

Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 (STPR2)

Comments from Living Streets Edinburgh and Spokes Lothian

Living Streets Edinburgh and Spokes Lothian would like to comment on the proposals in the STPR2. We strongly support investment in walking and cycling and the sustainable movement hierarchy set out in the National Transport Strategy). This is essential if the Scottish Government's environmental, climate change, social and economic objectives are to be achieved.

Specifically, we strongly support Intervention 7 ("Reallocation of Road Space for Active Travel") in the context of the urgent need (and opportunity) to enable successful 'Spaces for People' measures to be made permanent¹. Whilst SfP measures were introduced for Covid-related purposes of social distancing, freeing up space on buses, and active travel exercise, they in practice also contribute significantly to other government priorities such as climate, public health, place, decongestion, etc. On such grounds successful interventions need to be made permanent – indeed, not to do so would be effectively to throw away much of the £39m government investment.

Many of these measures in Edinburgh have demonstrated that better infrastructure for walking, wheeling and cycling has been well used. This increase should continue if the schemes are made permanent and further improved on the basis of experience and consultation. They have certainly not caused the city to grind to a halt as some predicted.

However, making cycling and walking infrastructure permanent will involve significant costs, which the City of Edinburgh Council doesn't have.

As regards the widened footways in Edinburgh's ten 'town centres' (such as Corstorphine, Morningside and Leith), these temporary interventions mostly consist of reallocating short stretches of carriageway to walking space through the use of cylinders and 'defenders'. While this may have been appropriate to facilitate physical distancing during the pandemic, these designs need significant improvement for the future. In Edinburgh's 'town centres' many are discontinuous, inaccessible to many pedestrians, introduce trip hazards and in places may impede cyclists and buses. Instead, 'proper' wider footways are needed, with raised kerbs, the necessary changes to drainage, etc.

The 40km of semi-segregated cycle lanes on main roads are proving a great boon, being largely separated from traffic, and given that main roads are generally the most direct and least hilly routes from A to B. The significance of this provision, which otherwise would have taken many years, cannot be underestimated. Again, however, significant changes are necessary to further improve safety in permanent schemes – for example, kerb separation rather than 'defenders,' and safer junction facilities.

Some 80 schools have been given street safety measures, ranging from wider footways to road closures - and these social distancing measures have also brought much-welcomed traffic-reduced or traffic-free areas around school gates.

¹ <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/49058/stpr2-phase-1-ast-project-7-reallocation-of-road-space-for-active-travel-3-feb-2021.pdf>

Finally, there have also been smaller numbers of other SfP schemes such as road closures and pedestrian/cycle measures at dangerous junctions and roundabouts. We anticipate further measures, yet to be introduced, including to clear pavements of 'clutter' and to increase the priority given to people walking at pedestrian crossings.

From preliminary discussions with the City of Edinburgh Council, we understand that the costs of converting the temporary footways into proper, wider permanent footways in the ten 'town centres' might be in the region of £30 million. If the benefits to walking are not to be lost, this investment is needed urgently. A Department for Transport report² suggests that permanent main-road segregated cycle routes might cost around £1m per km. Adding in the costs of school measures, road closures, active travel measures at dangerous junctions, etc, we might expect a total cost up to £100m for Edinburgh over a period of years.

While our focus as Edinburgh/Lothian groups is on Edinburgh and the wider region, clearly funding under STPR2 would need to be Scotland-wide. Given that Edinburgh received some 13% of the government SfP funding, this might imply a Scotland-wide STPR2 project of around £800m over a period of years

We would like to see the Scottish Government prioritise these measures, which would make everyday walking, wheeling and cycling significantly more viable, attractive and safe. This would be a genuinely strategic investment, which builds on successful SfP investment and experience, and makes a significant contribution to achieving all four of the strategic pillars of the new National Transport Strategy.

² https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/742451/typical-costings-for-ambitious-cycling-schemes.pdf