

Spokes Action Update 29.12.14

... This is a circular to emailable Spokes members. If you recently sent us a change of email address it may not yet be in our database, so this message may go to your old address or possibly to both.

... When using email addresses below, replace [AT] by @.

1. FOR YOUR DIARY

- January 18-22 **Filmhouse 'Get On Your Bike' week**. Includes *Bicycle*, documentary of all types of UK cycling; and *Wadjda*, inspiring story of a young Saudi girl fighting for the simple right to ride a bike. <http://www.filmhousecinema.com/seasons/get-on-your-bike-jan15/>
- Mid/late March [date on our website soon] **Cycling in the City Centre Spokes Spring Public Meeting** - the future for the immediate central area, George Street, Princes Street, etc. Headline speaker – **Cllr Lesley Hinds**, Transport Convener of Edinburgh City Council.

2. FORGET NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS !!

Why spend ages thinking up resolutions you'll soon forget? Instead, keep yourself busy by **acting now!!** We've a few suggestions in items 3-6 below...

We think the issues below are important. If you agree, contact your councillors and/or MSPs as appropriate. You can find them all by entering your postcode at www.writetothem.com. We'd be pleased to see any useful replies.

Do you want to raise more than one subject - or do you feel very strongly? **If so, why not ask in your email if you can *meet* them (probably at their regular surgery) or speak to them on the phone.** Face to face meetings often have even more impact than emails alone.

3. SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT 2015 BUDGET [**contact your MSPs**]

We have been campaigning hard since the draft budget was published in October. As we highlighted, [the draft budget means less cash for cycling infrastructure in 2015/16 than in 2014/15](#). Many members and other concerned individuals and organisations have contacted MSPs and we understand that this is making an impact – **thank you if you have already done this**.

Remarkably - the government subsequently announced what we think is the first ever government-sponsored Parliamentary debate on active travel - for January 7. Crucially, this debate comes *before* the budget is finalised, which usually happens in late January. We suspect that the government would be unlikely to sponsor such a debate at this point in time unless they were planning a positive announcement – though the details may well only be finalised at the last minute.

You could put one or two of the following ideas/questions to your MSPs...

- Ask if they will attend the above Jan 7 Parliamentary debate. Suggest a couple of points you'd like them to make in the debate. Also, tell them of a new facility which you love but which was only possible with cash .. e.g. [in Edinburgh] the rebuilt North Meadow Walk, the vastly improved A90 cyclistroute, or the new Edinburgh-Midlothian connection.
- Ask for a step change in active travel cash. [Over 100 prestigious organisations say 10% of transport budgets should go on active travel](#). The Scottish Government invests 1%-2%.
- Ask that the [£5m mistake in the budget speech](#) is corrected. So far [Ministers have just skated round the point](#), even when asked directly by MSPs.

4. SCHOOL STREETS CONSULTATION [*consultation*]

Edinburgh Council is to experiment with pedestrian/cycle-only zones outside 11 Primary Schools at opening and closing times – i.e. motor traffic will be banned at these times.

The lucky schools are... Abbeyhill, Bonaly, Buckstone, Clermiston, Colinton, Cramond, Duddingston, St John's, Sciennes, St Peter's, Towerbank.

If you are affected - or anyway if you like these plans - fill in the online questionnaire, attend the public drop-ins, and tell your councillors what you think. [Full consultation details here](#).

If you live outside Edinburgh - tell your councillors about the Edinburgh plans and ask them to do similar. NB – East Lothian Council already has a similar experiment [at Haddington schools](#).

5. SATURDAY BUS LANES TO BE SCRAPPED [*contact your councillors*]

We have already highlighted our great dismay at [Edinburgh's plans to allow motor traffic into all bus lanes except in peak hours](#) [plus motorbikes at all times]. Unfortunately the position is worse than we realised - **the proposals also allow all traffic to use all bus lanes all day on Saturdays**.

We cannot understand why the council, whose policies are *succeeding* in raising cycling, bussing and walking, and cutting car use, should suddenly retreat, make cycling conditions more intimidating, pavements noisier and more splashy, and risking Edinburgh's hard-won reputation as a top public-transport city. [For data on Edinburgh's progress see the census links in section 1 [here](#)].

If you don't like what's happening, tell your councillors and, politely but forcefully, ask them to justify their decisions.

6. GEORGE STREET CYCLEROUTE REMOVAL [*contact your councillors*]

The George Street cycle lane, and the new George Street environment in general, are not perfect - but an early public survey by an independent research agency,* and feedback from individual spokes members, suggests it is a big improvement on previous conditions.

* <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/1412-December-Steering-Group-Presentation-Lorna.pptx>

What few people realise, however, is that unless the council takes decisions in the next few months the cyclistroute will be removed in September and George Street will revert to motor traffic on both sides. The entire current scheme is based on an experimental Traffic Regulation Order which expires in September, and so legally the scheme cannot remain after that date without a new Order.

This, incidentally, is why the scheme has been built very cheaply. If the experiment, or a revised version, becomes permanent, then obviously higher quality materials and appropriate design changes will be used.

Furthermore, although the general public likes the scheme, the council is under fierce pressure from influential groups who are unhappy with it – a consultation meeting we attended was dominated by articulate speakers complaining about the scheme and questioning the validity of the public opinion survey. Only Spokes was prepared to give clear support. Some local traders and residents argued strongly for more car parking and more car access; whilst the powerful heritage lobby was very unhappy that the current layout no longer looks 'symmetrical' and that the wood-construction tented restaurants are 'tatty' [obviously they had to be built cheaply for the experimental phase!]

For the future, we see it as vital that segregated cycling remains in George Street [though the design could be improved in various ways]. It is equally – or more – important to make Princes Street traffic-free on one side (or both sides), with segregated cycling provision, as we argued in our earlier consultation response <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wordpress/documents/members-campaigning/edinburgh/princes-st-city-centre/>. Incidentally, note that virtually all the Princes Street cycling tramline crashes happen because traffic pressures result in difficult positioning for the cyclist – these problems would disappear with proper cycling provision.

What *You* Can Do...

To revert to the previous situation in September would be tragic – and, we think, widely unpopular. So the council must *in the next few months* decide what to do next for George Street – and, ideally, Princes Street. **Decisions must be made soon, as even to retain the present layout will require a new Traffic Regulation Order - a lengthy process. If the Council cannot decide yet on a new scheme, the present layout [with minor improvements] should be retained* until a decision is taken.**

*Officials say it is tricky technically to have 2 successive experimental TROs, but we believe the Council could retain the current scheme by some means or other, even if it involves introducing a full TRO for the present scheme and then replacing it when a future scheme is agreed.

Please tell your councillors what you want for Princes Street and George Street – but, vitally, ask them to ensure that in September we do not lose George Street segregated cycling provision and that we don't revert to two-way motor traffic and kerbside parking.

7. FINALLY ...

- Remember to check out our **website** every so often www.spokes.org.uk.
- We have an active **twitter** presence, [@SpokesLothian](https://twitter.com/SpokesLothian). Please look every so often, and RT any tweets you support. The latest Spokes tweets now also appear on our website in the right-hand column.
- **Happy New Year** – as it will be for Spokes if your elected representatives hear from *you*!