

Climate, Transport and Cycling Spokes Public Meeting, 17 Nov 2015

Notes from the 'Question and Answer' Session

AJ Alison Johnstone
DG Dave Gorman
TB Tom Ballantine

1 Can people be persuaded to live without cars?

TB: It has happened for many people in other cities around the world. Needs a gradual process of increasing costs of using a car and making alternatives more attractive.

AJ: Appropriate car use is ok and should continue but there will have to be more constraints on car use than there are now - health problems caused by emissions now include heart attacks and are being viewed very seriously; more now die from respiratory causes from air pollution than are killed on the roads. Congestion costs business billions every year.

2 How is Edin University managing to cut so many car park spaces?

DG: It is a gradual program of spaces being cut, charges gradually rising, and alternatives being promoted. It is working, reducing car use by staff and students and creating modal shift.

3 The so-called 'Quality Bike Corridor' is full of parked cars - how to address this?

AJ: The QBC shouldn't have been called 'Quality.' More courage was needed to restrict car space further. Lessons have been learned and AJ thinks future Edinburgh schemes will be better.

4 Will an agreement be reached in Paris?

TB: The momentum is increasing and is much better than pre-Copenhagen. A conclusion might be "not enough, but still part of an ongoing momentum".

DG: Technology and attitudes are changing faster and faster. Costs of renewables eg solar have reduced by up to 80%; the technology is changing rapidly; investment in renewables now outstrips investment in fossil fuels. Financial markets are likely to see what is happening and will respond – there may well be a 'tipping point' in attitudes as happens very rapidly in other areas of life and politics from time to time [e.g. smoking]

AJ: Mark Carney (Chief Exec, Bank of England) now talking about "stranded assets" in fossil fuels, which are assets worth much less because their basis (fossil fuels) can't continue to be exploited without constraint. Divestment in fossils is already becoming significant (cf Edin Univ).

5 Could the idea of an Active Travel Week without the car be promoted to MSPs?

AJ: Great idea. AJ will follow up on this. MSPs need to experience active travel themselves.

TB: "Walk the walk" (literally) is far better than talk the talk!

6 More info on the "exemplar project" competition announced by the Transport Minister – will it go ahead if none of the bids are high enough quality?

AJ: Expects there will be some good bids. Gov't looking for a project likely to have biggest impact on increasing cycling. Money amount, likely to be around £3.5m, but depends on the bids – will be decided at that time. It is not thought to be 'new money' but likely to come out of Community Links cash.

[*Spokes note* – cost this year is very low, just grants to help councils work up their bids. Main costs will be construction in next year(s) – we must campaign for that money to be extra, not reducing cash levels for other Community Links cycling projects].

7 What is meant by the 'carbon bubble'?

DG: Similar to the 'stranded assets' mentioned above. Carbon “assets” no longer worth what they were. When the EU moved to end coal power, prices fell by 90%.

8 Will electric cars achieve better storage capacities?

DG: technology is moving fast. In the battle between Tesla and VW, Tesla is winning. Makers of traditional cars are worried. Recent breakthrough at Cambridge Univ indicates Edinburgh to Portsmouth will be possible with a single charge.

9 Could cargo bikes replace some of Edin Univ's small electric vans?

DG: Ed Uni has one already, DG will ask their transport coordinator Emma to look at this

10 Air quality health impact of cars?

TB: Toxic pollution is serious and important, but the biggest public health challenge by far for the future is the impacts of climate change.

AJ: See answer to (1) above. In 1989 an EU regulation stipulated that every individual is entitled to clean air; the BMA has said air pollution from vehicles is now the biggest health crisis and included as cause of heart disease.

DG: Far more needs to be done. Government leaves it up to councils, but doesn't give them the resources to deal with it adequately. Prof Jamie Pearce working on a very serious link between air pollution and cardiology illnesses & deaths.

11 How to make alternatives to the car more attractive? Bike carriage on buses for example.

AJ: Integrated transport could be much better - bus, rail, cycle.

DG: The layout and compactness of cities also important, enabling facilities to be more easily accessible without lengthy travel. We must demand more of planners. [DdF mentioned talk by Dutch sociology professor @fietsprofessor at Cycling Scotland conference – high quality infra is vital but different cities in Netherlands with similar cycling infra have very different levels of cycling – due to layout, distances between home and shops, work, school etc]

TB: Bike hire at destination is an alternative to carriage of bikes on public transport when there are a lot of bikes.

12 Views on nuclear power?

All: very expensive; recent Westminster decision utterly wrong; renewables preferable in every way; engineering skills from redundant fossil fuel technology could be employed on better renewables; power sources could be local and benefit communities; nuclear waste disposal hugely expensive and risky; nuclear power stations require own police force for security; de-commission costs are astronomical - £150bn.

13 Closing roads to reduce cars and boost cycling - the “well-placed bollard” is a very cheap method

AJ: The idea of closing residential streets at times when children could play is worth pursuing – it is very cheap using methods such as bollards.

The QA session ended with each speaker giving a very short summary of points for us and them to take away. These points are in our main website report on the meeting.