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Scottish Government Active Travel Task Force ... additional evidence from Spokes

Our written evidence discussed the following barriers to implementation of ambitious cycle schemes

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

This paper gives additional comments on (5) and also includes...

6. Historical structural changes, national and local, which have impacted hugely (positively and negatively) on cycle scheme delivery in Edinburgh

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

Our previous evidence¹ gave three historical examples of where potential ambitious cycling infrastructure (as part of larger developments) appeared very late, or appeared in a severely watered-down form, or only after an inordinate amount of external lobbying. The primary cause in all cases appeared to be that **'major' decisions were taken, and only then was it attempted to slot in cycling infrastructure. Good cycling provision was not an essential requirement from the outset.**

The recently published *Review of Active Travel Policy Implementation*² adds weight to this conclusion, arguing 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.

Unfortunately this situation still persists within Transport Scotland - we list below two current issues where potentially ambitious cycling projects are being watered down...

a. Sheriffhall Roundabout The government's preferred option for grade separation is the worst option for cycling and exactly 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. The proposal is completely out of line with **SEStran** recommendations, **Sustrans** recommendations, 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 (to be debated by the Petitions Committee). 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.*"

Further information and our letter to the Transport Minister are here³

1 <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/1703-AT-Task-Force-spokes-response.pdf>

2 <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/10302/tp-active-travel-policy-implementation-review-october-2016.pdf>

3 <http://www.spokes.org.uk/2017/05/sheriffhall-scotgov-plans-worst-for-cycling/>

b. Bike Spaces on the refurbished HST125s for the Inverness and Aberdeen lines

Initial promises of greatly improved bike capacity have been severely watered down. Whilst we are not experts on the technical details, it is our understanding that one of the main problems, perhaps the main problem, is the relatively small amount of cash need to convert redundant toilets into bike space or flexible space – under current plans these spaces will be locked away and will just transport air. There are other intricacies but *if maximisation of bike capacity had been a priority* Transport Scotland would have somehow resolved this problem, in conjunction with the operator – like a previous administration did in 1998 when they allocated match-funding to the operator and the leasing company to improve bike capacity on Class 158s and 156s.

Thanks to the extensive public unrest on this, a Private Member motion has qualified to be debated in Parliament (on May 24). There is more background here⁴ and in linked articles.

6. The importance of structural change – with historical examples, national and local, which have impacted very significantly on Edinburgh cycling delivery

The point of this section is to show from real-life examples how cycle project delivery can be *and has been* hugely impacted (positively and negatively) not just for one scheme, but for many years, by political decisions taken either locally or nationally. **We hope the Task Force will consider including recommendations of this nature, as well as its recommendations on how to improve acceptance of individual schemes.** Such decisions can have a huge and permanent impact on cycle scheme delivery for as many years as they remain in effect.

Such recommendations would need careful thought but, for example, could include...

- Return capital funding to Regional Transport Partnerships, to raise the priority of inter-authority routes. Individual councils, understandably, concentrate cash where potential usage is highest, in conurbations.
- Some means of ensuring that every local authority has at least one full-time AT officer, if necessary by providing dedicated funding
- Providing incentives to local authorities to invest in cycling from their own funds (which should also make them take cycling more seriously as an objective). For example, whilst 50/50 Sustrans support is welcome for CWSS cash, councils could receive 75% or 80% support when they invest their own transport money.

Historical examples

1987 – Lothian Regional Council, under a Labour manifesto commitment, **created a Cycle Team** of 3 people (with a substantial budget). The Team completed the North Edinburgh Network, installed extensive coloured onroad cycle lanes/ASLs and drew up plans for cyclistoutes in Lothians towns. Cycle use doubled (census).

1996 – The Conservatives **scrapped Regional Councils**. The Cycle Team was lost, with one cycle officer initially appointed in Edinburgh. Importantly, the new Lothians councils had little cycling expertise, Lothian's plans for town networks all fell, and progress slowed even in Edinburgh.

2001 - Sarah Boyack MP, then Transport Minister, set up **new funding arrangements** to benefit cycling by modifying Public Transport Fund rules and creating CWSS. CWSS continues to this day and has been a bedrock of cycle funding, ensuring at least some interest in cycling in a much wider range of local authorities.

2008 – The new SNP government **removed capital funding from RTPs**. This was a massive disaster for routes between Edinburgh and surrounding authorities, for which SEStran had budgeted £4.6m. As a result the A90 route to the Forth Bridge was delayed many years and few other such routes are yet complete.

2012 – Edinburgh LibDem Transport Convener Gordon Mackenzie introduced the policy of a **% of transport capital and revenue budgets being allocated to cycling** (initially 5%, rising 1% a year to 10%). This has made a huge difference with growing cycle project implementation and the ability to attract significant Sustrans funding.

2014 – SNP government **doubled cycle funding** from ~£20m to ~£40m p.a. Whilst this is still much too low, it is clear that the number and range of cycle projects supported in Edinburgh and elsewhere is now much larger.

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4 <http://www.spokes.org.uk/2017/05/highlands-n-e-bike-rail-cuts-parliament-debate-may-24/>