**Paul Murray,**

Active Travel Lead for Ridge & Partners comments**:**

**The new Low Traffic Neighbourhoods Guidance**

**– does it make any difference?**

Some weeks after the publication of the IPSOS Research Report and DfT Guidance, I think it is time for a considered view. Will this make any difference? Lunch with Rhion Jones gave me a great opportunity to discuss my thoughts with a consultation expert and get his feedback too. We decided to write up our thoughts and share them with the world because the negative spin put on the report did not seem to match the content …but we are reading the content as if there is no intention behind it. The Guidance provides *best practice* Guidance on how to deliver LTNs and the research report assesses the success of 4 LTNs across England.

**What are the key points from this report?**

* Following on from the [Plan for Drivers](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/651fe3022548ca000dddee82/the-plan-for-drivers.pdf) Policy Paper, the Government has kept its promise to create new Guidance on the implementation of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs).
* The phrase LTN might well disappear and be replaced by “People Friendly Streets” or perhaps calling these simply traffic management schemes as they were in the past.
* There is very little that is new in the research report survey – it is consistent with other LTN surveys showing they are more popular than not (and that most people are too busy living their lives to notice that the scheme is actually happening).
* Monitoring the effects of the schemes remains critical to their success - something that, in my experience, is already being done by many organisations.
* The Guidance may be particularly useful to local authorities who are delivering their first LTNs, bringing many of the considerations for LTNs into one place. Guidance can, of course, only provide a framework. It cannot tell designers exactly how to design schemes as they need to take account of local considerations/character/feel.
* The Guidance is released at a similar time to when Active Travel England (ATE) releases their Area Check showing how they assess LTN and similar schemes.

**What are some of the other points in the report?**

* Further UK based LTN evidence
* Monitoring and evaluation for new schemes compared to the research report
* Guiding local authorities to new ATE checks
* Encouraging only permanent schemes without Experimental Traffic Regulation Orders (ETROs)

The report is correct when it states there is little evidence, or at the very least more is required, on the impact of LTNs within the UK. This report adds to the evidence from assessing more LTN schemes, which is great news for them! The more evidence that is produced, the less that other places across the UK need to rely on being brave and saying it works in other countries as done in the London Borough of Waltham Forest

The monitoring and evaluation refers users to the ATE Guidance from the Active Travel Tranche 4 Fund Guidance which is well thought out Guidance. The ironic thing is that the research report that was produced did not follow this Guidance. The ATF4 specifically mentions that when you are monitoring the success of a site, that you take a comparison site where no scheme has been implemented and compare the results. The research report released by the DfT fails to do this, and it would have been possible to obtain the results by asking one of the four Local Authorities that they assessed for the research report and asked for their traffic data. If not the four local authorities, then at least one of the other 90 local authorities that they were in touch with for the wider questions in the research report.

This draft Guidance came out around the same time that ATE released 2 new tools (crossing selector and cross section) and 2 checks (Area and Route) that they use to assess the success of ATE funded schemes, to provide some transparency. The Area Check tool is not something that is particularly designed to help designers, but to provide a standardisation of how LTN schemes (and other similar schemes) are assessed. This will prove useful in understanding how to deliver schemes and ensure that they fulfil ATE’s objectives. Of course, the Area Check does not replace a designer who understands the local area and through consultation creating the balance of how street space should be altered.

Because many were implemented during the COVID years, Local Authorities have been using temporary filters instead of permanent construction. In hindsight, the Guidance suggests that temporary LTNs followed by permanent LTNs might not be the best way forward; better to consult over a permanent scheme. It suggests that the use of ETROs may have created a more onerous way of implementing LTNs. Had schemes sufficient funding for the construction of permanent filters from the beginning it would have been more appropriate. Implementing the temporary filters, I think it creates confusion, whereas permanent filters show people in a neighbourhood what is possible with reclaiming the road space and how it can be allocated to different uses. This would also mean that you would only need to consult with the public once.

**How will this change implementing schemes moving forward?**

So will this report make a difference? I am not sure this will change much for many of the Local Authorities who are successful delivering LTNs and want to continue this. In my experience, the majority of the engagement set out in the Guidance is already being undertaken for by Local Authorities and delivered by most consultants and organisations implementing LTNs.

Sadly, I think that Councils seeking to carry out as few changes as possible to the local area might use the negative spin that Ministers put on this report to argue against such changes. It highlights the need for the Government to provide more funding for consultation on transport schemes. With a General Election looming, it remains to be seen whether this is forthcoming, especially for schemes that require over 12 months to deliver.

Despite this, the Guidance will form a good template for delivery for consultancies and organisations who have not yet delivered LTNs, as well as Local Authorities writing their first tenders/papers for cabinet in councils on looking for consultancy support to deliver them. Of course, it will also be a point of reference for others already experienced in this field.

Having seen up close, the delivery of LTNs over the past few years, they can be an incredible challenge, and this material would have been useful if it had been to hand at that time.

Regarding the [research report](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65f400adfa18510011011787/low-traffic-neighbourhoods-research-report.pdf), it may have been sensible to compare 2 LTNs in more detail than the 4 in this report. It adds weight to the body of evidence for LTNs in the UK, One flaw which I found after reviewing twitter postings on the technicalities is that it seems that Ipsos Mori only asked for opinions within the LTN. This is disappointing, as it is critical to also to obtain the views of those on boundary roads as well as beyond. Where I have been involved, Councils have always sought to do this.

**Conclusion**

I certainly think that this is a response to what we saw in 2020, when changes were made as quickly as possible without meaningful consultation. I think the industry has learnt this lesson and this Guidance at least put in measures in place to ensure that this does not happen again. Across the UK and Europe, we are seeing the backlash that happens when you do not take people with you, and this is crucial to our industry as well.

I would suggest that the new Guidance could be used by local authorities looking to deliver their first LTN and have the option of having an independent checker for the consultation to ensure that it is completed to the highest standard and creates that check and balance on things that can go wrong on projects (consultants overspending, political changing of minds etc.)

**Rhion Jones comments**

I think Paul’s analysis demonstrates that the main value of this document is to reinforce existing good practice rather than introduce anything particularly new. My main takeaways are to consult well first time around then continue to monitor ongoing perceptions to see if the public still support the scheme, and to identify any changes that may be needed to retain public confidence.