

SPOKES

The Lothian Cycle Campaign

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Cllr Phil Wheeler
Transport Convener
City of Edinburgh Council
High Street
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3 December 2007

Dear Cllr Wheeler

EDINBURGH TO FORTH BRIDGE STRATEGIC CYCLEROUTE

As you know, we wrote on 24 September to John Swinney, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, about the above, following his statement that, in connection with the removal of Forth Bridge tolls, “*We will continue to invest in initiatives which reduce congestion, such as ... improved rail, bus and cycle links.*” We copied our letter to you, and a further copy is now attached. Our letter highlighted both the importance of the route, and the extreme concern from users and potential users over its condition. I am sure you will be aware that, of all the longer-distance cycleroutes in the Council area, this is the one which generates by far the most complaints.

We have now had a rather belated reply from the Government, on behalf of Mr Swinney, and I attach a copy of that reply.

The letter refers to the fact that the issue was raised with Transport Minister Stewart Stevenson MSP by the Convener of the Scottish Parliament Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee, Patrick Harvie MSP, on 2 October. We are delighted to see that the Minister is happy to discuss this specific issue with the City Council after the Spending Review (which is now over) and that it would be for the Council “*to bring forward prioritised, specific proposals.*” Although the reply also refers to sources of funding already available to the council, there would surely be little point in the Minister offering to meet the Council if he felt that the Council could and should fund this project entirely or largely from its own resources.

We are sure that you will wish to take up Mr Stevenson on his offer of a meeting, and are therefore taking this opportunity to put forward the reasons why we believe that all or most of the funding for this project should come from national resources rather than from the Council. The reasons are listed below, not in any particular order.

- Mr Swinney's above statement was made in relation to mitigation of the impact of toll removal, and specifically refers to the government investing in “*cycle links.*” There is no cycle link anything like as significant to the Forth Bridge as is this link to Edinburgh, and therefore if Mr Swinney's statement is to have any meaning at all in relation to cycle links, then it must include this route. We presume that is the context in which Mr Stevenson is happy to meet the Council.

- Whilst it is of course correct that the route is in bad condition prior to toll abolition, as stated in the government reply, that is surely all the more reason why it should now receive the necessary investment. Mr Swinney's promise was to invest in "initiatives ... such as cycle links." There was no suggestion in his statement that he would only invest where conditions were currently satisfactory!
- The cost of upgrading the route is exceptionally high for a local authority cyclerooute project. Written evidence from the Council to the above session of the Scottish Parliament Transport etc Committee put the cost at around £2million. It is impossible for the Council to fund this from its own resources. The government reply mentions the CWSS fund, presumably implying this might be a suitable source of funds. However, that fund is likely to total around 800K in 08/09, after which it will cease. And that 800K is dedicated to walking and safer streets as well as cycle projects, so any suggestion that it could fund this project would be wholly unrealistic. The best the Council could do would probably some sort of patching job, which could in no way solve the problems outlined in our original letter, and in the longer term would effectively be money wasted.
- The reply mentions that cyclerooutes on local roads are a matter for individual councils "in the first instance." The government does fund cyclerooutes associated with trunk roads, and, although the A90 itself is now a local authority road, as far as cycling is concerned it is a route of major national significance as well as a vital commuter route. Indeed, from the tourism perspective it is probably the most important single cycle link in the whole of Scotland, leading from the Capital City to the Forth Crossing – the entry point for cycletourists heading north. Obviously most cyclists do not wish to follow the trunk road network here, taking a massive detour to cross the Forth!
- In the past, cross-boundary routes could be funded wholly or largely with regional money, which allowed aggregation to fund largescale projects of regional and national significance, such as this one. However, following the Spending Review, there is apparently to be no further regional capital funding, and so the suggestion in the reply that Sustran could fund the project must be incorrect. Local authorities are of course concerned largely with their own residents, and therefore any substantial funds that Edinburgh Council itself decides to spend on cycle projects are most likely to go on routes whose benefit is largely within its own area, rather than a route whose largest benefits are probably its major national cycletourism significance and its value for commuters from another local authority, Fife. In this context, the government reply that cyclerooutes on roads such as the A90 are a matter for councils "in the first instance" is perhaps helpful – since once the council has, in the first instance, considered the project, it will become very apparent for the reasons in this letter that national intervention is the only way to tackle it. If the government did not thus intervene, it would mean there is now no funding source for major cyclerooute projects of regional or national significance.

Finally, in connection with any meeting you may have with the Minister, it may be helpful if we also mention that we have received supportive comments on this matter from several politicians from the area. These include the local Lib Dem MSP (Edinburgh West), Margaret Smith, and the local SNP councillor (Almond Ward), Norman Work.

We look forward to hearing from you on this matter.

Yours Sincerely

Dave du Feu
Spokes

cc Patrick Harvie MSP, Margaret Smith MSP
Almond Ward councillors – Cllr Norman Work, Cllr George Grubb, Cllr Kate MacKenzie
CEC – Caroline Burwell
SG - Karen Furey
Relevant organisations – Sustran, Sustrans, TransFORM Scotland