

LEITH WALK 23.7.13 EXHIBITION/CONSULTATION

Comment from Spokes Planning Group

As we have said from the outset, Spokes would prefer a European-style solution with segregated facilities the whole length of the Walk, as was proposed in the outline sketches prepared for Spokes by Dutch transport consultant Hans van der Stok when the tram was first being debated some years ago. Such an approach would be likely to attract larger numbers of new people to using a bike for their everyday journeys.

Nonetheless the council/Sustrans plans improve significantly on the current situation, and we welcome the fact that various suggestions by Greener Leith, ourselves and others have been taken on board. However, even on the basis of the Council's intended approach, further improvement is possible and important. We are particularly disappointed that the latest plans have retreated in some respects from those made public in June.

Assuming the Council maintains its present general approach, we urge the following points...

a. Foot of the Walk

The June plans showed a simple junction at the Foot of the Walk, with single-phase pedestrian crossings and good cycle facilities, but we understand this is now being reconsidered due to traffic modelling. We urge that the previous plans form the basis of the final solution, with a trial if necessary, and perhaps different traffic-light phasing during any peak periods. On one specific point, we were pleased in the June plans to see that the Leith Walk citybound cycle lane began before the junction rather than after it as had been the case in earlier plans.

Traffic modelling is an inexact science, dependent on assumptions. We recall, for example, that Spokes was initially told that modelling said dual traffic lanes were essential at the Mound Princes Street crossing - however after further consideration the council nonetheless tried reducing to a single lane (to allow space for cycle lanes) and this has worked well. To reduce the value of the Foot of the Walk junction for pedestrians and cyclists 24/7 for the sake of possible slight queuing during a 30-60 minute period on 5 days of the week also seems inequitable, especially given the Council and Government hierarchy of pedestrian – cycle – bus – car.

b. Elm Row and the 2-way segregated route at Playhouse

The June plans showed a 2-way segregated route at Elm Row, with a light-controlled crossing (presumably a toucan) at Montgomery Street. This would allow northbound cyclists from the Playhouse area, London Road, etc, to avoid the busy bus interchange area. The new plans show this route now restricted to 1-way; an unfortunate decision, and one which may well result in some illegal and potentially hazardous 2-way cycling in the 1-way lane. The 2-way facility should be re-instated. Ideally it should also be continued north as far as Pilrig Street, as suggested by Greener Leith.

Consideration should also be given to making the Playhouse route 2-way all the way to Leith Street. If the present crossing near John Lewis was also converted to a toucan, cyclists coming down Leith Street and heading for Omni, Playhouse or London Road, could then cross here and use the segregated route. See also (g) below.

Finally, the exits from these and any other segregated facilities need carefully designed, not just for safety but also not to delay cyclist trips.

c. Coloured surfacing.

Given that the road is being entirely resurfaced, we appreciate that chipping here (unlike in QBiC) is virtually cost-free - and also maintains its condition indefinitely without ongoing maintenance costs. Nonetheless experience elsewhere has shown that chipping is significantly less visible than the traditional thermoplastic. We therefore urge that, at the very least, points of greatest potential cycle/motor conflict receive a more effective colouring method. For example, if the chipping is installed throughout (given that it is cost-free as part of the resurfacing) then it could be overlaid with thermoplastic at locations such as side-road crossings.

We also point out that Spokes has submitted a paper to the Council asking for a revision of colouring policy - there has so far been no feedback, but we understand this is to be discussed at the Cycle Forum. Our hope would be that an alternative colouring method would be found which is more visible than chipping but more cost-effective than thermoplastic in terms of maintenance, and that this could be used throughout in Leith Walk. Therefore our paper needs attended to urgently.

d. 20mph zone

We understand that the Council intends to make major decisions on 20mph zones across the city in the fairly near future, as part of the new LTS, and will not consider individual changes such as in Leith Walk until then.

We urge that once the new LTS is approved Leith Walk is considered as a priority for 20mph. It is an ideal candidate for the proposed new policy of '20mph even on major roads where there is high pedestrian usage.' Furthermore, the proposed redesign of Leith Walk, particularly north of Pilrig, will in any case be a physical encouragement to lower speeds, thus making enforcement simpler.

e. Cycle parking

We support the provision of frequent bike parking at all shopping and public-facility areas along the Walk – this is vital to promote local shopping and to avoid bikes leaning against shops, restricting access to doors and the visibility of shop window displays.

f. Cycle lane design

We welcome the fact that the cycle lanes north of Pilrig are now continuous and on both sides of the road, albeit we continue to argue that they should be physically segregated. However, if not segregated, all such cycle lanes need a marked door zone at parking areas, and their coloured surfacing should take account of our comments in (c) above. Also, for those lanes south of Pilrig which are segregated, some form of marked or ideally physical separation from pavement-side car doors is needed where the route passes a parking bay.

g. Picardy Place

No detail was given for the treatment of this very difficult roundabout, which will be a major challenge. Particular difficulties will be travelling safely and non-scarily from Leith Walk to York Place and from Broughton Street to Leith Street. Continuing the 2-way Playhouse segregated route across Leith Street and along the south side of the roundabout may be a partial solution (see also (b) above).

h. Other points

- Traffic-light phasings need carefully considered to minimise cycling delays and maximise safety.
- Side-road junctions such as Albert Street (and possibly others – it is not entirely clear) have cyclists giving way to cars. This should be reconsidered and a more cycle-friendly solution found. Similarly at those junctions where a detailed design was not shown, such as Pilrig St/ Iona St.

Yours Sincerely
Sandy Scotland

Spokes Planning Group