



A deputation to the Transport and Environment Committee (TEC) 17th June 2021

Introduction

Good morning Committee, on this Clean Air Day, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you on behalf of Low Traffic Corstorphine.

Low Traffic Corstorphine is a group of local Corstorphine residents and business people passionate about bringing safer streets, better air quality and much improved accessibility to residents of all ages, genders and abilities whether they are walkers, wheelers, cyclers, drivers or passengers.

We recognise that each of us can simultaneously belong to several of these categories, and indeed, that our dominant mode of travel can change throughout our day depending on the challenges we face as we go about our often busy lives. That said, and despite the dominance of private vehicles in our public spaces, we must remember 40% of Edinburgh residents do not have access to a private car.

Recognising the diversity within our community, we fully support a more balanced choice of travel modes, strongly supporting 'active' travel within that dynamic mix as a crucial way to get around our local communities. Empowering individuals to choose to travel in a safe, active way has great benefits to personal health and is good for local business.

We thank the councillors and officers of CEC for having achieved so much infrastructure change, as mandated and funded by the Scottish Government. The work to date has been carried out under extremely challenging and difficult circumstances throughout the COVID pandemic and we congratulate members of this committee for their strong leadership and commitment to bring these 'Spaces for People' changes to our communities.

But crucially, now is not the time to slow down.

We recognise that interventions have not always been smooth in transition and some have fallen short of intended outcomes, but that officers and representatives have maintained a tireless pace and passion throughout to respond to criticism and modify measures where required often amidst considerable objection, conspiracy theories and in a deeply concerning way, direct and sometimes deeply personal attacks.

We've seen from the Corstorphine Connections LTN data that almost double the proportion of people now walk to get around locally on a daily basis than did prior to the pandemic – so it's crucial we support that momentum and improve, not lose, the many measures in place here such as the school street closures around Gylemuir, Corstorphine and Carrick Knowe Primary Schools, the filtering of Cammo Walk, the protected cycle provision on one of the steepest streets in Edinburgh at Drum Brae North and further south at Meadow Place Rd, the Corstorphine High Street measures, the shopping street measures around St John's Road and the recent measures on Craigs Road to improve safety adjacent to Craigmount High School.

We also know that suggestions in the public LTN engagement for improvements to accessibility ranked:

- ▶ **dedicated cycle infrastructure,**
- ▶ **better footpaths,**
- ▶ **improved road surfaces,** and
- ▶ **traffic reduction**

as the top 4 suggestions.



With 'Spaces for People' measures aimed specifically at improving 3 out of 4 of these suggestions, the value of the interventions is clear.

Retain, Improve and Extend

The Spaces for People report before you today, to which I now speak, is a very full and commendable report, the recommendations of which we strongly request you support, with a vote for taking it forward, along with the following considerations:

We specifically ask the committee not to roll back any measures but to Retain, Improve and Extend the current SfP intervention portfolio thus:

- **Retain**, whilst the reasons for initial installation may have differed to those going forward under the Places for Everyone project and the proposed ETRO plans, there is of course an urgent need to move away from dependence on private vehicles, particularly for short local journeys to ensure the health of the city, lessen our impact on the environment and improve air quality. Access must be maintained for those who have no other choice but to travel by motor vehicle but the aim must be to encourage residents and visitors to walk, cycle, wheel and use public transport wherever possible. Indeed, in order for the city to meet its own 2030 net zero carbon targets, it is crucial this work not roll back but be developed further to support a move out of the economic and environmental cost of being one of Europe's most congested cities.

Active Travel is a key linchpin to reducing that congestion, improving our environment and personal activity levels and the value of improved and extended cycle and pedestrian infrastructure is enormous.

With 3 high schools and 6 primary schools in the area and a combined school roll of over 4350 pupils, many will have journeys which traverse St John's Road. We ask that you retain all additional pavement space which has been provided in Corstorphine not just measures around the schools but also elsewhere. St John's Road specifically, is not just a 'Shopping street' but often an important route to school for local families.

Evidence from shopping streets in other towns consistently shows that improved pedestrian space helps local businesses. Knowing as we do, there has been a 40% increase in shopping locally since the start of the pandemic, why should we be removing measures which support this increase?

There appears to be an unjustified perception that Spaces for People is responsible for all manner of ills, for example, congestion, lost sales, new safety risks for those with limited mobility, because being so visible they're an easy target for objections, but dig deeper and we tend to find the root causes are more to do with the pre-existing challenges of high volumes of traffic, poor, often illegal parking choices and big changes of buyer behaviour that we've all experienced through the pandemic amongst other things.

In Corstorphine, Local residents are very aware that congestion on St John's Road is a decades long issue.

Our experience is that the additional pedestrian space as supported by the SfP measures, particularly at the small number of pedestrian crossings and the many narrow stretches of pavement on St Johns Road, have made a real difference to those trying to access the shops and businesses and move across and around the area more safely.



- ▶ **Improve on existing Spaces for People** existing provision and communications – We recognise the report makes it clear that any measures retained will continue to be monitored and modified as feedback comes in, as they have been over the last year or so, and hearing and responding to the challenges facing users with limited mobility and ensuring clear access for emergency services is imperative.
- ▶ We additionally wish to see better information communications on planned installations, the reasons for them and, their progress in installation, better displayed on the Council websites – frequently much of the concern and anxiety over what has been put in place stems from a genuine misunderstanding of what, how and why an installation has appeared. (Better installation programming on the ground could help too). If this could be resolved by providing a fuller detail of all the interventions in a dedicated space online, we believe much of the doubt and negative speculation on social media and elsewhere, which feeds on confusion, could be nipped in the bud.
- ▶ **Extend** Spaces for people interventions to join up and properly develop a working active travel network across the city. Currently there are significant gaps between the locally placed measures and we would like to see a more holistic and joined up approach to linking all these measures across communities – existing measures are often separate interventions – linking them together to bring a far more functional network of infrastructure would be to everyone's benefit.

...

It seems pertinent at this point to remind the Committee of the considerable pressure mounting in West Edinburgh of the 12,000 or so new homes being planned to be built across the area over the next 10 or so years, which will of course bring huge pressures to the local infrastructure, particularly if sufficient active travel and public transport service support to reduce local car journeys is not in place as these developments are populated with new residents.

We would dearly like to see the city's major west to east artery of the A8 receive a separated cycle Lane like (or improved upon) those installed to Comiston Road and Lanark Road. Cycle routes in the city urgently need to be direct, visible and easy to navigate. The "quiet routes" in West Edinburgh are simply not fit for daily commutes or indeed regular A-B cycle travel, being highly shared spaces with so many other users leading, inevitably, to frequent conflict.

...

To summarise

We know each and every political party represented here has clear support for active travel as key parts of your 2021 manifestos – these measures, whilst not perfect, are a key part of those pledges which your parties have already made to the voting public. The Spaces for People programme effectively complements a large range of local and national policy objectives such as the Scottish Government and CEC striving for 20 minute Neighbourhoods, Net Zero 2030 commitments, the CEC City Mobility Plan which this committee approved in February, the Scottish Government sustainable transport Hierarchy, Scottish Government and CEC policy to tackle transport poverty and social inequalities and a range of national public health and environmental policy objectives.

Voting for this report is not simply the right thing to do – it is a vote in line with your party manifesto promises.



Please be minded to be bold and support the motion to approve the SfP Retention report before you, with a view to ...

Retain the measures brought in under Spaces for People, giving the opportunity to **Improve and modify** and **to Extend** the measures across our the city, that it might flourish as we progress out of the pandemic, albeit to face our global Climate Emergency combined and a societal inactivity epidemic and the clear pressures both of these enormous challenges will bring to bear on our health and other crucial services in coming months and years.

Thank you – lets make this a momentous **Clean Air Day!**

Chris Young

Low Traffic Corstorphine