

Edinburgh's new path connects the past to the future

Edinburgh's paths offer something bucolic, something of an escape from the often [congested city](#). Edinburgh's best paths are generally found along waterways and ex-railways.

The Water of Leith Walkway, the [Burdiehouse Burn Path](#) and the Union Canal, among others, offer places where you are surrounded by nature, with traffic often a distant memory. These 'green corridors' are a great asset to the city, benefitting physical and mental health. The ex-railway path network on the north side of the city offers this in abundance.

New link

A new addition to Edinburgh's paths offers something *different*. The [newly opened link from Roseburn to Fountainbridge](#) allows smooth "active travel" across terrain that has been very difficult to navigate, whatever mode of transport you are using. The new green corridor simplifies things for those on foot, in wheelchairs or on bikes.



The new path connects Fountainbridge to Sauchiebank/ Russell Road, where – via a short roadside section – it meets the Roseburn Path, part of the extensive ex-railway path network. At the Fountainbridge end, it meets the West Approach Road and the Telfer Subway. From there, it's just a short walk or ride to the Union Canal. In forging this link, the new path brings the canal, the ex-railway paths *and* the Water of Leith Walkway within easy reach of each other. This opens up several options for unbroken walking and cycling.

This wedge of the city most closely resembles a modern metropolis. Busy roads, glass towers (at Haymarket) and general sense of dislocation. It feels like different transport eras (canal, train, tram, car, active travel) are battling for primacy as they criss-cross each other.

New views

Opened in December, the path's surroundings are a little bleak at present, waiting for grass to emerge from the soil and other foliage to spring into life. It's a reminder that a significant number of trees had to be removed from Sauchiebank in order to build the link. New saplings have been planted to replace them. In time, this route will start to resemble Edinburgh's more scenic paths. But not yet. Some of the benches are still wrapped in plastic, emphasising the newness of it all. On a damp and blustery December afternoon, there was no demand to use the seats. On a sunny summer afternoon they will offer a calm spot.



The path gives you views of the city rarely seen, or allows you to look at familiar things from unusual angles. It's a puzzle trying to work out what fits where. This area of the city is a real hodgepodge, with buildings and businesses

wedged between railway and tram lines. There's very little accessible green space.

Until you actually explore it, the path's route is a little difficult to work out. Even detailed diagrams of the route don't quite make it clear. Over the past few months, I often travelled on the 22 bus (which goes along the West Approach Road). From the top deck, I've monitored the progress of the path, trying to picture myself wandering down it towards the varied buildings on and around Russell Road.

Transformation

The buildings in this area are in various states. Hopefully, as this area is redeveloped, they can be repurposed, not erased. They are a reminder of the deeply industrial character of this area. Less so now than in the past, but still more than most areas of the city. This is not the genteel and elegant city usually portrayed in the tourist guides. The industries etc that were based around here are a key part of the city's history. The new path is helping to reveal some of these, enriching our vision of the past.



It's an increasingly busy area, with a new residential section of the city at Fountainbridge expanding every month. This is transforming an area previously dominated by breweries and other industries. These include the massive Castle Mills building of the North British Rubber Company. The last remaining of this is now the home of Edinburgh Printmakers, which has enriched the cultural aspect of this area of the city.

Though many will wonder if the money could have been better spent, the value of this path to the city will surely become evident in time. It's already well used. Fortunately, the new path is generally wide, allowing sufficient space for cyclists and pedestrians. This is in contrast with some other paths, especially the canal walkway, which can be crowded and cramped at times.

The Roseburn Link appears to have had an immediate impact on the number of people using the Roseburn path as a north-south

link.

This is the Strava heat map for the last week, so only picks up people recording their journeys with a watch/phone.
pic.twitter.com/uuWe7xq6lr

– Edward Tissiman (@edtiss) [December 16, 2024](#)



Potential paths

What it will surely do is add weight to those wishing to see other potential paths opened. Most notably, the unused railway between Abbeyhill and Powderhall which has been earmarked as a public active travel route for some time. This would be an excellent quiet route through the city. I am sure it would be

very popular, given the number of new residential areas around the route.

That path would also give those who use it and other different views of the city, a fresh perspective on areas they are familiar with. Those who live in the city such as Edinburgh for a long time are often in need of something fresh. Perhaps something that reveals aspects of the city long under wraps.

Edinburgh's path network is thankfully growing and its importance recognised evermore. The paths help keep the city very liveable and walkable, despite a growing population and significant increases in tourism. They are in some sense lungs allowing the city to breathe. They allow people to explore the city unencumbered by traffic and noise. They transport walkers and cyclists to interesting places that would otherwise be missed . This all adds to Edinburgh's rather unique character.



The new path from Sauchiebank/ Russell Road to Fountainbridge

has added something that is both practical and interesting, giving us a new view of the city and how it may develop. In time the new path itself may develop.

A bridge from Sauchiebank over the tram line and main Edinburgh – Glasgow railway line directly to the Roseburn Path would make sense, although it would be a substantial further piece of engineering. At present, two bridges out of three ain't bad.

According to the project page on the council website: "The Roseburn to Union Canal link is a £17 million active travel scheme to transform public spaces along a route between Roseburn and the Union Canal, creating a green corridor and cycleway and bringing disused areas back into community use." Click on the logo below to find out more.



Roseburn to
Union Canal