

Spaces for People – some comment on the new Quiet Route

The Edinburgh Reporter article about the Quiet Route which has been installed on a temporary basis from Greenbank to The Meadows in our article [here](#) has attracted some reader response.

Road traffic measures usually do, and even though there has been a lot of discussion about proposals for this particular active travel route, it still seems to have come about as a bit of a surprise to a few road users we saw in the area on Sunday when we were on Whitehouse Road taking photographs.

The stretch of Whitehouse Road between the corner of Warrender Park Road and Bruntsfield Crescent is now closed to vehicular traffic, and the road is also closed further south. The full details are shown on the council's diagrams below.



Whitehouse Loan Road. Photo: © 2021, Martin P. McAdam
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We have had to rely on others for photos of actual cyclists as we were on foot on Sunday, and it was bitterly cold when we were there, leading us to curtail our visit. As you can see below however some young cyclists have been really enjoying the space on Whitehouse Road.

https://twitter.com/daihamu_san/status/1358510995195523073?s=20

The plan below is the first of three plans of the specifics of the Quiet Route which have been made available to us by the council – the other two are embedded at the foot of the article.

WHITEHOUSE LOAN TO STRATHEARN PLACE



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READER COMMENT

Paul Bailey lives on Braid Road and explained to The Edinburgh Reporter that he is interested in the effect of the the new Quiet Route on the whole area. He got in touch to say that while he is supportive of the concept of quiet routes, he takes issue with what he refers to as the 'spin'. He said that he does not approve of the way the road traffic measures are being implemented. He also called the comments from the Transport Convener, Cllr Lesley Macinnes, in our earlier [article](#), into question.

Mr Bailey said: "It is interesting to note the 'spin' about the new Quiet Route. I support the concept and hope it improves safety for children, but I take issue with some of the statements made. Referring to residents, parents and school pupils, Cllr Macinnes says "they've been extremely supportive". That's not true of the 80+ residents living near Whitehouse Loan, 99% of whom oppose the scheme to close the road all day instead of just at school hours. It's not true of residents on other parts of the route who have not even being told of the route's existence by the council.

"Residents around Whitehouse Loan have recommended an alternative solution to Edinburgh Council that is proven to improve road safety for children while leaving the road open for vehicle access at other times. The Council could use the same timed road closure scheme already successfully in place in numerous schools in London via the ["School Streets"](#) programme from Sustrans.

"Edinburgh Council has stated that a timed closure scheme would be too expensive to operate but [schools running them](#) state they only need a couple of extending barriers plus a

crossing guard/volunteers to operate it.

“As for safety which is mentioned by several people, the modal filters may even jeopardise safety due to cars which are travelling north on Whitehouse Loan being forced to make a u-turn at Bruntsfield Crescent where children are walking or cycling; cars travelling south will be funnelled along Warrender Park Crescent, where the entrance for the primary school is.



Bruntsfield Crescent. Photo: © 2021, Martin P. McAdam
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“Cllr Macinnes says she has heard about traffic volumes, implying they are high. But no data or evidence to support this has been provided by the Council other than for school drop off and pick-up times. A spokesperson for Blackford Safe Routes says that the route will enormously benefit everyone in our community. Everyone? No, it won’t benefit local drivers who have to make detours, it won’t benefit delivery drivers, taxi drivers, emergency vehicles or bus services on the main roads.

“To say that it will ease congestion and pollution is disingenuous because, coupled with the closure of Canaan Lane, it will cause more congestion on Morningside Road and Comiston Road. The list of schools being helped by the route [which was supplied by the council] is ridiculous. Far from *helping* pupils at Boroughmuir at Viewforth, it will cause more congestion on the routes they actually use. How can it possibly help pupils at Edinburgh Steiner School on Spylaw Road? It is just spin.

“The big question which is not discussed is whether this is really a “temporary” measure due to the COVID emergency. Of course it isn’t; everyone can see the long-term aspiration of the council and Spokes that it remains after COVID. Cllr Doran says that it will make it safer for people taking daily

exercise. How? As far I know, cars will still be travelling along most of the route and pavements are not being widened. Councillors approved the plan in November without being shown the details; astonishingly the detailed plan still appears to be a secret.

“In short, a permanent Traffic order is needed with a Safety Audit and full consultation of residents, not just selected groups, because the closure has nothing to do with the emergency, despite the council pretending that it is.”

REPLY FROM THE TRANSPORT CONVENER

The Edinburgh Reporter approached the Transport and Environment Convener Cllr Lesley Macinnes for a response.

She said: “There is no doubt that there is significant support for this scheme judging from our own communication with the community, schools and comments we’ve received directly from the public. Of course we understand that these changes do take some getting used to, and we’re continuing to monitor any Spaces for People schemes once they’re in place to make sure they’re effective.

“These measures are about increasing safety for everyone and are being introduced on an emergency basis to provide protected routes where people can travel on foot, bike or use a wheelchair while physically distancing. We have engaged closely with the emergency services, Lothian Buses and other community stakeholders as part of the agreed process for introducing them.”

Transport and Environment Vice Convener Cllr Karen Doran said: “Through Spaces for People we’ve been able to quickly install effective measures quickly, helping people to physically distance while taking exercise or making essential journeys. Our team have designed interventions that are workable within the timeframes and offer accessible routes, in this case for

the many children who will soon be returning to school.”

In addition the council offered some further explanation on some of the points Mr Bailey raised:

Introduction of a ‘School Streets’ style intervention

For the council to do this would require resources to operate the filters and for others to do it as volunteers which would bring up issues around liability and authority. Volunteers aren’t allowed to *enforce* closures. In addition, access to schools isn’t the only reason for the scheme, it’s also about access to/from the City Centre. Not all journeys by bike are made at peak times.

Modal filters might jeopardise safety due to cars being forced to make a u-turn at Bruntsfield Crescent or funnelled along Warrender Park Crescent

There is signage in advance of the route to warn drivers against driving there.

No data to support claims about vehicle volume or speed

The council says it has counts from Braid Avenue where it meets Cluny Avenue, which is part of the route. These show:

- Around 3000 – 4000 vehicles used this route per day on weekdays
- For a quiet route to function as per Edinburgh Street Design Guidance traffic should ideally be below 1,500, and certainly below 3,000
- Around 33% of traffic on this route was travelling at above the speed limit

It won’t benefit local drivers who have to make detours, it won’t benefit delivery drivers, taxi drivers, emergency vehicles or bus services on the main roads

Residents still have access, emergency services have been

engaged with, and the council does don't anticipate any impact on buses – and if any do emerge the council will work with Lothian Buses to address this.

BLACKFORD SAFE ROUTES

Ewen Maclean of [Blackford Safe Routes](#) has campaigned for the introduction of a quiet route for some time, and is also one of the organisers of the Bike Bus which allows children to travel to school on bikes and scooters with supervision which took place in the past at least once a month.

Mr Maclean said to The Edinburgh Reporter: “Schemes such as this offer safe and sustainable alternatives to using the car in the city. The very short term effects may include drivers becoming aware of the route and, for example, having to u-turn, but these will quickly disappear once the route is known.

“The long term effect of such schemes elsewhere has been the reduction of traffic volume, which means less pollution, the chance of a less sedentary lifestyle meaning far less strain on the NHS. 80% of UK children are so inactive they risk their long-term health. 25% of adults barely move at all. About 20% of adults say they **never** walk for 20 minutes or longer at a time.

“The NHS estimates that 100,000 UK deaths per year are due to inactivity. For those that have to drive, the difficulties of congestion are caused by traffic volume. Opening up more routes only encourages more traffic in a phenomenon known as “induced demand”.

“The long term societal benefits of providing safe and sustainable travel alternatives are well documented and far outweigh any of the short term disadvantages mentioned. The disadvantages cited all refer to longer vehicle travel times within the city centre. For delivery drivers, route planning

or more sustainable delivery methods mitigate this, and for most journeys those that are short enough for the delay to be a significant proportion should be discouraged in the city where possible.”

There are supportive comments [here on their website](#) from others who support the move.

This includes the Communication Workers Union who said: “The local CWU rep and postal colleagues fully support the Meadows to Greenbank Quiet Route proposals. We recognise that this will create safer streets, closer communities and make the streets less polluted and a more pleasant place to be. As postal workers on foot, we welcome the lower traffic volumes on residential streets, and as delivery drivers we see no significant difference to delivery times or access as all areas can still be accessed by vehicle.”

SPACES FOR PEOPLE

The Quiet Route is being implemented under the Covid-19 emergency legislation introduced by The Scottish Government, and the funding is also provided by the government. The special circumstances of the pandemic were behind the move last spring when Transport Secretary Michael Matheson introduced them to parliament and Edinburgh was initially awarded half of the £10 million fund.

The Edinburgh Reporter commented last year that the new legislation and funding would allow the council to put many of its already well developed plans for active travel into place. It is well known that the council administration led by the SNP and Labour groups in coalition are very much favours active travel. The Scottish Government and indeed the UK Government have confirmed that active travel is also at the forefront of their travel policy and both made funds available for temporary pop up schemes such as this one.

The [Spaces for People](#) process when it first began, included discussion with community councils and local ward councillors for a period of up to five days before being rubber stamped in terms of the emergency powers by the council's senior management team.

POLITICAL OPPOSITION

Later, that was changed so that the Transport and Environment Committee when it was reconvened, had more say on schemes, although the political make up of the committee means that the administration's own proposals are more often approved. The opposition groups including Liberal Democrat and Conservative councillors, do not always approve the introduction of such measures.

For example the Transport spokesperson for the Conservative Group, Cllr Sue Webber, has been outspoken both at committee, and also on social media. Cllr Webber has two Twitter accounts – one [here](#) where tweets are open and the other [here](#) as Conservative candidate for Edinburgh Western in May 2021 and you may be able to read some of the criticism Cllr Webber has levelled at the council's plans.

Most recently Cllr Webber has started a petition to ensure that any temporary road traffic measures introduced under Covid-19 measures do not become permanent, describing them as “undemocratic and reckless changes”. Meanwhile Conservative Party leader and Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, himself a keen cyclist, announced in summer 2020 that in the next decade the aim is for over half of all journeys to be made using active travel rather than a private motor vehicle.



Cllr Susan Webber 
@SueJWebber

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⚠ Spaces for People : Changes should NOT be made Permanent

!! Controversial changes brought in across the city during the COVID Pandemic are now being considered as PERMANENT measures across the entire city.

✓ click on the petition below. 



Road changes should not be made permanent!

Sue Webber is fighting back against the SNP-Labour Council's changes to our city.

 edinburghconservatives.org.uk

5:44 PM · Feb 4, 2021 from Edinburgh, Scotland · Twitter for iPhone

The Conservative Group on the council has used the Section 30 Standing Order under council procedure to refer decisions on transport matters to a meeting of full council with all 63 councillors in attendance, which has caused delay in implementing some of the emergency measures in streets outside schools.

The Scottish Government confirmed last year that it would fully fund a new infrastructure programme for pop-up walking and cycling routes or temporary improvements to existing routes. The awards are being administered by Sustrans.

Every year, Transport Scotland and Sustrans Scotland run the 'Places for Everyone' active travel infrastructure initiative. The organisations pointed out that they knew what the impact of Covid-19 would mean for this programme. They believed that local authorities would not have the capacity to design and apply for complex multi-year infrastructure programmes due to the necessary focus on responding to the outbreak.

Instead they awarded up to £10 million from the 'Places for Everyone' budget to deliver the new 'Spaces for People' initiative with no match funding from local authorities required, while continuing to support previously committed projects. Some of the Spaces for People measures have been welcomed, and others such as that on Great Junction Street were removed after a trial period established it just did not work as the road was too narrow there for two way traffic and widened footpaths.



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WHITEHOUSE LOAN TO WARRENDER ROAD



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GREENBANK TO MEADOWS – DIVERSION OF CANAAN LANE




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