

Council plans to spend £1 billion on a refreshed active travel programme

A major review has been carried out of all of the transport policies in Edinburgh, and there will be a step change in active travel spending if the council's plans come to fruition.

In the spending for active travel which was forecast last year, £118 million was set aside for such projects. Now that figure is to step up to £1 billion with expected contributions from the Council's Transport Capital Investment Programme, The Scottish Government's Cycling Walking and Safer Routes fund, the Sustrans Places for Everyone fund (distributed on behalf of Transport Scotland) and the new Active Travel Transformation Fund. The Scottish Government has already announced planned increases in spending on active travel investment.

Answering questions on the Strategic Transport Projects Review in The Scottish Parliament on Thursday, the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport, Michael Matheson said: "The era of catering for unconstrained growth in private car use is now well and truly over. The majority of the recommendations directly contribute to achieving a reduction in both emissions and dependency on the private car. Although we will not be able to deliver them all immediately, or all at once.

“Four key areas of investment will help us to make truly transformational changes to how we travel in Scotland. They are: decarbonising public transport, improving active travel infrastructure, improving connectivity in our rural and island communities, and establishing mass transit systems in our biggest city regions.”

This is about much more than a few cycle lanes, but rather investment in improving Edinburgh so that active travel is encouraged, with funding for around 500 benches and thousands of dropped kerbs being created at the rate of one each day. There are an estimated 17,000 missing or damaged dropped kerbs in the city.

Pedestrian crossings will be reviewed, with hopes of introducing more low-cost zebra crossings (those without the flashing belisha beacons), all subject to Scottish Government legislation. Delays for those crossing the road on foot or wheeling will be minimised, while prioritising routes in town centres, and to bus stops or health centres.

If the several joined up plans – Active Travel Action Plan, Public Transport Plan and Parking Action Plan – are approved by the Transport Committee next Thursday at its (now monthly) [meeting](#) then these will go into a single public consultation along with the Road Safety and Air Quality Action Plans which were approved last month.

The Transport Convener Cllr Professor Scott Arthur is adamant that the consultation process will reach as many groups of people in the city as possible. He said: “I need to engage with the hardest to reach people in the city, who are often the least likely to respond to any consultation. But it is important note that a consultation is really a form of local intelligence. It is not an opinion poll or a referendum.”



Cllr Scott Arthur Transport and Environment Convener ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter

IMPROVED ECONOMY AND WELLBEING

The key aims of the Labour administration are to improve the efficiency and reliability of public transport, improve the infrastructure for active travel of all kinds, and manage parking with increased enforcement of offences such as double parking or parking in bus lanes. The council may also look at discussing the possibility of using cameras on buses to report offenders to the police who have the powers to enforce parking or speeding offenders. But it all starts with making Edinburgh a more walkable city.

Cllr Arthur said: “There is a huge focus on getting walking right. That means removing pavement clutter and making footpaths wider. If you take public and active Travel together then Edinburgh will be in a very different place in ten years. The benefits are threefold – to wellbeing, finance and

economy. These plans will make it easier for everyone and boost the economy”.

The council’s contract to employ parking attendants is up for renewal next year and that may also allow the council to look into new ways of enforcement. But Cllr Arthur is also looking to The Scottish Government to hand down more powers such as using automatic number plate recognition technology.

Cllr Arthur set out in the foreword to the public transport review: “Edinburgh is a city of differing needs, ages and abilities. Our transport systems can have a significant impact on peoples’ ability to find and sustain work, to look after children and relatives, and to use health, education and other public services. Cutting congestion and improving public transport is absolutely key to attracting investment to Edinburgh. With tens of thousands of houses being built in Edinburgh in the coming decade, and more in surrounding local authority areas, now is the time to act.

“We need to create a city where you don’t need to own a car to move around. This means further strengthening and protecting our excellent local public transport, alongside improving walking, wheeling and cycling. I am determined that the Council plays its part in making this happen.”

The overarching themes of the council’s business plan relates a great deal to the way we move around the city. The three strategic priorities which cover all council policy are to:

Create good places to live and work
End poverty in Edinburgh and
Become a net zero city by 2030

There are some other big ideas

One of these is the very slim possibility of a cross-Forth ferry – covered by one line in a 48-page appendix which reads

that the council will by the end of 2025: “Explore the opportunity for a cross-Forth ferry considering commuting and wider tourism opportunities.”

This was trialled more than 15 years ago by Brian Souter of Stagecoach but stymied by Edinburgh Council who did not approve the application to build any infrastructure on the southern shore. A private company which wants to purchase three ferries fuelled by hydrogen to set up this route has contacted the council and initial discussions have been held. The project would not in itself cost the council anything, and so will depend on the business concerned raising sufficient finance to take off from Newhaven to Kirkcaldy for a 35 minute commute.

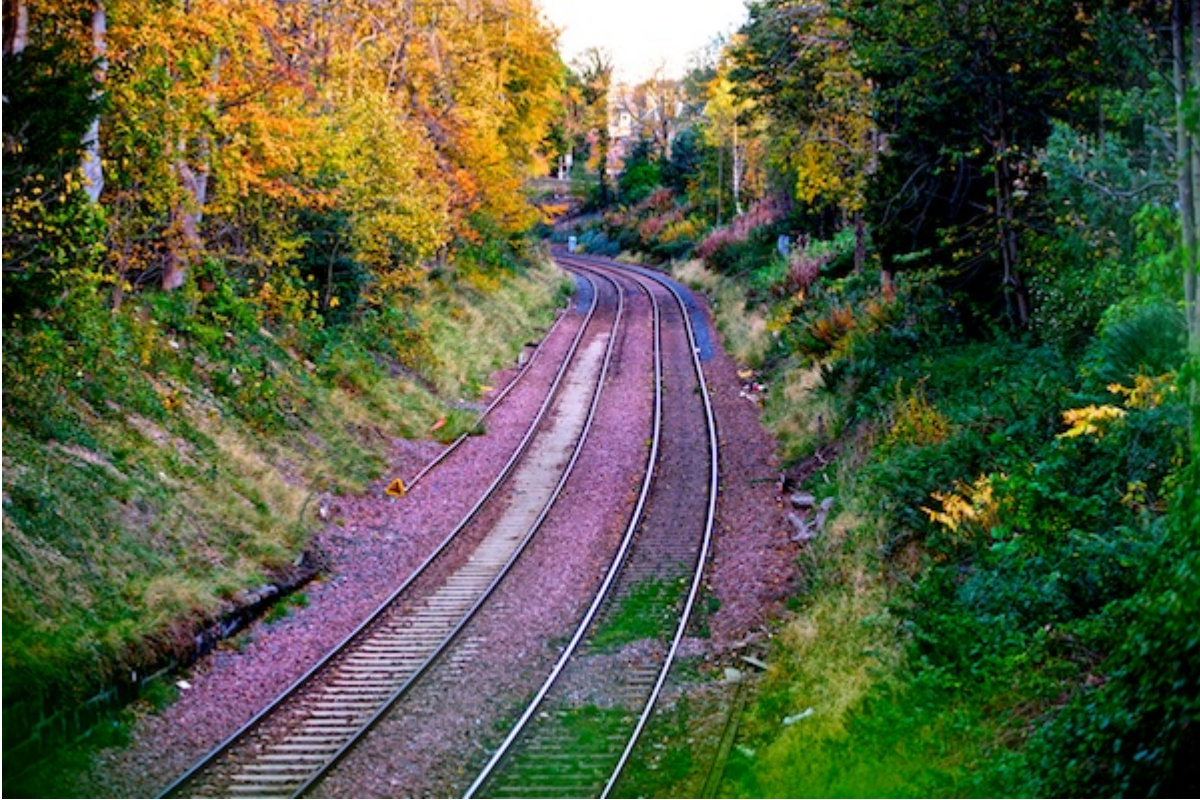
South Suburban Railway

Another one liner, which couches what could be a game-changer, is that the council will look once again at the South Suburban Rail Line and has had discussions with Network Rail. The Convener said that the reality is a loop is probably not feasible as the line is “too busy between Waverley and Haymarket” but at least a part of it may open to passenger traffic in the fullness of time.

The council also plans a second north-south “mass rapid transit” link, probably a tram line, but will also include bus rapid transit, supporting development at Granton Waterfront and the BioQuarter. This would need more Park and Ride facilities and “additional strategic bus lanes”.

The list of reports to be considered by the Transport & Environment Committee at their February meeting is extensive, but all are subject to the administration’s big vision of becoming one of the leading cities in Europe for public transport and active travel.

- The papers for the Transport and Environment Committee meeting [are published here](#) and there is also a link to the [council webcast](#) which can be watched live or as an archive.



Morningside – a view of the railway line that the Edinburgh South Suburban railway uses for freight and could use for passenger trains. PHOTO Martin P McAdam