

## **EVENING NEWS ARTICLE – final version**

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More and more people are getting about by bike in Edinburgh. You see it on the streets every day! A recent Spokes rush-hour traffic count found more bikes and less cars than ever before. On Forrest Road, bikes were 1 in 4 of all citybound vehicles, and even on bike-unfriendly Lothian Road a remarkable 17% citybound were bikes.

Despite the huge roadspace which they occupy, 75% of cars had only one occupant, and their decline helps free up congested streets for the more space-efficient buses, walkers and cyclists.

So why is bike use mushrooming? – and will the council elections on May 3<sup>rd</sup> change anything?

*First* – The public wants it! They know it's healthy and it doesn't cost the earth! The council's recent consultation on a 'Quality Bike Corridor' from Mayfield to the Mound found 75% for and only 15% against. When the Scottish Government last year proposed to slash walking and cycling funds, south Edinburgh's MSP Jim Eadie alone received over one hundred letters and emails, and the government had to retreat.

*Second* – Edinburgh Council has consistently improved cycling conditions over the years, through measures like coloured cycle lanes and advance stop areas at traffic lights. With the growth in public support for a more bike-friendly city, Edinburgh Council, thanks to a LibDem initiative, recently allocated 5% of its transport budget to cycling projects, with more in future years. Such a decision might seem a tad niggardly in Denmark - but is revolutionary in Scotland and the UK!

*Third* – Edinburgh has seen huge growth in commercial and voluntary activity encouraging cycling. The **Edinburgh Bike Coop**, founded in 1977 in a back-street, now operates UK-wide and has just announced a 5-year expansion plan bringing 100 new jobs. A rash of new independent bike businesses, such as **Laidback** and **Grease Monkey**, are opening.

The **Bike Station**, a social enterprise company which takes unwanted old bikes, has just processed its 30,000<sup>th</sup> bike, with 13,000 back on the road and the rest stripped for spares and materials recycling. **Spokes** helps people get cycling through our fantastic bike/walk maps – over 130,000 have been sold! - and our free factsheets on topics like living in a tenement with a bike, or how to keep cycle commuting when you have children.

When Spokes began, less than 1% of trips to work in Edinburgh were by bike – now it is around 7%. Yet despite that massive growth, cycling casualties have not risen. Sadly, tragic casualties still do happen to all road users, but cycling, like all transport modes, has become significantly safer. When Spokes began, there were no onroad cycle facilities, and almost none offroad. To get from Marchmont to George IV Bridge, for example, there was no Meadows cycleway – Tollcross junction and the main roads were your only option.

### **What will happen in the elections?**

Thanks to the growing public demand for better cycling conditions, Labour, Lib Dems and SNP all promise to stick to the council's 5%+ budget decision. The Greens promise even more, increasing cycling investment gradually to £10 per person per year, the sort of level seen in Europe. The Conservatives unfortunately don't specify any figure but promise "improved cross-city routes."

But don't rely only on manifestos – also check out the individuals standing in your local area. Don't just ask them about the future, but also ask for their track record – have they encouraged bike use at local workplaces and schools, for example? What bike routes or bike racks at local shops have they lobbied for? The Spokes website election news item also lists candidates – from Labour, LibDem, Green and Conservative parties – who are Spokes members.

## **What should the new councillors do?**

Although cycling conditions are continually improving, many people still do feel scared. Surely everyone should feel happy cycling round their own city on their everyday business! We need...

- Princes Street truly welcoming for cyclists and walkers, with one or both sides motor-free
- Trials of European-style segregated cycle routes – Scotland's first has just opened, but in Glasgow!
- All residential and shopping streets to be 20mph or less
- All main roads in built-up areas to be 30mph or less
- Cycle facilities on all 30mph roads, and on 20mph roads where necessary
- Connecting up missing links on Edinburgh's off-road 'family network'

Measures like these will continue Edinburgh's transition to a more people-friendly city and its glowing reputation as Scotland's best city for getting about by bike.

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### *Useful information ...*

**www.spokes.org.uk** See the election news item, which includes how to contact your candidates. Also Spokes maps, factsheets and membership.

**www.pedalonparliament.org** Join the April 28 Pedal on Parliament to ask the Scottish Government to do more too.

**www.thebikestation.org.uk** For low-cost refurbished bikes and training – ideal if you want to start cycling – and to recycle unused old bikes.