

SPOKES

The Lothian Cycle Campaign

St. Martins Church, 232 Dalry Road, Edinburgh EH11 2JG 0131.313.2114 [answerphone] spokes@spokes.org.uk www.spokes.org.uk

If replying by email, please use... ddf@staffmail.ed.ac.uk

John Swinney MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth
Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

24 September 2007

Dear Mr Swinney

FORTH ROAD BRIDGE – CYCLE LINKS

Spokes is extremely concerned over the probable impacts on congestion, traffic growth, and CO2 emissions of the proposal to abolish tolls on the Forth Road Bridge, as predicted in the Scottish government's own Toll Impact Study. The traffic and congestion increases will, in particular, be detrimental to conditions for cyclists not only in the immediate vicinity of the bridge, but in the city and in other areas surrounding the bridge. In relation to CO2 emissions, we are disappointed that the SNP manifesto commitment on tolls is helping undermine your ultimately far more important manifesto commitment to emissions reductions. On all these points, we fully ally ourselves with the comments of the City of Edinburgh Council, TransForm Scotland, Scottish Environment Link, and others, to the Parliament's Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee.

Having said that, we were delighted with certain of your remarks when you commented on the government's Toll Impact Study [SG News Release 20.8.07]. You said, "***We will continue to invest in initiatives which reduce congestion, such as improved park and ride, and improved rail, bus and cycle links.***" It is quite unusual for a Minister when commenting on such an issue to specifically include cycle links, as you did, and we hope this indicates that we can expect a very serious commitment to growing cycle use by the new government, in line with other forward-looking European countries.

First, we would be very interested to hear which particular initiatives on cycle links you are proposing in relation to mitigating the impact of Forth Road Bridge tolls abolition.

Second, we would like to put forward what is undoubtedly by far the most important such link, that between Edinburgh City and the Forth Road Bridge, and we would be pleased to hear whether you intend to take action on this matter. This route is a vital commuter route [particularly since cyclists were banned from the A90], an important leisure route, and also perhaps the most important single tourist cycle link in the whole of Scotland, taking large numbers of cycletourists heading from the Capital towards the north of Scotland. It is thus a route of national significance, and a critical section of Route 1 of the Sustrans National Cycle Network. It should be an absolute flagship example in terms of design and maintenance.

At present, the inner section of this route, from near the city centre out to Barnton, is in general excellent. Although this section follows the future route of Edinburgh tram in part, we have been assured by the tram promoters that the cyclist route will be maintained at a very high quality. Unfortunately, from Cramond to the Forth Bridge, far from being a flagship route, the journey is in parts truly appalling, and the source of perhaps the strongest complaints received by Spokes about any cycling provision in Edinburgh or the Lothians.

Unless this route is designed and maintained to a proper standard a great deal of cycling potential is being lost, impacting on congestion, health and environment, and leaving international cycle tourists with a very poor impression of Scotland.

To indicate the strength of feeling on this matter, and the genuine seriousness of the situation, here are some direct quotes from letters and emails received by Spokes [some quotes refer only to specific sections of the route]. The majority of these comments are not from leisure users, but from cyclists who try or have tried to commute on this route, and so are desperately concerned about the conditions...

- “Completely inadequate cyclistroute – too narrow, poor surfacing, dazzle from car headlights at night.”
- “I have cycled National Cyclerooute 1 from Aberdeen to Edinburgh, and this is one of the poorest parts of the route.”
- “The trenched section between Cramond and Dalmeny is not wide enough for safety, and forces cyclists to commute at eye level with oncoming motorist headlights less than a few feet away.”
- “It is a national disgrace that this is allowed to continue.”
- “This path is extremely dangerous and unsuitable for bike use. In places it is approximately one metre wide, so if you meet someone travelling in the opposite direction you need to stop. The surface is very bumpy and slippery, and constantly strewn with debris, and worst of all, due to its sunken level, when cycling down the hill northbound, the cycling eye-level is at the same level as car headlights. Added to the fact that there is no lighting on the path means that you simply cannot see what is in front of you.”
- “It is ridiculous that for a city of Edinburgh's size this is the only route open to cyclists from the North.”
- “Note the narrowness - imagine two cyclists meeting, one going downhill, possibly at speed – how safe is that? - the hemming in by stone walls on both sides, the roughness of the surface, and the steepness of the gradient compared to the main road.”
- “The only proper solution is a cycle path beside the main road. In continental Europe a segregated cycle path beside main roads is bog standard. The reason is that main roads usually go from A to B by the shortest and easiest routes, and that is exactly what cyclists want too.”
- “The situation is dangerous and intimidating, particularly for pedestrians.”
- “There is a frequent need to stop, and even dismount, at busy times.”
- “I am at my wits end with the whole thing. Over the last year I have emailed my MP, Sustrans and Edinburgh Council. They all claim to be sympathetic, but the substantial funding needed is not available.”

I hope you will agree that these quotes indicate not just a minor problem, but a completely unacceptable situation, and a high priority for expenditure to mitigate the impact of toll abolition on the Forth Road Bridge.

We would stress most strongly that what is required is *not* just tidying up and/or resurfacing of the present route. What is required for this route, which is of national significance and is surely the prime candidate for your above commitment on Forth Bridge cycle links, is...

- A complete assessment of cycling conditions and requirements between the city centre and the Forth Bridge, including both on-road and offroad sections, with particular attention to commuting [which demands the highest conditions, including 3m width, lighting, maintenance, priorities at road crossings, and so on] as well as long-distance tourist and local leisure travel. We cannot stress strongly enough that this assessment must not just look at improving the existing route – it must look at all options, since some sections of the route will almost certainly require completely new alignments, although other sections such as Roseburn to Barnton will require very little work.
- Advance commitment to full funding for the recommendations of this assessment – albeit the costs are likely to be exceptionally modest in the context of bridge tolls and non-cycling mitigation measures.

We hope our comments are helpful in your desire to mitigate the impact of the abolition of tolls, as well as to promote cycle use and to provide a positive impression of Scotland to visitors. We look forward to hearing from you on this matter and will be copying this letter to various other interested parties, including those below.

Yours Sincerely

Dave du Feu
Spokes

cc: Patrick Harvie MSP [Parliamentary Transport Committee]
Margaret Smith MSP, West Edinburgh
Sustrans [John Lauder]
CEC [Cllr Phil Wheeler and CEC Director of City Development]
SESTRAN [Alec Macaulay]
Almond Ward councillors [Cllr George Grubb, Cllr Norman Work, Cllr Kate MacKenzie]
Transport and environment groups [Transform Scotland, Scottish Environment Link, FOE Scotland]