

SPOKES

The Lothian Cycle Campaign

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EDINBURGH PUBLIC REALM STRATEGY - CONSULTATION

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the above. Whilst supportive of the objectives we are concerned that the strategy is not sufficiently concerned with function – particularly with accessibility, and specifically with cycle use. The strategy's concentration on appearance, materials, etc, whilst obviously very important, must be properly integrated with function. If this holistic approach is not taken from the very outset, mistakes will occur, and there is a serious risk of one policy being implemented to the detriment of another.

A. BACKGROUND

Streetscape and Public Realm in Edinburgh

Specifically on the question of cycle use, Spokes and our members have been extremely concerned that problems have already occurred in several respects with regard to Streetscape and Public Realm developments, for the above reasons. Obviously we appreciate there may be some cases where it is decided that cycle use, promotion and safety will be a lower priority than some visual or other priorities. However, this has to be a conscious and considered decision, with all priorities and council objectives given serious consideration from the outset.

Our strong feeling is that, in the area of streetscape and public realm, cycle use has often been an afterthought – which then is too late to deal with properly. Some months ago Riccardo Marini was invited to attend the CEC Cycle Forum, and after extended discussion his final words before leaving were on the lines that whilst he felt that the Streetscape Initiative was in principle very supportive of increased cycle use, possibly they had not really given it proper consideration when it came to concrete plans and situations. We agree completely.

As one of the respondents to your own 2005 council Streetscape consultation, Professor Phil Banfill, who teaches building conservation, stated in his response, *“Every building conservation charter in the world emphasises the need for conservation proposals to be sustainable in order to give buildings and areas new life. ... If allowed to prevail, the pre-eminence of appearance over practicality will undo the good work that has allowed cycle use in Edinburgh to grow while declining elsewhere in the UK, and Edinburgh will not achieve its stated objective of sustainability.”*

To give a few concrete examples...

- In Princes Street and Leith Walk, every inch of width is vital to provide the maximum space for pleasant and convenient conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. Yet over 1 metre has been devoted to a central island between the tram tracks. Our belief is that the main reason for this was appearance – and if that is the case it is a clear example of (subjective) views on appearance taking precedence over really important functional (and enjoyment) considerations for pedestrians and cyclists. We note that whilst some other reasons were given for the central island, tram systems in most other cities in the world do not require such a central island. We do understand that Princes Street is a rather unusual case, with no buildings on one side, but that is not the explanation, as it does not apply in Leith Walk.
- The banning of coloured surfacing for cycle lanes and advanced stop lines in a wide area of central Edinburgh has brought, and continues to bring, countless complaints to Spokes from our 1200 members. Research by Napier University (referenced in Edinburgh's Local Transport Strategy) suggests strongly that coloured surfacing minimises intrusion into bus and cycle lanes by motorists, making this a *safety* issue. It is also a *promotional* issue - the council's own streetscape consultation in 2005 drew a remarkable response from members of the public showing very convincingly exactly how Edinburgh's widespread onroad facilities were bringing about increasing cycle use – against a national trend of declining cycle use at that time. Again, this was a question of subjective views on appearance taking precedence over other policy priorities and potentially over road safety.
- As an example on a much more minor scale – the cyclists' southbound dropped kerb from Teviot Place into Middle Meadow Walk was removed during pavement reconstruction, and when representations were made (as a result of complaints from our members) we were told it would never be reinstated because of pavement appearance. Now pedestrians and cyclists share the same remaining dropped kerb, despite congestion at busy times, with southbound cyclists conflicting with northbound pedestrians and cyclists.

The general point is that accessibility and safety for cycle use often seem an afterthought, when they should be integral considerations from the outset. Furthermore, the appearance considerations which appear predominant are highly subjective. Finally, in for example Copenhagen or Amsterdam - cities with which Edinburgh is often compared - provision for and encouragement of cycle use would be an automatic consideration from the outset, not something to be tacked on later if remembered or when complaints are made.

Charter of Brussels

In signing the Charter of Brussels, Edinburgh City signed up to a really ambitious target of 15% of trips to be by bike by 2020. That requires a big change of mindset, so that cycle use is considered from the outset in all relevant policy and decision-making – as does of course already happen in countries which have achieved and passed such targets.

We are delighted that City Development Director Dave Anderson has told us (in respect of Princes Street Public Realm) ... “*Our proposals will take fully into account the Brussels Charter and our wider aspirations to increase active modes of transport.*” That needs to be reflected in relevant documents and policy development from the outset, not added on at a later date.

B. DRAFT PUBLIC REALM STRATEGY - COMMENTS

2 Vision

With such a densely-populated central area, Edinburgh has a high level of local accessibility – with very easy access to shopping, leisure, workplace and cultural facilities for large numbers of people on foot, by bike and by bus. Public realm developments should recognise, build on and enhance this, to the benefit of the local economy, public health, carbon emissions, and the avoidance of excessive car traffic. Therefore we suggest the vision says,

“Edinburgh will have and maintain a high quality public realm to complement, act as a setting for, and enhance the outstanding natural, built and accessibility qualities of this unique capital city.”

4 Objectives

[a] A new objective should be added (probably between existing objectives 1 and 3)...

“To ensure a public realm which meets and enhances the opportunities for local accessibility, particularly by foot, bicycle and local public transport.”

It may be argued that this is covered in existing objective 3, but that objective also deals very much with the visual aspects – materials, dressing, etc. Function and access are so exceptionally important as to require a separate objective. Relevant wording from sections 5 and 6 of the existing draft strategy would be moved to and adapted for the new objective.

Furthermore, with the passing of the Climate Change act, and subsequent requirements on local authorities, local accessibility needs to take on a whole new level of importance. That new context needs to be included in all relevant policies - such as this one.

In the section expanding on the proposed new objective above, there should be explicit mention of cycle use. Many of the points already made in the existing 5.5, for example, apply equally to cycling as to walking. The Charter of Brussels target, being so ambitious, means that cycling needs considered from the outset in all relevant policy areas, and therefore the Charter target also needs explicit mention in this new section.

[b] If, regrettably, it is decided not to include this new objective, then the existing and future relationships between public realm and cycling travel/access needs explicitly mentioned, very much on the lines of the paragraph immediately before this one – in the same way that pedestrian movement is already covered in 5.5 and elsewhere.

11. Bibliography

The bibliography already includes the council Walking Strategy and the Designing Streets (consultation draft).

It should also include the existing council Cycle Design Guide and the Cycling Action Plan (in preparation).

We hope our comments will be of value and where possible incorporated into the developing Strategy.

Yours Sincerely
Dave du Feu, for Spokes