

# SPOKES

*The Lothian Cycle Campaign*

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Riccardo Marini  
City Design Leader  
City of Edinburgh Council  
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Dear Mr Marini

## **BICYCLE USE AND CITY DESIGN**

I am writing to ask how you see bicycle use and its promotion fitting into our city and, more specifically, into the city design initiative, as outlined in the current City Chambers exhibition.

It may help if I give you a bit of background, to explain our position and our concerns.

First, in case any of this letter sounds negative, could I stress that Spokes supports a design initiative for the City, leading to design which is both coordinated and integrated with function; and we support many of the streetscape ideas, such as guardrail removal. On both design and streetscape, however, cycling and its encouragement must be fully integrated. Continuing with the example of guardrail removal, its unintended but vital function of providing very frequent bike-parking opportunities needs to be recognised and replaced by other facilities.

Next, you doubtless know that the City has ambitious targets to increase the modal share of cycle use in the city by 2010, to 4% of all journeys (from 2%), to 6% of work journeys (from 4%), and to 4% of school journeys (from 1%). You may also know that as a legacy of council policies in the 1990s and early 2000s, notably the widespread provision of onroad facilities seen every day by every road user, adult cycle use has already grown substantially – for example journeys to work have risen from a low point of around 1% to the current 4% - a particularly remarkable achievement at a time when cycle use in most parts of Britain was static or falling.

Recent traffic counts and interview-surveys by Spokes, and other evidence, suggests there are now significant pockets of regular adult utility cyclists. For example, bicycles comprise 15%-20% of all citybound vehicles on Lothian Road in the morning rush hour, and around 20% on Forrest Road; twice as many people commute to work in Edinburgh by bike as by rail; and cycling now comprises over 20% of staff commuting at Edinburgh University's Kings Buildings campus. These show the potential for substantial bike use growth across the city.

You are probably also aware that the leading party in the City Council, the Liberal Democrats, have a manifesto commitment to creating a 'Model Cycle-Friendly City.' I need hardly point out that increased cycle use is equally desired by the government for reasons of public health, environment and congestion – indeed very recently Transport Minister Stewart Stevenson pointedly remarked how far Scotland is behind its European comparator nations in this respect.

In this context we have been very disappointed to see that there is, apparently, no thought to cycle use or its promotion in the current exhibition outside the City Chambers.

Regrettably, this is in line with an apparent downgrading of the enthusiasm and impetus to promote cycle use in the last few years, as streetscape (and the tram) rather than transport integration have come to dominate the City's transport agenda. Due to the new enthusiasm for streetscape, onroad cycle facilities have suffered (resulting in many complaints from our members), bike parking has been disallowed in Princes Street, and there are smaller items such as removal of a dropped kerb to make a pavement look nicer, despite resulting increased pedestrian/cycle conflict. We are particularly concerned over the downgrading of onroad bike facilities. When these were widely introduced (initially in the 1990s under Cllr Begg) they were seen not just as a safety measure but as a means of promoting cycle use, making it feel as if cycling is expected, desirable and a normal activity. Subsequently, responses to the Council's own streetscape consultation strongly suggested that the onroad facilities were succeeding in raising bike use. Despite that, and largely due to Edinburgh's recent ideas on what streetscape means, the promotional aspect of onroad facilities has now been largely disregarded, and they are seen as only to be installed where important for safety, and to be black where possible. Similarly, although this is perhaps less close to your own area of work, the tram means that cycling conditions are soon to worsen in Princes Street and Leith Walk with the removal of cycle lanes (though car parking will be retained on Leith Walk, being considered higher priority). Spokes (and TIE) brought over a Dutch tram/cycle consultant last year to report on bike/tram integration, but virtually all his proposals were rejected - some for streetscape reasons.

Turning to the current City Chambers exhibition, we note that comparator cities quoted for Edinburgh include Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Portland (Oregon) and Paris. These are all cities which not only have high quality design, and tram systems, but also high levels of cycle use – and not by chance, but due to deliberate, effective council policies. Furthermore, those cities, and their mayors, are publicly proud of their cycling policies and achievements, and how cycle use integrates into the city and into the overall transport picture. It is really disappointing that Edinburgh appears not to be looking to the lessons and examples of those comparator cities.

In terms of specifics, the exhibition covers many individual locations such as Lothian Road, Haymarket, the Waterfront, and so on, whose future is absolutely critical to providing welcoming and safe conditions to encourage more cycle use in the city, as well as to cater for existing cyclists. Yet not once is cycle use even mentioned. Taking Lothian Road as an example, we note that Reich and Hall consultancy (Neil Gillespie) has already been asked to prepare designs for that important corridor into the city centre. Has Reich and Hall been asked to ensure that the street will be welcoming and safe for cyclists? - in our comparator cities that would be an unquestioned and instinctive requirement. Have they been made aware that even in the current bike-hostile conditions (and Council data reveals Lothian Road to be a hotspot for cyclist collisions and injuries) some 15%-20% of citybound morning rush-hour vehicles are bikes?

In conclusion, the apparent omission or downgrading of cycle use in the design and streetscape initiatives so far – in complete contrast to Edinburgh's comparator cities – has already raised a significant level of scepticism and distress amongst our members. We fear that if the existence and the promotion of cycling is treated similarly in the concrete outcomes of the design initiative, as is already happening in the concrete outcomes of the streetscape agenda, then the council's targets significantly to grow cycle use will not be met, the leading party's manifesto commitment to a Model Cycle-Friendly City will fail, and visitors from Copenhagen or Portland will ask why it's so difficult to get around in Edinburgh as compared to their home city.

We remain convinced that integration of cycling promotion into city design, as in our comparator cities, is not only perfectly feasible but eminently desirable. We would be pleased to hear your thoughts on this, and if and how you envisage cycle use and its promotion fitting into our city and its design initiative.

Yours Sincerely

Dave du Feu  
Spokes