

To: Convenor of Transport & Environment committee

February 2026

## Future of Princes Street and George Street

Following the Council decision of 12 February 2026 on the Visitor Levy, there appears to be considerable uncertainty around projects to improve Princes Street and George Street, in terms of funding, timescales and project scope. These decisions are of great interest and concern, including to our members, and we here put forward our views, to be taken into consideration in ongoing discussions and decision-making.

### 1. Princes Street / George Street – relative issues

Specifically with regard to cycling, Spokes has always been concerned that there should be safe and attractive conditions on both streets, as we believe would be the case in most other European capitals.

Both streets are important destinations in their own right, and both serve essential, but different, functions for through-journeys.

In the case of George Street, this has been chosen as the route for the central core of CCWEL, the west and east sections of which are now complete and already continue east down the whole of Leith Walk and on nearly to Ocean Terminal. George Street is an essential missing link [fig 1 below].

Princes Street is also a vital through route for many journeys. Whilst some in the Council have suggested that George Street is a suitable alternative for all cycling trips, this is far from the case. Indeed, for some journeys, to use George Street rather than Princes Street would entail not just a detour, but crossing tramlines twice and/or undertaking additional main-road left and right hand turns.

The fact that both streets serve very different journey needs is clearly evidenced by the relative numbers of cyclists currently using the two streets. Visually it appears that as many or perhaps more cyclists use Princes Street than George Street, despite the tramlines, a conclusion supported by Strava data [fig 2 below]. Of course, Strava data is far from complete, and we urge the Council to conduct counts to confirm the current usages in both streets.

### 2. Princes Street

The Planning Committee of 12 November 2025 rejected draft planning guidance on Princes Street and the Waverley Valley. The agreed motion asked officers instead *“to convene an elected member/ officer/ stakeholder workshop that brings together those with transport, culture, heritage and placemaking expertise so a more ambitious and exciting strategy can be brought forward for approval.”*

In that debate, the ambitious proposals by Richard Murphy architects [[here](#) and fig 3 below] were raised as the type of approach that merited consideration, providing considerably increased pedestrian space and largely protected bike lanes. Spokes had also suggested such in [our deputation](#). Without a major rethink on Princes Street roadspace, it is difficult to see how the Planning Committee decision can be realised.

Furthermore, we note that whilst that Committee decision was taken in mid November, three months ago, we have as yet heard nothing further, and in particular no mention of the stakeholder consultation which was mandated by the Committee.

We also note that, way back in 2011, the Council's own commissioned [Jan Gehl report](#) on Princes Street and George Street identified "cycle and pedestrian priority" and *reduced vehicle presence* as "essential" for Princes Street to achieve its "huge potential." A theme repeated in 2025 by Richard Murphy.

### 3. George Street

Discussions on the future of George Street have continued for the 15 years since the 2011 Jan Gehl report, with a vast amount of time and money expended. Not least huge amounts of voluntary time and effort by community organisations such as Spokes through endless consultations, and it is highly frustrating that George Street remains car-dominated, with relatively narrow footways, no safe cycling provision and a huge amount of roadspace still given over to static car storage.

The current 'cycle street' proposals are certainly a massive improvement on the present position on the ground. However, in offering our support, [Spokes has compromised](#) on our ideal solution which incorporated segregated bike lanes, as in the Council's [earlier proposals](#) (and similar to (3a) below). Subsequently we have also become increasingly concerned as the intended restrictions on motor traffic in the 'cycle street' have been progressively eroded, to the extent that [we considered withdrawing support](#).

Following the visitor levy decision we are unclear if the existing proposals can still be funded. However, if they are not going ahead – or not in the relatively near future – then we urge that ***low cost changes are made as rapidly as possible to complete CCWEL, including connections at Charlotte and St Andrew Squares, and to improve pedestrian conditions.*** We suggest two alternatives, even if they are only interim solutions for a number of years.

**3a.** [our strong preference]

**Remove central parking, and reduce traffic lanes from 4 to 2, with wider footways and unidirectional kerb-protected cycle lanes [fig 4 below] on both sides**

This type of approach was in fact accepted to be a feasible low-cost option by transport officers in a TEC debate a few years ago, when concern was growing about escalating project costs, but was rejected in favour of developing the more comprehensive, but costly, current scheme.

It also has the advantage of preserving symmetry, important from a heritage perspective.

Under an initial, low cost, scheme, the central setts etc could be retained and the space repurposed, for example seating and planters with trees. The proposal would ideally also be accompanied by restrictions on moving traffic, for example allowing only taxis, buses and necessary deliveries, although this could be a later stage so as to aid early implementation. The removal of central area parking would in any case substantially reduce private motor traffic.

**3b.** [a tried and tested solution, easy to implement, but losing symmetry and retaining car parking]

**Remove all traffic from one side of George Street, enabling a wider footway and 2-way bike lane**

For those with a long memory, *the council actually did this as an 18-month experiment* under an ETRO in 2014-2015 [figure 5 below]. See [plans](#), [statement of reasons](#) and this [Broughton Spurtle overview](#). The scheme was a [considerable success](#), with increased footfall, reduction in cars, and people feeling it made the street more pleasant and encouraged them to return.

Unfortunately at that time, prior to subsequent legislative changes, ETROs could not be made into a permanent scheme, which would have required a full TRO process to be undertaken after the experimental lane had been removed. Since it was expected that a full George Street project would go ahead within the relatively near future (!) and would use a very different layout, redesigning the entire street, it was decided not to dedicate the time and costs to undertake the TRO process.

In conclusion, we trust the Council will consider our comments carefully. We are of course very open to discussion and in any case look forward to the George Street stakeholder consultation.



Fig 1: The George Street CCWEL missing link. The drawing is from a Cycling Scotland report on automatic counter data which shows cyclists already making up nearly 10% of trips (including pedestrian trips) at the east on Leith Walk cycle lanes and at the west on Roseburn CCWEL section.



Fig 2: Edinburgh central area Strava weekly heatmap, 7.11.25

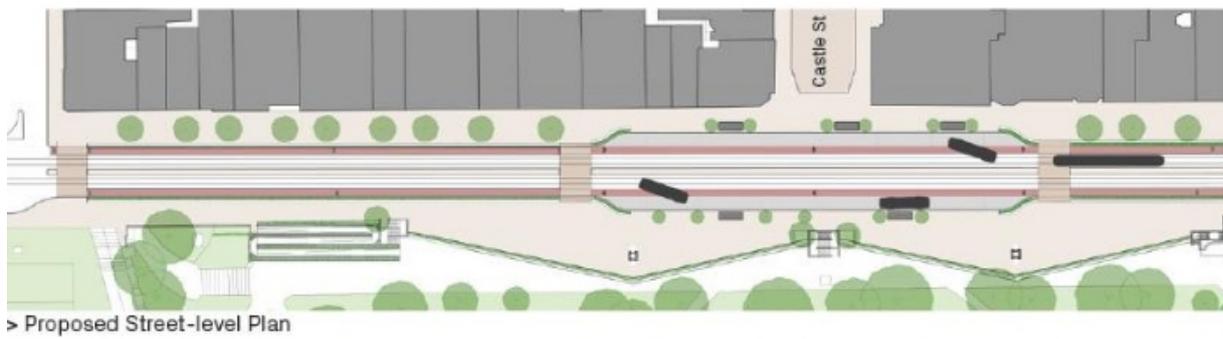


Fig 3: Extract from the [Spokes 12.11.25 TEC deputation](#), showing drawings from the Richard Murphy proposals



Fig 4: Example of a kerb-protected cycle lane, in Holyrood Road [CEC picture]. Kerbing without the stone infill could if necessary be used in an initial or experimental minimal-cost scheme.

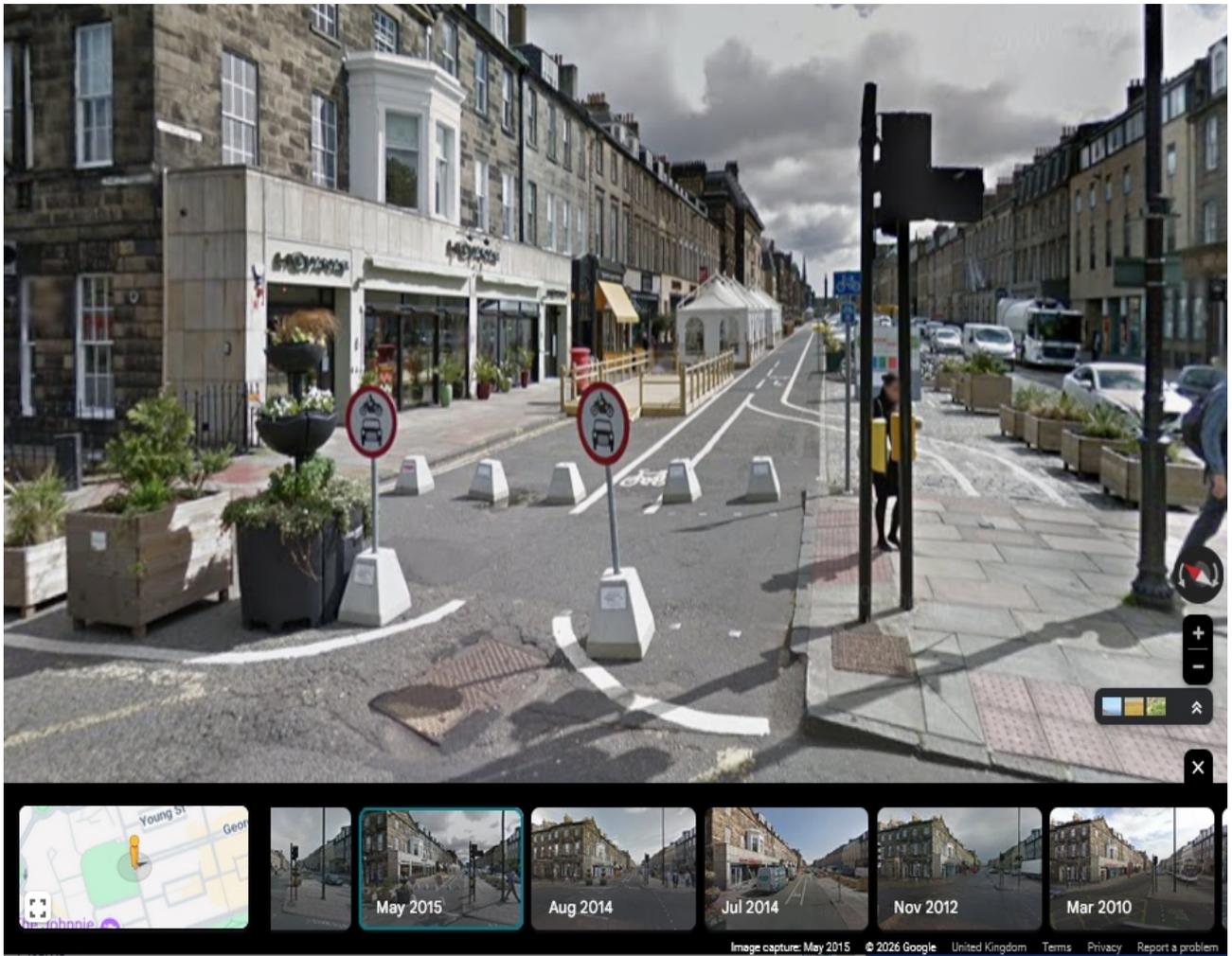


Fig 5 George Street 18-month experimental cyclistroute, 2014-2015 [google streetview, May 2015]