

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... DaveduFeuATgmail.com

To: John Swinney MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, Scottish Government

Cc: Other party transport representatives...

Des McNulty MSP, Labour

Alison McInnes MSP, LibDem

Alex Johnstone MSP, Conservative

Patrick Harvie MSP, Green Party

14 December 2008

Dear Mr Swinney

Scottish Government Budget 2009-10

You will recall that we wrote to you in September, about funding for cycle projects in Scotland, and you asked John Ewing formally to accept our letter at the Parliament on 22 September.

Mr Ewing then arranged for us to meet Diane McLafferty, Head of Transport Strategy, and officials from your Sustainable Transport Team, to discuss our proposals in detail. We felt that meeting to be very constructive, and our impression was that our proposal was eminently workable should funding be made available from the political side.

Subsequently we fleshed out our proposal in more detail, as a submission to the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee on the draft Budget 2009-10, and this was discussed when you gave evidence to that Committee on November 4th.

We are writing now in the hope that you are in a position to give us a written response to our above September letter, and also respond to our comments below on the subsequent developments and the current opportunities.

A. THE SPOKES PROPOSAL

As you know, we proposed that the government in its 2009/10 budget takes the first step towards the policies and levels of funding seen in comparator European nations (such as Norway and Denmark) by creating a new £20m cycle projects fund, additional to current initiatives, and so raising cycle spending towards a still small 2% of total transport spend. The fund would be administered by the government's existing Sustainable Transport Team, and would be open to bids over a certain level (say £1m) by any relevant body – for example, Sustrans, local authorities, Transport Partnerships, First ScotRail, BWB, and so on. The rationale for this approach was explained in our budget submission and its practicality was discussed in detail with your officials at the above meeting.

B. CABINET SECRETARY'S EVIDENCE TO THE TICC COMMITTEE, 4 NOVEMBER

We were delighted to see your comment, “I am very much attracted by the lines of argument that Spokes puts forward.”

On a perhaps lighthearted note, however, whilst it was interesting to hear that you are an enthusiastic cyclist, we trust that this would not influence your decisions any more than the fact that you may or may not be an enthusiastic motorist! It is in fact our past experience that some decision-makers who are 'enthusiastic cyclists' are reluctant to increase cycling investment. Sometimes they see cycling as a pastime or as sport rather than as transport. They can also be concerned lest they be seen as favouring a personal interest (though that argument doesn't seem to apply when they are 'enthusiastic motorists', with driving regarded as transport rather than a hobby!) **We therefore stress most strongly that our proposal is entirely a transport proposal.** It aims to raise cycle use for everyday journeys, primarily for utility journeys for work, shopping, school, social visits, and so on, whilst also contributing significantly to family recreational trips and to tourist travel. It is not in any way aimed at cycle sport, mountain biking, or similar, which should be funded under sporting rather than transport budgets (and which are not relevant to our own Spokes objectives).

It is a source of great frustration that cycle use appears to be regarded by many decision makers largely as a hobby or a sport and not, as in comparator European countries, as a hugely valuable means of local transport and accessibility. This may well be the crux of the explanation for the comparatively derisory levels of cycle investment in Scotland.

Turning to your evidence at the Committee, your main argument against adopting our proposal was that cycling investment already comes from more sources than just from the £11m Sustainable and Active Travel and the £9m CWSS budget lines. That is of course correct, but we fear it leaves two very misleading impressions with anyone who is not familiar with the considerable intricacies of cycle investment sources in Scotland.

a. *Your comments might be taken to imply that cycle investment is much higher than it actually is.* Spokes research suggests that total cycling investment in Scotland from **all** sources is around £20m, equivalent to around 1% of the Scottish transport budget. We can argue plus or minus a few million, but what remains abundantly clear is that total cycling investment is far below that in comparator countries who, through consistent policy and investment over the years, have successfully achieved levels of everyday cycle use far above those in Scotland.

b. *Your comments might be taken to imply that cycle investment has risen under the new SNP government.* We do not believe that to be the case. Certainly, some relevant budget lines have risen – notably Sustainable and Active Travel. However, funding in some other areas has fallen – for example the £4m a year to Sustrans, largely for local capital schemes across Scotland, allocated by the previous Lab/LD administration in its last two years. We believe the net effect is that total cycle investment under this government is very similar to that under the previous administration, or perhaps slightly lower.

Given the subsequent recommendations of the TICC Committee in their report, it is clear that they were not wholly convinced by your arguments.

Finally we noted, as doubtless did the Committee in deciding their recommendations, your constructive remarks that as Finance Minister in a minority Government you have to take the Parliament with you, and that you are happy to engage with Committees or indeed with other political parties on this matter.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE TICC AND FINANCE COMMITTEES

We refer to the reports on the draft budget from the TICC Committee [paras 113-120 thereof] and from the Finance Committee [paras 203-204].

We were pleased with the TICC recommendations, but very surprised that the Finance Committee did not comment one way or the other on most of those recommendations! We note that TICC Committee had the time to consider the matter in some detail, including discussion with yourself, whereas Finance would have been unfamiliar with the background.

a. Finance Committee noted your points about there being more than one source of cycling and active travel investment but did not comment on that.

b. Finance Committee opposed any reduction in the (rapidly rising) trunk roads budget, a point which clearly concerned them far more than the positive recommendations, given that TICC had not even explicitly recommended such a reduction!

However, Finance Committee made no comment one way or the other on the following most important and positive TICC Committee recommendations...

- c. **that the active travel budget be increased.**
- d. **that the Spokes Budget Submission be considered carefully in the context of increasing the active travel budget.**
- e. **that other budget lines (e.g. trunk roads or maintenance) be examined for slippage, as possible funding sources.**

D. SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE TO DATE

We have to point out that two recent monitoring reports, too late to be included in our Budget Submission, point to very poor government performance in the area of modal shift towards cycling and walking, a matter of great and increasing concern in the light of the ambitions of the Climate Change Bill.

The Sustainable Development Commission's *Review of Progress by the Scottish Government*, November 2008 states "Transport is the poorest performing area in terms of sustainable development.." and, even worse, within this badly performing area, "Active travel is in relative decline..."

Similarly the *Scottish Government Climate Change Programme 2nd Annual Report, 2007-8*, concluded, "It is imperative that overall emissions from this sector (transport) are driven down."

Whilst the Scottish Government is raising investment in public transport, largely assisting journeys of over a few miles in length, it is freezing investment (at a miserable level relative to comparator countries) and literally regressing in terms of modal shift to active travel for local journeys and local accessibility. Why is a case for sustainability recognised by the government for longer journeys yet largely neglected for short ones, even though the cost of doing so would be far lower?

E. THE NEXT STAGES

In conclusion, we urge you most strongly, in preparing the Budget Bill, to take seriously the above recommendations (marked c, d, e, in bold type) from the TICC Committee. The debate on these matters at TICC makes clear that virtually all their witnesses, not just ourselves, sought very substantial rises in funding for active travel, and it was also clear that the Spokes proposal was seen as a concrete and workable means of achieving a first immediate significant step in that direction.

Whilst the Finance Committee explicitly rejected funding such an initiative through a reduction in the trunk road budget (albeit that the trunk roads budget is rising rapidly, and the rise alone is many times higher than our proposed £20m Cycle Projects Fund) it must be noted that TICC asked that other funding sources be investigated if an immediate reduction in the trunk road budget was not appropriate.

It must also be noted that in the current recessionary climate the Cycle Projects Fund has the particular advantage of providing labour-intensive and rapidly implementable projects, also likely to be widely spread across Scotland.

Finally, we attach for your information a letter from experts in climate change, public health and transportation, urging support by the Scottish Government for our proposal.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours Sincerely

Dave du Feu
for Spokes

Attached – supporting letter from academic experts in climate change, public health and transportation.