

George St and First New Town RBA Stage 3 Design and Operational Plan Update

1. Spokes welcomes the principle of a George Street free of all motor traffic other than truly essential vehicles (including blue badge).
2. We have been consulted throughout the development of this project and we welcome this and, in particular, the opportunity to have held bilateral discussions with the Project Team and Edinburgh Council Project Managers.
3. George St is an integral part of City Centre West East Link (CCWEL) cycleway which was agreed, in principle, by the Council some years ago. This cycling project has progressed very slowly and the benefits will only be fully realised when it is completed, including George St; along with links to the Meadows to George St and Leith Walk cycleways.
4. Before 2021, the Council proposals included a segregated bi-directional cycleway along the south side of George St which would have given cyclists space separated from both motor traffic and pedestrians. This proposed scheme was abandoned in 2021 and, instead, it was suggested that cyclists use the central carriageway, shared during limited access periods with delivery vehicles and other “essential motor traffic.” This was, and is still, described as a European-style ‘cycle street.’ **Spokes accepted this, albeit somewhat reluctantly, on receiving assurances that there would be very tight controls over what counts as essential traffic, at what times of day, and an effective system of enforcement.**
5. **We are concerned that the above assurances may now be significantly diluted.** Councillors will note that today’s report is still very open-ended regarding the final content of the Operational Plan. If indeed the assurances previously given are seriously diluted in the final Operational Plan, then the segregated cycleroute should be reinstated so that George St is an effective element of CCWEL and a destination in its own right which attracts people of all ages and confidence levels by bike.
6. In this context, we have the following comments on paragraphs 4.8.3 and 4.11.
7. We welcome the redesign of the junctions along George St although we would appreciate further consultation before these are finalised. In particular, we would want to see a design that ensures that buses crossing at Frederick St do not create a potentially dangerous blockage for cyclists travelling along George St.
8. We also welcome the intention to move service buses off George St itself, but have concerns about tour buses having permitted access to hotels.
9. We think that the proposed routine access window for servicing and loading (7.00pm to 10.00am) is too wide and will conflict with the peak period for morning cycle commuting. In our view the access window should be from 7.00pm to 8.00am.
10. We note and welcome the commitment to preserve the availability of cycle infrastructure all year round. However, this must include safe routes through the “plaza” areas when they are in use for activities during the Festival and the winter festive seasons. Safe routes require clear sight-lines for cyclists along the length of the street and at relevant junctions.
11. We agree that taxi access should only be permitted during service and loading windows and that private hire cars (PHCs) should not be given access to George St itself. Taxis should not be permitted to use George St as a through route during the permitted service hours, unless picking up prior bookings or dropping off passengers. We would be strongly opposed to any further relaxation here.

12. We agree that traditional enforcement which would rely on signage and lining restrictions to enforce traffic violations are unlikely to be effective. We note the intention to continue to explore technology-based methods such as APNR but we have been told by Council officials that legislation does not permit this at the present time and we have concerns that the technology itself to recognise and allow permitted vehicles of all types (including blue badge) may not be available in time. We, therefore, welcome the intention to introduce an automated bollard-based enforcement system. We trust there will be further consultation on the details in due course.
13. Without meaningful access restrictions and effective enforcement, we are very concerned that:
- the scheme will be significantly less safe and welcoming for people on bicycles than the previously proposed fully segregated cycleway, deterring some people from using CCWEL and/or from visiting George Street by bike, and
 - in the worst case, there will be vehicles of all types accessing and parking randomly throughout.
14. We would be grateful if TEC members could note our views and **ensure that the final Operational Plan meets the assurances given when the physical layout proposals were changed** (4 above).

Ewan Jeffrey and Richard Grant

Spokes Planning Group

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