

Deputation Request - Item 10.2

Deputation for November 12th, 2024 Net Zero, Environment and Transport Committee meeting.

Submitted By: Elizabeth Leslie

Thank you for the opportunity to address your Committee this morning.

Today we are putting forward questions, observations on Aberdeen's city centre as well as what/who is driving changes in Aberdeen that no citizen has been asked to vote on.

It is impossible to separate the recently approved Bus Gates from the LEZ, because although different in their objectives, their outcomes are very similar.

An empty store count on October 15th, from Great Western Road to the east end of Union Street indicated the following:

Seven (7) empty stores in just the short stretch from Great Western Road to the west end of Union Street.

Thirty two (32) empty stores on Union Street, with two in liquidation, plus the construct at Union terrace Gardens remains "for let".

In the time it took to walk the length of Union Street only two regular cyclists were observed, even with Council's push for "active travel". E-bikes too numerous to count, were without exception, utilised commercially for food delivery.

Aberdeen city centre small businesses feel unheard on their imposed reduced trade predicament having had their their June 11 Net Zero, Environment and Transport Committee deputation request(s) deemed incompetent.

On the disproportionate emphasis against private vehicles; Recommendations in section 2.1 of the Oct 11 Council meeting talks about safe and efficient movement of "active travel and public transport users" through city centre. Why were cars not mentioned?

The UN Environmental Program says,
"stakeholders may need to kickstart a walking and cycling policy in a city to help local authorities to prioritise, walking and cycling. Find out what steps need to be taken to ensure that cities prioritise people over cars"

Aberdeen City Council and the Scottish Government did not coin the phrase "active travel", it was given to them. This UNEP quote helps understand why Councils around the world are utilising the exact same UN words and phrases; active travel; wheeling; stakeholders; 15 minute cities; Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI), etc. This may explain why Aberdeen City Council feels justified in prioritising pedestrians, bikes and wheeling over cars.

And the WHO's Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018-2030 provided recommendations to help countries increase levels of physical activity within their populations, by developing and implementing dedicated comprehensive national policies to ensure safer roads for cycling and walking.

All this to say that, while Aberdeen citizens voted for their Councillors to represent them, what they are getting instead is a one size fits all approach from the UN and its WHO agency, using local Councils as proxies to impose their agenda, regardless of real need. These external influencers should take a walk down Union Street to personally witness the damage caused by their no private car ownership and active travel policies.

Apart from ourselves, others are rebelling against arbitrary global policies being implemented by various Councils on a local level, (videos are included.)

Aberdeen City Council initiatives align with the UN's SDGs prioritisation of "active travel", over privately owned cars. The words "privately owned" are of growing significance since the UN's vision of ending private ownership goes beyond just cars and encompasses private property.

On air quality, further to comments made by an Officer at the September Net Zero, Environment and Transport Committee meeting on the WHO standards, why are these standards used and how do they apply to Aberdeen? Even prior to the conceptualisation of LEZ, Aberdeen has had excellent air quality and low levels of pollution as measured on the air quality index.

Even with harbour ships accounting for 10% of emissions (source Scottishairquality.scot), does the council acknowledge that Aberdeen is in an enviable position having one of the finest, if not the finest air cleansing mechanism, only meters from its city centre - the pristine North Sea air and wind?

The public is now well aware of the detrimental impact LEZ has on the city centre and that it is not proportional to the perceived (or actual) benefit, however the Council does not appear to acknowledge this. We draw your attention to four highlights from a research article conducted by a group of academic & public bodies: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1877584518300716>

1. We present a study of the health impact of exposure to air pollution in Scotland.
- 2) We quantify the potential impact of reducing air pollution in city centres where low emission zones (LEZ) are typically located.
- 3) Air pollution affects respiratory disease, but not cardiovascular disease.
- 4) Reducing pollution in city centres will likely have a minimal impact on public health.

Please reconcile this last point with Aberdeen City Council's own website which says;

www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/environment/air-quality-aberdeen/air-quality-and-your-health)

"While healthy people will not be troubled by the pollution levels we usually experience, those with asthma or other pre-existing conditions may find symptoms worsen during the periods of high NO₂ or PM₁₀ levels. However, everyone is at risk of effect from long-term exposure to pollution, including people living or working close to busy congested streets".

On the consultation process, Transport Scotland (2019) says:

"Recognising that collaboration is at the heart of the successful delivery of the LEZ, we launched a consultation to gather the views of stakeholders and the general public. This process will help inform the LEZ policy making process helping to shape the guiding principles that the Scottish government will adopt to design, establish and operate Scotland LEZs".

This implies the decision to implement LEZ had already been made and as the quote says, the objective of the consultation was "to shape policy".

It should be noted that as the consultation was answered by only 500 people, it does not reflect a broad spectrum of residents, businesses and visitors to Aberdeen, therefore putting into question its validity. The majority of people were unaware of any consultation until it was closed.

There is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the Council has not complied with the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 and therefore the powers granted (under section 9) are not valid.

LEZ enforcement started on June 1st, 2024, and the overwhelming majority of people were against it. Many people are electing to not come into the city centre as a result, instead going to nearby towns like Inverurie or Stonehaven. This is reflected in all media as well as financial loss to city centre small business.

A poll reported by Aberdeen Live in August 2023 shows that 90% of respondents opposed LEZ. Similarly, a survey published by the P&J in January 2024 revealed the majority were against LEZ implementation in the city centre.

During our September deputation, an Officer claimed since LEZ was introduced in May 2022 it was responsible for improved air quality in 2022 and 2023. However, the consensus of the many people asked is that no-one paid any attention to the LEZ regulations until June 2024 when LEZ became official along with its risk of penalties.

Glasgow and Edinburgh with their significantly larger city centres than Aberdeen and with the same air quality standards as Aberdeen, continue to be vibrantly alive in contrast to Aberdeen. Glasgow and Edinburgh because of their size and scope

suffer the consequences of LEZ much less if at all, than does Aberdeen's, small in comparison, city centre.

Bus Gates were introduced to improve timeliness, reliability of buses and to displace car travel in favour of buses.

Here are a just a couple of many anecdotal stories, in which LEZ and Bus Gates intersect in ways that make day to day life more challenging:

My niece lives in Newtonhill and prior to LEZ drove her VW diesel, which she had been encouraged by the government to buy, to her city centre place of work. Because her vehicle was rendered not LEZ compliant, she sold it with a view to taking the bus instead, helping meet the Council's objective of displacing cars. What she was not aware of was Stagecoach's plan to withdraw service from her area.

My own experiences are that the Stagecoach app prior to Bus Gates consistently gave a thirty nine (39) minute travel time from Portlethen to Union Square. Now it is 40-42 minutes - why?

I accept the fact that weekend service is generally not as good as weekday service. Week day service was every half hour with Sunday being once an hour. However in August 2024 Portlethen bus service was downgraded, with Sunday service reduced to one bus every two hours - and that is IF the bus comes.

How is it possible that if Stagecoach was apprised of Council's goal to replace cars with bus travel to the city, that within months of LEZ introduction they chose to degrade service? They didn't improve it or even maintain status quo, they degraded it.

For myself, the simple act of going to church in Aberdeen on Sundays, now requires a potential six hour round trip. When Stagecoach was questioned on their service degradation coincident with LEZ, their answer was; the Council approved it!

And finally, on resources and finance;

A deputation was made November 5th at the Finance and Resources Committee meeting to request funds and for services not to be cut for Aberdeen's vulnerable. Also discussed at this meeting was the hardships faced primarily by small business because of the increased NI and minimum wage.

And, at a recent Anti-poverty Committee meeting there was meagre fund allocation for clothes for Aberdeen children living in poverty.

Let's contrast that with the cost of LEZ to the taxpayers (available through a FOI request & rounded to closest thousand))

Expenditure on the LEZ (to 1st June 2024) is as follows- Studies, research & consultations - £215

- Design, Engineering & Planning - £407
- Procurement costs of equipment, signs & materials - £592

- Construction & Commissioning - £222
 - Advertising and public outreach - £103
- TOTAL - £1,539,384.75.

I don't think I would be wrong in thinking almost every Aberdeen City Council committee is scrambling for funds, while an inordinate amount of manpower resources and funds is allocated to agendas such as LEZ, and similar misguided Net Zero offshoots.

One way or the other, regardless of what branch of government funds come from, their origin is always the taxpayer.

In summary:

-Aberdeen City Council has a duty to assess and balance both the reasonability and proportionality against damage being done to its city centre.

The unique differences between the still vibrant Glasgow and Edinburgh city centres and Aberdeen's decaying city centre should highlight that the policy must not be applied equally to all cities.

Therefore, we are requesting that a cost benefit analysis is undertaken to investigate the proportionality of LEZ benefit versus impact on Aberdeen's city centre.

-The Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 was not complied with and the powers granted under Section 9 are not valid. LEZ must be immediately revoked and all fines levied returned.

-The Aberdeen City Council was elected by citizens of Aberdeen ...works for the citizens of Aberdeen...and is paid by the citizens of Aberdeen. The unelected UN, WHO, WEF and NGOs should not be allowed to influence local policy making.

Given Aberdeen City Council's environment initiatives and Climate Change emergency declaration, I hope it is not pointless to suggest to Council that Climate Change (which had to be renamed from "global warming" because "warming" couldn't affirm the required narrative) is overrated. I have included just a few references with different perspectives on Climate Change that I hope you will review with an open mind.

Without CO2, all life forms die.

100% of climate catastrophe predictions over the past 60 years have been 100% wrong.

Thank you

Citizen presentations to Councils

https://rumble.com/v5g6syr-sandi-adams-discusses-that-glastonbury-council-speech-and-her-upcoming-even.html?e9s=src_v1_upp

(Sandi Adams addressing Glastonbury Town Council)

<https://www.tiktok.com/@maggiedingman/video/7281326828634049798>

(15 minute cities)

www.kiclei.ca

Kicking International Council Out of Local Environmental Initiatives

Perspectives on Climate Change

NetZero prove it or lose it

<https://www.yorkvoice.org/library/videos/countrywide-council-watch/net-zero-prove-it-or-lose-it>

<https://expose-news.com/2023/09/24/there-is-no-climate-emergency-says-nobel-prize-winner-dr-john-f-clauser/?cmid=09b5168a-c5d9-4cdf-a723-95133e44d61b>

<https://wattsupwiththat.com/2017/06/30/life-on-earth-was-nearly-doomed-by-too-little-co2/>

climatediscussionnexus.com

<https://x.com/SaiKate108/status/1722090247285260519>