

TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 8 December 2009

Session 3

£5.00

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Printed and published in Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body by
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ACTIVE TRAVEL INQUIRY2387

TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE 28th Meeting 2009, Session 3

CONVENER

*Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)

DEPUTY CONVENER

Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab)
*Charlie Gordon (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)
Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD)
*Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP)
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Jim Tolson (Dunfermline West) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Campbell Divertie (Institute of Highway Engineers)
Eric Hill (Institute of Highway Engineers)
Michael McDonnell (Road Safety Scotland)
Douglas Norris (Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport in the UK)
Duncan Pickering (Institute of Advanced Motorists)
Will Reid (PARC Craigmillar Ltd)
Sebastian Tombs (Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Steve Farrell

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Alastair Macfie

ASSISTANT CLERK

Clare O'Neill

LOCATION

Committee Room 2

Scottish Parliament

Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee

Tuesday 8 December 2009

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 13:30*]

Active Travel Inquiry

The Convener (Patrick Harvie): Good afternoon. I welcome everyone to the 28th meeting in 2009 of the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee and record apologies from Cathy Peattie, Alex Johnstone and Marlyn Glen.

The only item on our agenda is a third evidence session for our active travel inquiry. We will take evidence first from professional transport and logistics bodies and then from road safety organisations. I warmly welcome to the meeting Campbell Divertie, chairman of the south of Scotland branch of the Institute of Highway Engineers, and Eric Hill, a member of the institute; Sebastian Tombs, chartered architect with the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland; Will Reid, senior development manager with PARC Craigmillar Ltd, an urban regeneration company; and Douglas Norris, national officer for Scotland at the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport. Members have quite a number of prepared questions, but first I invite the witnesses to make some brief opening remarks.

Sebastian Tombs (Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland): Chartered architects, whom I am representing this afternoon, cover all issues of urban design, and active travel forms only part of their work. Speaking on behalf on those who have direct experience of that field of activity and from my background as past chairman of RIAS and Architecture and Design Scotland, I will focus in my responses to members' questions on a number of key issues: planning; buildings and places; road standards; leadership and budget; and the need for this to be a shared community design agenda issue. I certainly think that the concern for all of us this afternoon is to find ways of tackling those issues and translating policy into practice.

Campbell Divertie (Institute of Highway Engineers): The Institute of Highway Engineers welcomes the publication of the cycling action plan for Scotland and supports its aspirations.

The Convener: I will kick off with a general question about where we have reached. Most people will agree that, for many years, perhaps

even half a century, accommodating as much vehicular transport as possible, particularly private motor vehicles, has been the key consideration in the design of roads in the public realm. How has that situation come to be so dominant and is there any realistic prospect that it will change?

Will Reid (PARC Craigmillar Ltd): We have not applied that principle at PARC Craigmillar. There has been no segregation in the residential areas; indeed, right from the start—from the design framework that was agreed in consultation through master plans that were agreed in consultation to planning consents and road construction consents—we have ensured that integration of all users of the road space has been part of the design. As you will appreciate, even getting that far has been a long haul and it has taken probably five or six years of lengthy consultation to be able to implement what has been implemented. That tells you straight away that there is an issue with making such changes.

I am pleased to say that our work to date has been recognised—this year, we won a United Kingdom award for the best home zone. I would be happy to answer questions on the detail of that.

The Convener: Does anyone else wish to comment?

Sebastian Tombs: It is clear that the advent of the motor vehicle and the internal combustion engine represented a great strike for freedom for many people who aspired to depart their place of residence and access their work, and that has been widely adopted as an expression of civilised development.

The consequence of that, given that there are high-speed vehicles moving around, is an increased perception of risk, which has led to a general attitude of protecting pedestrians and cyclists from that risk. An interesting and counterintuitive approach to tackling traffic congestion and accidents was adopted in the north of Holland by the engineer Hans Monderman, who was allowed to experiment. He asked what would happen if the road signs were taken out.

Of course, the Netherlands is a different country, where there is a much greater level of cycling, but what he found was that people's behaviour started to change as roads became less regulated. Drivers had to make decisions when they were faced with the reality of pedestrians and cyclists moving across their space. It became a negotiation, which led to slower traffic movement and, in some cases, greater bus reliability, as well as a much pleasanter environment for walking and cycling. That approach has led to a number of initiatives taking place in the UK, such as the naked streets initiatives, which all allow for greater

shared access to space. As yet, apart from cases such as Craigmillar, there are few such examples in Scotland, so more work needs to be done in that regard, but here in the UK we are beginning to see the benefits of the interesting counterintuitive move that was led by the Dutch.

The Convener: Are there any other comments?

Campbell Divertie: I disagree with Sebastian Tombs. There is a roads hierarchy that must be recognised. There are different roads for different types of journey and different types of traffic, so the approach that Sebastian Tombs described is not a panacea for all. The roads hierarchy needs to be observed. A phased and staged approach needs to be adopted, which involves roads being treated differently and having different priorities, relative to the hierarchy.

The Convener: You seem to be implying not only that you do not sense a mood for challenging the assumptions of that hierarchy but that it would be wrong to do so.

Campbell Divertie: It is right to do so, but it is a case of horses for courses. There are roads that will lend themselves to what Sebastian Tombs suggests and I support that, but there are other parts of the network on which such measures would not be appropriate for the road or for the type of traffic movement on it.

Sebastian Tombs: The great move at the moment is to do with residential areas and streets. Moves have been made to calm traffic, for example by limiting traffic around schools to 20mph, all of which are extremely welcome.

The Scottish Government is busy preparing a policy document called "Designing Streets", which translates the English document "Manual for Streets" and gives it a Scottish application. That will be important for advancing the initiative for residential areas at a policy level, but there is another level that we should discuss—the improvement of facilities for walking and cycling in town and city centres. That is where the two hierarchies could start to come into conflict. We should look to the Scottish Government to produce additional policy guidance for those situations once "Designing Streets" has bedded in. A lot more work of a positive nature can be done.

Rather than being in conflict with one another, we probably all approach the issue in a positive mood. Nobody would disagree that trunk routes and motorways are designated for fast-moving, high-speed vehicles and are inappropriate for pedestrians or cyclists. As we move down the hierarchy, we have to find appropriate mechanisms to accommodate all users.

The Convener: My next question was going to be about the draft policy "Designing Streets". I

invite other witnesses to comment on that document or the other issues that it raises in relation to walking and cycling.

Eric Hill (Institute of Highway Engineers): As you mentioned, those of us from a highways background have traditionally looked at the design of roads very much with the motor vehicle as king in mind. Basing "Designing Streets" on the "Manual for Streets" south of the border, which looks at pedestrianisation, home zones and similar areas, is a good move.

There is a hierarchy. We have to be careful in our approach and ensure that we do not cause safety concerns by trying too hard to integrate various modes of transport in one area. Generally speaking, I think that the guidance in "Designing Streets" represents a brave move—I know that colleagues in our part of the industry have expressed some concerns about it. We have to consider not only engineering aspects but the psychology of road users. That is a major issue. In the Netherlands or Denmark, there have always been large numbers of non-motorised users on the network, so there is a different psychology among road users, who respect one another. Because we have had so many years of strong segregation here, that psychology is not yet instilled in road users here.

The Convener: Do the ideas that are coming forward from the Government, albeit in draft form, lead to an expectation that we should design environments that will support a change in psychology or behaviour patterns?

Eric Hill: The evidence from some of the schemes on the continent and the United Kingdom is that, where we remove fixed boundaries that segregate road users, interaction is improved, certainly where speeds are low and people have time to react to and acknowledge one another. We could achieve a lot, particularly in residential areas and busy shopping centres, where speeds and volume of traffic are not high. The guidelines should work successfully in those contexts.

The Convener: Are there any other comments on that subject, or on alternative approaches, in which there are segregated cycle facilities as opposed to on-street cycle lanes?

Will Reid: We should widen the discussion and not concentrate purely on engineering technique. Our experience is that a combination of many factors must be considered and that should happen through the urban design master planning process. We have not yet spoken about walking. Rather than concentrating on your question about integrating rather than segregating users, we should think about what makes a successful street for all users. The area should be overlooked, feel secure, comfortable and pleasant and be

attractive. We have to look at all those other issues, which is what we have tried to do in operating from the top down, starting with making sure that all the connections are in place. There should be no cul-de-sacs and layouts should be permeable. Eventually, when we get down to street level, we look at engineering techniques, but we have to get everything else in place as well.

Sebastian Tombs: An observation that I picked up from some of the talented architects involved in designing the Craigmillar scheme was that they had to go through a mindset adjustment to accommodate what the client was looking for and understand what quality of streetscape was required of them. A change of psychology is needed not only in a particular part of the professional world, the lay world or the political world; rather, everybody's psychology must go through some adjustment, because, although we can see plenty of examples of urban areas from the past that exhibit the required characteristics, we seem to have lost the skills that are needed to create such places and the ability to take an integrated approach.

"Designing Streets" will require changes by our road engineering colleagues, but changes will also be required by design professionals, architects, landscape engineers, clients and, indeed, everybody who is concerned about and has a stake in the quality of our local built environments. That is quite a large challenge, and leadership and investment will be required to meet it. As I have said, the areas inherited from our past that many people value often have density, mixed use, public space and quality-of-space features that we disregarded in the 20th century with our love affair with the motor vehicle.

13:45

Douglas Norris (Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport in the UK): We believe that it may be desirable to reduce the speed and volume of motorised traffic on shared roads, particularly on local and urban roads, to give walkers and cyclists a more comfortable feeling. Safety is a key issue, and it is probably not practical to enlarge major roads in some older towns. There will have to be fewer cars, fewer motorised vehicles and possibly lower speed limits so that collisions or incidents are less serious.

The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport in the UK is planning to set up an active travel and planning group in the early part of 2010, which will have a specific cycling, travel planning and walking remit. More will come out about that shortly.

The Convener: Is that group intended to be a short-life group that will produce a report or an on-going group?

Douglas Norris: It is meant to be an on-going professional sector within the institute.

The Convener: Does anyone want to add anything about the issues that have been raised so far?

Campbell Divertie: On the better design of streets, we have to remember that long-term maintenance is an issue. Local authorities' revenue budgets are stretched, so proposals are resisted, although there is support for them, because of their financial and maintenance implications. Obviously, the utility companies must be able to maintain their infrastructures and ensure that supplies can be repaired. That creates resistance or reluctance to move forward. The geometry of the streets needs to be such that access for refuse vehicles and fire engines can still be maintained. That is where a lot of the conflict comes in.

Will Reid: Before it receives approval, every scheme is put through a tracking model, through which emergency and refuse vehicles are tracked. Such matters are therefore dealt with at the design and approval stage.

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP): How can road space be reallocated to cyclists and pedestrians without unduly restricting the movement of essential vehicular traffic? I am keen to find that out. How can we prioritise pedestrians and cyclists more without impeding traffic flows, if that is a good thing?

Eric Hill: I think that what you are suggesting would involve taking a step backwards towards segregation, in which all the flows are separated and allowed to do their own thing. If we are trying to encourage cycling in particular, to take it out of a leisure context and put it into a necessity context—my impression is that design for cycling has been carried out in that way over the past 20 years or so—and to give it as much importance as public transport that goes into town centres, for instance, we will have to alter things so that cyclists have priority at junctions similar to the priority that they have on the continent. The Netherlands is always a good example in that respect.

However, we find that when many of our cycle routes come to a side road, the give-way is on the cycle route, which means that anyone trying to commute by bicycle is stop-starting all the way in and it would be quicker for them to cycle on the road in among the traffic. Segregation can create that kind of issue. Having cyclists in with the traffic means that, from the design side, it is easier to maintain the priority for cyclists in particular by using adequate cycle lanes, bus lanes and so on.

It is more difficult with walking in the sense that, unless we are talking about major investment in bridges, underpasses and so on, maintaining priority for walking means having controlled junctions. As you will be aware, somebody has to stop at a controlled junction to give walkers priority. We must look at each situation and identify what is needed. If we want to encourage people to commute by walking or cycling on a particular route, we must treat it as a priority route and design it for non-motorised transport. However, we must accept that motorised transport will be delayed because of that.

Sebastian Tombs: Speaking as a cyclist, I thought that I might be a little cheeky and raise the question, as I do at most conferences to which I go, of which modes of transport everybody used to get here—perhaps I will not ask you to answer that. I got down here from Grove Street, having just had a haircut, in 12 minutes on my bicycle. I came down through the Cowgate and shared space with traffic, which is a little hairy at times because the road is fairly narrow and you have to be very alert. Many people do not cycle in this city because they are concerned not so much about the hills as about other users of the road space.

Everybody makes a set of risk assessments when judging how to travel. The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment produced a document about risk and the design of public space that might be of interest for the committee's work in trying to find which balance of measures is appropriate at certain levels of the hierarchy. Separate, segregated access for pedestrians and cyclists is appropriate in many cases where vehicles move at a certain speed, but once one gets below that, as others have said, one can then start to talk about integration.

We have not mentioned disabled people and those with sight impairments and so on, for whom this whole agenda is extremely worrying. One looks at their submissions to the "Designing Streets" consultation, for example, and notes that they have concerns that we must try to work through in practice. It is all very well to try to get some of this done by debate and discussion but, at some point, one has to make decisions, start implementing and learn from experience. We could get a long way towards some good results by looking at experience elsewhere.

For example, Neilston in East Renfrewshire is a renaissance town that promotes community-wide measures to improve access to schools. We have not talked about access to schools, but that is a real congestion problem there. In Neilston, they are looking at ways of dealing with traffic and vehicle movement and are trying to encourage young people to get to school by bike. There is a through-route in the town, which brings us back to

the initial question of how we manage getting vehicles from one end of the town to the other without stopping, while providing the appropriate quality of space whereby drivers will adjust their speed and behave according to what is required. There has to be a mixture of solutions that is appropriate for each case. Craigmillar, too, has a big through-route as well as residential areas. It is therefore a question of trying to find the right mode and degree of separation and protection according to the speed of the vehicles.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We can perhaps hear from Will Reid about his experience of dealing with that issue in his design for Craigmillar.

Will Reid: There is equal priority in the residential areas, so there is integration there. We have a school right in the centre of the development, which has been a great boon, particularly as the school was built first—two primary schools came together into one new one. The streets were therefore colonised by the children before the motorists arrived as the housing was built up. I would recommend to anybody who is looking to do a similar design that they get a use in early that generates a lot of pedestrians and cyclists. In that way, they naturally take over the public realm and the motorists, because of the design techniques that have led to low speed, naturally give way. Although I cannot give you figures—the evidence is anecdotal—cycling to those schools has increased, so more primary school children are cycling in that shared space environment and I believe that walking is also up. We will of course endeavour to get statistics to back that up.

I agree with Sebastian Tombs's comment that, when we move out from the residential areas to the busier streets, there is probably a case for having an element of segregation but, in our experience, some of the links out from residential areas to other areas are lacking. We are part of the Scottish sustainable communities initiative. One aspect of that is that we are working on an active travel plan, which addresses how to improve the links out from residential areas and the long-distance routes back into the city centre and how to improve the knowledge among people moving into the area so that they choose to cycle or walk rather than use their car.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Does anyone have anything to add?

Campbell Divertie: I think that we all agree that people require safe routes to encourage them to consider using their bicycle, so safe routes are important.

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