

NTBCC Transport Committee Update – February 2024

Our Future Streets – Impact on New Town Residents

The February Transport and Environment Committee meeting considered a report on the work being undertaken under the “Our Future Streets” project which was previously called a Circulation Plan as part of the City Mobility Plan. This project seeks to decide on the priority that should be given to different modes of travel across the city and allocate street space accordingly. Although the overall aims of this approach are generally positive it will result in a further loss of street space and access for general traffic.

The City Centre has been largely designated as a traffic free area especially for traffic passing through it. Of particular concern is the plan to remove general traffic from the Bridges Corridor (which would be essential if the proposed route for the trams extension to the BioQuarter is progressed) as this would leave Lothian Road and a number of small side streets as being the only means to travel between the north and south of the city without significant diversions around the city centre. Modelling of the impact of the closure of North Bridge has shown that this would result in significant congestion in other areas. Locally the report identifies that certain streets including Broughton Street are not wide enough to accommodate all of the intended purposes. It was also recognised that if HES decide to further restrict vehicle access to Holyrood Park that this would further limit the ability to restrict traffic on other routes. It was acknowledged at the committee meeting that changes affecting the City Centre would not be easy and that any implementation would need to be phased and depends on the necessary funding becoming available. There was however a wide level of support among most of the political parties represented at the committee.

East London Street

At the January Transport and Environment Committee meeting, a report was presented to take no further action to improve the road surface or otherwise reduce the nuisance caused by high traffic levels on East London Street. However, following the intervention of Councillor McFarlane, it was decided that road department officials should commence consultation on the replacement of the setts with asphalt. Disappointingly, the issues with the noise survey that we have raised previously have still not been addressed and as a result we believe that the conclusions reached that noise levels are acceptable are not correct. We will continue to work with Councillor McFarlane to ensure that the review of this street is progressed.

I also had a further Teams meeting with senior management from Lothian Buses. They advised that they are not willing to consider a proposal to remove “out of service” buses from East London Street on Sunday mornings as they stated this would require an additional two drivers to meet their service schedule. They also acknowledged that the number of buses using this street is higher than that reported to the TEC last year due to individual driver decisions and significant congestion around Picardy Place due to signalling problems. The promised in-cab monitoring system is not yet operational on buses based at the Annandale Street garage and is not expected to be until late summer 2024. They also reported that work to allow more electric buses to operate from this garage would be commencing in the next two weeks.

Picardy Place

As noted previously, the drawings provided in response to our Freedom of Information request did not contain the requested information regarding the dimensions of footpaths and cycle paths. I submitted an appeal against the decision to withhold the detailed drawings and the time taken to consider this request. In January, I received a response to this appeal which upheld my concerns in both instances. A further batch of information has been received which I will review to determine

whether it provides the necessary clarity on the design of this public realm. It is disappointing that it has taken over 6 months for this information to be released.

Tram Works

Community Councils Together for Trams (CCTT) and NTBCC made deputations to the January Transport and Environment Committee meeting in support of a motion from Councillor Caldwell that was seeking further information on the outstanding works. The meeting also considered a report in response to an earlier motion from Councillor Mowat which sought greater clarity on the governance of the project. The CCTT expressed concern that the report did not provide the expected level of clarity. It was stated that these issues and the points raised by Councillor Caldwell would be included in a planned close out report to be considered by the TEC in April. CCTT has subsequently written to Hannah Ross who is the author of the planned report and to local Councillors highlighting a number of issues which should be included in the report.

Supported Bus Services

As noted previously the Council has gone out for bids for the supported bus services across the west of the City. Currently no bids have been sought for the number 13 bus, but it is stated in the February TEC Business Bulletin that this will occur once the initial bids have been received. Given budget constraints, the concern is that there will be insufficient funds to continue the support for the number 13 bus service.

Powderhall Junction Review

I attended on behalf of NTBCC along with representatives of Spokes and other local groups, a walk-through of the proposed changes to the design of the junction between Broughton Road and Macdonald Road. The consultant, Stantec, did a good job of explaining the rationale for the proposed changes and the steps that they had taken to engage with local interest groups. Funding for this work has come from Sustrans but it is unlikely that any construction work will be undertaken until at least 2027 as it is dependent on the planned redevelopment of the Powderhall area.

Prepared by Mike Birch
Transport Convenor - NTBCC

10 February 2024