

Greens promote cycling debate at Holyrood



Green MSP, Alison Johnstone, lodged a motion on cycling this morning which promoted a well-mannered cross party debate on the issues of cycling safety and the improvement of planning regulations to allow introduction of cycle lanes across Scotland's cities.

Several Edinburgh and Lothians MSPs took part in the debate today, and the capital was mentioned many times as a kind of pioneer in the improvement of cycling safety, particularly with the introduction of 20 mph zones and the use of 5% of the transport budget for cycling and Active Travel.

Johnstone's first argument was that to improve cycling safety on our streets we should build a critical mass of cyclists who use them. She praised the work of the grass roots campaign Pedal on Parliament who plan a flash cycle event on 28 April 2012 to highlight their eight-point manifesto, and mentioned the work of Sustrans and Spokes as instrumental in the growing call for action in this area.

She mentioned that in South Edinburgh a pilot scheme has been initiated by the council to introduce 20mph zones. What Johnstone wants however is the situation where 20mph becomes the norm. She said:-"We need to ask about 40mph roads." We were reminded that it was on two separate 40 mph roads that the two recent fatal accidents in Edinburgh took place.

It appears that the cycle training record is much better in England and Wales than in Scotland as they manage to involve 60% of schoolchildren rather than our rather paltry 30%. Johnstone believes that it is essential to educate children if

we are going to have a cycle culture, but also more training for other road users too, including HGV drivers and bus drivers.

But she conceded that funding is crucial to the cycling lobby. She said that only yesterday the Minister for Transport had announced the sum of over £500m for motorways, but only 0.8% of the transport budget has been made available for Active Travel. Johnstone said:-“We must match words with action.”

She continued:-“There are so many benefits in cycling, and I want Scotland to stand tall among those countries who have put cycling on the agenda.”

The Transport Minister, Keith Brown, welcomed the opportunity to debate the cycling question and congratulated the Green Party on introducing such a comprehensive motion. He also said that he had been heartened by the good attendance at the recent cycling summit. Brown said:-“There has been a 12% drop in casualties, but there have also been 4 casualties over the last 12 months. We have a vested interest in ensuring an improvement in cycling safety. This will ensure an increase in cycling too. One life lost is one too many.”

The Minister also called for an improvement in the coordination of all communications between cycling groups. He summarised:-“We cannot insist but we must encourage cycling, but also we must encourage a mutual respect among all road users. Some cyclists don't approve of the behaviour of other cyclists.” The Minister alerted us to the fact that the Give Me Cycle Space campaign will be introduced in May.

Edinburgh Southern MSP Jim Eadie said:-“The City of Edinburgh Council is leading the way and setting a good example for the rest of Scotland.”

City Centre MSP, Marco Biagi, explained that cycling safety features highly in his mailbag, and endorsed the strong argument that a critical mass of cyclists would encourage more

safety. Biagi mentioned the Transform Scotland report which shows how cities around Europe have improved their streets, and called for all transport planning to put cycling at the forefront of all developments.

Malcolm Chisholm, Labour MSP for Edinburgh Northern and Leith said that he believes that it will be unlikely that the government achieves its goal of having 10% of all journeys made by bike by 2020, notwithstanding the introduction of 20 mph zones and the many good cycle paths in his own constituency. He mentioned however that he had recently attended a cycle training event at Leith Primary School with Alison Johnstone, so perhaps we should expect to see Mr Chisholm on his bike soon?

Chisholm also said he was dismayed at the fact that Leith Walk is included in the Top Ten most dangerous streets in the UK for cyclists, and that Greener Leith had called for reductions in other forms of traffic to alleviate this situation. He also referred to the Edinburgh Labour manifesto which advocates the separation of cyclists from other road users as well as cycle storage for those living in flats (something which the city council is spending money on).

There were many calls for MSPs to show leadership and get on their bikes during the debate. It seems that several including the Transport Ministers will be taking part in Pedal for Scotland on 9 September.

Conservative MSP John Lamont came in for much ribbing after declaring his prowess as a long-distance cyclist, but one of the interesting points he made was that around three quarters of all journeys in the UK are 5 miles or less. He also explained that in Europe the less vulnerable road user is the one deemed responsible for any road incidents unless proved otherwise, which is quite different from our own road traffic legislation. He was encouraged by Helen Eadie MSP to take part in a road cycling endurance event this June when it takes

place in Fife. Eadie also commented on the condition of some cycleways and said:-“The cycle path along the A90 is a disgrace. It often means that cyclists use the road instead, which is in itself dangerous.” City Centre MSP Sarah Boyack also commented that the condition of some trunk roads for long distance cycling commuters needs to be examined

Claudia Beamish MSP for South Scotland recalled that:-“There used to be a cycling culture in Scotland. Cycling clubs abounded in the 1950s.”