

ADEPT Engineering Board update January 2021

The Engineering Board convened virtually on 15th January and was extremely well-attended again, suggesting future post-Covid-19 meetings will potentially be a blend of in-person and virtual attendance.

Given the timing of the meeting and criticality of gaining clarity about highway maintenance funding in 2021/22, the Department for Transport was the first item on the agenda. It was disappointing to hear that overall funding for 2021/22 had fallen from £1.65m in the current year to £1.125m. This perhaps reinforces the prudence of those authorities that have already withheld or are considering withholding some of their 2020/21 allocation until next financial year to achieve resource smoothing against an uncertain future. Although a helpful update was also given on the Emergency Active Travel Fund, there was little confidence that settlement letters confirming actual allocations would be received in February.

Proving Services attended and provided an update on the work of the Future Highways Research Group, with a particular focus on innovation and how corporate partners might potentially contribute in this space. Board members were asked to consider whether they would wish to participate in the planned service peer reviews for 2021 or, indeed, whether their authority would wish to also undergo such assessment. This led into updates on the progress of the current Live Labs programme and some discussion about a potential Live Labs 2 programme, primarily considering the decarbonisation agenda.

Engineering Board also agreed that, given the passage of time and a return to a national lockdown with additional tiers, the Covid-19 response spreadsheet should re-emerge. This would provide cross-authority clarity and, once again, aid the DfT's understanding of local authorities' positioning.