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To: Councillors on CEC Transport and Environment Committee  
cc: Veronica MacMillan, Committee Services

23 January 2018

## **PICARDY PLACE REDEVELOPMENT, Jan 25 TEC COMMITTEE**

We are writing with our views on the Council's proposals for Picardy Place, as described in the [Committee papers](#) for the meeting on 25 January.

### **Overview**

1. The proposals following December's consultation represent a considerable improvement for cyclists and pedestrians as compared to the earlier plans. They are also a huge improvement on the current roundabout as regards cycling safety and the ability to attract more people to travel by bike.
2. Nonetheless the basic concept of a gyratory is very disappointing – the roadspace itself is excessive and the area within the gyratory is to some extent sterilised as public space due to traffic on all sides, as can be seen with existing gyratories and very large roundabouts such as Calder Road, Granton Square and Cameron Toll. With a non-gyratory solution, all space would be easily accessible on foot and the conditions for cycling, walking and, especially, lingering, could be far better.
3. Regrettably, due to the GAM agreement, as described in the Committee papers, and potential major financial and contractual implications, it seems likely that the Committee will approve the gyratory – although we urge against this. Should it be approved, however, there remain steps which can be taken to further improve the present plans to provide safer and more attractive cycling and pedestrian conditions.

### **The gyratory**

4. The principle of a gyratory has been a clear Council intention for at least 10 years, and Spokes has actively opposed it throughout - long before the current controversy and indeed long before the GAM agreement. For example, back in 2010 [we wrote to](#) then Transport Convener Cllr Gordon Mackenzie laying out arguments most of which remain valid to this day, albeit, fortunately, the hotel has now gone.
5. It was extremely unfortunate that the Council, the government and the St James developer then 'cemented' the gyratory into the GAM agreement, so that (as we understand it, and as the Committee papers suggest) there would be very significant financial implications were it removed. Furthermore, although there had been consultation at much earlier stages (e.g. the 2009 Picardy Place Development Principles) there was no meaningful consultation when, years later in 2016, the gyratory was cemented into the GAM, with no real public awareness of what was happening – leading to today's problems.

6. By the end of the present year, 2018, two major uncertainties, which are critical to the future of Picardy Place, are likely to have become much clearer, if not finally resolved. Namely, the proposed tramline extension and the proposals for the [City Centre Transformation](#). It is tragic that decisions on the future of Picardy Place are being taken in advance of those decisions, rather than as part of an integrated solution.

7. Finally, despite public perceptions to the contrary, council policies are succeeding in gradually reducing city centre car traffic (as also in some other cities) - for example see data from the regular Spokes [rush-hour traffic counts](#) and [Census data](#). We do believe that the Council wishes to maintain this trend, and the redesign of Picardy should be an opportunity to do so. Instead, through non-holistic policy making, the Council appears to have boxed itself into a corner through decisions such as the GAM and the planning approval some years ago for a massive increase in car spaces in the St James development.

8. In summary, if the GAM can be renegotiated to allow a re-think on the basic Picardy design, in conjunction with the Transformation process, that should happen. However, if the gyratory is built, it has to be seen as no more than an interim solution.

## **Leith Street**

9. The Committee papers also refer to the future of Leith Street. Spokes has argued for its closure to be maintained (except for buses and emergency vehicles) once the current Leith Street works are complete, for the benefit of pedestrians and cyclists – also bearing in mind that their numbers are likely to dramatically rise once St James opens.

10. We are aware, however, of concern by some New Town and London Road residents that this means possible deterioration in their local areas. We therefore suggest a compromise whereby Leith Street would be fully reopened to downhill traffic, whilst only buses, emergency vehicles and possibly taxis would be allowed uphill (private traffic uphill could be permitted as far as the St James car park entrance and/or possibly Calton Road). These suggestions would eliminate any queuing elsewhere currently caused by diverted buses on the road or at bus stops, and should greatly reduce or eliminate any rat running. Local mitigation measures could be considered if any such problems did remain. Furthermore, all Leith Street options would remain up for discussion as part of the Council's Transformation process.

11. If Leith Street fully re-opens to all uphill traffic, the difficulties for both pedestrians and cyclists (supposedly the Council's and the government's top priority transport groups) will be acute. As Living Streets point out, the current plans mean an uphill footway which narrows at one point to a mere 2m, well below the Council's own standards. And there is no provision at all for cyclists, travelling slowly uphill in this relatively narrow carriageway beside lorries, cars and buses. Restriction to only buses, taxis, etc would allow one of the two uphill traffic lanes to be converted to a wider footway and an uphill cyclistroute, thus resolving these difficulties and encouraging more travel by foot and bike.

## **Detailed Picardy Place improvements [including tram stop design]**

12. Should the current plans be approved by Committee, there remain issues of detail which could improve safety and permeability for travelling by bike and for walking. In terms of cycling, these include the detail of how cyclists enter and leave Broughton Street, the need for a cycle/pedestrian crossing to Union Place, and the specifications of the cyclistroutes. We trust that any decision by the Committee on the overall plans will not prevent the possibility of such minor tweaks.

13. Whilst somewhat more substantial, we urge a re-think on the design of the tram stop, in two respects...

- ◆ Rather than a central platform, there should be two platforms, outside the tracks, as at several existing stops in the system. This would gain a significant amount of roadspace which is currently wasted beyond both ends of the platform, as the tracks diverge – at the west end of the stop that space would be extremely useful in detailed design of the very tricky Broughton Street junction, and at the east end would make a pedestrian/cycle crossing simpler. Adjacent tramlines, rather than separated tramlines, also allow more direct (and therefore safer) cycle crossings – a vital consideration given the existing record of bike/tramline crashes and injuries. Tram passengers too would benefit, by being able to get off the platform anywhere instead of having to walk down the platform to the tramline crossing point.
- ◆ As is common in European tram systems, selected bus routes should be able to use the tram bahn (particularly near the tram stop) and use the platforms. This would ease pressures on roadspace and, most importantly, would hugely enhance Picardy's 'transport interchange' function - which is widely perceived to be deficient under the current proposals.

Yours sincerely

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for Spokes