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The Future of Transport in Edinburgh?

Cllr. Andrew Burns, Edinburgh's transport chief, writes exclusively for FoEE. Come and hear more from Cllr. Burns on 23rd October.

The recent announcement of provisional tram routes by the Council's arms-length transport company - Transport Initiatives Edinburgh (tie) - and the likelihood of Parliamentary Bills for these routes being submitted to Holyrood as early as December 2003, is fantastic news for this city and wider region.

Given this significant news, you would be forgiven for wondering why the City of Edinburgh Council is still pursuing the use of congestion charging? Well, it really is simple – no urban conurbation on planet earth has consistently reduced congestion by improving

public transport alone. Cities I know of that have – Oslo, Trondheim, Bergen, Rome, Singapore and now London – all have some form of demand management (congestion charging). Yes, we need improved public transport but yes, we also need a form of demand management. One without the other will not solve our pressing congestion problems.

And the problems are very pressing - by 2016, over 25 per cent more vehicles will come into Edinburgh daily. This will add 100 per cent to (double!) the impact of congestion delays and will adversely affect air quality, noise levels and



Picture: Colin Hattersley

Transport in Edinburgh

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the number of road accidents. To do nothing about this makes no sense at all; to keep our city and region forging ahead, Edinburgh must do something about it now.

The introduction of a congestion charge offers a real means of addressing these challenges. And all the money raised from the proposed charging scheme (after costs) will be spent on transport or related projects and services in the "Edinburgh neighbourhood". Edinburgh City Council has been working with its neighbouring authorities to define an impressive array of projects, which will make a vast difference to travel options within and around Edinburgh.

So that's why the City of Edinburgh Council has just published the first 'Draft Charging Orders' under the terms of the Transport Scotland Act. After a decade, at long last, we have moved on from endless theoretical debate on this issue and have entered the beginning of the statutory phase for the implementation of a congestion charging scheme. If you have web-access, please do visit www.ititime.com where you will be able to find the detail of the Council proposals.

By 2006, when the scheme could start, more experience of the effects, the organisation and the technology used elsewhere will be available. We will learn from the experiences in London and elsewhere to ensure we have the very best system we can devise.

Combined with transport improvements, congestion charging could achieve reductions in the impact of congestion of more than 50 per cent in the city centre and up to 30 per cent across the city as a whole. This will help essential journeys to be quicker and more reliable. It will free up roads, give pedestrians and cyclists a better deal and help buses move around much more efficiently, keeping to more reliable timetables.

Edinburgh's strength is the quality of its environment and townscape. Investing in travel improvements funded by a congestion charging scheme is the only way to meaningfully tackle

increasing traffic and congestion. There is no other credible solution.

Councillor Andrew Burns is Executive Member for Transport & Public Realm at The City of Edinburgh Council

Report of FoEE meeting: Duncan McLaren: The Future of Environmental Justice

What links the current savage war in the Democratic Republic of Congo with a landfill site in North Lanarkshire? The answer, according to Friends of the Earth Scotland Chief Executive Duncan McLaren (pictured), is environmental justice.

Many environmental justice issues in Scotland will be familiar to Friends of the Earth Edinburgh members, thanks to a national campaign. And for the UK a clear link is drawn between environmental justice and social justice. Tackling social exclusion has been a major objective for the Scottish government, and since May the Partnership Agreement between Labour and the Lib-Dems also highlights the government's commitment to include environmental justice in the policy agenda.

So what is environmental justice? For FoE, it concerns the rights of everyone to live in a healthy environment with access to resources they need, and, crucially, to live within the limits of our earth's resources. By drawing attention to the environment as an issue related to all aspects of politics, the potential is there to make the environment the centre of real political debate in Scotland. The rising importance of the green vote, created by FoE Scotland's engagement with the political process, was welcomed by Green MSP Mark Ballard, who was in the audience. He called for a total shift in public thinking to place environmental justice at the heart of policy-making.

For Scotland, this means integrating

environmental justice into areas like transport and planning legislation. McLaren quoted research suggesting that areas with the lowest rates of car ownership suffer most from traffic pollution and road accidents involving children. This has environmental justice implications for congestion charging in Edinburgh and Glasgow's planned M74 extension. In addition, research by FoE in England has shown that factories producing two thirds of all carcinogenic emissions are located in wards in the bottom 10% of the deprivation index.

The picture is certainly similar in Scotland. The birth of the environmental justice movement in Scotland can be traced to the Greengairs landfill site in North Lanarkshire. In 1996 soil laced with PCBs was trucked up from England to be dumped there. While this soil was too toxic to be dumped in England, SEPA (Scottish Environment Protection Agency) had not yet tightened up regulations for Scotland, and legally the company was allowed to use the site. For the local community, the struggle for environmental justice meant they not only had to fight against the toxic waste being dumped in the first place, but they also needed to fight for stricter regulation by public watchdogs.

But beyond Scotland, McLaren reminded us we should also be aware of the global and cross-generational dimensions of environmental justice. For instance, the demand for mobile phones has contributed to a war in Congo over the exploitation of natural resources, specifically coltan, used in mobile phones.

The greatest international and inter-generational problem we face is, of course, climate change, the impacts of which are going to be felt hardest in countries like Bangladesh and Egypt. Other problems include depletion of the ozone layer, "gender-bending" chemicals in our atmosphere and rainforest clearances in Brazil for soya plantations, which displace smallholders and cause soil erosion, but produce animal feeds for European cattle.

But it's no use blaming multi-national corporations alone; the chances are that if you're reading this article you too are a victor, gaining from the many environmental injustices perpetrated all around the world

today. Many connections run between our privileged lifestyles and their far-flung impacts.

We may all be major beneficiaries of environmental injustices in the UK and abroad, but, as McLaren asked, are we really the winners? Our salaries may go up, but is our quality of life going down as society becomes less and less equitable? By creating problems for our neighbours and children, are we truly, as consumers and investors, creating a world that we can be proud of?

Environmental justice highlights the global connections arising from our lifestyles and demonstrates how they impact most on the impoverished, both at home and abroad. And the answer? According to McLaren, it's about greater corporate accountability enforced by governments and financial centres, primary legislation on Strategic Environmental Assessment, with environmental justice written into Scottish law, and a real commitment to applying the three principles of the Aarhus Convention: access to environmental information, greater participation in environmental decision-making and greater access to justice - for example with a third party right of appeal provision being brought into planning law.

As individuals we may have little choice, but we are consumers and investors in the corporations which are acting as agents of environmental injustice. We need to fight for environmental justice here in Scotland, internationally and also for our children.

Helen Todd is a Committee member of FoE Edinburgh



Picture: Colin Hattersley

Make Contact

If you'd like to get involved in the work of Friends of the Earth Edinburgh, please email us on info@foe-edinburgh.org.uk

Or visit www.foe-edinburgh.org.uk. For those without access to the internet, call Jolin Warren on 0131 466 8329.

We'd also be keen to hear any ideas or comments you have about the events and campaigns organised by the group.

Dates for Your Diaries

Thursday 23 October, 7.30pm:
FoEE Public Meeting, Friends Meeting House. Cllr. Andrew Burns: "The future for transport in Edinburgh."

Thursday 27 November, 7.30pm:
FoEE Public Meeting, Friends Meeting House. Wasting Away - Edinburgh's plans for the city's waste. Cllr. Bob Cairns, CEC Executive Member for the Environmental Services.

Thursday 18 December, 7.00pm - 1.00am:
FoE Scotland 25th Birthday Night. Three course meal, after-dinner speaker, ceilidh & disco to commemorate 25 years campaigning for Environmental Justice in Scotland. Call Jo Heron on 0131 554 9977 for more information.

Co-ordinators' Comment

As I write this first Co-ordinator's message after our short Summer break, I'm sitting on the couch nursing the predictable Autumn cold. After a fabulous Summer, the nights are getting longer and chillier, and FoE Edinburgh are preparing to get stuck into some much needed campaigning.

Last month FoEE held their end-of-Summer barbeque, which was enjoyed by everyone who attended (despite the efforts of a grumpy neighbour). The food was all organic and lovingly prepared by Jolin, Susan and myself,

as well as being cooked to perfection - no burnt burgers or charcoaled chicken to be seen!

Our AGM and first Public Meeting after the Summer break was held on September 25. It was well attended and everybody felt that the past year had been a success, with FoEE achieving most of the aims that were decided upon at the strategy day last January. There will be another strategy day organised for early 2004 and everybody is welcome to come along and offer input for the coming year.

A brand new committee was elected which has a good mix of old timers and new blood among the office bearers and committee members. I am delighted to have been appointed as joint co-ordinator, a role in which I share responsibility with Jolin Warren (our top BBQ chef!).

Now is an exciting time to be a part of FoEE - we are growing in number and with a new influx of learned enthusiastic committee members, who knows who we can influence and what we can achieve? I look forward to spending the next year working with Jolin and everybody on the committee to make FoEE a force to be reckoned with.

Katriona Harding, Joint Co-ordinator, FoEE



Picture: Colin Howden