



29 October 2024

AECOM by email - Charlie Fuller, Joanna Duck

Dear Sirs,

Aberdeen to Laurencekirk Corridor Study

We are writing in response to your current consultation and have chosen to respond by letter rather than by giving answers to pro-forma questions in the on-line questionnaire.

About us

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. The majority of our focus is on Aberdeen city however we also take an interest in Aberdeenshire, particularly connections between fringe communities and the city, as here. Our aims, as set out in our constitution, are noted at the foot of this page.¹

We will generally only comment on active travel measures, although may comment on other options where there are issues of significance to active travel.

General

Aberdeen to Stonehaven is a key corridor serving the city from the south, and current active travel provision is poor or very poor. Improvement is long overdue and urgently required. All of the communities within the corridor (Muchalls, Newtonhill, Chapleton, Portlithen, Cove) are within a distance where active travel between them and the destinations at either end (Aberdeen and Stonehaven) is feasible if proper infrastructure was made available. Hence there

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.

is huge potential for new infrastructure to be well used provided it is properly designed and located.

Overall we are disappointed with several aspects of the options presented. We realise that implementing high quality active travel infrastructure in a relatively busy corridor is not easy, but nevertheless we feel that the solutions presented are not optimal, and in some cases they are not fit for purpose.

As a minimum, new active travel infrastructure should comply with Transport Scotland's Cycling by Design (2021). Even without having seen detailed designs, we feel that the route proposals cannot comply with a number of the core design principles such as **directness, safety, coherence** and **attractiveness**.

We would suggest that an obvious key criteria for active travel infrastructure is to provide safe routes to school. In this instance, secondary school pupils from communities such as Newtonhill and Muchalls should have a safe, attractive and convenient route to travel to and from Portlethen Academy. We don't consider that any of the options presented fulfil that need. The same could be said of pupils from Cove gaining access to Lochside Academy. This is perhaps to a degree inevitable if the focus of the study is taken as a *corridor* rather than a *network*. We note the acknowledgement of the parallel Network Review currently underway.

Active Travel

From Stonehaven northward, we reluctantly accept that it probably makes sense for new infrastructure to follow the route of the A92. That is not ideal but geography probably may make an alternative routing impractical. To make the route as appealing as possible, given the constraints of an adjacent high-speed and busy road, the maximum practical buffer should be provided.

From Muchalls northward, alternatives are proposed which are either to continue with the A92 alignment, or to follow a 'Quiet Routes' alternative. We don't think that these are comparable alternatives and should be considered as 'one or the other'. Aspects of both would be needed in order to provide a route or *routes* which meet the needs of all users. The consultation does acknowledge that one or other route would be unlikely to meet the needs of different types of user. In which case we don't understand why they are presented as a one-or-other choice. Your response questionnaire (which we have chosen not to use) is particularly unhelpful in this regard, forcing respondents to choose one option only.

We agree that the proposed routing through Muchalls and north to Newtonhill appears sensible, with necessary re-surfacing on the track between the two villages.

In some places the 'Quiet Routes' option remains very convoluted and indirect, Newtonhill to Portlethen being the most obvious example. **Cycling by Design** defines any route requiring more than 20% deviation as providing a 'low level of service'. Although we have not measured it precisely, we suspect the deviation proposed for this section is closer to 100%. We feel that a more direct route needs to be found, even if that means additional land acquisition. We note that 2 uncontrolled crossings of the A92 (a busy dual-carriageway with 70mph speed limit) are proposed to provide a connection to Cammachmore, which we cannot accept as competent in terms of active travel provision. Use of a section of 'A92 aligned' route here is unlikely to be viewed as safe or attractive for school pupils travelling between Newtonhill and Portlethen. For

connection to Cammachmore, we understand there is already one pedestrian underpass crossing the A92 from Newtonhill so would suggest that upgrading of that might be considered, and another created if necessary.

The route through Portlethen is also indirect – again significantly more than 20% deviation. A shorter routing via Oak Drive and Downies Drive might be preferred? We think levels of traffic on Bruntland Road do not make it attractive for on-road cycle provision, even with traffic calming.

In North/new Portlethen, the route is shown as an existing shared-use, without target notes suggesting any improvements required. The existing route is incomplete, on the west side the route ends shortly after Schoolhill Drive. At the north end (twin roundabouts) no suggestion is given as to how cyclists would negotiate these junctions and the underpass in a safe, convenient and efficient manner.

Although it may be beyond the scope of the current exercise, it should be recognised that the routing of NCN1 in this corridor (i.e. between Aberdeen and Stonehaven) is very convoluted and indirect. Rather than identifying points at where the options coincide with the existing NCN1, a greater ambition would be to provide a high quality route which NCN1 could follow in future.

Marywell to Wellington Road

Again we note that the route proposed via Old Stonehaven Rd is not the most direct. Adjacent to the A956, we are not clear if what is intended is uni-directional or bi-directional? As with a route adjacent to the A92, cycling (or walking) in close proximity to a busy dual carriageway is unlikely to be appealing or to feel particularly safe, and so may attract a limited number of users. Noting our comments above about access to Lochside Academy, such a routing clearly does not help with that need.

Our comments on bus and rail measures

- Lack of capacity to carry bikes on trains and buses is currently a failing which severely limits and undermines integrated travel. Any new infrastructure should be designed to facilitate the carrying of bikes so far as possible.
- The travel hub includes a huge amount of car parking. Although car hire/share places are welcome, a provision of 1% of the total seems very low. Similarly, the provision of 16 cycle parking stands vs 400 car parking spaces does not reflect the potential for short home-to-station journeys to easily be done by bike.
- Notably, Aberdeen's other attempts at Park & Ride (Kingswells, Craibstone) have failed to operate at anything like capacity and must be considered to have failed as a whole, at least thus far. How will this scheme succeed when other attempts have failed?
- We note the options for a new rail station in Newtonhill and the proposal to provide car parking under one option, making use space currently given over to a public park and playground. We could not support the loss of local greenspace for car parking and doubt that this would be popular with local residents, indeed it would risk generating significant additional traffic within Newtonhill itself. Given that Newtonhill is itself a relatively compact community, the railway station should be within easy walking or cycling distance for most users.

- The bus measures outlined for Wellington Road do not indicate whether they have been designed to take account of any future active travel provision. It should be obvious that a segregated cycle path is badly needed on Wellington Road and particularly at the northern end between Abbotswell Rd and the Queen Elizabeth bridge. Although we generally support improved bus measures as a way of reducing car traffic, we cannot do so to the exclusion or detriment of active travel measures, all in line with the widely accepted *sustainable travel hierarchy*.

Our comments on this consultation

- As noted above we do not agree with the presentation of the active travel options as a one-or-the-other choice, this risks distorting the results of the consultation.
- The on-line response questionnaire presents questions which we think are limiting and leading.
- Other than the on-line questionnaire, no alternative means of submitting comments, or even a contact address has been provided.
- Given the scope of the consultation and the importance of the outcomes both to the people who live in the corridor and to the residents of Aberdeen, we think that only two drop-in events was inadequate.
- Unlike other exercises of this kind, there was no direct engagement with our group prior to or during the consultation, and we can only guess whether other community groups (whether communities of interest or of locality) have been engaged with.

We hope you find these comments useful.

Yours faithfully,

Gavin Clark

Chair, Aberdeen Cycle Forum