

# **Time for respectful debate over council's transport plans**

**A newly-approved consultation on roads and active travel in Edinburgh should not descend into another “cars versus bikes” debate, the city's Transport Convener has said – as his predecessor revealed she still receives “threats and harassment” over the Spaces for People scheme.**

The City of Edinburgh Council agreed on Thursday to put its 'Circulation Plan' to the public for feedback on changes aimed at cutting car use, reducing emissions and boosting walking, wheeling and public transport patronage over the next ten years.

Proposing more cycle lanes and tram lines, and even a new city centre bridge, the consultation will collect responses on many of the capital's hottest topics.

Councillors called for a respectful debate around the changes as they discussed the £1 billion transport plan, contained in four reports on public transport, active travel and parking and the circulation plan, as the previous Transport Convener, Cllr Lesley Macinnes said she is subject to online abuse over

previous travel schemes.

Speaking at the City Chambers meeting on Thursday Cllr Macinnes said “disinformation” had been circulated about “very extensive consultations” while she was transport convener in the last administration.

The SNP councillor was met with a fierce backlash following the roll-out of Spaces for People (SfP), which included temporary cycle lanes, widened pavements and pedestrianised streets introduced across Edinburgh during the pandemic, under emergency Scottish Government Covid-19 legislation and funded with £5.25 million from the UK Government.

Whilst there was support for the measures, the previous SNP/Labour administration have also been criticised for not engaging with the public enough or taking their views on board.

Cllr Macinnes said she was still getting “threats and harassment on social media as a result of that period in time”.

She said: “As the person who sat in that chair for five years I know exactly the level of personal abuse I got for the kind of programmes that we’re trying to bring forward.

“Strategies that are within the general degree of thinking around climate change, for example, sustainability of the city, fitted within the Scottish Government’s priorities – all of those things that as a city we need to tackle and understand.

“The level of disinformation that went out to people about the very extensive consultations that we did in the last term that were being regarded and encouraged to be regarded as referenda was I thought not the world’s most responsible approach.”

She added there will be “a range of opinions” and called on residents to come together in a positive way.

Cllr Scott Arthur who is the Transport Convener said “mistrust around consultation” was a challenge for the council.

He said the debate can quickly turn into one about “cars versus bikes” due to a “quite noisy minority”.

Cllr Claire Miller, Greens, added she gets “very angry emails” in her inbox on the subject and called for a “safe conversation”.

She continued: “How do we have those hard conversations but at the same time try to de-escalate some of the tensions that people have and the emotions that come to the surface when we talk about changing the way that we use our spaces?”

“We have to make choices between space for this and space for that and that’s really at the heart of what I think we need to be facilitating in the dialogue that we have with people.”

Head of placemaking and mobility at the council, Daisy Narayanan, said: “Everything gets conflated especially when you talk about change.

“Nobody in this city wants to live in a congested, fume-filled place – we all want to live in a city that we can all thrive in.

“There is far more in common that people have than not.”

The council said its “extensive” three-month consultation will allow people to understand the “common issues” and help to shape the plan before it is implemented.

There are more than 100 actions contained in the proposals which “are intended to work together towards key council objectives including cutting car kilometres by 30% by 2030, reducing congestion and improving health and well-being, as

well as the vital net zero goal”.

*by Donald Turvill*

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