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Leith Walk: McDonald Road to Pilrig Street

Thanks for the opportunity to give feedback on the June 2015 proposals for Leith Walk¹, McDonald Road to Pilrig Street, following the recent exhibition.

The scheme has many commendable aspects. In particular, we welcome the enhanced provision for pedestrians, the widening of pavements, the raised tables and the tightening of curves at junctions, and feel that these measures will have a very positive effect on the area.

We also welcome the southbound segregated cycle lane, although we have several suggestions for how this could be substantially improved, which are detailed below. With these changes the southbound cycle lane could be an excellent piece of cycle infrastructure.

We note with regret that the segregated element of the northbound cycle lane has been significantly scaled back since the previous² set of plans. Well designed segregated cycle lanes linking up with future provision at the top of the Walk could have a transformational effect on cycling in the area. The current plans offer inadequate fragmented pieces of segregated cycle lane that fall well short of the vision of safe segregated cycle infrastructure to which the council and Sustrans are committed for this area, and for which significant additional government funding was made available. This design may well feel insufficiently attractive to novice/nervous cyclists whilst experienced cyclists will find it very frustrating having to decide whether to remain on the road or divert for a short distance onto segregated provision with ceases at main junctions.

In particular, the new plans seem to have been designed on the premise that it is not possible to take segregated cycle infrastructure safely across medium sized junctions, such as the junction of Leith Walk and Pilrig Street, without creating unacceptable conflict with pedestrians - a premise which is clearly false given the wealth of examples from the UK and abroad in which segregated cycle lanes are safely carried across junctions.

1 June 2015 McD Rd – Pilrig plans
http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/downloads/file/5658/latest_design_proposals_for_pilrig_street_to_mcdonald_road_section_of_leith_walk_june_2015

2 April 2015 McD Rd – Pilrig plans
http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/5432/design_proposals_for_leith_programme_phase_4.pdf

Given the above, we suggest the following changes to the scheme:

1. The segregated cycle paths must have priority at various minor-road junctions with Leith Walk. This is extremely important, otherwise the segregated route would be much slower than riding on the road and will not be well used. The cycle lanes should be brightly coloured so as to be clearly visible and distinguishable from the road surface in all weather conditions, in order to emphasise the priority of bikes over the side road at junctions. In particular, since the lanes are a different height from the main carriageway, the normal arguments in favour of coloured chips are less applicable and so brighter solutions (such as coloured tarmac or coloured overlay) could be used.
2. Northbound the segregation should begin before McDonald Road so as to be able to link up with future plans for the top of the Walk.
3. Northbound the segregation should continue across the Pilrig St junction and, if at all possible, be carried around the back of the bus stop before rejoining the carriageway.
4. Southbound the segregation should begin before the Pilrig St junction and have separate lights for the bike lane, allowing bikes to proceed southbound along Leith Walk through the Pilrig St junction on green even when traffic is emerging from Pilrig St (but not when pedestrians have green). This would cost little extra in terms of money and space and would provide a significant time advantage to cyclists.
5. Southbound segregation should continue to beyond Brunswick St. so as to link up with future plans for the top of the Walk.
6. Brunswick St. is currently a rat run used mostly by traffic heading to London Road and trying to avoid the roundabout on Leith Walk. In particular, it is heavily used by HGVs. Consideration should be given to closing it at Leith Walk, thus adding significantly to the ambience of the outdoor seating at adjacent cafes and turning Brunswick St. into a pleasant, quiet street.
7. In line with Council policies in the Active Travel Action Plan, there should be a cycle exemption to the one-way exit from Iona Street.
8. We regret the dropping of the toucan allowing a worry-free right turn from Leith Walk (southbound) into McDonald Road, although we are not aware of the numbers affected. The Council should undertake a count as to how many people currently make this manoeuvre – appreciating, of course, that the numbers would be likely to rise, perhaps significantly, once the scheme is in place.

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