

Corstorphine bus gate scrapped but rest of LTN to stay

A traffic restriction which tickets over 100 drivers a week is to be removed from an Edinburgh suburb, following concerns it left drivers dealing with congestion and longer journeys.

Councillors voted to get rid of a 'bus gate' introduced in Corstorphine, which has proved so controversial locally a camera set up to monitor compliance and issue tickets was cut down twice by vandals.

However other restrictions and changes introduced as part of a Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN) will be made permanent following an 18-month trial, which attracted objections from 594 people.

These include wider footways and traffic calming measures which officials say have improved road safety and created a safer environment for children to travel to school.





A report to a council sub-committee on Thursday, October 24,

recommended keeping the bus gate but shortening hours of operation to restrict general through traffic on Manse Road until 4pm, rather than 6.30pm currently, to align with pick ups from Corstorphine Primary School.

Traffic displacement

A key criticism of the restriction has been that it displaces traffic elsewhere.

Anti-LTN campaigners heckled from the public gallery as project manager Martin Lings told councillors it was "difficult" to establish traffic displacement from one place to another. Attendees continued to interject angrily throughout the meeting, as convener Margaret Graham urged them to "sit quietly" or face being removed.

Mr Lings said there were on average 340 weekly bus gate fines when it was first installed and this had since "significantly reduced" to around 118.

He admitted a "very small increase" in traffic on Corstorphine High Street shown in monitoring "isn't what we would ultimately desire," but said this was "offset" by "significantly widened footways" on the street.

He said: "We feel that around the school that has been a package of improvements for road safety.

"From a project point of view we were aware that [traffic increase] might occur, however by increasing the footway width we felt that overall we could still make this street significantly better for people walking to the school, and that seems to be reflected both in the data where we see some of the largest increase in footfall along Corstorphine High Street."

Narrow pavements

He said parts of Manse Road, including near the turn onto

Manse Street which leads to the school's main entrance, had "exceptionally narrow footways".

Taken together with what he called a "long catalogue" of concerns from parts of the community about high volumes of traffic cutting through the street, and a lack of off-street parking which meant parking spaces couldn't be removed to widen pavements, Mr Lings argued the bus gate was the "best way to address that road safety issue".

Councillor Neil Ross, while welcoming extra space for pedestrians and new crossings, said it was his view the bus gate "causes congestion elsewhere and longer journeys".

He said: "Traffic has evidently been displaced so I'm concerned as to whether the scheme has achieved its objectives.

"I'm concerned about the bus gate contraventions, to my mind they are still far too high. I think traffic needs to get through the area efficiently and onto St John's Road safely through traffic lights. It seems silly to me to displace traffic onto Corstorphine High Street right in front of the school when you're trying to reduce traffic in the area.

"I think there has been an unfortunate lack of proper engagement with the local community, the surveys to my mind are not representative of the demographics of the local community and the conclusions drawn as a result."

'Sampling bias'

Data gathered by the council to test the effectiveness of the LTN showed a 9.2 per cent drop in traffic on streets 'surrounding' the primary school, but a 6.5 per cent increase across the project area, roughly in line with the average rise in traffic recorded across western Edinburgh over the time of the trial.

Officials also used independent market research, conducted by approaching people in the street within the LTN at random, to claim around half of locals supported the measures and just under a quarter opposed.

However this was rubbished by Councillor Marco Biagi, a polling expert, who said the method of data collection resulted in a “non-probability sample”.

He said: “If I was wanting to get an accurate gauge of local opinion I would have got the address file and picked every fifth of tenth home and gone to that, rather than recruiting on the street which introduces a sampling bias when the method of recruitment is so related to the recruitment of the research.”

He said there was also a “one-sided presentation of arguments” and questions were sequenced to “prime respondents to think about the problems of traffic and then to ask them their opinion on the proposals at the end”.

The cumulative effect of this, he added, was inaccurate market research which didn’t “stand up to analysis”.

‘Respect community’s voice’

Cllr Jo Mowat said “more evidence” was needed to support keeping the bus gate. “I appreciate there is a small gain but to me that is offset by further displacement elsewhere,” she said.

“We should respect the voices of the very many people who have chosen to engage with this and describe that is happening.”

Backing the officers’ report, Cllr Graham said the LTN “was introduced due to the growing concerns about the speed and volume and traffic in the area especially around the school”.

She said: “As someone who’s worked with children and moved them about on pavements in this city over the last 30 years I

know how difficult it is around schools at the end of the day collecting children.

“So any measures that help to reduce the traffic and anxiety around walking is much welcome.”

Councillors voted 6-3 in favour of an amendment by Cllr Ross to scrap the bus gate but make the rest of the LTN measures permanent.

After, local Lib Dem councillor Euan Davidson said the decision was a “testament to the power of community campaigning”.

Outcome ‘unexpected’

David Lowe, a member of the Stop the Corstorphine LTN, said he was happy but surprised with the outcome.

“I didn’t really expect it to be honest,” he said. “However there are other issues with this scheme . . . I think they should look again at some of these other closures.

“It’s not working, traffic in the area has gone up by 6.5 per cent – in the west of Edinburgh it’s gone up by six per cent so it’s not made any difference. They claim it has improved traffic around the school and made it safer, that’s highly dubious. It depends which streets you include as ‘around the school’.”

He added: “I don’t mind the widening of the pavements, I don’t know how necessary it was.”

The group, which has flooded councillors’ inboxes with emails objecting to the scheme, has now raised over £6,000 to obtain a legal opinion on whether the implementation was lawful and is eyeing a judicial review.

Mr Lowe said: “There’s a lot of people who are still unhappy about some of the other things. We will have to see

what the legal opinion is.”

“I certainly feel good about that, that was one of the biggest problems.

“I’m pleased about that. And I didn’t really expect it to be honest.

“However there are other issues with this scheme, there are other roads that have been closed off and it’s still difficult to exit Featherhall and Manse Road, I think they should look again at some of these other closures.

“I came thinking they would wave it all through because their attitude until now has been like that.

“The people who spoke against it, they were really comprehensive. The criticisms of that really blew it away.

“There’s a lot of people who are still unhappy about some of the other things.

We will have to see what the legal opinion is.”

‘Creating safer environment for residents’

Following the meeting the council confirmed the bus gate camera would be switched off and any penalty notices issued today (October 24) cancelled.

Cllr Graham, convener of the traffic regulation order sub-committee, said: “Following today’s decision the Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) will become permanent but remove the bus gate on Manse Road. The Council will now consider the consequences of this decision and its wider impacts, including the programme for removing the bus gate.

“Under the wider Corstorphine Connections project we’re creating a safer and more comfortable environment for residents walking, cycling, wheeling and spending time in the

local streets and outdoor spaces of the area.

“We’ll continue to keep the community and key stakeholders informed and updated as we go forward.”

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter