

Spokes Public Meeting 21.11.24, Local Bike Campaigning

Speaker notes from Ben Seven, Edi Dot Bike

Hello! My name is Ben, and I produce edi.bike.

edi.bike is a weekly news digest about utility cycling in Edinburgh, covering news, events, consultations and infrastructure progress.

We'll also do a monthly roundup of the Council's Transport and Environment Committee meeting, and have a few national and international links each week with news and progress beyond Edinburgh too.

It's delivered by email each Monday at 7am.



Ask for slide?

At present, the team consists of myself, and then our wider readership - we have also had support in the last year from regular contributor Andrew White, who some of you may know from his volunteer work with Cargo Bike Movement.

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I've lived in Edinburgh all my life, growing up in Liberton and the South Side, and I commuted into the centre by bike for many years.

In the last few years, I've enjoyed discovering more of Edinburgh's cycling community, and slowly started to get involved in campaigning and activism.



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Like many activists before me, cycling with my kids was a big factor in starting to agitate for change.

After trialling an electric cargo bike from Edinburgh Festival of Cycling — later purchasing one through Laid Back bikes instead of a second car for our household, we were encouraged by David Gardiner to attend national protest Pedal on Parliament for the first time in 2022.

Over the next year I started to follow more and more local bike shops, activists and other families cycling on Social Media.

The more connected I was, the more I started to pick up on the amount of demand for safe cycling in the city, and also the dissatisfaction at the slow pace of change.

A key moment in starting up edi.bike came by chance. As a family - at this point completely unaware of the existence of Spokes and the wonderful Spokes Maps of Edinburgh - were pootling our way across the city and happened upon a section of the City Centre West to East Link under construction.

I had had absolutely no idea that the CCWEL route had been designed and approved, never mind being built and nearly ready to use. And here we were, potential users of this new protected cycleway, just stumbling across it.

I found that mind-blowing.

I wondered about what else I was missing out on week to week - given I was already following a decent number of organisations and increasingly 'plugged in' to what was happening.

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Traditionally, news media would have publishing constraint - for example, a limited number of pages in a newspaper, a limited number of minutes in a broadcast. As such, everything was filtered and curated — before being published.

Internet media is the opposite - we publish, then filter. Communally, as social media users, we promote and share the things we find that we think others should see.

But this can be an overwhelming amount of information, within which it's easy to miss something important; and it's spread out across a myriad of platforms, many of whom are doing their own algorithmic curation and filtering to control what is seen by audiences.

Now, there are two pretty common attributes of people like myself who work in the tech sector - one being we think we have all the answers to life's problems, and the other being that we love a side project.

So at the start of August last year, I sat down to start this newsletter, and drafted a document with a list of organisations to monitor for stories, and a vision statement:



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I put together a first draft on the newsletter platform 'Substack', messaged twenty-two of my friends who I knew cycled in the city, and told them about my wee experiment - and they indulged me by subscribing.

A few issues into this experiment, a friend passed it on to Michael Macleod at The Edinburgh Minute - whose daily newsletter digest format had been a big inspiration - and after a single link from his daily publication, over the course of a day or two, 22 subscribers increased tenfold, to 220 subscribers.

Thanks to reader referrals and continued links from the Edinburgh Minute and from others too, it's grown quite substantially since:



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Since August of last year, we've sent out a digest email every week, totalling 67 issues.

We now have over 1,600 subscribers, which continues to grow at a steady pace.

Of these subscribers, over fifty folks are paid subscribers, who help with the ongoing costs of sending and promoting the digest, through our 'Supporter's Club'. I'm very grateful for their support.

Readers also subscribe to the digest via RSS feeds, and social media platforms like Bluesky and Mastodon.

Like many in the community - and indeed, beyond - we are currently phasing out our use of Twitter.

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Earlier this week, I put out a short Reader's Survey - the first time we've done so - to try and have some kind of sense of the impact of edi.bike beyond the many kind words readers have shared with me over the last year.

We had over 300 responses, and here's the benefits those readers have found:



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In terms of reader visits to articles and organisations we have linked to, we had over 1,100 links clicked in the last month;

across the last six months, this was a total of around 8,000 links followed,

raising awareness of everything going on in the city, from consultations to cycle counters and cargo bike libraries.

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This is the best aspect of the project - bringing attention to the wealth of cycling activity and campaigning across the city, from one place - attention that is richly deserved by those projects.



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When readers were asked about actions they'd taken because of edi.bike directly, a great number of folks are responding to consultations, discovering new routes like CCWEL, and connecting with local organisations and campaigns, because they've read the newsletter.



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These are great outcomes - and my next focus is on continuing to grow the readership, through posters, stickers, promotion and outreach,

in order to connect even more cyclists with their wider community,

the progress being made in the city,

and how they can get involved too.

Thank you.