

# Proposal for new bridge network in Midlothian

**Midlothian councillors are calling for an investigation into the possibility of a new bridge or bridge network to create access for everyone across the county.**

Concern about difficulty facing people in the east of the county and the pressures on the transport network caused by an increasing population, saw councillors agree to call for the Scottish Government to fund a feasibility study into the bridge infrastructure.

A motion backed by elected members noted that some job opportunities are concentrated in the west of the county while there are higher areas of deprivation in the east.

And it said a lack of sufficient transport infrastructure and road network between the east and west of Midlothian 'hinders economic growth, access to services, and social mobility'.

A meeting of the council saw council leader Kelly Parry present a motion asking them to write to the Scottish Government asking for a study of the network to be supported.

It said: "The council believes that improved transport links are essential to supporting economic equality and sustainable development across Midlothian and furthermore, believes that a bridge, or a multiple bridge network, could provide a vital connection between the east and west of the region, improving

accessibility for residents, businesses, and public services.”

Seconding the motion Councillor Russell Imrie told the meeting that the issue was about equality for all the county’s residents.

He said: “We are talking about jobs on one side and people on the other side and how we get the people to the jobs. The only way is through a network that was built so many years ago it is not fit for purpose.

“All we are asking for is money from government for a feasibility study to look into how we can make it better for all residents to get around Midlothian and I do not think that is much of an ask.”

Councillor Imrie pointed to the growing population in the county and housing which has been required in the last two decades as part of the reason why the call should be considered.

He said: “We have taken, for the last 20 years, anything that has been handed down from government by way of housing development, and rightly so.

“I have no problem whatsoever, about having roofs for people there is nothing wrong with that but our infrastructure is bust, it isn’t fit for purpose in the 21st century.”

The motion, which called on the council to resolve to “rite to the Scottish Government, urging them to provide funding and commence a feasibility study into the construction of a bridge, or bridges, to enhance connectivity between the East and West of Midlothian, and to engage with relevant stakeholders, including Transport Scotland, local businesses, and community groups, to support and inform this proposal” was backed unanimously.

Midlothian Council leader Kelly Parry said the council must

explore every possibility to overcome these challenges to improve connections between the east, which has higher levels of deprivation, with the west, where there are more job opportunities.

Councillor Parry said: "We've done it before. We built new bridges in Midlothian for the Borders Railway and reinstated others. We have in the past reinstated the viaduct bridge at Bilston and I believe we should investigate if this could be a possible solution for the future for other existing bridges, either for vehicle use, or as part of walking and cycling routes.

The council leader said in 2020 Sustrans considered a proposal to re-open the Lasswade viaduct, but the bid was not submitted.

"I think this is a missed opportunity and I hope that decision can be revisited," she said adding: "A feasibility study is necessary to explore the potential benefits, costs, and environmental impact of such infrastructure. With the motion now approved, we will be writing to the Scottish Government, urging them to provide funding and to start such a study as soon as possible."

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter