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Mark Turley
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Dear Sir

Building a Vision for the City Centre Consultation

I am responding on behalf of the New Town and Broughton Community Council to this report, which we note aims to enhance the pedestrian experience in the City Centre. Whilst we support this objective, we consider that far too much weight has been placed on it, as opposed to other desirable outcomes, and this has led to an unbalanced proposal, which pays little regard to the consequences for New Town residents of further reducing road space in the City Centre, and threatens to diminish rather than enhance George Street for shoppers and pedestrians alike. Above all, the Community Council considers the report premature, as until the trams are running and the Tram TRO's are implemented, their effects on city centre traffic, be they positive or negative, cannot be known.

Adverse consequences for residents of the Moray Feu

Previous reductions in road space in the City Centre displaced traffic into the New Town. The removal of general traffic from Princes Street turned Queen Street/York Place into the main route through the City Centre well before the coming of the tram works. This had the consequential effect of increasing traffic through the Moray Feu (the Randolph Crescent – Great Stuart Street route). There was an alternative route through Charlotte Square and Hope St- but tram works and the Tram and Charlotte Square TRO's have served to establish the Moray Feu as the main route from the City Centre to the Dean Bridge, a situation which residents find alarming. Displaced westbound general traffic from George Street will have no choice but to use Queen Street, and the fear is that this will simply add to the traffic continuing through the Moray Feu, as westbound traffic currently turning into South Charlotte Street from George Street will prefer the Moray Feu- Drumsheugh Gardens route. Whilst the Council claims that traffic through the Moray Feu will decrease after the trams are in place, we would urge the Council to wait to see whether this is so before taking steps that may increase it.

Adverse consequences for Central and Eastern New Town residents

We are also concerned about the impact in the central and eastern New Town, where the closure of York Place has brought heavy traffic to Heriot Row, Abercromby Place and Albany Street. Despite the welcome reopening of the eastern end of Princes Street to general traffic this "second New Town" route is still carrying far too much traffic for what are mainly residential streets where many families reside. The Council have repeatedly assured residents that this traffic will revert to York Place when it is reopened. However York Place will lose a lane to traffic each way to the trams- and at rush hour queues were already serious pre tram work. The removal of westbound general traffic from George Street would leave Queen Street as the sole route for westbound general traffic. This will increase congestion on Queen Street and York Place still further, making it ever more tempting for motorists to continue to use the second New Town as a rat run.

This would be bad for residents, but it is bad for the city as a whole. The really unique feature of Edinburgh is that it has a planned Georgian New Town large parts of which are still used for its original purpose. However, over the last fifty years there was a trend away from owner occupiers, particularly families, towards offices and HMOs. More recently some offices have become dwellings, but the residential character of the area should not be taken for granted. Home buyers are currently being deterred by the level of traffic (on, for example Albany Street), and many residents are at breaking point when they find the quiet residential street they had planned to live on become a major through route. Reversing this unwelcome development should be a priority for any vision of the City Centre. And quiet New Town streets such as Heriot Row were a great route for cyclists traversing the city centre – before the tram works- and could be again.

Adverse consequences for George Street

We are concerned that the report does not recognise another great strength of the City Centre, George Street. This, far more than Princes Street, is the true retail heart of Edinburgh, with an increasing number of quality retailers. They share the street with venerable institutions like the Northern Lighthouse Board and quality cafes like Centotre. But the miracle is that despite this concentration of commerce George Street remains a fairly quiet and pleasant street accessible to pedestrian, cyclist and motorist alike, as well as accommodating a few buses.

This relative harmony is more likely to be disturbed than enhanced by transferring all eastbound buses from Princes Street to the south side of George Street. Whilst some cafes may put more outside tables out, which would be attractive on (rare) hot days for residents and tourists alike, we suspect that existing George Street cafes and shops would rather maintain the status quo than have all Princes Street's buses rumbling down the south side of the street, which will become as congested as during the tram works, and we fear blighted. It will be difficult to access by bus users, as the consequence of using the wrong side carriageway is to place the bus stops in the central reservation. Bus passengers would also have to find their way across the two lane cycle way to get to the pedestrian area, which will be particularly off putting for the disabled and elderly. These disadvantages outweigh any possible advantages to pedestrians of a wider north side pavement. Whilst we appreciate that there is a demand for an east west cycle way,

George Street, which is awkward to access at either end for cyclists, and bisected by busy north south routes, is not suitable, and hope that alternative routes can be explored.

We share the concerns of the George Street traders that the removal of most on street parking will threaten the quality and variety of the shopping experience. We are surprised to see no reference in the report to any study of shopping patterns on George Street to establish what percentage of shoppers do use the on street parking, why they use the car (despite the tram works), and what type of purchases they make. The fact that most parking spaces are filled despite very high parking charges shows that there is a demand for this parking. We are mystified where the Council is going to find an equivalent number of parking places on neighbouring streets. We accept that underground parking is a possible alternative, but would need to study any such scheme in detail as it could cause more harm than good. However until nearby underground parking is constructed, we do not believe there is scope for removing central parking on George Street. We are aware that St Andrew's and St George's West Church are concerned at the loss of parking for Sunday churchgoers and places for the elderly and disabled to be dropped outside - and we imagine the George Hotel would have similar concerns,

Princes Street

Turning to Princes Street, there is little evidence to suggest that cafes with outside dining will spring up on Princes Street, or that if they do it would be a desirable outcome. First, Princes Street is zoned for retail, not restaurants. Even if that zoning is broadened- and it has not happened yet- there are very few restaurants or cafés which could begin to pay the rents and rates of Princes Street ground floor property. Currently there is nothing to stop restaurants using the first floor and above, but despite the fantastic outlook it is mainly department store cafes and chains such as Costa which do so. This is likely to be doubly so with the ground floor. The writers of this report probably hope for a Parisian café scene to develop- but we suspect quality establishments will not set up outside tables on as exposed a street as Princes Street. The place for a café scene in Edinburgh is the relatively sheltered and lower rent Grassmarket. If this was on a free shopper bus route many more would flock to enjoy the excellent Grassmarket experience. However on Princes Street the likelihood is that what we will end up with (at best) is a MacDonald or Starbucks with outside tables.

A moratorium on traffic schemes till the trams are up and running

Whilst we understand that the Council's computer modelling predicts lesser traffic impacts than we anticipate, such modelling is only as good as the assumptions programmed into it, and cannot replicate the human element. We would have thought the failure of the CETM ten years ago should give the Council pause for thought. **The NTBCC is strongly of the opinion that there should be a moratorium on any major changes to the City Centre traffic flows until the trams are up and running and their impact known and fully understood.** For example, looking at matters positively, if combined tram and bus ticketing is successfully introduced it may be possible to remove some bus routes from Princes Street, which might then enable a cycle way to be accommodated on the more desirable Princes Street route.

We also hope that any revised proposal for city centre traffic will place Edinburgh's most unique asset, its residential New Town, at the heart of the vision.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ian Mowat". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'I'.

Ian Mowat