



ABERDEEN CYCLE FORUM **RESPONSE TO UNION STREET PROJECT CONSULTATION**

1. General comments

The Aberdeen Cycle Forum believes that a better cycling environment in the centre of the city will result from a combination of traffic restraint and improved cycling facilities. Increased levels of cycling, in turn, will make a positive contribution to improved air quality and tackling congestion, as well as helping with wider public policy targets on public health. Cycling as a mode of transport should be integral to any transport planning, most especially within the city.

It is extremely disappointing, therefore, that cycling does not merit a single mention in the consultation proposals. Indeed, there is no evidence that the impact on cycling has been considered at any stage in the thinking behind the proposals.

The pedestrianisation of a section of Union Street is a golden opportunity to plan for reduced traffic levels in the city centre. With a lead-in of several years, planning to enhance the cycling and walking environment, to improve public transport, and to change the expectations of car drivers regarding access to the core of the city centre could all be undertaken. Instead, the proposals centre on a significant increase in road capacity, much of which is inherently cycle-unfriendly and which, in turn, will only serve to generate more traffic. The Forum's overall view is that this is out of date transport planning that does not meet the modern concern to promote more active and sustainable modes of travel.

Whilst the Forum is generally supportive of the specific proposal to pedestrianise a section of Union Street, and accepts that some traffic management and local road improvement may well be needed in the light of this proposal and the advent of Union Square, we believe the generality of the road building proposals are misconceived. We believe that these proposals threaten a reduction in cycling amenity in the city when the urgent need is to improve the cycling environment.

2. Specific comments

2.1 Pedestrianisation of part of Union Street

Union Street currently is a popular linear route for cyclists, especially commuting cyclists. Cycling and walking as active modes of transport need to be encouraged if air quality improvement targets are to be achieved and for there to be a less polluted

city core. We believe that there is no need for the pedestrianisation proposal to result in a loss of amenity to cyclists and that cycle access through the pedestrianised area should be ensured. There are plenty of models for this elsewhere in the UK and on the continent. Indeed, Union Street is excellently placed to accommodate both, given its greater width than a typical high street. Key to this is good design which will minimise any potential conflict between pedestrians and cyclists. We would therefore urge the city council to commit itself in principle, and at the earliest stage, to cycle access through the pedestrianised area.

We support any associated bus priority measures on the understanding that these will be 'Bus and Cycle and Taxi Only' sections. We are disappointed that cycles have been omitted from the proposals for such measures, given the long-standing experience of combined bus and cycle lanes in the city. We trust that cycle access to these sections will be confirmed in future documentation.

We believe that the rest of Union Street should not be ignored in the quest for improving the city centre environment. The non-pedestrianised sections of Union Street should be subject to an enforced 20mph speed limit and this should be considered as integral to the proposals. This will benefit both cyclists and pedestrians/shoppers.

2.2 The road infrastructure and traffic management proposals

The Cycle Forum is sceptical about the case being made for significant increases in road capacity. There is plenty of evidence that transport modelling overestimates the likely congestion levels (see enclosed paper). Such models have no capacity to take account of behaviour change on the part of drivers who find, as a consequence of the traffic restriction that pedestrianisation represents, that taking the car is marginally less attractive now than it was before. They also do not model outcomes on the basis of active policy choices to restrain traffic demand and promote sustainable transport modes. They offer a seemingly deterministic view of the future when in actuality there are key choices to be made.

In particular, the Cycle Forum is very concerned about the proposed road infrastructure projects - the new urban dual carriageways in the Berryden corridor and in the College Street corridor, and the proposed gyratory at the southern end of South College Street. These road schemes are inherently cycle *unfriendly*. They represent unattractive, and potentially dangerous, cycling environments. As such, the Cycle Forum believes they represent a significant backward step in cycling amenity.

Likewise, we are also concerned at the proposals for a new roundabout, or gyratory, at the Westburn Road/Hutcheon Street junction. Such junction arrangements are acknowledged as posing greater risks to cyclists and we are therefore concerned that such measures are being considered. A roundabout/gyratory at this junction, coupled with an even busier roundabout at Skene Square would pose a significant barrier to safe cycle travel along an east-west axis north of the city centre.

An emerging concern is the impact of these proposals on access between Torry and the city centre. The cycling and walking environment is already poor. The gyratory

proposal at the end of South College Street, together with increased traffic volumes on Market Street, will make the active travel options even worse. Given the relative proximity of Torry to the employment and amenities in the city centre, it is our view that developing attractive cycling and walking links should be a key priority. The current proposals should have this as a key aim.

The Cycle Forum accepts that there will need to be junction improvements and traffic management schemes at various points in the road network, as a consequence of the pedestrianisation scheme and the Union Square development. These should offer an opportunity to improve the cycling environment and we hope such opportunities are taken. For example, existing roundabouts could be replaced with traffic light systems and traffic management reviews should include a consideration of cycle lanes and other cycle measures. Indeed, there are many options for creating cycle-friendly junctions that meet the requirements of increased traffic flows and meet the needs of cyclists as well. We would stress that any proposed measures will require full consultation with cyclists, via the Cycle Forum.

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