

City of Edinburgh Council, meeting 29 October 2026

Written deputation from Spokes

in support of [Cllr Martinico's motion](#) "Car Free Day and Playing Out"

Our deputation concentrates on the Car Free Day side of the motion, as we have no experience of the Playing Out schemes, although those proposals do appear valuable.

Spokes wistfully recalls the Council's first ever – and highly successful – participation in World Car Free day on 22 September 2002.

At that time, the Council did not even have a formal traffic reduction target, but recognised the over-dominance of motor traffic in the city, and specifically in the central area where the dangers, noise and pollution was most strongly in evidence.

Now, in 2026, the recognition of those issues is much greater, the Council has an ambitious traffic reduction target – and yet, since the pandemic, the city no longer joins others around the world in demonstrating, even for one day, how it could be if shopping and congregating areas, such as the city centre and our local town centres were car-free.

A brief report on Edinburgh's first car-free day was included in [Spokes Bulletin 83](#)¹ and states...

Edinburgh's first ever car-free day was a delight for the many thousands of people enjoying entertainments, stalls, and the freedom of a car-free George Street [Herald 23.9.02]. Unusual and decorated bikes roved the area, and a huge topical mural was created.

The day was also a big success for businesses like the George Street cafes, whose busy tables stretched right across the pavement, and for the farmers' market whose takings well exceeded their normal Castle Terrace location. We congratulate Edinburgh Council on at last joining the 1400 other European cities celebrating Car-Free day.

As can be seen, George Street was car-free for the day, and the Farmers' Market moved from Castle Terrace to George Street, attracting large numbers of people to the street and to George Street cafes.

Of course, the Council is still deliberating on the future of George Street, and we very much hope that, at the least, by 2027, the central car park will be gone and there will be safe cycling provision. This would complete the massively-delayed central section of CCWEL, meaning a relatively high quality route from Roseburn all the way to Leith, via the city centre. Our [recent traffic count](#)² has found that already a remarkable one-third of George Street vehicles in the peak period, and 20% at lunchtime, are bicycles. How much more would this be if the street provided safe and attractive cycling for families and the traffic-nervous in addition to the existing more confident users.

In conclusion, we urge the Council to re-join World Car Free Day, as proposed in the motion. Whilst for 2027 we see some value in combining with the Grand Depart, we urge that in future years (and possibly additionally in 2027) that the day should align with other countries around the world on September 22, or a day in the nearest weekend to that.

1 <https://www.spokes.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/10/B83p1.jpg>

2 <https://www.spokes.org.uk/2026/10/city-centre-bike-boom/>