

FINANCES AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

5 July 2023

(DRAFT MINUTE EXTRACT)

CITY CENTRE SIX MONTHLY UPDATE – STREETSCAPE PROGRAMME

The Committee received two deputations from (1) Mr Gavin Clark, Chair of Aberdeen Cycle Forum and (2) Ms Libby Hillhouse and Mr Graham Findlay, Disability Equity Partnership.

Mr Clark in his presentation, outlined the aims of Aberdeen Cycle Forum and advised that they had around 600 members and made reference to the Council meeting in December 2022, when his fellow-campaigner, Rachel Martin was in attendance and presented to members.

He indicated that at the aforementioned Council meeting, Ms Martin pleaded not to approve plans for Union Street which did not include a segregated cycle track and that Councillors sympathised with that plea. He indicated that in the past 6 months or so, Officers and Designers were working under instruction to produce plans which would include a segregated cycle track, and that Aberdeen Cycle Forum and other stakeholders had been involved throughout that process and had the opportunity to input at various stages.

Mr Clark advised that a bi-directional cycle track on one side of the street only would not have been their first choice, but given the other constraints, they were told it was really the only feasible option for segregation. He intimated that they had accepted that compromise was required on all sides and therefore they supported the design now presented. He explained that they now had something which was in line with the Transport Hierarchy and which met current design standards.

He advised that the key was that this would create a segregated cycle track where cyclists were kept separate from vehicular traffic and separated from pedestrians indicating that it was not the whole solution to the city's transport problems, but it would be a big step in the right direction and could hopefully be the start of a high-quality network of segregated routes which would allow so many more people to use a bicycle as an everyday means of transport whether for shopping, commuting to work or education, for leisure, for fitness or just for enjoyment.

Mr Clark indicated that segregation from traffic opened up cycling to many more people who currently did not feel safe on the roads and cycling should not be the preserve of a hardened minority who were inured to cycling in traffic as he was, it should be accessible for all ages and abilities.

Mr Clark intimated that cycling could of course have multiple benefits: greater uptake of cycling contributes to improved air quality and to carbon reduction targets. He

explained that increased levels of cycling had been shown to boost local economies and increase footfall in shops and that people who cycle regularly tended to be healthier and so place lower demands on the NHS, therefore most of these positives were not just for the individual on the bike, they benefitted everyone.

He advised that he understood that one of the trickiest design details to resolve had been how to route the cycle track around bus stops and the solution proposed was that a bus-stop bypass, as he called it, was also known as a floating bus stop. He explained that essentially this meant that the cycle track went behind the bus stop, and pedestrians cross the cycle way to get to the bus stop and when doing so, they had priority over cyclists. He explained that this approach would be novel to Aberdeen, but it was not new. He indicated that it was the preferred approach in Transport Scotland's design manual *Cycling by Design* (2021) and it had been used successfully elsewhere. He explained that they were ubiquitous in the Netherlands, and common elsewhere in Europe.

Mr Clark made reference to a pilot/trial scheme in Oxford Road, Manchester, for which a comprehensive review paper was published in 2016 and generally the design was found to be a success with high levels of satisfaction and low levels of conflict between users. He advised that the Transport Hierarchy clearly put the most vulnerable at the top of the pyramid, however the design proposed did include numerous mitigations to address concerns.

He intimated that there would be a learning process for all users, and equally no design would ever be perfect although he thought that the designers had gone as far as they could in making it a safe environment for everyone, and they have followed published design guidance. He explained that they could never entirely eliminate the risk of collision between a pedestrian and a cyclist, (although the Manchester trial showed the likelihood of collision was very low – there were none at all in their monitoring period) the alternative of putting cyclists back on the carriageway with buses vastly increased the risk of harm and the severity of outcome.

He indicated that there would be many design details to be resolved, not least a safe and convenient way for cyclists to cross back to the south side of the street to continue their journey as necessary.

Mr Clark advised that the city centre currently had an issue with illegal electric mopeds, which may be masquerading as cyclists but they were not, and in his view and in law, those types of users should not be on a segregated cycle track. He intimated that he did not think that was an issue which could be resolved today but thought it was worth mentioning in case members were visualising those types of user when he referred to cyclists.

In conclusion, he thanked the Council for having the courage to re-visit the plans presented in December, and those officers and designers who had worked hard to find what appeared to be the best available compromise.

Mr Clark responded to a number of questions from members.

The Committee then heard from Ms Hillhouse and Mr Findlay (North East Sensory Service), on behalf of the Disability Equity Partnership.

Ms Hillhouse advised that she was employed by NESS but was also a member of the Disability Equity Partnership and explained that they had a meeting with the City Centre Master Planning Team on Friday to explore some of the mitigations around the design of the by-directional cycle lanes and bus pass design which they had serious concerns about.

She indicated that the city centre should be a space for everyone including people who were blind or deaf (over 2500 people in Aberdeen known to them), and explained that 1 in 5 of the population had some kind of disability (around 50,000 in Aberdeen) that may impact on their mobility and their confidence to get out and about, many of whom relied on public transport and do not have the freedom of choice to either access car or cycle travel.

She intimated that in relation to the by-directional cycle lanes, they did not agree in having segregated cycle lanes and they were limited to the constraints which were available to them on Union Street, therefore having two cycle lanes across, particularly if you are visually impaired was incredibly difficult, as a visually impaired person would not be able to see a bicycle approaching and in a busy environment, not hear it and therefore someone who was hard of hearing would not be able to hear a bicycle approaching until they were very close.

She advised that depending on the design of the streets, people who were visually impaired would rely on tactile information to understand where they were in relation to what was going on around them and they questioned whether some of the design mitigations had enough tactile information to ensure people know where they were so they could keep themselves safe.

She indicated that some of the research which we had not been able to critique suggested that the incidences of conflict between cycles and people with disabilities was very low, however we were aware that it was significantly higher for people with visual impairment and it was also about the perception of risk for people who were visually impaired/deaf and hard of hearing or otherwise have another disability.

She explained that people who were visually impaired/deaf and hard of hearing had many barriers on a daily basis which they had to deal with and more likely to be dependent on public transport. She advised that Union Street was a major route through Aberdeen and an interchange place for the City, therefore not being able to see what was coming towards you and probably not being able to hear what was coming towards you caused great anxiety for people who may already be stressed and anxious and don't feel confident to get in and about a busy environment.

Miss Hillhouse advised that they believed that the by-directional cycle lane would be putting in an additional barrier which would leave people feeling unsafe and uncomfortable to go into that area to use the public transport network down Union Street and would stop them accessing both the city centre and other parts of Aberdeen.

In conclusion, she advised that they had appreciated the engagement which they had, including many discussions with the City Centre Master Planning Team and welcomed the consultation, but they noted that there were other options available, which would require compromises, which could put pedestrians at the top of the hierarchy again. They believed that this model would put pedestrians second in the hierarchy behind the cyclist which was not what the hierarchy was intended to do and members of their community who were particularly vulnerable and social excluded would find it difficult to access the bus transport network through Aberdeen City.

Ms Hillhouse and Mr Findlay responded to questions from members.

Having heard both deputations, the Convener on behalf of the Committee, expressed his thanks for their comments and input.

With reference to article 16 of the minute of meeting of Council of 14 December 2022, the Committee had before it a report by the Director of Resources which provided a six-month update on progress with the city centre streetscape programme (Union Street Central, Market to Guild Street and Schoolhill/Upperkirkgate).

The report recommended:-

that the Committee –

- (a) note the progress update and instruct the Chief Officer (Capital) to present an update report to this Committee pending completion of Financial Close of the Union Street Central project;
- (b) agree the inclusion of a segregated cycle lane in Union Street Central consistent with emerging proposals for Union Street East and Union Street West; and
- (c) instruct the Chief Officer (Capital) to continue engagement with key stakeholders in the development of the RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) Stage 4 Technical Design.

The Convener, seconded by the Vice Convener moved:-

That the Committee –

- (1) approve the recommendations contained within the report;
- (2) instruct the Chief Officer - Capital to continue to engage with stakeholder groups as the detail of the bus stop crossing design develops and is implemented on street, including involving them in monitoring and evaluation during first year of operation; and
- (3) agree the inclusion of any necessary underground infrastructure to accommodate the future erection of a signalised crossing should it be deemed appropriate following the post completion monitoring and evaluation.

Councillor Malik, seconded by Councillor Watson, moved as an amendment:-

That the Committee note the decision of Council on 13 December 2021, following a Notice of Motion by Councillor Hutchison, that all decisions relating to the Masterplan should be made by Full Council, and agrees as the Committee are being asked to determine a position at 2.1 and 2.2 of the report, to send this report to the next Council meeting to allow Full Council to debate the merits or otherwise of these recommendations.

On a division, there voted:- for the motion (8) – the Convener, the Vice Convener and Councillors Allard, Cooke, Fairfull, Greig, Hutchison and Radley; for the amendment (5) – Councillors Farquhar, Macdonald, Malik, Massey and Watson

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to adopt the motion; and
- (ii) to request that the Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning circulate details of the Core Path status of Union Street and what that status would mean for those wishing to cycle

In terms of Standing Order 34.1, Councillor Malik intimated that he would like this matter to be referred to full Council in order for a final decision to be taken. Councillor Malik was supported by Councillors Farquhar, Macdonald, Massey and Watson.