



Aberdeen Cycle Forum Response to Westhill to Aberdeen Cycle Route feasibility study July 2006

The Aberdeen Cycle Forum would like to thank Aberdeen City Council for this opportunity to comment on FaberMaunsell's feasibility study regarding the options for improved cycle route provision between Westhill, Kingswells & Aberdeen.

1. Principles

This route represents one of the main commuter corridors to and from Aberdeen city but, in terms of cycle commuting, has some of the biggest problems with current cycling infrastructure. Improving this route would therefore yield some real benefits in the short and long term both for current and for new cyclists.

Aberdeen Cycle Forum has set out criteria for **Quality Commuter Cycle Routes** in its submission to NESTRANS (May 2006). These **criteria are fundamental** to set the context of our response to the FaberMaunsell feasibility study on the Westhill to Aberdeen route. ***In our view the options outlined within the feasibility study fall short of these aims, and in some cases are potentially dangerous*** (see further details in Section 3). Consequently the criteria are reiterated and further background information is given below.

At present, there are few safe and direct commuter cycle routes between the growing settlements around Aberdeen and the city and its main areas of employment. As a consequence, cycle commuting rates are low and existing cycle commuters have to contend with unsatisfactory and unsafe conditions. The Cycle Forum receives regular complaints about the poor cycle commuting options both from current cyclists and from commuters that would like to cycle but are discouraged; a clear latent demand exists for utility cycling. Strategic investment in quality cycle routes within the main commuting corridors will:

- encourage more cycle commuting.
- fit with the intention to provide alternative transport choices to encourage a shift away from car commuting
- integrate with travel awareness and travel planning strategies
- open up options for more safe and flexible cycle journeys as the city cycle network develops
- as a valuable spin off, open up more local leisure cycling opportunities by providing connecting links.

What is a Quality Commuter Cycle Route?

Commuter cycle routes follow the major commuter corridors used by all forms of road transport and therefore present unique challenges. Roads tend to be busy, are often dual carriageways, with the adjacent networks of minor roads equally busy and probably more dangerous to use at times of peak traffic flow. As we demonstrate below, most attempts at creating cycle routes along these corridors fall short of the mark in providing infrastructure that is safe, useful and desirable to the commuter cyclist. Consequently, we feel that whilst existing road infrastructure can be improved to facilitate cycle use, in

many of these corridors the routes will need to be, at least in part, completely segregated. Key criteria are:

- Route continuity – the cycle route must be as continuous as possible, without ‘cyclist dismount’ signs and barriers that force dismounting, or any other features that significantly slow the cyclist’s progress.
- Route surfaces should be of good quality, allowing bikes of all types to use them (road and mountain bikes). They should be well drained, well lit and well maintained (including regular sweeping).
- Off-road cycle route entrance and exit points must be designed to ensure safe re-integration with the road infrastructure. Exit / entrance points can be the weakest link in a cycle route, potentially negating any safety and journey time gains made.
- Commuter cyclists need routes that link as directly as possible to their destinations; detours and delays will deter use. Cycle routes should be convenient to use and avoid complicated routing.
- Ideally, cycle routes should enable the commuter to match or better the journey times they would achieve using the road system alone.

It is of utmost importance that the cycle routes attract existing and new cyclists to use them, and to keep using them.

2. Existing infrastructure for cyclists between Westhill and Aberdeen

Westhill and Kingswells commuter suburbs are within cycling distance of Aberdeen city centre and have significant and growing populations. In addition many people commute to business and industry at Westhill from Aberdeen. Currently there is no practical, safe or efficient route for commuting by bicycle. These settlements are linked by a single road corridor, which includes the fast dual carriageway (A944), upon which there has been several vehicle-bicycle accidents and near misses, previously reported in local press. There are no back-road alternatives. Such road infrastructure coupled with poor commuter driving and traffic volumes in peak hours is off putting for experienced cyclists and actively discourages greater cycle use, either for leisure or cycle commuting.

The current cycle infrastructure/route is highly discontinuous, contains numerous obstructions and is poorly maintained, forcing cyclists to dismount regularly, lose priority at side junctions and merge into flowing traffic with no assistance. In short it is poorly designed with no overall strategy or objective. Well developed dirt tracks along side the A944 demonstrate the demand and that the current provision is inadequate. The continued use of the road system, highlighted by reported accidents, indicate that the current piecemeal provision is so ineffectual that some cyclists would rather use the road.

A quality commuter cycle route would provide a real choice (which these large communities lack) between cycling and using motorised forms of transport. It would also integrate with the Kingswells park and ride facility.

3. Comments on FaberMaunsell route options

The Aberdeen Cycle Forum received comments about the FaberMaunsell study from cyclists that either live or cycle in this area. Although there were a number of different preferences expressed about the route choice, it was clear that one mile of a quality cycle route would be far more appreciated than many miles of cycle provision that had been poorly designed, built or maintained.

3.1 Westhill to Kingswells section

Current cycle path & WK R5

The Aberdeen Cycle Forum is strongly against the option of improving the existing route between Westhill and Kingswells, for the following reasons:

- These options follow the A944 on the North and South side of the road respectively between the Kingswells P&R and Westhill. The latter has to cross the roundabout at the junction with the B9119. The proposal offers limited aid (traffic controls ect) to enable cyclist to negotiate the most dangerous aspect of this route: the roundabout.
- These routes cross, and lose priority at, numerous side roads and access driveways. In particular the minor road junctions either side of the East Kingsford buildings can be busy at peak times (which are important times for cycle commuter usage).
- In addition the frequent loss of priority at junctions slows cyclists' progress. Both of these routes suffer this same issue, which prevent them from being considered as quality commuter cycle routes.

Furthermore:

- Close proximity of fast traffic to a two way cycle lane is not desirable.
- The suggestion that widening the route and introducing a segregation strip is sufficient to improve protection (section 6.15, para 2), offers no protection against an out of control vehicle travelling at speed.
- The current route is presently poorly maintained (i.e. suffers from broken glass and accident debris and is not adequately gritted in Winter), and has obstructions (particularly at the Five Mile Garage where cyclists are forced to dismount).

Crossing these side roads and negotiating the roundabout from an off-road cycle lane is **more dangerous** than crossing them on the road, as the cyclist has no designated priority, lacks any right of way and may be approaching these junctions/roundabout in unexpected directions from the motorists perspective. In short the cyclist are abandoned at the point of greatest need!

Suggestion: Although we in no way support this option, if it is taken forward then during 'peak time signal operation' on the roundabout an extra phase should be inserted into the traffic control sequence, bring all road traffic to a halt and giving priority to the cycle route. Out-with of peak hours at the roundabout, due to the fast nature of the road/traffic, the traffic signals could be activated by a push button control on the cycle

way (preferably in advance of the junction so that the cyclist does not have to stop or dismount). This should stop all traffic entering and leaving the roundabout, as motorists exiting the roundabout may not be anticipating a toucan crossing and be accelerating towards their exit, the toucan and the unfortunate cyclist. I.e. a toucan alone may/do not provide enough protection, when traffic is flowing at speed.

Potential new cycle routes Westhill to Kingswells

Route WK R18/19

Agree with feasibility study too circuitous to be of use, not a direct quality route.

WK R8, R7 and R6

Of these options Aberdeen Cycle Forum cautiously welcomes the WK R8 option, with suggested modifications (see below), for the following reasons:

- This route directly accesses a large area of suburban housing on the SE side of Westhill, thus providing the start of a quality door-to-door approach.
- The route is kept clear of the fast dual carriageway, providing significant segregation without impractical diversions. It thus meets the criteria of a direct commuting route.
- It is predominantly on-road (see suggestions) removing the undesirable two-way cycle lane approach and has reduced side road issues.
- The option, with new infrastructure, to pass behind the Five Mile Petrol Station, removes a current bottleneck and obstruction/barrier on the current route. This suggestion is warmly received.

Suggestions for improvement:

- *From Westhill travelling towards Aberdeen the first mile and a half of road services a relative limited number of dwellings. This road could be redesignated 'for access only', possibly with traffic calming and narrowing at entrances to reinforce the designation and a wide on-road mandatory cycle lane on each side (possibly turning it into almost single-track for vehicle use) which would deter 'rat-running'. This would decrease traffic, improve the cycling environment and possibly be favourable with local residents.*
- *As suggested in the feasibility study the current unmade track could be improved to cycle grade. Re-joining the road at its termination is at a bend with poor visibility for the cyclist, consequently a parallel new segregated cycle route could be provided until the new section behind Five Mile garage is reached. Crossing of the side road at this point could be controlled by a toucan.*

Influence of the proposed AWPR

At this time the development of the AWPR awaits completion of the planning process, with planning approval outstanding and strong contest ongoing. The AWPR route proposals cross the A944 at the East Kingsford buildings and plans are presently being developed for a large-scale interchange at this point. Therefore:

- Development of the Westhill to Aberdeen cycle route should not be constrained by the possibility of a development that has yet to occur. The best solution should be chosen for a quality cycle route on the basis of the current situation.

- Suggestions within the FaberMaunsell report that certain traffic concerns along the current route will diminish with the development of AWPR are therefore entirely speculative and shouldn't influence design process.
- In the event of the AWPR being constructed, (along the currently preferred route complete with interchange), the Westhill-Aberdeen Cycle Route with the potential for being a major transport connection between three major communities (Westhill, Kingswells & Aberdeen) **warrants its own infrastructure** in the form of a bridge or underpass to cross the AWPR.
- The lack of such a dedicated crossing would be counter to all 'quality cycle route' criteria, namely convenient, continuous, unhindered and safe progress.
- Gyratory road systems, such as that proposed for this junction in the event of the AWPR are extremely difficult for cyclists to negotiate on the road and are difficult to plan cycle infrastructure within/around, resulting in a potential dangerous interaction between cyclists and vehicular traffic. Any cycle route within such a system is likely to fall short of a 'quality' provision.

3.2 Kingswells to Hazelhead section – R4 & R6

The Aberdeen Cycle Forum has **strong reservations** about this proposal as it currently stands, for the following reasons:

- The cycle routes negotiation of A944 roundabout junction with Skene Road (B9119) has similar concerns as that of the Kingswells roundabout. Furthermore in the current absence of traffic controls vehicles approach, and negotiate this roundabout at speed, and there is an embankment hindering visibility.

Suggestion: Traffic control similar to that proposed for the Kingswells roundabout would be required. In this case due to the fast speed of vehicular traffic and the problems of visibility, traffic lights would have to be situated some distance back from the roundabout on all approaches, as well as a toucan at the cycle crossing itself. The Aberdeen Cycle Forum considers quality cycle provision at this high-speed roundabout to be paramount to prevent potential accident. Island refuges provide little security against speeding traffic and therefore cyclists must be able to cross all carriageways quickly and safely. To prevent disruption to cycle progress and to aid safety allowing the roundabout to be clear of traffic 'advanced' push button activation should be considered.

- Clearly from a 'quality cycle route' perspective it would be preferable if the off-road/on-pavement provision along Skene Road was a dedicated (i.e. no pedestrian) cycle way. However, given that few pedestrians use this stretch of path, provided that there is sufficient path width to allow safe passing (3m) a dual-use path would be acceptable. If the available road space allows, continuous on-road cycle lanes in both directions of travel would also be satisfactory. Whatever option is chosen careful consideration should be given to how West bound cyclists may cross to the northerly off-road provision if developed.
- It was felt that routes should allow progress to the South through Hazelhead and West into Aberdeen i.e. allowing better access to more of the city.
- Generally two-way cycle routes on one side of a road are undesirable and in this case will not aid cyclists who wish to travel part way on this route before turning

South. Note: that where off-road provision is provided within view of the road, driver behaviour to cyclists remaining on the carriageway is increased aggression and deliberate endangerment (as has been experienced with the introduction of the airport cycle facility).

- Reviewers felt if the on-pavement scheme was pursued a minimum width of 3 meters is required to allow safe and uninterrupted progress around pedestrians. The route surface should be of a high quality, adequately drained and maintained, including regular sweeping.
- Careful design should allow re-integration of cyclist with the road at the termination of the route, without the cyclist losing priority i.e. unhindered progress.
- Street lighting is paramount on this section of dual use two-way on-pavement scheme, to prevent cyclists being blinded by oncoming traffic (which will be on the nearside, closer, and with headlamps angled towards the cyclist), increase pedestrian visibility (reducing the risk of pedestrian-cycle collision) and remove motorist confusion. Motorist confusion at approaching bright cycle lights on the opposite side to that they expect (i.e. their left side) has led to driver error resulting in cyclist fatalities on similar infrastructure. Lighting would also increase personal security.

Note: A similar problem would occur along the Westhill to Kingswell section if the current cycle route were upgraded, thus street lighting should also be provided there.

KA R1/R5

Aberdeen Cycle Forum has issues with this route and the assessment of its quality, namely along the Lang Stracht:

- West-wards from the 30mph zone (i.e. beyond the last set of traffic lights) the route is not of good quality being only on one-side of the road, frequently covered with debris, crossed by and loses priority at numerous side roads and driveways. At times it is an example of how cyclists can lose right of way, suffer discontinuous progress and be placed at a disadvantage by infrastructure supposed to help them!
- Problems exist with integration of Westbound cycle traffic at the Roundabout, if a single cycle way on the North of the A944 is provided.

The Forum believes that routes along the Lang Stracht, Skene Road and South via Hazlehead should all be considered. Commuter cyclists will have varying destinations throughout the city, and a single route will not serve their need.

Closing remark:

This route represents a marvellous opportunity for a quality cycle route linking major settlements, let it not be lost due to substandard design and inadequate funding.