

## **PE1595/BB**

Margaret Hutchison Letter of 11 January 2016

The Petitions Committee  
Scottish Parliament

Petition Ref PE1595:  
Moritorium on Shared Space schemes until all safety issues are addressed

I wish to add my support to the above Petition lodged by Mr Alexander Taylor on 3rd Dec 2015 for the following reasons.

I am a registered blind person who has a low "carbon footprint" who currently walks daily INDEPENDENTLY & IN TOTAL SAFETY to my local Town Centre of Kirkintilloch with assistance from my guide dog who helps me negotiate through numerous obstacles & along the streets using vital "Landmarks" such as guard rails, building lines, kerbs & Controlled Crossings . We have been trained together as a partnership & get across the very busy roads /junctions using this safe proven method.

Even though I have a "disability" I'm currently included with everyone else & have the same freedom of choice to fully access my town & be independent --part of my local community.

I have the SAME ACCESS as anyone else as is my right. I should NOT be denied access or prevented from doing so by a new Town Centre "Master plan" which discriminates against me & as such does not comply with Equality legislation.

Currently, despite being in the minority I am not treated as a "second class citizen" deserving no consideration or regard.

(There IS however one large "shared surface" area in Southbank Rd which I'm currently unable to cross safely on my own & have to plan my route to avoid this which means a longer more circuitous route.)

With the "expansion" of such areas planned throughout Scotland our exclusion will become almost total. This isn't fair or equitable & is a retrograde step should the planned "Shared Space or inaply named Balanced Street Approach" come to fruition in Kirkintilloch.

I, like many others who are in a "Protected Group" will then have to use TAXIs as a safe method of travel & "up" both our carbon footprint & lose our hard fought independence which is ludicrous & discriminatory.

In this plan there will only be 3 Controlled "Puffin" Crossings in total all of which are at the one end i.e. the far end of Cowgate; two of which will be located in 2 "side streets"

off the main thoroughfare of the Town Centre. NONE OF THESE WILL BE IN THE MAIN SHOPPING AREA OF COWGATE (where most of the banks & local medical centres / surgeries are located).

There will be NO Controlled Crossings, only 6 Courtesy Crossings WITHIN Cowgate so vulnerable folks like us will be denied SAFE access across (Our council's comment is that this is OUR CHOICE! as they ARE providing us with a crossing! So much for their "Public Sector Duty of Care") What blatant discrimination!

It has also been intimated that the Controlled Crossings will only be TEMPORARY until we "get used to" the new courtesy crossings! & will then be removed. How Balanced will this plan be then?

We obviously don't matter as we're only a small minority within the local community deemed as expendable, not worthy of consideration or equal treatment being then fully excluded!

These "Shared Space /Balanced Streets" schemes are based on purely a false ideological theory as to their positive benefit & NOT based on factual evidence.

The design of such schemes are based mainly on aesthetic appearance & DO NOT HAVE INCLUSION AT THEIR HEART & as such effectively "ban" the most "vulnerable" residents within the community from their own Town Centres. "Access For All" does NOT apply!

By removing vital proven "safeguards" such as CONTROLLED Crossings, guardrails & kerbs these schemes become confusing & dangerous "no go" areas for many people who are in a more "vulnerable" category as reiterated in a recent House of Lords Debate by Lord Chris Holmes who described "Shared Space" schemes as "the most systematic, institutionalised discrimination against blind people the U.K. has ever seen"

Local authorities are also motivated by the vast financial "contributions" from both the government & other agencies under the banner of "Green Issues" towards these plans which promote & give preference to walkers & cyclists which is commendable but shouldn't override the rights of the disabled.

Government has only given GUIDELINES under "Designing Streets" to Local authorities who are then not held to account for their actions which is unjust.

These "vulnerable groups include those with mobility problems, the elderly, mothers with young children in buggies, those with Dementia/Alzheimer's who need familiar "landmarks" such as traffic lights to navigate SAFELY & INDEPENDENTLY .

I have a totally blind friend who used to be able to go out independently with her guide dog in DUMFRIES until they made FRIARS VENNEL into a "shared space" & she can no longer go there due to the many obstacles around including traffic, A Boards, tables

& chairs, parked cars, bollards & the tactile paving which was unsuitable Her guide dog too was confused as these schemes negate all the guide dog training. She now can only go there with her husband accompanying her & without her guide dog thus defeating the reason she got her guide dog & mobility training.

I have another friend who has a mobility scooter & who MUST have controlled crossings to travel locally independently.

I know several local motorists who also dislike these schemes as they find them very confusing as they don't know who has right of way/or predict another driver's actions & also feel very anxious in these areas as they too find it difficult to take in everything all at once. They too say they'll avoid the area as happened during the "trial" here in Aug 2014.

Those who are totally blind ( i.e." BLACK BLIND" ) who have no sight or light perception at all, Deafblind are placed in a really frightening, particularly difficult & dangerous situation EACH TIME they step out into what is a "vast No Mans Land" without any idea of where they are & WHERE vehicles are coming from .

It is a proven fact that without sight a person CANNOT walk in a straight line for more than a few steps before "going off course" thus rendering the statement that tactile surfaces at each side of a road will guide them safely across to the other side - a total fallacy.

They may START correctly but there is absolutely NOTHING at all to guide them safely in a straight line to the other side

A Controlled Crossing such as a Puffin crossing firstly ensures vehicles MUST STOP when the button is pressed. Also when the green pedestrian Light is on & the "Bleeper" sounds the blind ( or visually impaired person) can be assured no vehicles will be in their way & can be "guided" safely & INDEPENDENTLY to the other side by the audible sound.

For someone who is Deafblind there is a cone which revolves when the button is pressed on a Controlled Crossing to let them know it's safe to cross the road.

These schemes show the total lack of understanding or empathy with the reality of BLINDNESS.

This proposed "shared space" area is at a very busy 4 way junction where cars, buses, cycles, motorbikes, electric cars, lorries & pedestrians will be approaching from 4 different directions at the same time - an extremely frightening & hazardous situation for any blind or seriously visually impaired person to be placed in.

To show such scant regard to those of us who are more vulnerable is absolutely shocking as is the statement by the proponents of such schemes that there SHOULD

BE AN ELEMENT OF RISK in such schemes! (Obviously a comment by a fully sighted able bodied planner!)

It is stated that our local authority consulted with groups such as Guide Dogs, Deafblind & the Federation of the Blind but this WAS NOT OF THEIR OWN INIATIVE & was at OUR insistence. In fact our group only found out about it by accident. It was only in late 2014 that any "vulnerable" groups were so called "consulted". Our views & concerns were by & large ignored. e.g. the council's brief for their "Equality Impact Assessment" was to be only a technical assessment without any input /reference to the "end users"

Despite what the planners of Shared Space schemes claim there is NO MANDATORY OBLIGATION for a vehicle driver to stop at an uncontrolled or "Courtesy Crossing" or that miraculously all drivers WILL have a less aggressive driving behaviour& immediately stop as soon as a pedestrian's foot is laid on a courtesy crossing!

This has overwhelmingly been proved NOT to be the case as demonstrated in the many accidents, even fatalities caused at such schemes in England where some private individuals have taken local authorities to court under the Equality Act & Human Rights legislation.

As "Courtesy Crossings" ARE NOT CKASSIFIED by the Dept of Transport there is NO MANDATORY OBLIGATION to record, maintain or provide OFFICIAL statistics of any such accidents (whether serious or even minor) at "Courtesy Crossings" as is required at Controlled Crossings.

Claims that there has been "no significant increase" in accidents occuring in "Shared Space" areas cannot be substantiated.

As Vice Chair, I also am speaking on behalf of the Members of E.D.V.I.P. Forum who also share the same concerns & will face the same problems if this "Shared Space / Balanced Street" scheme goes ahead in Kirkintilloch. Many of these members have both hearing & sight impairments.

Margaret Hutchison  
11th January 2016