



BUILDING A VISION FOR THE CITY CENTRE

The City of Edinburgh Council

Full report on the findings of the City of Edinburgh Council's consultation with the public, businesses and other organisations on potential changes to the city centre. The main areas addressed by the consultation were proposed changes to the way space is used on Princes Street and George Street.

APPENDIX 1

♦ **EDINBURGH** ♦
YOUR COUNCIL – YOUR ENVIRONMENT

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of more than 2,000 responses from the public, businesses and other organisations (respondents) as part of the City of Edinburgh Council's consultation on potential changes to the city centre, in particular the proposed changes to the use of space on Princes Street and George Street. In summary the findings are:

- There is a broad enthusiasm amongst respondents for creating a vision for Edinburgh city centre that delivers a vibrant social and retail offering similar to that provided by other European cities.
- Respondents would like a more informal feeling to street space that allows for seating, more greenery, creative and well-managed use of space, and food and retail market stalls.
- An approach to change that values long-term planning is likely to have more support from stakeholders than any short-term actions. There is a significant risk that short-term change without clearly-communicated, well-evidenced benefits would negatively impact on the Council's reputation.

Princes Street

- Respondents felt that flexible use of the space should be a priority, especially given the Scottish climate, to allow cafes and restaurants the ability to open out to street or not.
- It was suggested that better utilisation of upper floors of buildings for social, café and dining opportunities would make the most of views of the city, while avoiding the problems of using pavement space.
- Respondents questioned whether existing space was being used to its full potential and suggested that removing bus shelters and utilising existing spaces, such as Castle Street and the plaza next to Scottish Royal Academy Building on the Mound, would help to increase the capacity of pedestrian space.
- It was felt that improving shop frontages, the quality of retailers and extending opening hours would increase the appeal of Princes Street to shoppers.

George Street

- Businesses were generally enthusiastic about the development of George Street but felt that this should be done to the benefit of both sides of the street. Respondents felt it was important to maintain the symmetry of the street.
- Maintaining parking facilities on this street was a contentious issue. Businesses and many other respondents believed parking was vital to allow customers to access retail and leisure activities and removing parking would drive people out of the town centre. Others felt that while it wasn't necessary to have parking on the street itself, current parking sites were too far away or too poorly connected to George Street to be realistic alternatives. A minority favoured a long term move towards excluding cars from the city centre altogether.

- Many respondents favoured a move towards the pedestrianisation of George Street. It was felt that this would allow for a more relaxing environment for shoppers and other users. With anchor points at either end in the form of a more frequently used Charlotte Square and the redeveloped St James Quarter, respondents drew similarities with Glasgow's Buchanan Street.

Connecting the City Centre

- Respondents were sceptical about the benefits of introducing a one-way system to the city centre, arguing that traffic would be displaced if no developments in alternative transport provision or better linkages between other parts of the city were provided.
- While cyclists are keen to have high permeability, including dedicated two-way cycle routes on both streets, a two-way route on Princes Street appears to be a much stronger desire line than George Street.
- Respondents did not support the movement of half of the buses to George Street. Retaining bus services in Princes Street or transferring routes to Queen Street were seen as better options.
- Princes Street businesses were clear that footfall was a key factor affecting their sales. Reducing footfall on Princes Street would mean a decrease in their revenue – therefore Princes Street businesses were generally in favour of maintaining bus routes on their street.
- George Street businesses want to retain car parking nearby and some, but by no means all, felt parking needed to be on George Street. Regardless of the measures introduced, it was felt to be essential to maintain access for both deliveries and public collection and drop-off (from coaches, taxis and private cars). Restricting parking and access were felt to have negative consequences for businesses.
- Respondents felt that a period of stability in the city centre would allow the impact of trams to be understood and felt that any major changes should not take place until after this period.

Background

Combining culture, history, shopping and leisure, the centre of Edinburgh attracts millions of local, national and international visitors each year. The city is home to the world's biggest arts festival, one of Europe's largest financial sectors, several prestigious universities, the Scottish Parliament and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Edinburgh has a strong reputation as a place to study, invest and do business, residents consistently rate the city as an excellent place to live and it regularly wins accolades as a tourist destination.

However, following the global economic recession, a general trend towards online shopping and the disruption caused by introducing trams to the city, it has been recognised that the centre of Edinburgh needs to provide a better experience to remain vibrant and meet the evolving needs of its many stakeholders.

In April 2013, the City of Edinburgh Council began a consultation to assess how the city centre could be improved. The main focuses of this consultation were the iconic thoroughfares of Princes Street and George Street, the use of pedestrian space and the travel arrangements through the city centre.

A draft proposal was prepared by the Council and this was used to consult with the public, businesses and other organisations. In summary the changes proposed were:

- Increased pedestrian areas for Princes Street;
- Increased pedestrian areas for George Street;
- Introduction of a new dedicated cycle way on George Street; and
- Change to traffic arrangements so that public transport would run one-way (east to west) on Princes Street and the opposite direction (west to east) on George Street.

Respondents were invited to give their views in a range of ways. An online survey was posted on the Council's website. Respondents emailed and wrote to the project team. And a series of workshops and open days were held throughout the consultation period, including:

- Two open days for the general public hosted at the Assembly Rooms on George Street;
- Workshops with the City Centre Neighbourhood Partnership;
- Two workshops with George Street and Princes Street traders hosted at the George Hotel and the Royal Overseas League;
- Workshops and discussion with the Transport Forum;
- A workshop with the Built Environment and Heritage Groups;
- A workshop with cyclists; and
- A workshop specifically with equalities groups.

In total, 1,655 individuals and organisations responded to the online survey, around 300 personally attended an open day, focus group or meeting and around 100 made written submissions by letter or email. Of the online respondents¹:

- 47% live in the city centre;
- 70% shop in the city centre;
- 68% visit for social reasons, the same percentage visit for cultural and leisure reasons;
- 30% work in an office in the city centre;
- 11% work in the city centre (including shops);
- 7% visit Edinburgh for work but live and normally work elsewhere; and
- 4% were tourists.

This report presents the results of this consultation, identifying the key themes in the feedback provided by respondents. As much of this feedback is qualitative, it is not possible to indicate “how many” or “what proportion” of respondents would support any particular option or suggestion. However, where particular questions have been answered as part of the online survey, these responses are reported.

It should be noted that no attempt has been made to exclude respondents from responding to the consultation in more than one way. An individual, who attended a workshop, completed the online survey and wrote a letter to the project team, would have all of their submissions noted and these would be included in the report. This does not significantly affect the analysis, which deals primarily with the range and strength of expression of views, rather than the number of responses which cite a particular issue.

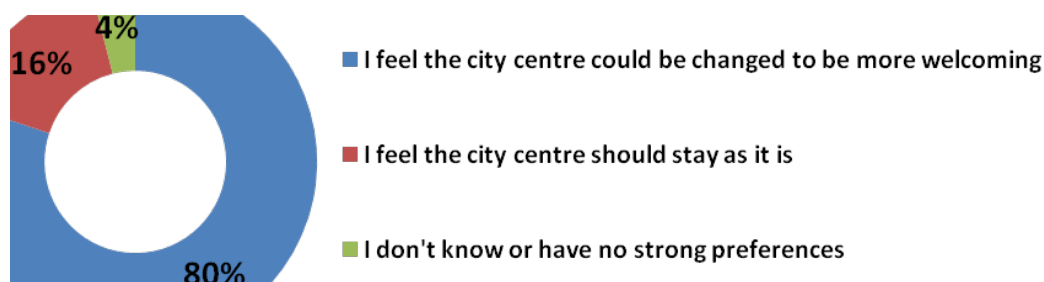
This report is intended to be read as an appendix to a report to committee and therefore makes no recommendations itself.

¹ Base 1,236. 419 respondents did not provide personal details about themselves at the end of the online consultation.

Introduction

Because the city centre is a World Heritage Site, the project team managing the consultation felt it was important to judge whether respondents were fundamentally opposed to making any changes to the centre of Edinburgh. Respondents cautioned that the Council should be mindful that world heritage status can, in extreme cases, be removed. Furthermore it was observed that Edinburgh has had several years of significant infrastructure work and that many would be grateful for a period of stability. Despite these concerns, most respondents to the online survey felt that the city centre could be improved, as summarised in the graph below:

Figure 1: "What is your opinion of Edinburgh city centre?" – base 1,637 responses.



The feedback reported in the following sections will demonstrate that 80% of respondents are not endorsing the proposal for discussion put forward by the Council; indeed within the range of views expressed there are some irreconcilable positions. However this level of response indicates that there could be significant support for the right plan of action and there is broad consensus that the city centre can be changed and improved.

The rest of this report is divided into three sections, dealing with opinions about and suggestions for the use of space on Princes Street, opinions and suggestions relating to George Street and broader transport issues which do not specifically relate to any one area, but affect the entire city centre.

Princes Street

Set against Princes Street Gardens and Edinburgh Castle, Princes Street was recognised as a unique shopping location, providing a mass market retail offering essential for a thriving city centre. However the overall tone of feedback about Princes Street indicates respondents believe there are many opportunities that need to be taken.

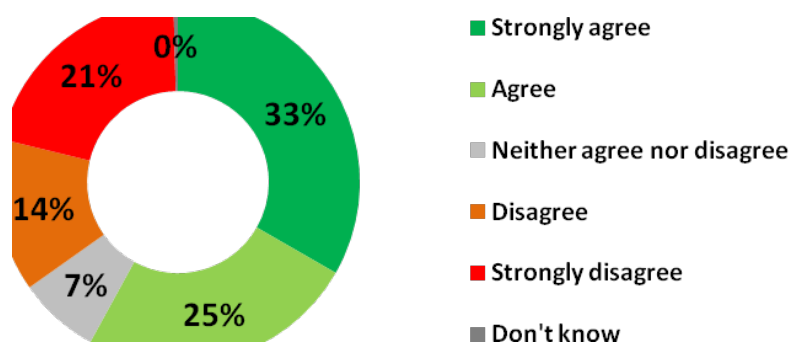
Feedback on travel arrangements along Princes Street is located in the “Connecting the City Centre” section of this report. This section deals with two main themes:

- Use of space on Princes Street
- Use of buildings on Princes Street

Use of Space on Princes Street

When presented with the outline proposal for the use of space in Princes Street, most respondents (58%) agreed that this would improve the experience of those visiting, but around a third (35%) disagreed. This is shown in the chart below.

Figure 2: “To what extent do you agree or disagree that additional pedestrian space on Princes Street will improve the overall experience of those who visit, work or live in the area?” – base 1,401 responses.



The majority of respondents to the online survey wanted to see any extra space introduced on Princes Street used to create casual seating areas, outdoor cafes and bars, food and market stalls similar to existing farmers' markets in the city and public spaces for culture, art and music performance. Respondents felt that this type of usage would encourage more people to gather on Princes Street and use the space to mingle and relax.

The pavement along the south side of the street was identified as being narrow and could be widened to allow people to walk along without encountering congested areas at bus stops. The possibility of including tables and chairs and food and drink kiosks was raised, with many feeling the south side of Princes Street, being next to the gardens, was the more logical location for relaxed seating.

Other European cities such as Amsterdam, Barcelona and Prague were cited as a source for inspiration and ideas on how the street could be used, as well as more local examples such as Sauchiehall Street and Buchanan Street in Glasgow, and Edinburgh's Grassmarket and Festival Square.

Although pavements on the north side of Princes Street are large, respondents found it difficult to move freely along the street. Bus stops, street performers, people begging, charity workers and the sheer volume of footfall currently creates congestion on pavements, restricting their access to shops they want to visit. By widening the pavements, moving these groups elsewhere and removing bus shelters respondents felt that this would be less likely to happen. Placing tables and chairs on the north side of the street was felt to be a possible impediment to easy use of the street.

Introducing more greenery to Princes Street, such as trees, landscaped seating areas, planters and flower boxes, would make the space more welcoming and could provide shelter for pedestrians from the wind. However, respondents questioned whether the addition of greenery would encourage vandalism and be used as rubbish bins.

Climate was a more significant issue for street use on Princes Street than on George Street, as the former was considered to be more exposed. Some respondents suggested that sheltered paving areas used in New Zealand and Australia would help to address this problem, but also felt that flexible use of space should be a priority – cafes and restaurants that could be easily opened to street, but still functioned well without that extra street space.

However for many respondents the climate issues were insurmountable. They felt that as they had no desire to sit outside in Scotland for most of the year, it was unlikely that anyone else would want to. The use of outdoor heaters to address some weather problems was cited as being expensive and not environmentally friendly.

Respondents questioned whether existing space – which was ample – was really being put to the best possible use. Large bus shelters dominate the street scene, Castle Street and the plaza next to the Royal Academy provide areas of public space that are used infrequently outside of the summer Festival and Winter Market. As a pedestrianised area, Rose Street has sufficient space – many believed – to allow for the expansion of cafe culture in the city centre.

Using the existing areas of pedestrian space better would serve to convince many of the benefits of increasing the capacity of pedestrian space along Princes Street, which many considered to have an important transport role as a bus / tram / train / taxi interchange.

The greatest concerns were raised in relation to tram works. Following those significant disruptions to individuals and businesses, and a city centre visitor experience that respondents found embarrassing, the potential benefits of large scale changes were felt to be uncertain. It was felt that a period of stability in the city centre would allow the impact of trams to be understood and give the Council time to articulate a longer term vision for the city centre, instead of making numerous temporary changes.

Use of Buildings on Princes Street

Respondents questioned whether it would be practical to open street-level cafes and restaurants on Princes Street. The volume of pedestrian traffic and a still-considerable number of buses and taxis would prove an obstacle to enjoyment – but the cost and size of retail spaces were also remarked on.

Most retail units on Princes Street are large in relation to properties on George Street, limiting the number of food businesses that could reasonably be expected to occupy the space and increasing the likelihood that only fast food would be provided – which was seen as undesirable. It was generally recognised that Princes Street had a much different retail

offering to George Street and that this would also influence the type of food business likely to open in this location.

Rather than the proposals suggested, respondents felt that more should be done to improve the quality of retail shops on Princes Street. It was felt that more independent, quality retailers were needed to entice people to visit Princes Street, rather than the 'tacky' tourist and leather shops currently on offer. Shop frontages should also be improved to make them more appealing to shoppers. Some respondents suggested that they had no need to visit the city centre as they could get everything they needed elsewhere or from the internet.

While ground-level restaurants and cafes were controversial, respondents noted that the views were even better on the higher floors of buildings. They felt that more should be done to encourage better use of those upper floors, which did not lend themselves so well to mass-market retail.

Whereas George Street was felt to have found an excellent balance of shopping, social and dining establishments that drew a crowd all day and all night, the current balance of businesses on Princes Street meant the street closed at 6pm. While adjusting the balance of properties on upper floors would be a useful step to making the street more vibrant, it was also felt to be desirable that shops extend their opening hours to match many out of town shopping alternatives.

George Street

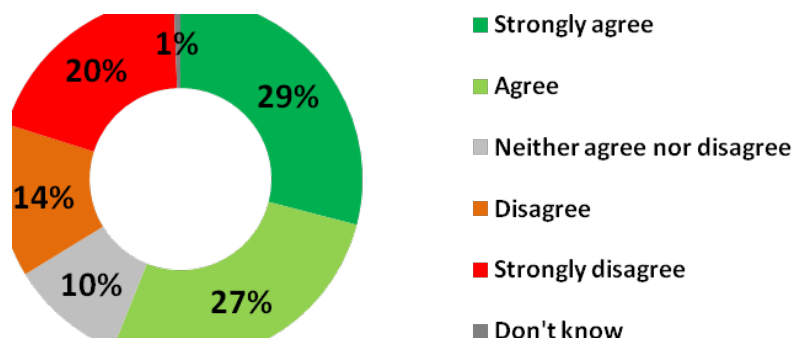
An iconic Georgian thoroughfare originally envisaged as the heart of Edinburgh's New Town, in recent years an upmarket social and retail offering has helped make George Street one of the most city's most important shopping areas. Despite lacking the castle and gardens of its neighbour Princes Street, George Street is more uniformly praised as providing a successful early-to-late experience.

Feedback on travel arrangements along George Street is located in the "Connecting the City Centre" section of this report. This section deals only with the use of space on George Street.

Use of Space on George Street

When asked whether the proposed changes would improve the experience of visiting George Street, respondents to the online survey expressed similar opinions about George Street as about Princes Street. More than half of respondents (56%) agreed the measures would be an improvement, while around a third (34%) disagreed. Perhaps reflecting the higher use of Princes Street, more respondents expressed uncertainty about George Street (11% don't know and neither / nor) compared to Princes Street (7% don't know and neither / nor). This is shown in chart below.

Figure 3: "To what extent do you agree or disagree that additional pedestrian space on George Street will improve the overall experience of those who visit, work or live in the area?" – base 1,388 responses.



As with Princes Street, the majority of respondents suggested that any extra space introduced on George Street could be used to create additional outdoor seating (for café, bar, restaurant and public use), market stalls and public spaces for culture, art and music performance. Respondents also suggested introducing greenery to the area to help brighten up the street.

The Spiegeltent in 2012 was cited by individuals as a positive example of use of public space and it was suggested that if George Street were pedestrianised it would allow for more cultural and entertainment activities like this to take place. However businesses observed that the Spiegeltent attracted visitors to the area who did not make any purchases from the local shops and may have served to drive away potential customers because of the increased congestion on the street. There was strong concern amongst traders about George Street being treated as an amusement park with activities that damaged the overall retail offering.

Businesses were generally very enthusiastic about considered development of George Street, but felt this should be done in such a way as to benefit both sides of the street, rather than only the north. Respondents also felt that it was important to maintain the symmetry of the street.

It was felt that by pedestrianising this street the area would become a more relaxing environment for shoppers and users to experience and would be similar to Buchanan Street in Glasgow.

It was suggested that Charlotte Square should be opened to the public, similar to St Andrew Square, to allow a better flow through the West End Village to George Street for pedestrians. It was felt that providing a better connection between these areas would encourage people to visit and bring the west side to life and that this could create a large shopping and socialising route from the redeveloped St James Quarter to the West End with George Street at its heart.

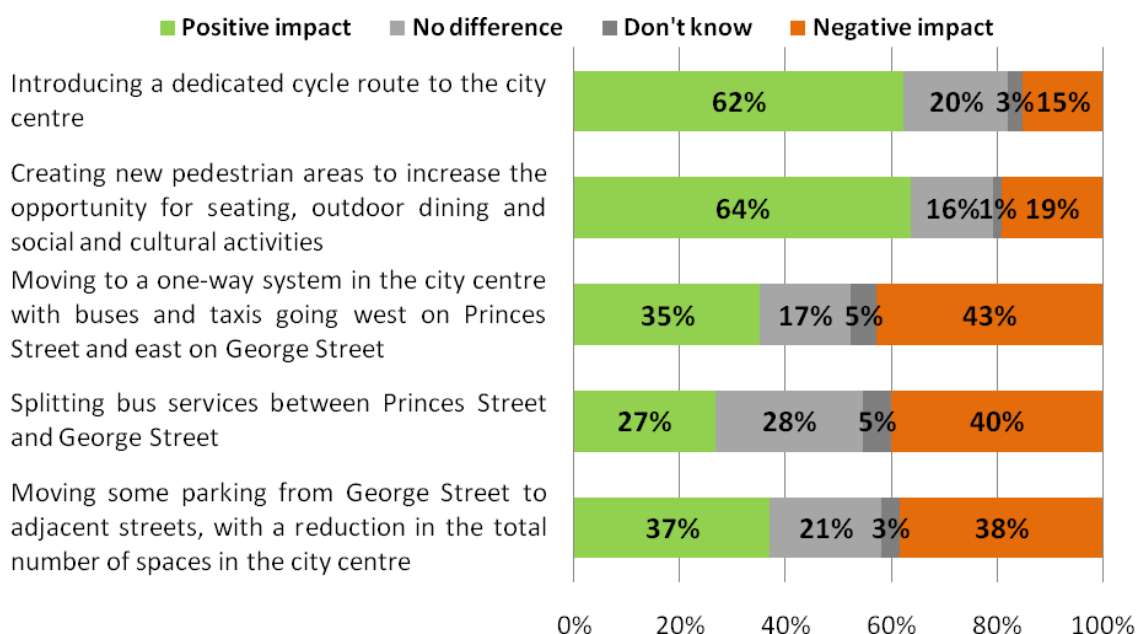
Other respondents felt that it was important to maintain parking facilities on the street – this is discussed in more detail later in this report – and that there is currently enough space available on George Street for pedestrians. They felt that George Street does not have the pedestrian congestion issues of Princes Street and did not see benefits to making any changes to the street layout and traffic movements.

Connecting the City Centre

Issues raised by respondents did not always relate directly to Princes Street, George Street or any particular area of the city centre, but related to interconnectivity of the centre and the surrounding city as well as movement within the city centre. Respondents stressed the interconnected nature of Princes Street and George Street with other areas of the city centre and felt that a holistic review of the city centre was of more use than looking at any area in isolation.

Respondents to the online survey were asked to say whether they thought each of the proposed changes would have a positive or negative impact on them. The proposed changes and the responses are shown in the chart below.

Figure 4: “For each of the following changes proposed, please indicate whether you think there will be a positive or negative impact on you personally (or your business, if you are responding on behalf of a business)” – base 1,304 responses.



As shown in the preceding sections, there is significant support for improved pedestrian areas and agreement that these would have a generally – but not entirely – positive impact on stakeholders. Equally strong is the level of perceived positive impact from introducing a cycle route, but much more negatively viewed are the proposals to change the traffic arrangements for motorised transport.

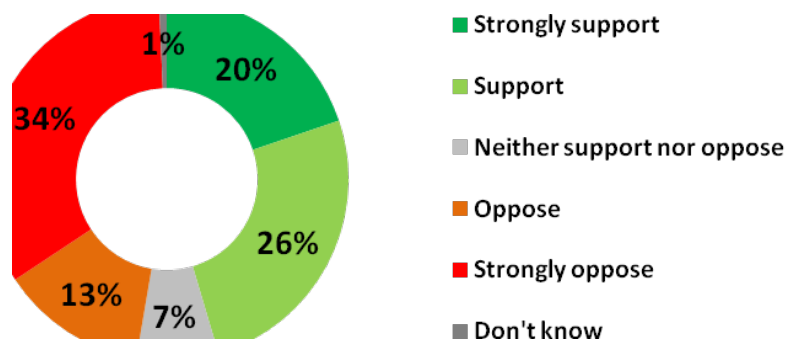
These figures give a good sense of the general tone of the feedback. To address all of the issues raised by respondents, this section is divided into the following themes:

- General traffic
- Bus traffic
- Parking
- Cycling
- Pedestrian routes and signage

General Traffic

Opinion was divided over the proposed traffic management arrangements. Roughly equal proportions of respondents were in favour (46%) and opposed (47%) to the one-way system, with significantly more respondents strongly opposing than strongly supporting the measures. This is shown in the chart below.

Figure 5: “Overall, to what extent would you support or oppose the introduction of the proposed traffic management arrangements in the city centre?” – base 1,355 responses.



Introducing a one-way system to the city centre was interpreted by some as a way to reduce total traffic volume. Respondents were sceptical about the benefits of this approach, arguing that any traffic reduction measure needed to be pre-empted by developments in park-and-ride, alternative transport and the effective functioning of tram, otherwise traffic would tend to be displaced into other parts of the city rather than reduced.

Necessary diversions and closures due to tram works resulted in a spread of all traffic (taxis, buses and at some stages private vehicles) to quieter, residential areas of the city centre. Respondents expressed concern that a one-way system aimed at controlling the total volume of traffic going through the city centre would result in continued or increased pressure on these residential areas. Instead of further traffic restrictions, it was suggested that allowing *all* vehicles to travel along Princes Street at night would reduce the traffic in these residential areas while having no effect on the normal use of the street.

However the aim of reducing traffic volume was supported by many either as a principle influenced by environmentalist beliefs or on the practical grounds that reducing traffic was necessary to encourage increased cycling, walking and release more areas for pedestrian, social and retail use.

It was generally understood that more radical changes to the city centre required a trade-off between existing and alternative uses, and that any substantial transformation required some reduction in road space and vehicle traffic. However, whilst understood, this change was not universally welcomed. Many felt some customers would prefer to go to Livingston by car rather than Edinburgh by bus and that the growth in out-of-town shopping was evidence that excluding cars from the city damaged the city's economy. Others cited the needs of disabled shoppers and the elderly (who were felt to occupy the city centre during most working days) and felt that a strong push towards cycling and walking would obviously prevent those customers visiting. In addition, some felt that the proposed vision is aimed at tourists rather than acknowledging residents' local shopping and travel needs.

There was some concern that a one-way system on George Street would negatively impact one side of the street in favour of the other.

Bus Traffic

There were several distinct concerns over splitting bus routes between Princes Street and George Street using a one-way system. Objections were made both by individuals – which tended to be about accessibility and environmental impact – and by businesses – whose concerns related more to the economic and environmental impacts.

Splitting transport routes between two streets was felt to be confusing, in particular for infrequent visitors and tourists, but the change might also make a shopping trip to the city centre very difficult for those with mobility problems.

Princes Street retailers emphasised that reduced footfall in the street meant reduced sales. They had observed how tram works had reduced their takings and moving large numbers of buses away from Princes Street on a permanent basis would significantly affect the viability of their business. In contrast, and emphasising the different retail offering in both locations, George Street retailers reported no positive impact from increased footfall from bus route changes during tram works.

While no detailed figures are available to make a comparison in terms of total spend, the experience of retailers would seem to indicate that diverting large amounts of bus traffic from Princes Street to George Street would not simply move spending from one area to another, but reduce the total amount of money spent in the city centre.

George Street retailers were keen to emphasise the environmental consequences that would result from such a change and felt that any significant volume of traffic being diverted along their street negatively impacted the retail experience. Pollution, dirt, vibration and damage to buildings were all significant concerns.

It was suggested that if some buses were diverted away from Princes Street – and it was acknowledged that traffic was very heavy on this street – it would be better if entire routes were redirected in both directions. For example, Queen Street, being broader than George Street and open like Princes Street, was felt to be a better route for some buses through the city centre, in particular those routes that duplicated a large part of the tram route. However some respondents felt that Queen Street was currently congested.

The suggestion to split bus routes between Princes Street and George Street was supported by those who were concerned about air pollution, traffic congestion and the visitor experience and those who actively advocated a reduced amount (or the complete removal) of motorised transport on Princes Street.

As well as the number of buses on Princes Street, the rate at which people entered and exited buses was mentioned and some respondents identified ticketing as an issue. A lack of ticket machines and conductors operating on Princes Street was felt to increase the amount of time buses spent loading passengers. The importance of a good ticketing system would increase with the introduction of trams the possibility of integrated journeys across different transport modes.

Parking

Parking in George Street was a contentious issue. Many noted that parking in the middle of the street was both an eyesore and a poor use of valuable space in the city centre. Equally, many were concerned that reducing parking would reduce the number of people visiting the area rather than persuade them to use another form of transport.

Businesses noted that loading, dropping-off and picking-up on George Street was essential for them to conduct their business, but they also expressed concerns that people using the parking all day (workers parking all day for example) provided them with very little benefit and also reduced the number of spaces available to shoppers.

George Street was viewed as having the best parking in the city centre for motorcycle users because of the provision of secure bays in this street. The proposal was also criticised for not recognising that motorcycle transport is distinct from other forms of motorised transport and should be accommodated in the design of the city centre, rather than grouped with all other vehicles.

While it was acknowledged that abundant parking was available – in particular Greenside was felt to always have capacity – parking was generally too far away from where people wanted to shop and there were poor access routes from parking to shopping. The pedestrian route from Greenside to George Street was felt to be so bad it was impractical to talk about the car park as a substitute for on-street parking.

Under-street parking solutions were mentioned in various forms including stacked car parking and suggested sites for large underground car parks beneath Charlotte Square and Princes Street Gardens. Additional park and ride facilities were also desired by many respondents.

Cycling

A proposed dedicated two-way cycle route along George Street was generally welcomed and recognised as increasing the overall ease and safety of cycling through the city centre². Amongst regular cyclists, opinion of the ease of access and safety created by the George Street route was even more positive³. There were questions raised about how this would integrate with other cycle routes through the city – in particular the areas of concern were connections to Leith at the top of Leith Walk and connections to the west of Edinburgh at Shandwick Place. The priority in both cases was ensuring an integrated and safe cycle network.

Respondents felt that improvements need to be made at intersections to allow cyclists priority over other traffic, and that advance stop lines should be introduced where possible. Resurfacing of roads to eliminate existing potholes that currently make cycling on roads difficult and dangerous was highlighted as an important improvement.

² 59% of respondents agreed the proposed route along George Street would make it safer to travel through the city centre, 19% disagreed. 54% felt the route would make it safer to travel by bicycle through the city centre, 20% disagreed. It should be noted that while a very large number of cyclists responded to the survey (441 responses to the online survey were from cyclists), the majority of respondents to both cases were not cyclists and would therefore not have recent personal experience of travel by bicycle through the city centre.

³ 76% of cyclists agreed the route would make travel easier, 12% disagreed. 65% felt the route would make bicycle travel safer, 19% disagreed.

Respondents raised questions about how the cycle route would be differentiated from roads and pavements. Some favoured a section that was physically separated from roads and pavements, while others recognised that cyclists would need to coexist with pedestrians and felt that the space should be clearly designated as a shared surface during rush hours.

However, despite the benefits perceived in a George Street route, it appears that Princes Street is the preferred route for cyclists. Travelling from either side of the city through George Street would frequently involve a cyclist deviating from the shortest route, taking several turns across tram lines to join and leave the George Street cycle way, and navigating busy intersections unnecessarily.

Prohibiting two-way cycling on Princes Street would – respondents felt – make no difference, as cyclists were likely to travel both ways even if that meant cycling on the pavement. Non-cyclists disapproved of cyclists using the pavement and identified this as a problem in the city centre at the moment.

A dedicated two-way route on Princes Street was viewed by some as an alternative to George Street, while others felt this should be in addition to a route on George Street. In terms of their own cycling experience and promoting cycle use in general, a priority cyclists expressed was for high levels of permeability; allowing cycles easy access to as much of the city as possible. Adequate bicycle parking would also need to be made available throughout the city centre to encourage usage.

Alternative suggestions for cycling provision in the city centre included cycle lanes on Princes Street Gardens, Rose Street, Queen Street, Hill Street and Thistle Street.

The counterpoint made by some respondents was that they felt giving cyclists priority in the city centre was not desirable, since they were generally using the city centre as a traffic route. Others felt that proposals seem to assume that there is a larger number of cyclists than there actually are, and that current cycling provision is adequate.

It was felt that a system of hireable bikes, similar to the “Boris Bikes” in London, could be introduced in Edinburgh. However the success of this scheme would be dependent on key desire lines being accommodated in transport planning and the number of cycle routes and bicycle racks being considerably increased.

Pedestrian Routes and Signage

Pedestrian routes around the city centre were felt to be poor. While the temporary disruption caused by tram works was cited – in particular the problems pedestrians experienced with long diversions at the junction of Princes Street and St Andrews Square opposite the Princes Mall – most problems were of a more permanent nature.

The Old Town and the New Town are separated from each other by pedestrian unfriendly routes and impassable geographic features. Even within these distinct areas, the Royal Mile and the Grassmarket, Princes Street and the Princes Mall and George Street and Multrees Walk exist in isolation. It is difficult for the casual visitor to learn about these areas and moving between them requires effort.

It was felt that improvements to the pedestrian experience of the city centre were necessary to connect these areas, with the highest priority being the side roads connecting George Street and Princes Street, but with some respondents offering longer term and more ambitious projects including a direct route via bridge from Princes Street to the castle.

CITY CENTRE VISION

It was felt that the social experience of visiting the city centre would probably be unchanged by pedestrian routes – since individuals select an area where they wish to go to socialise. However the shopping experience could be improved by providing shoppers with journey routes, desirable opportunities to move from one shopping area to another and improved information about the location of shops. These improvements would benefit regulars, retailers and visitors but the street presence would need to be carefully considered to avoid clutter in the form of large numbers of tourist information signs that were of little assistance to most users of the city centre during most visits.

Conclusions

There is broad enthusiasm and great ambition for what Edinburgh city centre can become. The public and businesses feel passionately about realising a vision that creates a social and retail offering of global significance. Other European cities were often cited as examples of what Edinburgh might emulate, but respondents were keen to emphasise what Edinburgh was uniquely capable of becoming and to emphasise and interlink the various strengths of the capital.

Almost as strong as the support for an improved city centre is opposition to the one-way traffic system proposed as a means of delivering these changes. Respondents recognise free space in side streets and existing buildings and question why this isn't better used – and interpret the change to traffic and parking as removing a real benefit to make room for an imagined one.

It is clear from the feedback that no short term plan to change some transport arrangements can deliver on what stakeholders aspire to. Edinburgh requires a vision for its city centre that enables all stakeholders to work together, to understand each other and to believe in positive change.

Creating such a vision is not the work of a single consultation and is beyond the scope of this report. However, based on the feedback received, it is suggested that a vision for the city centre should address the following elements:

- A city centre that welcomes all visitors regardless of their form of transport, while actively managing transport within the city centre;
- An effortless transition from one form of transport to another facilitated by more pedestrian friendly areas, dedicated cycle routes, short-trip buses and better links between retailers and car parking, park-and-ride and rail facilities;
- Careful management of through-traffic that minimises impact on residents in wider the City Centre Neighbourhood;
- Better links between the Old and New Town, which currently feel very separate;
- A more informal feeling to street space that allows for seating, creative use of space and irregular food and retail offerings such as markets;
- A means of encouraging landlords to make better use of upper floors of retail premises on Princes Street for hotel, social, cafe and dining opportunities;
- The pedestrianisation of George Street (respecting the need for drop-off, collection and deliveries at hotels and businesses) as the heart of a Buchanan Street style shopping district anchored at either end by a more frequently used Charlotte Square and the redeveloped St James Quarter;
- More greenery amongst street furniture; and
- An improved approach to information provision that emphasises major retailers and retail areas as well as tourist information, without cluttering the street with numerous directional arrows on poles.

Without such a vision, respondents advocate a wait-and-see approach. Short-term caution should be exercised when making any public space changes. Occasional and imaginative use of public space needs to be shown to deliver benefits to a broad range of stakeholders and here the story is mixed. The book festival in Charlotte Square is a success, while the Spiegeltent in George Street appeals to social users of the city centre, but appears to be of no benefit to local retailers. Successful programmes, sensitive to their immediate locality, would serve as a practical demonstration of what can be done with further enhancements and would help to build consensus around the creation of the necessary, more detailed vision.

While cyclists are keen to have greater permeability, ideally with cycle routes on both George Street and Princes Street, a two-way route on Princes Street appears to be the much preferred option. Cyclists advocate a car-free city centre, but it is important to recognise this as a minority view and that any moves towards this in the foreseeable future would be both practically and politically difficult.

The impact of trams on bus traffic is not clear and the management of individual bus routes is preferable to a sweeping change in public transport. Buses are not welcome on George Street – with the size of Queen Street felt to provide a better option for any transferred routes.

A fundamental problem with changing transport arrangements is that Princes Street retailers want as much bus traffic as possible, George Street retailers want as much car access and parking as possible, and the public are accustomed to both of these things. While it is true – and important to note – that all change to transport arrangements tend to be opposed, at the moment there are no substitutes acceptable to even a majority of stakeholders. Changing current transport arrangements without appropriate alternatives in place would negatively affect businesses and city centre residents without a clear understanding of the benefits to any groups.

In moving forward with the development of a vision, the Council has a responsibility to accrete evidence and public opinion, to communicate a direction and unite stakeholders in a long-term process. There is ambition and there is support for bold thinking, but attempting to deliver short-term benefits outside of an articulate vision may damage support for change.

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