**Talk for SPOKES public meeting**

**20 November 2014**

Thank you very much indeed for the kind invitation to address you this evening. I’m not a fan of power-point so those of you expecting slides will be disappointed!

It has been my privilege to represent the Dunbar & East Linton ward on East Lothian Council since May 2012, a community where cycling is extremely popular, with an excellent cycle shop and a well established local charity who have been very proactive in promoting cycling over recent years.

I have also been the Council’s Transport spokesman during that time, and while not a cyclist myself, I am passionate advocate of public transport in particular, and have been actively involved in a range of schemes in our county over the past two and a half years – especially with bus and rail.

Before I turn to cycling specifically, allow me to say a brief word about transport in East Lothian as a whole, to help place things in context. As many of you will know, the county can de neatly divided between the urbanised west and rural east, with Musselburgh – by far our largest town – seamlessly running into Edinburgh. As such, our transportation needs and priorities vary extensively between west and east. In the west, our roads are very busy – with Musselburgh in particular experiencing congestion. Public transport is however excellent in the west thanks to the dense network of Lothian Buses services. Further east, we have a vast network of expensive to maintain rural roads and a more heavily subsidised bus network. And running straight down the spine of the county we have the A1 trunk road and the East Coast main line – including the North Berwick branch – offering what is an overall very efficient and high quality transport network. Nothing stands still for long however, and thanks to a Scottish Government target of around 10,000 new homes and a large projected population increase, the pressure on transport infrastructure will intensify further. It is in this context that East Lothian Council seeks to provide and promote sustainable travel options for residents and visitors alike – and of which cycling does, and will continue, to play an important part.

As many of you will know, East Lothian is a very popular cycling destination. As well as several major cycle routes, we also have the John Muir Way – opened by Alex Salmond back in April - which runs between East Lothian and the west coast.

The local authority has been and remains extremely proactive in supporting and promoting cycling, to which I pay particular tribute to our lead officer, Mr Iain Reid, who is in the audience this evening. Measures include:

* Ongoing investment over a period of over 10 years in cycle parking and infrastructure in schools.
* A range of down-loadable route maps available on the Council website.
* On-road advisory cycle lanes introduced on the very busy stretches of road between Gullane & Aberlady and Musselburgh & Joppa.
* A budget this year of around £322,000 – which is over 6% of the total transport budget for the county.
* And maintaining a high level of spend – despite severe budget constraints – on roads maintenance. This is especially important in an area like East Lothian with a dense spread of rural routes which can be prone to pot-holes – a danger to cyclists and motorists alike.

Regular dialogue with cyclists is key, and in my ward where cycling is so popular, this has never been a problem. East Lothian-wide, it’s one of my jobs as Transport spokesman to chair the East Lothian Cycle Forum which meets in Haddington several times a year. These meetings are always well attended and I trust are valued by those who come along.

Cycling to school is especially popular in parts of East Lothian Council. The recent Sustrans ‘hands-up’ survey revealed that around three-quarters of East Lothian pupils travelled ‘actively’ – including cycling. Indeed, Dunbar Primary, in my own area, is among the top schools in Britain for cycling, with 310 of 804 pupils cycling and 226 scooting.

Other East Lothian schools also continue to excel with growing cycling numbers and benefiting from new and improved cycle/scooter storage facilities, with ongoing support from the Sustrans Cycle Parking Fund. The latest facilities were installed at some schools just last month.

Dunbar is fortunate in that we have been able to develop traffic measures to make cycling as safe as possible. In my own limited experience, it’s very important to develop measures which will receive the widespread support of the community at large – not just cyclists.

One example of this was the recent closure of a road to cars outside the junior campus of Dunbar Primary School to traffic during the peak drop-off and pick-up periods.

\*\*\*EXPLAIN COMPROMISE SOLUTION IN DUNBAR\*\*\*

A second example has been the introduction of 20 mph speed limits, with Dunbar serving as a pilot. The area identified is close to the senior primary school campus and also includes a range of residential streets and connecting arterial roads. One key road, where 20 mph would be all but unenforceable, has remained at 30, which in my view makes the whole scheme much more sellable to the community at large.

It remains the Council’s policy to introduce 20 mph limits where there is community support, and we have been working very closely with local groups to identify this. Three new schemes have been approved in North Berwick, Tranent and Cockenzie, which I hope will be started soon. There is also interest from East Linton and elsewhere.

Looking ahead, we are planning more improvements including new shared-use paths on route 76 at Broxburn near Dunbar and route 196 at Crossgatehall – both part-funded by our friends at Sustrans. A feasibility report, co-funded by Sustrans, was published in April which will assist the Council in identifying which other schemes to progress going forward. This may include improved surfaces for the Haddington-Longniddry and Pencitland railway walks, albeit mindful that there may be differing views among users as to what this surface should be!

We are also reviewing and updating our Local Transport Strategy which will be followed by a Cycle Action Plan.

One big project, which is very much an aspiration, but on which early discussions with all the key stakeholders have taken place, is the construction of a bridge for cyclists and pedestrians over the A1 near Torness.

At present, the villages of Innerwick and Oldhamstocks on the south side of the A1 east of Dunbar are effectively cut off from Dunbar and the beaches along the coast by the new A1, which slices through the countryside. This means that cyclists from these villages, who would not wish to take their lives in their hands by using the dualled A1, are forced to embark on a huge detour across steep and winding country roads to access Dunbar.

A bridge would provide a quick, direct and safe route to cycle route 76 and is the sort of ambitious project which will require genuine joined-up working – and, of course, a lot of funders. The project is being led by Sustaining Dunbar, and if anyone would like to know more about it, please speak to me afterwards. Ambitious it may be, but I think it’s a great example of the vision, partnership working and dogged hard work which is going be necessary in the future if we are to achieve the sort of integrated, safe, low carbon transport system which I think everyone in this room wants to see.

Thank you very much indeed for listening, and I look forward to your questions.