

27 March 2014

Inquiry into Flexibility & Autonomy of Local Government

www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/72829.aspx

Submission from Spokes to the Scottish Parliament Local Government and Regeneration Committee

Please note: We have only just discovered this Inquiry and Call for Evidence. As such our response is brief and without the depth of evidence we would normally submit.

Spokes was founded in 1977 and has a long history of liaison with and lobbying of both local government (Edinburgh and the Lothians) and the Scottish Government. As such we have experienced many situations where outcomes which we sought were delayed or even stymied by the need for the local authority to get permissions and/or abide by national rules.

Generally we see the value of national rules and standards in relation to roads, traffic, planning, etc. However, there should be greater freedom for local authorities to experiment with alternatives or modifications, and a far greater openness by government to adopt such changes if they prove effective.

We list below some examples of where things have gone wrong in the past and/or are still going wrong. In all these cases, **government and local authority policies and targets to increase cycle use and/or cycle safety are being stymied by government rigidity and/or unwillingness to allow experimentation.**

1. DOMESTIC BICYCLE STORAGE

There is evidence that difficulty storing bikes at home is major deterrent to bike ownership, and therefore bike use. Spokes has done a great deal of work to try and assist these difficulties. The link below outlines some of the problems and gives further links to relevant research, factsheets, etc.

www.spokes.org.uk/wordpress/documents/members-campaigning/edinburgh/residential-bike-storage/

One specific problem is the difficulty for householders who have no option for bike storage except their own front garden. In many such cases the planning rules have caused great problems and personal distress, as well as working against the formal government and council objectives to raise cycle use substantially. After huge effort, Spokes has agreed with the council a factsheet which gives somewhat more clarity to potential applicants – but no certainty, and still a requirement to pay a £192 PA fee for a storage unit which may even cost less than that fee! The story and a link to our factsheet are here...

www.spokes.org.uk/wordpress/2013/10/spokes-gardens-bike-storage-factsheet-now-in-use/

These problems could be greatly reduced by a government change to the rules such that sheds or containers meeting certain criteria (such as those in our factsheet) were classed as 'permitted development.'

2. RIGIDITY OVER ROAD SIGNAGE

You may be aware of the very large number of crashes which have happened with cyclists sliding on tramlines in Edinburgh, or getting wheels trapped. Many of these involve so-called 'minor' injury – fractured cheekbones, broken legs or wrists, etc - often entailing serious pain and hospital visits.

www.spokes.org.uk/wordpress/2013/10/tramline-traumas/

Although crashes have reduced somewhat they are still a frequent occurrence, and in the last few weeks we had the first case where a following vehicle ran over a fallen cyclist – fortunately only over their foot, but that is serious enough.

Whilst warning signage (for cyclists and to make motorists aware that cyclists are at particular risk) is not the solution, it is nonetheless very important to at least try and reduce the numbers of crashes.

We have raised this with Edinburgh Council on several occasions, but we understand that they have had, and continue to have, great difficulty getting approval for the signs they deem most useful. Some signs are apparently classed 'temporary' and so officially should be taken down when we feel they are still performing a vital function; whilst the council is apparently also experiencing difficulty getting approval for other signs which have not been used in Scotland before (though I believe they have been used in one or more English tram systems). These problems should be sorted out quickly and the council, who know the situation on the ground, should be permitted to introduce such signage experimentally if necessary.

3. TRAFFIC REGULATION AND REDETERMINATION ORDERS

First, we stress that objections to such orders need taken seriously, if necessary with an independent element, but currently the delays (which can be over a year) and costs involved can be disproportionate. This is especially so in the case of schemes which have undergone extensive and lengthy public consultation, achieving widespread support, but with just a few objectors remaining.

There is a current example in Leith Walk, Edinburgh, where there have been several phases of consultation, over more than a year, prior to the TRO, and where a major scheme with widespread support is at risk of being delayed for perhaps a year or more and at huge public cost. The local authority has now taken the decision to go ahead with the scheme except that they will have to leave in its original state the disputed section, until the appeal is decided, and then (if successful in the appeal) return to upgrade this section.

We trust these comments are of value to the Committee.

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for Spokes