

Meeting with Dame Sarah Storey, GM Active Travel Commissioner: 15.04.2024 (Appendix D)

Sarah is aiming for a GM connected network to make journeys safer and travelling more accessible for everyone, with a focus on active travel.

Regarding 20 mph speed limits, she advised us that if we have evidence and it is data driven, we can go ahead with installing these, regardless of the Government's current advice. It is best to start small and build out gradually. A road should be seen as somewhere to live, not simply a thoroughfare. As Wirral Council have experienced, the police need to be involved which is difficult due to low resource. Alongside reducing speed limits, we should also be looking at engineering solutions to encourage drivers to drive more carefully, such as creating narrower lanes.

She commented that road rage is a huge issue, and that we should also be looking at enforcing speed limits on the A56, suggesting proactive measures, such as installing temporary average speed cameras to enforce speed limits.

Regarding pedestrian prioritisation, she suggested that timings should be adjusted to 10 seconds everywhere, as we need to inconvenience the motorist. Timings can be reduced on a gradual approach that is not noticeable. As this is a political decision, it would need a Council directive. But this can be supported by evidence, such as how not being able to cross a road can mean missing a bus, and so does not encourage using public transport.

She said that School Streets can only be effective if they are permanent, and the priority should be to make them permanent though using cameras. Also, she suggested schools could be providing data to us regarding the reasons why parents are driving to school. She also said that Park and Stride should be looked at and directing parents to larger car parks, with park and rides.

She suggested ensuring our network of clean air cameras is being used for solving crime and monitoring vehicles.

She mentioned a TfGM audit that has taken place which demonstrated that a lot more crossings are needed to deliver a dense network of walking and cycling opportunities, which has not yet received LA response which is needed for future planning. She suggested identifying where third parties are involved, such as waterways, in integrating active travel. This may access more funding pots.

Sarah was asked about zebra crossings. The Active Travel Fund has currently allocated £200,000 to West Midlands Combined Authority to trial simple zebra crossings on side roads.

She stressed the importance that active travel is a prerequisite for increasing bus usage.

Finally, she commented that electric cars are not a clear-cut solution due to the large amount of particulate matter they create and that we should be cautious about focusing solely on EV charging.

Summary of meeting with Dame Sarah Storey

Sarah is very passionate about this subject and gave us some helpful insights. She supports our view that the balance needs to be shifted away from the motorist to give us all equal rights to safe streets and pavements. She also emphasised that electric cars are not the panacea.