

Southern Arc Area Development Framework (ADF) Response to Consultation on behalf of CTC Lothians

Excerpts from the document are in italics; our comments are in normal.

1.1 The ADF aims to provide a framework in which projects and proposals can be developed and co-ordinated that encourage walking and cycling and in so doing improve the health and well-being of its residents and visitors and create a place that is attractive and liveable.

Excellent!

*1.2 Cities that promote and foster walking and cycling are among the most liveable places in the world e.g. Helsinki, Zurich, Munich and Copenhagen ...
In these and other cities, this has led to the increased use of public transport, a reduced number of car journeys and an improvement in air quality for those using the area. Such cities also create opportunities for improved social interaction – a fundamental characteristic of a vibrant and liveable city.*

We agree, and we like the focus of the document in this respect.

1.4 The ADF has been prepared by the City of Edinburgh Council in collaboration with Architecture + Design Scotland (A+DS) and the National Health Service (NHS).

Very good that the NHS has been involved as a major partner. All studies of the economic benefits of cycling emphasise the role of health, and this has not hitherto been sufficiently recognised.

2.3 A number of principal traffic routes pass through the area both in east-west (Haymarket, Royal Mile, Cowgate and Chambers Street) and north-south (Lothian Road, North / South Bridge) directions. These routes are busy and often congested, making movement by foot or cycle unappealing and potentially hazardous.

2.4 The area contains a number of on and off-road cycle routes. Some of the on-road routes can be hostile and hazardous for cyclists, particularly the Lothian Road and North/South Bridge /Nicolson Street corridors, where cyclists must negotiate high volumes of traffic, parked vehicles and junctions primarily designed for the benefit of vehicles.

Very well put.

The traffic and cycle counts, which Spokes conducts regularly twice a year, take place on Lothian Rd and Forrest Rd, both of which are in the Southern Arc. The counting takes place at peak morning hours. The counts show a regular increase in cycling, year by year. Cyclists as a percentage of all vehicles are now as high as 15-20% - and car numbers have fallen slightly. This is a tremendous contribution to reducing congestion; since a small increase in vehicle numbers is known to have a disproportionate effect on congestion one can assume that a small switch to cycling can similarly have a disproportionate benefit on congestion.

2.5 Active Travel Action Plan (ATAP):

Excellent! We welcome the concise summary of ATAP and the inclusion of a map showing the 'Family Network' of cycle routes in the area.

Ch. 3 Links between the Built Environment and Health

The emphasis on the link between the built environment and physical activity and health is excellent, and we, the cycling organisations, have been saying this for a long time. There is far more to physical activity than sport, and active travel is doubly effective because it combines regular bouts of physical activity with essential travel. If only some of the budgets allocated to sport could be re-allocated to making the city more pedestrian and cycle friendly, we might achieve the same health outcomes at far less cost! And as the document says (3.1), this includes mental as well as physical health.

3.8 Residents and local workers identified pedestrian and cycling routes that are compromised by poor pavement quality or maintenance and road engineering that are perceived to favour [sic] cars. This goes against the locally and nationally accepted hierarchy that prioritises pedestrians and cyclists ahead of motor vehicles.

This puts the whole problem very neatly and concisely. What we need to tackle are footway and road maintenance (particularly the relatively narrow strips used by cyclists – ie the road edges – except where these are blocked by parked cars); and road engineering which too often gives vital space on narrow streets to vehicles. We noticed this on our 'walk-through' (see below), especially on East Fountainbridge, Morrison St., and Morrison Link.

3.12 ff, Air Quality, and 3.14 ff, Green Space:

This is well said, but there's no mention of possible solutions, which must include traffic reduction, especially private vehicles (on our cycle counts, we become aware of the high proportion of high-emission 4x4-type vehicles in the city centre, usually with a single occupant).

There is a good case for excluding most vehicles from the east-west streets of the area for most of the day, since an alternative route is available, via Melville Drive.

Ch. 4 Vision:

Again we welcome the linking of health and life expectancy to active travel, urban design, and green spaces.

4.2 Making Edinburgh Healthier, Edinburgh's joint Health Improvement Plan 2008-2011 aims to improve health and address health inequality in the city. It addresses physical activity as a key issue and recognises that the Council has an important role to play in encouraging active travel, creating quality green spaces, championing good urban design, providing facilities for physical activities and fostering strong community and social networks.

4.3 In responding to this challenge, the Council aims to make Edinburgh the most physically active city in Europe by 2020. To achieve this ambition the Council has published an Active Travel Action Plan that seeks to make movement around the city on foot or by bike easy, safe and attractive.

This is a tremendous Vision and an exciting and challenging target (most physically active city in Europe by 2020). It won't be achieved without a substantial financial commitment, and we hope the Council will devise a plan to deliver it.

4.4 Quality of Life:

The Council aspires to make Edinburgh one of the most attractive and liveable cities in the world.

The goal is for the city to be recognised as being among the top 10 most liveable cities in the world by 20211.

This is another exciting and challenging target. We hope the city will come up with the funding to make it happen. If the funding is focussed where it's most needed – quality of surfaces, re-allocation of road space – we believe the targets could be met, and that the costs could be moderate in comparison with other areas of spending; certainly it is hard to think of what else could offer such good value for money.

5.2 Within the Southern Arc there are a number of projects which represent opportunities for change across the area. The ADF focuses upon the potential of these areas to contribute to delivering the vision for the Southern Arc and the actions that will be necessary ...

5.3 The five broadly defined project areas include:

- *Haymarket to Holyrood*
- *Haymarket*
- *Chambers Street*
- *The Royal Mile*
- *Temporary projects*

We broadly welcome this selection of projects, but we would like to see Kings Stables Rd included. This road falls within the Arc, and offers a great opportunity to link the West End and the cultural and financial centres around the Usher Hall area, to the Grassmarket. It could also be part of a pedestrian circular route encompassing Princes St Gardens and the Grassmarket; and part of an east-west through route for cyclists.

Kings Stables Rd is at present a gloomy and depressing street. We think it has potential for improvement.

In Figure 7, the light-green band which runs from Haymarket to Holyrood is described as 'Low Road-Cowgate' but should really include Morrison St, Fountainbridge and West Port – we trust these are meant to be included but it would be better to say so if possible (though 5.5 spells it out).

5.7 Aspirations;

We broadly support the 'Big Project' and 'Organic Change', especially the 'review of one-way systems' and 'creation of a Family Network cycle route between the West End and Holyrood (shouldn't this be 'Haymarket and Holyrood', as stated in 5.1 and elsewhere?), and 'overall improvement in the conditions for pedestrians and cyclists'.

We have reservations, however, about the 'Details':

Details

- *Lighting along this route should be conducive to the character of the area – taking cognisance of the busy evening economy and as a residential area;*
- *Basic improvements to crossing details such as traffic light sequencing, increased pavement space and traffic speeds;*

- *Focus architectural lighting on bridges; and,*
- *'Off road' route from the Grassmarket to the canal with better signage and key crossings.*

The Details have too much focus on lighting. Far more important in our view are the details of the quality of road surfaces and pavements. A PhD student from Heriot-Watt (Paul Whybrow) and I did a 'walk-through' from Haymarket to Grassmarket, looking at such details. We were amazed at how pavement widths change from moment to moment; likewise type and quality of surfaces; and we were appalled at how pavements are in places constrained so tightly that 2 persons can scarcely pass, while traffic is given two lanes in the same direction.

The details should thus focus on improving the road surfaces, especially the edges where cyclists ride, and the footways where pedestrians walk.

5.8 – 5.10 Haymarket area and Morrison St.

This is excellent and very well put. It 'pulls no punches', but these things have to be said, and brought into the open, if we are ever to make improvements.

Aspirations – excellent. We hope the station will get a back entrance onto Distillery Lane, which would help disperse the crowds in two directions, and link to the crossing of Dalry Rd which in turn would lead to the proposed route, parallel to Morrison St, through the new development. (The plans we've seen for the station worryingly do not include this back entrance.)

5.12 ff Chambers St

Aspirations: excellent. We agree with all this, though under 'Details' we're not so keen on lighting (until all our power comes from renewables anyway) and would rather see attention given to road and footway surfacing.

5.14 The Royal Mile

Aspirations – we agree with these, broadly. We hope the changes will include the lower section of High St, and the Canongate, where we feel there is too much traffic, too little road space for pedestrians and cyclists, and too many setts in the street, which cause a hazard and deterrent for cyclists (even if they "look nice").

Cyclists don't need tarmac across the whole width of the road, just enough for a linear strip in each direction – so long as this is 'dedicated', ie not blocked by parked vehicles, and not shared with pedestrians. The upper section of High St has a stone gutter between the setts and the kerb – notice how cyclists try to use this very narrow strip in preference to the setts! The gutter clearly has an inadequate width, but shows how cyclists could be catered for quite simply and without undue expense.

The Lawnmarket is even worse – the setts are badly laid and uneven and interrupted with manholes. This is a nightmare for cyclists, yet part of an essential east-west route via Johnston Terrace and the Royal Mile.

Lower High St (North Bridge to Jeffrey St): badly-laid setts create a disincentive to cycling, especially the parallel rows at the kerb side, which lie just where cyclists need to ride. Road surface throughout is uneven and potholed.

Details:

We agree with the need for better signage for pedestrians and cyclists. But again we feel attention to surfaces, to make them cycle-friendly, is more important than '*location of bus stops*' on another street.

5.15 Temporary Projects:

Throughout the Southern Arc there are opportunities to host temporary projects/events that would contribute to improving the area as a place and help assess the impact of change within the area.

Aspirations

- *Temporary lighting projects at key locations such as the Cowgate arches beneath George IV Bridge and South Bridge;*
- *Temporary greening projects of gap sites;*
- *Pilot cycle parking initiatives at strategic locations across the area;*
- *Temporary road closures to create pedestrian zones during festivals and other events; and*
- *Consider the opportunities for art installations across the area.*

We support these aspirations, except that again we have reservations about lighting projects, and feel there are far more urgent demands on funds, as we have outlined earlier.

(Ch. 6?) Next Steps:

In particular we are seeking comments on:

- *Whether you agree/disagree with the proposed 'projects'*
- *Are these the right areas to be focussing on?*
- *Do they have the right aspirations to ensure they become successful places?*
- *What are your views on improving the 'walkability' and 'cyclability' of the area? How would the balance between vehicles and other users be improved?*
- *What suggestions do you have on making the Southern Arc area a more walkable place?*
- *Would any other temporary projects benefit the area in terms of health and well-being and walkability?*
- *Do you think we have missed anything? Or, as the case me [sic] be, included something we shouldn't have?*

Our comments, throughout, have indicated the extent to which we *agree/disagree with the proposed projects, whether these are the right areas to be focussing on, and whether they have the right aspirations.*

On the next two (the second of which seems to be a re-statement of the first, whereas the first is really two topics – surely this can be better put?), *improving the walkability and cyclability, and the balance between vehicles and other users*, we have said throughout that the priorities must be to take road space from vehicles and re-allocate it to pedestrians and cyclists; and to tackle the poor quality of the surfaces of the roads and footways.

The details of how this might be done, for the route from Haymarket to Grassmarket at least, are given in a separate document, based on the outcome of the 'walk-through', which I attach. (This may be too much detail at this stage, but the document does ask for '*suggestions for improvements*')

p.32, first line of boxes (Haymarket to Holyrood), second column (Walking and Cycling) – shouldn't this be '**Haymarket** to Holyrood'?

Have we missed anything?

Not really. I have to say this is, overall, an excellent document, with which for the most part we strongly agree. We are delighted that the Council has such enlightened views on what needs to be done and what can be achieved, given the right approach and adequate funding.

The document's emphasis on the links between health, the built environment, active travel, and green spaces, is, in our view, outstanding.

The presentation is also of very high quality, the text is well written and a pleasure to read. Congratulations!

We hope our comments can be taken on board, and we wish the Project all success!

Peter Hawkins
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22 Jan. 2012

CTC is the national cyclists' association, with over 1000 members in Lothians

Southern Arc 'Walk-through' – notes

On 17th August Paul Whybrow and I did a walk-through of the Southern Arc, from Haymarket to the Grassmarket. These are notes from our observations, and I hope can be taken into account as part of the consultation.

In view of the health remit (Paul's PhD is partly health-funded), our interest was mainly in walking and cycling as modes of travel/transport, and the role of the public realm.

1 General impressions:

The route has great potential for both commuters and tourists, since it links a major transport hub (Haymarket) to offices and other places of employment (commuters), and to a historic part of the Old Town (Grassmarket), with possible links to the canal, the shopping/cultural areas around Lothian Rd, many cafes and restaurants, and some antique and book shops (West Port).

The overall impression of the public realm is that it is shabby, and uncoordinated, with the feeling that it has happened by accident rather than by design. Footways vary greatly in width, even over quite short passages; they also vary in type of surface (slabs, tiles, tarmac). Many of the slabs are cracked and uneven and pose a hazard to pedestrians, esp. the elderly or partly-sighted. Similarly, the surfaces of the carriageway vary greatly, but are mostly broken up, and the paint of the white lines, cycle lanes, bus lanes etc is badly worn.

The exception, which as it were proves the rule, is the Grassmarket, where the public realm has recently been improved – carriageways re-surfaced, line paint renewed, footways in good order. The difference between this and the rest of the route is astounding. The quality of the footways and carriageways makes a huge difference to people's impressions of an area.

Much of the route is lined with small shops and stores, cafes etc, which also look mainly shabby and run-down. If the owners could get together, it would make sense to give a whole street a facelift, and co-ordinate the colour schemes and type-faces.

Kings Stables Rd has the potential to be a major pedestrian/cycle route between Grassmarket and the West End, but has not so far been mentioned in Southern Arc consultations and appears, indeed, to be very neglected in many ways. We mention it briefly at the end.

From the transport viewpoint, we felt far too much road space is given over to cars and vehicles, whereas the greatest number of people are the pedestrians, who are given the least space. Morrison St, viewed from on high, ie from the junction with Gardner's Cres., looks like a motorway, so dominated is it by vehicles. At junctions, pedestrians are sometimes grossly constrained by railings, and since official Council policy is to remove railings where possible, every junction should be looked at with this in mind. Railings could be removed if vehicle speeds, and road space for vehicles, were reduced.

2 Specific Locations:

(The problems, for pedestrians and cyclists, with the Haymarket junction have been well aired previously)

A: Junction Morrison St/Morrison Link:

Morrison Link appears far too wide for the volume of traffic it carries – an example of recent roads over-engineering. To test this we did a small-scale count of vehicles. Over a 10-min period, from

9.45 – 9.55am, we counted, southbound: 30 cars, 8 commercial vehicles; northbound, 18 cars, 7 commercial vehicles. Yet the road is basically a 4-lane road! Two lanes would appear to be more than adequate. The vast majority of Morrison St traffic went straight ahead at this junction, and the vast majority of vehicles from Torphichen Place turned R into Morrison St.

There is nothing worse, visually, than a road that is too wide for purpose. It seems unlikely that traffic generated by the new Goods Yard development would make a significant difference. In principle, if the majority of streets in an area are 2-lane, a 4-lane road serves no useful purpose. If the road were narrowed, the space could be used for attractive public realm, eg trees, or for other purposes.

B: Junction Dewar Place/Morrison St/Gardners Cres:

Dewar Pl has no cycle lanes, and at the junction, we saw how a cyclist heading into Gardners Cres had difficulty establishing his place on the road against overtaking vehicles wanting to turn L, esp. as there is uphill gradient at this point.

There is no pedestrian crossing of Gardners Cres at this junction; and there are no lane markings, so pedestrians have to 'guess' which way vehicles are heading. The footways around the junction are very narrow, and made worse by an excess of railings, which at one point (Morrison St, south side) mean two persons can scarcely pass each other. On the other hand the width of the traffic lanes is generous.

We recommend the traffic lanes be narrowed and the footway widened, and/or a cycle lane built in.

Just west of the junction, a large office block, St David's House, stands vacant and seeking business.

C: EICC and Scottish Widows:

The cycle/pedestrian route from Edinburgh Quay to Festival Sq, which crosses the concourse of the EICC, has been disrupted by the EICC extension. There are no diversion signs, and it was only by chance we discovered that the route is still available, by a lane beside the Widows building on the north side of the street. Since these works will probably last months or years, diversion signage in both directions is urgently needed.

The contrast at this point between private affluence (EICC, the Widows) and public squalor (the uneven road surfaces and footway surfaces, the paint almost worn away) could hardly be more apparent.

(The EICC Extension boasts the provision of huge amounts of new office space, whereas St David's House, and the vast former Social Security block on the north side of West Port, lie vacant. This gives the lie to claims by the Business Forum that city centre office space is insufficient. Yet the city needs hotels, residential family accommodation, and student accommodation. Is there no way of building for flexible use of space to meet fluctuating demands?)

D: Lothian Rd/Morrison St junction:

Morrison St leading into the junction has 4 lanes, 2 for right turning, one ahead, and one for L. We noticed that the outer R lane is hardly used by vehicles, even when there is queueing in the other R lane. On the other hand there is need of an 'ahead' lane for cycles, coloured red, similar to that at the foot of Morrison St on the approach to the Haymarket junction. If the second R lane were removed, there would be room for an 'ahead' cycle lane.

The pedestrian crossing of Lothian Rd is poorly marked out. Only metal studs are used, and many are missing. There should be strong white lines to guide pedestrians, as this is a very busy crossing.

E: Bread St:

The contraflow bus lane is wide enough to include some parking, and can be used by cyclists, which is good.

F: Bread St junction with E. Fountainbridge:

The footway on the south side of the latter is extremely narrow (2 persons cannot pass), and made worse by railings. On the other hand westbound traffic gets two lanes, even though the lead-in is only single lane, and there is no reason for a second lane dictated by conditions beyond the junction. This is a prime example of where space could be taken from vehicles and given to pedestrians and/or a cycle lane.

Eastbound, the single lane is excessively wide, again with no justification since it remains single lane beyond. Some of this space could become a cycle lane; the footway is wide enough here. The junction lacks a pedestrian crossing.

G: West Port:

South side footway is very narrow in relation to the number of pedestrians using it. The footway on the north side varies greatly in width, from adequate to too narrow, and has wide variation in styles and condition of the paving, giving a strong impression of inconsistency and lack of planning. At Portsburgh Sq, a wonderful view of the Castle opens up over a very short space, and the houses of the Square are also interesting visually. It would be good to have an info board stating when this housing scheme was built, and why.

A very small "square" on the opposite side of West Port could have seats and some planters to make it more attractive and encourage passers-by to enjoy the views, but this may not be in public ownership.

Just east of this, a very ugly sub-station (?) and very battered Police Box do nothing to enhance the appearance.

H: Grassmarket:

The pedestrian crossing located at the bottom of West Port might be much better sited a little further east, beyond Kings Stables Rd (KSR), since most pedestrians want to cross there to access the Vennel; and there is no crossing of KSR itself.

The Grassmarket lacks cycle lanes – a great opportunity missed, when the upgrading was done. A lane eastbound would be more essential, because of the uphill gradient. It's hard to understand why vehicle parking should be provided on this north side of the road.

J King's Stables Rd:

KSR itself is potentially a great route for pedestrians and cyclists from Grassmarket to Lothian Rd, the West End, and many venues like the Usher Hall, the churches etc, but KSR is totally vehicle-orientated, and, for pedestrians, featureless and intimidating. There is surely an opportunity for an attractive route here – and not many vehicles use it, and it isn't a bus route.

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CTC Scotland

18/8/11