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3 April 2014

## **TRO/14/13, George Street Experimental TRO Comment from Spokes Planning Group**

*Please note:* the TRO above, as advertised, appears unchanged from that circulated earlier under the stakeholder consultation, at least as far as cycling issues are concerned. Our comments below are therefore virtually identical to those we made to the stakeholder consultation.

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### **1. Context**

Before commenting on the detail of the TRO, Spokes wishes to re-emphasise that, ***whilst we do support this experiment, and we have detailed comments in section 4 below***, it was not our first choice for how the city centre should develop in terms of encouraging and catering for cycle use. Our preferences and the rationale for them were contained in our submission<sup>1</sup> of 26.4.13 to the City Centre Vision consultation.

We appreciate that the Council is under heavy pressure from many directions, and that the present TRO, in its experimental form, is a compromise which does at least improve on the present situation in George Street for pedestrians, cyclists and the local economy, whilst not worsening conditions for cycling and walking in Princes Street.

However, we see two serious weaknesses in the overall understanding of City Centre cycle use in the draft TRO, as described in sections 2 and 3 below.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/1304-City-Centre-Vision-Spokes-v4.pdf>

## **2. An East-West route is insufficient – it also needs permeability**

The council appears strongly motivated by the concept of an east-west route. We do very much support the principle of such a route, but would like *also* to see greater emphasis on permeability, particularly in a city centre location. *We fear a mindset in which it is assumed almost without thinking that all trips are long-distance, right through the city centre from east to west or vice versa.* This mindset is perhaps reinforced by the fact of a Sustrans national route having to be catered for.

In fact many cycle trips – quite possibly the majority - will only use part of the route. Cyclists will turn in and out as they head for different shops, workplaces or other destinations, sometimes with several different destinations on the same trip. For example, someone working in the Southside may nip down the Mound to Boots and Nationwide by bike at lunchtime. A family may cycle from the New Town to an event at the Assembly Rooms. Someone living in Marchmont may work at an office in St Andrews Square. All these people are likely to use sections of George Street, but not as a long-distance through route. Thus 'the George Street route' needs to be seen as a part of city centre cycling infrastructure as much as, or more than, solely an 'east-west route.'

## **3. Princes Street is also vital**

For the reasons in (2), it is vital that there are also safe and welcoming cycling conditions in Princes Street, and *we very strongly urge the Council to think about this during the one-year experiment, with the aim of finding a Princes Street solution for the stage of city centre development immediately following the one-year experiment.*

Additionally, all the evidence points to *Princes Street being even more important than George Street* for east-west cycling connections and for general cycling permeability. The reasoning and evidence for this conclusion were contained in our above-mentioned April 2013 submission but briefly...

- ◆ Our cycle count<sup>2</sup> found 50% more cyclists in Princes Street than in George Street, despite the deterrent effect of tramlines
- ◆ A survey of Spokes members<sup>3</sup> found much stronger support for good cycling conditions in Princes Street than in George Street.
- ◆ The highest levels of cycle ownership and use in the city are in south central Edinburgh, suggesting that many more cyclists are likely to reach the city centre at Princes Street (from Lothian Road, the Mound, Waverley Bridge and the Bridges) than at George Street.

Finally, we believe that some in the council think that a George Street route, with no special provision for cyclists in Princes Street, will reduce tramline crashes. This is unlikely, since any cyclist who uses George Street as an alternative to Princes Street will still have to cross the tramlines as many times as they do now – and indeed they will then be faced with additional left and right turns in order to reach George Street.

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2 <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/130416-PrSt-GeoSt-MiniCountFigures.pdf>

3 <http://www.spokes.org.uk/wordpress/2013/04/the-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly/>

## 4. Comments on the experimental TRO itself

First, this is a scheme very different to anything that Edinburgh has yet experienced. We therefore welcome the fact that it is experimental. We urge careful monitoring from the outset and we welcome the stated willingness of the council to make changes during the course of the experiment.

- (a) **We are concerned about the Frederick Street crossing point** where the north-side and south-side cycle lanes cross over and where “*cycle lane routes will be indicated on the roundabout.*” The drawings accompanying the draft TRO do not show this detail, but we cannot see how it can be compatible with a 'Family Network' route suitable for an unaccompanied 12-year old. Having the cyclist route move from one side to the other is very unfortunate in cycling safety/convenience terms, although we do appreciate that the entire scheme has many objectives, and that the pedestrian and commercial imperatives point strongly to this solution. Given that, it is vital that this difficult crossing point is made to look and feel as safe as possible if it is to cater for its intended market. We urge the council to consider instead a 'straight-across' crossing, with light control. Immediately after the junction, the cyclist route would then cross the central reservation.
- (b) **At the other junctions** (Hanover Street and Castle Street) the cyclist route continues straight across, which is less problematic. Nonetheless it needs to be marked in a very clear and definite way, so that it is safe and welcoming even for inexperienced or young cyclists. Since no detail is shown on the TRO drawings it is impossible to comment further. The route also needs monitored particularly carefully at these crossings to identify how it is working.
- (c) **We are concerned about links from the cyclist route into the surrounding street network** – this is important for the reasons in (2) above. Most difficult is safe and welcoming connectivity at the two ends of the route where the route meets the complex arrangements at the two squares. Obviously any route will have to connect into the road network at some points, but these particular linkages need careful thought in the interim situation before a longer east-west route is designed. Two examples of the great difficulties here are how to connect adequately to the major cycle flows from the Bridges and from Lothian Road – difficulties which would be somewhat less for a Princes Street route [(3) above] rather than George Street.

Immediately at the two ends of the cyclist route, and in the period before a wider east-west route is constructed, it was our understanding from a consultation meeting last year that a short oblique cycle lane would be provided across the central reservation so that cyclists who wished to do so could enter the traffic lane immediately before the junction. This is not shown on the plans, and should be added – it would be an important safety measure to reduce complexities for some cyclists emerging at the junction.

- (d) **The design of the cyclist route itself**, other than at the junctions (i.e. at the main danger points!) seems very sensible, with a physical barrier from the car area (rubber kerb and planters), a white line separating from pedestrians, and frequent onroad cycle logos. However, given its innovative nature for Edinburgh the design needs carefully monitored for how it works in practice. In particular we note that 'armadillos' and planters in a London scheme have been badly displaced/damaged by motor vehicles, even becoming hazards along the cyclist route; hopefully that will not happen here as there is no parallel traffic, but depending on the exact layout the barrier could be damaged/displaced by cars moving in and out of the parking spaces.
- (e) **We are disappointed at the extent of car parking which still remains** and we suggest smaller parking areas, with parts of the central reservation landscaped, perhaps with seating, etc.

Yours Sincerely

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for Spokes Planning Group