

The importance of the proposed Roseburn to Haymarket cycleway

This document aims to explain why the proposed cycleway between Roseburn Park and Haymarket is so important in the city's ambition to encourage cycling as a means of getting around. The proposed cycleway is part of a wider plan to provide a cycle link right through the city centre to York Place and the East End, more details of which can be found on the [council's consultation](#).

There is a [petition opposing](#) the new route at Roseburn and Wester Coates for various reasons, and it suggests that cyclists should continue to use the existing cycle route via Balbirnie Place and Haymarket Yards. However, this route is not fit for purpose as a main cycle route and in this document I will show why this is the case. I believe that many others agree given the signatories on a separate [petition in support](#) of the proposed new route.

Context

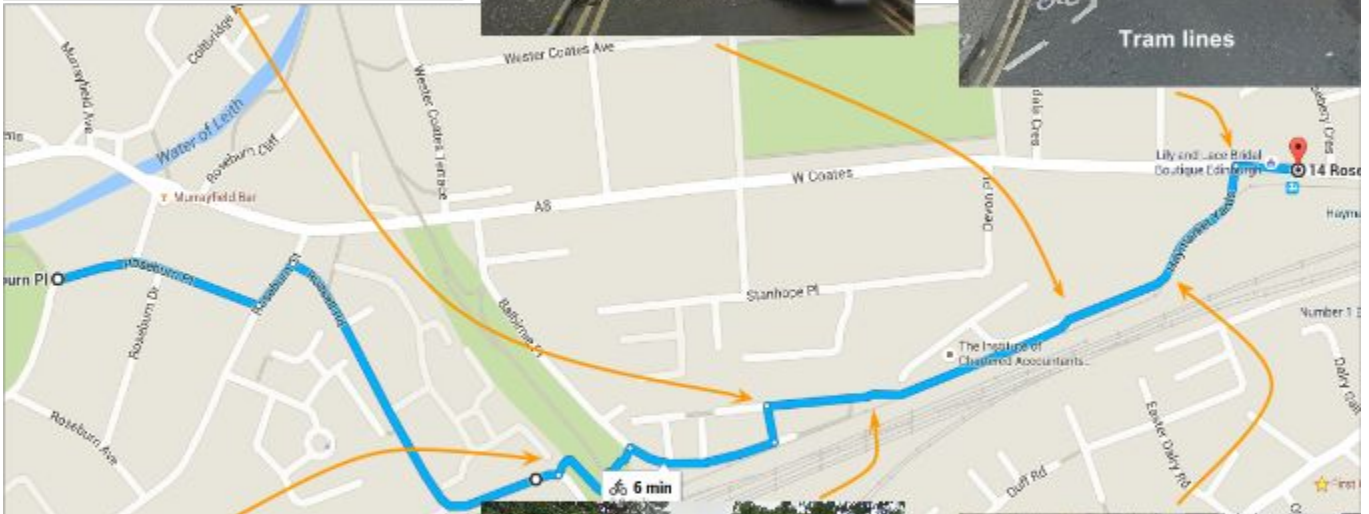
The area around Roseburn is a key point in Edinburgh's existing and proposed cycle network. In particular it's worth highlighting:

- the high quality North Edinburgh Path Network (NEPN) runs north from Roseburn and links to the whole of North Edinburgh including Leith, Newhaven, and Granton;
- the NEPN also carries National Cycle Route 1 north of Roseburn, which links to the north-west of Edinburgh including Davidson's Mains, Barnton, Dalmeny, and Queensferry;
- QuietRoute 8 runs west from Roseburn Park and links to Balgreen and Edinburgh Park;
- QuietRoute 9 runs west of Roseburn Park and links to Edinburgh Zoo, Corstorphine, Gogar, and Newbridge;
- there is an [active plan](#) to connect the NEPN with a new route south of Roseburn to provide a link with Fountainbridge, the Union Canal (and south-west Edinburgh via National Cycle Routes 75 and 754), and Bruntsfield (and onwards to south Edinburgh via QuietRoute 7).

As such, it is essential that there is a corresponding route east of Roseburn that links all of the above routes and places with the city centre.

The existing route

There is an existing route, signed as National Cycle Route 1, that connects Roseburn with the city centre via Balbirnie Place and Haymarket Yards. However, it's worth emphasising that this route is not a purpose built cycle facility and is instead a mix of roads with tram tracks, pavements, and residential car parks. As can be seen below, the existing route ([blue line](#)) has many turns in it, and also has considerable up and down due to the switchbacks where the NEPN ends at Russell Road. In short, it is not inviting to cyclists.



Comparison with the proposed new route

The following table attempts to objectively compare the council's proposed new route via Roseburn Terrace and Wester Coates with the existing route.

	Existing route	Proposed route
Directness	Not direct. Between Roseburn Park there are 11 twists and turns as you cross between various roads, pavements, and paths.	Very direct with a long straight section along Wester Coates and Roseburn Terrace. Between Roseburn Park and Haymarket Terrace there are only 2 turns.
Discoverability	Although the route is signed it mostly follows back roads and so is largely invisible to users of other modes of transport.	Very discoverable as it follows the main road. May encourage users of other modes of transport to try cycling.
Gradient	Bit of a hill coming up Haymarket Yards to Haymarket Terrace, though not too bad. Main concern are the ramps and switchbacks at Russell Road to get to Balbirnie Place – this is not at all desirable for a main cycle route.	Steady throughout.
Surfacing	The roads are well surfaced, but some sections between Balbirnie Place and Haymarket Yards features can be bumpy. The frequent jump between road and path means there are lots of little kerbs to bump over, which is not desirable for a main cycle route.	The new cycleway will be a consistent level surface throughout making it pleasant to cycle on.
Safety	Crossing the tram tracks twice at Haymarket Yards when heading west, both at awkward angles ¹ . Using a narrow path shared with pedestrians between Balbirnie Place and Haymarket Yards creates conflict with pedestrians and other cyclists. Car park for flats at end of Balbirnie Place has end on parking which risks a driver reversing into a cyclist by accident.	The new cycleway is segregated throughout, so hazards are relatively few. Cyclists have priority at junctions with side streets along Wester Coates, so this should be low risk. The road crossing at Roseburn Street will need careful design though to avoid conflict with pedestrians.
Shops & destinations	There are no shops on the route, though there are a couple of offices at Haymarket Yards. The offices could access the proposed route easily.	Guest houses on Wester Coates and shops on Roseburn Terrace, including pubs, cafes, takeaways, and professional services which cyclists can easily stop into while passing.

¹ Spokes have received several reports of accidents occurring on the tramlines at Haymarket Yards. Details of these are provided by Spokes in the appendix.

I hope this shows why the existing route is not fit for purpose, and not going to encourage more people to try cycling around Edinburgh, particularly those new to cycling. Nor is it well suited to those cycling with bikes designed to carry cargo or children which may struggle around the twists, turns, and tram tracks of the existing route.

Conclusions

If Edinburgh is serious about encouraging cycling² then I think it's clear that the existing route needs replaced so that there is a high quality cycle link between the city centre and Roseburn (and the many routes from there). The question then becomes what the replacement route should be.

The proposed section along Wester Coates is critical to the success of the project as the only other route is the poor one discussed above. The council plans for Wester Coates show how off-peak parking is retained along the north side which will benefit the hotels and guest houses, and the bus lane into the city is also retained, leaving 3 lanes available for traffic. It therefore seems like this part of the proposal makes sense, and indeed there will be benefits for pedestrians by making the two staggered pedestrian crossings into single stage crossings (where pedestrians only need to wait for one set of lights instead of two).

Clearly though, there are concerns among Roseburn residents and businesses about the plans at Roseburn Terrace, and the council need to take these into account as part of detailed designs. This section is tricky given the need to accommodate through traffic and loading and the council have acknowledged this and are also considering a route off the main road via Roseburn Place and Roseburn Street. This alternative would still deliver a high quality link, however it seems a shame that this would divert cyclists around Roseburn and not encourage them to go through Roseburn and stop in at the local shops³, nor would it result in more separation between pedestrians and traffic on the road.

Acknowledgements

This document was prepared by Chris Paton with comments and contributions by various people who are interested in making Edinburgh a better place to cycle, and maps and images from Google Maps. I am a Haymarket resident and have cycled around Edinburgh for 20 years, mainly because it gets me around quickly and cheaply without needing to wait for the bus or find a car parking space. As a bonus, cycling keeps me active and my 10 minute commute helps wake me up in the morning!

I was lucky enough grow up next to the North Edinburgh Path Network, which helped me build confidence as a cyclist and gain transport independence at a young age. I really want to see Edinburgh invest in world class cycle facilities so that everyone in Edinburgh can reap the benefits of cycling, and so that we can in the long term reduce the amount of traffic and noise in the city and make it a nicer place to live and work in.

² The council's target is 15% of trips to work made by bike by 2020. The [most recent data](#) shows the current level as 11.8%.

³ There are a number of reports documenting the trade benefits associated with cycle infrastructure. Various links are available at [People for Bikes](#), and British Cycling's "[Benefits of Investing in Cycling](#)" reports cites several sources on page 15. [CityLab](#) also makes a case specifically for converting street parking into bike lanes.

Revisions

The latest copy of this document can always be found at

<http://www.chrispaton.co.uk/documents/TheimportanceoftheproposedRoseburntoHaymarketcycleway.pdf>.

- 20 Jan 2016: First revision.
- 24 Jan 2016: Added link to latest version and acknowledged Google Maps.

Appendix

RECENT CRASHES KNOWN OF BY SPOKES AT HAYMARKET YARDS - quotes from victims

August 2015

I am reporting a crash caused by the tram tracks that my daughter Beth had this afternoon.

She was travelling eastwards along Haymarket yards and had started the short uphill stretch to Haymerket Terrace. About 1/2 way up, going quite slowly, her front wheel slipped on the most westerly tram track and she fell to the ground. Fortunately she was unhurt though a small baggage carrier was bent out of shape and may need to be replaced. Her tyres are wide and could not have become jammed in the tracks.

Jan 2015

I am reporting my cycle accident which happened having turned left at the lights at Clifton/Haymarket terrace into Haymarket Yards. While crossing over to the (ridiculously narrow) marked cycle path, my front wheel slipped along the wet steel of the tram track, getting stuck in the actual track groove. I was thrown from my bike, bruising my elbow and hands. I also hurt my back, resulting in pain across my ribs and stomach for the next 2 days. I have the details of 2 witnesses as well as pictures of the bruising. Luckily, the 2 people who checked I was ok managed to help me up before the next airport-bound tram came around the corner.

June 2014

I was cycling home from work and was crossing over the tracks at Haymarket Yards (coming down the hill from haymarket station) and hit them at the wrong angle and crashed. Two passerbys helped me off the road and I got a taxi home with my bike (which had a buckled front wheel from the crash). I sprained an ankle and a wrist, and seem to have caused more serious damage to my knee as it still hasn't recovered now - i can't put pressure on the top of my knee without pain.

I was a week into cycling from home to work and trying to replace my daily commute with a bike when I crashed. I haven't cycled to work since, as the crash shook me up quite a bit and I need to find an alternate route that doesn't involve tram tracks, as I won't go near those things again. Even taken at the right angle, they are dangerous and slippery, especially when there are cars and trams all around you.