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## City of Edinburgh consultation on Bus Lane Operational Hours

[consultationhub.edinburgh.gov.uk/sfc/bus-lane-operational-hours](http://consultationhub.edinburgh.gov.uk/sfc/bus-lane-operational-hours)

Spokes is delighted that the Council is consulting on 7-7-7 bus lane operation (7am-7pm, 7 days a week). We firmly support this proposal - although 24/7 operation would be even better.

### 1. HISTORY

We were extremely disappointed with the decision<sup>1</sup> by the previous Council to scrap Saturday bus lanes and restrict all others to peak-hour-only; a proposal against which we campaigned vigorously but unsuccessfully, urging 7-7-7 operation instead. The Council's decision at that time represented a clear disconnect with their own transport policies. Our reasoning was detailed in a joint Spokes and Living Streets letter<sup>2</sup> to councillors.

We also note that...

- Glasgow City Council consulted widely on bus lane hours and as a result<sup>3</sup> adopted 7-7-7.
- Edinburgh City Council did not consult the public, and no convincing rationale was advanced.
- Although Edinburgh trialled its peak-only plan before making it permanent, the outcome was inconclusive and, if anything, came out worse than existing timings. 7-7-7 was neither trialled or consulted on.

We are therefore delighted that the present council is considering 7-7-7 operation - and is consulting the public on the proposals.

### 2. WHY WE SUPPORT THE 7-7-7 PROPOSAL (and would prefer 24/7)

#### 2.1 Role of buses

Spokes campaigns for cycling within an overall sustainable transport strategy. We support extended bus lane times not just because this benefits people using bikes, but also because it benefits buses.

In order to reduce the huge amounts of space occupied by parked and moving motor vehicles, as well as their pollution, noise and danger, the alternatives of bus, cycle, walk and car-club must be as effective as possible. Few people will use only one transport mode for all journeys at all times, and a city with high quality options of bus, bike, walk and car-club enables more and more people to live car-free, thus benefiting the whole community as well as people's own bank balance.

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1 <http://www.spokes.org.uk/2015/06/bus-lanes-150-objections-rejected/>

2 <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/1610-TEC-cttec-SpokesLS-letter.pdf>

3 <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/1503-Bus-lane-review-RESULT.pdf>

## 2.2 Council Policy

Relevant policies and statements in the Council's *Local Transport Strategy*<sup>4</sup> include the following, which all point to support for increasing bus lane operational hours to 7-7-7, or indeed 24/7.

- ◆ **PubTrans1:** The Council will presume in favour of giving buses and Trams *priority over other motorised traffic*
- ◆ **PubTrans7:** The Council will continue to maintain the bus lane network, review it regularly and *extend* it or *enhance* it where opportunities arise
- ◆ **Walk1:** The Council will seek opportunities to improve pedestrian facilities
- ◆ **[9.2]:** The attractiveness of cycling is dependent on the degree to which the road network is dominated by motor vehicles.

## 2.3 Bus delays

In its response to Edinburgh's trial of peak-only bus lanes (before the trial was made permanent) Lothian Buses stated, "*Bus lanes are an effective mitigation measure for congestion and as such their provision is important in encouraging modal shift to public transport*" and "*The analysis did not show a conclusive effect on transit times but did show a consistent marginal increase.*"

Here Edinburgh's award-winning bus company clearly summarised the importance of the bus lane network and reported a "*consistent marginal increase*" in journey times when operational hours were cut. There is thus every reason to expect times to improve when hours are extended.

Professor David Begg (who introduced Edinburgh's Greenways bus-lane network when he was Transport Convener, and is an expert on public transport) has stated<sup>5</sup>, "*When they were first introduced, Edinburgh was the only city in the UK to show a consistent improvement in bus journey times. However, since then bus journey times in Edinburgh have been increasing.*" This he put down to increasing congestion and inadequate enforcement of bus lanes.

He also stated that if journey times increase by 10%, then full-fare patronage falls by 10%-14% .

Answering questions at a later Spokes public meeting,<sup>6</sup> in 2018, Prof Begg said bus speed is critical to increasing patronage, so congestion is a serious danger. Bus lanes should be maintained at a high standard (funded by bus income), enforced strictly, and the cut in bus lane hours was of "great concern."

## 2.4 Cycling aspects – reducing danger and fear, and providing direct routes

The ideal infrastructure for safe and pleasant cycling on busy roads is segregated provision, and we are pleased that the Council now recognises this. Nonetheless, where segregated provision is not yet in place, bus lanes – when operational and when enforced – provide a much safer and more pleasant environment for cycling than mixing with all traffic. Buses are relatively few compared to general traffic, and Lothian Buses drivers have significant cycle awareness training, including on-bike. Other companies, with less cycle training, do at least have professional drivers unlike much general traffic.

Furthermore, roads with bus lanes tend to be major routes to important destinations such as workplaces and shopping centres. Cyclists, like anyone else, are often travelling to such destinations, and so tend to prefer the direct and less hilly routes provided by main roads – but only if they feel sufficiently safe. Enforced bus lanes increase the proportion of existing and potential cyclists who feel able to use such routes, albeit segregated routes will increase that proportion much further.

4 [http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/3525/local\\_transport\\_strategy](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/3525/local_transport_strategy)

5 <http://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/news/transport/greenways-journey-times-up-18-minutes-1-4144254>

6 <http://www.spokes.org.uk/2018/06/spokesmtg-city-centre-transformation/>

Bus lanes with operating hours of 7-7-7 (or, better, 24/7) rather than peak-period only, and assuming adequate enforcement, would thus significantly enhance the city's cycling provision.

The fact that this is a safety issue, not just one of amenity, is illustrated by this video<sup>7</sup> which shows a 'close pass' of a cyclist during the hours when cars are at present allowed in bus lanes. The video shows, first, the back view as a car approaches, then the front view as the car overtakes.



*In watching the video, note the following...*

- ◆ There is no value in the motorist being allowed to use the bus lane – there is plenty space in the main traffic lane, with traffic travelling at a similar speed.
- ◆ The motorist appears more concerned with keeping within the thick white line of the bus lane than with passing the cyclist at a safe distance, in keeping with the Highway Code.

In summary, the video illustrates an entirely unnecessary danger - a danger which would be largely eliminated by 7-7-7 operation, and the sort of incident which deters people from taking up cycling.

## 2.5 Pedestrian aspects

It is not always appreciated that operational bus lanes also benefit pedestrians. Keeping moving traffic one lane away from the footway greatly improves the pedestrian experience in terms of noise, splashing, pollution and general ambience – as the attitude survey in 2.6 below suggests.

Furthermore, crossing the road becomes easier and safer since visibility of traffic is significantly better.

## 2.6 Cyclist & pedestrian attitudes to reduced bus lane operational times

As part of the previous Council's trial of peak-only bus lanes, a small opinion survey was conducted. Whilst the November 2016 Committee report<sup>8</sup> presented its findings such as to support peak-only, a different interpretation is possible. In particular, the results showed a clear view that walking and cycling conditions under peak-only bus lanes had deteriorated compared to a year earlier, before the experiment. In nearly all questions below, 20%-40% of respondents felt that conditions had become worse, compared to just 3%-10% who felt they were better (the remainder not noticing a difference)...

- ◆ Speeding in the bus lane
- ◆ Parking in the bus lane
- ◆ Crossing the street
- ◆ Journeys take longer
- ◆ Feels less safe for cycling
- ◆ Street is worse for walking or cycling

## 2.7 Car issues

Cars tend to stay out of bus lanes due to potential delays from bus stops and parked cars. However, even without such delays, the benefit to drivers of using bus lanes off-peak, when the main traffic lane usually has plenty capacity, is hard to fathom. Thus, since the lanes are vital for buses in the peak, and have little value for cars off-peak, an obvious solution for simplicity and consistency is 7-7-7 or 24/7.

<sup>7</sup> Close pass video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TshXNHSsnU8&feature=youtu.be>

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.spokes.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/161101-Item\\_7.6\\_Bus\\_Lane\\_Network\\_Review.pdf](http://www.spokes.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/161101-Item_7.6_Bus_Lane_Network_Review.pdf)

## **2.8 Parking in bus lanes**

Although the current proposal does not tackle parking in bus lanes, we urge the Council to follow this up separately and restrict parking permissions to those that are truly essential

Bus lane parking is a major cause of delay for buses, whilst for cyclists it means moving out of the relative safety of the bus lane and into the main traffic stream – a manoeuvre which is bad enough for regular cyclists but is particularly daunting to the new cyclists that the council wishes to encourage.

## **2.9 Bus lanes enforcement**

Effective enforcement of permitted hours for driving and/or parking in bus lanes is absolutely essential, and automated enforcement such as by cameras must be the most effective approach.

In the above-mentioned 2016 Committee report, Lothian Buses was quoted thus:

*“For bus lanes to be effective they need to be kept clear during their hours of operation; this requires enforcement of parking and loading restrictions which are frequently ignored particularly in the vicinity of hotels and urban supermarkets.”*

It is possible that the fact of bus lanes being operational throughout the day and at weekends, rather than only for the current very limited hours, will to some extent increase compliance since the lanes will be seen as less the province of private vehicles than now, and the hours will be easier to remember - but the real solution is effective enforcement.

## **2.10 Operation 7-7-7 or 24/7 ?**

7-7-7 operation will be a huge improvement on the current position, for the reasons above. However, we urge the Council to go further and instead make all bus lanes operational 24/7.

Many people cycle to and from work before 7am and/or after 7pm and some of these people do so because the bus service tends to operate at a reduced level at such times. Before 7am and after 7pm is also when it is more often dark than light, making cycling more difficult and offputting.

Given that the roads are rarely congested outwith 7-7-7 it is hard to see any significant benefit to drivers from allowing bus lane use at such times, whereas prohibiting cars entirely would be a worthwhile benefit for cyclists and indeed for pedestrians.

Sometimes, of course, there are sudden but temporary rushes of traffic after 7pm, notably at the end of events. At such times the benefits of operational bus lanes for buses and cyclists are obvious, particularly as it is often then dark. Without restrictions, cars will inevitably pile into the lanes at such times, delaying buses and hazarding cyclists.

Yours sincerely

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