

Frequently-asked Questions

Emergency COVID 19 related on-street social distancing measures

Part 1: General questions

Q1. *How have you informed the public about the temporary changes to streets?*

A: Communications regarding the Safer, Greener, Healthier measures have been wide reaching and well publicised through the media & social media, as well as being updated on the Essex Highways website. These communication channels are being used as the primary means of advising residents of Colchester & Chelmsford. However, there have also been letter drops to residents and businesses on the corridors directly affected.

Q2. *Why are you spending money on all this, what's the point?*

A: While Covid-19 is still a threat, people need to be able to social distance as much as possible, which poses particular problems on busier, more crowded town-centre streets. We have therefore extended the widths of some pavements and cycle lanes to enable people to keep safer. Government is providing the money directly to councils to enable us to do this.

Q3. *The temporary measures you are introducing have not been requested and are not necessary in my community?*

A: These measures have been introduced in response to Government instructions to provide and promote social distancing measures within town centres to support public health and reduce the spread of Covid19. The measures proposed have been road safety audited before being implemented on site. A 20mph speed limit has been introduced along the entire corridor to help promote a safer environment for cyclists and to recognise the reduction in the overall road widths.

Q4. *How long will these changes last?*

A: It is likely that the temporary measures will be required while we need to maintain social distancing, so that we can avoid creating pinch points whereby pedestrians don't have enough space in certain locations.

Q5. *By the time these and maybe other schemes elsewhere are ready, won't they be too late as Coronavirus becomes less of a problem, for one reason or another?*

A: Hopefully the virus will disappear, or a vaccine be developed. However in the meantime we must, for public health, do everything possible to enable people to stay alert and minimise their risk by being able to go out with social distancing space available.

More active travel, whether walking, cycling or running has various other vital health and environmental advantages, including the mental and physical benefits of regular exercise and a contribution towards cleaner air.

Q6. *Why aren't you building permanent, segregated, protected cycle lanes and wider pavements, as have so often been demonstrated in the Netherlands in general and many continental cities in particular?*

A: We have to act fast, now, to give people the extra space they need to socially distance while COVID-19 is a current serious threat. If some of the initial measures are successful, they may be made semi-permanent.

Permanent, major building projects usually take many months to plan, agree and then build, which does not meet the current urgent need. We may also not have the space in our historic towns to deliver the exact measures that the Netherlands uses. However, we are absolutely committed to doing everything we can with the resources available to encourage more people to shift to more sustainable travel for all or some of their journeys.

Q7. *Will these temporary measures be made permanent beyond the Coronavirus crisis if they are shown to encourage more sustainable travel?*

A: That would fit well with our general intention to encourage more people to travel more sustainably and we hope at least some of these measures will be made permanent. However, we must learn all we can from experience of the temporary measures, not least monitoring any possible adverse effects on business, jobs and peoples' livelihoods. Funding available to make much more expensive permanent changes will also be an issue needing consideration.

Q8. *Q: Why have you waited for a national crisis in health to start making serious progress towards shifting the balance away from polluting, unhealthy, resource-intensive cars?*

A: ECC is continually working to bring about a shift to active and sustainable travel with various programmes underway and planned. Walking and cycling are often the easiest way of getting around our towns and cities. The new segregated cycle lane in New St, Chelmsford is just the latest example of infrastructure we had already planned. However, the current situation, accompanied with the emergency funding from DfT, presents us with an opportunity to accelerate some of those schemes. Immediate action is required by the current situation.

Q9. *Won't all these new signs, cones and barriers create confusion and a road safety risk in themselves?*

A: Our schemes are audited by road safety engineers and the safe operation of these changes will be constantly monitored. We very much welcome all feedback from everyone who uses them – you can send comments to SGH.Routes@essex.gov.uk.

If changes are required for better safety as we learn how pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles interact in practice, then we will make them immediately. We accept we have work to do to ensure that people understand and can use the new routes safely, and we welcome all ideas as to how to improve on that.

Q10. *What is being done to ensure cyclists or e-scooters are not causing injuries on the pavement?*

A: Pavement areas will remain for the use of pedestrians. The shared-space areas, are to accommodate pedestrians who might otherwise be forced into close proximity to meet social distancing guidelines and where pavement widths need to be increased due to anticipated higher footfall. Cyclists will also be able to use the newly created space within the carriageway. Furthermore, the corridors will all have a 20mph speed limit to encourage and support cycle use where they wish to travel at speed in the remaining road-space.

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Q11. *What other measures are you implementing to improve conditions for pedestrians?*

A: At certain signalised crossings on the corridors with temporary measures, the 'green' pedestrian crossing time is being increased, but more importantly on pressing the button the crossings will change to the pedestrian stage more quickly, reducing the duration for pedestrians to wait and the number of people likely to be congregating (supporting social distancing).

Q12. *Aren't you killing off motor transport access to town centres that will be another blow to hard-pressed town centre retail businesses?*

A: Traders are likely to need more space for people to circulate and maintain social distancing. We have talked to business organisations and representatives. We are confident that we have made allowances for deliveries to businesses, for access for customers living with disabilities and for increased public confidence in the safety of our town centres. However, we will keep listening very carefully to business, including individual shops and traders, as the situation develops with re-openings, to adjust our measures to help them as we can. Business success in our towns is crucial to all our futures! There is evidence to suggest that this sort of improvement to walking and cycling access may increase retail sales by up to 30% as people who travel this way often visit more frequently than car drivers.

Q13. *With public transport still seen as relatively high-risk for people and capacity limited due to social distancing, aren't you creating gridlock as more people have to use their cars to get into work and shopping in town centres?*

A: There is undoubtedly a risk of that happening to an extent. We are still in the (in this sense) 'fortunate' position of many people who used to travel to work in an office still not being able to do so, so traffic volumes are still significantly less than they were. However, public safety, and the associated confidence to come into town has to be the first priority for the councils. Some increase in public transport, less travel in general, more cycling and walking and staggered travel times all have a role to play. If there are tweaks, we can make to help the situation as it develops, we will.

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Q14. *Will the Police be able to enforce the temporary changes*

A: Yes, the police will be able to enforce the scheme. However, when available traffic management operatives will provide advice and guidance to motorists about the temporary restrictions and additional resources will be provided by local partners.

Q15. *How will these temporary measures be monitored to ensure they are being used effectively by the public?*

A: We are actively monitoring the use of the new measures through our own staff, but crucially we are asking residents and visitors to please have their say by telling us what they have experienced and their ideas via our dedicated email address at SGH.Routes@Essex.gov.uk Essex County Council will develop a system to assess the feedback from the public.

Other apps such as www.lovetoride.net/essex ; www.cyclinguk.org/bikeweek/7daysofcycling and www.gojauntly.com/ are other ways people can get involved by logging their own cycling and walking journeys, whether that be for work or leisure.

Q16. *I would like to ride a bike to, from and around town, but I'm not confident enough. What can you do to help?*

A: The Safer Essex Roads Partnership (SERP) currently offer FREE adult cycling (until at least the 18th July 2020). Please contact saferessexroads@essexhighways.org

Q17. *Q: How do I ensure I know about future planned changes?*

A: Refer to our website, in particular www.essex.gov.uk/safer-greener-healthier and follow us on twitter (www.twitter.com/essexhighways)

Please let us know you would like to be kept in touch with our future plans by emailing SGHRoutes@essex.gov.uk and ask to be added to our mailing list.

Part 2: Scheme-specific questions

Colchester FAQs

Q1. In Colchester in particular at the moment, although there are examples elsewhere, there are already significant traffic delays with more works planned too. Why are you putting further restrictions on motorised traffic at such a time?

A: We didn't choose the pandemic timing and some current works have taken longer due to Covid suspension and new working practices, and other unforeseeable engineering issues. However, for public safety reasons, which must be our top priority, we have to act now to improve the situation for people who need to come into the town centre and need to know that they will be able to stay alert and social distance from others. There may be some short delays for drivers, or a need to find alternative routes, but we know that many people use their car for short journeys when they could choose alternatives.

Q2. Why are you introducing these changes in North Station Road? They are not needed and will make it more difficult for local businesses.

A: These measures have been introduced in response to the government's instruction to provide and promote social distancing measures within town centre to support public health and reduce the spread of Covid19. The main 'station to the town centre corridor' along North Station Rd is an important sustainable transport corridor. There have been discussions with the district council, Colchester BID, and the measures proposed have been road safety audited before being implemented on site. Parking spaces have been left to support businesses, but to create space to enable social distancing (particularly where the footways are narrow) it has been necessary to reduce the provision. A 20mph speed limit has been introduced along the entire corridor to help promote a safer environment for cyclists and to recognise the reduction in the overall road widths.

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Q3. The temporary measures do not sit easily with the conservation area?

A: The initial measures are created using traditional traffic management equipment. This ensures compliance with legislative requirements for the highway, while also enabling the initial measures to be easily amended if necessary.

Over the next few weeks the measures will be monitored and feedback through the official website and email address will be reviewed before the temporary traffic management equipment is replaced with measures which will be less intrusive and reflect the use of more bespoke coloured signing, lining and bollards, which will be easier to maintain and reflect a more aesthetic appearance to the temporary social distancing measures in place.

Q4. Are pollution levels being monitored?

A: Air quality data to understand the impact of the Covid19 lockdown is being analysed to understand latest impacts.

Q5. Are taxis and private-hire vehicles allowed to access Colchester High Street?

A: Yes, they will continue to be able to drop off and set down in the High Street.

Q6. Are you going to segregate bikes and pedestrians on the High Street?

A: This first phase will not see segregation for people who are cycling. However the corridor will be safer due to the reduction in the number of motor vehicles permitted and the introduction of a 20pmh limit. This will be reviewed for subsequent phases.

Q7. How will delivery drivers and riders be able to access the take-away businesses ?

A: The situation associated with take-away delivery services is being reviewed and official delivery vehicles will be included on a list of permitted vehicles under the temporary traffic orders, subject to them displaying the delivery company logo.

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Q8. I need to load/unload my vehicle on the High Street, Head St and Queen St. Will I still be able to do this?

A: Yes, existing loading bay provisions have been maintained as part of the measures.

Q9. How are you going to monitor/police/enforce the High Street ?

A: Initially Essex Highway, Colchester Borough Council and North Essex Parking Partnership officers will be present on site to monitor and advise motorists when the measures are first introduced. Contraventions will be a matter for the police, who have been fully engaged in the development of the proposals.

Q10. How will disabled badge holders know they are able to enter?

A: Disabled blue badge holders will be able enter the High St. This will be indicated with temporary signage.

Q11. What is happening to Priory Street?

A: Priory Street access will remain as it is from East Hill/Queen St.

Q12. I need to load/unload my vehicle on North Station Road. Will I still be able to do this?

A: To enable space to be created for social distancing measures, parking space provisions have been reduced along the corridor. From Albert Roundabout to Causton St, the existing layby provision on the westbound side of the road (outside HSBC) has been maintained. From Causton Rd southbound, 3 bays on the eastbound side have been maintained and can be used.

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Q13. I need to load/unload my vehicle on St John Street. Will I still be able to do this?

A: A loading bay provision is to be maintained outside of Tokyo Fries within the measures provided.

Q14. Am I able to access to streets off the High Street in the Dutch Quarter? (West Stockwell, Culver St East etc.)

A: Access to all the Dutch Quarter will be maintained at all times. As part of the temporary works we are suspending the One-Way Traffic Orders on West Stockwell Street, George Street, Maidenburgh Street and William's Walk, as well as opening the point closures in East Stockwell Street and Maidenburgh Street.

Q15. How will people get to their homes who live at the top end of East Stockwell Street, William's Walk, George Street, Maidenburgh Street and Castle Methodist Church?

A: The existing road closures in East Stockwell Street and Maidenburgh Street will be suspended, allowing traffic into the southern areas of East Stockwell Street and Maidenburgh Street and to George Street and William's Walk. A diversion will be put in place directing traffic to St Peter's Street to enter the Dutch Quarter.

Q16. How will people get to their homes in the flats above High Street retail premises in front of the Castle?

A: Residents will access the Castle Bailey area via the eastern end of High Street, following a diversion along Queen Street, Culver Street East and St Nicholas Street.

Q17. Q: Will there be alternative routes to access the Dutch Quarter?

A: A diversion route will be signed along North Hill, left into Middleborough, to U-turn at the roundabout, then ahead to St Peter's Street then either right into Short Cut Road or continue into Maidenburgh Street. The access route for Museum Street, Castle Bailey and Ryegate Road is from the east, via East Hill, High Street (eastern end), left into Queens Street, Right into Culver Street East, right into St Nicholas Street, back into High Street and left into Castle Bailey (see map)

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Q18. I am concerned about the impact of increased traffic and rat-running in William's Walk and the safety of pedestrians because it's very narrow. It would probably be safer to remove one bollard in either East Stockwell Street or Maidenburgh Street rather than both."

A: The suspension of the one-way system and the opening of both roads is considered appropriate to try and reduce the number of turn-around manoeuvres within the very narrow streets. The proposal is for the access from the High St to be removed, therefore access will be via St Peters St to the Dutch Quarter. Traffic levels will be monitored so that we can review the status of the closures, with the possibility of re-instating if appropriate to do so.

Q19. There is concern that as the bollards are suspended drivers may pass through the Dutch Quarter to try and drop off near the High Street.

A: This is a possibility, however due to the narrow nature of the roads in the southern section of the Dutch Quarter and the route needed to be taken to get to this point, it is considered that this is unlikely to be an attractive option. However, this location will be monitored and should reports of inappropriate traffic levels be noted the traffic management arrangements will be reviewed.

Q20. How will residents who live off the top end of West Stockwell Street get to their homes? Flats in the former Telephone House building, Sanderson Mews, West Stockwell Street itself, flats at Angel Court?

A: The existing one-way Traffic Orders are to be suspended allowing vehicles to travel in both directions with access via St Peter Street and Northgate Street

Q21. How will I be able to access Eld Lane Baptist Church car park (currently achieved via High Street and Long Wyre Street)?

A: Access to the Eld Lane Baptist Church car park will be via the eastern end of High Street, following a diversion along Queen Street, Culver Street East and into Long Wyre Street.

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