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5 March 2017

## Scottish Government Active Travel Task Force, first call for evidence Response from Spokes

### Background

The Minister's letter of 12 December asks us to be “forthright and honest” and we trust we are so in this response.

The aim of the task force is to look at tackling local barriers to the delivery of ambitious cycling and walking projects in Scotland. The Task Force was set up as a result of severe delivery problems with onroad segregated cycle facilities, due to opposition often based on actual or perceived loss of space for motor traffic (moving or parked). That is certainly the top issue, but there have also been serious delivery problems with other types of cycle infrastructure, though to some extent for other reasons, as discussed in (5) below.

We highlight the **urgency** of the Task Force's work. A task force should lead to early action and not necessarily to a university thesis! The government wishes for 10% of all trips to be by bike in 2020, just 3 years away. We really do not see the need for the whole task force process to take over a year since the Minister announced it. However, if the final report is not to be until December 2017, interim recommendations should be published in summer 2017, before the next budget process begins. Whilst the evidence<sup>1</sup> is now overwhelming that 10% cycle use is unachievable by 2020 (due to insufficient investment during the nearly 10 years since the 10% 'vision' was first announced), nonetheless everyone will wish cycle use to be as high as possible by that date, and so this is a matter of urgency.

The barriers we describe below are...

1. Insufficient funding
2. Insufficient time availability by expert local authority staff
3. Hostility to project proposals by groups of local people and/or businesses
4. Insufficient support from some local councillors
5. Poor buy-in by other arms of government, agencies, council departments and developers

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1 <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/1611-Spokes-extra-pre-budget-submission.pdf>

## **Local Barriers to Delivery [not in any particular order]**

### **1. Insufficient funding**

The funding available from Community Links Plus and other sources is insufficient for more than one or two "ambitious" CL+ projects each year, and therefore there is little opportunity to build up experience of ambitious projects by any but a very few local authorities. The only realistic solution to achieve a step change in the numbers and ambition of delivered projects is a major increase in central government funding for infrastructure projects – probably largely channelled through the Sustrans CL/CL+ programme plus a rise in CWSS. We have argued,<sup>2</sup> using what evidence we could find, that 5% of the transport budget should be invested in cycling, or 10% for AT as a whole.

Part of the funding problem is that the composition of the transport budget appears largely to be based on tweaking the previous year's budget, according to current political or other priorities, rather than through a more objective process. This militates against AT, not least because AT has always been very very low in the financial pecking order, and so even a small absolute increase is a very large % rise. A £100m rise is seen as 'normal' for trunk road spending (for 17/18 the rise is £146m) but for AT £100m would be seen as a crazy 250% increase. Obviously the transport budget has to meet many largely fixed costs, but the composition of the remainder should be reassessed on the basis of how it contributes to high level government objectives such as on public health, climate emissions, inequalities and the economy. We believe that this would result in much more realistic treatment of AT funding.

We note that not only does the level of funding constrain what can be delivered but, importantly, it also gives a powerful message to government and local authority staff and politicians as to the priority which the government attaches to AT and to AT targets. This point is particularly relevant in 4 and 5 below.

### **2. Insufficient time availability by expert local authority staff**

Council staff have to create CL+ bids - a lengthy 3-stage process, with the need for substantial senior staff scrutiny even when consultants are brought in to assist. Councils must also be confident of having the time, expertise and strength of will to go through the difficult processes of public consultation, detailed design and implementation - possibly in the morale-sapping and time-intensive face of sceptical stakeholder groups and/or groups of sceptical councillors (3 and 4 below).

As a minimum, every large local authority should have a dedicated AT team, reporting at a high level. Also, AT should be fully integrated in all other relevant aspects of transport and of planning: for example staff dealing with road maintenance (particularly structural maintenance) should be required to liaise with the AT team so that AT improvements are built in; decisions on bus lane routes and times or on kerbside parking should be audited to ensure they give a high priority to encouraging more cycle use; and so on.

### **3. Hostility to project proposals by groups of local people and/or businesses**

Those affected by roadspace reallocation – particularly loss of space for moving and/or parked motor vehicles – can be very hostile to schemes. This may or may not be due to lack of understanding ... such schemes are indeed very likely to be beneficial overall for the local area. However, benefits may not be convincing until the scheme is in place and has had time to bed in. Also, there may genuinely be some local businesses and/or individuals who will lose some opportunities. Some existing businesses may even decide to relocate and a somewhat different mix of shops may develop once a scheme is in place.

Edinburgh provides a positive example, where it looked as if SNP, Conservative and LibDem councillors together would defeat the Council's main-road segregated West-East scheme at Roseburn. Rather than taking things to a vote, the Convener (Cllr Lesley Hinds) and her officers undertook a further and highly intensive round of consultation, developing further detail to address some of the concerns, and achieving all-party support subject to a requirement for a full review one year after completion.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/1611-Spokes-extra-pre-budget-submission.pdf>

#### 4. Insufficient support from some local councillors

Some councillors, particularly those from affected wards, may not be convinced of the benefits of cycling in general, or of the particular scheme, or perhaps more likely they are being forcefully lobbied by constituents. Councillors need, sometimes, more information and, sometimes, more backbone. This is not easily resolved, though a strong political lead from government, highlighting the importance of the AT agenda, and backed up by European-level investment in cycle funding available to local authorities, would help. The fact that Sustrans funding brought substantial additional investment into Edinburgh City was one factor, though not a deciding one, in the example in (3) above.

#### 5. Poor buy-in by other arms of government, agencies, council departments and developers

This point has been raised in countless reports and discussions over the years, to the point of utter frustration. We do agree that things have improved a little, but this remains a major issue. Basically, cycling is not seen as a sufficiently serious priority by any arm of government other than the AT Team. The government itself is only willing to allocate 1.6% of its transport budget to cycling *and* walking – a far more potent message than written objectives - so it is little wonder that departments and agencies follow that lead, and developers in turn follow that. A few examples local to us are in the bullets below.

It is unclear how such problems can be resolved effectively. If cycling was seen to have higher priority at senior levels, through European-level funding, reflecting a strong political lead, this would certainly help – as discussed in (1) above. Possibly also a review of structures, to give AT a profile both wider and higher, and both at government and local authority levels. We note that several cities around the world that have successfully increased cycle use in a short time (e.g. London, Seville, Paris, Bogotá) are those with powerful mayors. We do not necessarily suggest that solution (and a mayor might be anti-cycling!) but it does show the importance of structures and of the processes needing followed to implement policy.

- ◆ Only with an inordinate amount of pressure from Spokes (a voluntary body) over many years, and from Edinburgh Council in later years, did Network Rail agree that people should be allowed to cycle in the A8 underpass to Edinburgh Gateway Station (rather than dismounting or crossing the daunting A8 at grade). The initial design did not allow for this. The Scottish Government, in the form of Transport Scotland, was the paymaster and *could have ensured this from the outset*.
- ◆ Despite much lobbying from ourselves, from Sustrans and from local authorities, the Bathgate-Airdrie railway was built without cycle connections between stations and nearby towns - although car connections were a matter of course. Cycle connections had to be built in subsequent years, via councils and Sustrans CL bids, well after initial travel patterns had been established. Again, Transport Scotland was the paymaster and *could and should have ensured from the outset that cycle/pedestrian connections to nearby communities were an integral and funded part of the project*. That would be true transport integration, whether or not it breaks normal conventions.
- ◆ Although Edinburgh Council prepares masterplans for development areas, with good cycle provision usually built in, they often allow developers to get away with grossly inadequate and non-joined-up provision when it comes to subsequent planning applications for the area. An absolutely dreadful example is the cyclistroute from Edinburgh Canal Basin to Rutland Square - even though the Council was working from a completely blank sheet of disused railway yards and a masterplan which included this cyclistroute from the outset. More recently, the Quartermile Development (in a university area with huge numbers of cyclists) is truly shocking for a modern development, with one-way streets not allowing 2-way cycling, and with wide 'cyclist dismount' pathways leading to important destinations – with no effective local authority intervention and with the developers insisting throughout that they wish to support and encourage cycling.