

PE1595/DDD

Sustrans Scotland Letter of 15 February 2016

Consideration of Petition [PE1595](#) (Moratorium on Shared Space Schemes)

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to place a moratorium on all shared space schemes until safety and equality concerns have been addressed.

The (Public Petition) Committee asks Sustrans Scotland for its views on shared space schemes and the place of controlled crossings within them.

Thank you for asking Sustrans Scotland to contribute its views to the above Public Petition and, specifically, on the matter of controlled crossings within shared space schemes.

Executive Summary

Sustrans considers that the principle of recalibrating streets away from accommodating only vehicle movement in favour of quieter, calmer space where the movement of people comes first is a sound approach to the urban realm.

Shared space is, however, an often misunderstood and widely used term that can mean more than one design approach to the urban realm.

Generally speaking, we see shared space as a design that delivers an urban space that causes the driver to be less dominant in favour of pedestrians, people on bicycles, emphasising quieter, less congested and less polluted space.

Controlled crossings are an orthodox element in an infrastructure project in the urban realm. They allow and encourage traffic to be the dominant user in a street which is at odds with the principles of shared space. We contend that the introduction of controlled crossings into an infrastructure project in the urban realm causes that project to cease to be considered a shared-space scheme and become a standard, orthodox treatment for the urban environment, such as can be seen on many high streets in Scotland.

Response

Sustrans Scotland seeks to help organisations – such as Local Authorities – meet their duties under the Equality Act 2010 to deliver inclusive projects in the public realm which advance equality and accessibility. Community Links and Street Design are two Sustrans' programmes that provide financial support, technical guidance and support to partner organisations involved in the planning and construction of new street layouts as well as the modification of existing street layouts. Sustrans manages the funding for these projects on behalf of Transport Scotland, with participants providing half the funding required for delivery.

Sustrans Scotland supports shared space when the concept is understood as an inclusive design approach.

The term shared space refers to an approach to the design of space rather than a prescribed set of design solutions of physical features. It is a very broad term covering a wide variety of interventions. For example, Home Zones, such as the award-winning streetscapes of Wauchope Square in Craigmillar, Edinburgh are shared space.

Some shared space schemes feature what is often referred to as a shared or level surface, whilst other shared space schemes retain physical segregation between different user groups.

When used as a design approach shared space places an emphasis on the creation or re-design of public areas where greater priority is given to pedestrians and cyclists and other vulnerable road users – rather than movement by motor vehicles. This view is consistent with the Scottish Government Policy document Designing Streets (2010, p.13).

A good quality place, in our opinion, is one that has been designed from the outset of the process with an understanding of the physical barriers to movement that people with reduced mobility or impaired senses have. Public space should be an enabling - not a disabling - environment that is collaboratively designed to support movement by all road users, regardless of age or ability.

The place of, and justification for the inclusion of controlled or uncontrolled crossings, should therefore derive from a thorough understanding of the local context and an assessment of risk.

Good quality design takes time and starts with genuine and meaningful engagement with a range of stakeholders from the outset - rather than the laying out of preferred or prescriptive design solutions. Designs should reflect both local needs and aspirations based on a thorough understanding of the specific requirements of people with reduced mobility and or impaired senses.

For many designers and delivery bodies this may mean that as part of the design process there will be greater emphasis on engagement with groups with specific requirements relating to their physical abilities or impairments.

For example, at Sustrans Scotland we have undertaken training with the Guide Dogs for the Blind and Accessibility Panels and our staff have worked on a one-to-one basis with many individuals – including the petitioner – to facilitate inclusive designs which improve accessibility for all.

The place of controlled or uncontrolled crossings within any scheme therefore depends on the local context and community needs. It also depends on both designers and delivery bodies being able to justify the inclusion of any particular feature with the full knowledge of the associated risks and benefits.

Notwithstanding the above, on the specific matter of uncontrolled crossings (also known as courtesy crossings) there are many thousands of informal crossing points in the United Kingdom. These are often marked by no more than dropped kerbs, sometimes with a central island.

Please see Appendix A for some examples of uncontrolled/courtesy crossings.

Courtesy crossings – when applied in public realm design schemes - tend to be present where the likelihood of pedestrians crossing is made more evident to drivers through paving, lighting or other means. It means that where signalised crossings are not appropriate or are impractical, the presence of pedestrians and cyclists can be made more visible.

For example, in Bristol, the pedestrian and cycle route to Temple Meads through Queen Square passes over several long-established examples of courtesy crossings. It is not possible to include signal-controlled crossings at every point where pedestrians may cross a road. Courtesy crossings are a means to recognise and enable pedestrians crossing by highlighting them to drivers. Indeed, a number of shared space schemes include central median strips that serve to reduce traffic speeds whilst at the same time facilitating pedestrians crossing along the full length of a street.

Controlled crossings are similar to the above but also include signals or similar controls to stop vehicles using the carriageway for a period so that pedestrians can cross. Examples include zebra crossings, puffins, pelicans and toucans and Signalised Junction arrangements with pedestrian crossing phases. Please see Appendix B for examples of controlled crossings.

Given the above, and the wealth of evidence from around the UK, Sustrans does not support the proposed moratorium on shared space schemes. We believe that legislating against a specific design solution or approach would be a retrograde step. It would make genuine community consultation and collaboration in public realm design less likely and reduce the pressing need to make our streets more accessible, inclusive, safer and healthier for all users.

Yours Sincerely,

John Lauder, National Director
Sustrans Scotland

Appendix A

Uncontrolled / Courtesy crossing examples



Courtesy crossing in Chester (photo provided by Ben-Hamilton Baillie)



Courtesy crossing in Swaffham (photo provided by Ben-Hamilton Baillie)

Appendix B

Controlled crossing examples



Zebra crossing in Bristol (photo supplied by Sustrans)



Puffin crossing in Bridlington (photo provided by Sustrans)