

Towards Active Cities: Scotland the Brave?

Abstract

Scotland has seen considerable progress in terms of national policies and growing national budgets for active travel. However, this has not yet translated into a transformation of our towns and cities. In most cases, transport at a local level is dominated by space for private motor vehicles. Dedicated space and infrastructure for cycling is rare and the quality and scope of pedestrian infrastructure compares poorly to space provided for motor vehicles.

The local situation contrasts sharply with national policies that promote a vision for active travel and safer more pleasant streets. Nor does, Scottish practice match the scale and ambition of leading European and global cities that have adopted bold policies to reallocate space through transformative transport and public realm aligned to theories pioneered by urbanists such as Jan Gehl. Leading examples, of modern place-based transport planning include: Copenhagen, Paris, New York, Brussels and London, alongside many smaller cities.

At the time of writing (early 2018), no Scottish city had completed a major project that matches the ambition of national policies, or comparable to continental examples of best practice. However, there are encouraging signs that new approaches are emerging, although progress varies across Scottish cities. Significant change will come when suite of new projects is delivered. This will test political commitment to allocating new levels of space and priority for active modes of travel. The Glasgow Avenues project and Aberdeen City Centre Master Plan and potentially Edinburgh City Centre Transformation represent a major departure in how space for transport is provided within city centre areas. This paper identifies factors associated with the successful development of active cities and discusses how applicable these drivers are in a Scottish context and the prospects for further change.

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Towards Active Cities: Scotland the Brave?

1.0 Background

There are significant benefits in designing cities around active travel in terms of public health and economic competitiveness. This evidence is summarised in publications such as [Cities Alive: Towards a Walking World](#)¹ and [Designed to Move a Guide for City Leaders](#)². City Leaders and policy makers have also embraced commitments to more active cities expressed through the [Toronto Charter](#) a documented cited in Scotland's physical implementation plan. Leading exponents of the creating active cities in include Amsterdam and Copenhagen. Copenhagen via techniques and approaches pioneered by the architect and urbanist Jan Gehl has been instrumental in shifting practice from traffic engineering to designing places where people and active travel are prioritised. Jan Gehl provides a good explanation of the concepts underpinning active cities in his 2010 book *Cities for People*:

“Achieving the vision of lively, safe, sustainable and healthy cities has become a general and urgent desire. Four key objectives – lively cities, safety, sustainability and health can be strengthened immeasurably by increasing concern for pedestrians, cyclists and city life in general. A unified city wide political intervention to ensure that the residents of the city are invited walk and bike as much as possible in connection with their daily activities is a strong reinforcement of these objectives”³

Gehl's vision is mirrored in the vision set out in the Scottish Government Government's Active Travel Vision⁴:

“We want to capitalise on this golden opportunity for Scotland to achieve lasting change and increase the number of people choosing to travel actively across all communities as part of their everyday lives, whether to get to work, pick up the shopping or to visit friends. Creating the types of place where active travel is popular will help us achieve many outcomes, including better health, having attractive, safe communities and increased economic activity.”

Whilst health, inactivity and air pollution are a major driver of this agenda, there is also a growing recognition of the importance active travel to quality of life and economic performance. For example, Amazon is making access to a network of bike lanes a requirement for any city wishing to host its new HQ⁵. It is debatable whether any Scottish city would have the infrastructure to enter a similar European competition.

2.0 Active Cities: The Global Leaders

The following examples leading the active cities, offer a contrast with current Scottish practice.

2.1 Copenhagen

Copenhagen is synonymous as a bicycle city, but this was not always the case, and today's status stems from decisions made in the early 1960s. This started with pedestrianisation of its principle street Strøget. In comparison, Scottish Cities weren't to see similar projects until the 1970s (Buchanan Street, Glasgow) and into the 1980s. Whereas progress in Scotland was sporadic and tailed off in the late 1990s, progress in the Danish capital continued. At the end of the last century Copenhagen had over 96 000 m² (of which 33 % is street and 67 % city squares) of car-free space⁶. Even by 2018 no Scottish city has a comparable level of dedicated pedestrian space. However, Copenhagen's influence is even greater in establishing an approach in terms of a unified citywide political intervention to ensure that the residents of the city are invited to walk and bike as much as possible in connection with their daily activities⁷. A key lesson for Scotland is the presence of a coherent overarching vision focused on quality of life, then growing a network of space for bikes and civic space for people on foot.

2.2 New York

The Big Apple offers significant lessons for Scottish cities in terms of how the Gehl approach to active cities can be applied in a rapid and transformative manner. Starting in the early 2000s the mayor Michael Bloomberg supported moves by Transport Commissioner Jannet Sadik-Khan to improve the downtown environment of Manhattan via reallocating space for bike lanes, and mini plazas. The project started with temporary projects but advanced to deliver significant and permanent changes including the part of pedestrianisation of Times Square. As a result of installing a network of protected bike lanes on key routes, cycling trips doubled⁸. This period is documented in Sadik-Khan's book "Street Fight" on the challenges of working with the city's pro-business mayor Michael Bloomberg to reallocate space in previously car dominated Manhattan and surrounding boroughs.⁹ Edinburgh can learn from New York in the way it built a commercial case to address the overcrowding of its downtown areas despite an initially skeptical business community and hostile media. Glasgow, a grid plan city like New York, can learn from the focus on developing bike lanes on key routes into the city centre along key avenues.

2.3 Paris

In 2013 Paris turned the Place de la République from a busy road junction into a pedestrian plaza planted with trees, lined with benches, and filled with people. The transformation was so popular that the city decided to roll this programme onto other areas¹⁰. This has included regular car free days, most notably closing 1/3 of the city in September 2015¹¹. One of the most significant and controversial projects led by the Mayor Anne Hidalgo was to replace a high-way on the right side of the Seine with a pedestrian walkway in 2016¹². The scheme represented a significant part of a strategy aimed at tackling air pollution. Whilst successful as a new space for people and bikes the decision is now being challenged by opponents on legal procedural technicalities¹³. Paris is significant in strong leadership in using active travel and reallocating space from cars as a response to the type air quality issues now becoming a concern in Scottish cities. Public support for the retention of the Seine pedestrian walkway illustrates the effectiveness of the test and learn approach. The need to tackle air pollution has also been used to justify radical action, which previously seemed unthinkable.

2.4 Brussels

In July 2015 city authorities in Brussels pedestrianised three squares including Bourse, plus the section of Boulevard Anspach that connects them. It was touted as the biggest car-free zone in Europe outside of Venice. The scheme doubles the amount of pedestrian space beyond the Grote market area to cover a space between the inner ring road with the Brussels tunnels, the so-called pentagon. An explicit part of the plan was to have as few cars as possible inside this pentagon area¹⁴. The project has proven controversial and taken time to bed in, but overall it has proven popular. Pascal Smet, mobility minister for the region, noted the problems of driving through a project of this scale whilst relying on support from local mayors¹⁵, a situation contrasts with the centrally led Paris example. This point is significant in Scottish context given the relatively weak powers of local government and regional transport authorities, and the absence of executive figures such as elected city mayors. Brussels illustrates that despite institutional barriers and opposition, significant change can be delivered quickly through strong leadership and a test and learn approach.

2.5 London

Within a UK context, London has been the leading proponent of modal shift and creating new space for people to walk and cycle. This started in 2003 with the first and only UK congestion charge, an example that Edinburgh would have liked to follow but failed to do so due to an unsuccessful referendum. More recently the rollout of a network of super cycle highways has rapidly increased commuting by bike. At a borough level 'Mini-Holland' projects have sought to reduce through traffic in residential neighbourhoods. The London Assembly, Transport for London (TfL) and the City of London Corporation have gradually raised their ambitions including, Trafalgar square part pedestrianisation in 2003 the creation of new public realm outside stations (Kings Cross¹⁶) and removal of gyratory junctions (e.g. Aldgate¹⁷) and finally the removal of all traffic, including buses from Oxford Street¹⁸.

These projects however don't sit in isolation and are part of an approach to 'Health Streets' that are now at the heart of the Mayor's Transport Strategy produced by TfL¹⁹. The strategy's central aim is for

80% of all trips in London to be made on foot, by cycle or using public transport by 2041²⁰. Such targets if realised will require the full application of the London 'Healthy Streets' approach which takes inspiration from Jan Gehl's work in Copenhagen. London demonstrates the value of a strong city-wide authority, mayoral leadership and a visionary plan focused on quality of life. Scotland can also learn from the use of station redevelopments as a catalyst for creating new public space, notably Kings Cross station regeneration. Overall, the London strategy sets out to reallocate space and reduce traffic as part of a wider vision to make the key destinations more accessible.

2.6 Smaller Cities lessons for Scotland

It can be argued that smaller Scottish cities face challenges embracing ideas conceived in global capitals, although Edinburgh and Glasgow are comparable in scale to Copenhagen. This argument also holds little water when progress in other smaller European cities is reviewed. For example, **Oslo** has upgraded plans for its cycle network which when complete will place 85% of citizens within 200 metres of a cycle path²¹. and plans to ban all private cars from the city centre by 2019²². Meanwhile, **Helsinki** has ambitious plans for a "mobility on demand" service so good that nobody will want to drive a car in the centre by 2025²³. Nearer to Scotland, **Dublin** has ambitious plans that echo Paris and New York which will see large scale transformation of the public realm in the city centre²⁴. This includes a major public realm revamp and creation of dedicated pedestrian plaza in the College Green area²⁵. **Barcelona** a city, seeking to rival Copenhagen in terms of quality of life is also taking action to challenge car dominance – via Super Blocks. In these spaces through traffic will be eliminated in favour of prioritising more direct trips by foot and by bike²⁶. **Seville** has also shown that a rapid cycling led transformation of city transport can be achieved²⁷. Again, each project has been built around strong vision and leadership to deliver a coherent network of active travel routes and places for people on foot.

2.7 Summary of factors influencing active cities

Whilst, many of the changes documented reflect distinct local factors, there are obvious common themes. These include:

1. **A strong vision for active travel built around quality of life**
2. **Clear targets and outcomes for active travel including new active travel routes / networks, space reallocation and traffic reduction,**
3. **A visible leader or champion to drive forward change**
4. **Significant investment in strategic projects that reallocate space**
5. **A willingness to disrupt, test and learn**

3.0 Scottish Cities: Vision And Strategy For Active Travel

3.1 The national picture

The National Planning Framework (NPF) puts cities at the heart of economic and spatial policy "Scotland's seven city regions are home to the majority of our population and economic activity. In the coming years, our cities network will continue to be a focus for investment"²⁸. The NPF sets out a focus "on the quality, sustainability and resilience of the built environment and wider public realm, and on improving accessibility by public and sustainable transport modes, such as cycling". The NPF states "Reducing the impact of the car on city and town centres will make a significant contribution to realising their potential as sustainable places to live and invest by addressing congestion, air pollution and noise and improving the public realm. Significant health benefits could be achieved by substantially increasing active travel within our most densely populated areas."²⁹ Whilst the national transport strategy and NPF are largely devoid of concrete targets The National Performance Framework tracks progress on three transport-specific National Indicators: reducing traffic congestion; increasing the proportion of journeys to work made by public or active transport; and reducing death on Scotland's roads³⁰. This provides a basic framework for developing active cities both nationally and locally. Meanwhile the 'Place Standard' offers a holistic way to plan projects with communities³¹.

3.2 Aberdeen

For Scotland’s cities this converts into a vision for Aberdeen “To create a “Vibrant, attractive, connected and economically sustainable city centre that is accessible to all and well equipped to adapt to changing circumstances over time”.

3.3 Dundee

In Dundee there is a general commitment to sustainable travel across a number of documents from the city plan, local plan and capital investment strategy. Its notable however that the Dundee Local Development Plan Action Programme makes not specific commitments to major projects that deliver new space for people to walk or cycle³².

3.4 Edinburgh

Partly prompted by high profile tragedy involving a cyclist³³, the City of Edinburgh Council made a commitment to: *“A medium-term action plan, to be implemented before the end of this Council term, to improve the public realm in the city centre with the aim of improving conditions for, and prioritising access for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users.”*³⁴ The paper goes to state *“Edinburgh can learn from other leading cities that have balanced city growth with an improved quality of life and urban environment and develop solutions that reflect its own circumstances and the needs of its citizens”*. The committee paper also goes onto cite the Jan Gehl 2010 paper on a vision rooted in a Copenhagen focus civic space and priority for active travel for Edinburgh’s main streets³⁵.

3.5 Glasgow

In 2011, Glasgow made a strong statement of intent about the city’s future, encapsulated in Future Glasgow, which sets out a vision of what kind of place the Council, partners and the people of Glasgow would like the city to become over the next fifty years. The vision committed the council to: *“Promoting active and sustainable travel as part of a healthy lifestyle through greater use of walking, cycling and public transport. This is a core part of the future vision for Glasgow”*.³⁶

3.6 Summary of strategies support active cities

Table 1 provides as summary of key local strategies supporting the development of active cities in Scotland.

Table 1 Key Strategies Supporting Active Cities

City	Reimagined Public Realm	Requires Space reallocation	Key Document
Aberdeen	Yes	Yes	Aberdeen City Centre Masterplan and delivery programme Local Transport Strategy 2016-21
Dundee	None	None	Waterfront not counted due to lack of active travel provision
Edinburgh	Consulting	To be confirmed	City Centre Transformation Local Transport Strategy 2014-19

Glasgow	Yes	Yes	Glasgow City Centre Strategy and Action Plan 2014–19 Glasgow City Centre Transport Strategy 2014-2024 Future: A fifty-year vision for the city
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Table 1 shows that Scottish cities are at various stages of development in terms of strategies to transform their public realm and new priorities for transport. Aberdeen and Glasgow lead the way in terms of agreed approaches that are beneficial to active travel in terms through masterplans. In both cases the strategic vision has been converted into projects which are in construction. However, Glasgow has a much clearer pipeline of city centre active travel projects. Although at an early stage, it's clear Edinburgh's city centre vision will include two major cycle schemes (N to S and E to W) and one major public realm project (George St) and this could result in a significant reduction in space for traffic to accommodate active modes.

4.0 Scottish Cities: Targets for Active Travel And Traffic Reduction

4.1 National commitments

Beyond the non-specific commitments to positive trends for active travel in the National Performance framework the only specific national targets for active travel are contained in the Cycling Action Plan (CAPS) which sets out a shared national vision for a 10% modal share of everyday journeys³⁷. There is no specific target in the National Walking Strategy aside from “*aspiring to achieve levels of walking on a par with the best performing countries such as the Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland. Where, well over 30% of journeys are walked.*”³⁸

4.2 Summary of targets for cities

Table 1 Active City Targets

City	Target for walking	Target for increasing cycling	Traffic reduction
Aberdeen	Increase non-specific	Increase non-specific	Master plan requires city centre traffic to decrease by 20% LTS mode shift aspiration
Dundee	Increase non-specific	Double The number of journeys made by bike annually in Dundee by 2026	No specific target
Edinburgh	+ 0.5 % increase on baseline	+ 5% on baseline	- 6.5% reduction in traffic modal share

Glasgow	Increase non-specific	Increase in cycling to/from the City Centre from 7,636 per day (2012-2014 average) to 15,000 per day by 2025	Reduce non-specific
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Its notable that Aberdeen is the only Scottish city that discusses a specific and ambitious traffic reduction target through recognising that a 20% reduction in traffic is needed to realise its Masterplan vision. However, this isn't specifically reflected in the local transport strategy. Other Scottish cities are less specific in terms of aspiring to a general reduction in traffic levels. Further evidence of a developing commitment to traffic reduction in Glasgow was demonstrated in the formation of a Connectivity Commission³⁹. Edinburgh aspires to change modal share in its Local Transport Strategy but does not spell out what this means in terms overall traffic levels entering the city.

Across Scottish cities there is little consistency in how targets are being set making analysis challenging. The lack of any clear targets for walking is notable. Apart from Edinburgh cycling targets must be seen in the context of very low baselines. Further work also is necessary in defining what targets for active travel mean in terms of traffic reduction. Nor are clear 'Oslo style' targets on cycle lane network development visible.

5.0 Scottish Cities: Leadership On Active Travel And Placemaking

5.1 Aberdeen

Aberdeen has a bold master plan, however its less certain who will drive this forward, with each project to be voted through one by one. So far councilors have shown a determination to see through the Broad Street project, removing general traffic and increasing public realm. However, aspirations to make the scheme for walking and cycling only (excluding buses) have been voted down twice. It will take an even higher degree of political courage to deliver the bolder projects such as removing cars from Union Street. In this regard plans to pedestrianize Aberdeen's main street where effectively put on hold in 2013. In the meantime, a number of minor adjoining streets are proposed for evening only pedestrianisation⁴⁰. Its seems debate on the future of union street is both ongoing and open ended as part of masterplan rollout, although discussion on the need for dedicated cycleways has begun⁴¹.

5.2 Edinburgh

Edinburgh has required bold leadership on active travel to deliver a city wide 20mph project, based around signs, lines and the promotion of behaviour change – including a high concentration of 20mph limits in the city centre.

Building on the successful introduction of 20mph the latest council administration has set out a bold agenda for Edinburgh's City centre. Recently Lesley MacInnes, the councils Transport and Environment Convenor has stated:

“Under Central Edinburgh Transformation, we want to bring issues like congestion, street clutter and poor air quality to the fore, working with residents, communities and businesses to rethink transport priorities, in turn unlocking the potential of our historic streets. ... Though we ultimately hope to create a change in behaviour and a shift away from private cars, this is not a case of 'driver vs pedestrian' or 'tourist vs resident'. We are absolutely committed to creating a safer and more enjoyable experience for everyone. But we simply can't ignore the fact that we need to make significant changes in order to protect our environment, ensure the safety of the public, provide access to people of all abilities and improve the quality of life here⁴²”.

The prospects of such statements being reflected in policy change are strengthened by Edinburgh's appointment of a leading sustainable travel practitioner to lead its city centre transformation⁴³.

5.3 Glasgow

In Glasgow Anna Richardson City Convener for Sustainability and Carbon Reduction has shown strong support for an active cities agenda stating:

"A healthy city is one in which we can all breathe clean air, yet we know that one of the main causes of pollution in urban areas is motorised transport. A healthy city is one that, through its very design, had embedded attractive walking and cycling routes, so that essential journeys also double up as much needed physical activity. And a healthy city of the future requires us to ensure that today's children are able to walk and cycle safely to school and round their neighbourhoods, without their streets being congested with cars"⁴⁴.

The Council Leader Susan Aitken's backing for an independent Glasgow Connectivity Commission chaired Professor David Begg shows a similar commitment to change. In this respect Begg has stated:

"We need to get more people onto public transport, walking and cycling, we need more quality pedestrian space and public realm to improve the retail environment and city centre experience. We need to both arrest decline and improve Glasgow's offer. If you live in a community which is not on the rail network and don't have a car they are pretty marginalised. That must be addressed."⁴⁵

5.4 Dundee

There are no visible champions for substantive active travel projects in Dundee. Notably, Dundee has struggled to implement a 20mph project comparable with Edinburgh or Glasgow

6.0 Scottish Cities: Investment In Active Travel Projects

6.1 Overview

The level of a cities ambition is better measured in projects delivered, rather than in the targets it sets self.

Aberdeen has delivered one project at Broad Street and has a number of smaller civic realm schemes in its master plan. However, pedestrian improvements on union street are only a longer term aspiration⁴⁶.

Edinburgh has two significant projects emerging, although only one has a secure final funding package. Beyond major schemes Edinburgh has a further 24 cycling schemes that funding and resources to progress to the construction stage⁴⁷.

Its notable that Glasgow has suite of initiatives emerging through its [Avenues Project](#) which offers a network of strategic active travel links in the city centre. In addition, Glasgow has built the first dedicated segregated cycle corridor in a Scottish city, in the South-West City Way, with a second currently under construction. The Connecting Woodside project also offers the prospect of Barcelona or London style filtered permeability for a neighborhood bordering the city centre.

A review of the Dundee City Councils capital plan says little on active travel and instead focuses on major road schemes: *"We will work with the Tay Cities Deal, Transport Scotland and Tactran to bring forward proposals to consider the best option for upgrading the A90 around/through Dundee"⁴⁸.*

Beyond the larger cities Stirling and Inverness as progressing significant cycle led projects, through successful community links projects on major strategic arteries into the city centre. Both projects are funded by the Community Links Plus fund, showing the significance of national backing for transformative schemes.

Table 3 Summary Of Major Active Travel Projects

City	Summary	Status	Funding
Aberdeen	Broad Street delivered	Construction	Community links
	Union Street (no timescale)	Aspiration	TBC
Dundee	No major projects identified	NA	NA
Edinburgh	Meadows George St	Consultation	Community Links plus
	George Street	Design	TBC
	East – West Cycle Route	Design	Community Links TBC
Glasgow	Avenues Project	Construction of first project	City Deal
	South City Way	Constructions	Community Links Plus
	Connecting Woodside	Design	Community Links Plus
	South-West City Way delivered	Complete	Community Links

6.2 Scotland’s missing projects and missed opportunities

Haymarket, and Dundee stations redevelopments both pose significant challenges for pedestrians and cyclists to navigate. Dundee’s station redevelopment offers people arriving on foot multiple traffic lanes and split crossing points whilst there is no dedicated cycle infrastructure. Plans for Glasgow Queen Street station similarly fail to make the link with George Square as a regenerated civic space. This approach contrasts with the more holistic approach, best illustrated by Kings Cross or Oxford Circus. However, against this trend, proposals are being developed for public realm enhancements as part of plans to improve Stirling and Inverness stations.

Proposals for Edinburgh’s Picardy Place as part of the new creation of the new St James shopping centre and tram stop, are notable in terms of the level of criticism from both active travel and heritage organisations. Whilst, the final gyratory design does contain some dedicated elements of public realm space and new cycleways, these are disjointed and subservient to traffic management arrangements little different from those in the 1970s. In London This type layout is being systematically removed (e.g. Aldgate) as a means of promoting active travel. A similar, lack of coherent provision for active travel are apparent in the initial plans for the Edinburgh Tram system extension, which have been universally criticised by active travel organisations. The Fast Link Project between Glasgow City Centre and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital has only partial provision of dedicated infrastructure for cycling and walking.

Meanwhile, in the capital 20 years after the upper part of the Royal Mile was partially pedestrianised (car access to the City Chambers and Courts has been maintained), the lower half of the mile from the North Bridge to Holyrood is a traffic dominated space, with narrow and overcrowded footways.

It's notable, with the exception of Glasgow's avenues projects no active travel projects are proposed in the city region deals for Aberdeen⁴⁹ or Edinburgh⁵⁰ or Dundee⁵¹. This belies the economic importance to Scottish cities of creating more high-quality spaces for people. The big risk for Scotland's cities is that other cities which are doing this, such as those discussed above, have a competitive advantage in terms of attracting investment, business relocations and skilled labour,

7.0 Scottish Cities: Disrupt, Test and Learn Activities

New York and Paris have shown the value of acting quickly via temporary projects to demonstrate the viability of more permeant changes. Car free days particularly in Paris have also been used as a tactic to allow people to experience the benefits of active cities. However, cities in Scotland have shown limited appetite for test and learn projects. Notably exceptions are Aberdeen's limited but highly successful car free day and Edinburgh's 12-month closure of George Street. Whilst, George Street did demonstrate transformation was positive and achievable. However once the experimental traffic order lapsed, the street reverted to its original configuration and a final vision for its future has been very slow to emerge.

Edinburgh hasn't chosen to use its international festival as a trigger for temporary street closures. This is despite concerns about overcrowding and pedestrian safety. Glasgow significantly reduced access to the city centre and key routes to venues, when it hosted the 2014 Common Wealth Games. Whilst the evaluation of these arrangements showed impressive results, particularly in relation to walking, the overall legacy remains unclear. Both cities have hosted pedal on parliament and 'city ride' cycling events involving significant but short-lived road closures to promote cycling. However, such events are irregular and not linked to a wider strategy for change as in New York and Paris.

The most convincing example, of why this approach can succeed in Scotland can be seen in City of Edinburgh Council's 20mph programme. This grew out of a ward level pilot, which validated the approach allowing a city-wide roll-out to be justified. Its notable that this process started in 2011, spanning three political administrations. Despite this success and school street closures more ambitious temporary initiatives haven't followed. This includes failing to exploit the 44-week closure of Leith Street to traffic and creation of a temporary but popular cycle lane. The reluctance to exploit these opportunities points, to institutional, procedural differences with continental cities who use temporary closures as part of strategy to make permanent changes and promote active travel. As far back as the 1960s Jane Jacobs observed: "*Cities are an immense laboratory of trial and error, failure and success, in city building and city design.*"⁵². It can be argued that Scottish cities either have a fear of failure or lack the intuitional tools to move quickly with trial initiatives deployed successfully in leading cities.

8.0 Towards Active Cities In Scotland Summary

Evidence from Europe and North America show five consistent factors in the delivery of active cities. The efforts of Scottish cities can be assessed using these factors to judge progress.

8.1: Vision and strategy

This is visible particularly in national policies and also reflected at a city level. Aberdeen and Glasgow have masterplans that if implemented will represent a considerable shift to places that support active travel. Edinburgh is further behind, but is developing an aspirational vision.

8.2 Clear targets for active travel and traffic reduction

Whilst targets exist its questionable whether these fully reflect the level of ambition set out in the vision set out at a strategic level. Cycling targets start from a low baseline whilst walking targets are largely

absent. A commitment to traffic reduction is generally implicit rather than explicit. Defined targets for network development are also illusive.

8.3 Political Leadership to champion and to drive forward change

Scotland's main cities benefit from a group of political leaders that are committed to active travel. This has allowed progress towards a city wide 20mph network (Edinburgh), major cycle schemes (South City Way and Avenues Glasgow), and public realm transformations (Aberdeen Broad St). However, this level of engagement will need to be sustained if more ambitious projects are to be realized, including Edinburgh City Centre transformation. However, there is evidence, from Paris, London and New York, that the appointment of elected City Mayors with greater powers including appointing commissioners, may make it easier to push through more radical traffic reduction and active travel policies.

8.4 Investment in strategic projects that reallocate space,

Much will ride on the success of Glasgow's South City Way and Avenues projects in demonstrating the impact and popularity of new active travel links. Community Links Plus appears to have raised ambitions with six major projects in Glasgow (2), Edinburgh (2), whilst Inverness and Stirling are also delivering projects of a strategic nature for the first time. However, significant opportunities to develop active infrastructure have been missed, and mainstream funding, such as City Deal, isn't often being directed towards active travel. Outside Glasgow investment has focused on conventional road improvements, such as the £140m Sheriff hall round about.

8.5 Willingness to disrupt, test and learn

Scotland has been slow to seed new projects via tactical urbanism initiatives. This means lessons aren't being learned and opportunities to demonstrate the benefits of change are being missed. The institutional reasons holding back trial initiatives need to be explored, including staff capacity, organizational culture and cumbersome procedures such as traffic regulation orders.

9.0 Conclusions

Scotland has a brave vision for active travel at both a national level and in most of its major cities. This embraces many aspects of the people centred approach conceived in Copenhagen and now transforming major cities including, New York, Paris and Brussels. In these cities changes have come about through a powerful vision focused on quality of life, targets, strong and visible political leadership, high profile projects of a transformative nature and testing new approaches.

In Scotland, a new generation of projects is emerging driven by Community Links Plus funding. However, the ambition in terms of measurable targets is limited, especially in relation to new networks, creating new pedestrian spaces and traffic reduction. This may change as a bolder group of political leaders' demand more tangible and larger scale projects to tackle air pollution, congestion and inactivity. A greater urgency and willingness to test and learn from quick non-permanent transformation is also needed to increase the pace of change.

Projects in Copenhagen, New York, Paris, and London show leading cities are not only brave but getting braver. Meanwhile smaller cities such as Brussels and, Oslo are following their lead. Scotland's first steps towards more active cities are only bold by the nation's own historical standards. They appear less ambitious when seen through an international lens. Therefore, braver decisions will be needed if the vision shared with leading active cities is to become a reality in Scotland.

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