

SPOKES KES *The Lothian Cycle Campaign*

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Important note: this letter is addressed to **Council leaders**, rather than to Transport portfolio holders, since the letter proposes action within the **City-Region Deal**, and so decisions would need to be taken at that level.

Sheriffhall Roundabout Reconstruction ... An Oasis of Cycling Excellence in a Desert of Underprovision? An integrated project, incorporating cyclistroute links, is essential

BACKGROUND AND CURRENT STATE OF PLAY

Spokes and many others were extremely concerned at the original plans for Sheriffhall roundabout, which paid little attention to Active Travel and, if anything, worsened the existing appalling conditions for walking and cycling. Many people and organisations contacted their MSPs.

Gorebridge Community Development Trust, supported by Spokes, were so concerned as to take this to the Scottish Parliament Petitions Committee¹, as an example of the neglect of active travel in trunk road projects.

As a result of the above, Transport Scotland had a welcome and constructive rethink, undertook some superb consultation, and appears now on track to produce high quality provision for the several active travel desire lines at the site [of course, proof of the pudding will be in the building!]

This, however, is set to be an oasis of cycling excellence in a desert of underprovision, as the routes from the site to relevant destinations, notably Dalkeith and Edinburgh, are in general very poor, as explained below...

¹ <http://www.spokes.org.uk/2017/06/double-deputation/>

- ◆ A7(N) – A very busy road, with speed limits of up to 50mph. There are advisory cycle lanes in places, but fast close passes are common. There is no cycling infrastructure between Newton Church Road and Ferniehill Drive, and a very poor road surface between The Wisp and Ferniehill Drive. Further north, the southbound carriageway between RIE and Ferniehill Drive has two very nasty pinch points at traffic islands and a dangerous section of “door zone” cycle lane. We understand that CEC has plans to improve the section of Old Dalkeith Road between Cameron Toll and the BioQuarter, but these changes do not currently have a delivery date and in any case end well before Sheriffhall.
- ◆ A7(S) – This is an incredibly busy road with a 60 mph speed limit and no cycling infrastructure. Midlothian Council’s A7 urbanisation plans will be a huge improvement, but currently only go as far north as the Gilmerton Road roundabout.
- ◆ A6106(N) – Another busy road with no cycling infrastructure of any sort. The speed limit is 60mph from Sheriffhall to The Wisp, except for a short section at Newton Village. Midlothian Council’s (draft) ATS says that a cycleway from Sheriffhall to Old Craighall Road is "aspirational". No cycling infrastructure is proposed between Old Craighall Road and Shawfair Road.
- ◆ A6106(S) – This has a bidirectional shared use path from Sheriffhall to the northern edge of Dalkeith. Whilst it has poor sightlines for cyclists crossing to Melville Gate Road and for northbound cyclists at Lugton Brae it is the only one of the four roads that is at all suitable for risk-averse cyclists. Unfortunately, there is also no cycling infrastructure connecting it to Dalkeith High Street or National Cycle Route NCN 1/196.

Spokes has often criticised Transport Scotland for silo thinking² whereby, particularly in relation to Active Travel, TS concerns itself solely with its own narrow within-scheme responsibilities, leaving cycle or pedestrian route upgrades/construction connecting to/from the project site entirely up to other bodies – usually the local authority. In particular, no provision is made for funding such routes or for ensuring concurrent timescales. Bathgate/Airdrie rail re-opening was a prime and supremely frustrating example, with active travel routes from the new stations to surrounding areas left entirely to the councils - who did not have the cash and other resources available. Thus several of the required routes were built five or more years later, when the local authority eventually managed to scrape up the cash, usually with Sustrans assistance. By this time, most local residents will have long since cemented their travel routines into car-commuting to the station.

That pattern is surely the epitome of non-integration and should be avoided at all costs by a government committed to modal shift and to environmental responsibility.

Whilst councils may have ambitions for new cycling infrastructure, such as Midlothian’s ‘Urbanisation of the A7,’ they do not have the financial or staffing resource to ensure these projects are undertaken timeously and concurrently with the roundabout project. We can be almost guaranteed that if the connections are left for individual councils to deal with amongst their many other cycling priorities then we will see a very similar pattern to Bathgate/Airdrie.

THE CITY-REGION DEAL – An opportunity for holistic thinking and action

Sheriffhall is the ideal first case in which Transport Scotland, working with the two Councils, could break this mould, particularly now that the scheme is funded through the City-Region Deal. With the Deal being an integrated Scottish Government/ local authorities arrangement, surely an integrated project can be secured, rather than 'as and when' sporadic independent provision by the three separate public bodies, Transport Scotland and Edinburgh and Midlothian Councils.

2 <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/1708-Roy-Brannen-mtg-final-agenda-ideas.pdf>

The City-Region Deal presents the opportunity to expand the Sheriffhall project, as regards active travel, from a 'trunk road silo' project to a genuinely integrated project including not just the roundabout but also a high quality, separate, 'aspirational,' cycle route linking Edinburgh, Dalkeith and wider Midlothian.

It needs also to link in with developments (some of which are still in the planning process) including cycle links between Dalkeith, Shawfair, Eskbank, the Royal Infirmary, the Bioquarter, and, with more work, Fort Kinnaird -- these very clearly link areas of population with areas of work, and with distances that are cycle friendly.

Project governance

We are not clear how the City-Region Deal is managed, but clearly the whole above project would need to be managed in an integrated way, involving all three public authorities, but with clear leadership and driven in such a way that, crucially, it would be implemented no later than the roundabout rebuild.

SEStran might also be involved, given their cross-boundary remit, and their report on Cross-Boundary cycleroutes³, which highlighted Sheriffhall as a particular barrier to active travel.

Conclusion

The City Deal is all about regional connectivity. Building connecting paths would deliver real and valuable active travel routes, with all the consequent benefits to public health and the local economy, and reduced climate and toxic emissions.

This is also an opportunity to reduce the number of private cars coming into Edinburgh each day, and to reduce congestion on the City Bypass and in other areas between Edinburgh and Midlothian.

We urge the Scottish Government, City of Edinburgh Council and Midlothian Council, through the City-Region Deal, to adopt this genuinely integrated project, an exemplar for other such Deals, for Transport Scotland, and for the wider future of active travel regional planning.

We would be happy to meet to discuss these issues if that would be helpful.

Indeed we would be particularly happy to take relevant politicians and officers on a guided tour of the current infrastructure to illustrate the absolute necessity that the Sheriffhall project becomes a true and popular active travel exemplar rather than a masterpiece of cycle infrastructure isolated in the middle of C20th carmageddon.

Yours sincerely

Michaela Jackson

with the involvement of
David French
Alec Mann
Dave du Feu

3 <http://sestran.gov.uk/publications/sestran-strategic-cross-boundary-cycle-development-final-report/>