



Response of Sandbach Town Council to Crossing Strategy Consultation 2024

Executive Summary and recommendations are on page 5/6

Historically the only objective of a crossing was the protection of those crossing. In many places in the past years where traffic levels increased those who could travel on foot felt unsafe and moved to car travel as a safer and more convenient travel method. Of course, this in turn made those same roads more unsafe and increased this shift. So, for provisioning choices fewer users and more need. As car ownership became widespread often the criteria for number of current beneficiaries to a crossing scheme was not met, Increased road traffic meant more spend on roads and fewer places meeting pedestrian criteria for crossings outside of the very center of towns. Over the last 40 years the emergence of the 2-car family further fed this process.

The increasing awareness of the environmental and health impact evolved so that by the last policy considerations in 2011 it was identified a crossing policy would have a benefit to Cheshire East's aspirations for Climate change and Health improvement by residents leaving the car at home more and participating in active travel. Indeed, Central government also suggested improvements in crossing provision will give confidence for users to take up more active travel and should be a feature of provisioning by local councils.

And then in 2020 Covid made many move to homeworking and think about life choices for themselves including transport methods locally, active travel possibilities and the ease of these became more important to many.

Since identification of this active travel contribution of crossings Cheshire East has made little progress over the last 14 years despite having re-enforced its desires to combat climate change and support active travel.

Across Cheshire East we see crossing provision attached to new developments funded by site developers under S106 arrangements. Often these are in areas where a crossing of some type is provided on a forecast demand basis at the insistence of planners and does not form part of an obvious larger active travel plan by Highways and appears not to meet any of the proposed or past criteria for council to fund a crossing.

Residents therefore see an unfair distribution of crossing provision where areas with busy roads in older developments do not figure in provision consideration, despite such provision being more sensible than that required of developers to service their developments. More sensible in older areas as these locations often support larger and often older populations and are more likely to be used for active travel as journey times are shorter, and usually form a waypoint on the active travel journey from newer developments into the town center.

That is not to say provision of crossings at new developments is not desirable it merely demonstrates a dual standard applied across the borough and a lack of priority shown by highways in funding such improvements adequately to date in favour of what seems a continuing obsession with prioritising funding of road development for car use above all else with Highways own main budget.

The amended policy attempts to address the issue of demand for crossings for active travel introduction, safety and confidence and retain its core safety first for current users agenda and at long last bring in formally suppressed demand for crossings and to factor in local support for the proposals.

The Consultation Report we note in sections ...

5.1 Introduction

This section provides a clear context for the need to prioritize pedestrian crossings due to self-imposed budget choices in favour of other spending areas politically described as budget constraints. It emphasizes the importance of a systematic approach to ensure consistency and efficient use of limited resources. Effectively could be re-worded as crossings, active travel and by implication climate change mitigation is not a priority of Highways budgeting.

5.2 Prioritisation

The introduction of a prioritization matrix is a systematic approach, which includes eight key areas for evaluation. The use of a point / percentile-based system to select locations for further investigation helps in resource optimization. The proposal is a light touch reworking of existing schemes which does begin to consider other factors.

While it quite rightly will continue to prioritise traditional safety issues if highways budget did expand to want to support active travel and crossings then this is a format to develop to support such a change in budget policy if this ever came to pass. The proposal offers a potential of 35% of points if petitioners are a school or educational establishment so is inherently biased to these locations which is understandable.

6 Further Investigations for prioritized requests

This section introduces criteria for assessing the type of crossing, considering safety, convenience, and accessibility. The inclusion of factors such as location, national guidance, benefits, costs, demand, and engineering judgment demonstrates a continuation of a car orientated approach to decision-making for budget allocation.

The issue of recurring intermittent peaks in traffic flow should feature in considerations. Road and motorway closures and accidents impact towns like Sandbach changing the whole safety dynamics of roads in minutes.

7 Changes to crossing type

Acknowledging legislative changes and the need to review crossing types is a proactive measure. The criteria for review, including visibility, pedestrian activity, collision data, and others, contribute to a thorough assessment.

Traffic Management including Refuges appears omitted from consideration / suggestions.

It may be possible to create more crossing opportunities by:

- *the provision of a refuge or*
- *installing traffic calming measures or*
- *build outs or narrowing the carriageway (to reduce the crossing time).*

8 Development Sites

The inclusion of controlled crossings in development sites aligns with the planning process. The requirement for a commuted sum for future maintenance from developers should ensure sustainable support for pedestrian facilities, regrettably this is and will be at the continued expense of existing older developments with greater need which will appear more expensive in the longer term. Such S106 funds are also far too often diverted from pursuing sustainable travel projects with a specific local benefit to borough benefitting road schemes as a matter of policy.

Within Appendix A Prioritisation Matrix we note.

Age demographics from highways of tartan rug point scoring is not detailed so comments are based around related weightings between sections and topics actually scored in the matrix.

D- Amenity

This section excludes all rural and areas where active travel to amenity is possible but one assumes the 'close proximity' rule excludes most routes to places not in close proximity. Therefore, active travel made possible by the existence of a crossing where journey time is not short is by default disadvantaged.

Clarification of this close proximity definition should be stated. The scoring system allocating 25% of points to this section and favours town centers and proximity to school locations and not routes just out of town suffering with traffic issues from passing and town bound traffic.

Highways E - NEIGHBOURHOOD ENGAGEMENT and F - LOCAL CONCERN

These sections provide a scoring system based on political and stakeholder support, school travel plans, and resident concerns. The inclusion of these factors should enrich the prioritization matrix and should offer community involvement in decision-making. However, the weighting of these areas is skewed towards a Highways decided car safety only agenda.

The fact ward member political support is scored a 5 and local resident petition requests a maximum 2 under we assume 'other political support' seems wrong.

Political support should not figure at all in a fact-based approach and resident petitioning is far more relevant.

The 'CONFIRM' system/process seems unknown to residents as a registration method for vulnerable users represents a 6% rating and seems a substitute to age profile assumptions.

This Confirm Enterprise Asset Management could be described as a physical item/location Customer Relationship Management system. How do residents register issues on this system?

Highways G - SUPPORTING GROWTH and H - PROTECTS AND IMPROVES THE ENVIRONMENT

These sections consider aspects such as links to town centers, employment sites, and environmental impact. They contribute to a holistic evaluation of the benefits and implications of installing a crossing facility.

Section G is the embryonic 6% only weighting toward active travel but only to 'nearby' locations.

Section H sounds impressive and merits 12% 'PROTECTS AND IMPROVES THE ENVIRONMENT' 'but in reality, can be seen as 'will a crossing support travel investment we have already made or is near a school'

Overall Assessment

The document appears to be well-structured, with a systematic approach to prioritization and assessment. The inclusion of multiple criteria in the prioritization matrix and the consideration of various factors in the review process demonstrate a comprehensive if biased methodology. Regrettably it is still skewed to perpetuating historic crossing decisions but a format that could evolve to something more in line with councils policies if budgets were actually aligned with council policy objectives.

Recommendations / Conclusion

The policy is regrettably falling short of its aspirations in detail and not the FULL crossings strategy many had hoped for, designed for pedestrian safety and also to encourage and enable active travel in existing communities where it is desired.

Regrettably it still shows a continuation of highways low prioritisation of crossing provision for health or active travel reasons unless it is part of other transport investments often part or mainly funded by central government and this is reflected in scoring.

As a rationed decision-based process on relative probability of accidents being likely or risk increasing the policy appears to work in this context and is rightly focused on schools which have specific traffic and safety issues. This is of course the prime historic purpose of a crossing, so this is to be welcomed.

As a 3-year cycle of consideration is planned it means once every 3 years a request could get on a short list of crossing projects to be investigated for progression. So effectively a 2 to 4 year at best request to delivery and only those fundable in the following year will be investigated.

More positively the suppressed demand or desire of local residents for active travel is noted by highways in this proposal but to a degree that it will not be acted upon without very significant elements of the current selection policy being applicable too. It does however offer a point of consideration that has not featured before and could be expanded in its importance in coming years.

The scoring criteria use of vague terms like 'close proximity' is an issue. Along with other terms that are unclear so a glossary would be useful for those entering the process. It is refreshing to see a recognition by highways of tartan rug socio economic differences in a policy. However, the weighting of this element is unclear.

The scoring process in a 'non-close to school' setting requires it seems travel destinations in close proximity on both sides of the road for higher scores so outlying communities without facilities of a significant scale' needing to cross busy 'feeder roads' to our towns facilities and shops will be scored lower and continue to be ranked lower on the priority list.

Budget Constraints are designated by the highways committee itself in spite of Cheshire East Council policy. The inability of Cheshire East Highways to offer any meaningful community delivery of the borough environment policy through Highways due to its continued funding choices is to be lamented. It is a missed opportunity to go along with a policy proposal that funded appropriately could make some if biased impact to improve road safety and active travel opportunity.

Executive Summary

Introduction:

The historical focus on pedestrian crossings for safety has led to a decline in active travel, with increased car usage in response to growing traffic levels. Despite climate and health considerations, crossing policies in Cheshire East have made limited progress in the past 14 years. New developments often fund crossings, but the distribution appears uneven, neglecting older areas with higher pedestrian demand.

Background and Policy Evolution:

In 2011, there was a recognition of the environmental and health benefits of active travel, prompting a crossing policy. However, Cheshire East has made slow progress, especially in older areas. The 2020 pandemic emphasized the need for local active travel, but the current strategy falls short of addressing these concerns effectively.

Consultation Report Analysis:

Prioritization Matrix: The report acknowledges budget constraints and introduces a prioritization matrix. However, it seems biased towards school locations, potentially neglecting other important areas. Active travel and by implication climate change mitigation is not a priority of Highways budgeting.

Further Investigations: Criteria for assessing crossing types focus on safety and convenience, maintaining a car-oriented approach.

Changes to Crossing Type: Acknowledging legislative changes, the criteria for reviewing crossing types are thorough but appear to lack a defined process for consideration of other traffic management alternatives.

Development Sites: The inclusion of controlled crossings in development aligns with planning but may neglect existing areas with higher demand.

Appendix A Prioritisation Matrix Critique:

D- Amenity: Excluding rural areas and favouring town centers and schools may disadvantage active travel routes with longer journey times.

E & F - Neighbourhood Engagement and Local Concern: While community involvement is encouraged, the scoring system is rightly skewed towards car safety. Fact-based and community requests should be considerations more relevant than political.

G & H - Supporting Growth and Protects/Improves the Environment: These sections contribute to a holistic evaluation but seem biased towards car-oriented priorities, with over emphasis on existing active travel projects. Section G is the focus on embryonic active travel but 'nearby' is undefined.

Overall Assessment:

The document is well-structured, but biases persist, reflecting historical prioritization of car-centric policies. It may evolve with budgetary alignment to council objectives. However, it falls short of being a comprehensive strategy for pedestrian safety and active travel promotion.

The policy should align more closely with council objectives, prioritizing pedestrian safety and active travel; but choices quite rightly bias toward safety first (likely in practice safety only) ; a continuation of current policy.

Considerations for active travel need more emphasis in the scoring criteria.

Vague terms and unclear definitions should be addressed with a glossary for clarity.

The 3-year cycle may result in delayed response to pedestrian needs, suggesting a need for more frequent assessments of possible lower cost alternatives.

Budget constraints limit the potential impact of the policy in improving road safety and promoting active travel.

In conclusion, the policy has potential but requires refinement and alignment with council objectives for it to be truly effective in promoting pedestrian safety and active travel.

We Recommend Specifically

- Consider providing more details on the prioritization matrix definitions in Appendix A for clarity.
- Definition of 'close proximity' should be specified in distance or time.
- Additionally, periodic reviews of the entire process could ensure its continued effectiveness and relevance should be defined.
- Remove or reduce scoring of political considerations entirely in favour of resident petitioning with informal councillor representations.
- Describe how to register need on CONFIRM system.
- Describe the criteria that other road crossing methods and possibilities could be considered. E.g a request for a pedestrian crossing could be discounted on cost but a cheaper engineered solution like central refuge is possible and achieve a similar benefit. Will highways highlight the possibilities or do applicants need to request a specific crossing type?
- Expand or append the proposal with a request process or scoring matrix to include scenarios where highways would support externally funded or part-funded crossing engineering proposals including the provision of a refuge, installing traffic calming measures, build outs or narrowing the carriageway (to reduce the crossing time).
- Any carriageway narrowing, or refuge should be designed in a way to not unduly compromise the ease of passage for cyclists