

The impact of Covid-19 road-space reallocation measures in the north of England

Stephen Parkes & Tony Gore
Sheffield Hallam University

Richard Weston & Mary Lawler
University of Central Lancashire

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic and the associated national lockdowns led to a substantial disruption to movements, and the number of journeys made. Across the UK, local authorities pursued programmes of rapid road-space reallocation to help create more space for pedestrians to social distance and to encourage the uptake of cycling and other active modes.

£217 million

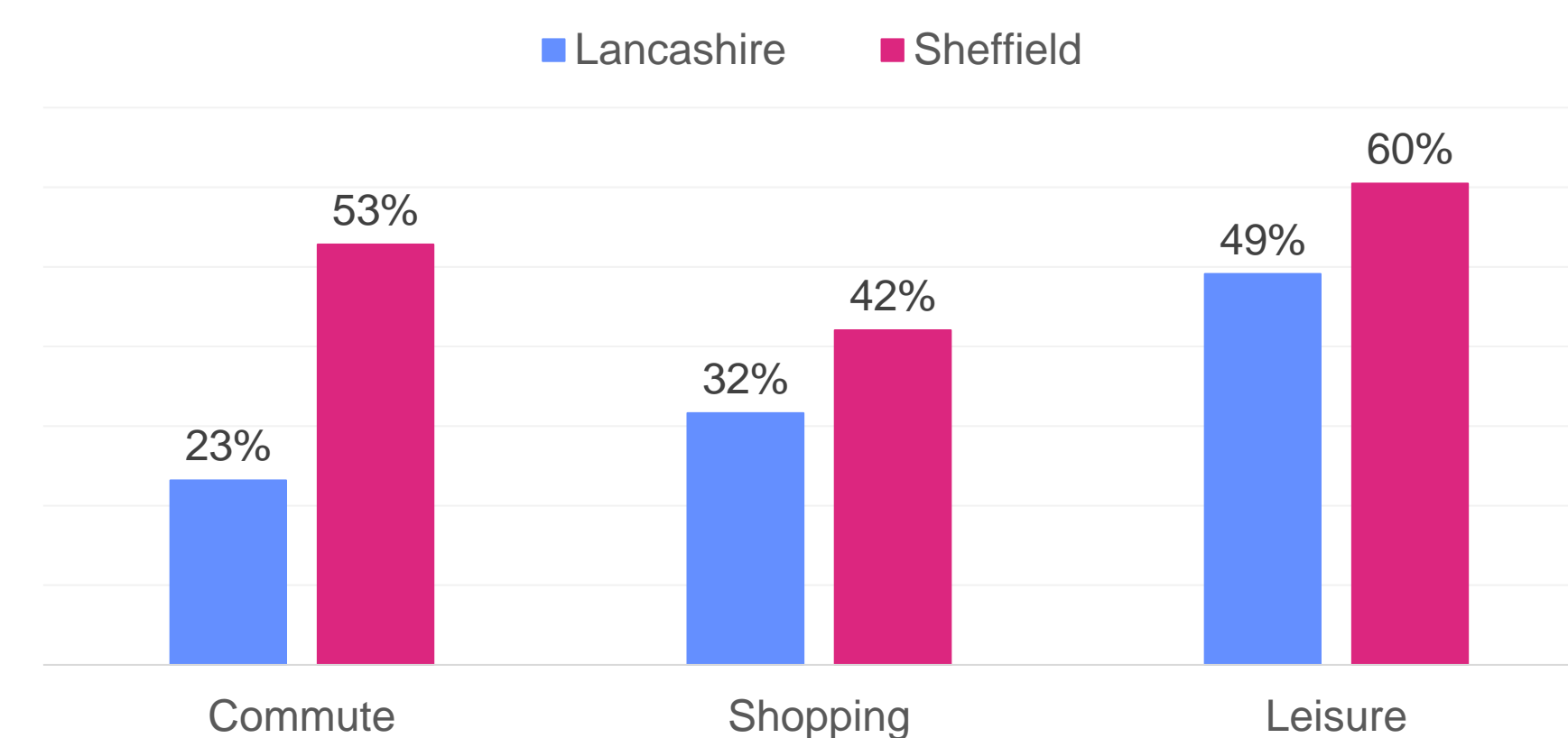
allocated to temporary road-space reallocation measures in England.

Our project explored responses to the pandemic in Sheffield and Lancashire (both local authorities in the North of England). This place-based approach allowed us to consider how the impacts played out across two diverse areas. Sheffield is a deindustrialising city with a population of nearly 600,000 (1601 inhabitants per sq. km.). Lancashire is a non-metropolitan county with a population of over 1.2 million but dispersed across a number of smaller towns and a large rural area (424 inhabitants per sq. km.).

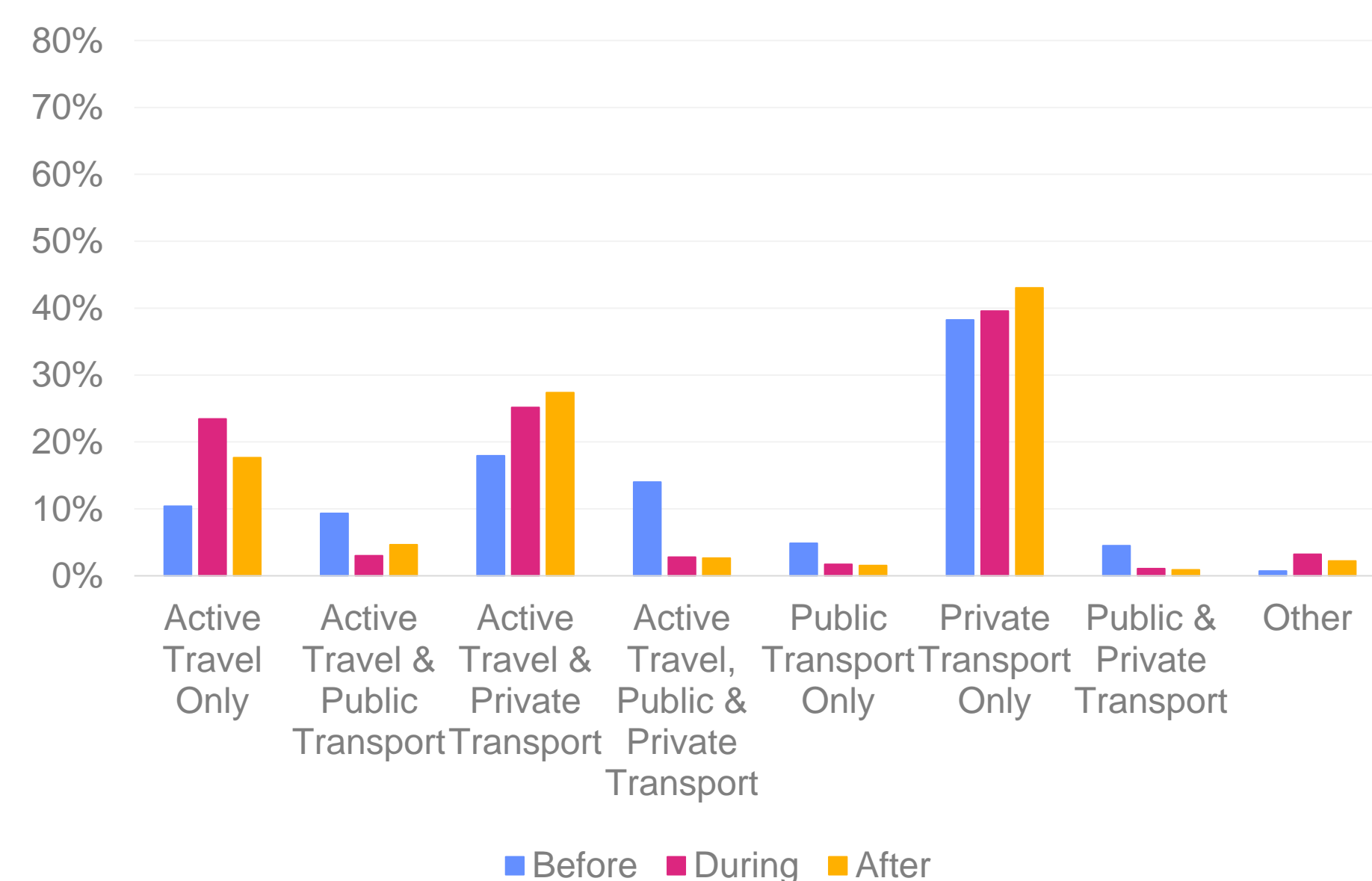
Impact of the pandemic on travel behaviour

A substantial amount of travel behaviour change occurred in both locations but Sheffield saw a higher proportion of the sample changing how they travelled.

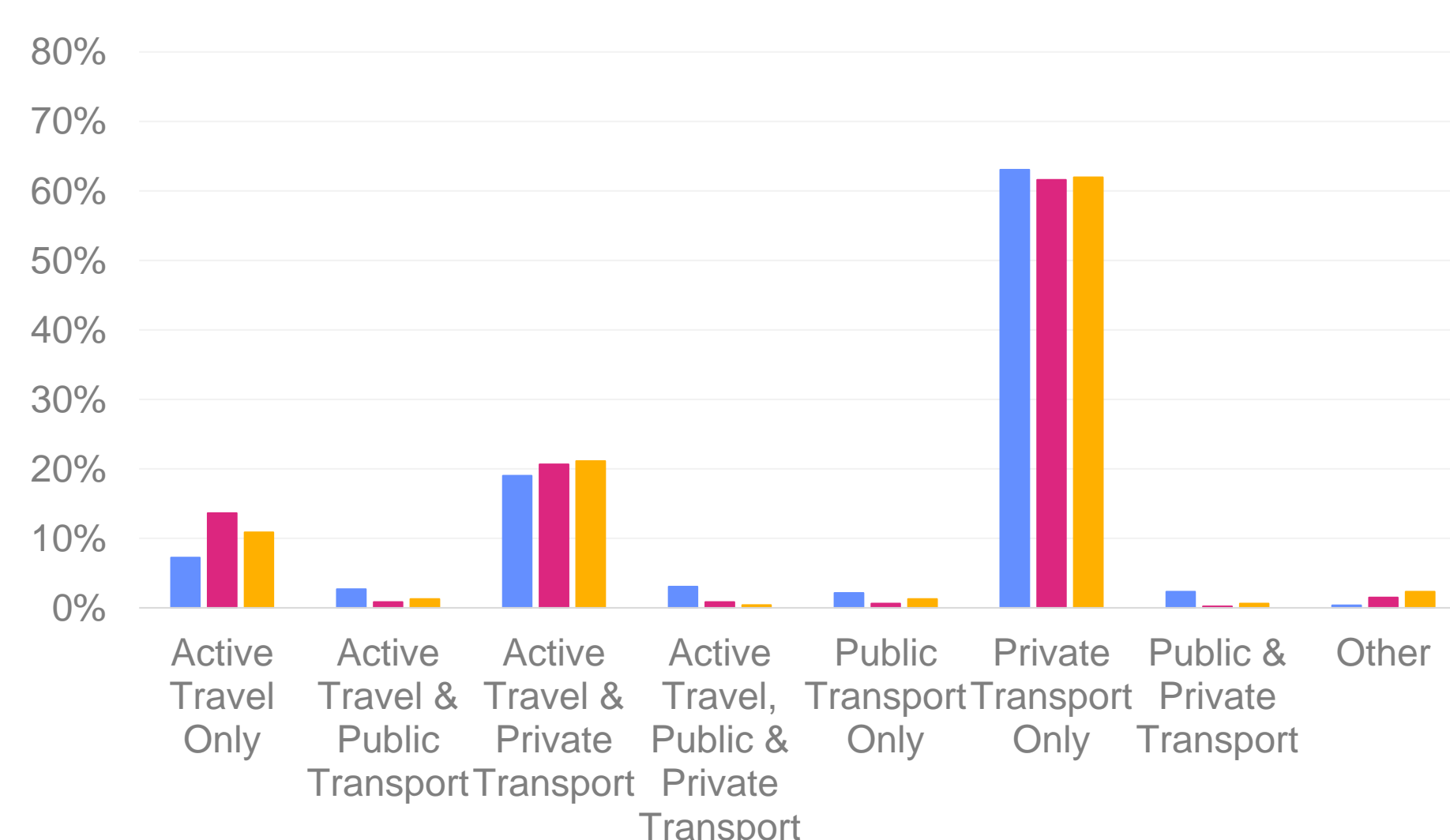
% of sample who changed during lockdown #1



How these changes were represented in the use of different modes is shown in the charts below. These charts highlight the modes used for shopping journeys before, during and after the first national lockdown.



In **Sheffield**, there were more pronounced changes to **shopping journeys**, similar to commutes. Those using solely active travel modes for their shopping trips increased from 10% to 23% during lockdown.



In **Lancashire**, overall change for **shopping journeys** was more stable in comparison. Active travel increased, but to a smaller extent and reliance on solely the private car was much greater amongst this cohort.



Kelham Island low-traffic neighbourhood, Sheffield



Temporary cycle lane, Hammersmith, London



Division Street Pedestrianisation, Sheffield



Temporary cycle lane, South Road, Lancaster

Use and views of the measures introduced

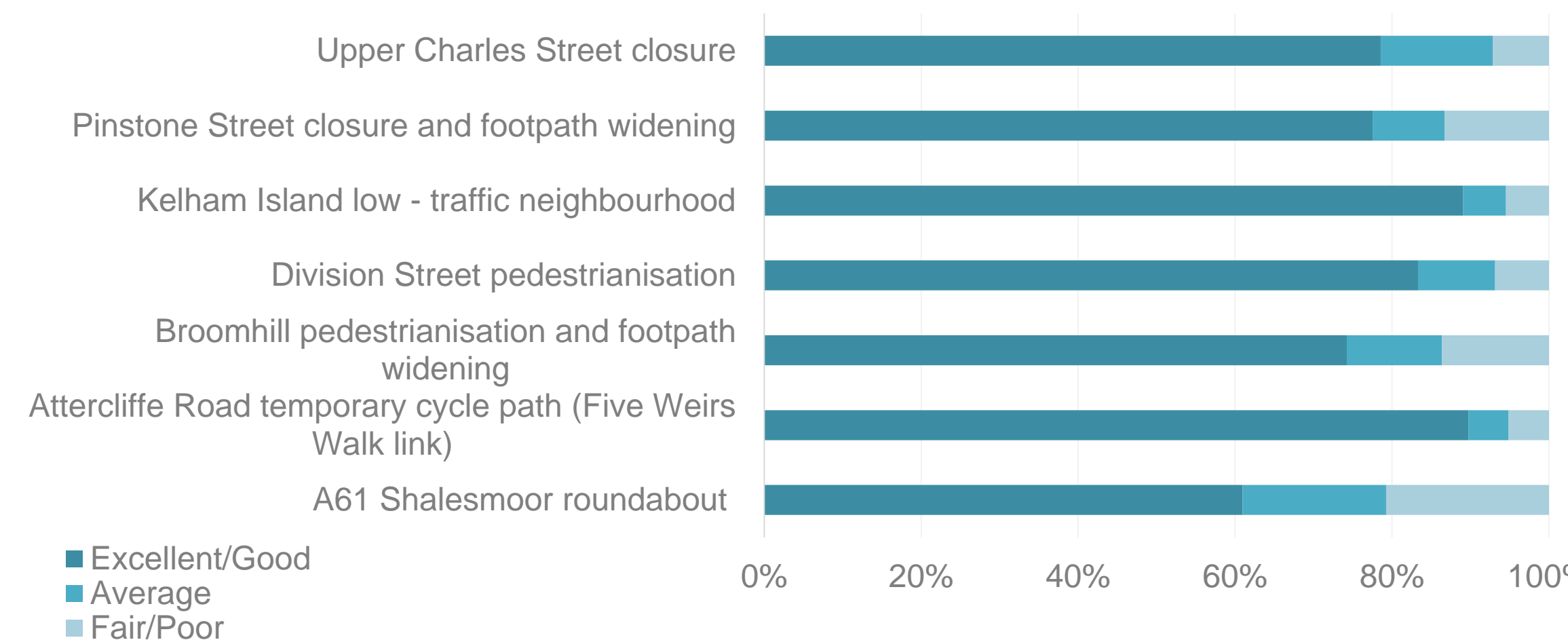
The deployment of the temporary measures was rapid and during a period of intense disruption across society. In the first survey wave respondents were asked about their awareness of the measures that were introduced in their local area and whether they used them. Awareness was very high, but ultimately the use of measures remained much lower. 32% of those in the total sample aware of the measures reported using at least once. The most common reason for not using it was the measure not being close to their travel route.

	Lancashire	Sheffield	Overall
Aware of the temporary measures?	70%	88%	79%
(If aware) did they use any of the measures?	21%	41%	32%

We asked those respondents that had reporting using one or more measure to tell us about their experiences of using them. Respondents rated the measures between 1 to 5 (1 = Excellent and 5 = Poor). In Lancashire, 14 separate measures were examined. Many were not widely used by our sample, however. The closure of Fishergate in Preston was the measure most utilised by the Lancashire sample (6%) and was also the only one rated as Excellent (based on median score). The remaining measures in Lancashire had a median rating of Good.

In Sheffield, there were fewer measures introduced and we examined seven through the survey. Larger proportions of the Sheffield sample used the measures compared to Lancashire, likely a reflecting the more compact nature of Sheffield's geography and centralised location of many of the measures.

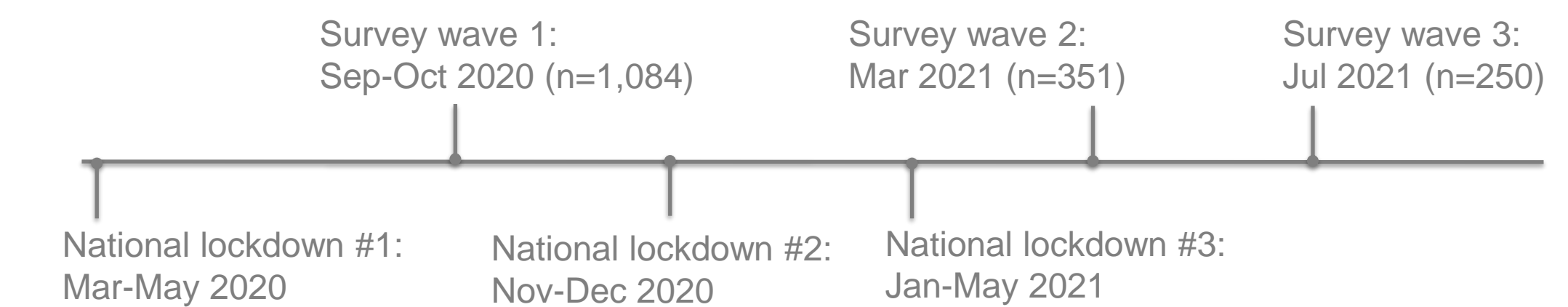
Views of measures introduced in Sheffield



Methods

Due to the pandemic, the project adopted an online survey approach, conducted over three-waves. With the project being conceived and funded after the first national lockdown had begun, it was impossible to collect a pre-pandemic baseline without asking respondents to answer retrospectively. The first survey wave captured travel behaviour related to the first national lockdown (pre-lockdown, during lockdown, and post-lockdown).

Three-wave panel survey



The second and third waves represented shorter, follow-up surveys with the same respondents to capture the longer-term behavioural picture. Resource limitations meant a representative sample was not possible. More information on sampling and methods can be found in our project report, available online.

Encouraging active travel

In the first survey wave respondents were asked about what measures would encourage them to start to cycle, or to cycle more frequently. Half of Lancashire respondents and 58% in Sheffield responded that improved cycle lanes would be their priority. Other measures that were prioritised included reducing traffic on the roads and more secure cycle storage.

58% (Sheffield) & 50% (Lancashire)

rated "better or segregated cycle lanes" as the key improvement that would encourage them to cycle more.

We also explored whether local town or city centres should be designed to prioritise space for pedestrians. There was a great deal of support amongst respondents for this.

72% (Sheffield) & 74% (Lancashire)

believe that streets in their local town or city centre should be designed to prioritise space for pedestrians over traffic.

Conclusion

Our respondents demonstrated significant changes in travel behaviour in response to the pandemic, mirroring the huge shift in the status quo observed nationally. Some key points include:

- More pronounced changes in Sheffield compared to Lancashire, particularly in relation to using active travel. This is likely a reflection of the geographic differences in the two locations.
- Awareness of the measures was high but actual use was more limited, mainly owing to not being located on routes to destinations.
- Those that did use them rated them highly, with the most commonly used measures more likely to receive higher ratings.

Further information

For further information on this project, please contact Stephen Parkes (s.parkes@shu.ac.uk) or Richard Weston (rweston@uclan.ac.uk).

Project Partners



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