research should recognise the lived inequalities in gaining access, specifically those related to gender, ethnicity, age and disability.



This research has been jointly funded by Transport for Greater Manchester and University of Salford (Higher Education Innovation Fund). The project was devised collaboratively with ongoing involvement of both organisations. The analysis, conclusions and recommendations presented in this report are the independent work of the academic team and do not necessarily represent the position of Transport for Greater Manchester.

Authors

Harriet Larrington-Spencer
Dr Graeme Sherriff
Dr Alan Price
School of Health and Society, University of Salford

This report is available online at:

<http://usir.salford.ac.uk/id/eprint/62322> (full version)

<http://usir.salford.ac.uk/id/eprint/62321> (executive summary and recommendations)

SHUSU
SUSTAINABLE HOUSING
& URBAN STUDIES UNIT

**Healthy
Active
Cities** 

www.salford.ac.uk/healthyactivecities
@ActiveCitiesUoS

ISBN 978-1-912337-56-9