

Retaining 'Spaces for People' measures public consultation: Response by Grassmarket Residents' Association (GRASS)

Introduction

As a community organisation, we are making our response to the consultation in this way because the online survey is designed only for individuals and businesses, not community groups and other organisations. This seems a serious and inexplicable omission.

The survey also fails to include some of the measures that have been taken in our neighbourhood and which are having serious impacts on it. Also, some measures have had direct impacts on local residents, whilst others have had indirect impacts, 'knock on' effects. It seems that the Council has had little regard for all the consequences of the changes it has implemented. Considering them on a street-by-street basis as in the survey will not provide the Council with the full picture.

We are of the view that these changes are discriminatory and not fit for purpose. We endorse the recently-announced views of the Edinburgh Access Panel that many of the measures will make life more difficult for disabled people and pedestrians to travel. With the prime purpose of introducing cycle lanes, the SfP measures generally favour the needs of cyclists over pedestrians and disabled road users. This is contrary to the Council's stated endorsement of Active Travel and the National Transport Strategy.

Members of this organisation, along with many others, recognised very quickly that the measures were impacting badly on our local neighbourhoods and have been trying to get the Council to recognise this and reconsider them. Responses from the conveners of the Transport Committee in the press continue to claim that the Spaces for People measures are popular. Despite many well-reasoned complaints, they state that innovations such as 'floating bus stops' are an accepted design in many countries, a good way of freeing up space and that we will get used to them.

This response is intended to spell out in some detail why the SfP measures are not working in our neighbourhood and why they should be reversed.

Spaces for People measures in the Grassmarket and neighbouring streets:

George IV Bridge: Double cycle lanes installed in each direction; vehicle lanes reduced from two to one lane each way; bus stop outside Central Library moved close to Victoria Street; bus stop at Chambers Street removed; remaining two bus stops designated in single vehicle lanes instead of against the kerbs.

The Mound: Installation of bollards to protect the existing cycles lanes north and south; removal of bus stops in both directions at Market Street.

Forrest Road: Installation of bollards to protect the existing cycles lanes

Victoria Street: Closed to all but service traffic by planters in the West Bow; resident and disabled parking spaces removed.

Candlemaker Row: Access from George IV Bridge closed to all vehicles except No 2 bus; access from Cowgatehead restricted to No. 2 bus, although also used by tour buses.

Cowgate: Bus stop for tour buses installed below George IV Bridge for buses diverted by Victoria Street closure. (Cowgate presently closed at the Cowgatehead to all east-flowing traffic during construction of the multistorey hotel behind the Central Library)

Grassmarket: north side: removal of 25 mixed use parking bays in October without prior notification and any signage; reinstated in March after many complaints about loss of parking for tradesmen and permit holders, and about the fines issued without proper notices. The Council has acknowledged that this was an error and restored the parking.

Impact of these measures on the Grassmarket Area

GRASS members have considered these changes and reviewed the list of possible benefits given in the online survey. Members have agreed that none of the changes have been beneficial to the area and the lives of local residents.

In many respects the SfP measures have been detrimental. Referring to the lists given in the online survey and with additional observations, these have been particularly identified:

- Negative impacts on people walking
- Harder for wheelchair users and those with other mobility difficulties
- Harder for people with sight loss
- Negative impacts on people using buses
- Negative impact on bus services from restricted lanes and badly designed stops
- Harder or more dangerous to cross the road
- Confusion about which lanes are for which users, eg. pedestrians or cyclists
- Level changes where sections of road allocated to pedestrians create trip hazards
- Hostile pedestrian environment caused by proximity of fast moving cycles
- Pedestrians less able to stop and chat
- Traffic increased due to diversions caused by road closures.
- Negative impact on streetscape by signage, temporary barriers, etc.

Detailed comments on changes

George IV Bridge: The major alterations to this busy thoroughfare are entirely unacceptable on the following grounds:

- Much-used bus stop at Chambers Street removed; this has left only one stop between Princes Street and Lauriston Place at the National Library
- Bus stops outside the Central Library and National Library displaced away from bus shelters
- Floating bus stops require passengers to cross cycle lanes
- Big step up and step down to access buses;
- Loss of raised curbs that have become common across the city and make travel much easier, particularly for wheelchair and buggy users.
- Buses stop in only traffic lane causing delays
- Four cycle lanes make street too narrow for the volume of traffic likely once shops and businesses reopen, eg. buses, taxis, coaches, delivery vehicles, tradesmen
- The current layout bears little resemblance to the Meadows to George Street proposals so will have to be scrapped if that goes ahead
- No provision made for the access needs of the 200-bed Virgin hotel and new restaurants and bars presently under construction in Victoria Street

Of greatest concern to so many people is **the floating bus stops** that, contrary to claims by the Council, do not comply with designs used elsewhere. These pictures illustrate that:



Cycle lanes segregated from bus lanes; warning strips and zebra crossing give pedestrian access to bus stop on island; bus shelter provided



Proposed layout for George IV Bridge with segregated cycle lanes and raised pedestrian island with bus shelter



Bus stop with no shelter; passengers have to cross two cycle lanes and enter or exit bus without raised curb



Warning strips and zebra stripes installed after complaints; no pedestrian island or shelter

Action required: reinstate original layout with two vehicle lanes and bus stops at the kerb side; reinstate bus stop at Chambers Street.

Timescale: We understand that the Council is proposing that some schemes be retained for a further 18-month period so they can see how they work when the city begins to function again. We are firmly of the view that this scheme on George IV Bridge does not work. It is detrimental to pedestrians, makes bus travel hazardous and puts the needs of cyclists above pedestrians. It has been in place for nearly a year. **It must be scrapped without further delay.**

The Mound: The removal of the well-used bus stops at Market Street is likely to cause great inconvenience to local residents and visitors alike, for instance, travellers using Waverley Station. The bollards protecting the cycle lanes are set in black raised strips that create a trip hazard for those crossing the road. Most bollards already missing.

Action required: reinstated the bus stops; replace bollards with more robust ones set the directly into the road or remove them altogether, as some cyclists find them hazardous.

Grassmarket/Cowgatehead/Cowgate/Candlemaker Row Junction

The rapid move to close Victoria Street and to restrict access along Candlemaker Row and the re-routing of traffic along the Cowgate have been seriously detrimental to both pedestrians and cyclists. There are no pedestrian crossings so people take their lives in their hands crossing the road. Congestion has been increased by the closure of the east traffic route along the Cowgate so vehicles forced to do a U-turn back into the Grassmarket. Traffic will be further disrupted by a contract due to start at the Grassmarket Community Project at the foot of Candlemaker Row.

Victoria Street

No allowance has been made for servicing businesses and houses in Victoria Street. Given that there are tenements, many shops, several pubs, clubs and restaurants, plus a new 215-bed Virgin hotel, all needing deliveries, drop offs and on-street waste bins collections, this is unacceptable. The removal of resident and disabled parking bays is causing problems for residents; parking in the area is already severely limited.

Action required: Victoria Street: Reinstate resident and disabled parking bays; review access arrangements for deliveries, uplifts, etc and make them workable.

Candlemaker Row: Restrict use to service buses only; ban tourist buses and tour coaches

Cowgatehead/Cowgate: Provide pedestrian crossing

Buses

Priority must be given to service buses. The SfP measures with the agenda of 'walking, wheeling and cycling' have largely ignored the need for buses. The two services on the east-west route through the Old Town, the No 2 and the No 35 are already under pressure from the City Centre Transformation Project and other ideas. As residents, we are very concerned to see them protected. We have also long called for a circular route linking the Grassmarket with the Southside, Holyrood and Princes Street. This would be beneficial to residents and visitors alike.

With no through access following the closure of Victoria Street and the temporary but long term closure of the Cowgate, the route for tour buses and coaches is unviable. They also operate too frequently, often almost empty, they cause traffic congestion and they cause pollution in already highly polluted streets.

Action required: Preserve all existing bus routes east/west and north/south through the Old Town. Stop the operation of tour buses and tourist coaches through the Grassmarket and along the West Port and the Cowgate,

Conclusions

In implementing these changes under the Spaces for People initiative when money became available from the government, assumptions were made that everyone would benefit from a move to more active travel. For those with limited mobility, limited resources to invest in bicycles and store them, time pressures that make walking too slow, and many other different needs, this is not the case.

We fear that as was our experience when restrictions were lifted last summer, the widened pavements and closed streets will become performance areas and space for cafe and pub tables, rather than providing extra space for pedestrians. The Council has again removed charges for these uses so the businesses will benefit rather than the citizens of Edinburgh.

The SfP measures have been introduced without knowledge of the long term needs of the city and without asking local people what they actually want and what they need to get around their city. Rather, they were designed to meet the immediate needs of people and businesses as perceived by the Council during a highly abnormal period.

This consultation has been set up by the Council in haste and without any published research evidence of the benefits that it claims. We need this information. In particular, we want to know the numbers of cyclists using the cycle lanes, how does this compares with the numbers using the streets in the past and what is the projected use once the city begins to function again.

Observations by members of our organisation are that they see very few cyclists using the cycle lanes. In addition, they report that the problem of cyclists using the pavement has not diminished, despite the availability of fast cycle routes.

Figures need to given for bus use too. We need to know how bus services have been affected by the pandemic and also the narrowing of the streets, what the carrying capacity of the bus services was prior to the Covid emergency and what level it is likely to return to. The huge disruptions to the streets have to be justified and if it turns out that the numbers travelling by bicycle are miniscule in comparison to the number using the buses, that is unacceptable.

In Edinburgh we are lucky to have a bus company that is innovative and introducing new low energy buses with low emissions. Their ability to move large numbers around the city at speed and in an eco-friendly way is just what the city needs, not just a small number of fit people on bikes.

We strongly oppose the retention of the SfP measures in the Grassmarket area on a long term basis because they do not work as claimed and are not fit for purpose. As already stated, we do not want to wait another 18 months for a further consultation, we want action now. We wish to see them removed as quickly as possible.