

Active travel during COVID-19 lockdown Space for social distancing - initial ideas

This note is based on the assumption that we are likely to have some level of lockdown measures, on and off, until a vaccine is rolled out and or herd immunity is achieved. That could be around one to two years. We expect ongoing dialogue with the Council on active travel issues throughout the period, and we understand that we will all be learning as we go along.

At the moment many arterial routes are very quiet with the exception of some drivers speeding and instances of road rage (e.g. see twitter reports). However, traffic will increase as some lockdown measures are lifted. This could pose the most dangerous time for people on bikes, particularly those who have started cycling recently due to the COVID-19 restrictions. There are anecdotal reports that traffic is already increasing from the low levels of the beginning of the lockdown.

A very important issue is the risk of large numbers of people who previously used public transport transferring to car. Temporary cycle facilities should be sufficiently attractive to provide an alternative for many, also to help deter motor traffic (moving and parked), and, where possible, be capable of conversion to permanent facilities. This will be particularly important for people living in areas of multiple deprivation.

For reasons such as these, cities around the world are urgently introducing temporary – or permanent – cycle and walking facilities using road space previously occupied by moving or parked motor vehicles. This is discussed in a briefing by the Scottish Parliament Information Service, SPICe <https://spice-spotlight.scot/2020/04/14/coronavirus-covid-19-remaking-our-streets/>

Arterial routes

Main roads are the most important but can be difficult to tackle as there are also demands to widen footways, as well as parked cars, and junction problems.

Spokes strongly urges the speedy provision of cycle lanes (as segregated as possible) on arterial routes even if these have to be bidirectional lanes. These would allow people to travel from their residential areas (quieter roads) towards or away from the city centre.

On many of the narrower main roads (e.g., Gorgie/Dalry roads, Stockbridge, Morningside/Bruntsfield) widening the footway would help pedestrians but disadvantage cycling unless a cycle route can also be provided. Possibly, if parking is removed, an option could be a wide footway on one side and a two-way cycleway on the other. Bidirectional lanes might, however, cause problems at junctions and side roads.

Another option is to consider coning off bus lanes, for example in Minto St, to provide a two-way cycle lane with no impact on traffic (except for public transport). Again, there would be junction issues.

Bus stops also need to be considered, but bearing in mind that bus use is now a tiny fraction of previously, being intended only for key workers who are not using individual transport. The number and frequency of bus vehicles themselves has also been much reduced.

Residential areas

Residential streets access could be tackled separately and would best be handled through or at least with local communities if this could be done quickly. Perhaps the community councils could play a significant role here in identifying problems and finding temporary solutions that might include closing off rat runs which would otherwise provide active travel routes into schools.

To minimise potential delays, it would need to be made clear that any such measures could be changed if serious drawbacks occurred.

Closing off streets by bollards and or planters to make them safer and more attractive for walking/cycling, and making social distancing simpler, feels like the obvious solution. Leith might be a good area to start as it has a relatively high use of bikes and a range of incomes.

Priorities

We are not able to prioritise the routes outlined later in this paper as we don't have access to data. However, we would suggest something along the following lines, whilst also stressing the urgency of taking rapid action to foster safety and to encourage transfer to bike and walk rather than to car use.

- **Immediate priority:** known locations where there is a danger to public health (social distancing) and or danger to walkers/cyclists by drivers. Examples: Portobello Promenade, the canal towpath, busy and popular shared-use paths such as those on the Water of Leith, Ferry Road etc. We stress that we are urging the provision of attractive alternative routes using redundant road space, not a total ban of cycling on paths. Other immediate priorities should be speeding hotspots where these can be identified.

- **High priority:** current key destinations (with high numbers of employees/users) for key workers. This would include the major hospitals and schools that are currently open, followed by other key-worker destinations such as bus garages, waste depots and food-shopping areas. We should also prioritise areas with high potential for transfer from car to bike, and limited existing active travel infrastructure, where road conditions are putting off active travel, such as South Edinburgh (beyond Marchmont/Grange).
- **Medium priority:** routes to key destinations that will open up as restrictions are lifted. For example, safe routes to schools that are yet to open. This could also include routes to destinations with lower numbers of key workers, for example care homes. This should also be done in context of economic recovery. What would be most helpful for businesses opening up in the city?

Principles

- The Council needs to be brave, and fast, learning from things that don't work and moving on quickly to different approaches. This may be a difficult change of approach in a city and council accustomed to extensive and repeated consultations, but we are now in a pandemic emergency, so trial and learning should be the new order of the day in respect of these measures.
- It is important that as many cyclists as possible move off the busier shared-use paths onto safe roads to give sufficient social distancing space to walkers and wheelers, although a total ban must be avoided.
- We need to ensure that, once on road, cyclists, particularly those who are inexperienced, feel safe and know how to get easily and directly from A to B.
- Cycling includes adapted bikes, trikes, cargo bikes, people pulling trailers etc.
- We will need a clear communications strategy to all road users on the what, why and how alongside all temporary changes. This will need to be flexible and adapt to feedback as we go along.
- We should use the COVID-19 crisis to help change people's travel habits to active travel in a way that will keep them active post lockdown, to help meet other public health and climate change objectives. A strong comms approach focussing on public health and risk reduction should help.
- Minimise the risk of large numbers of people transferring from bus to car.

Potential measures

1. **Essential routes** that should be considered for calming/temporary lanes/removing parking/managing speed etc in some form:
 - a. Well-used shops and supermarkets or streets with significant number of food shops (e.g., Dalry/Gorgie, Morningside Road).
 - b. Routes to bus depots/terminals and waste depots (for key workers).
 - c. Travel to Royal Infirmary requires East/West travel via Braid Hills Drive, and/or Frogston. Both roads too fast. Braid Hills Road should be closed to traffic (Liberton Farm and Braid Farm Road). Old Dalkeith Road would also benefit from slower speeds.
 - d. The Gilmerton Road/Minto Street/Bridges corridor.

- e. Gilmore Place/Polwarth Terr/ Colinton Rd to Gillespie Crossroad
 - f. Tollcross/ Bruntsfield Pl, Morningside Rd/ Comiston Rd up to F/head Crossroads (with potentially quiet route to meadows from Greenbank crossroads used for cyclists to bypass Morningside (narrow))
 - g. Travel to Royal Edinburgh Hospital/Astley Ainslie Hospital can be achieved via Colinton Rd and Morningside Rd.
 - h. Redford Rd/ Oxfangs Rd/ Frogston Rd / Captains Rd /Ellens Glen Rd / Moredunvale Rd route to RIE.
 - i. Crewe Rd South - adjacent to WGH
 - j. Area around Inverleith and Botanics. (Inverleith Place, Inverleith Terrace, East Fettes, Inverleith Row (approaches to Western General and exercise in park))
 - k. East/West City Centre. Note that widened south pavement on Princes St might push cyclists too close to tram lines.
 - l. Leith Walk – cyclists on-road to keep distance from pedestrians. Wider cycle lanes and prevent parking in cycle lanes.
 - m. Brighton Place/Duddingston Road, Duddingston Road West (into Holyrood Park).
 - n. Portobello High St, Seafield Road/Leith/Granton.
 - o. Portobello Road to London Road.
 - p. Joppa to Musselburgh (CEC/East Lothian Council boundary issue)
 - q. Alternative to Blackhall, Telford and Ferry Road shared use paths – Ferry Road and Telford Road.
 - r. Alternative to canal routes – Fountainbridge, Dundee Street, Slateford Road, Inglis Green Road, Murrayburn Road, Gilmore Place, Polwarth Gardens and Terrace, Colinton Road.
 - s. Dundee Street/West Approach Road junction – close.
 - t. Lothian Road. Our pre-COVID-19 counts found nearly 20% of all vehicles were bikes at peak period time.
 - u. George IV Bridge - and this could remain in place until full MGS implementation
 - v. Longer roads into the centre such as A8 or Comiston Road - a rolling programme of introducing more whilst the restrictions remain.
 - w. Shoreline – gap in Starbank Road and part of Pier Place
 - x. Corstorphine Road/St John’s Road.
2. Could **bus lanes** (e.g. Minto Street) be coned off to provide a two-way cycle lane, if some thought is given to how bus stops and junctions are managed?
 3. Could we prepare to roll out temporary **tiger-style crossings** (combines pedestrian zebra with a crossing for bikes) at once on every route so that motorists get used to seeing and obeying them without needing lights.
 4. Improved **signage** of existing on-road quiet routes and temporary signage of new on-road routes – particularly to hospitals, supermarkets, transport hubs including bus depots, and schools. Perhaps colour coded signs attached to lamp posts for particular destinations, ‘do not overtake cyclists’ on narrow roads, and cyclist diversion signs for popular shared use paths. Also market these routes through social media.
 5. Dialogue with **major employers** on reducing need to travel and maintaining that where appropriate: home working, local hubs etc (in advance of any workplace parking levy in the future).
 6. Address **traffic light** timings on a temporary basis.

Speeding and close passes

Close passes are still continuing, despite clearer roads. Spokes Party asked (on twitter) whether people on bikes were experiencing speeding by drivers. The list below is therefore anecdotal and not verified by the police. Cyclists are experiencing speed issues throughout the city and on every day of the week.

- Portobello Hlgh St
- Joppa
- Baileyfield Rd
- Duddingston Park
- Queens Drive, Holyrood Park (HES)
- Russel Road
- Craigcrook Road
- Telford Road
- Westfield
- Ravelston Dykes Road
- Glasgow Road
- St Johns Road
- Jock's Lodge
- Bonnington Road
- Easter Road
- (Edinburgh!)