

# TRAMS BACKGROUND

Spokes continues to lobby for tram/bike integration as safe and successful as possible, though it is sometimes far from easy. A major achievement is that Edinburgh will be the first UK tram to try out bike carriage on regular services. Many minor improvements to the proposed onroad conditions have been agreed, many remain under discussion, and some arguments are lost – such as the road-width lost through the central island in Princes Street. A collection of relevant documents and more background information is at <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wordpress/> in downloads – public transport.

Following problems since Princes Street opened, the council is looking to **immediate safety measures** - for example, there are several locations where road markings and/or lanes could be used to show the safest route to cycle along. Some of these ideas were discussed prior to the re-opening, and it is unfortunate they are not yet in place – we still have no idea of timescale.

There will be a chance for more change in 2010 when **Traffic Regulation Orders** [TROs] are out for objection and comment. As just one example we - and **you** - should formally object if there are not left-turn bike exemptions at the foot of the Mound, Lothian Rd and Dalry Road. *We always try to notify members when and how to make relevant comments/objections on such issues – join Spokes if you wish to be kept informed.*

**The long-term future of Princes Street** [i.e. once trams are running] is also up for grabs. The Council has promised to consult on this in 2010 [quite separate to the above TRO consultation]. We are assured the options will include banning motor traffic from one or both sides of Princes Street, and a 2-way traffic-free cyclistroute.

# TRAMLINES ADVICE

Whatever the future, tramlines are now in place on Princes Street, and will soon be spreading west to Haymarket and north-east via St Andrews Square, down Leith Walk and on to Newhaven.

This sheet aims to give you advice on coping with tramlines. **Bikes and tramlines co-exist in many European and US cities – but tramlines take getting used to, drivers don't always appreciate the problems, and consequences can be extremely serious – the Sheffield tramlines have even resulted in a cyclist death.**

The advice in this note is offered in good faith, but Spokes can take no responsibility for the consequences of following it. Always be alert to your exact situation and be as aware and safe as you can in the circumstances at the time. Also, every cyclist is different, every bike is different, every bike tyre is different, and every traffic situation is different – and all these affect your interaction with tramlines.

*Please send us suggested improvements to this document*

## OTHER AVAILABLE ADVICE DOCUMENTS

**a. Cycling and Trams TIE.** Red brochure circulated to all Spokes members in March 2009 – also on Spokes website at <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wordpress/> in downloads – public transport – tram – 0903. As well as advice, the brochure also includes background on how the tram was developing in relation to cyclists at that time.

**b. Bike Training video TIE.** This shows the TIE/Bike Station tramline-training event held in a coned-off area of Princes Street on 13 December. It does give you some advice but is more a record of the event than a training video. Also note that some pictures show what *not* to do – for example, the cyclist with fat tyres who successfully crosses the tramlines at a fairly narrow angle [see *crossing tramlines* below]. The video is 35.8MB in size, and can be downloaded from <https://rcpt.yousendit.com/790788822/3d0104d0bf29c0f012eddf5b3ad10332> [we hope this will soon be on Spokes website].

**c. US video – how to cross tramlines** [www.streetfilms.org/how-to-properly-cross-rail-tracks-on-your-bike](http://www.streetfilms.org/how-to-properly-cross-rail-tracks-on-your-bike). Some very useful points, but doesn't answer all the problems in Princes St. Also shows road markings which we don't have (yet???)

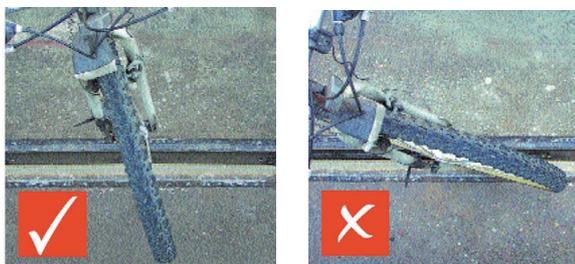
## CROSSING TRAMLINES

**Always try to cross at as near to 90° as possible.** A common recommendation is **never cross at less than 45°** even if this means signalling that you are stopping and getting off (to signal stopping, stick your arm out straight and wave it up and down). To some extent the acceptable angle depends on your bike and its tyres. For narrow tyres 45° may be too small an angle. Even with wide tyres 45° may be dodgy in the wet, when skidding along the line is an added danger.

Longstanding Spokes member Harry Henniker boasts a scar on his chin, resulting from getting his bike stuck in tramlines in 1955(!) whilst cycling to school along Princes Street. Harry says, “*I was nervous about the tram lines at first but soon got used to them. The secret was to cross them at an angle of at least thirty degrees and to keep a firm grip of the handlebars. I must have become a bit blasé however because eventually I got caught in them and went flying over the handlebars.*” Perhaps if Harry had stuck to the now-recommended minimum of 45 degrees his chin would still be blemish-free!

As mentioned above, video (b) includes a crossing manoeuvre which is *not* recommended. The dangers are shown in this Princes St photo - taken at the December 13 tramline tryout [photo by Chris Hill, chdot at [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)].

Document (a) includes these two useful pictures...



## CYCLING BESIDE TRAMLINES / OVERTAKING STOPPED BUSES

Most cyclists travel a metre or so out from the kerb, and overtake buses at stops. For most of Princes Street there is ample room to overtake a bus which is properly stopped at a bus stop. Some cyclists who travel faster tend to stay far out from the kerb much of the time. In either case, you will be cycling parallel to and fairly close to the tramlines. **This is normally quite safe - but be aware of potential problems which may force you to the right and into the tramlines.** We know of at least 2 crashes which have happened for this reason, with a broken foot resulting in one case.

*Be especially careful in the following situations...*

- a bus which is about to pull out – never risk a 'last minute' overtake
- a lot of traffic – it may be less aware of you, it may move unexpectedly, you have less space to manoeuvre
- a bus which is not parked squarely - it may leave less space next to the tramline

We understand that Lothian Buses drivers have been trained to think about cyclists and tramlines. They may occasionally forget, especially in the early days. Drivers from other companies may not have been trained.

If you have a problem with Lothian Buses, please do report it – [mail@lothianbuses.com](mailto:mail@lothianbuses.com) 0131 554 4494. Give date, time, bus number, location, and report it rapidly – all buses now have video recording which we understand is kept for one week only, in case of complaints, after which the tapes are re-used.

## DIFFICULT LOCATIONS [not in any particular order]

### a. Cycling from Hanover Street to Mound

*Problem* – there is a tendency to cross the second tramlines at a too narrow angle, as you swing right to head for the Mound.

*What to do* – try to make your right turn as late as possible – this is not easy as there is restricted width between the final tramline and the guardrail at the National Gallery. Maybe walk the pavement the first time, to get a good look at the layout.

#### **a. Cycling from Hanover Street to Mound [continued]**

*Comment* - the Council is considering marking out on the ground the most suitable route, possibly by leaving a cycle-lane shaped gap through the yellow box planned for that location. In our view, markings should have been installed prior to Princes Street re-opening. We also know that **Streetscape** interests within the council have argued for as few road markings as possible, and roads officials are reluctant to propose solutions likely to get knocked back – presumably cyclist injuries are less important than a lovely uniformly grey road surface.

#### **b. Cycling west past the National Gallery and then the cobbled area**

*Problem* – the gap between the guardrail and tramline is fairly narrow, and cobbles begin shortly after.

*What to do* – problem should not be too serious as long as you stay in the middle of the space between guardrail and tramline, and then keep to the left lane rather than attempting to pass other vehicles.

*Comment* – Spokes was shocked to see cobbles installed, and we had not been consulted on it. It sounds very much like another **Streetscape** decision taken with little or no thought for cyclist safety or encouragement.

#### **c. Cycling from Princes St into Shandwick Place [road situation still in a state of flux]**

*Problem* – in the final layout the straight-ahead lane will have tramlines in it, and both left-hand lanes will be for left-turning traffic. This will be very tricky for straight-ahead cyclists, as you will have to sit either right next to a tramline or in a left-turn lane.

*What to do* – very difficult to make a satisfactory recommendation – be aware and be clear to drivers

*Comment* – Spokes is urging the council to include a cycle facility – possibly advance traffic light and ASL for straight-ahead cyclists, together with signing central lane for straight-ahead cyclists as well as left-traffic.

#### **d. Turning right off Princes St [e.g. westbound to St Andrews Square and eastbound to Waverley Bridge]**

*Problem* – If you position yourself correctly [in the right-hand lane] then you cross the tramline at a very dangerous angle. If you stay in the left lane till the last minute, to cross the tramlines at a better angle, this is extremely bad road practice – motorists will assume you are going straight ahead and you could be hit by traffic in the central lane as you turn right.

*What to do* – extremely difficult to make a satisfactory recommendation - suggestions welcomed!

*Example report* - “Today when cycling to work I had a potentially nasty accident. Cycling west down Princes Street I had to turn into Hanover Street. While crossing the tram lines my front wheel lost all grip and I fell heavily on my hip. Had a bus tram or taxi been behind I would have ended under the wheels. There seems to be no grip when tram lines are damp and the situation is not helped by the transition from tarmac to cobbles. This problem needs addressed before someone is killed.”

*Comment* – The problem is much worse than it should have been, thanks to the central island between the tram tracks – introduced in significant part for subjective visual Streetscape reasons, even though such an island is very unusual in other trams. Spokes fought hard but unsuccessfully against this for several years.

#### **e. Westbound, at start of tramlines [especially if turning right into St Andrews Square]**

*Problem* – [this is only a temporary problem until the rails are extended, but resulted in one of the earliest known falls, captured in this video <http://www.youtube.com/v/IlgMQV6zjfk>]. When travelling westbound, a cyclist turning right, or occasionally a fast straight-ahead cyclist, will use the right-hand lane. Suddenly, without warning, you find you are cycling down a tramline with rails on both sides – or worse, you might even cycle straight into the start of the tramline.

*What to do* – If you are going straight ahead, stick to the left lanes. If you need to turn right, at least now you know the tramlines are there – but now you are stuck with the problem in (d) above.

*Comment* – signage, road paint and/or an ASL seem the only solutions here. Again these should have been in place before Princes St reopened – and potential solutions are also hindered by the Streetscape policies as in (a).

**Please consider joining Spokes.** As an organisation we fight for better conditions for everyday bike use now and into the future. However it is also really important that **individuals** contact councillors, MSPs, officials, etc. Arguments from Spokes carry far more weight if politicians are also hearing the same sort of thing from members of the public. **So - we tell you when is a good time to write to who about what.** Where possible we also notify members in specific areas about plans affecting that area. Of course, your donation helps us too – we'd probably give up rather than spend time fundraising! [but you can join free if hard up]. To join, download a membership form [<http://www.spokes.org.uk/wordpress/membership/>], fill it in and post to Spokes. Or send us a stamped addressed envelope for a membership form and copies of recent Spokes Bulletins.