

Cycling & Transport policy in the new Edinburgh Council: Spokes public mtg 23.9.22

Dave intro

- Welcome to our Spokes public mtg on cycling and wider transport policy in the new Edinburgh Council
- Our mtg is also part of the Climate Fringe Festival, for which there is a link in our website article about tonight's mtg
- The meeting is being recorded and will be on our YouTube channel, which you can find on our website under the video tab
- If you are tweeting about tonight's meeting please use hashtag #SpokesMTG

SLIDE 1 – HEADINGS

- First **in-person** public mtg since Nov 2019, but pleased also to welcome those still watching online
- I'm doing a short intro, then we will hear from our speaker, Cllr Scott Arthur, the Council's new Transport Convener.

SLIDE 2 - HUGE AMOUNT HAS HAPPENED SINCE OUR 2019 MEETING

- Admittedly not quite on the scale of covid, war, or a change of PM or monarch
- But who would have thought that, within 18 months or so of that meeting, we would have 40km of semi-protected bike routes on major city roads – especially when previous bike projects took years not to happen!
- Although at last we do have the start of one major onroad project, the City Centre west-east route, CCWEL
- Or who would have thought that Scot Govt would promise to raise the proportion of the transport budget going to active travel from 3% to 10% by 2024, with rising cash already starting to filter through to councils
- Sadly, however, another big change was the collapse of Edinburgh's bike hire scheme, whereas they continue to flourish in many other cities
- Finally, big growth in local voluntary activity supporting active travel, e.g. SW20, Blackford Safe Routes, several new school bike buses, and our own Spokes Party. Also seeing increasing presence of cargo bikes for local family and business transport, thanks to initiatives such as CargoBike Movement, Laidback Bikes and of course our own grants to assist community organisations needing a cargobike.

SLIDE 3 - MINORITY COUNCIL

- Another big change was this year's Council election, which gives a whole new context to how decisions are made. It is really important to understand this.
- In Edinburgh we have been used to coalitions of 2 parties, SNP and Labour, or Labour and LibDem, which formed a majority and negotiated an agreed programme, usually with tacit Green support on active travel
- Having a majority, these coalitions had no need to compromise with other parties. Conversely the other parties tended to act as an opposition which could complain but not change anything or have to take any responsibility
- The new Council, however, instead of a majority coalition, voted in a minority Labour administration – just 13 councillors out of 63. Thus there is no agreed overall programme or manifesto which commands a majority in the council.
- Whilst Labour will attempt to implement its manifesto, the reality in the Transport Committee is that no party can achieve anything without support or at least abstention by 3 of the 5 parties
- Some people feared this might lead to paralysis or to mediocrity, but instead the signs from the first *Transport Committee* meeting (Sept 1st) looked good for cross-party cooperation, to combine the best ideas from each party on an issue-by-issue basis

- For example in the debate on Spaces for People, it was not clear at first if the Labour or the Green motions would win out. The Greens then agreed to incorporate a couple of important points from the Labour motion, on implications for climate and for buses, resulting, in our view, in a ‘best of both worlds’ outcome.
- An example of minority working at a *full Council meeting* was the Workplace Parking Levy, where SNP, LibDems and Greens combined to outvote the more sceptical Labour position, and instruct officers to look further into the options. It will be interesting to hear Cllr Arthur’s views, not specifically on this motion, but how far the administration will work consensually on issues where it is outvoted.

SLIDE 4 – WHAT NEXT?

- Of course, we cannot know the future, but perhaps we get a clue from the first Transport Cttee, where Cllr Arthur began by stating his top personal motivations as Convener
- It is great to see **staff well-being** included – it is often not appreciated how tough it is for officers, who are not politicians, when they are faced by angry people who don’t want their car privileges reduced. Or indeed by a few social media cycling activists who use insults rather than argument.
- Secondly, the importance of **net zero** cannot be underestimated, as we see from the ever-growing litany of climate disasters, together with their increasing impact on food supply, living conditions and the world economy

SLIDE 5 CLIMATE

- Whilst Britain was changing its PM and monarch, literally millions of people lost their homes in Pakistan’s flooding catastrophe, over 1000 died, the Indus river became a 60-mile wide lake, and 7000 sq miles of agricultural land were destroyed.
- The UK is fortunate being in a temperate zone, but nonetheless is far from immune to global heating – this summer’s heatwave resulted in several urban mini-wildfires in and around London, with 41 properties destroyed on one day in July
- All this is happening with a rise in average global temperatures of just 1.1 deg, yet we are now virtually certain to reach 1.5, with subsequent rises dependant on *what we do now*.

SLIDE 6 – REPEAT SLIDE 4 - WHAT NEXT?

- On **traffic reduction**, in December 2020 the Scottish Government, as part of its *climate* plan, committed to cutting car-km in Scotland 20% by 2030, but we have not yet seen serious action resulting
- A year later, November 2021, Edinburgh Council, as an urban area, set an even higher target, to reduce car-km 30% by 2030
- Such tough targets need early action and messaging, but, in fact, the opposite message is being given to the public by road capacity expansion plans, such as Sheriffhall roundabout – and whilst this is largely funded by the Scottish Government, local councils have not disagreed
- Government and Councils emphasise the improvement of sustainable and active transport as the means to traffic reduction, but there is plenty evidence that traffic reduction *also* requires measures that make driving less attractive. And, indeed, in order to *achieve* the promised high quality alternatives of bike routes, bus lanes and wider footways, space *has to be* reallocated away from motor traffic, whether parked or moving.
- So, in summary, Cllr Arthur really is in the hot seat if he is to achieve his - and indeed our – ambitions, and I’m hoping we’ll leave the meeting feeling that things really are going to happen!

SLIDE 7 – QUESTIONS

- Finally, on a personal note, these are some of the issues I hope we will see clarified in the rest of the meeting