

Active Travel Network Maintenance Hierarchy

To: Highways and Transport Committee

Meeting Date: 23 January 2024

From: Executive Director of Place and Sustainability

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: Yes

Forward Plan ref: 2024/020

Executive Summary: This report outlines the work in developing standards and approaches to support active travel through highway maintenance. A crucial aspect of this work is establishing an Active Travel Network Hierarchy to provide a basis on which to make network-level and operational decisions. The report sets out changes to the Highways Operational Standards that will support active travel.

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:

- 1) Approve the changes to the Highways Operational Standards that support maintenance for active travel, as set out in Paragraphs 3.4 and 3.5 of this report.

Officer contact: Assistant Director – Highways Maintenance

Name: Jon Munslow

Email: jon.munslow@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

1. Creating a greener, fairer, and more caring Cambridgeshire

This report relates to

- 1.1 Ambition 1. Net Zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2045 and our communities and natural environment are supported to adapt and thrive as the climate changes.

Development and adoption of an Active Travel Network Hierarchy will help support modal shift by making highways safer and more attractive for walking, cycling and wheeling. This will help reduce car use, with resultant reductions in carbon from transport.

- 1.2 Ambition 2. Travel across the county is safer and more environmentally sustainable.

Development and adoption of an Active Travel Network Hierarchy will help support modal shift by making highways safer and more attractive for walking, cycling and wheeling. This will help reduce car use with resultant reductions congestion from transport and promote physical and mental wellbeing.

- 1.3 Ambition 4. People enjoy healthy, safe, and independent lives through timely support that is most suited to their needs.

Making regular journeys on foot or by bike boosts health. Maintaining roads and highways infrastructure in ways that supports active travel helps support health improvement by making walking, cycling and wheeling a more attractive travel choice. Resultant reduction in motor vehicle journeys help reduce traffic congestion, reduce air pollution leading to increased air quality; reduce noise levels which further supports increased physical and mental health and wellbeing.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Council has established an Active Travel Centre of Excellence to accelerate the Council's aims to make travel safer and more sustainable. The effective management of highway infrastructure is a key element towards achieving that aim.

- 2.2 The Council manages and maintains a wide range of assets across a network comprising 4,550km of roads; 2,936km of footways and over 550km of designated cycleways.

- 2.3 Operational decisions relating to the maintenance and management of the highway must be underpinned by a robust network-level, risk-based approach to decision making. This is particularly important when responding to and repairing defects in the highway that are a hazard to road users.

- 2.4 The Council's Highways Operational Standards (HOS) set out the service level standards to be delivered. This includes response action times for various levels of defects. In common with most authorities, the standards for carriageways have been based upon a hierarchy considering motorised vehicle use. Whilst this provides a robust basis for risk-based maintenance decisions, it is not optimised for the support of active travel.

- 2.5 Maintenance hierarchies are a well-established approach for prioritising resource allocation and service delivery towards locations of greatest need and/or strategic importance. They are routinely used for footways and carriageways. However, their use and development as an approach for supporting active travel through the asset management of cycling and wheeling infrastructure or for rights of way is less common.
- 2.6 *Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure*, the national code of practice for highway maintenance for local authorities, recommends the definition of local network hierarchies based on risk; these are typically used, along with specific local factors, for targeting resources and setting maintenance standards, for example:
- For allocating maintenance budgets.
 - For determining inspection frequencies.
 - For determining speed of response to defects.
 - For determining the level of defectiveness that would require maintenance.
 - For setting standards for routine and cyclic maintenance, such as vegetation and grass cutting, gully cleansing.
 - For prioritising planned maintenance schemes.
- 2.7 Following adoption of the active travel maintenance hierarchy, if the Council wishes to do so, maintenance standards will be developed reflecting the Council's ambitions and priorities balanced with resource availability. The resultant hierarchy will be regularly reviewed to ensure it reflects need, use, network growth and change.
- 2.8 The Council has commissioned external advice to help to create a hierarchy for the county's active travel infrastructure and right of way networks to support maintenance that promotes walking, cycling and wheeling. This support is drawing on the Council's own expertise in Highways Asset Management and Active Travel Centre of Excellence to develop the Hierarchy work. Officers are also coordinating with the Greater Cambridge Partnership.
- 2.9 The work so far has resulted in the definition of draft maintenance hierarchy categories. To develop the drafts, a range of available datasets specific to Cambridgeshire and national, publicly available data, have been used.
- 2.10 The approach to prioritising and defining categories will have significant impacts on how budgets are allocated and requires careful consideration. Each section of the road, footway, cycleway and right of way network is allocated a category, based on a consideration of:
1. The **importance** of that section to users
 2. The level of **risk** to users
 3. The **level of use** of that section
- 2.11 The **importance** of a section within a route is a distillation of a range of criteria reflecting proximity to important locations such as schools and hospitals etc. and whether it forms part of a strategic route, such as one identified in the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP).

- 2.12 *Risk* factors consider, for example, whether cyclists are protected from high-speed traffic, or whether there is a higher-than-average older population in an area.
- 2.13 Finally, the *level of use* reflects the current and potential for future volume of cycling, walking or wheeling traffic.
- 2.14 It is proposed to have 6 categories in the walking and wheeling hierarchy, 4 categories in the cycling hierarchy and 3 in the Public Rights of Way hierarchy. This number of categories will enable sufficient categorisation of the network to support operational decisions and actions.
- 2.15 Whilst data is limited, it provides a sound basis to identify initial categories for road sections to enable consultees to consider and respond to the proposals. Appendix 2 sets out the data sets used in the development work.
- 2.16 The draft hierarchies have been developed through an interactive process of data analysis and consultation and review by internal staff. The next steps are to gain the input of key stakeholders and local communities, to fill data gaps, and to validate network categorisation based on the local contexts of location, use and community importance.
- 2.17 The resultant hierarchy will enable the council to better direct available maintenance funding to support active travel. The hierarchy will also support the Council in applications for funding outside of normal maintenance funds through presenting a strategic approach to maintaining for active travel. A key consideration of the hierarchy will be deliverability, ensuring that the resulting maintenance regimes would be practically implementable in a timely manner and within budgets.

3 Main Issues

Changes to the Highways Operational Standards

- 3.1 The HOS set out how the Council manages and maintains the highway infrastructure for which it is responsible. It brings together the Council's and the Combined Authority's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan objectives. The HOS details how the principles of asset management will be used to ensure that the Highways Maintenance Service meets the requirements of its users and delivers value for money.
- 3.2 To ensure active travel is supported through maintenance, some changes to the Definitive Map Modification Order Statement of Priority, and Public Path Order Statement of Priority have been made regarding Public Rights of Way. These are:
- a. The criteria for adoption of new Non-Motorised User (NMU) Routes¹ allocates higher scores to new highways that provide enhanced connectivity and sustainable travel links.

¹ See Appendix 1 (Appendix I of the HOS: Adoption of new NMU routes)

- b. The Definitive Map Modification Order Statement of Priority² enables routes which provide active travel links, and which bring benefits to different types of NMU, to attract higher scores during prioritisation.
- c. The authorisation process for changes to the surface of Public Rights of Way³ has been introduced this year to channel applicants through the correct approval gateways to ensure that enhancements to public rights of way surfaces as part of active travel schemes achieve appropriate stakeholder input.

3.3 Two recent changes to Highway Safety Inspections – Cat 1(1a & 1b)⁴ Defect Investigation levels and Reactive Maintenance Investigatory levels for Category 2 defects have been made under officers' delegated powers and in consultation with the Chair/Vice Chair of this committee.

- d. The addition of a new safety defect so that gaps/cracks on cycleways and footways are now recorded on safety inspections. If risk assessed as Category 1A, these defects will be repaired or made safe within 36 hours, in common with similar defects.
- e. The addition of a Category 2 non safety defects for gaps/cracks in footways and cycleways. These defects will be recorded, and repair requirements added to planned programmes of maintenance work.

These changes will help ensure a safe environment for cyclists and pedestrians, thus encouraging and facilitating active travel.

3.4 The Committee is asked to approve four further changes to the HOS to help align highway maintenance standards to the Council's active travel aspirations. These changes reflect recent changes to operational practice and their formalisation in the standards will further align the highways maintenance policies of the Council with the support of active travel. The changes, as follows, are applicable to all defects within the carriageway that are itemised in the HOS:

- a. Where a defect meeting the investigation level is within 3m of a controlled pedestrian/cycle crossing then it should be assessed as Cat 1A.
- b. Where a defect meeting the investigation level is clearly on the desire line for pedestrians/cyclists crossing the road, or traversing a junction it should be assessed as Cat 1A. A typical example would be where the defect is between dropped kerbs for pedestrian use either side of the carriageway.
- c. Where a carriageway or cycleway defect meets the relevant investigatory level and is 1m or less from the kerb edge, then it should be assessed as Cat 1A.

² See Appendix 1 (Appendix J of the HOS: Definitive Map Modification Order Statement of Priority)

³ See Appendix 1 (Appendix T of the HOS: Change to surface of PROW)

⁴ See Appendix 1 (Appendix A of the HOS: Cat 1 (1a & 1b) Defect Investigation Levels)

- d. Where traffic calming features significantly narrow the road, defects meeting the investigation criteria within the narrowed carriageway should be assessed as Cat 1A.

Category 1A defects are assigned shorter timescales for repair than those categorised as 1B. Such assignment is typically undertaken via an on-site risk assessment, but the importance of defects in these locations is reflected in the removal of the need for such an assessment. These defects will be given higher attention and repaired more quickly. These changes are reflected in Appendix 1 of this report extract of the HOS where they are highlighted in Yellow.

- 3.5 The Committee is also asked to approve a further change to the HOS, to enhance safety for cyclists, which is not current operational practice. This is an enhancement to the above such that:
 - a. Where traffic calming features significantly narrow the road, defects meeting the investigation criteria within the narrowed carriageway **and immediately adjacent, within 3m carriageway area** should be assessed as Cat 1A.

Active Travel Maintenance Hierarchy

- 3.6 The Code of Practice “Well Managed Highways” contains several recommendations to Local Highways Authorities. *Recommendation 12: Network Hierarchy* states “A network hierarchy, or a series of related hierarchies, should be defined which includes all elements of the highway network, including carriageways, footways, cycle routes, structures, lighting, and rights of way. The hierarchy should take into account current and expected use, resilience, and local economic and social factors such as industry, schools, hospitals and similar, as well as the desirability of continuity and of a consistent approach for walking and cycling.”
- 3.7 Specific Active Travel Hierarchies are not in general use by local Highways Authorities. Cambridgeshire is an early adopter of their use to support Active Travel. There are limited examples nationally and limited specific guidance on the implementation of this approach.
- 3.8 To develop a functional hierarchy, additional local data will be collected, though consultation with local communities, users, and user groups.
- 3.9 The table below provides timescales for the further development of the active travel hierarchy.

Action	Timeline
Local community and user stakeholder input via consultation on draft hierarchy	April 2024
National Stakeholder Consultation – Active Travel England; Living Streets; Local Access Forum.	May 2024
Review updated Draft Hierarchy	May to June 2024
Consultation on Final Hierarchy	July to August 2024
Consider further changes to HOS	April to July 2024
Hierarchy adoption – H&T Committee	September 2024
Implementation of Hierarchy	September 2024

4. Alternative Options

4.1 The alternative options are:

To not adopt the proposed changes to the HOS. This is not recommended, as these changes are a further step in ensuring highways maintenance standards support active travel.

5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

5.1 The approval of the proposed changes to the HOS will help ensure that the County's highways are maintained with due regard to the needs of active travel and non-motorised users of the network.

5.2 The further development of the active travel hierarchy, including consultation with communities, will be a key step in further alignment of highways maintenance with the Council's active travel aspirations.

6. Significant Implications

6.1 Finance Implications

There are no significant implications within this category. The defects repaired through the new operational standards are funded from the Highways Maintenance Service revenue budgets. The adoption of Active Travel Maintenance Hierarchies will change the apportionment of available funding across the network as part of the highway asset management approach.

6.2 Legal Implications

The standards contained within the HOS regarding the rectification of highway defects, will be key considerations in the Authority's statutory defence to third party claims, under Section 58 of the Highways Act 1980. The proposed changes to defect categorisations are relevant in this respect.

6.3 Risk Implications

There are no significant implications within this category. The defects repaired will remove risk to road users of slips trips and falls.

6.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

What are the equality and diversity implications? See EqIA. The changes to the HOS and the Active Travel Maintenance Hierarchy are designed to improve the quality of provision for all, particularly vulnerable road users.

6.5 Climate Change and Environment Implications (Key decisions only)

Adoption of the Active Travel Network Hierarchy and the changes to the HOS will help support modal shift to sustainable travel. This change, over time, will increasingly contribute to the reduction of carbon in transport. The resulting reduction in motor vehicle travel will help reduce vehicle produced pollutants, improving air quality.

Sign off table for Chief Executive or Executive Director
(to be deleted by the DSO before publication)

Area	Officer	Sign off confirmed
Mandatory Sign Offs (these are required for every report)		
Executive Director for relevant area	Frank Jordan	Yes
Finance	Sarah Heywood	Yes
Legal	Pathfinder Legal Services/external solicitors where relevant	Yes (Emma D)
Risk	Chief Executive and Executive Directors	Frank Jordan Yes
Equality and Diversity	EqIA Super User from within Directorate or EDI.Team@cambridgeshire.gov.uk	Jon Munslow Yes (also approved by Faye McCarthy)
Please note that unless the mandatory sign offs above have been met the Corporate Clearance Group will not approve for publication		
Corporate Clearance Group (Head of Paid Service, S151 Officer, Monitoring Officer)	Stephen Moir Michael Hudson Emma Duncan	Yes
Optional Sign off (not necessary if there are no implications)		
Climate Change and Environment	Emily Bolton	Yes
Procurement	Clare Ellis	n/a
Public Health	Kate Parker	n/a
Resource (Assets, IT, & HR)	Chris Ramsbottom Katherine Hlalat Janet Atkin	n/a
Communications	Sarah Silk	n/a

7. Source Documents

It is a legal requirement for the following to be completed by the report author.

7.1 Any supporting or background documents which have been relied upon to a material extent

when preparing the report which are not confidential should be listed here. Where the document is held electronically, please provide a web link(s) if appropriate. Source documents are open for inspection by the public and must be retained for a period of 4 years (by the report author's records section) from the date of the meeting.

Current Highways Operational Standards

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/asset-library/highway-operational-standards-20-oct-2023.pdf>

Appendix 1: Active Travel Changes to the Highways Operational Standards

Appendix 2: Hierarchy Data Sources

Appendix 3: Equality Impact Assessment CCC572919320