

[LINLITHGOW, A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE 2022-32](#)

Comments from Spokes, largely based on feedback from local members in the town.

Introduction

- Our comments largely concern active travel (AT) aspects, walking wheeling and cycling, but particularly getting about by bike for everyday purposes such as shopping, work, school, relaxed leisure, etc
- Spokes welcomes the Plan as a whole and supports many aspects of it, although we only have the capacity to comment on the above issues
- We particularly welcome the recognition of the climate crisis; the need for the town to play its part and “*come to terms*” with the crisis, including in issues such as “*over-use of cars.*”
- We particularly welcome the frequent mention of cycling, and the clear understanding of it as a form of everyday transport. Cycle sport, although enjoyed by many, is less relevant here.

Recent context

- Whilst the draft plan provides some historical and policy context, we draw your attention to two very recent and major Scottish Government policy shifts which are not referenced in the draft document but which should be seen as vital new context
- First, as a direct and evidence-based consequence of its legal climate obligations, the government has made a remarkable and world-leading national 'commitment' (not a 'target') to achieving a 20% reduction in car-km by year 2030. A draft [Route Map](#) to achieving this has recently been consulted on. We are sceptical that the Route Map is sufficiently bold to fulfil the commitment - the Spokes response is [here](#) – but if it is to succeed then local authority decisions must play a full part.
- Second, the government has committed to raising AT investment to 10% of the total transport budget by 24/25 (with a minimum of £320m in that year) - links [here](#). This amounts to around £60 per head, which we believe to be the highest whole-country figure in Europe (although some individual cities may invest at a higher rate). Major interim rises are already in place, with £150m in the [22/23 Scottish budget](#). This means Local Authorities now have scope to bid for very substantial AT projects (largely via Sustrans at present).

High Street

- The draft plan rightly recognises the many and varied problems here, which result in a very negative experience for pedestrians, wheelers and cyclists as compared to many other towns and to what could be. Cycling along the High Street, with car-door threat on the left and often-impatient drivers behind, means that only the most confident get around by bike. Walking or wheeling on narrow footway space, squeezed between parked cars and wall; or trying to cross the road between parked cars and constant 20mph+ traffic – this is not what a town centre should be. The undue priority given to motor traffic, both moving and parked, contradicting the government's [Transport Hierarchy](#) (pedestrian-cyclist-bus-taxi-car) is at the root of the problems.
- The main solution in the draft Plan is construction of an expanded motorway junction and new roads around the centre. Spokes is dubious about these solutions, particularly the former (T2A). How does expanding road capacity fit with the government commitment to 20% car-km reduction by 2030? What about the opportunity costs of the huge sums involved? Funding a new motorway junction through a hotel is also expanding out-of-town development and not compatible with 20-minute neighbourhood development policies. As regards the north or south bypass solutions proposed in the Plan (T2B,T4/T5), in addition to sterilising large areas of land these risk traffic proliferation, even greater suburban car dependency, an increasingly car-based town and more use of out-of-town facilities. With greater general car dependency, High Street traffic might also remain high, or grow further.
- In order to deal with whatever through traffic is unavoidable, the first approach should be to 'tame' this and all High Street traffic, as in the 'bolder approach' we suggest below. If this fails to sufficiently civilise the street, then we understand that building a low-speed road under the most sensitive section of the High Street for through traffic (e.g. between Tesco roundabout and the Vennel area), as in Italian historic towns, might well be cheaper than building new peripheral roads, and would not encourage further traffic proliferation. If, however, regrettably, a new peripheral road is built, the High Street should then be made as near to 'no-through-road' as possible, so that only vehicles with a genuine need are permitted. The Plan talks of 'relieving' the High Street of through traffic if an alternative is built – it should be more explicit to say this means *preventing* it (with exceptions), not just *reducing* it.
- On one specific matter, the cobbles, although the original rationale was understandable, have proved highly problematic in practice. They create noise and vibration, and although the smooth-slabbed strips are valuable for cyclists, turning into the Cross is a real problem, especially when wet. They also result in lengthy, costly and disruptive maintenance periods. Furthermore the left bend often results in westbound cyclists squeezed against the kerb by motor traffic – at the least a wider smooth strip is needed here.

High Street bolder approach

- Even if the High Street can be closed to through traffic in future, that is likely many years away. Measures must be undertaken to improve conditions urgently. We strongly support points 1-4 immediately before policy T1, but **we suggest a bolder approach...**
 - The street should be converted to **15mph, perhaps 10mph during shopping hours**, ideally controlled by automatic numberplate recognition. By **narrowing carriageways** to the minimum possible, through wider footways and cycle lanes, drivers are less likely to feel the need to maximise their speed

- We welcome that the draft Plan recommends **cycle lanes**, at least “where practicable” though it must be noted that non-continuous lanes, and those which stop at dangerous locations, will not attract the true potential. It is worth noting that a cycle lane provides a barrier between carriageway and footway, enhancing the pedestrian experience. A drastically speed-reduced High Street, freed of most or all through traffic, might not require cycle lanes, but the presence of even slow-moving motor traffic can deter child and family cycling. Finally, whilst unidirectional cycle lanes are preferable for many reasons, the width of the High Street means that a bidirectional lane might be the only realistic option.
- The Plan refers to more **pedestrian crossings**. We urge that these are far more frequent and are of the zebra type – or, as in some European countries including some French towns, painted on the road at frequent intervals. Such crossings would fit with 10/15mph speed limits and would make the whole High Street far more enticing for pedestrian shoppers. Light-controlled crossings encourage drivers to go faster and inevitably mean long distances between crossing points, which seriously reduce window-shopping opportunities.
- The wording of **policy T1** should be expanded to reference pedestrians and cyclists. Possibly amend its title to something like, “*Traffic management to reclaim the High Street for safe and welcoming walking and cycling.*”
- We are delighted to see the new *Cycling Without Age* trishaws initiative in the town. When these can use the High Street without fear, that will be a sign that the street is moving towards the kind of place that it should be.
- **A meeting should be held with Sustrans Scotland**, to discuss the High Street, including the issues we raise above, and whether such a bolder approach might qualify for at least partial funding from the above-mentioned increase in government AT cash.

Parking

- We strongly support charges for all-day car commuter parking, with a particularly high fee for the car park at the station itself so that it is available for drop-off/pick-up and for short-term users.
- The Plan recommends parking restrictions on roads used by commuter parkers, but only once more parking is provided elsewhere. Instead these restrictions should be introduced in parallel with the introduction of charging, which should reduced the parking pressures.
- The Plan references Winchburgh Station, but should be *actively calling for it to be built, and urgently*, given its benefits for Linlithgow and for wider carbon reduction. A school is being built, in part to relieve pressure on Linlithgow – the same should be the case for the station.
- We strongly support removing all High Street pavement parking. Some years ago one of our members surveyed this parking for a whole day and found a significant proportion was all-day parkers rather than shoppers, so loss to shops should not be great. The main rationale, however, is to create a more liveable High Street as discussed above, and thus also more shopper-friendly.
- The Plan recommends major additional off-street parking. We suggest holding fire on this until the working of the government's car-km reduction policy, and the long-term impacts of covid, are clearer. It is noticeable, for example, that usage of the cricket club area car park remains substantially lower than pre-pandemic.
- As regards bike parking, a full assessment is essential. We do not go into detail here, as the issues of safe travel and access are the primary concerns, whilst bike parking is relatively easy to tackle in comparison. Clearly adequate bike parking at all important destinations (including dotted frequently along the shopping street) is vital.

Station access

- We support the need for much improved pedestrian and cycle access. ScotRail has recently seconded John Lauder, former Director of Sustrans Scotland, for an 18-month project to improve non-car access to rail stations in Scotland. Could he be contacted with the hope that Linlithgow could be a pilot project?
- We suggest a foot and ideally cycle path between the north of the station and Tesco car park. Should the suggested multi-storey car park go ahead this becomes even more important.

Cycle and pedestrian links

- We support the bullet points at the start of this section of the draft plan, and are pleased to see that the early bullet points are about **access** to the High Street and to important destinations, with leisure travel covered in the later bullet points. This reflects the priority directions to which we should be aiming.
- We strongly support the need for a **Maidlands connection** (T12) from canal to Springfield, and made this point in our comments on the current PAN consultation for the field at that location. Minor works would also be required to the nearby footway, so that cyclists can reach the rail underpass without having to enter and re-enter Edinburgh Road when they leave Maidlands at the blind bend.
- On one specific, an easy 'quick win' would be to resurface the very useful **Falkirk Road** cycle lanes and, very important, protect them – perhaps initially with the 'spaces for people' low-cost bollarding. This would encourage use by a wider range of people.
- Surfacing of the **canal towpath** was indeed welcome, and this is a delightful east-west route for leisure and for some access purposes. However it can never be a major east-west utility route for large numbers of cyclists.
 - It is very narrow in parts, with little space for widening, and indeed is potentially risky at the very narrow point under one or two of the bridges
 - If cyclist numbers become really substantial, it would prove problematic for walkers
 - Physically, the towpath is significantly higher than the High Street and the main town destinations, with steep and awkward connecting roads and paths.
- We do re-emphasise that the towpath is a delightful facility, but the above points make clear that the town's major east-west cycling facility can only be a drastically redesigned High Street.