

Spokes Meeting with Transport Scotland CEO, Roy Brannen, 23.8.17

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SUGGESTED AGENDA, WITH BACKGROUND MATERIAL

1. Background issues

The main theme permeating this document is that of insufficient consideration for cycling objectives in Transport Scotland projects. This problem is apparent in various departments/agencies of government – but it even applies in Transport Scotland, the body responsible for much of transport policy, as this paper illustrates. There are two closely related aspects...

1.1 All too often **major decisions are taken, and subsequently cycling has to be fitted around them**, rather than this being a prime consideration from the outset, influencing initial strategic decisions as well as subsequent detail.

The recently published [Review of Active Travel Policy Implementation](#) supports this argument, stating that whilst active travel contributes to health, education, environment, etc, it is not a main objective of any. We add that the same applies even to the various areas *within* Transport Scotland (excepting the Active Travel team, which we believe is fully committed). Indeed the Review makes the point for us with respect to Rail, in its conclusions on the Bathgate-Airdrie rail project, which are very similar to our own conclusions (3.1.1 below).

This relatively low priority to AT might be understandable if the government did not have ambitions for cycle use, but in fact the government has a hugely ambitious vision (first stated in 2009 and often referred to as a 'target', [including by Ministers](#)) for 10% of all trips to be by bike in 2020. It has been clear for some time that this will be badly missed, and so there should be concerted effort throughout Transport Scotland to play its part in attaining 10% as soon as possible post-2020.

The 10% ambition also supports many other government objectives, notably on climate emissions, on public health (sedentary lifestyles and toxic emissions) and on urban congestion. There is also an ambition to increase rail use, and promotion of cycling can assist in this, as seen for example in Denmark and the Netherlands. *In contrast, there is no stated government objective to increase use of motor transport.* Indeed it needs to be openly recognised that to achieve significant rising use of active and sustainable transport parallel efforts need to be made to reduce motor use. Edinburgh Council has set an example here, accompanying its targets on increasing active and sustainable travel by targets to reduce private motor traffic.

Finally, fitting cycling around other transport decisions, rather than being a prime consideration from the outset, fits very poorly with the Sustainable Transport Hierarchy – which, although originating in planning policy, appears in a range of government transport documents including the [National Transport Strategy](#) (2016, p26) and the Scottish Government [Travel Plan](#) (2007, p1).

1.2 A closely related issue is that **projects should as far as possible be integrated transport projects**, not single mode, and this should include integrated funding. For example a new railway should not be built without, as part of the project, incorporating good cycling and walking links to major nearby populations and destinations (the need for road links is taken for granted). A cycle/pedestrian bridge over a new road should include upgrading/providing good quality links to likely user populations, working with the local authority to ensure this happens as part of the overall project. To argue that such provision should be left to the local authority as and when they can manage or find alternative funding it is a triumph of silo-thinking over common sense.

2. Road and motor traffic examples

2.1 Sheriffhall roundabout

The government's preferred option for grade separation, Option B, is the worst option for cycling and fits the picture of taking the major decision and then trying to slot in cycling, rather than ambitious and attractive cycling infrastructure being a requirement from the start. As far as we can see, the choice of option ruled out the possibility of a (reasonably direct) cycle/pedestrian bridge – the [Stage 2 Assessment Report](#) certainly suggests a bridge is only possible under Option C.

The proposal is out of line with **SEStran** recommendations, **Sustrans** recommendations, and the government's own **Trunk Road Cycling Initiative** which promises, amongst other things, “*special consideration for cyclists ... within improvements of trunk roads.*” It has prompted a Scottish Parliament petition by a local Midlothian Community Trust, recently debated by the Petitions Committee, and a letter from Sustrans urging a rethink on option choice. Indeed, even a Transport Scotland spokesperson in effect condemned it with faint praise, telling the BBC it will be an improvement for pedestrians and cyclists “*compared to the existing arrangement.*”

We are however pleased that, following the extensive public concern, a workshop is now to be held to see if cycling and walking separation from motor traffic can after all be provided, though this is clearly very problematic under Option B other than via an equally undesirable lengthy diversion.

2.2 E-mobility

The government is rightly ramping up proposals for phasing out fossil-fuelled motor transport.

However we fear this will be another example of single-mode silo-thinking rather than integrated thinking. The switch should be to “*e-mobility*” not to “*e-vehicles.*” In other words, incentives to move to electric should include e-bikes, cargo bikes, etc. This should be *fully integrated into policy throughout* and into all joint working with suppliers, local authorities, RTPs, and so on.

For inner-city and “last mile” goods distribution, cargo bikes can offer an ideal low-impact solution and are widely used in some European cities. A report on the potential is downloadable [here](#) and the example of Munich's e-mobility programme is [here](#). Similarly, individuals for personal travel might consider a switch from car to e-bike if the idea was promoted and incentivised, or from car to a combination of car-club and e-bike.

2.3. Trunk versus local roads

This is a different type of issue, and much more in the political arena, but one which we at least draw to your attention as it is of great concern.

Generally trunk roads are well maintained whereas local roads are often in a poor condition. Furthermore there is high investment in trunk road widening and extension, creating more traffic – which then finds its way into local roads at the start and end of journeys, damaging them yet further and adding to congestion.

Some sort of rebalancing between national and local funding, responsibilities and/or objectives is called for to tackle this gross imbalance.

Whilst such decisions are largely for government, Transport Scotland could use policy discussions to point out to government that the current position runs counter to the government's own vision for greatly increased cycle use (as well as to concerns over emissions, sedentary travel, etc).

3. Rail examples

Our concerns about Scotland's railways and their interface with cycling in Scotland fall into three main categories, as in 3.1-3.3 below.

3.1 Cycle access to stations as part of an integrated journey

3.1.1 Bathgate-Airdrie project – a missed opportunity

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. Road links were already in place, and any necessary connections to car parks were included as a matter of course. Cycle connections had to be built in subsequent years, via councils and bids for Sustrans Community Links cash, 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.*

In summary, this should have been an integrated transport project, with integrated funding and integrated connections to nearby communities, not just a rail project.

3.1.2 Waverley Station Cycle Access Ban

As an example of past frustration, the Waverley Station cycle ban, although imposed by NR, was actively supported by TS, until Phil Verster's intervention following approaches by ourselves, MSPs and others at the time of his appointment and the creation of the ScotRail/Network Rail Alliance.

3.1.3 Borders railway - a current opportunity

Transport Scotland reported at a recent Scotrail Cycle Forum that the large car park (capacity > 240 cars) at Tweedbank is to be extended because of high demand. On a recent visit the car park indeed was very busy, but there was only one bike parked at the station.

We suggest that consideration should be given to encouraging cycling to the station, before extending the car park. Cycle routes to Tweedbank from nearby likely sources of cycle traffic (Melrose, Borders Hospital, southern Galashiels and Selkirk) should be upgraded/constructed, then promoted through workplace and other initiatives, before the car park is expanded, or at the very least in parallel. See Appendix 1 for more details.

3.2 Cycle facilities at stations

Astonishingly, in the Haymarket refurbishment, bike parking (let alone the Dutch-style cycle hub which a station of Haymarket's patronage merits) was omitted entirely from original plans.

Fortunately bike storage at stations is now being much improved across the network and we understand that a Bike Hub on the lines of [Leeds CyclePoint](#) is now being considered for Waverley – a pilot, we hope, for others, if it succeeds.

3.3 Cycle carriage on trains

There are of course many complications here but *if maximisation of bike capacity had been a priority* Transport Scotland would have resolved many of the problems, in conjunction with the operator and the government. A previous political administration, working with ScotRail, [did just that as long ago as 1998](#) when they allocated match-funding to the operator and to the leasing company to improve Class 158 and 156 bike capacity.

3.3.1 Local trains

There is an enormous missed opportunity off-peak which is the time when, for commercial reasons if no other, patronage needs expanded as much as possible.

Cycle carriage isn't simply a choice between passengers seats and bike space. Scotrail trains are filled to capacity with fixed inflexible seating that fails to recognise different off-peak usage patterns. This disadvantages a wide range of passenger types, not just those travelling with a bike.

During the EGIP consultation on new trains we sought (sadly, unsuccessfully) to highlight the benefits of flexible-use space, suggesting such a space at one end of each centre coach. This is almost universal in European local trains. We believe that this is a huge missed opportunity. See [our factsheet](#) produced during the consultation.

3.3.2 Scenic line / tourist area trains

Cycle carriage often appears to be an afterthought once bigger decisions have been taken. This is not just a matter of convenience for cyclists - there are also significant tourism implications if cyclists are deterred from travelling to the area and this becomes widely known in the cycletourist market. Tourism is a vital industry for Scottish rural areas, and [cycletourism an important element](#).

Transport Scotland's franchise spec for WHL required only 2 bikes, way below the existing CI 156 capacity of 6. Perhaps as a result, the refurbished CI 158 trains were originally to have only 2 bookable spaces instead of the current 6. We are pleased that there is a review in progress, but this is due to outside pressure from MSPs, the tourist industry and cycle groups as a result of the planned major downgrade of existing capacity.

3.3.3 HST trains for Inter-City

Initial promises of greatly improved bike capacity ("20 bikes per train") were severely watered down to 6 bikes in the power cars, for end-to-end journeys only, plus just 2 spaces in one coach, for intermediate stations. We understand some relaxations are now being considered – but, again, only after widespread public and political concern and not at the outset.

Whilst we are not experts on the technical details, it is our understanding that one of the main problems, perhaps the main problem, is lack of the relatively small amount of cash needed to...

- convert redundant toilets into bike space or flexible space – under current plans these spaces will be locked away and will just transport air.
- increase capacity in each power car. These are very large spaces. The current plans adopt the inherited racks and Scotrail say they had no budget to increase capacity.

These concerns are set out in greater detail in Appendix 2

Appendix 1 - Tweedbank Cycle Exemplar Case Study

Although station facilities are important, an equally or perhaps more essential factor in encouraging integrated bike-to-train journeys is making the journey from home to station attractive. This “door-to-door” approach has been recognised in written documents and presentations such as the [Cycle Innovation Plan](#) (CIP) but we have not seen any impact on the ground.

We have been giving some thought to possible locations where it might be relatively easy, with appropriate TS and local authority involvement, to have an exemplar trial of encouraging commuting to stations. As an example, we set out the Tweedbank Case Study below, as that station was mentioned by Kathryn at the last meeting.

Tweedbank Case Study

The new Borders Railway stops short of Melrose at Tweedbank (the former railway alignment having been taken over by the Melrose By-Pass).

The Borders towns not served by the new railway, but which have good potential for cycling to the Tweedbank railhead are:

- Borders Hospital 1.2 miles
- Melrose 1.8 miles
- Gattonside 2 miles
- Newton St Boswells (Borders Regional Council HQ) 4.8 miles
- Selkirk 5.9 miles

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CIP principles suggest that consideration should be given to encouraging cycling to the station, before extending the car park and thus sterilising valuable land.

Tweedbank is quite well served by cycle routes running north into Galashiels and west to Selkirk, although Selkirk is stretching distances for some potential bike commuters. Unfortunately, cycle routes south towards nearby Melrose are less good, although there is a good route onwards from Melrose to Newton St Boswells. Towards Melrose, the "Melrose Link" segregated cycle path covers only the first quarter mile or so. Thereafter, the signposted route is firstly a shared use path alongside a main road and then on "B" roads which carry most of the local traffic between Melrose and Galashiels and so are often busy.

We propose that the missing and low quality routes are constructed/upgraded, then promoted through workplace and other initiatives, before the car park is expanded, or at the very least in parallel. TS could have a valuable role in promoting and facilitating such a project, which would illustrate that the “door-to-door” policy is more than just words.

Appendix 2 – HST bike capacity

The introduction of the HSTs provides a great opportunity for improvement and, on the face of it, eight cycle spaces per train is a great improvement. However, even eight spaces is much less than [the 20 first mentioned](#).

Furthermore, the bulk of the cycle carriage capacity (6 bikes in the power-cars) will only be available for end-to-end journeys, with maybe as few as two spaces within the train itself. This will make journeys to popular tourist destinations, such as Aviemore very difficult.

Two reasons were given from within Scotrail for the end-to-end-only restriction, these being...

Extended dwell times at intermediate stations

We suggest that further consideration should have been, and should be, given to measures such as...

- allocating cycle reservations to a specific power car.
- booking the related seats in an adjacent coach.
- platform markings showing where to wait.
- guards/station staff speaking to passengers with cycle reservations and/or making a public address system announcement.
- the guards knowing in advance about the cycle reservations.

Insufficient platform length to gain access to the power cars

This seems surprising, considering that these are 4/5 coach units compared with the usual 8 coach length of an HST. At which stations would the platforms be too short?

Looking at existing cycle carriage on HSTs...

- VTEC successfully operate full length HSTs over the Inverness and Aberdeen routes, albeit with less frequency, but with cycle carriage available to all intermediate stations.
- GWR, with full length formations and which use these same power-cars for cycle storage, offers cycle journeys to all intermediate stations.

In respect of cycle carriage outwith the power cars, draft plans show two hanging bikes in a former toilet space. However, we understand there will be a number of other redundant toilet spaces throughout the coaches, which will be closed off and out of use. Surely these should also be converted these to cycle storage use?