

SPOKES

The Lothian Cycle Campaign

St. Martins Church, 232 Dalry Road, Edinburgh EH11 2JG 0131.313.2114 [answerphone] spokes@spokes.org.uk www.spokes.org.uk

If replying by email, please use... davedufeu@gmail.com

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Building a Vision for the City Centre

www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20056/city_centre_and_leith_neighbourhood/1958/building_a_vision_for_the_city_centre

Consultation response from Spokes

0. Summary of Spokes recommendations

- ◆ Spokes believes that **Princes Street should be entirely free of motor traffic** [except perhaps an electric shuttle-bus] with significantly reduced car provision in George Street and a re-think on buses: probably with long-distance buses via Queen Street and Lothian buses using George Street.
- ◆ Failing the above **Spokes supports the Council's one-way motor traffic concept *provided that two-way traffic-free cycle use is enabled in both Princes Street and George Street***. We however see this as an interim solution leading eventually to a more radical solution, with Princes Street traffic-free.

1. Introduction

Spokes strongly welcomes the intention of the Council to proceed rapidly with steps to make the City Centre a better place for enjoying, shopping, traversing and being in. We have long argued and lobbied¹ for such steps, in particular for Scotland's premier street, Princes Street, which is currently dominated by noise and visual intrusion – in the words of Jan Gehl, “*a bus station*.” Pollution levels are attracting official concern². As long ago as 2009 we held a public meeting³, chaired by the BBC's Lesley Riddoch and addressed by the Council's then Transport Head Marshall Poulton, to try and encourage movement on the issue.

The initiative by the new Council to tackle this issue, with tram finances and timescales now apparently also under control, is a breath of fresh air.

Continuing our long-standing efforts to raise the profile of Princes Street as a place which should be far more amenable for pedestrian and cyclist use, we have undertaken several recent initiatives. These include...

- ◆ A **petition**⁴ to the City Council's April 18 Petitions Committee calling for a traffic-free Princes Street, where people on foot and bike can co-exist happily with the trams. The petition, which was launched prior to the Council's consultation, has attracted some 600 signatures so far.
- ◆ A **survey of Spokes members**⁵, seeking opinions on the future of Princes Street and George Street, and attracting 140 responses. This too was undertaken [in March 2013] before we were aware of the Council's intended consultation, and so asked somewhat different questions.
- ◆ A **bicycle count**⁶ in April 2013 to identify actual numbers of people using Princes Street and George Street by bike under current conditions.

1 Most recently, see Spokes Bulletin 115, but on many earlier occasions such as our 19.11.09 public meeting on the future of Princes Street, chaired by Lesley Riddoch and addressed by then Transport Head, Marshall Poulton.

2 Air pollution: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-22296926>

3 Public meeting report... <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/0911-K-note-Spokes-Public-Meeting-191109-notes-301109.pdf> and Scotsman report

4 <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wordpress/2013/01/princes-street-petition/>

5 Spokes member survey: <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wordpress/2013/04/the-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly/>

6 <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/130416-PrSt-GeoSt-MiniCountFigures.pdf>

2. The Council's overall consultation concept

Spokes's top preference is for a Princes Street entirely free of motor traffic, even if this means continued two-way bus and taxi traffic in George Street along with limited private non-through traffic. Long-distance and out-of-town buses should be encouraged to use Queen Street, for example by slow speeds in George Street.

We are however, *subject to 2-way traffic-free cycling in both streets*, willing to support the Council's proposal for one-way motor traffic westbound in Princes Street (bus/taxi) and eastbound in George Street (bus/taxi/car). We see this as an interim more politically feasible approach, hopefully leading to a future phase making Princes Street entirely traffic-free; in the same way that the Council initially banned private cars from one direction in Princes Street, extending this to a full ban some years later.

Our member survey [1 above] is compatible with this stance, with 45% of respondents preferring Princes Street entirely free of motor traffic [with 2-way cycle use], 37% wanting a Princes Street/ George Street 1-way system for motor traffic [assuming 2-way cycle use on the traffic-free sides of both streets], only 12% preferring a traffic-free George Street, and 6% favouring the current arrangements.

3. Cycle use in Princes Street

Although we support the overall consultation approach we are shocked that the City Council seeks effectively to ban people from getting about by bike in safe conditions in Princes Street⁷. This is a serious mistake, completely at odds with European comparator cities and with the Council's own avowed intention that 10% of all trips, and 15% of commuter journeys, will be by bike by 2020.

The proposed ban is even more of a surprise given that the Head of Planning told the Policy and Strategy Committee in 2011, in response to a Spokes briefing paper⁸, *"It is not the intention that cycle lanes are squeezed out, but are part of the solution."*

Assuming a one-way motor-traffic solution is adopted, two-way cycle use should be provided for on the traffic-free sides of both Princes Street and George Street. The exact nature of each facility needs to be debated, but should enable 2-way traffic-free cycling. See 3.4 and 3.7 below for further discussion.

The rationale for the Princes Street ban is not given in the Committee Report⁹ which forms the consultation document. However, we make the points below on this matter. Many of these points also reinforce the need for 2-way traffic-free cycle provision in George Street as well as Princes Street if the Council's 1-way motor traffic proposal is in fact adopted.

3.1 Desire lines and permeability

We suspect the council did not undertake any bicycle counts before deciding that east-west cyclists should all use George Street [apart from those continuing to brave the Princes Street westbound bus/taxi/ cycle carriageway]. Spokes has conducted such a survey [1 above] during a morning rush hour, 8-9am. Despite bad weather 97 cyclists were counted in Princes Street, compared to 62 in George Street.

Thus **whilst there is significant cycle use in George Street, Princes Street is clearly the main desire line**, even despite the current difficult conditions in which traffic pressures can force the cyclist towards the tramlines.

⁷ Under the council proposals, cyclists would still be able to travel westbound in the same lane as buses and taxis, and would therefore (in this direction) still be subject to the traffic pressures which lead to many of the tramline bike crashes.

⁸ 18.2.2011 Spokes briefing <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/1102-to-cllrs-re-Gehl1.pdf>

⁹ http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/downloads/download/2587/building_a_vision_for_the_city_centre

The fact that George Street is currently part of the National Cyclerooute Network is not a reason to adopt it as the one and only east-west cycle route through the city centre. It is an important route, but local cycle journeys are the priority, and our survey shows that Princes Street is vital for such trips.

Cyclists need to be able to travel to their destination as directly as possible, given that cycling requires physical effort. Permeability, enabling cyclists to travel from A to B easily, is widely recognised as an important factor in encouraging greater cycle use. Whilst some cyclists use Princes Street as a through route, many others use it as a place of multiple destinations [3.7 below].

It is no surprise that Princes Street is the greater desire line. It connects directly to the West End, North Bridge, and Waverley Station. It gives access to many shops, the National Gallery and RSA and Princes Street Gardens.

3.2 Gehl Report, *Edinburgh Revisited: Public Space Public Life*

The 2010 Gehl report¹⁰ on which the Council's ideas are based, has absolutely no doubt that cycling should be catered for in Princes Street. Indeed, Gehl's local Director, David Sim, told an Autumn 2010 Council seminar for councillors, senior officers and invited groups, that Princes Street "*has huge potential for cycling*" and there should be "*many more bikes*" there (as well as in George Street).

References to Princes Street cycling in the Gehl Report include...

- ◆ Chapter 3, p112. Princes Street currently: "*Lack of focus on walking and cycling*," "*No cycle lanes in the centre*," "*Lack of coherent cycle network*."
- ◆ Ch 4, p142. Princes Street diagrammatic example cross section showing cycle lanes
- ◆ Ch 6, p218. Princes Street and surroundings: "*Bike routes*," "*Coherent network*."

3.3 Tramline dangers

Although the Council's consultation report does not mention bicycle tramline crashes, we suspect that part of the rationale for banning cycling from the north side of Princes Street would be to reduce tramline crashes and injuries. If so, this is a very mistaken approach...

- ◆ Most Princes Street tramline crossings by cyclists will be near the West End and St Andrews Square, and many cyclists using George Street as an alternative to Princes Street will still need to cross the tramlines here to get to and to return from the George Street cyclerooute – and they will additionally face several extra left and right turns [3.6 below]. To take a particularly bad example, a Lothian Road cyclist heading for Waterloo Place will have to cross the tramlines, cycle through at least 4 unnecessary turns, and then re-cross the tramlines.
- ◆ Our member survey, and the reports we have seen of tramline crashes, suggest that at least 50% of tramline crashes involve traffic pressures. A cyclist travelling parallel to the lines is forced sideways into the lines, or a cyclist wishing to cross the lines is unable to position them self safely. Such crashes would be avoided in traffic-free conditions.
- ◆ Any remaining cyclerooute-related tramline crashes are likely to be less serious than now. The cyclist will probably be travelling slower [in a non-trafficked and possibly paved area] and will not feel pressurised into a dangerous last-minute forced manoeuvre for fear of being run over.
- ◆ Under the Council plans, westbound cycling will remain as at present, so any reduction in crashes would only be eastbound.
- ◆ **Indeed a 2-way cyclerooute could well reduce total tramline crashes and injuries** by providing a safer environment for some of the 50% of bike journeys which the council's current proposals will retain on the westbound carriageway.

¹⁰ Gehl report: http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/207/planning-policies/1096/public_realm/2

3.4 Use of space

There is adequate space for 2-way traffic-free cycle use on the north side of Princes Street. The following bullet points expand on this.

- ◆ First, there may be need for a route for eastbound emergency vehicles and for out-of-hours eastbound delivery vehicles. If so, this could be designed so that it doubles up as a 2-way cycle facility, traffic-free except for the above. We note that allowing 2-way cycling in 1-way streets is increasingly common, and is supported in ATAP.
- ◆ A 3m cycle facility will still allow space to widen the existing pavement.
- ◆ However even at its present width, the pavement's pedestrian capacity will be greatly enhanced once the large bus shelters are removed – these considerably reduce effective width, and also create semi-dead areas between the shelters. At most times of the day, and on most days of the year, the Princes Street pavement, with bus shelters removed and some widening, will cope well with pedestrian activity, including some pavement cafes etc.
- ◆ Pedestrian and cycle flows differ significantly at different times of day and different periods of the year. The times of heaviest cycle use will probably be commuter times, when pedestrian levels are lower. The cycle facility could be designed such that, if pedestrians did spill into the cycle area at very busy times, cyclists would travel at speeds consistent with that. For example, the cycle facility could be in appearance somewhat similar to the pavement, but 2 or 3 cm lower.

3.5 Previous experience

- ◆ In December 2011 Princes Street was completely traffic-free, and there was totally unrestricted cycle use, without even a separate cycle facility. Our pictures from the time¹¹ suggest successful integration of cycling, rather as the Gehl report would have us expect, although for a permanent solution a segregated solution is preferable.

3.6 Additional risks to people using bikes

- ◆ Banning cycling in Princes Street means that cyclists on many journeys will not only have to leave their preferred direct route, but will be forced into several additional left and right turns, despite junctions being recognised as conducive to crashes between motor vehicles and cyclists.
- ◆ The council's proposals do not indicate any safe and convenient ways of reaching and leaving George Street from Princes Street. For example it is difficult to see how the council can connect George Street and North Bridge in a manner attractive and safe for cycling.

3.7 Nature of the cycle facilities

- ◆ Two-way cycle use should be enabled on the traffic-free sides of both Princes and George Streets, although a few fast and confident cyclists will doubtless continue to use the traffic lanes.
- ◆ The exact nature of each facility needs to be debated, but it should be free of motor traffic and allow for 2-way cycling. Our recommendation is clearly designated 2-way cycle lanes, but these questions are new to Edinburgh and there may be a case for experimenting with temporary designs prior to final implementation. The design of the Princes Street facility, in particular, should be such that cyclists are encouraged to adjust to the conditions when large numbers of pedestrians are present.
- ◆ Design needs to take into account that some cyclists, particularly in commuter periods, will use Princes Street as a through route, whereas for many other people on bikes, including perhaps many of those currently scared of cycling, and at many times of day, Princes Street will be a destination. Many people will in fact be visiting multiple destinations – for example shops (and future cafes!) in Princes Street, building societies in George Street, the gardens, Waverley, etc.

¹¹ December 7 Spokes website news item: <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wordpress/2011/12/princes-street-paradise/>

3.8 Visitors and tourism

- ◆ Tourists and visitors, particularly those from European countries or from London, will be astonished to emerge from Waverley or disembark from the tram only to find 'No Cycling' signs in Scotland's premier street! If they have heard of the Council's now widely-reported reputation¹² as Scotland's most forward-looking council on cycling, they will be doubly shocked.
- ◆ Should the council introduce a future city centre 'Boris Bikes' public hire scheme [as Glasgow City Council¹³ is already planning to do] it will appear ludicrous if cycling is banned from Princes Street, the likely top destination for most visitors – and it will probably damage the financial viability of a hire scheme.

ANNEX

November 1996 : Edinburgh City Council Transport Convenor Cllr David Begg proudly opens the new Princes Street cycle lane, accompanied by other councillors, four senior officials, and a proud Council banner. Will Princes Street still welcome people travelling and shopping by bike 20 years later??



12 London praises Edinburgh: <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wordpress/2013/02/london-praises-edinburgh/>

13 Glasgow Bike Hire scheme: <http://www.heraldsotland.com/news/home-news/city-to-get-on-its-bike-with-13m-cycle-hire-scheme.20853782>