

Pedal on Parliament 2017 - Aberdeen

How was it for you?

This was Aberdeen's third PoP ride and having been the first city outside Edinburgh to adopt it, we were pleased to see more contagion this year with rides also happening in Glasgow and Inverness.

This year we had changed the route from the very visible ride down Union St to something that we hoped would be more family-friendly. And yes a few families with kids did come along this year, but there is no escaping the fact that it is practically impossible to devise a 'safe' route - one suitable for novices - entering the city centre without having some tricky junctions to negotiate. Road closures would be the other option but brings a whole other level of complexity to organising the ride.

This year we did start out by asking both Aberdeen City Council and the Police if they could help manage the traffic at the busy roundabout (Beach Boulevard / Commerce St) for just a few minutes to help us cross safely. The answer unfortunately was a resounding 'No' unless we were to apply for a Temporary Traffic Restriction Order (TTRO) at a cost of £800. So for each of the estimated 100 riders we were expecting (based on last year) that would amount to a charge of £8 each to safely cross one roundabout! Even if ACF had that money (and we don't) it would have been extortionate and immoral to pay that. Of course Edinburgh and Glasgow PoP rides do have road closures and their Councils are kind enough to waive the cost of the TTROs. For a while we thought we might be able to pull that off – but even getting hold of someone in ACC to ask the question is a major struggle and we ran out of time and energy. (If you are an ACF regular you will be aware that our dealings with ACC are often like wading through treacle).

As it turned out, the roundabout was one obstacle but at least there was a pedestrian crossing for those with kids to use as an alternative. Just as tricky were the 2 other traffic-light junctions we had to cross. Traffic coming from behind and wanting to turn left when there is a large group of cyclists wanting to continue straight ahead was a conflict waiting to happen and neither the on-road 'advisory' cycle lane or the advance stop box were much help. This ably

demonstrated what we already knew: that a white line painted on the road doesn't offer a cyclist much protection from an impatient driver wielding a two-tonne metal box.

Joining the road off the shared use path along the beach-front was another potentially difficult point in the ride that we had thought about in advance – and it didn't prove easy in practice either. Which just goes to show that cycling infrastructure is only really helpful if it actually joins up. Oh, and is the beach esplanade really a shared use path? We're told it is, and it is shown as such on the cycle map which we jointly produce with the Council. So why are there no signs or markings to tell anyone that it is a shared use path? If you have some time to spare and don't mind waiting a few months for an answer, you could always try asking the Council

Meeting us at Castlegate this year was current leader of Aberdeen City Council, Cllr Jenny Laing and her colleague Cllr Willie Young. It was good that they came and took time to engage with some of those who had ridden, and to listen to our campaign messages. Time will tell if any of it has sunk in, and whether anything changes in our often tricky relationship with the Council. It was disappointing that not a single Councillor or candidate from the SNP, Liberal Democrats, Conservatives or Greens managed to turn up. Or maybe they did and I just missed them (to be fair we did have apologies from Cllr Iain Yuill and Cllr Ross Grant). With elections imminent perhaps they were all too busy stuffing pointless campaign leaflets through city letterboxes, and perhaps despite the national *We Walk, We Cycle We Vote* campaign they momentarily forgot that cyclists are voters too! Perhaps they also didn't realise that we aren't just about bikes: we are about air quality, reducing congestion, urban regeneration and live-able city centres, climate change, health and active lifestyles. Cycling can tick an awful lot of boxes.

It's disappointing too that Aberdeen seems to be lagging pretty badly in terms of the number of people who will turn out for the ride. OK, so Edinburgh is a much bigger city but they get THOUSANDS of participants whereas we struggle to get even one hundred, so pro rata our representation is only a small fraction of what Edinburgh PoP manages.

So how did we do? How could a PoP ride in Aberdeen be done better? We'd love to hear your thoughts about the 2 routes we've tried so far and if you think there is something else we could do that would work better. A Sunday ride instead of Saturday? Should we try for a 'closed roads' ride? Any ideas are welcome, (send them to sec@aberdeencycleforum.org.uk) but please remember that the core membership of ACF (those who turn up regularly at monthly meetings and do the hard work of lobbying, campaigning, organising etc) is only a handful of people, so as well as ideas we could really use your help.

But even if you can't spare the time to become an active campaigner, keep your eyes open in April 2018 when we hope PoP Aberdeen #4 will be back, bigger and better. Meantime special thanks to the ACF PoP sub-group who did all the hard work this year. They were Henri de Ruiten, Pamela Rackow and Micheal de Barra. It wouldn't have happened without them.

