

# Midlothian Council Active Travel Strategy 2024-34

This is Spokes's response to Midlothian Council's [consultation](#) on their proposed Active Travel Strategy for 2024-34.

## Overview:

Midlothian, and particularly north Midlothian, has long been a car-dominated community. This has created several downsides including worsened congestion, road safety, air quality and contributing to the ongoing climate and biodiversity crises. As development proceeds and the population grows, it is imperative that as many people as possible in Midlothian are able to move around their local towns, villages and communities without needing a car. In order to make that possible, it needs to be made far easier, quicker and safer for them to do so, including for people using non-standard cycles (such as tandems, cargo bikes or tricycles), children and the elderly, and those who are risk-averse.

Importantly, active travel is also cheaper than driving. This means that if the council enables people to walk, wheel and cycle safely around and through Midlothian, there will be additional economic benefits for residents and businesses in Midlothian.

We believe that the proposed Active Travel Strategy is an ambitious, positive and necessary step towards a Midlothian where everyone is able to walk, wheel or cycle if they wish to.

We agree that the proposed 10-year project pipeline is "ambitious", but this is absolutely necessary. In particular, the twenty "very high" priority projects are crucial to the formation of the coherent, direct and contiguous cycling network that could transform Midlothian.

We therefore urge councillors to approve this strategy and to provide the resources and support to allow it to be implemented quickly.

Whilst we strongly support the proposed strategy, we have a number of suggestions which we think would improve it further, and we hope that these can be considered.

## Major points:

- Spokes strongly agrees with the three key aims of the ATS 2024.
- In Section 3, in addition to the points made about responding to public consultation, Midlothian Council could be reviewing policies and interventions from elsewhere in Scotland, the UK and further afield. This should be done to see which of them would be most likely to bring about the overall objectives of the ATS.
- Improvements to cross-boundary cycle routes (including at Lothianburn, Straiton and Sheriffhall) junctions are very important. We understand that, historically, it has been difficult to make progress here due to the complex nature of working with multiple roads authorities. If Spokes can be of any use as a stakeholder in discussions around such routes, then we would be happy to help.
- All new infrastructure must be built to contemporary best practice standards in terms of accessibility. We highly recommend that Midlothian engages with [Wheels for Wellbeing](#) where this would be useful, and adheres to their [Guide to Inclusive Cycling](#). Cycle parking standards should be revised to mandate inclusion of accessible cycle parking.
- We are very pleased to see the proposal to improve access and remove physical barriers on cycle paths. However, the text on page 51 should be changed to emphasise that barriers will be removed except where this cannot be done safely; the default position should be to remove a barrier.

- A small number of large roads projects could reverse all the benefits from the entire ATS. The “Relief Road” and Sheriffhall grade separation projects will, if they go ahead, both induce demand for driving. This would worsen congestion, air quality and road safety on the local road networks. Money and resources the council is currently allocating to these projects should be re-allocated to improvements to sustainable transport modes.

## Minor points:

- Section 2.2 says “transport is estimated to make up 37% of Scotland’s carbon emissions”. More up-to-date figures were [recently published](#), with the relevant figure now being 42%.
- The final paragraph of Section 3.2.3 (page 26) mentions increased attention for leisure and tourism journeys, rather than simply focusing on commuting. A large proportion of (potential) active travel journeys don’t fall into any of these categories,
- On page 32, decent online reporting tools for road surface defects, overgrown vegetation and other issues are really useful. Clearing of fallen leaves from cycle paths should be proactively scheduled (it happens at the same time every year).
- The lack of gritting on key cycle routes is a huge problem, as the snow soon gets packed down into ice, meaning it takes much longer to thaw.
- On page 35, there is a proposal to “look for funding opportunities to develop a ‘green/quiet road network’” in rural Midlothian; whilst this would have some benefits, we think that resources would be far more effectively used improving the urban and inter-urban active travel networks.
- Page 41 refers to “Cycling Sctoland”.
- “A detailed audit of the Sustrans National Cycle Network Route 196 will be undertaken” (page 43) – Spokes would be more than happy to help crowd-source a wider audit of Midlothian’s cycling network.
- As stated above, we think the main focus should be on developing a coherent, safe and contiguous cycle network in north Midlothian, rather than on expanding the long-distance off-road network. Nevertheless, there may be very good reasons for doing the latter in certain times and places.
- We are pleased to see the proposal on page 55 to incorporate active travel improvements into all road infrastructure projects. Such improvements should be substantial rather than just, for example, token cycle parking. This will make these projects more cost-effective and, if modal share shifts from motor vehicles to active travel, longer lasting. Furthermore, active travel improvements should be incorporated into all transport projects (unless inappropriate), not just road infrastructure projects. Indeed that should also be the case for many non-transport infrastructure projects, such as housing, public buildings, etc, where cycle access and links to the wider cycle network are vital.
- We believe that the most effective way to achieve Aim 2 (“Promote and enable behaviour change towards uptake in all forms of active travel.”) is to build as much high quality active travel infrastructure as possible. Monitoring and evaluation of projects which focus on the promotion/encouragement side of things is critical, to avoid ineffective use of resources.
- A table summarising proposed projects (other than active travel routes) would be a useful addition to the ATS.
- Without a map, some of the routes listed in Part 2 sound quite similar to each other. Consideration should be given, if it hasn’t already been, to how these routes are prioritised, to avoid scenarios where multiple routes are built between Town A and Town B, but no routes are built between Town C and Town D. For example:
  - Roslin-A701: Routes 12, 18, 53
  - NCN1-NCN196: Routes 13, 30

## Route-specific comments:

- Route 1 (RR3a. Roslin to Auchendinny): in the previous ATS, a short link is also shown connecting NCN196 to Firth Road at the west end of the Firth viaduct via the current informal footpath. Upgrading this short section would provide a very useful quiet alternative to the B7026. A speed limit reduction on Oatslie Road would also be very helpful.
- Route 3 refers to “Mellville” Dykes Road.
- Routes 5,6 and 58 (A702 Bush Loan Road to Flotterstone): Route 58 is listed as Medium priority, but would be very low hanging fruit if Routes 5 and 6 are implemented, and could possibly be done simultaneously.
- Route 24 (Newbattle Abbey Road/Newbattle Road): Very good to see this included as the existing pavement is very narrow. It is unlikely to be possible to make it wide enough to be shared use, in which case modal filters and other traffic calming measures should be included.
- Route 26 (Links from Shawfair/Millerhill to Dalkeith Country Park): Is the estate being consulted over this? In the meantime, improving access arrangements via the existing bridge over the bypass at Old Craighall would be beneficial; the locked gate could have a simple quick win solution rather than waiting for new paths and access to be made.
- Route 30 (Improvements to NCN1 along the B704): Since this is part of NCN 1 this should possibly be a higher priority given it is on the NCN (perhaps no longer given review). Also refers to “Dundass”.
- Route 52 (G7 and G9. New Hunterfield Road to Stobhill Road, Gorebridge, and the A7): This might be the most important gap in the network if all “Very high” priority projects are built, and it should be increased in priority from “Medium”.
- Route 69 (Path along Melville Gate Road): This feels like very low hanging fruit that would become incredibly useful when the A7 urbanisation makes the A7 a genuinely safe cycle route.

## The importance of language:

- On pages 7 and 15, the 20% reduction in car-km by 2030 is described as a “target” and a “goal”, whereas it is in fact a “commitment” of the Scottish Government (as stated when it was introduced in the December 2020 [Climate Change Plan 2018-2032 Update](#)). This is an important, if subtle, distinction.
- In many places the document says that Midlothian Council will “encourage” people to walk or cycle more. We think that, in most cases, the word “enable” would more accurately convey the intention. This is also an important shift in focus – few people will walk or cycle more simply because the council asks them to; many will if it becomes safer, quicker and easier.
- In a number of places, “segregated” cycling infrastructure is proposed. We think the word “protected” better conveys the point of such infrastructure.

Spokes  
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