# A701 Relief Road and A702 Link Road 2025

## Motion by Councillor Cuthbert - Support for Midlothian Council's A701 Relief Road & A702 Link Road Project

### Spokes deputation - 13 November 2025

## Summary

Spokes strongly objects to the principle of the A701 Relief Road and A702 Link Road proposals, and therefore to this planning application. If built, these roads will aggravate the issues they are supposed to alleviate.

The proposed scheme particularly fails to meet the “Takes climate action” and “Improves our health and wellbeing” priorities identified in the National Transport Strategy,[1] and also runs counter to the national policy to reduce car use as part of the commitment to achieving net zero by 2045.[2]

Whilst there are some notable improvements for cyclists included in the latest plans, the scheme as a whole will create a more dangerous environment for cycling in Midlothian and Edinburgh. It will also further entrench the dominance of car use, making it even more difficult for future generations to switch to using sustainable modes of transport.

The time, money and other resources being allocated to this project should instead be spent on projects which will actually help solve these problems, such as improving the public and active travel networks in Midlothian and south Edinburgh.

Below we list general and specific comments on the proposals.

### Induced demand

The fundamental assumption of the proposal is that congestion can be relieved by increasing road capacity. This assumption is categorically incorrect. Instead, it has been well known for a long time that increasing road capacity will induce demand (that is, people who previously wouldn’t have driven will then choose to do so). On average, there is a one-to-one relationship, so a 10% increase in road capacity will be followed, within a few years, by a 10% increase in vehicles being driven.[3] A major study commissioned by CPRE "The Impact of Road Projects in England” [4] examined Highways England's reports on road developments. They found:

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[1] National Transport Strategy - Transport Scotland
[2] Achieving Car Use Reduction in Scotland: A Renewed Policy Statement - Transport Scotland
[3] The Fundamental Law of Road Congestion: Evidence from US Cities
[4] Sloman L, Hopkinson L and Taylor I (2017) The Impact of Road Projects in England Report for CPRE

- Average traffic increases over the short run (3-7 years; seven schemes) were +7%
- Average increases over the long run (8-20 years; six schemes) were +47%
- Of 25 road schemes justified on the basis that they would benefit the local economy, only five had any evidence of any economic effects. These schemes were as likely to suck money out of the local area as to bring it in.

We note that there is no discussion of induced demand in the Transport Assessment, and must therefore question whether these well-known effects have been properly considered.

Increasing road capacity on one of the main routes into Edinburgh will also make it harder for Edinburgh Council to meet its City Mobility Plan targets, including the commitment to reduce car-kilometres by 30% by 2030.[5]

There can therefore be no long-term reduction in journey time expected. If there is evidence to suggest that the current proposals will not induce demand then this should be presented. Chapter 3 of the EIAR notes that previous attempts to relieve congestion by increasing capacity on the A701 have failed; there is no reason to believe the current proposals will be any different.

The consultation page says that the proposed route will reduce traffic on the A701 by 30-40%; this will not be maintained unless road capacity on the A701 is reduced. Plans for the "Sustainable Transport Corridor" on the A701 are therefore critical, and should be considered alongside this planning application.

The ~3 minute journey time saving is negligible in the context of a peak-time journey from Penicuik to central Edinburgh taking ~60 minutes. Crucially, if the proposed increase in road capacity does initially result in lower journey times, that will induce demand, leading to more people driving, more congestion and, sooner or later, average journey times being higher than they are now.

We consider the proposed increase in motor vehicle capacity to be unsustainable and in contravention of NPF4 Policy 13 (in particular sections d) and g)) and Policy 8.

## Active travel infrastructure

The plans for the existing A701 should be made available so that they can be considered alongside the plans for the proposed roads. Furthermore, if the Council does unfortunately approve the new road, then the project should be legally and financially tied in with A701 physical measures to reduce motor traffic capacity and to provide high quality active travel routes and bus routes, and within a specified limited time frame.

Should the scheme go ahead, it is absolutely critical that the opportunity to reallocate road space on the A701 corridor to sustainable modes of transport is seized before the long-term effects of induced demand take hold. That means the plans for the Sustainable Transport Corridor need to be shared as soon as possible.

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[5] City Mobility Plan 2021-2030 | City of Edinburgh Council

It is also worth noting that, whilst a short-term reduction in motor traffic volumes on the A701 may make the road safer for cycling, the long-term effects of increased traffic on the wider network will negate and reverse this benefit. Increasing road capacity by going ahead with this project will lead to more people driving in Penicuik, Loanhead and other local towns; these places will therefore become even less safe for cycling.

The proposed route jeopardises, and possibly precludes, the Straiton-Hillend active travel route ("LB6") identified in Midlothian's Active Travel Plan.[6]

The additional toucan crossings at Straiton junction are a welcome addition as they will provide a continuous north-south route for pedestrians and cyclists. However, this route is incredibly indirect and involves up to 10 separate crossing stages. Any cyclist choosing to follow this route is likely to delay their overall journey by 5-10 minutes.

Signalising the remaining slip roads at the junction would allow for much quicker, more direct and easy-to-navigate routes for those walking, wheeling or cycling.

Adding another arm to Straiton roundabout will make the junction more dangerous for motorists, as well as for those cyclists and pedestrians who prefer to take a direct route rather than the indirect route described above. In particular, it will make it more dangerous for those cyclists who prefer to use the main carriageway.

We are pleased to see that a protected cycle track is now included in the plans for the new road itself. We hope that plans to extend this to reach destinations such as the Bush Estate and Penicuik are in the works.

Finally, it is important to stress that any and all of the scheme's advantages to active travel could be achieved, at far lower cost, without increasing capacity for motor vehicles (and the associated disadvantages for active travel).

## Conclusion

Increasing road capacity to relieve congestion is an experiment which has repeatedly failed, and there is no reason to believe it will work on this occasion.

Inducing demand on the main road network in Midlothian will increase the number of vehicles being driven in Edinburgh. This will make Edinburgh more dangerous for those who walk, wheel or cycle in the city.

The goals of this scheme could, and should, be achieved without increasing capacity for private motor vehicles, by enabling people to make journeys by sustainable modes of transport.

We therefore urge councillors to reject this motion.

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[6] Midlothian Active Travel Strategy - Midlothian Council 2024-2034