

A701/A702 relief road route, options questionnaire

Response by Spokes and Spokes Dalkeith, October 2021

From the options presented on a701reliefroad.co.uk and details given by various representatives and consultants at the [online consultation](#) event, we do not have any clear preference in terms of the six route options being proposed. We would however, like to reiterate some serious concerns we have about this project, as well as outline some further issues.

As is well established, building additional relief roads such as that proposed may offer a temporary respite, but will ultimately induce further traffic and exacerbate issues elsewhere on the road network. As this project is not accompanied by any work to alleviate congestion and wait times on the Straiton roundabout or the slip roads joining the A720, any slight improvements to journey times on the A701 south of Straiton (and the increased journey times by up to 3 mins outlined on the project website hardly seem sufficient to justify a project of this scale), will likely be counteracted by additional traffic attempting to leave or join the road at the Straiton Roundabout and further congestion on the A720 Edinburgh Bypass.

This scheme would be somewhat more understandable if it were being led by a desire to improve the bus service along the A701, and develop active travel links. However, all indications from the consultation event suggest that these are an afterthought, as evidenced by the fact one of the planning consultants repeatedly stated “there will be no constraints on vehicle traffic, this project adds choice to drivers”. Many more people in Midlothian would like to choose to use active or public transport than do currently, but attempts to accommodate and offer further route choices to more and more private traffic prevents this. This effort to offer “choice” actually removes the ability to choose to walk or cycle (due to the danger, perceived or otherwise, of sharing the roads with high volumes of traffic), or the choice to take the bus (due to unreliable journey times caused by congestion). Unconstrained vehicle traffic is the main deterrent to active travel on this corridor and adjoining roads, so it is difficult to see how the council will achieve its goal of making the A701 a sustainable transport corridor without deterring vehicular traffic from using this road.

Considering the local context whereby Midlothian Council are struggling to maintain existing roads even without building new ones, the national context whereby the Scottish Government has committed to cutting car journeys by 20 % [[Climate Change Plan](#)], and the global context of the ongoing climate change crisis, makes this project seem even less desirable.

The plans also clearly flout the policies, visions and outcomes outlined in the [National Transport Strategy](#), including “Will help deliver our net-zero target”, “Will promote greener, cleaner choices” and “Will enable us to make healthy travel choices”. The building of new main roads also contradicts policies in the [Fourth National Planning Framework Position Statement](#), including “We will not plan infrastructure to cater for forecast unconstrained increases in traffic volumes. Instead, we will manage demand and reduce the need to travel by unsustainable modes.”

If Midlothian Council is serious about declaring a climate emergency, then the developments which are being used to justify this project should be built in a manner so that they do not encourage car dependency. The following specific improvements should also be considered for the A701 and surrounding roads –

- Any new road being built should include protected active travel infrastructure. It is far more cost-effective to do this at the beginning, rather than retrospectively add it in the future.
- Re-allocating existing carriageway (rather than grass verges) as footway/cycleway.
- Adding bus priority lanes or bus gates throughout the Straiton site.
- Cycleways should have clear priority when crossing side roads; otherwise it is safer for most people to cycle on the road.
- Through traffic should be prohibited. This could be achieved using a bus gate or some other Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) system, so that local access could be maintained.
- Additional crossings (toucans and tigers, preferably) should be added at regular intervals along the entire section.
- The speed limit should be reduced to 30 mph (at most). Speed cameras to automatically enforce the speed limit should be added. Alternatively, a system similar to the speed discrimination traffic signals on the A75 at Springholm could be considered.
- Toucan crossings should be added to every road leading on to and coming off Straiton junction, to make it safe for pedestrians and cyclists
- Ideally there would be a bridge or underpass at Straiton junction, such that pedestrians and cyclists don't need to cross the slip roads at all. The roundabouts at Straiton Park (IKEA) and the B7006 should be converted into signalised T-junctions.
- The radii at junctions should be tightened, particularly at Niven's Knowe Road.
- The project should future-proof Straiton junction for the proposed cycleway parallel to the bypass from Straiton to Lothianburn (proposal LB6 in council's Active Travel Strategy).
- The existing shared use paths are in need of upgrades (widening in points, resurfacing in others). The signage is often confusing or inadequate as well. For example: there is only one blue sign between Burdiehouse Burn Valley Park and Lang Loan, the paths either side of Lang Loan are only about 1m wide (and have poor sightlines due to overgrown hedges) and the path to the west of the southern dumb-bell is very rough (and normally covered in glass).
- Pedestrian crossings should be direct, rather than the Z-shaped, guardrail enclosed type (such as the existing one just north of Sofology).
- A connection along Loanhead Road to the existing path at Straiton pond should be included.