

Opinion – why a Low Traffic Neighbourhood is a good idea

by Chris Young of Corstorphine Climate Action

It has been an interesting few weeks in the area with the proposed Low Traffic Neighbourhood project in the East Craigs community local to Corstorphine.

I thought it timely to make my stance clear, and why, and explain why I think it's a good plan overall.

So first, clearly the handling could have been a little cleaner, although I confess I'm not sure how. This sort of proposal is always going to go down with a lead balloon because as we know, Humans don't like change very much. And this is effectively a forced change in behaviour for a community.

So, inevitably, even with a longer public consultation period, there was always going to be shouting and angst.



At the public meeting about the proposed Low Traffic Neighbourhood in Gyle Park 28 August 2020 ©2020 The Edinburgh Reporter

It also seems clear that action to reduce car traffic in a bulging busy city is urgently needed, not only because of air pollution issues but also because it's killing lots of people.

The spate of fatal car accidents in Edinburgh post lockdown is one small indication of how dangerous motoring is.

And that's just the headline worthy stuff.

At a time when clear links between pollution and serious covid complication susceptibility have been made, healthy travel in the form of more active travel needs to be a serious consideration and it's in the local and national governments interest to push a healthier more active lifestyle. That does mean letting go of the car keys in favour of walking or cycling if you are able to do so.

We know from numerous studies the large proportion of car journeys currently are short ones which could be switched to alternative modes.

We also know that many people simply feel unsafe on many of our streets or at least are not the priority in planners' eyes.

We also know that car journeys are very often single occupancy journeys and so just a logical space vs people travelling shows that cars take up a massively disproportionate space in our communities for the journeys they actually make.

So enter Low Traffic Neighbourhoods.

These are being introduced across the UK and indeed much of the western world and they are, on balance, a massively progressive move toward reducing car journeys and bringing back the active travel balance.

But – and here's the problem. Car ownership and travel has been trained into most of the driving community over decades of city design, planning, advertising, societal recognition of a hierarchical car led system where bigger engines means bigger pockets, means higher up the aspirational pyramid. It's an addiction that's very hard to break.

Many of us enjoyed the peace and clear air of lockdown – but

the car keys now call to us to be clutched in our hands and held on to. It's an expensive addiction. It robs us of our cardiac health (sitting as we drive to get around), our respiratory health (we're exposed to more air pollution as a driver/passenger than as a cyclist/pedestrian on the road), our mental health (the stress of driving in congested city streets does nothing for our blood pressure), our sense of time (driving tends to give us the belief we can do more than we maybe should, piling on pressure to get out and do and be everywhere). Paradoxically, taking time to walk or cycle and the cardiac function that brings us is enormously beneficial for our mental health, and surely strengthens sense of our place in time.

The best indication of strength of any addiction is the difficulty with which giving up said addiction is achieved.

Driving is no different – does it have benefits? Yes of course.

Are some people reliant on driving because of disability? Yes of course.

Are able bodied drivers driving far too many journeys they could otherwise make, far more mindfully, by other modes. Yes absolutely.

And that dear reader, is what Low Traffic Neighbourhoods are about.

Making places safer to travel by other more active modes, whilst reducing the convenience of driving every journey.

It's a simple enough concept, and one which on balance most everywhere it's put in place, brings benefit to a community, albeit after an 'interestingly angry' transition period.

Are there losers? Yes of course. Main arterial routes may well get a bit busier.

People currently using a proposed LTN area to cut through will have to adapt their habits. It may take a bit longer. Perhaps

that path network might be a quicker, more enjoyable route to your destination?

But, crucially, the local space, near to home, in an LTN is made safer, and for the majority, more pleasant, calmer and far quieter, so that things like bird song might be audible again and kids can cycle on the road without parents becoming fearful.

The current proposals are in line with recent changes to planning process in the new and challenging times of change forced by Covid-19.

But let's not forget prior to coronavirus the spectre of climate change loomed large. This has not gone away. It demands urgent change. Edinburgh has committed to being net carbon neutral by 2030. That itself demands radical change of habit, of which transport is a large chunk.

And so, in conclusion, I accept change is hard. It will always be fought by those unwilling to accept it for whatever reasons. But we are in a transition period of such enormous demand for change that we all have to accept that change, big and small, will be a fact of life for the coming years and decades as we navigate our way through the natural world's defence to the mess we have made of the planet.

An LTN is a small thing compared to all of that.

Breath. Remember our place. Remember we have to adapt.

Bigger stuff is surely around the corner.

We have to be ready.

We are not, currently.



Chris is a semi-retired Professional Gardener, house husband, father of 2 primary school age children and climate campaigner with interests in active travel.

He has been developing [Corstorphine Climate Action](#) as a small

grassroots action group and has campaigned for improvements in air quality in Corstorphine for a couple of years. The group has organised regular community litter picks on Corstorphine Hill and Sighthill Park which have resulted in a dramatic improvement to litter levels there. In his previous life he set up and grew a large Edinburgh landscape and maintenance gardening company which he ran for 20 years. During that time, latterly, he also chaired a business development/networking group which helped members to support each other in all areas of business management.

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For information about what a Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN) is is have a look at the [Sustrans site here](#) where the active travel body explains that in relation to an LTN it is important to get the size right, but the optimum size is around 1-1.5km². The boundaries will be those roads which 'remain open to through traffic'.

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