



30 June 2024

Tim Steiner, Jacobs

By email: [Tim.Steiner@jacobs.com](mailto:Tim.Steiner@jacobs.com)

Dear Tim,

### **Regional Active Travel Network**

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to the draft RATN. We are also grateful for the efforts made to engage with our group directly, at our meetings in November 2023 and May 2024.

ACF is an established cycle campaign and advocacy group formed in 2003. Although we cannot claim to represent all cyclists, we have approximately 600 members. Our aims, as set out in our constitution, are noted at the foot of this letter.<sup>[1]</sup>

Although we sometimes comment on issues within Aberdeenshire, most of our focus tends to be on Aberdeen City, or on connections to communities within reasonable commuting distance of Aberdeen (for example Portlethen, Newtonhill, Westhill, Ellon).

Several of our members will have responded individually to the consultation and made point-specific comments using the GIS tool you have made available. In this letter we therefore limit ourselves to mostly general points.

We broadly agree with the stated reasons as to why a network plan is being developed, and its aims.

We note the seven types of provision and agree with most of the distinctions and treatments proposed. However;

**Primary mixed traffic streets** (shown pink on plan): we do not necessarily agree with this category. We note it is currently proposed for some key streets in Aberdeen including Holburn St, King St, and the Westburn-Lang Stracht corridor. The descriptor for this category of route includes "*measures are in place to slow down and reduce the*

*amount of motor traffic*". We find it difficult to imagine that motor traffic could ever be slowed and/or reduced to a point where it would be safe and attractive to cycle on the carriageway, on these key routes. The descriptor also says that this approach may be used on "*Important bus routes in built-up areas where there is not enough space for both bus lanes and cycle tracks*".

We feel that the unstated implication is that cyclists are expected to use alternate routes for these key corridors: for example Hardgate as broadly parallel to Holburn St, or Golf Rd as an alternative to King St. We don't think this is a satisfactory approach as a parallel route will not always serve the same destinations – for example a route via Golf Rd would not properly serve the University which is one of the key trip generators on King St. This approach therefore fails to comply with the sustainable travel hierarchy, and with one of the **core principles** of Cycling by Design (2021) "*directness*", (see p19). The preamble included in the consultation claims that the RATN is being developed in line with both the sustainable travel hierarchy and Cycling by Design, although in this aspect it would seem that is not correct.

**Quiet roads:** Aberdeenshire has fantastic potential for recreational cycling. This may sometimes be seen as less of a priority than A to B travel for work or other purposes. However recreational cycling has significant benefits to health (physical and mental) and also economic benefits by stimulating tourism. We are aware that other local authorities, such as Perth & Kinross, have been better at recognising this and introducing a network of reduced-speed rural roads. We support a similar approach being used in Aberdeenshire (and rural roads within the city boundaries; Countesswells-Blacktop Rd and Whitestripes Rd would be two examples). We note that the descriptor for this category includes "speed limits are reduced to 30mph or lower". Some thought should be given to whether this is achievable in practice i.e. what level of driver compliance would be likely were 30mph (or lower) speed limits introduced across a wide number of minor rural roads. We note that in Perth & Kinross, a 40mph limit has been used in their approach. Although 30mph is of course safer and preferable for cyclists in theory, that is only the case if the limit is complied with.

We think there is probably significantly more scope for designated quiet roads than currently shown and hope that other suggestions will come from the current consultation.

## **Prioritising delivery**

We broadly agree with the description of how delivery could be prioritised. However we also note that in the short term the focus will be on delivery of schemes currently in development. Some current or recent schemes however (Craigshaw Drive, South Harbour link road) have been opportunistic or ad hoc and offer relatively little benefit in terms of network development. As with the South Harbour link road, Berryden corridor is another example of what is essentially a road-building scheme with active travel provision only as an adjunct. At the same time, blatant gaps in the network (the Bridge of Dee[2] bottleneck for example, or the long-awaited Murcar to Blackdog scheme) are missing or are so slow in being delivered that the credibility of any network plan

becomes undermined. If resources (whether financial or technical) continue to be absorbed by road-building schemes (with or without active travel adjuncts) then proper development of an active travel network will be delayed or slowed unacceptably.

Some priority should be considered for various 'missing links' where cyclists are using 'quiet roads' but then are forced to join a more major road in order to reach the next section of quiet road. Examples would be the B9119 at Cairnie-Garlogie, the A93 east of Aboyne, or the A93 between Banchory and Crathes. In a similar vein there are some short sections of former NCN1 where there is a critical lack of infrastructure over a relatively short distance to fulfil a missing link e.g. the A92 for approx. 500m west of the Dunnottar turn-off. Providing links like these offers the potential for quick wins at relatively low cost.

### **Supporting measures**

As covered in your accompanying survey, there is definite scope for supporting measures such as route signposting, and measures to support behaviour change, so that people new to cycling are encouraged - whether for commuting journeys or travel to school for example.

### **Continuous development**

Once a RATN is developed, we feel it will be important to review it regularly and provide a means of collecting feedback from users.

### **Pace of delivery**

We would also highlight Key Principle No10 from Cycling by Design: that cycle infrastructure can be delivered quickly and cheaply by trialling schemes. We note other cities such as Dundee and Edinburgh have built on the temporary schemes installed during the covid pandemic (Spaces for People) to provide quick solutions. It is unfortunate that Aberdeen has no legacy of cycle routes from Spaces for People to build on, but nevertheless we think cycle infrastructure could be trialled in a way that is much less expensive than the fully engineered construction recently used in Craigshaw Drive for example (reported as £1.62M for a route of only 600 metres).

Without adopting some means of speeding up delivery, such as we have suggested above, it is likely that the development of the network will be too slow and too late to meaningfully contribute to the solutions which are needed to the current crises of climate change, air quality and poor health – *and will therefore fail to meet its stated aims*. We have – in recent years – contributed to numerous 'corridor studies' but have yet to see any actual improvements delivered from these – despite the fact that some of them date back as far as 2015. Similarly, the Aberdeen City Centre Masterplan, unanimously adopted by Aberdeen City Council in 2015, and which promised "a cycling city" has yet to deliver any tangible improvement with the sole exception of Broad St. This emphasises the point that the current processes of development and delivery are ineffectual and seemingly not capable of delivering the meaningful improvements to active travel that are so badly needed.

We hope that the RATN can be used as a tool to change the current processes, rather than just being another aspect of them.

Yours sincerely,

Gavin Clark

Chair - Aberdeen Cycle Forum

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[1] A) To encourage cycling and to promote the benefits of cycling to the individual and the wider community B) To advocate for a safer cycling environment and improved cycle facilities in Aberdeen. C) To campaign for cycling to be an integral part of planning and transport strategies and practice, in order to provide the widest possible access to cycling as a healthy and efficient means of travel for work and leisure.

[2] Currently shown as a 'primary street' although space constraints mean that not even an acceptable standard of footway is provided at present