

CEC GEORGE STREET AND FIRST NEW TOWN

Transform Scotland consultation response

25 January 2019

We very much welcome the design concepts for George Street and the First New Town (GNT), in particular the priority given to non-vehicular traffic, and continue to support measures to reduce the amount of general traffic in the city centre to improve the experience for people who travel on foot, bicycle and by public transport.

The planned changes are long overdue and have the potential to change radically the area and its function. However, we do have certain concerns and comments which we would like to express in relation to particular aspects of the plans.

1. The carriageway widths could be reduced further.

This would reduce the speed of general traffic and consequently the likelihood of crashes and injury.

2. There are problems associated with the planned accommodation of existing levels of traffic.

It is stated that: 'The concept design proposals for George Street have been developed with a view to ensure that they can accommodate current vehicular movements whilst allowing for anticipated future trends within the City of Edinburgh.'

The opportunity provided by the design changes should be used to reduce vehicle movements along and across George Street with greater discouragement of private car traffic into and across the city centre. **Attempting to maintain existing or future traffic movements undermines the fundamental aim of the proposal.**

3. There are similar problems associated with maintaining existing access.

This is likely to be favoured by retailers, but research shows a negative, rather than positive, relationship between parking and footfall.¹

4. There is a need for pedestrian and cycle areas to be segregated from vehicular traffic.

The concept of shared space does not yet appear to be understood by the average motorist, who tends to abuse it and park in the pedestrian and cycle space. Castle Street provides an example of a shared space that is currently not working; on the contrary, Waverley Bridge, has some bollards in the central section which appear to be an effective deterrent.

5. Relocation of general parking.

The plans state that '1,500 new parking spaces will be provided at the new St James Centre, creating an overall future net gain in parking spaces in the city centre' and that '40 new parking spaces within North Castle Street and Frederick Street, supporting the relocation of permit parking, city car club and motorcycle parking'.

In our view, general parking should be removed entirely and not relocated anywhere given the massive increase in parking provision at the St James Centre.

Any measures to provide general parking will diminish plans to improve the experience of the city centre.

In general, providing further car parking facilities fundamentally undermines all efforts to improve air quality and liveability in city centre as well as undermining climate change objectives.

As regards the statement that parking provision within the dwell zone is proposed

to prioritise 'Blue Badge' parking, we would suggest that 'Blue Badge' parking alone be permitted.

6. Attention needs to be paid to the wider context and the GNT cannot be seen in isolation.

Naturally, the City Centre as a whole will be much more attractive if it is not dominated by motorised road traffic. The increased parking capacity at the St James Centre will contribute significantly to traffic movements in the area and measures need to be taken to deter further increases.

Account also has to be taken of the need to integrate the cycling provision in the GNT with the Meadows to George Street project and the City Centre East to West Link (CCWEL).

Furthermore, all the changes carried out need to be future-proofed to accommodate further proposed changes.

7. Proper enforcement of traffic regulations needs to be in place to support the proposals.

Castle Street and Rose Street currently provide multiple examples of vehicles infringing pedestrian space in the absence of effective planned and implemented vigorous enforcement.

8. There must be proper prioritisation of pedestrians at lights.

Walking assessments of the city centre, including wait times at crossing points, are critical to delivering the improvements.

No city centre traffic lights should force those on foot - officially the top of the transport hierarchy - to wait more than 30 seconds while private vehicles are instead given priority.

We would suggest that crossing types be consistent as far as possible, for example the Hanover Street junction also having zebra crossings, to improve predictability of traffic movement and speed.

9. One-way cycleways on George Street would be preferable for practical reasons.

We support the idea that the cycleways should be one-way on the ground so that it is easier for cyclists to leave the cycle way at intermediary junctions and that the cycleway on George Street, whether one- or two-way, should be continuous with a consistent design along the whole route and no vehicle parking on the cycleway itself.

10. Time restrictions should be placed on access by motorised vehicles

For the plans to have the desired effects of making the GNT more user-friendly and accessible for those using active travel, it is essentially that deliveries, waste collections and the transportation of hotel guests be restricted to non-peak times and properly enforced.

11. Surfaces and Planting

Proposals are not entirely clear from the consultation documents. Material choices should maximise accessibility, improve climate resilience and minimise maintenance requirements. For example, replace formal box hedges with a more diverse plant selection.

Conclusion

Overall, there is a great deal to commend in the design proposals for the GNT. However, they will only be maximised if:

- There is absolute priority for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users;
- Existing access, parking and traffic movements are significantly reduced and not offset; and
- There is proper segregated cycle and pedestrian provision along with adequate ongoing enforcement of traffic regulation.

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¹ See, for example, these articles:

- <https://road.cc/content/news/251992-more-shoppers-more-shops-tfl-stats-show-benefits-designing-streets-around>
- <http://content.tfl.gov.uk/walking-cycling-economic-benefits-summary-pack.pdf>
- https://www.sustrans.org.uk/sites/default/files/file_content_type/sustrans_sustainable_transport_briefing_a3_spreads.pdf
- <https://www.transport-network.co.uk/Walking-and-cycling-give-cities-economic-advantage-study-finds/11811>
- <https://road.cc/content/news/251992-more-shoppers-more-shops-tfl-stats-show-benefits-designing-streets-around>
- <http://e13c7a4144957cea5013-f2f5ab26d5e83af3ea377013dd602911.r77.cf5.rackcdn.com/resources/pdf/en/active-cities-full-report.pdf>
- <http://www.urbantransportgroup.org/resources/types/reports/case-active-travel>

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