

SPOKES The Lothian Cycle Campaign

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Dear Minister

Sheriffhall Roundabout – provision for cyclists

We are writing to express our deep concern at the selection of Option B as the government's *preferred option*¹ to replace the Sheriffhall roundabout. The proposal will mean that Sheriffhall remains a major barrier and disincentive to travelling between Dalkeith and Edinburgh or Shawfair by bike.

In our view, from the perspective of the person wishing to travel by bike, this is easily the worst of the three shortlisted options² (despite changes in the cycle facilities from the original Option B design). It is also very weak in policy terms.

For both reasons, the government needs to find a solution which includes a pedestrian/cycle bridge over the bypass and over (or avoiding) the slip roads – even if that means reverting to Option C.

We also note the concern expressed by local Midlothian people, led by Gorebridge Community Trust, and their Scottish Parliament petition³ about provision for cycling in major infrastructure proposals, with Sheriffhall roundabout as the background⁴ to the petition.

1 <https://www.transport.gov.scot/news-item/58d937bc65a26e12c4a100f0>

2 http://www.spokes.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/A720-Sheriffhall-leaflet-_Emerging-Options-Exhbiton-Dec216.pdf

3 <http://www.parliament.scot/GettingInvolved/Petitions/activetravelinfrastructure>

4 http://www.parliament.scot/gettinginvolved/petitions/PE01600-PE01699/PE01653_BackgroundInfo.aspx

Practical aspects

Under the revised and government-preferred Option B, cyclists, depending on their journey, will have to cross up to four of the roundabout approach-roads, including two bypass slip-roads, at-grade. This is completely unacceptable in a modern main-road design intended also to cater for safe, pleasant cycling.

It appears that the existing proposal does not include light-controlled pedestrian/cycle crossings of the approach roads. However, even the addition of such toucan crossings would not be an adequate solution in terms of safety, particularly given the relatively high speed slip roads. The route would also remain a deterrent for many – would parents allow their youngsters on a bike outing which included these crossings, for example?

The original Option B design, to which we also objected⁵, avoided the two slip-road crossings, thanks to the cycle path running below the bypass in a tunnel, but instead entailed a long there-and-back detour, and still retained two other major road crossings.

In contrast, Option C, which you have rejected, used a pedestrian/cycle bridge, separating cyclists and motor vehicles, and avoiding all the above at-grade main-road crossings. There were several design details that needed to be significantly improved, but the general principle was right.

A further point is that the original plans for Option C in 2014 (when it was Option 8) included removing the slip roads at Gilmerton junction whereas they were retained under Option B. Removal of the Gilmerton junction slip roads, if included in Option B, would at least have provided an alternative option for some cycle trips between Dalkeith and Edinburgh, though trips between Dalkeith and the new developments at Shawfair - a route that is an ideal length for cycle commuting - and some Edinburgh trips, would remain via Sheriffhall.

Finally, it is of course essential that the cyclist route is suitable for all categories of user, from the youngest to the oldest, and from the hardy commuter for whom time is of the essence and who needs a direct route to the novice leisure cyclist who might avoid the route altogether if it does not feel safe and attractive.

Policy aspects

It has been widely accepted for many years that the only cycle-friendly solution to the Sheriffhall barrier is a pedestrian/cycle bridge.

The need for a bridge was recognised as long ago as 2004 when the then Labour government allocated £800k, through the now abandoned public transport fund, for Midlothian to build such a bridge. Unfortunately, due we believe to land ownership problems, it was never built and permission was given to the Council to use the funds for other purposes. Over a decade later, and despite a complete junction rebuild, the present government proposes a substantially inferior solution.

Going back even further, over 20 years to 1996, the then Conservative administration issued the *Trunk Road Cycling Initiative* (still in force, though currently being updated) which stated that the government would ...

- “give special consideration for cyclists ... within improvements of trunk roads”
- “ensure no hazards to cyclists are built into the scheme”
- “ensure that opportunities for cyclists within the scheme are recognised and exploited.”

5 <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Sheriffhall-Spokes-response-final.pdf>

In respect of the above TRCI criteria, the current Option B proposal, with up to 4 crossings of roundabout approach roads, *is* building in hazards - and by not providing an overbridge the proposal *does not* recognise and exploit a major opportunity (recognised as such by SEStran, below).

The Sheriffhall Option B proposal also appears to violate the supposed principle of considering walking and cycling first, followed by public transport and then private motor traffic. To follow this principle, a pedestrian/cycle overbridge should surely be a requirement from the outset. Instead, Option B appears to have been designed firstly for motor vehicles, with cycle facilities only then added on as and how they could be slotted in. Such an approach is extremely unlikely to produce a satisfactory solution, and has not done so in this case.

Nor is the government paying attention to the regional transport and planning bodies, whose knowledge and studies of local transport needs, including cycling requirements, surely deserves full consideration.

The 2015 **SEStran** report *Strategic Cross Boundary Cycle Development*⁶ identifies Sheriffhall roundabout as a “*dangerous and intimidating*” location within the Edinburgh South East active travel corridor and identifies the following “opportunity” ...

“Overpass/fully segregated bridge at Sheriffhall junction – the redesign of the junction should incorporate the highest quality solution for cyclists.”

It also identifies Edinburgh-Midlothian (adding both directions) as having the highest current level of bike commuting of any of the SEStran cross-boundary corridors – suggesting the potential for significant growth if conditions were made cycle-friendly.

Finally, the **SEsplan** 2016 *Proposed Strategic Development Plan*⁷ endorses the cross-boundary strategic cycling and walking network identified by SEStran in their above document, and shows the Edinburgh-Dalkeith route through Sheriffhall as a “proposed functional route” - i.e. to be suitable for direct commuting trips, not purely recreational cycling. Furthermore in recommending a Sheriffhall junction upgrade it specifically notes the need to provide “non-car alternatives” for this functional route.

In conclusion, any option without a pedestrian/cycle overbridge (which is also reasonably direct, and which caters for all types of cyclist) should be considered by Transport Scotland to be unacceptable in the light of the above and also of the government's supremely ambitious 'vision' hugely to increase everyday cycle use.

We look forward to hearing from you on this and would be happy to discuss the matter further.

Yours Sincerely

Alec Mann
Dave du Feu

for Spokes Planning Group

6 http://www.SEStran.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/10.1.1_Strategic_Cross_Boundary_Cycle_Development.pdf

7 <http://sesplan.gov.uk/assets/publications/SDP2/Proposed%20Strategic%20Development%20Plan%20-%20Low%20Res.pdf>