

Edinburgh City Council, [meeting of full council, 29 June 2017](#)

Spokes deputation on the cycling motion, item 9.1 in the [agenda](#)

- Good morning. I am Martin McDonnell and I am providing a deputation on behalf of Spokes, the Lothian Cycle Campaign. Spokes was founded 40 years ago and has campaigned effectively for better cycling conditions in Edinburgh, and across Scotland as a whole, working constructively and as a critical friend to the City of Edinburgh Council and to Holyrood.
- Spokes welcomes the motion by Councillor Macinnes for Action to Improve Conditions for Vulnerable Road Users, which we understand has been discussed between the parties in the new City Coalition, as well as the Greens. This is a great sign of cross-party working on further raising cycle **use**, and cycle **safety**, in the city. This follows last year's great example of all-party agreement on the west-east cycle route.
- Council has a great legacy to work on. According to the last census, Edinburgh is the only Scottish city to achieve rising bicycle, walking and bus usage and, most challenging of all, with car commuting falling as a % of work journeys. Spokes peak period city centre traffic counts over the last 10 years confirm the pattern, with bikes up 50% and cars down 25% [*hold up Bulletin 128*]. This is a great basis for the new council to work from, and we were pleased to hear Cllr McVey say at the Spokes bike breakfast that the new council would be **the most bike-friendly ever**.
- Nonetheless there are many serious problems, and a step change in infrastructure is needed, in particular a big effort on segregated cycle routes on main roads.
- We were very sad to hear about the recent death of student Zhi Min Soh at a busy city centre junction, where there are tramlines, heavy traffic at peak periods and **no** cycle facilities. We particularly thank those councillors who came along to the one-minute silence at the junction to mark the tragedy, along with 300 or so other people.
- Hence we very much welcome this motion and its commitments to **early action** to improve conditions for cycling at this junction, and more widely along the tram route, and in the city centre as a whole. Spokes will be very pleased to support the council on improvements, though we of course reserve the right to criticise conditions and proposals which we feel are inadequate.
- Improvements to Edinburgh's tramline dangers are not simple, because the basic layout was designed without proper consideration of cycling, and so some dangers were inherent in the design from the outset. This shows the importance of building cycling in from the start on all transport and infrastructure projects, an important lesson for councils and the government.
- Nonetheless much can be done to improve safety where there are tramlines, and Spokes has already made a detailed proposal to resolve some of the West End junction problems, though not all [*hold up bulletin 123*].
- Finally, we are very pleased to see para 5 of the motion, seeking a rethink of the city centre public realm during the term of this council, with the objective of higher pedestrian and cycling priority. However, it must be recognised that this cannot be achieved without a **substantial** reduction in motor traffic, and until this or another new Council, is brave enough to grasp that nettle, Edinburgh will **never** equal other top European cities. European visitors, not least Edinburgh's former city adviser Jan Gehl architects, see Princes Street as a bus station and George Street as a car park. Such a change would not be easy, but is the most significant and boldest step that the Council could take, to make the city centre a place truly worthy of Scotland's Capital, and it should be a top priority for the Council. Finally, specifically on cycling, we strongly believe that the rethink should include a 2-way segregated cycle path on the north side of Princes Street - this would remove many of the tramline dangers, and we will argue for this in any consultation.
- In conclusion, despite the above reservations, we are pleased to support the motion overall, and hope that councillors from all parties will vote for it. I am happy to answer any questions.