

# COVID-19: Leicestershire County Council's Approach to Transport Recovery



*Please keep a  
safe distance  
from each other  
wherever possible*

**CORONAVIRUS** PROTECT YOURSELF & OTHERS



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# Purpose of this document

This document sets out the work that Leicestershire County Council, as the Local Transport Authority, is undertaking to support travel around Leicestershire during the continuing pandemic. It sets out the general approach to transport recovery and is not scheme specific.

This document does not consider long-term transport policy. We have much to learn from and understand about the wide-ranging impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic before we can make informed judgements about the future direction of our policies.

This document is an update of our previous Approach to Recovery, published in June 2020, which sets out our approach to travel in the immediate aftermath of the national lockdown (23rd March to 1st June 2020), and should be read in conjunction with that document.

It is currently anticipated that a further update of the document will not be prepared until Autumn 2021 at the earliest.

## Developments between 1st June and 5th November 2020

On 1st June, primary schools began to reopen, and car showrooms and outdoor markets resumed business. Non-essential shops were permitted to reopen from 15th June. Hospitality and leisure facilities which could meet Covid-19 safety requirements such as social distancing reopened from 4th July.

Throughout August, the Government offered financial support to enable cafés and restaurants to offer 50% off meals for customers eating in. This aimed to smooth customer numbers across the week, avoiding potential capacity issues associated with weekend peaks, and to encourage people to support the hospitality industry. Some establishments decided to extend these offers through September.

Schools began holding in-person classes for pupils in all age groups at the start of the of September, while Universities began to deliver courses in a mixture of online and in-person formats.

On 14th September, the Government announced a new 'rule of 6', under which people in England are forbidden from meeting in groups of more than 6 unless covered by an exemption. Exemptions include attending weddings or funerals, work, and education.

Continuing high levels of coronavirus infections led to further restrictions being announced on 22nd September. Under these restrictions, hospitality venues must close by 10pm, and businesses face tighter requirements for making premises Covid-secure. Business conferences, exhibition halls, and large sporting events remain closed.

Despite these restrictions, it became apparent that the UK was heading towards a 'second wave' of coronavirus infections. In response to this, on 12th October Government introduced a three-tier system aimed at reducing the number of infections and minimising the impacts of the second wave.

Under this system, local authority areas and regions were assigned a risk level. This risk level determined the severity of restrictions in that area, and the level of Government support available. The announcement of the tier system did not affect the restrictions placed on Leicestershire, due to the number of coronavirus cases and existing restrictions in the County.

Throughout the changing restrictions, schools and universities remained open, customers were required to wear face coverings inside shops and businesses unless covered by a specific exemption, and social distancing guidance had to be observed.

## **November and December 2020 - second national lockdown and subsequent restrictions**

On 31st October, the Government announced a second national lockdown in England, to begin on 5th November and last until 2nd December.

Unlike the March lockdown, schools and universities remained open. However, all hospitality, non-essential retail, and other businesses whose staff cannot work from home were required to shut for the whole lockdown period, indoor and outdoor exercise facilities will be closed, and mixing between households was banned.

From 3rd December, the tier system was reintroduced, and expanded to include a fourth tier in which non-essential businesses were required to remain closed.

Mixing between households was banned. This ban was lifted for areas in tiers one to three to allow up to 6 people from no more than 3 households to meet indoors on Christmas Day.

## **January to March 2021 - third national lockdown**

On 4th January 2021, the Government announced a further lockdown, in response to rising numbers of coronavirus cases and increasing pressure on the NHS.

During this third lockdown, schools and universities were closed in addition to all non-essential retail, hospitality, and other businesses. A 'stay at home' order was imposed, under which people were permitted to leave home only for specific reasons such as buying essential goods (e.g. food and medicine) or to take exercise in their local area.

Regarding travel, advice from Government since the lifting of the original lockdown restrictions in June has been, and continues to be, that, in all areas, people should avoid travelling by passenger transport if possible. People who can work from home are asked to carry on working from home and avoid travelling for work.

# The roadmap out of lockdown

The Government's plan to ease lockdown restrictions (known as The roadmap out of lockdown) was published on 22nd February 2021.

At the time of printing:

- schools have reopened for all students;
- universities have restarted delivery of practical courses;
- care home residents are allowed one visitor;
- outdoor gatherings of up to either 6 people or 2 households are permitted, including in private gardens;
- formally organised outdoor sports have resumed and outdoor sports facilities have reopened;
- outdoor hospitality such as zoos and theme parks;
- self-contained holiday accommodation such as campsites have reopened;
- non-essential retail, personal care, indoor leisure facilities, and public buildings such as libraries have reopened;
- pubs, cafés, and restaurants have been allowed to reopen for outdoor table service only.

Tentative dates for removal of the remaining restrictions have been set out in the roadmap. However, decisions regarding whether these dates can be met will be based on four tests relating to infection levels, the vaccine rollout programme, and pressures on the NHS.

The sections below set out how transport demand has changed since the easing of lockdown restrictions in June/July, and how Leicestershire County Council is supporting safe travel by all modes as the pandemic continues and as the remaining restrictions are eased.

## Transport demand changes

The graph below illustrates how traffic flows have changed in line with the introduction and easing of the various restrictions up to November 2020. Greater detail regarding traffic flows during the Spring lockdown period can be found in the previous version of this document, published in June 2020.

It is evident that transport demand rose steadily since the lifting of the first national lockdown (figure 1). However, flows remained approximately 11% below the pre-lockdown weekly average.

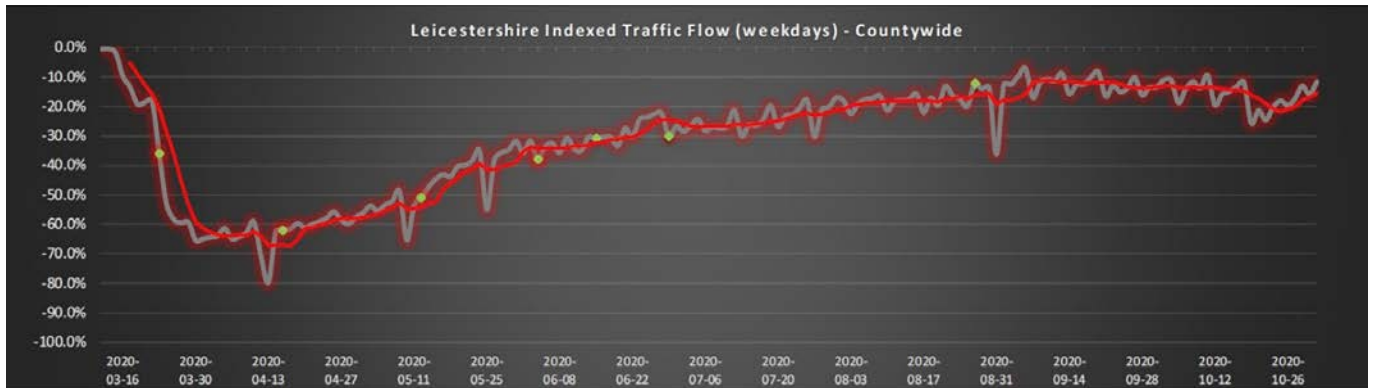


Figure 1: traffic flows between 16 March 2020 and 26 October 2020

The green markers denote:

- start of lockdown 24 March 2020;
- the extension of lockdown for a further three weeks 16 April 2020;
- the relaxation of exercise restrictions 13 May 2020;
- partial reopening of schools 1 June 2020;
- reopening of non-essential retail 15 June 2020;
- Leicester lockdown announcement 29 June 2020;
- reopening of schools for the new school year 26 August 2020.

Although traffic figures dipped again during the second and third national lockdowns, the reduction was much smaller compared to the first national lockdown in March/April 2020 (figure 2). Current traffic flows are approximately 40% lower than pre-pandemic levels.

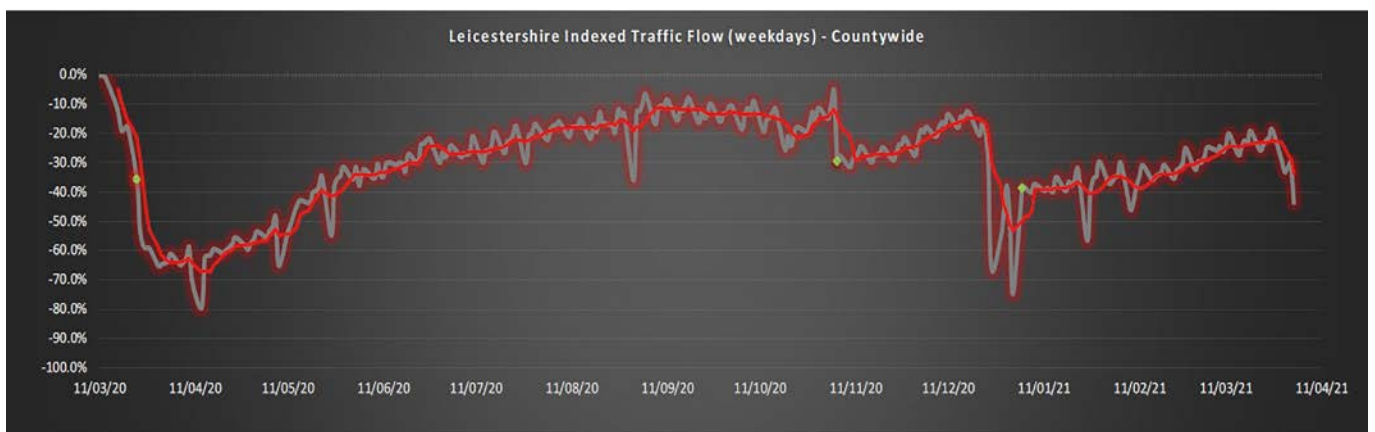


Figure 2: comparison of traffic flows from 11 March 2020 to 1 April 2021

The green markers denote:

- start of first national lockdown 24 March 2020;
- start of second national lockdown 5 November 2020;
- start of third national lockdown 4 January 2021.

# Our overall approach

The County Council is playing a lead role in the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Resilience Forum's Coronavirus Covid19 Recovery Strategy. As the Local Transport Authority, we are working to ensure a consistent and coordinated approach to evolving circumstances, by continuing to:

- prepare consistent messages and guidance to deal with inquiries raised by the public, Members, district and borough authorities, parish councils, etc.;
- lead on the drawing up of potential programmes of measure in response to Government announcements to the easing of lockdown restrictions and associated funding announcements;
- support processes that wherever possible seek to take on views of the public, Members, district and borough authorities, parish councils, etc. in the development of those programmes, given often extremely short Government deadlines;
- deliver agreed and funded measures to support safe travel within the County.

We are also continuing to work with the Resilience Forum to support economic and community recovery through local resilience funding provided by the Department for Transport (DfT).

Our work to manage travel associated with children returning to school was recognised as best practice in a study by the Department for Education. This included:

- street and media advertising;
- signage outside schools;
- direct contact with parents, businesses, and other local stakeholders (e.g. Public Health);
- covid-compliant public events to encourage active travel for work and school.

## Cycling and walking

Walking and cycling, particularly for leisure purposes, increased during the Spring lockdown. The Government is encouraging people to continue travelling by active modes, due to the comparatively low risk of virus transmission and the environmental and physical and mental health benefits.

We are working to ensure that people continue to feel confident travelling on foot or by bicycle as lockdown restrictions are lifted, bearing in mind the fact that lower levels of traffic both on the road and the footway are likely to have been a significant factor in encouraging walking and cycling during the lockdown.

# Emergency Active Travel Fund schemes

Leicestershire County Council received a total allocation of £340,000 from the DfT's Covid-19 Emergency Active Travel Fund, for the delivery of measures to support walking and cycling.

The schemes which have been implemented this funding include:

## **Birstall**

The creation of a temporary cycle corridor on the A6 Loughborough Road in both directions by removing central road markings and narrowing existing traffic islands, and implementing a right-turn ban to improve safety for cyclists.

## **Leicester Forest East**

The existing cycle lane on the A47 Hinckley Road has been extended in both directions by removing central road markings and narrowing existing traffic islands.

## **Market Harborough**

The existing cycle lanes on Kettering Road have been widened. Traffic flow has also been improved, through provision of temporary traffic signals.

We have also introduced new park and pedal facilities, such as public overnight bike shelters and lockers, at Enderby and Meynells Gorse Park and Ride sites, and at County Hall, Glenfield.

# Devolved parish council funding

We have devolved £1million to the parish councils in Leicestershire, to implement local measures to support walking and cycling in their immediate communities, including:

- temporary 20mph zones in many parishes. 20mph zones have been installed or are due to be installed shortly in parishes including Cossington, Countesthorpe, Foxton, Kibworth Beauchamp, Kibworth Harcourt, Scraftoft, Smeeton Westerby, Swannington and Woodhouse. This supports parishes in reducing traffic speeds on a temporary basis in areas where residents would like to walk safely whilst socially distancing;
- vegetation cut back work to help walkers to socially distance along previously overgrown paths. Parishes in Coalville, Arnesby, Claybrook Magna, Claybrook Parva, Kibworth Harcourt and South Kilworth are among those that have had work carried out. More requests for this type of work are currently being processed.

## What we are doing

We are continuing to:

- work with district and borough authorities through the Market Town Group to ensure a coordinated approach to the delivery of measures, focusing particularly on our town centres;
- co-ordinate our approach cross-boundary with Leicester City Council as necessary;
- engage with the DfT to understand future support which may be made available for measures to support travel during the pandemic;
- reviewing the physical measures which we have implemented to ensure that they are appropriate, and amending them where necessary;
- work with our Choose How You Move brand to reinforce messages around walking and cycling and promote travel by these modes over private car use and passenger transport;
- promote the existing walking and cycling infrastructure in the county;
- highlight opportunities to use Park and Ride sites to park and cycle;
- consider how best we can monitor the measures that we implement and collect data to provide evidence to inform future policy and strategy development.



## Car travel

Leicestershire is a predominantly rural county. This means that the private car is often the only practical means of travel for residents living outside of urban centres. This is likely to be the case for more journeys in the short-term, particularly longer journeys, due to concerns regarding passenger transport use during a pandemic and the Government recommendation to avoid using passenger transport where possible.

It is likely that there will continue to be an increase in single-person car journeys and a reduction in car-sharing, as people seek to avoid the risk of spreading Covid-19. We will continue to manage traffic flows as effectively as possible to minimise congestion and maintain the smooth flow of traffic.

## What we are doing

- Carrying out monitoring around schools, using our camera car, to ensure increased car travel is not introducing or exacerbating safety concerns in these areas.
- Working with district councils to ensure that parking charges, including on-street parking controls, are relaxed, reintroduced, or reinforced as appropriate.
- Making use of new Traffic Regulation Order guidance and legislation to introduce measures at short notice.
- Highlighting opportunities to use park and ride sites to park and cycle.



# Passenger transport (including rail)

Passenger transport presents particular challenges in terms of social distancing and maintaining clean surfaces.

However, it will continue to be an essential mode of transport for many people, particularly those who do not have access to a private car and who may have disabilities or whose journeys may be too long to be undertaken on foot or by bicycle.

Government has issued guidance for passengers and operators regarding safe use of passenger transport during the coronavirus pandemic.

## What we are doing

We are continuing to:

- provide continued financial support to operators of our supported bus services at pre-Covid19 levels (even where passenger demand has dropped markedly and/or service provision has been reduced), in line with Government guidance;
- reinforce social-distancing messages through use of real-time information signs and posters in/on buses and in bus shelters;
- work with operators regarding measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19 on passenger transport, including measures to ensure the safety of both drivers and passengers such as;
  - hand sanitisers;
  - additional cleaning;
  - reducing the number of seats available to support social distancing.
- hold discussions with operators regarding service provision, using daily monitoring of traffic levels as an indicator for likely demand;
- undertake routine cleaning of Local Authority bus shelters;
- monitor the impacts of changes to the street environment to support social distancing at bus stops, and make further changes if appropriate;
- work with Leicester City Council to coordinate efforts as service levels begin to increase as lockdown restrictions are eased, including to restart Park and Ride Services at Meynell's Gorse and Enderby. (The site at Birstall continues to be used as a Covid19 testing facility for the time being);
- liaise with rail operators to help to inform and understand ongoing changes to rail service provision in response to changes in Government guidance and advice;



## Other initiatives

The Government's priority focus on recovery is primarily around larger scale economic sectors and the reopening of key services, such as education. However, we recognise that our local communities may need help and assistance too. As set out under 'Devolved Parish Council funding', above, we are reallocating funding for minor transport schemes to villages and lower priority areas that will not be eligible for DfT funding, in order to complement modal shift and demand management.

## Co-ordination and communication

### Co-ordinating with key stakeholders

We are in regular communication with key stakeholders, to ensure that the measures which we are introducing consider work which they are doing to prepare for exiting lockdown. For example, we are liaising with the district councils to facilitate reopening key businesses and shops within the market towns. We are also liaising with Leicester City Council to ensure co-ordination across our boundaries.

### Residents and road-users

In such a rapidly-changing and unfamiliar situation, it is important that residents and road-users know what to expect from the transport system as they start to make more journeys around the county.

We are endeavouring to ensure that everyone living in and travelling to, from, and around Leicestershire can access up-to-date information regarding travel by all modes of transport.

This includes use of social media, our Choose How You Move website, press releases, posters and signage in town centres and at bus shelters etc.



As we emerge from lockdown and progress with recovery, we will continue to review our approach to communications to ensure that we provide clear messages about what we are doing and why.

## Next steps

This document sets out our immediate work to get people moving around the county and support reopening of shops, services, and businesses as lockdown restrictions are lifted.

We are continuing work to understand what longer-term measures may be appropriate, and how these should be captured in our future plans, policies and strategies, such as Local Transport Plan 4. In line with our existing Passenger Transport Policy and Strategy, we will continue to support the commercial sector in encouraging people to return to passenger transport in the medium to long-term as the rate of virus infections decreases and social distancing measures become less necessary.

We also are investigating how we can secure some of the benefits from the Covid-19 pandemic for the future, such as improved air quality and public health due to reduced car travel and increased walking and cycling. Ultimately, what we learn and understand about the transport impacts and changes in travel behaviour resulting from Covid-19 will be a consideration in the development of our future, long term transport policies.

In tandem with this work, we are keeping our approach to communication and information under review, to make sure that residents, businesses, and other stakeholders know how our plans are developing and what specific measures we plan to introduce.

