

Weekly Poll - COVID-19: Spaces for People

Each week Disability Equality Scotland send out a poll question to our members on a topical issue. For the week beginning 14 August 2020, we asked a question about the Spaces for People programme, a topic suggested by the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland (MACS). Spaces for People is a new temporary infrastructure programme to provide additional space for physical distancing for people to walk, wheel or cycle while COVID-19 restrictions remain in place. The Spaces for People programme is funded by the Scottish Government and managed by Sustrans Scotland.

Results

Question 1: Have you noticed any 'Spaces for People' changes to your local streets, or town centres?

- YES – 86% (416 respondents)
- NO – 14% (68 respondents)

Question 2: Have the Spaces for People changes made it:

- Easier to get around – 10% (48 respondents)
- More difficult – 71% (333 respondents)
- Made no difference – 19% (91 respondents)

Comments

The majority of respondents (71%) reported that Spaces for People changes in their local communities made it more difficult to get around. This compares with 10% who believed the changes made it easier to get

around, whilst 19% of respondents had noticed no difference. Respondents identified the following main themes and key concerns. We provide verbatim comments where appropriate to illustrate strength of feeling or personal experience.

Pavements

Pavements have been widened in some locations to support physical distancing. A portion of respondents raised concerns about the implementation and design of such changes. There are examples of pavements that have been extended into the road with cones separating the two. However, respondents in Edinburgh report that there are a limited number of dropped kerbs to make the extra space accessible for people with reduced mobility. In contrast, respondents in Aberdeen praised pavement extensions for being level with the existing infrastructure.

“In Edinburgh many of the pavement extensions are down a kerb which is difficult for disabled people.”

“Pavements in Edinburgh at various places have been extended but lack dropped kerbs.”

“I like the new wooden pavement extensions in Aberdeen. These have been put in at the same height as the pavement and this makes access easy.”

“In Aberdeen they have used wooden plinths to extend the width of pavements. These were put in at the same height as the pavement and have built in seating areas. This means that when out on my mobility scooter some of the previous barriers with advertising boards and litter bins sitting outside shops are easier for me to get round.”

In addition, concerns were raised by the inconsistent layout of pavement extensions.

“The council decides more space is required at one part of the pavement but not 100 metres further down. It just smacks of being obstructive.”

“I live in Edinburgh and I’m not a fan of the extended pavements - especially when they stop and start so much.”

Some respondents reported that no changes have been introduced in their local communities to increase the width of pavements, despite a recognisable need due to narrow pathways and an increase in footfall from tourists.

“I live in South Queensferry and hoped they could do something with the High Street as the pavements are too narrow and I can’t wheel on the busy cobbled road.”

“I would have thought there would have been more done to give people walking about in Aviemore more room, especially as tourists return and hotels and shops get busier (good for the local businesses and economy)”

“I live in Inveraray and nothing has been done to widen the pavements. The Old Military Road reopened and the town was mobbed with people too close on pavements”

Street Clutter

There were ongoing challenges faced by disabled people due to obstructions on pathways created by street clutter such as café furniture, guard railings, street signs and bollards. This limits the amount of space

available for physical distancing and can also act as a hazard for people with reduced mobility and visual impairments.

“Cafés and bars have been allowed to create spill out areas to trade outside.”

“In my town they have allows pubs and cafes to use the pavements for tables and this is a barrier.”

“The new pavement obstruction with sitting areas outside pubs and cafés are blocking pavements.”

Parking Bays

Disabled people were concerned by the removal and relocation of parking bays in town centres. These measures have been implemented to increase the width of pavements to make it easier for pedestrians to stay a safe distance apart. However, many blue badge holders can no longer access spaces in town centres, which may restrict access to essential goods and services.

“The removal of blue badge spaces in Glasgow city has left me unable to access the area. More exclusions!”

“I am unable to park in my local town centre. Trying to shop local and support local business, but parking restrictions have made it impossible.”

“My grandparents have a blue badge, but with the removal of parking, they cannot get out to Morningside or Bruntsfield at all. The normal bays that they could park in for free have been removed, and a very small number of disable bays are left, which are always full. Must be awful for local businesses that have already taken the Covid hit.”

Road Closures

Roads have been temporarily closed in areas across Scotland to provide more space for people to walk, wheel or cycle during lockdown. As the lockdown restrictions ease, there has been an increase in the amount of road traffic. With some roads remaining closed, this has resulted in greater levels of congestion. Several respondents highlighted the disruption created by the closure of Braid Road in Edinburgh.

“Closing Braid Road is causing tailbacks on adjacent roads. The space was initially useful as extra room for pedestrians but is no longer being used with lockdown over.”

“Congestion in our area has increased due to a vital route being closed for Spaces for People. Initially it was used by pedestrians but now people are returning to work the road space is unused but causes chaos in the surrounding roads. More congestion now is prevalent outside a primary school on Comiston Road. Braid Road should now be opened again.”

“Braid Road closure has caused chaos, extended journey times, increased pollution and additional measures in Morningside and Comiston road have done the same, along with making the area unsightly with so many new lines and cones. Also impossible to pull over for ambulance or fire engine so it is going to cost lives. No benefit to anyone and a complete waste of public money.”

In contrast, a respondent highlighted the benefits of the road closure.

“Edinburgh - closure of Braid Road is fantastic. The local children now have a safe route to school and local residents have safe access to the Hermitage for exercise. It's wonderful!”

Cycle Lanes

Pop up cycle lanes have been introduced in communities across the country to encourage more people to travel by bike. Disabled people are concerned by the design and layout of temporary cycle lanes and the introduction of floating bus stops. A floating bus stop is an arrangement that involves a cycleway running behind the passenger boarding area at a bus stop. This arrangement can pose significant dangers to disabled people when getting on and off buses.

“I live in Knightswood and my nearest bus stop is Great Western Road. They have put in new cycling area and a raised section to bridge to pavement to beyond the cycle lane, but this isn’t working, and cyclist are zooming past as you get on and off the bus.”

“Pop up cycle lanes have meant that taxis sometimes have to drop me significantly away from my intended destination because they cannot get to it.”

“Making pedestrians cross a cycle lane to get on a bus is just downright dangerous, as is having a disabled parking space in the middle of the road. Yes, encourage cycling but not at the expense of the safety of other road users.”

One respondent was encouraged by new cycle lanes introduced in Edinburgh.

“Loving the new cycle lanes in Edinburgh. Please keep adding to them, they are making cycling so much more pleasurable!”

Consultation

Respondents criticised councils for the lack of consultation with disabled people prior to introducing the Spaces for People changes. As the umbrella body for Access Panels, Disability Equality Scotland strongly recommends that councils across Scotland engage with their local Access Panel. Panels provide a valuable service in their communities by advising on the accessibility of the build environment. More information about Access Panels can be found on the Access Panel Network website:

www.accesspanelnetwork.org.uk

“Glasgow City Centre is a stramash and no-go area for disabled people now. Glasgow Access Panel were not approached to ask for advice before these changes and the council now aren’t listening. Most disabled parking bays have also been removed.”

“Buchanan Street is terrible and all-around George Square. So confusing now and difficult to navigate and physically distance. Why were disabled people or Access Panels not involved in these designs?”

“Inverness City Centre - reduced disabled parking, poorly placed barriers, no tactile or wayfinding and bike hire racks a bike obstructing pavements. It is not working for disabled people, visually impaired and blind people. I have not seen any consultation notices to hear from people - why not?”

“Won’t be long until there is a crash and the fact that none of the local community had been consulted makes it even more of an insult. No safety audits - they are getting carried out once the work has been finished. A total waste of money in that aspect.”

“In my area many of those interventions have been created at some urgency without any engagement with disabled people and with no EqIA's being carried out, or at least none of any quality that can be informative.”

Conclusion

Most respondents believed that the changes introduced by the Spaces for People programme have made it more difficult for disabled people to get around in communities across Scotland. In some areas, pavement extensions had created a hazard by extending into roads without the inclusion of dropped kerbs. An increase in café furniture created additional street clutter which poses a danger to people with reduced mobility and visual impairments. The removal of blue badge spaces from city centre locations restricts access to vital goods and services. Poorly designed pop up cycle lanes which incorporate floating bus stops do not take account of disabled people getting on and off buses. A failure by local authorities to consult with disabled people and Access Panels prior to introducing the Spaces for People changes is a significant misstep, which must be rectified through proactive and meaningful engagement going forward.

Disability Equality Scotland, September 2020

About Disability Equality Scotland

We are a national charity working to make life more accessible, equal and inclusive for disabled people in Scotland.

We promote access in its widest sense, including access to the built and natural environment and access to the same opportunities as are enjoyed by others in our communities thus promoting a life of dignity, respect, choice and independence. This extends beyond physical access to include access to information, access to inclusive communication and inclusion in decision-making, whether with planners over inclusive design or transport providers about accessible travel.

We represent the views of individuals with any type of impairment, as well as disability organisations and groups who share Disability Equality Scotland's values.

We are also the umbrella organisation for all disability Access Panels in Scotland and the principal provider of support and guidance to the Access Panels presently representing disabled persons at a local level throughout Scotland. Access Panels are committed to improving access and equality in its widest form, which means access to the physical environment, Education, Housing, Health, Transport, Leisure & Recreation and Social Justice amongst other areas.

We are membership led. If you are an individual or an organisation, you can [join our membership](#) for FREE and help to further our aims. We work to influence the policies of the Scottish Government, which affect how disabled people live and we work to encourage others to be inclusive and informed in their attitudes towards disabled people.