

Spokes Public Meeting 21.11.24, Local Bike Campaigning

Speaker notes from Victoria Hawkins, Edinburgh Critical Mass

Hi, my name is Victoria Hawkins and at my work we are encouraged to introduce ourselves with a visual description as part of being inclusive, so I am a white woman, just over 5'3", with mid-length blonde hair and I'm wearing ...

My pronouns are she/her.

Critical Mass

The first thing I want to say is that Critical Mass is a collective, with no leaders. So whilst I am speaking here today, any one who rides with Critical Mass could be stood here. If you can picture a starling murmuration, you'll have a more accurate idea of Critical Mass. Critical Mass is also not just about cycling either. People take part for environmental reasons, for social reasons, to learn to navigate the city, for mental health, and more.

How it started?

Critical Mass is part of a global movement. There are over 300 rides at the end of every month across the globe. The movement started in San Francisco in the 1990s and people enjoyed the freedom of cycling round the city so much that it grew.

Edinburgh's first critical mass ride was back in 1995, along Princes Street. It originally followed the same principles as the San Francisco ride, such as being on a Friday evening with no planned route. However, numbers were small. After Covid, it was revived but with a key difference. Edinburgh now rides on a Saturday afternoon and during daylight hours to make it safer and more accessible. This has meant that we regularly get about 100 people coming along each month, including families.

What are your specific objectives?

- To be seen
 - Individually, as part of a commute, cyclists don't have a high profile. As a mass, bikes are much more visible.
- To have fun
 - We usually have two PAs so we can play music on the rides. Individuals organize a playlist and we have flags
 - Some of the rides have had themes – superheroes, Hallowe'en, the next ride will be native animals to link in with the Scottish Rewilding Alliance.
- To be social
 - With each other and everyone on the street.

What have you done?

- Rides, including COP26 ride to Glasgow in 2021
- Music video – Our Streets
 - Back in 2022, Dan Abrahams who rides with Critical Mass composed Our Streets and Critical Mass took part in the filming of the music video

- Beetroot Collective – 2024
 - At the start of this year we supported Beetroot Collective and the Causey with a street art projection animation. Using footage and interviews from one of rides, as well as children’s drawings of futuristic bikes, Beetroot Collective created a fantastic animation. This was projected onto the walls of the buildings in the Causey as part of a free street event.
- Museum Project
 - We also worked with Infrastesters, the bike buses, and Spokes to create the exhibition Pedal Power. The exhibition was co-curated with Museum of Edinburgh and ran at the museum from April to September. The focus was on cycle activism, why we do what we do and what we want to see in terms of infrastructure in the city.
 - Reached 53,000 visitors

What would Critical Mass pass on to other groups?

If we want to engage people and build support, creativity is key. People want to be part of something fun, creative and social. You’ll also notice that a lot of what Critical Mass has done, has been collaborative and in partnership with other groups and organisations.

I’d like to finish with a short [Youtube video](#) created by Critical Mass.