

Consultation to be restarted by council after advertising errors

A consultation on making Edinburgh's Spaces for People measures permanent will have to be restarted due to "errors" by the council – costing thousands of pounds and dragging the process out by another six months.

The blunder – which the council admitted was an "unfortunate setback" – has come as a result of mistakes in active travel plans advertised to the public including inaccurate information on bus lanes and yellow lines.

Transport convener Cllr Scott Arthur blamed contractors hired by the council for the job and said the episode demonstrated the need to "reduce our reliance on external consultants".

He argued that positives would come out of the fiasco, including giving local residents "extra time to tell us what they think of these measures".

However an opposition councillor said there was "no positive spin" to put on the situation and added another six months of consultation is "the last thing we need".

In November the council began engaging with residents on segregated cycle lanes installed across the city during the

pandemic to be made permanent infrastructure.

It started an 18-month-long process to monitor the success of the controversial scheme, originally known as Spaces For People but later renamed Travelling Safely, to help inform whether the measures, which also included widened pavements and road closures, should remain in place.

The consultation was due to be wrapped up next month, however it has now emerged that “errors” with the amended road layouts advertised, known as Experimental Traffic Regulation Orders (ETROs) mean the entire process has to be restarted and will now run until November.

A briefing note to councillors and shared with the Local Democracy Reporting Service revealed the cost of re-advertising the ETROs would be £14,000 and the council would “incur additional staff costs over the next six month period”.

It said: “The costs associated with re-advertising and the extended consultation period are under discussion with the consultant appointed to prepare the ETROs.”

The council said the issue emerged because of a lack of resources to “check every dimension” of the orders.

Dave Sinclair, Local Transport and Environment Manager and Travelling Safely’s project manager, said: “All of the known errors have now been corrected. They related to restrictions including timings of bus lanes and access, small sections of yellow lines and ambiguous descriptions for side road measurements. If any of the orders were to transition to permanent orders, we need to make sure they are accurate.”

The council confirmed that comments submitted in the last six months existing comments will still be recorded and taken into consideration.

Councillor Arthur said the ETRO period was still expected to

end in 2024 “as planned” despite the consultation being dragged out.

He said: “One benefit will be that people can have some extra time to tell us what they think of these measures. Additionally, some residents have raised concerns about the visibility of the consultation, so the restart is a chance to get this right.”

However independent councillor Ross McKenzie said: “I don’t think you can put any positive spin on this.

“Active Travel measures are consulted on to death – the last thing we need is another six months of consultation.

“We need more focus on making these schemes permanent and less focus on expensive city centre vanity projects.”

Cllr Arthur continued: “Over the last five months we have gathered 339 comments from the public to inform our decisions for scheme retention, modification or removal – these will still be included in the trial assessment report.

“I have asked that Council Officers attempt to recover any additional costs from the contractor. Furthermore, this episode emphasises why we must reduce our reliance on external consultants and instead build up in-house capacity and expertise.”

Councillor Jason Rust, Conservatives, who raised residents’ concerns about the advertising of ETR0s, said: “The Council is taking ‘experimental’ to a new level.

“It was alerted to serious concerns about the ETR0 process some months ago and it’s therefore welcome that it has belatedly taken action. However, the proof will be if the Council actually take heed of the responses and listen to local people.”

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter.

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Spaces for People measures on Waverley Bridge