

Leith Walk is no go area for blind pedestrians

Due to the introduction of “shambolic cycle lanes, Leith Walk has become a “no go area” for blind people, a leading sight loss charity has said.

A major redesign of the street as part of the Trams to Newhaven project, which included the construction of a cycle lane along the pavement, has been criticised for creating more conflict between cyclists and pedestrians.

And now the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) had added its voice to those calling for urgent changes to the layout, which it said makes crossing the road “like playing Russian roulette”.

While the city council’s transport convener accepted there were “genuine concerns” he said the layout complies with street design guidance and provides “clear segregation for visually impaired pedestrians”.

A local councillor added the final months of the tram extension will be “crucial for pedestrians” and urged the community to keep flagging any concerns as work nears completion.

Appearing in a video filmed on Leith Walk, showing footage of cyclists deviating from the narrow zig-zag path and moving onto the pavement, Sandy Taylor, chairman of NFB Scotland, said: “Cyclists should not be sharing space with pedestrians.

It is too dangerous for blind and visually impaired people to use this space. It is impossible for us to navigate this area. We will avoid this area.”

The new pavement layout on [#LeithWalk](#) in [#Edinburgh](#) is not safe or accessible for blind & visually impaired pedestrians. Cyclists & pedestrians should not be expected to share the same space. Cycle lanes should not be put behind pedestrian crossings, it is a dangerous design. pic.twitter.com/tpbC1BZUeN

– NFBUK (@NFBUK) [December 5, 2022](#)



Sandy Taylor chair of NFB Scotland
Speaking to the Local Democracy Reporting Service, Mr Taylor, said: “We have to cross a cycle lane to get to the pedestrian crossing – that controlled crossing should go from kerb to kerb.”

He said he was “not prepared and not able to cross a cycle lane” to access bus stops either, adding: “It’s like playing Russian roulette if I was to step onto the cycle lane. I can’t see a cyclist coming, so how and when do I take this leap of faith? It’s clearly a no go area for us.”

Mr Taylor, who has been visually impaired for the last 20 years, also highlighted issues with how tactile paving – the textured ground that helps to guide those with poor sight – was installed at certain points along the street.

He said: “In a normal pavement, when you’ve got a push-button crossing, from the crossing back to the building line there is a tactile tail. A blind person like myself needs something to follow – we can’t walk down the middle of a pavement waiving a cane aimlessly.

“There are no detectable kerbs for someone like me with a long cane or someone with a guide dog. It is shambolic for everyone.”

He called for the pedestrian space along the Walk to be “completely redesigned” to make it more safe and accessible.

Cllr Scott Arthur, transport and environment convener for The City of Edinburgh Council, said: “The safety and comfort of all road users, in particular vulnerable groups, was at the forefront of Trams to Newhaven’s development by the last administration. Ultimately, in addition to the new tram line, this scheme aims to deliver a more welcoming environment for everyone travelling by foot, wheel or bike.

“The Council’s project team has worked hard to engage closely with the public from the project’s inception, and the design for Leith Walk was developed in close consultation with the community and stakeholders during 2018 to allow residents, businesses, pedestrians and cyclist to co-exist with buses and trams.

“The current layout complies with the Edinburgh Street Design Guidance (ESDG), which recognises that flexibility is required to accommodate a variety of modes in the design of existing streets. The lip between the footway and the cycleway is there to provide clear segregation for visually impaired pedestrians.

“I acknowledge, however, that there are genuine concerns regarding this scheme and I will ensure it is closely monitored once it is fully open to the public. Additionally, I have given careful consideration to what lessons can be learnt from what we see unfolding on Leith Walk.

“Early in 2023 I hope to start the work of collaborating with disability groups to establish an Access Charter against which all transport projects will be assessed. As well as focussing on physical and sensory disabilities, this approach will consider the needs and rights of residents with learning disabilities, neurodiversity and brain injuries.”

Leith Walk councillor Jack Caldwell said: “I think the next six months of works are going to be crucial for pedestrians so community engagement really can’t afford to wind down.

“The heart of Scotland’s most densely populated community has to be accessible, whether that’s through wider pavements at points or clearer demarkation.

“I’m grateful the council leader’s accepted my invite to walk down Leith Walk with members of the community in the new year to discuss these concerns and potential resolutions.

“I can’t stress enough the importance of alerting local councillors and Trams to Newhaven Project of outstanding issues at this stage.”

by Donald Turvill

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