

Waiting to Happen

by New Practice



Put simply, Waiting to Happen is a campaign about cycling safety. More specifically it is about confusion, inconvenience, impatience, crossing paths and the legacy of an avoidable loss.

At the start of 2023 our friend and colleague Emma Burke Newman was killed whilst cycling from her home in the Southside to Glasgow School of Art. The location of this collision, the Clydeside junction by the Casino, is a notorious problem spot. When we learnt of the tragic news, there was a commonality in our reactions: it felt like there was no need to ask how, just a quiet resignation that this junction was a latent danger spot.

Waiting to Happen is a survey based campaign that examines three junctions and gathers anecdotal, qualitative and quantitative data from the public about their everyday experiences of use. We have so far had over 800 survey respondents, far more than we anticipated. Each time something is highlighted like so in this piece of writing, it indicates a phrase lifted directly from the survey. By weaving respondents into this text we hope that it can be seen as more of a collective anecdote responding to issues around cycling safety in Glasgow. The problem with individual anecdotes is that they are easy to dismiss. But the problem with stripping anecdote from data collection is that it leaves no room for the on-the-ground detail of how near-misses and

collisions actually occur. Despite a cycle lane conforming to official guidelines, factors specific to the location may impact usability. For example, a distracting billboard may obscure a key view, there may be a particular set of traffic lights that some drivers race through, or a recurring puddle that forces cyclists into the road.

The three junctions that our survey focuses on were selected because they each feel like an 'incident waiting to happen', and because as an office we have personal experience frequenting them on our commutes; they do not necessarily represent the city's only or worst offenders. Our three focus junctions merely **scrape the surface**, with the survey respondents revealing just how many problematic spots there are around the city. The outcomes of this data gathering will be presented to Glasgow City Council's Active Travel Committee via local councillors, with the aim to promote safer design for junctions and the implementation of immediate interventions and changes to make our journeys in the city safer. Alongside this reporting exercise, we intend to do something more active with the data - what exactly that will be will only reveal itself as we begin the lengthy exercise of processing all the data after the survey closes at the end of this month.

From the data already received however, common threads are already emerging. The word that comes out on top is

confusion. There is a **proliferation of confusing junctions and signage** across the city affecting all road users. **Distracted drivers** are more dangerous. If they are concentrating on **complicated lights, unusual junction layouts, restrictions and lane changes all at once, this often takes precedence over awareness of other road users.** For cyclists, the confusion most often results from being **spat-out** at the end of a segregated cycle lane as it **suddenly ends and merges into four lane highways with large, fast junctions.** There has been significant new cycle infrastructure implemented in the city over the past 5-10 years, and there is much to commend in this regard. Yet these cycle routes **do not feel complete or seamless.** Traversing onto and between them is all too often an exercise in deciding what the least dangerous option is. As summed up by one survey respondent, specifically talking about the Casino/ King George V Bridge junction - **"I do what I believe to be the safest way of navigating but I find myself anxiously waiting for someone to have a go at me."** The worst outcome of navigating such confusion is of course a collision, leading to injury or death. But the lower-level more insidious effect is an increase in **aggressive interactions** between all road users, heightening the us-vs-them mentality. If the **cycle lane does not provide the cyclist with a safe and efficient option** then they will most likely choose another route, whether that be staying on the road (cue being aggressively