

Spokes Election Hustings, 23.3.2011

Councillor Gordon Mackenzie, Lib Dem candidate for Lothians Regional List

Opening Speech

- Draft Lib Dem manifesto will commit to allocating an increasing proportion of transport spend to cycling.
- Lib Dems support the delivery of the Cycling Action Plan for Scotland (CAPS).
- Mentioned the benefits of active travel.
- Examples of Lib Dems' activities in Edinburgh:
 - development of cycle route from George Square to the King's Buildings
 - piloting on 20mph zones
 - Family Cycling Network
 - supporting Spokes cycle storage project – trying to get pilots (+ hope to merge contract for maintenance of cycle shelters with maintenance of bus shelters)
 - junction of Gardiner's Crescent and Fountainbridge- and the opening is not a 'junctet' as the papers are making out.
- Policies initially concentrate on South Edinburgh – aiming to demonstrate how city could look if cycling made up 15-20% of modal share.

Groups

Question: What are/will you do to improve road conditions close to city centre? Cyclists are first to notice potholes etc.

Answer: Construction is part of my responsibilities. Have to allow utilities companies to make repairs, and a challenge to decide how much to spend on inspections and monitoring of repairs.

Have been conducting a pilot whereby instead of covering repairs with coal tar (temporary), a square of tarmac is cut out and replaced with permanent surface. This is more expensive up front but hope is that it will work out cheaper in the long term. This council has increased investment compared to previous years.

In last 3 years Council has reduced % of roads in need of repair from 49% to 34% (according to independent audit) - goes against Scottish trend.

Question: Something about Edinburgh's allocation of repair money.

Answer: Comes from UK Budget – Scotland receives about 10% of funding through Barnett formula. But funding to local authorities is done on road length, not usage, so Edinburgh gets a fairly small share of this. Need to press for more money for Edinburgh.

Question: Why is it taking so long to re-paint cycle lanes and advance stop boxes?

Answer: No dedicated budget for cycling road markings. Focus has been on roads and pavements. Colouring is also very expensive compared to normal road surface.

Currently piloting an approach in a couple of areas where head of roads is asked to “top-slice” maintenance budget so that a set proportion is spent on cycle lane repairs.

Also looking at alternatives to solid colouring of cycle lanes, such as colouring lanes at intervals instead of all the way along.

Has also changed the weighting different modes are given when deciding what material is used to make the road – changes give greater weight to active travel.

Question: What is the Councillor doing to expand off-road network?

Answer: Lots happening outside Edinburgh central area – e.g. West Edinburgh.

Putting pressure on the NHS to put money into route to Craigmillar.

Priority is [on-road] cycle routes in the city as 90% of journeys use these routes.

Question: Tell us more about the King's Buildings route.

Answer: Focus on South Edinburgh. Route is from Meadows to Holyrood Park and to the King's Buildings via George Square along Causewayside. Plans are currently going through traffic regulation order process. Already high levels of cycling in this part of Edinburgh – good potential for people willing to cycle more. Aim is to make cycling more visible, bring greater awareness.

Questions: How would you reallocate road space to have a complete network for all users – particularly along-road segregated routes? Any concrete plans for improving or changing cycle paths in Edinburgh? How would you achieve an increase in cycling levels?

Answer: For the vast majority of roads focus is on making them safer, not reallocating space. Examples of measures being taken are:

- 20mph zones being piloted in a few areas
- improving the planning process for changing road layout
- King's Buildings route
- re-painting cycle lanes and advance stop boxes (and pilot of top-slicing maintenance budget, described above).

Need to make the network seem safer – can do this using segregation but the space is not there on many roads.

Also published Family Cycle Network – identifies network of routes in Edinburgh suitable for children aged 8 and up (not the same as red routes). There are plans for extending this network.

Also trying to change the culture – stop people thinking that cyclists are a bit mad, making it more mainstream.

Question: Do 20mph zones work?

Answer: Evidence from Portsmouth is that they are obeyed. Also evidence that [those who speed in 30mph zone] slow down too(?).

Questions: Netherlands has legislation in favour of cyclist, such as automatic right-of-way and presumption of motorist's guilt in a collision. Would you consider introducing anything like this?

Answer: In Scotland we are a long way from having public support for such things.

Question: How would you continue to change the culture of the planning department? Spokes sees everything and has to object – not part of the process.

Answer: Not so much a matter of planning – more the appraisal process not considering long-term health or environmental benefits. e.g. nationally [the Government is] looking at changing the energy [consent] process to favour localised energy.

Spokes objects to traffic regulation orders rather than planning – these orders are very burdensome but Spokes has the right to be heard.

Question: As cycling increases more cyclists are being killed and seriously injured by freight vehicles. Would you consider fitting Fresnel mirrors on lorries [to reduce size of driver's blind spot]? Very cheap – only £3 each. And what else would you do to improve safety?

Answer: Immediate response is that UK legislation would be needed to require fitting of these mirrors. Could try handing them out as is done in other places (for example, at ports).

Question: Would you consider lorry bans in some areas or lorry-free routes?

Answer: Rather than banning lorries, Council is planning to identify preferred routes for lorries. Banning lorries from, say, Ferry Road wouldn't be popular. Council working with satnav companies to make satnavs suggest routes away from residential areas.

Question: Can see that there is a local commitment to cycling. What about the Lib Dems nationally? Cycling doesn't seem to have high profile in literature.

Answer: Alison McInnes lobbied the Scottish Government to get agreement with COSLA on preserving Cycling, Walking and Safer Streets in Budget. Manifesto will commit to increasing proportion of transport spend on cycling from current 1% - hoping it will give a figure. Lib Dems suffer from not being a major party.

Question: What national policies can you influence to make things change at a local level?

Answer: I see it the other way round. CAPS asked for areas to pilot 20mph zones. If Edinburgh does it well, these zones will get more support nationally. Edinburgh is lucky to have lots of cyclists – needs to set a good example.

Question: If Lib Dems were in Government, it would likely be as part of a coalition. Previously transport has not been a defining item. How can you make transport come higher up the list of coalition-busting arrangements?

Answer: Hard because focus is on the economy, growth, provision of care etc. Within transport we have set out our views. As seen in England, in a coalition you don't get everything you want.

Questions: Who would Lib Dems form a coalition with? Will you survive the coalition in London?

Answers: Labour and SNP are the largest parties, and they would approach Lib Dems or Conservatives for a coalition. Lib Dems would take decision based on which coalition would give them the best deal.

In coalition you don't get everything you want. You go into a deal where you get more of the things you believe in most. Not been as successful as would like – e.g. tuition fees. Have to be pragmatic. For example in Edinburgh Council Lib Dems felt they had more in common with the SNP; last Scottish Parliament was Labour and Lib Dem; down south is Conservative and Lib Dem. Lib Dems not tarts but pragmatic – will consider all offers. Trying to get things they believe in into Government.

Summing up speech

- Heard lots of concerns about safety, funding etc.
- Wish that people here had been talking to candidates less convinced than this panel, in order to get the message across about the importance of active travel.