

West Edinburgh Transport Appraisal (WETA)

A STAG (Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance) appraisal of transport options for West Edinburgh. This will take account of development, accessibility, environmental and implementation objectives and other proposed changes to the strategic transport network in the area.

A response by Peter Hawkins

“What's proposed for this area is basically, to move the Showground to south side of A8, build an International Business Gateway on north side, expand the airport where showground now is.

The WETA is to explore the implications for transport in all this. The proposals are backed in first place by the Gov't, and CEC has been asked to do the preparatory studies and consultations, of which this is one. The proposals include possible direct links to the M8, and a new road from the Gogar rbt direct to near the airport, ie roughly the line the tram will take.

To my mind the whole concept is totally flawed, for reasons given, and I'd like our members to know what's in store, and maybe take action by writing to their Cllr or their MSP if they feel strongly enough about it. It means ripping up the Green Belt on that side of the city, and the IBG will be just another Edinburgh Park.”

Peter attended a meeting on WETA, and his comments follow... -

Dear Deborah,

Thanks for organising the meeting at Ingliston House on Weds. This was a good opportunity to learn about the issues involved, and your colleague Julia did a sterling job to keep going for over 2 hours and answer our questions from the floor. Here is our feedback, based on the questions which appear on the form:

Q1 Should any priority criteria be taken into account.... and if so, what criteria?

In our view the priority criteria are sustainability and the environment. We have had ample warning about the dangers of man-made climate change. The Scottish Government has set a target of 42% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020. But emissions from transport are rising, and will continue to rise if more roads are built, because more roads means more traffic and people travelling ever longer distances.

Sustainable policies of land use and transport planning require settlements (including cities) to make use of existing land resources within their envelope wherever possible, and for any expansion to be on the edges, so that existing public transport and active travel networks can continue to be used. The overwhelming requirement is NOT to produce a high modal share for the sustainable modes, but to REDUCE the need to travel and to MINIMISE distances travelled from home to work. Even public transport has emissions costs, and Julia's suggestion that electric cars will help solve the problem is false, since they merely shift the emissions elsewhere unless the electricity is generated entirely from renewables, which seems unlikely in the near future.

Compared with other development areas in and near Edinburgh, the West Edinburgh Development Framework (WEDF) performs quite poorly in this regard, since it is not adjacent to any existing settlement and will thus require all participants to travel. Developments at, for example, the Waterfront, and in future around Leith Docks, are much better placed for travel because they are within the existing envelope. Edinburgh Park is also just within the envelope and is well served by public transport, and has a huge land capacity which could be used much more efficiently than it is at present.

We welcome the modal share aspirations proposed for WETA at 50%, but these are aspirations only and have no mandatory element. Traffic demand management is also rudimentary at present - in fact there is none, except control of workplace parking, and congestion. Since the latter is our only tool available, we have to use it, inefficient and exasperating though it is. We can't build more road capacity, for reasons above, and in any case one can never build one's way out of congestion.

Other reasons against WEDF are the need for the city to have a 'green lung', especially on the west side (prevailing wind) and especially in view of the pollution already caused by the airport. The loss of Green Belt at this location has particular significance for these reasons. And an 'International Business Gateway' as proposed would make an approach to the city which would be as bland, anonymous and impersonal as any other international airport anywhere in the world. Do we really want this?

In sum, the Scottish Government should be having a re-think as to whether WEDF is really such a good idea.

Q2 Are there any 'must-have' elements within the access strategies....?

The Active Travel options are in theory walking and cycling, but the location is so far from settlements that walking is impractical. Cycling is possible from the west side of Edinburgh and from Broxburn, Kirkliston and Newbridge. As you note, Edinburgh has a target of 15% of journeys to work by bike by 2020, though it hard to believe this could be achieved at a location so far removed from habitation.

The existing facilities, shown on your map in blue, are as you say 'paper' only and must be upgraded if they are to form part of the access system. In particular, the old rail path from Kirkliston to Newbridge is muddy, rough and in poor condition and is totally unsuited to utility cycling in its present state.

The path beside the A8 from Newbridge: - a section on the north side from Ratho Station eastwards for about 1km has recently been upgraded, but there is no link to it at either end. There is no path from Newbridge to Ratho Station on this side, and the footway is narrow and rough and not designated shared-use. East of the new section, the footway degenerates and has not been repaired for many years - it is unsuitable for cycling.

Continuing on the A8, there needs to be a cycle path on the north side between Eastfield junction (the Dumbbells) and the RBS junction (not even a footway at present). From RBS eastwards there is a reasonably good shared-use path which takes cyclists round the north side of the Gogar roundabout.

On the south side of the A8 the path westwards from Dumbbells is in poor condition and needs to be totally re-surfaced, as far as the Norton Hotel junction.

There is no means of crossing the A8 at Ratho Station and it is urgent that a crossing is provided. The present bridge has steps and is therefore useless to cyclists, and not DDA-compliant either.

The 'must-NOT-haves' are: an M8 short link; an M8 long link; a Gogar link unless it is for buses and trams only; and any euphemistically- called "capacity enhancements" (ie more traffic) at places like Newbridge, Gogar etc as mentioned in your Strategies.

Q3 What are the most critical issues for delivering the access strategies; ... barriers, and opportunities?

The opportunities would be for the Gov't to introduce workplace parking charges, which would encourage modal shift, discourage car use, and provide vital revenue for the city. If introduced as part of WEDF they would of course have to be introduced everywhere, which would offer a significant tool for demand management of traffic.

The barriers to Active Travel have been mentioned - poor existing infrastructure, to which we could add, too much traffic, travelling too fast, which is currently a blight over the whole area.

Another barrier is the future of air travel, which is looking increasingly uncertain, and might make an IBG less attractive as a prospect. For all our sakes, we can only hope that the decline in air travel continues.

Q4 Which access strategy works best... and why?

Active Travel is best (no emissions), followed by public transport. It is vital that these facilities are in place before any development commences, so that workers, staff etc get the public transport habit from the outset. Let us not repeat the Edinburgh Park mistakes, where car access was provided from the start and public transport came only later - making modal shift that much more difficult to achieve. Workplace parking provision should be minimal, and there should be no extra road provision until travel habits are well established. Even then, only the minimum 'capacity enhancements' should be allowed. Thank you for the opportunity to comment, and I hope the above will be taken into account. In particular, I think there are many issues here which should be raised with the Scottish Government and not just with CEC.

Yours sincerely,
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