



Councillors Jenny Laing and Douglas Lumsden
Co-Leaders
Aberdeen City Council

05 November 2020

Dear Jenny and Douglas,

Spaces for People - Beach Esplanade

We are writing to you as representatives from some of the main cycling organisations in Aberdeen, to express our dismay at the recent decision by Councillors on the City Growth and Resources Committee to remove the segregated cycle path at the beach less than two months after it was installed. This path was the first European-style segregated bike path Aberdeen city has seen and we had hoped it would form the start of the connected network of cycling infrastructure that Aberdeen so badly needs. It is also the longest fit-for-purpose cycle lane in Aberdeen and offers the possibility for a new audience to enjoy cycling, while keeping the esplanade path free for pedestrians, as was the rationale behind this *Spaces for People* project.

To recap, the purpose of Spaces for People was:

“Spaces for People is a new, temporary infrastructure programme in Scotland which offers funding and support to make it safer for people who choose to walk, cycle or wheel for essential trips and exercise during Covid-19.”

And to protect public health;

“Provide temporary walking and cycling infrastructure that helps to protect public health”

The city council's own masterplan (CCMP) goal is to create a "[cycling city](#)" and to *reallocate road space to other users* now that the [AWPR](#) has been completed¹.

And yet at the first test of introducing any meaningful and useful cycle lane, councillors have voted to remove it before it has even had time to be properly tested. We are at a loss to understand why, but it would appear to be a decision to placate a vocal minority of motorists who are no longer able to step straight from their vehicles onto the pavement. If there was a need to address safe unloading of vehicles, it seems to us it would have been relatively easy to implement some simple modifications, most obviously to increase the width of the buffer strip between parked vehicles and the cycle lanes. To propose the total removal of the cycle lane between Bridge of Don and the Beach Ballroom is illogical, a waste of public money, and appears to be a knee-jerk reaction to a perceived problem that could have been easily resolved through dialogue and consultation.

Although not perfect, the new arrangement also helped solve some long term issues with the beach esplanade, namely;

- Removing the vast majority of faster-moving cyclists from the shared-use walkway
- Limiting the speed of traffic by reducing the road width from 4 to 2 lanes, and
- Keeping cyclists safe by separating them from fast vehicular traffic

As the CCMP recognises, the continuing levels of private car use in Aberdeen are unsustainable and have multiple public dis-benefits. These are only amplified in the midst of a pandemic. Public transport is likely to be operating under normal capacity for some time, and cycling is one of the most obvious answers to pollution-free urban mobility. Aside from being simply a mode of transportation, cycling addresses so many other priorities and offers multiple public benefits. Not least, at a time of huge pressures on the NHS people who cycle have lower rates of heart disease and cancer².

As you know, Aberdeen city also suffers from dangerously poor air quality which causes health problems and in particular, exacerbates respiratory illnesses such as COVID19. Encouraging more people to cycle really is a win-win: it makes them healthier and at the same time by substituting bikes for cars it reduces air pollution, and of course greenhouse gas emissions too.

We recognise that *Spaces for People* measures are only intended to be temporary but 54 days is ephemeral: we feel it wasn't given a chance and any issues should have been addressed rather than opting for a complete reversal, which is shortsighted and reactionary.

Aberdeen City Council claims to want to create a cycling city but the removal of cycling infrastructure prioritises the convenience of motorists (i.e. unloading their car) over the NHS, the environment, and the safety of vulnerable road users. We should be doing everything we possibly can to support and encourage cyclists because cycling brings benefits to everyone, even to those who don't ride a bike.

¹ *"The benefits of the AWPR must be 'locked-in' to prioritise the movement of active and sustainable travel through the reallocation of carriageway space, ..."*

² <https://www.nhs.uk/news/mental-health/cycling-commuters-have-lower-rates-of-heart-disease-and-cancer/>

We hope that there will still be the opportunity to reverse this decision before the reputation of Aberdeen is irrevocably harmed. We would of course be very happy to discuss further with you how the beach cycle lane can be made to work for everyone.

Yours sincerely,

Gavin Clark

Chair, Aberdeen Cycle Forum

Tom Collier

Chair, Grampian Cycle Partnership

Colin Allanach

Chair, Scottish Cycling North East & Grampian