

Opinion – Spaces for People are Spaces for Children

Better Edinburgh for Sustainable Travel (BEST) say they were delighted to have the opportunity to present their deputation on Spaces for People (SfP) at Edinburgh council's Transport and Environment Committee. Their members had worked tirelessly to create a balanced presentation, reflecting the wide views and needs of various stakeholders.

In essence, they are calling on the Council to retain the Spaces for People (SfP) measures, take a more flexible approach to shopping streets, and to use the next regulatory processes to ensure the schemes are reviewed and redesigned where necessary to be safe and accessible for all.

They were, they say, even more delighted to see the heartwarming contributions from Duddingston Primary School, Blackford Safe Routes and Spokes South Edinburgh.

As Spokes noted in its deputation, children's voices are rarely heard in transport policy debates. Who can deny so many children the opportunity to get to school actively, or to cycle with their families for everyday trips? Many SfP schemes

have been genuinely game-changing, transforming the lives of those whose travel choices were limited because of the lack of safe infrastructure. The Council must keep these schemes. They cannot imagine going back to pre-pandemic status where many people were confined to shared off-road paths because they were frightened of traffic.

“BEST is calling on councillors to be bold, visionary and collaborative. Our children have been clear. Please don’t let them down.”

But they are encouraged by the consensus that experimental and permanent versions of SfP should be inclusive, pointing out that it has been tricky to get the right balance with the temporary measures going in so quickly during the pandemic.

A spokesperson said: “We realise there have been challenges, particularly for some disabled people. However, we’re hopeful that the collaboration between the Council, the Edinburgh Access Panel, RNIB Scotland, Guide Dogs Scotland and others will produce designs that ensure access for all, and align with the sustainable transport hierarchy. We reiterate our expectation that this collaborative approach will include disabled cyclists whose voices aren’t always heard. We were also heartened by the contribution from the Edinburgh Bus Users’ Group. It’s vital that our buses can move easily through the city, and that bus stops are conveniently located.

“Our members, and many people we have spoken with, are deeply disappointed about the proposal to remove segregated cycle lanes on Lanark Road. Councillors at Committee supported a Coalition amendment that will scrap this game-changing cycle infrastructure once the public health guidance changes. The main aim of keeping SfP schemes and moving them to the next design phase is to retain momentum and secure a sustainable travel future for everyone in Edinburgh.

“Protected cycle lanes on Lanark Road are an essential part of

this sustainable, inclusive future. We need bold leaps forward now. We should not be pulling up a scheme on what is in essence an urban dual carriageway. Relegating cyclists to the isolated Water of Leith path would be a retrograde and grossly unfair step. Many people, particularly women, will not want to take a chance on that path in the dark. They will be forced to choose another form of transport.

“It’s obvious from the packed agenda of yesterday’s Committee meeting that almost everyone wants the status quo to change.”

The future of Spaces for People will be discussed again next week at the full Council meeting on Thursday when the council will probably endorse the decision of the Transport Committee, unless public opinion dictates otherwise of course. This subject, more than anything else on the agenda at present, has attracted opinions from both sides of the debate, and they are quite polarised.

We recorded podcasts reflecting a variety of views earlier in the week which [you can listen to here](#).



Segregated cycle lanes on Lanark Road at the site of the former Hope Scott garage. PHOTO ©2021 The Edinburgh Reporter