



18 August 2024

Aberdeen City Council

By email: transportstrategy@aberdeencity.gov.uk

Cc Stantec: Emily.seaman@stantec.com George.daugherty@stantec.com

Dear sirs,

Westhill to Aberdeen City Centre – Active Travel improvements

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this stage of the consultation, and for the efforts made by Stantec to engage directly with our group on two occasions during development of these proposals

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.^[1]

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).

In general we are pleased to see a whole corridor approach and well considered proposals which go well beyond the kind of sub-standard approach to cycle infrastructure that Aberdeen has suffered from so often in the past. Plans such as this have the potential to be transformational for transport between Westhill and Aberdeen city centre, and of course by many others who would use parts of the route rather than end-to-end.

During earlier stages of this process the consultation looked at both the Queens Road and Lang Stracht – Westburn Road corridors. We note that the Lang Stracht – Westburn elements are no longer included. We understand this may be because future proposals for Lang Stracht & Westburn will be dependent on the development of Aberdeen Rapid Transit. We reiterate that Lang Stracht – Westburn is also a key active travel corridor, the hospital campus being the most obvious, but not the only, destination. We hope and trust therefore that the absence of active travel proposals for Lang Stracht here does not mean that they will not be brought forward, but that it will be done in a separate process.

We note that the preferred option remains along Queens Road, and that two 'off-line' alternatives are included. We agree that Queens Road should be the preferred route. We don't consider that the other alternatives presented satisfy the Cycling by Design (CbD) core principles of directness, attractiveness, safety and comfort. In particular we think the use of 'back lanes' such as Queens Lane North, Albert Lane and Desswood access road lacks appeal and might be considered unsafe (in terms of social safety rather than road safety) especially by more vulnerable users. CbD also sets out the importance of safety and sense of place under key messages for designers. These indirect routes also fail to serve key destinations (including two schools) on Queens Rd.

Parallel route A has the added disadvantage of steeper gradients which are off-putting to many less fit cyclists.

Section 1

At junctions with Enterprise Drive and again at Westhill Rd we note that although a raised crossing is proposed, to give priority to cyclists, however the crossings are set-back which is less than ideal causing the cyclist to slow and make awkward turns which in turn limit visibility.

Opposite the B9119 junction, the slight diversion onto a mixed traffic street is likely to be preferable to the alternative of a cycle track adjacent to the carriageway.

We note the novel approach to reducing the number of crossings at the junction with the AWPR. Although we welcome the intention to cut down the number of crossing points at which cyclists are currently forced to cede priority, we cannot be sure that all cyclists would be comfortable crossing to the central island which implies a degree of isolation and therefore might be felt unsafe, particularly given how novel this approach is (at least for Aberdeen). Other means of improving the existing crossing points might also be possible such as realigning the approaches and providing automated signalling which would detect a cyclist approaching and operate the traffic lights in their favour.

At Five Mile garage the design shows the cycle track ceding priority to turning vehicles. Is this consistent with the Highway Code?

We note that the proposals would finally resolve the unsatisfactory section of shared use path adjacent to Prime 4, something that ACF has been campaigning on for many years.

We have no strong view on the use of Old Skene Road on a parallel route adjacent to the main carriageway. On balance we expect most people would prefer the opportunity to be away from the main carriageway on this section, and Old Skene Rd also provides a better connection to Kingswells to the north.

Section 2

We note that on Skene Rd, west of Den of Maidenraig the design departs from the normal practice of placing the cycle track next to the carriageway and the footway inside of the cycle track. Although we see the reasons why this has been done, we don't think it will work successfully. The net result is likely to be that pedestrians decide to walk on the cycle track in preference to being on the footway adjacent to the road. This approach was tried on Tillydrone Avenue and the result has been as we describe above. A better alternative may just be to retain the current shared-use approach on this section, although we appreciate that shared-use

is not ideal, foot traffic here is likely to be low enough for it to work. The 'swap back' to more conventional layout, opposite the Groats Rd junction, is also likely to confuse users.

We note on Queens Rd the cycle track routing changes to uni-directional east of the Hazlehead roundabout. Although universal treatment is preferable, we understand why this approach has been chosen and we consider that one change from bi-directional to uni-directional is acceptable.

Throughout Queens Rd loss of on-street parking is likely to be controversial and unpopular. However, we believe this is a taboo that needs to be addressed if meaningful improvement to cycle facilities in Aberdeen is ever to be achieved. Access to driveways is also likely to be key in later stages of design, in order that cyclists are provided with maximum safety whilst at the same time householders are not unduly inconvenienced.

We note the changes to the roundabout at Anderson Drive, including the set-back parallel crossing points. Cyclists generally prefer signal-controlled junctions to roundabouts and we assume there is a good reason why a signalised junction is not proposed here. Parallel (single phase?) crossings should be an acceptable compromise in this instance although they do of course slow the cyclists' journey and divert them from the most direct route. The narrowing of carriageway lanes may have knock-on benefits of slowing traffic and improving general safety for all users.

At junctions such as Forest Rd, and later such as Esslemont Avenue and Albert St, signalised junctions should give cyclists an advanced phase, to give further protection from turning traffic.

At Queens Cross we note the novel approach of a dutch-style roundabout. We welcome the additional priority this would give to cyclists although such designs are still uncommon in the UK and we have no direct experience of their operation.

On Carden Place many of the same issues (loss of on-street parking, driveway access) will be the same as on Queens Rd. We note that you have in particular highlighted the loss of parking outside Gilcomston School. We're not sure why this deserves to be highlighted unless it is to highlight the opportunity for Aberdeen to create its first *school street*.

At the junction with Rosemount Viaduct we note that a two stage turn is proposed for east-bound cyclists. We have no experience of this type of provision or how it would operate.

At the junction with Blackfriars St the scheme ends abruptly. The road narrows significantly into Schoolhill as a result of a previous streetscape improvement (sic). We believe this has created a dangerous pinch-point and cyclists continuing onto Schoolhill should have continuing segregation or other meaningful protection.

We hope you find these comments useful and look forward to hearing more about the proposals as they are developed.

Yours sincerely,

Gavin Clark

Chair - Aberdeen Cycle Forum

[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.