

Spokes traffic count 11.5.21 – brief report

I'm not doing a website blog report at the moment as the results are very similar to the [November count](#), which was our first 'Covid count'. [The May count data](#) is however now on our [counts page](#). Furthermore Resources Group is hoping shortly to do some non-commuting-time bike-only counts on SFP routes, and a combined report might then be useful [if anyone can help in a daytime count, I can pass on your name].

So this short report is for the info of everyone who helped in the May count, including a few notes on the Spokes Party count on the same day. If anyone has comments on this report, please let me know.

Total number of bikes at the 4 central-area count points during 8-9am was marginally down, to 217, from 229 in November.

In fact bikes were slightly *up* both ways at Lothian Rd and only slightly down southbound at Forrest Rd, but there were 16 fewer bikes northbound at Forrest Rd, where we saw Heriots school children in November but none this time. Does anyone know if Heriots used a temporary cycle/walk access via Candlemaker Row in November, or any other reason for this change? (I think we'd never seen school kids here before either)?

Whilst bike numbers changed little from November, car numbers continued rising and are almost back to pre-pandemic levels* so the bike % fell from 10.3% of all vehicles in November, to 8.9%.

Our counts of course just give total figures, and cannot tell what modal transfers have taken place, but the figures fit very well with the assumptions in the 3 bullet points below. In the appendix at the end of the November article we showed how this might work numerically.

- Many *people* have stopped travelling by *all modes* (between 8-9am). Some will be working from home; others will have lost their jobs or been reduced to part time or are following travel advice.
- Amongst those who do still travel, many have probably transferred from bus to car. Bus use figures are hard to find, but sales of Lothian Bus rfid cards fell from 25K per month pre-pandemic to 3K in April-Sept 2020. There were roughly 10million LB journeys per month pre-pandemic. This fell to well under 1m at one point last year and I *think* I have read it is still only around 5m (anyone know?)
- In other words, car traffic (in our count locations) is now approaching pre-Covid levels* but within a context of many fewer people travelling in total.

Incidentally, I have heard from government traffic statisticians that they believe bike commuting (like all commuting) has fallen, but that bike use at other times has risen. Unfortunately we have no background data about other times of day, so we cannot know for sure what has happened locally, although it certainly feels like there are more bikes around during the day than there used to be.

Interestingly, single-car occupancy overall in our May count was very near its usual level of around 76%, though varying quite a lot at different count points.

Spokes Party also conducted a survey at the same time, on Brighton Place, a main road into Party town centre, using the same count format, and I have included their data in the results file. Numbers of bikes and of cars were lower than in our central area counts, but the % of bikes was significantly higher, 13.8% compared to the central area 8.9%. Car single occupancy, at 67%, was a fair bit lower than our central area 76%. So, overall, a better picture in Party than in the central area!

Party also did a one-hour lunchtime count. This, perhaps surprisingly, found a lower proportion of bikes than in the rush hour – and not only were there fewer bikes but almost as many cars as in the rush hour - and more single-occupancy.

*IMPORTANT NOTE

The oft-spoken phrase that traffic is “returning to previous levels” conveys a misleading message. Although traffic *levels* are now near previous, the *drivers* may have changed substantially. A significant proportion of former drivers are now likely to be at home, as in the first bullet point above. Meanwhile some former bus users will now be driving. This may help explain why many people thought driver behaviour changed earlier on in the pandemic: the drivers were different. Importantly, it also means that ***car numbers may continue to rise, above pre-pandemic levels*** if more people, including former car commuters, return to workplaces.