

AND SO, GOODBYE...

The first ever issue of SPOKES, in 1978, was published to cover Lothian Regional Council elections. By next issue, Lothian will be gone, and we would like to take the opportunity to say a big thank-you.



On April 1st the council is abolished, and transport in Lothian split

between 4 separate councils. With buses already fragmented, rail being split up, and the national cycle network to be created by a charity, the only element of Scottish transport with a strategic policy and extensive funding is trunk roads (see p.1). These will pour ever-increasing traffic into towns, cities and country lanes, leaving the small new councils to cope - exactly how *not* to establish an environmentally-based transport policy!!!

On cycling, Lothian now has an international reputation. **Between 1981-1991 bike commuting fell in almost all UK cities - but rose 30% in Edinburgh.** If cycle facilities still seem thin on the ground, just visit any other Scottish city! Recall too that Lothian started from nowhere, at a time when the car was still seen by the public, and government, as the highest consumer aspiration. A time when the government argued that more cycling merely meant more casualties. It took courage to institute pro-cycling policies.



Richard Williams

In 1977 SPOKES called itself *The Lothian Cycle Campaign* because the transport authority covered Lothian - though our first members all lived in the city! At first we were told "*pressure of work in major transport policy [i.e. roads] has precluded any action on cycling*". By 1981, under our consistent pressure, the council started the first railway paths; and in 1983, under Conservative convener **Ian Cramond**, appointed **John Grimshaw** of Sustrans to produce comprehensive long-term Region-wide proposals [Spokesfacts 19, 10p+ see] - the basis for most later work.

By the mid-1980s there was a substantial cycle budget; but despite our efforts it was underspent 50% or more each year. The legal, technical and consultation work for bike facilities needs almost as much staff time as for roads - though construction is of course far cheaper.

In 1987 came Lothian's best-ever decision. **As a direct outcome of SPOKES pre-election lobbying, the new Labour council created a 3-person specialist Cycle Project Team (led by Richard Williams).** Since then - with projects always 'ready to go' - the cycle budget has mopped up *extra* money at the end of each financial year! Annual spending is now £0.5m, 3% of the transport capital budget, with a real impact 'on the ground'.

Over the years many other Regional councillors and officials have done much to help promote cycling, and we would specifically mention long-time Transport Chair **Cllr Ron Muir**, and Liberal **Cllr Donald Gorrie**.

Since 1994, with **Cllr David Begg** as Transport Chair and **Dr George Hazel** as Director, there has been a whole new impetus, under the *moving Forward* transport strategy. Traffic calming, car restraint, and transport awareness publicity should boost cycling substantially. Specifically for bikes the many initiatives underway include networks for S.Edinburgh and 6 Lothian towns, Princes St cycle lane, and a big program of advanced stop lines. The target to double bike commuting between 1991-2000 (a further 150% by 2010) could even be too modest!



Cllr David Begg

However, whilst wholeheartedly thanking Lothian, we do admit that far less would have happened without SPOKES - and our members!! For whilst a council can often lead the public, councillors *must* remain popular - or their party will be out. For example, the idea of road-pricing was recently dropped because most Labour councillors felt it would be extremely unpopular. It makes a huge difference to councillors if they can *see* public support for their policies.

That is why SPOKES always asks you, our members and readers, to write to or visit your councillor; and to reply to newspaper letters only putting a pro-car view. If you do this, you share the credit for all we have achieved so far!!

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

☛ Lothian hopes to start a **car-sharing scheme** [Scotsman 28.11.95] of the type in many German cities. Users don't own cars, but can borrow one 24-hours a day for hourly and mileage fees - cheaper than ownership if you drive under 7500 miles a year, and cutting out chores like car-washing and maintenance. Cars are available widely, with ignition keys in security boxes. Not owning a car gives a genuine choice about using one - and this has cut car mileage by 50%.

☛ Our consultation on the proposed 1-way eastbound **Princes St cycle lane** [SPOKES 60] strongly favoured a position to the right of the bus lane; with a majority wanting a separating kerb. The council has agreed to experiment with white lines and kerbs in different sections; changes can be made rapidly if problems arise.

Lane width will be 1.5m. There may be scope to widen this (or make more drastic changes) later, when westbound cars are banned and more space becomes available.

☛ Lothian has introduced many **traffic-calming schemes**, with great success. Typical accident reductions are 56% (*The Calders*), 16% (*Niddrie Mains Rd*), 69% (*Niddrie House*), 35% (*Liberton Brae/Gdns*). The improvements, mainly by car speed reduction, are very welcome for cyclists - but don't hesitate to remind councillors that traffic-calming details must be bike-friendly!

The council's surveys show that residents strongly support calming - in fact, 80% want 20mph residential zones [Transport Committee 25.1.95]. However, newspaper letters from irate motorists on the supposed dangers of having to drive more slowly do worry councillors. *So if you see such letters, please put the other side!*