

# 40 years of cycling

Posted on **September 20,2017** by **admin**

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[2016-09-14 17:16:48](#) Our local cycle lobbying group Spokes is celebrating 40 years of cycling (or lobbying). 2017 being one of these years when there seem to be lots of anniversaries. This is also coincidentally about the same time I have been cycling (a bit longer). How time flies! How life has changed. I was not in Edinburgh 40 years ago but in those days there was no cycle lanes and cycling was banned in many places where its now possible. Spokes came out of some Friends of the Earth people who wanted to improve cycling provision in Edinburgh. Many had linked up in the unsuccessful fight against Torness. In those days only a tiny number of people cycled. Those who did were thought to be eccentric at most and according to one Tory councillor at the time dangerous "commies". He was forced to retract. The whole attitude to cycling is much better and I (rarely) get abuse. My boss says on the West coast abuse and even attacks are common. By the time I arrived in Edinburgh in the 90's there were cycle lanes (off road) and a growing number of "Sheffield cycle racks". The number of these has grown exponentially. There were also by that time cycling officers employed by the council to plan and improve cycling provision. One of Spokes big successes in 40 years of cycling lobbying has been over getting bikes on other forms of transport. This was a right battle when new trains started appearing in the 90's. At first Scotrail banned bikes! After 4 weeks of sit down protests at Waverley station (which I regret not taking part in), Scotrail caved in. They then said there would be a £3 fee for each journey. This was quite a lot of money in those days. All right for intercity but very bad news for commutes. After further lobbying this was dropped. The same thing happened with the trams. Spokes lobbied at the design stage. Again we were told that its was unsafe etc. It was pointed out European trams carried bikes. My understanding is that you can take a bike on the trams. Other things Spokes has done over the last 40 years are produce a series of excellent cycle maps and start an annual transport survey on a key route into the city. This suggests that cycling is rising slowly from the low level. This is borne out by my anecdotal experience. We have reached the 3% level where there is always a bike in front of a car. Spokes lobbies in a patient positive manner and its been very successful but key challenges still remain. These are as I see them.

- The Scottish government has cut cycle spending compared to that of the previous lib/lab coalition.
- Cycles on trains are still an issue on what could broadly speaking would be called intercity routes. Whilst carriage is free, a booking is required. This is difficult to manage if a further bike reservation is needed for another stage in the journey, though on Edinburgh/Glasgow there is a way round by using slower commuter routes such as the one I use where there is no need for reservations. New or refurbished trains are arriving and promises of increased cycle spaces are being reneged on. The rail/cycle fight is not over.
- Segregated cycle routes; this is just beginning but we can expect push back as in London from the motoring lobby.
- A lack of off road arterial routes in the centre of the city and almost nothing north-south.

Here's to 40 more years. Neil

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