

A horizontal bar with five colored segments: yellow, blue, red, green, and orange.

Second Review of Scottish Parliament Boundaries - Provisional Proposals Consultation Response

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Introduction

The following submission to Boundaries Scotland is not intended to represent a comprehensive response by Ballot Box Scotland to provisional proposals for new Scottish Parliament Constituencies. Although my work through Ballot Box Scotland has given me a generally better understanding and awareness of Scottish geography than the average person, it remains the case that I am not necessarily aware of exact local identities and feelings outside of the parts of the country I'm familiar with.

In addition, Ballot Box Scotland is a single person project, run in my spare time, rather than an organisation with multiple people who may be able to pool their expertise to give a full response to every proposed constituency. Instead, the proposals here bring together some thoughts on those areas that I am familiar with, plus areas where there are clear and easily amendable issues.

I would also like to reaffirm my regular statement that I recognise that "odd", "awkward" or downright "silly" constituency boundaries are not generally the fault of Boundaries Scotland, or any other boundary commission, but a natural consequence of the use of the First Past the Post voting system, even if in the case of the Scottish Parliament it is only part of the wider Additional Member System. It is not possible to divide Scotland, or any geographic unit, into X number of equally-sized electoral units and have all of those units feel "natural". That is simply not how human geography works.

There are a number of constituency boundaries, most notably in Edinburgh, East Lothian, Midlothian, North Lanarkshire, East Dunbartonshire, West Dunbartonshire and Argyll and Bute that, in an ideal world, I would not consider particularly useful or accurate for politically representative geography. They nonetheless may be the best options available under the present voting system, which simply further evidences that First Past the Post is an archaic electoral system, not merely ill-suited to genuine democratic representation, but also extremely poor at doing one of the key things it is claimed to be good at, namely representing distinct local areas.

It is of course the case that the electoral system is not within the remit of Boundaries Scotland or this review, and would instead be a matter for the Scottish Parliament as a whole. I do not believe it would be right or fair to blame Boundaries Scotland for the failings of our electoral system.

Nonetheless for context, Ballot Box Scotland takes a position supportive of Open List Party Proportional Representation, where boundaries would be permanently aligned to more natural geography – for example, local authorities – and the number of seats per constituency would instead vary based on population. [An example of such a system is available on the Ballot Box Scotland website here](#), and I would commend it to any elected representative upset about boundary changes.

Aberdeenshire East / Banff and Buchan Coast

The boundary between the proposed Aberdeenshire East and Banff and Buchan Coast constituencies bisects the village of Longside by using the A950 as the boundary. Whilst the road represents a convenient boundary, there does not seem to be any sense to breaking local ties by dividing a village of approximately 1,000 residents between constituencies.

Given the small number of electors involved and the fact both proposed constituencies are not very far from the electoral quota, the boundary should be amended to include Longside entirely within one constituency. Moving the boundary north so the village is entirely within Aberdeenshire East would involve the least change relative to the initial proposal (see image 1).

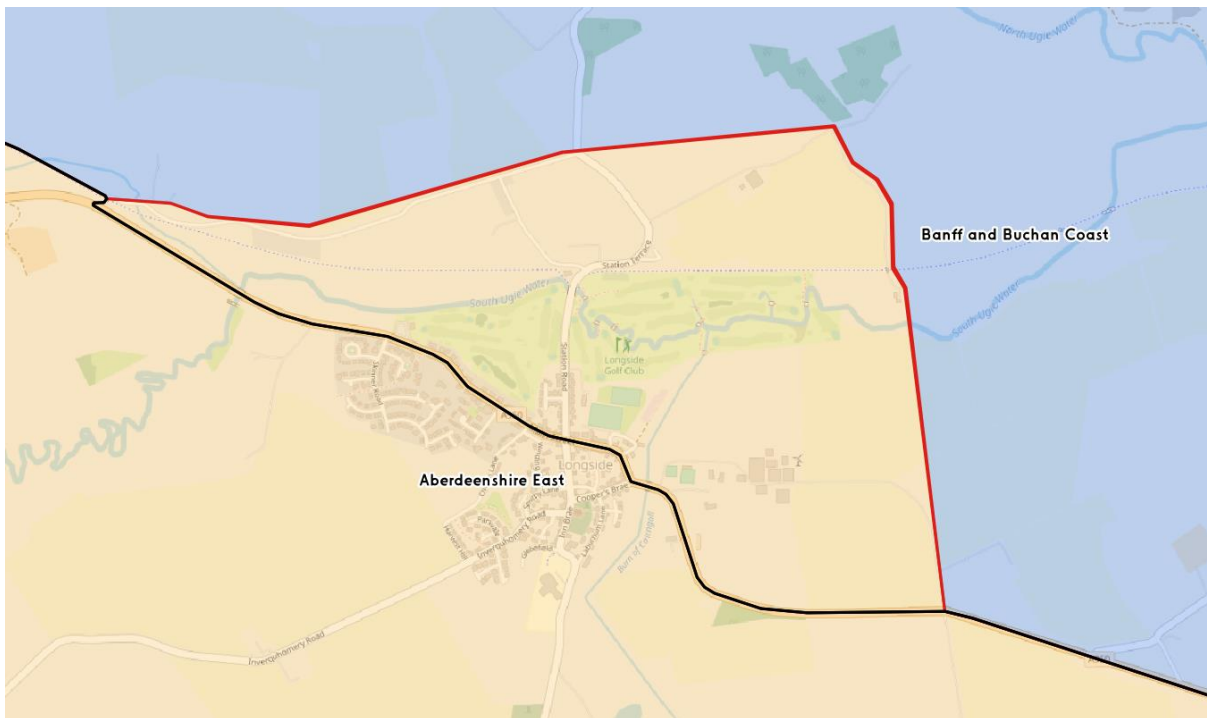


Image 1: Proposed alternative boundary at Longside for Aberdeenshire East / Banff and Buchan Coast constituency (including all of Longside in Aberdeenshire East)

Edinburgh Pentlands / Edinburgh Southern

The proposed boundaries for the Edinburgh Pentlands and Edinburgh Southern constituencies would split the Gorgie area between those constituencies. Realigning the boundary such that Gorgie is entirely within the Edinburgh Pentlands constituency would better reflect local ties, without negatively impacting the electorate size of either constituency.

Although I am not familiar enough with Edinburgh to say with certainty where the exact boundary should be drawn, I've opted to use an existing City of Edinburgh polling district as an alternative line for illustrative purposes (see image 2). This leaves only a very small portion of the Sighthill and Gorgie ward (ward 7) within Edinburgh Southern, but it may remove too many voters from the constituency if Dalry were also to be transferred.

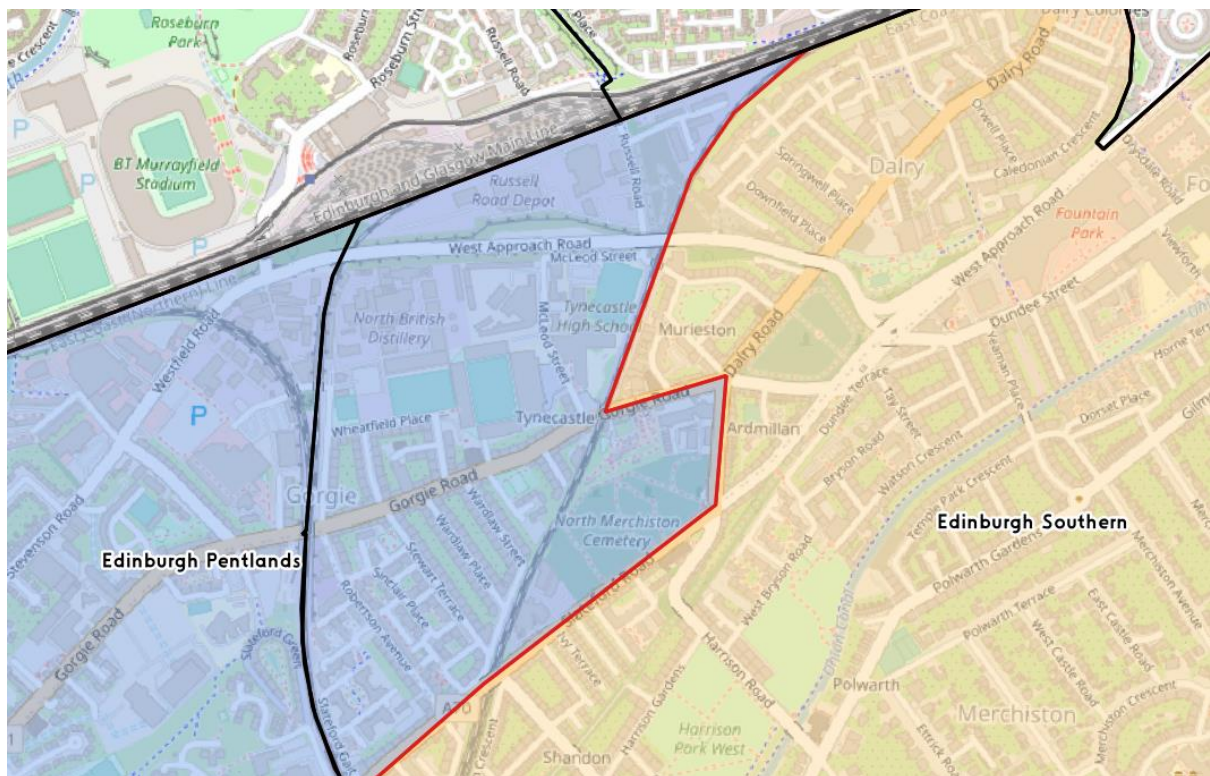


Image 2: Proposed alternative boundary at Gorgie for Edinburgh Pentlands / Edinburgh Southern constituencies (including all of Gorgie within Edinburgh Pentlands)

Paisley and Renfrew / Renfrewshire West / Renfrewshire South

The proposed boundary of the Paisley and Renfrew constituency excludes the Paisley Northwest ward (ward 4), lying instead in Renfrewshire West, which represents a significant breaking of local ties within the town. Although the current Paisley constituency does not include the Gallowhill area, which forms part of the Renfrew South and Gallowhill ward (ward 2), this represents a less significant breaking of ties than the exclusion of a ward entirely within the town.

However, simply swapping the Paisley Northwest ward for Renfrew North and Braehead (see image 3), which is easily possible as both wards have nearly identical electorates, would result in retaining the proportionately more impactful split of Renfrew. The commission could instead therefore give consideration to dividing the Renfrew South and Gallowhill ward into its component parts using the M8 as a boundary. Although this breaks ward boundaries, it does so between two distinct towns.

I am not aware of the exact electorate figures for each component part of that ward, but the population of the primary 2011 intermediate zone covering Gallowhill was estimated in 2021 to be 5,460. Given that a purely Paisley constituency which excludes Gallowhill would have an electorate of 54,606, it can reasonably be inferred that a constituency covering all of Paisley including Gallowhill would fall very comfortably within a 5-10% of the 59,902 target electorate.

Renfrew could then be added in its entirety to the Renfrewshire West constituency, which may be better named Renfrewshire North in such a scenario. If this Renfrewshire North has an overly large electorate, although it should not be too far beyond the 10% variance, redrawing the boundary with Renfrewshire South to put the remainder of the Johnstone locality area in the latter would likely both improve parity of electorate and local ties (see image 4).

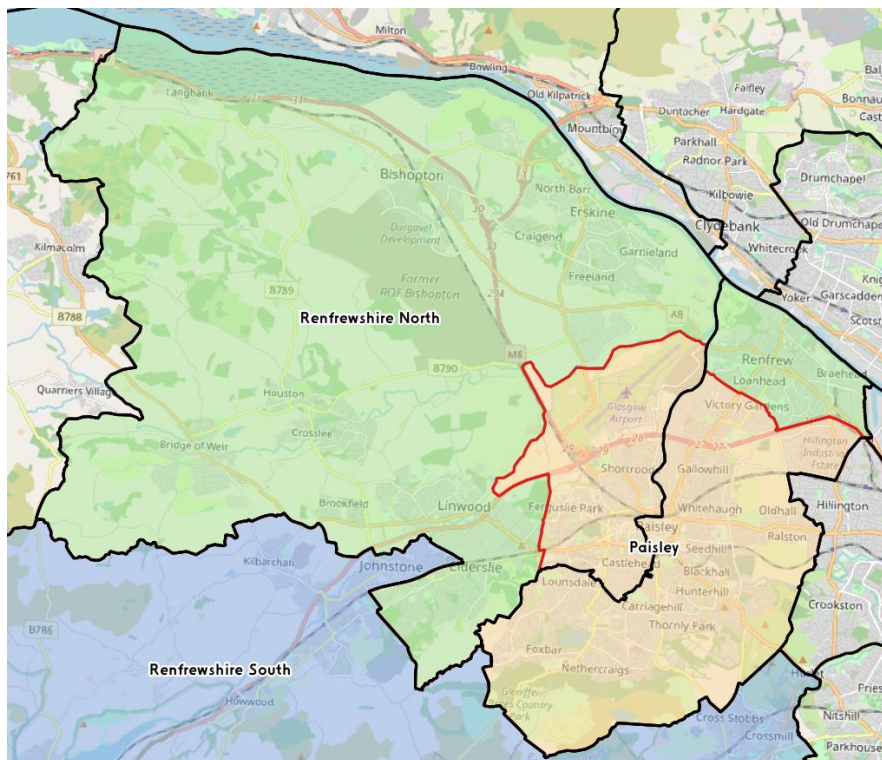


Image 3: Proposed alternative arrangements for Renfrewshire constituencies (swapping Paisley Northwest / Renfrew North and Braehead wards between constituencies)

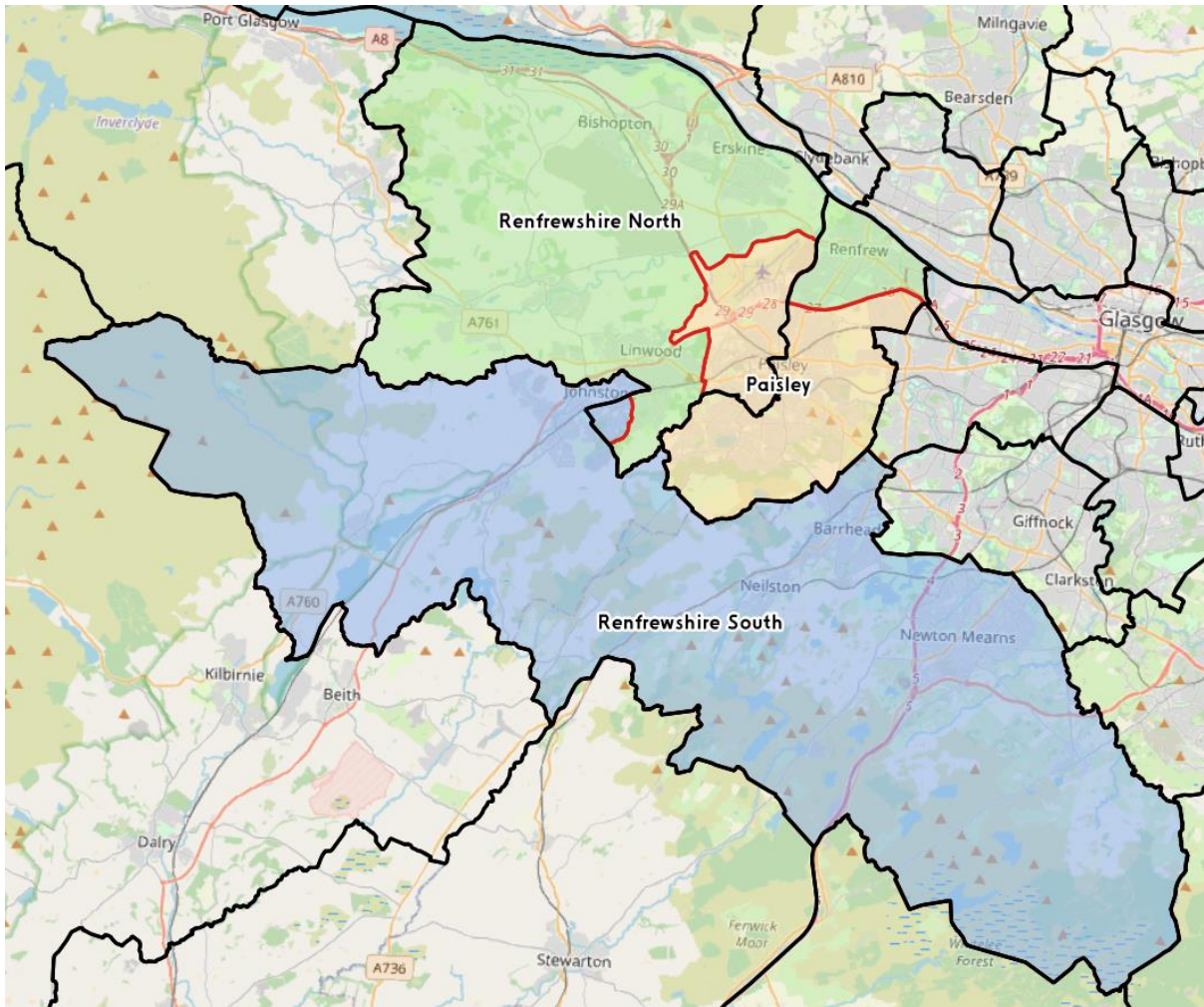


Image 4: Proposed alternative arrangements for Renfrewshire constituencies (including Gallowhill area in Paisley, all of Johnstone in Renfrewshire South)

Glasgow Priesthill and Giffnock

Although the proposed constituency crosses local authority boundaries between Glasgow and East Renfrewshire, on balance I consider that some form of Glasgow-East Renfrewshire seat represents the best possible solution within the bounds of this review. From reading the relevant papers, it appears that the only way to have constituencies contained entirely within Glasgow is to either give Glasgow 8 wholly-contained constituencies and force changes in neighbouring local authorities that would result in the traditional boundary between Renfrewshire and Ayrshire being broken, or by only having 7 constituencies within the Glasgow City Council area.

The wider Giffnock component to this proposed constituency, including Thornliebank, Clarkston, Netherlee and Busby, are generally considered to form Glasgow's suburbs, and indeed are statistically included within the Greater Glasgow settlement. A cross-boundary constituency between Glasgow and East Renfrewshire therefore impacts local ties and connections significantly less than consequentially breaking the Renfrewshire-Ayrshire boundary would.

Similarly, although Boundaries Scotland are not currently consulting on regions, an awareness of possible regional arrangements should be borne in mind. At present, Glasgow City Council is completely split between 8 constituencies, whilst the Rutherglen constituency which lies within South Lanarkshire Council is included within the Glasgow region. Unless the Commission were to take a drastically different approach to regional boundaries than the current and initial arrangements, the Glasgow region (or its successor) will again need to have 9 constituencies in total within it.

If constituency boundaries within Glasgow were drawn such that the city was reduced to 7 seats, that would require 2 additional seats from outside the City Council area to complete a Glasgow Region. Even assuming Rutherglen continues to be one of them, requiring a further additional constituency would represent a significant break from the current boundaries both of the Glasgow Region and whatever present region that seat is taken from. A cross-boundary constituency between Glasgow and East Renfrewshire allows the formation of a 9 seat Glasgow region with the least impact on current regional arrangements, thus preserving existing boundaries to a greater degree.

Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill / Glasgow Central and Govan / Glasgow Springburn and Provan

I recognise both that the commission is aiming to use whole wards to build constituencies where possible, and that it seems that electorate figures no longer allow for constituencies that do not cross the river. However, some of the proposals for constituencies at least partly to the north of the river may be improved by opting to split more wards using geographic features, whilst no longer splitting others. If electorate numbers allow, I would suggest the following changes (see image 5):

The Yorkhill and Finnieston area of the Anderston, City and Yorkhill ward (ward 10) could be moved from the proposed Glasgow Central and Govan into the proposed Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill. This would use the M8 as a natural dividing line between constituencies, whilst ensuring what is generally recognised as the wider community of Glasgow's West End is in a single constituency.

Correspondingly, the portion of Canal ward (ward 16) within the proposed Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill could be moved to the proposed Glasgow Springburn and Provan constituency. This would keep all of the Canal ward within a single constituency, whilst also not splitting the Possilpark area between two constituencies. As a further slight amendment, the Forth and Clyde Canal at Firhill and possibly again at Lambhill (see image 6) could be used as an alternative boundary, which would leave a small portion of the Canal ward within Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill, but use the canal as a natural boundary.

Finally, the Dennistoun and Haghill portions of Dennistoun ward (ward 22) within the proposed Glasgow Springburn and Provan constituency could be moved into the proposed Glasgow Central and Govan constituency. This would again use the M8 (partly) as a natural dividing line between constituencies, without extending too far beyond the city centre.

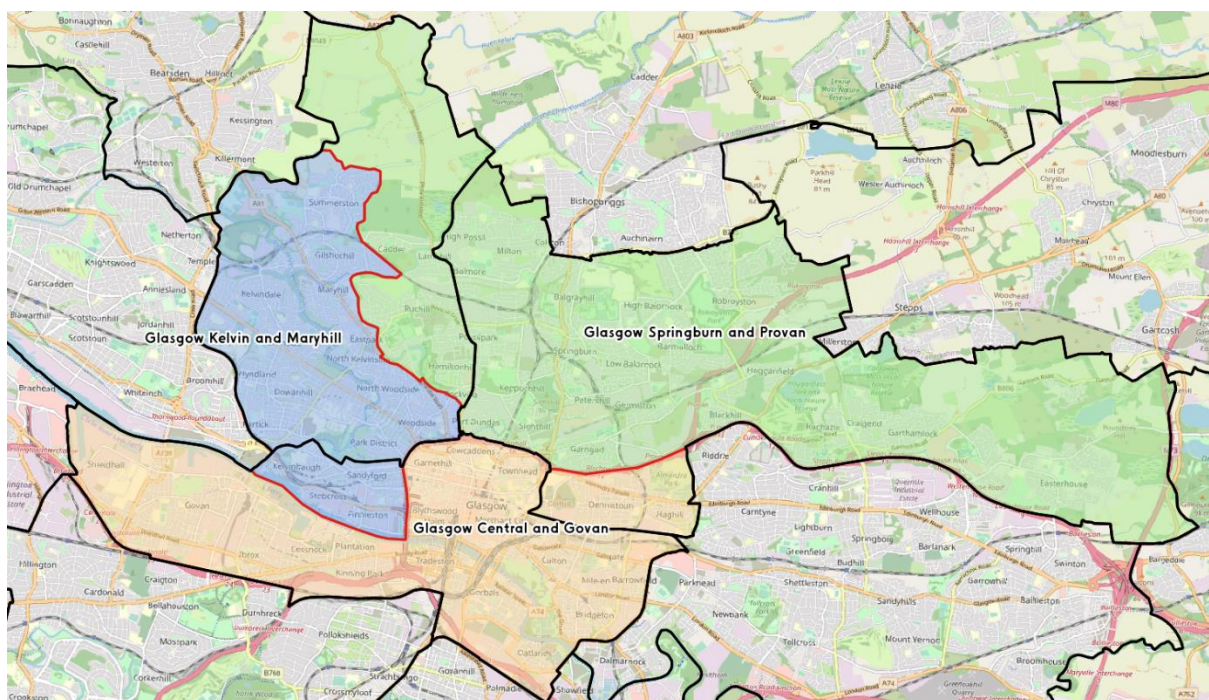


Image 5: Proposed alternative arrangements for three Glasgow constituencies (using M8 as boundary for Glasgow Central and Govan with both Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill / Glasgow Springburn and Provan, including all of Canal ward in Glasgow Springburn and Provan)

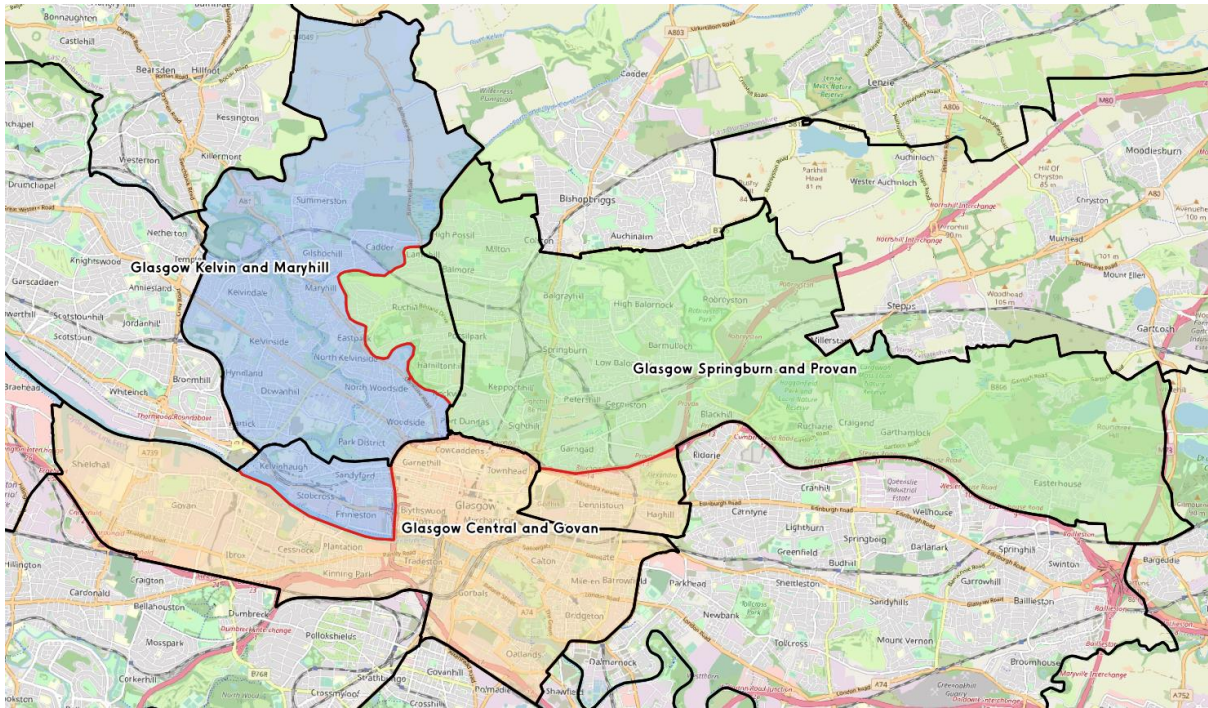


Image 6: Amended alternative arrangement for three Glasgow constituencies (using Forth and Clyde Canal as boundary between Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill / Glasgow Springburn and Provan)