

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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| COMMITTEE | Net Zero, Environment and Transport Committee |
| DATE | 11 June 2024 |
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| REPORT TITLE | The Aberdeen City Council (City Centre, Aberdeen) (Traffic Management) (Experimental) Order 2023 – Statutory Public Consultation |
| REPORT NUMBER | CR&E/24/169 |
| EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR | Gale Beattie |
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| REPORT AUTHOR | Graeme McKenzie |
| TERMS OF REFERENCE | 8 |

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report considers objections and comments received during the consultation process for “The Aberdeen City Council (City Centre, Aberdeen) (Traffic Management) (Experimental) Order 2023”.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That Committee: -

- 2.1 note the benefits highlighted, to date, by the bus operators, and recognise the measures will support continuing improvements. Similarly, noting the measures support active travel by way of walking or cycling. Collectively, the measures are a vital component of the City Centre Masterplan for establishing an attractive and vibrant city centre, with an environment that is conducive to encouraging footfall. Furthermore, choice remains in terms of access, with car parks and on-street parking capacity unaffected, and a network of appropriate distributor roads available, whether for access or through traffic;
- 2.2 approve the making of “The Aberdeen City Council (City Centre, Aberdeen) (Traffic Management) Experimental Order 2023” as a permanent Order, albeit with continued monitoring in terms of the ongoing city centre masterplan.
- 2.3 instruct the Chief Officer Operations to commence the procedure for the Order to be made permanent.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 “The Aberdeen City Council (City Centre, Aberdeen) (Traffic Management) (Experimental) Order 2023” was made on 24 July 2023, with its operation being brought into effect on the 1 August 2023. Albeit when allowing for roadworks it was the 21 August when all the necessary changes had been completed on the ground, and where it was announced as being fully operational.

3.2 A summary of the complete package of measures provided by the Experimental Traffic Regulation Order is specified in Appendix A, however, the restrictions that are the focus of objections / comments are: -

- the new city centre Bus Gates/Lanes on Bridge Street, Guild Street, and Market Street/Union Street (permitted vehicles are buses, cycles, goods vehicles, taxis, and private hire vehicles).

**Please note, the Bus Gates that control access onto central Union Street, between its junctions with Bridge Street and Market Street are already established by way of a permanent Traffic Regulation Order, however, the experimental order has extended access to all the vehicle classes stated above; namely, it was previously restricted to timetabled local buses and cycles, with goods vehicles (except 7.5T plus), taxis etc. having to enter central Union Street via Back Wynd.*

- the prohibition on turning right from Union Terrace onto Rosemount Viaduct (except for buses, cycles, taxis, and private hire vehicles)
- the creation of a 'Pedestrian and Cycle Zone' on Schoolhill / Upperkirkgate, between the junctions with Back Wynd and Flourmill Lane, with access being limited for the purpose of loading at adjacent premises between the hours of 4.30pm and 11am.

3.3 An Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) is a method of introducing traffic management arrangements and consulting simultaneously with the measures in operation. This allows the Council, acting as the Local Roads Authority, and road users the opportunity to ascertain the 'real world' effect of the measures. The consultation is open for a period of 6 months (commences with the making of the ETRO), while that actual operation of the ETRO is limited to a period of no longer than 18 months. Accordingly, a Roads Authority is compelled to reach a conclusion during the period of experimental operation as to whether the ETRO is made permanent (in full or part) or abandoned.

3.4 A criticism that has been levelled at the ETRO is it has been used to circumvent the usual permanent Traffic Regulation Order consultation process prior to implementation, and they are rarely used in Scotland. In this regard, the Scottish Government amended the statutory procedure for establishing ETROs in November 2021, thereby adopting the same long-established procedure in England and Wales. Prior to this, and for context, they were seldom used in Scotland, as they could often involve multiple procedures, that in practical terms defeated the purpose of their use. As stated, they can be an ideal way of testing traffic management measures, and anecdotally, since the procedure was modified, their use in Scotland does appear to be on the rise.

3.5 In terms of volume, the direct number of objections received during the consultation period, in-line with the statutory process, is 500+. The full content of the objections can be viewed in Appendix B (individuals) and C

(businesses); however, the main themes will be considered in later paragraphs.

- 3.6 Beyond the formal objections sent directly to the Council, there was further feedback received on behalf of businesses, from Aberdeen Inspired, and Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce (See Appendix D and E respectively).
- 3.7 Two petitions have been circulated via the 'Change.org' website; one titled "[Scrap the new Bus Gates – Keep Aberdeen accessible](#)", the other, "[Stop Aberdeen City Council's plans for Guild Street Bus Gates](#)", which have 6,887 and 738 signatories respectively (signatories recorded to 7 May 2024). These petitions are highlighted for information, and it is expected any comments associated with the signatories will echo the same themes submitted in the formal objections received by the Council.
- 3.8 The main purpose of the experimental order is to support the City Centre Masterplan by establishing a priority route for buses, while still maintaining access for pedal cycles, taxis, goods vehicles, and authorised vehicles (namely, private hire vehicles). This enhances bus reliability and travel time, thereby encouraging bus services as a sustainable transport option. Similarly, the removal of general through traffic from the roads concerned will establish an improved environment for pedestrians and cyclists, while facilitating future streetscape improvements.
- 3.9 The ETRO also maintains the 'Pedestrian and Cycle Zone' that has been established on Schoolhill / Upperkirkgate, between its junctions with Back Wynd and Flourmill Lane; this measure originally being established as a 'Spaces for people' intervention during the COVID pandemic.
- 3.10 In support of the changes, junction improvements were made to South College Street area that takes account of re-routed general traffic and corresponds with the local roads hierarchy which was updated in 2020. This project (£8.5 million spend) being funded through the Council and a grant received from the Scottish Government's Bus Partnership Fund. Further information can be viewed at the following link: - <https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/roads-transport-and-parking/south-college-street-junction-improvements-project-phase-1>
- 3.11 Accordingly, the B983 (Denburn Road, Wapping Street, College Street, South College Street), Palmerston Place, the A956 (North Esplanade West, Market Street, Trinity Quay, Virginia Street and Commerce Street) provide alternative routes for general traffic that previously used the roads where bus priority measures have been established (See Appendix G).

Objections

- 3.12 A summary of the main themes of the objections are provided below, with the themes highlighted in bold, and thereafter followed by a response from a traffic management / city centre masterplan perspective. The full content of

the objections can also be viewed at Appendices B (individuals) and C (businesses): -

3.13 **Objection theme: - “Acknowledge the need to improve public transport, however, the current system is unreliable and unable to meet the needs of residents.”**

“Buses are inefficient and there have not been any improvements in punctuality.”

3.14 The headline here, is while the bus priority measures have only been established for a relatively short period, they are bearing fruit in terms of measurable improvements, with First Bus Scotland indicating the following in terms of a timeline: -

September / October 2023

Improved bus running speeds are being noted as the Bus Gates / Lanes settle into operation.

Following the commencement of the new measures, First offered 50% off its ‘3in7’ day ticket bundle; this generated a 9% uplift in customers that were retained post offer. (The ‘3in7’ is a flexible ticket and provides for travel on any 3 days chosen by the customer during a certain week.)

January 2024

Bus running speeds have improved by 25%.

This allows First to save on the operational cost of three vehicles within the network, while maintaining existing frequency.

Savings invested back into customer offering through the ‘network wide free weekend travel’ throughout January 2024.

Figures show, at the end of January, passenger volumes at the weekends were up 20% year on year.

End of financial year 2023/24

Improved journey speeds continue to benefit bus passengers passing through the Bus Gates / Lanes.

Since switch on, over three million bus journeys made with First Aberdeen have benefitted from the Bus Gates / Lanes.

As at Year End 23/24, our passenger volumes on routes using the Bus Gates / Lanes are trending 16.5% above where they were previously (prior to the Bus Gates / Lanes being established).

Summary

Our passenger volumes have continued to climb from the initial 9% growth back in October 2023 to the 16.5% enjoyed at the end of March 2024. The bus priority measures have done what we said they would. Bus speeds have

been improved resulting in a more attractive service and significant fare reductions / free travel, giving customers much greater value for money, and delivering modal shift as a result.

All in all, when taking account of all the city centre interventions, so inclusive of the central section of Union Street, there has been a benefit provided to circa 12 million passenger journeys.

It is essential these journey speeds are maintained on a permanent basis for these benefits to be delivered in the future.

3.15 Similarly, Stagecoach issued the following statement in early December -

“Across our Aberdeen City network, we have observed an average uplift of passenger numbers by 5% since the bus priority measures went live. We have also seen a reduction of 10% in the time taken to cross the city centre on service 59, which connects key destinations such as Northfield, Balnagask, and Aberdeen Royal Infirmary.

With fewer buses being held up unnecessarily in city centre traffic, bus journey times are quicker and more predictable. This will have a significant impact on the daily lives of bus commuters and thousands of bus passengers across the North-east who make journeys into Aberdeen.”

3.16 With more recent data analysis by Stagecoach indicating the following with respect to specific services: -

The following analysis is based on making comparisons with data recorded for working / school travelling weeks in June/July 2023 prior to the bus priority measures coming into operation.

Service 59: Balnagask to Northfield via Aberdeen Royal Infirmary

Service 59 is showing the biggest passenger number improvement, starting slowly on the 21 August 2023 with 2%, up to 13% at the grace enforcement period end, with 23% improvement at the busiest week in December. Regarding service 59, additional measures that might have a positive impact for those numbers are the significant investment by Stagecoach in the service with new electric vehicles. It is also important to mention, that route connects Torry and Northfield which are residential areas with high dependency on bus services, including direct connection to ARI from both ends. In this case, bus gates clearly indicate a direct impact on passengers' journeys, which leads to patronage improvement.

Service 727: Union Square – Great Northern Road - Aberdeen Airport

Service 727 is showing a positive improvement, although it seems that the trendline is slower than mentioned for service 59. This is mainly because of factors that directly impact on the route, which are: airport seasonal traffic, events at P&J Live, football traffic, city conferences at TECA etc. Therefore, general route performance was considered on weeks that have not been

affected by the above factors; this to make sure that comparison between regular weeks is more reliable.

- Weekdays Service 727 patronage (excluding Airport Traffic) growth, from 21 August 2023, is gradually going up, progressing to a 4 to 5% improvement, with a 13% rise being recorded in the busiest December week.*
- Weekends data shows clearly better percentage improvement to weekdays, which would suggest that passengers could have chosen journey by bus rather than a car, with up to 17% growth in December.*

While those percentages might seem low, with passenger numbers on 727 relatively high, a 4 to 5% improvement is a significant increase.

Services 4/5/6 and 6A: Westhill Corridor and Kingswells Park & Ride

Kingswells Park & Ride detailed analysis: -

- Combined data for Kingswells Park & Ride, with Industrial Estates (Prime Four and Arnhall) included, shows improvement from 9% to 22% on weekdays. The data for Kingswells Park and Ride only (without Industrial Estates) shows even better improvement, starting at 11% in the initial week, ending at 24% in busiest week in December. Accordingly, the Park & Ride facility has been busier since the introduction of the new city centre Bus Gates, which may be a good indicator of more passengers switching onto bus.*
- Moving onto weekends only, Kingswells Park & Ride shows an improvement of up to 36% in busiest December week, and 10% increase in November.*

Westhill Corridor detailed analysis: -

Data that has been analysed was only for passengers travelling to and from Westhill and Elrick; this also shows good progression, 13% - 24% increase, with even 9% - 54% over the weekends.

Ellon Park & Ride

- Analysis of passengers only boarding / alighting at Ellon Park & Ride and traveling towards City Centre in both directions on weekdays. From initial week, 14% increase, progressing to 25% at grace enforcement period end, up to 43% in busiest week in December.*
- Weekends indicated greater increase, from 11% to even 57% in November. In addition, last January weekend shows significant increase, albeit this could be the effect of free weekend travel offer.*

King Street / Ellon Road

It was also beneficial to analyse the north corridor serving Aberdeen, and how the Bus Gates may have impacted our passenger numbers on services. Data was trimmed to only include Ellon Road and King Street locations, towards City Centre in both directions for full week, filtering all Buchan services that we operate on corridor (excluding services 290/291). We can clearly see that passenger numbers increased, especially at the end of the grace enforcement period, with 17% growth, then up to 23% in November. Weather disruption did not affect January numbers significantly, therefore last week in January shows 12% increase compared to average values in June / July 2023.

- 3.17 Accordingly, at this early stage there is positive indications the new bus priority measures are improving journey times and reliability and provide a platform towards a city mass transit system that is quicker, greener, and cheaper. While at the same time supporting the City Centre Masterplan for an attractive and vibrant city centre.

- 3.18 **Objection theme: - “Difficulty navigating the new road layouts by car”.**

“Longer journey times, with increased consumption of fuel and vehicle emissions.”

“Scared to access town for fear of receiving a penalty for inadvertently driving through a Bus Gate.”

“The city centre is no longer accessible.”

- 3.19 A common depiction of the bus priority measures in objections is they have led to the city centre being inaccessible by car; however, this is not the case. When considering visitors by car, they will generally be seeking to access an off-street car park, while some will also visit city centre streets where on-street parking bays are available. The crucial factor is all these facilities remain accessible and there has been no change in capacity for parking.

- 3.20 Likewise, for a driver of a car wishing to allow a passenger to board or alight, or carry out loading activities, there are few limitations in terms of access, with alternative routes remaining, albeit there will be some areas where it may be time-limited and restricted to loading goods and burden. For example, the ‘Pedestrian & Cycle Zone’ on Schoolhill / Upperkirkgate can only be accessed for loading from 4.30pm to 11am; the same being true of central Union Street when entered via Back Wynd.

- 3.21 There is an issue where some drivers still perceive some of the roads that have been restricted as ones that should be available as distributor ‘through road’ types for all vehicles, however, emphasis must be placed on their function as destinations to serve retail, business, hospitality, and residential function, which creates a welcoming environment for pedestrians, and similarly so for cyclists. Consequently, the priority provided to buses, cycles, taxis, and private hire vehicles, is championing sustainable transport. While

the access provided for Goods Vehicles acknowledges the necessity for the day-to-day servicing of shops, restaurants, offices etc.

- 3.22 A criticism often cited is the measures are leading to longer journeys; whether that be distance and time, or where 'delay' is highlighted because of congestion due to vehicles being displaced onto other routes. Most drivers, however, will generally be making their way to the city centre from outside its very core; the consequence being with journey planning and using appropriate routes, there will be no real impact. The context to this is the road network with its priority, secondary, and local routes is still facilitating the movement of traffic and continues to provide direct access to city centre destinations (See plan at Appendix F).
- 3.23 The central point being the main routes into the city centre all lead to a circular like distributor route that serves the very core; this is best visualised by way of the plan at Appendix G; without naming all the roads involved in their entirety, the following is descriptive of the route concerned: - Hutcheon Street, West North Street, East North Street, Virginia Street, Market Street, North Esplanade West, Palmerston Place, South College Street, College Street, Denburn Road, and Skene Square.
- 3.24 What has been apparent in many communications is a level of perception where some consider the change to be akin to "pulling the drawbridges up in the city centre", and where there is an element of being disconcerted as the route one has historically used is no longer available. This fuelling comments such as "I won't visit the city centre again", "I will go elsewhere to shop" etc. The contrast though is with an appreciation of the limited extent of the restrictions, and the alternative routes available, there is not a significant detriment.
- 3.25 To raise awareness of the measures, the Council, through its External Communications Team, released a series of news updates, media releases, maps, videos, and social media both prior to, and after the experimental Order came into operation. The Council website also hosts a dedicated page providing detail, along with a 'frequently asked questions' section. Similarly, the 'GetAbout' website, hosted by regional transport organisation Nestrans, and the Bus Partnership, have also publicised information.
- 3.26 There are objections that relate to car drivers based in, or routinely driving on roads in, the core city centre. Examples cited include a situation where secure documents are routinely being transported between city centre premises, travelling for property surveys, using private motor cars for delivery services, transporting heavy equipment between premises etc. In this respect, it is impossible to have a system that can accommodate every eventuality, and for a minority while the changes may be considered disruptive, this must be balanced against the overall benefit; with any negative impact being very modest when considering the alternative routes that remain available.
- 3.27 ***Objection theme: - "Traffic displaced onto other roads is leading to congestion, longer journey times and pollution."***

- 3.28 As indicated earlier, junction capacity improvements in the area of South College Street have been made, with a direct link also created between Palmerston Place and North Esplanade West. When considering the B983 (Denburn Road, Wapping Street, College Street, South College Street), Palmerston Place, and the A956 (North Esplanade West, Market Street, Trinity Quay, Virginia Street and Commerce Street), traffic appears to be running well. This is evidenced in Appendix H, I, and J, where information accessed by way of Google Maps highlights the movement of traffic on typical days.
- 3.29 Indeed, the only point of real note, have been emergency and planned utility works on Market Street, where the removal of a lane reduced capacity and did lead to a very limited period where congestion was noted. Such events, whether emergency or planned, occur across any road network, and efforts will be made to mitigate the impact. So, with planned roadworks, measures in advance will be advertising to avoid an area, highlighting alternative routes, possibly suspending certain traffic management restrictions, and on busy distributor roads, where possible, avoiding peak periods and/or arranging works during school holiday periods. While in an emergency, information will be disseminated as swiftly as possible. It should also be noted, that beyond roadworks, there is also the situation where Police Scotland can intervene to manage traffic in an emergency.
- 3.30 ***Objection theme: - “The Bus Gates / Lanes are a threat to the city centre’s vibrancy and footfall.”***
- “Businesses, shops, and the hospitality industry will be hit hard as potential customers shun the city centre in fear of contravening Bus Gates / Lanes.”***
- 3.31 As previously emphasised, access to all the parking facilities that existed prior to the new bus priority measures remains available. The concern is therefore one as to whether a negative perception over the extent of the Bus Gate / Lanes is deterring footfall.
- 3.32 In terms of measuring footfall, Aberdeen Inspired has a contract with Springboard which provides weekly footfall counts at specific sites in the city centre; this data is then shared with Aberdeen City Council. The sensors concerned count people as they pass, and there will be a significant element of double counting; the consequence being it will overstate the number of individuals visiting. Therefore, Aberdeen City Council will report on the percentage trend, as opposed to stating the actual number of pedestrians.
- 3.33 When comparing the period of 27 August 2023 to 22 April 2024, this following the commencement of the Bus Gates / Lanes operation, against the exact same 2022/23 timeframe, there is a 4.6% drop in footfall. (Of note, this is based on sensors that were collecting data at the same specific point on the pavement / footway; that is to say, if a sensor has been shifted it has been excluded, as the data is rendered unreliable.)

3.34 The difficulty in interpreting this data is it is not 'black and white' where it could be stated it must solely be a drop because of the Bus Gates / Lanes. There are a range of factors that could have contributed to this fall: -

- a long-term decline in footfall experienced in towns and cities across the UK. Between 2015 and 2020 there was a decline of 5% in footfall in major English town centres. A similar trend has been observed in Aberdeen, Scotland, and UK as a whole pre-pandemic, with footfall falling each year between 2017-19. This trend has continued in 2024 across all three locations.
- this more general trend in the decline of city centre footfall is likely caused by the shift to home working and increased online purchasing. Additionally, the contraction of retail and hospitality offerings in many cities, coupled with economic challenges stemming from the EU Exit, global supply chain issues, the cost-of-living crisis, and the downturn in the oil and gas industry, may have further influenced these patterns.
- the storms experienced in the North-East from October 2023 to January 2024 (with a fall of 250,000 pedestrians in October 2023 compared with October 2022; there being a 3-day period in October 2023 in which Storm Babet pummelled eastern Scotland, and where similar patterns were observed for other storm periods).

3.35 With regards to the business feedback, both Aberdeen Inspired and Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce (AGCC) ran their own surveys with levy payers and members over the introduction of the ETRO measures.

3.36 Both surveys are summarised below and the responses mirror those provided with the ETRO statutory consultation process and respondees may have replied in multiple surveys.

3.37 The survey by Aberdeen Inspired gathered 36 responses from approximately 685 levy payers. The collated responses, which can be viewed in Appendix D, have been summarised below.

- Many of the businesses responding have reported a decline in footfall and sales which they attribute to the ETRO. The main issue being that the changes have made it difficult for customers and delivery drivers to access premises.
- Their customers have reported that the ETRO has created confusion among road users, especially those who are infrequent visitors to the city centre, as they are afraid of getting fined for passing through the bus gates or turning onto restricted roads.
- Some businesses have expressed the need for the ETRO to be reconsidered or removed, as they believe it is discouraging people from visiting the city centre and damaging the local economy. They also

suggest that more support should be given to the city centre businesses to help them compete with online shopping and out-of-town retail parks.

- A few businesses have shown support for the ETRO to revitalise the city centre and reduce emissions, and they have suggested that it should be given a chance to prove itself.

3.38 AGCC's survey received 1,091 responses, having been widely and publicly promoted through their Morning Bulletin (daily subscribers 17,000) and a wide range of social channels. The responses were mainly from the public rather than businesses. This expanded on a previous survey carried out by the Chamber, prior to implementation of the scheme, which attracted 206 responses. The collated responses are available to view in Appendix E.

3.39 Within the responses they gathered, the summary is like that provided by Aberdeen Inspired: -

- 4% of respondents, (47) were city businessowners.
- 81% (38) of city business owners say that they have had less footfall since the introduction of the road network changes.
- 55% (26) indicate they have had less income.
- 32% (15) and 34% (16) respectively, have had to change delivery schedules or incurred higher delivery costs.

3.40 **Objection theme: - "The restriction on turning right from Union Terrace onto Rosemount Viaduct has created congestion and confusion for drivers and has no clear benefit for buses or cyclists."**

3.41 The prohibition of right turns from Union Terrace onto Rosemount Viaduct came out of the traffic modelling process for the City Centre Masterplan and is based upon the roads hierarchy where Union Street is considered a destination as opposed to a strategic through route. From a perception standpoint, the rationale for this prohibition will become clearer as the City Centre Masterplan progresses and eventual streetscape improvements take place on the section of Union Street to the west of Union Terrace.

3.42 **Objection theme: - "The Bus Gates / Lanes limit access for disabled 'Blue Badge' holders."**

3.43 There is no detriment in terms of access to dedicated parking facilities, as alternative routes remain available. There have also been additional 'Blue Badge' bays established on Flourmill Lane, and the area of the Green, as part of the experimental order process. Thereafter, when considering 'drop off / pick up', there are options for 'close' proximity waiting while a passenger boards / alights.

3.44 There were objections received on the basis if an exemption can be provided for 'Blue Badge' holders to enter the upcoming Low Emission Zone (LEZ),

why not for Bus Gates / Lanes. The distinction is the LEZ covers a large area with distinct entry points to a zone, whereas the Bus Gates / Lanes are limited lengths, with alternative routes remaining to access parking opportunities and for 'close' proximity 'drop off/ pick up'.

3.45 **Objection theme: - “The Pedestrian and Cycle Zone on Schoolhill / Upperkirkgate makes travel unnecessarily circuitous.”**

3.46 Given the high pedestrian movement between the St. Nicholas and Bon Accord shopping centres, and the shared space streetscaping in place at the Upperkirkgate / Broad Street junction, it was considered that the traffic restrictions included on Schoolhill, originally part of the *Spaces For People* measures, should be made permanent, primarily from a pedestrian safety and placemaking perspective, and preventing it being used as a general east-west 'through' route. In due course, as part of the City Centre Masterplan, there will be streetscape improvements which emphasise its function as a 'Pedestrian and Cycle' Zone.

3.47 **Objection theme: - “Difficulty negotiating new road layouts and interpreting road signs.”**

3.48 The regulatory signs and road markings that provide for the Bus Gates / Lane are in accordance with regulatory design specifications, and guidance set out by the Department for Transport / Scottish Government. Ahead of the regulatory signs there are also advance signs that warn drivers of the restrictions, while to further mitigate against vehicles attempting to use core city centre roads as 'through' routes, certain roads have a 'Prohibition of motor vehicles, except for access' stipulation.

3.49 The level of infringements is trending downwards; however, it continues to be monitored, and further changes are possible should it be considered additional signs, modifications to road markings etc. would be of benefit.

3.50 **Objection theme: - “Motorcycles are not permitted to use them, or indeed any of the other Bus Lanes / Gates in Aberdeen.”**

3.51 Given the alternative distributor routes available, and similarly where access is still provided to off-street car parks and on-street parking bays, it is not considered necessary to provide motorcycles with an exemption.

3.52 For information, the topic of motorcycles being permitted to use Bus Lanes was last considered by the Council Operational Delivery Committee on 16 May 2019, where the committee approved the recommendation to take no further action in terms of providing a citywide exemption: -

<https://committees.aberdeencity.gov.uk/documents/s96719/Motorcycles%20in%20Bus%20Lanes%20Committee%20Report%20-%20Final%20Version.pdf>

3.53 The Council Traffic Management & Road Safety Team are aware the Department for Transport are consulting on a possible update to their Traffic Advisory Leaflet titled “Motorcyclists using bus lanes (TAL 1/24)” which is

applicable to England. So, a situation that would be reviewed should the Scottish Government / Transport Scotland follow suit with any updated guidance.

Summing Up

- 3.54 Bus Gates / Lanes are invariably contentious and will be considered by some to be a significant inconvenience and direct challenge to a viewpoint that private motor vehicles should have unhindered use of the public road network; this opinion evident in the briefest examination of bus priority measures that have been promoted in cities across the United Kingdom, and where it features as a common thread of objection.
- 3.55 The counter argument is without appropriate restrictions; how can local authorities possibly meet the challenges of providing attractive and sustainable transport options. They are also integral to establishing a modern welcoming city centre that is vibrant and pleasant to negotiate by walking or wheeling, and where people want to spend time, whether that be for shopping, visiting cafes / restaurants, or entertainment. Likewise, recognising the value of an enhanced environment for those that live or work in the core city centre.
- 3.56 Measures that provide priority for efficient mass public transport are therefore essential, and in terms of Aberdeen city centre, early indications are the bus priority measures are working and bringing benefits, both in reduced journey times and service reliability. At the same time, the measures support access for cyclists, which is undisputedly the most green / sustainable wheeled transport option. While taxis and private hire vehicles are also granted access, so a recognition in their value of supporting the movement of people in the core city centre.
- 3.57 It is also crucial to consider, that contrary to a perception cited in objections that access is being denied to the city centre, it is a choice that is being presented. As emphasised throughout this report, access is maintained to all the city centre car parks and similarly to on-street parking bays where available. Thus, the owner of a car or motorbike is not being compelled to get a bus, and by using appropriate distributor routes there will be no, or at most, a very modest impact when compared against those routes a driver may have previously used. The same is also true for those that previously negotiated the now restricted roads as 'through' routes.

- 3.58 One of the difficulties in attempting to gauge any negative effects on footfall associated with the bus priority measures, is the profound changes that have been occurring in the city centre, so as previously mentioned the backdrop of declining footfall caused by online shopping, working from home, and where economic factors are also limiting spending, be that on retail, hospitality, or entertainment. This being a situation all too common in cities across the United Kingdom, with a recent (22 April 2024) House of Commons Library research briefing highlighting the retail sector is going through a prolonged period of upheaval and the 'Centre for Retail Research' describing the industry as undergoing a "permacrisis" since the 2008 financial crash.
- 3.59 It is therefore recognised the Council, and its partners must make continued efforts to highlight the benefits of the measures and drive forward the message the core city centre remains open for business. With the significant benefits of the Union Street / Market transformation on the horizon, it is a transformative period for the city that can lock in huge benefits for public / sustainable transport and create an environment conducive to encouraging footfall.
- 3.60 Thus, the recommendation is the experimental order should be made permanent. Albeit with a caveat the measures continue to be monitored and assessed as the City Centre Masterplan progresses.
- 3.61 Any decision to abandon the measures at this early stage of operation would be a retrograde step when considering all the national and local objectives the Council aspires to with respect to transport and the environment, and the ambitions set out in the City Centre Masterplan. Similarly, given the level of investment on the South College Street Junction improvements project to support the changes.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Council Budget meeting on 10 March 2021 outlined a funding commitment totalling £150m from the General Fund Capital Programme over financial years 2021/22 to 2025/26 to ensure the Council transforms the City Centre and the Beach area. This £150m funding commitment was used as match funding for the first £20m bid to the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund in 2021, and the second £20m bid submitted in 2022.
- 4.2 The ETRO measures reported here are installed on site therefore the major outgoings have been made. Any amendments to the measures will require resourcing however this will be covered by the above-mentioned funding.
- 4.3 After accounting for operational costs, income revenue from bus lane enforcement, in accordance with legislation, is allocated to processes, schemes, projects etc. that facilitate the achievement of policies identified in the Local Transport Strategy.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Aberdeen City Council made the ETRO in exercise of the powers conferred on them by Sections 9 and 10 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and of all other enabling powers and after consultation with the Chief Officer of Police Scotland in accordance with Part III of Schedule 9 to said Act and having complied with the statutory requirements of The Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (Scotland) Regulations 1999, as amended. The Order is experimental to allow the Council to modify or vary the scheme at short notice once in force, should circumstances require.
- 5.2 This report sets out the public and statutory undertaker response to the consultation phase of the progress.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The scheme promotes improved walking, cycling and public transport priority within the city centre, reducing vehicles within the main pedestrian spaces. This reduces people exposure to poor air quality whilst enjoying the city centre environment. The reduction in "through traffic" is a desired outcome that would also contribute to ACC's Net Zero commitments and the Scottish Government target of reducing vehicle km by 20% by 2030.

7. RISK

| Category | Risks | Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level | *Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account controls/control actions | *Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set? |
|-----------------------|---|--|---|---|
| Strategic Risk | Failure to proceed with project impacts on wider city commitments and economic targets | The consultation process is being undertaken and reported to allow the results to be fully considered. | L | Yes |
| Compliance | Delays in reporting or decision making can impact on the opportunities to amend the proposed order should | This report has been prepared in good time to instigate changes if these are deemed necessary. | L | Yes |

| Category | Risks | Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level | *Target Risk Level (L, M or H) <small>*taking into account controls/control actions</small> | *Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set? |
|------------------------------|---|---|--|---|
| | changes be required. | | | |
| Operational | | | | |
| Financial | Removal of the bus gates may have implications for Scottish Government Bus Partnership Funding provided for the bus priority measures and the South College Street works. | This report proposes the measures remain and the experimental Traffic Regulation Order is made permanent. This would have no impact on the funding provided. | L | Yes |
| Reputational | The report considers objections to the scheme creating a negative public narrative. | The report provides evidence-based responses to the objections raised. Addressing concerns and presenting solutions where necessary. | M | Yes |
| Environment / Climate | Created or perceived congestion on the surrounding network due to the installation of the measures. | Network improvements such as South College Street have been developed to help manage any diversion of general traffic from the streets around Union Street. The scheme does have the intention of reducing vehicles numbers through the city centre by making public and active travel easier, resulting in fewer | L | Yes |

| Category | Risks | Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level | *Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account controls/control actions | *Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set? |
|----------|-------|---|---|---|
| | | emissions and improves air quality. | | |

8. OUTCOMES

| <u>Council Delivery Plan 2024</u> | |
|---|--|
| Impact of Report | |
| Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement <u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u> | <p>The proposals within this report support the delivery of the following aspects of the policy statement: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving the provision of bus services across the city, through investment in new supported services, to enable bus services to be provided to areas and at times which are not economically viable. Improving cycle and active transport infrastructure, including by seeking to integrate safe, physically segregated cycle lanes in new road building projects and taking steps to ensure any proposal for resurfacing or other long-term investments consider options to improve cycle and active transport infrastructure. |
| <u>Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u> | |
| Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes | <p>The proposals within this report support the delivery of LOIP Stretch Outcome 14. Increase sustainable travel: 38% of people walking and 5% of people cycling as main mode of travel by 2026. The paper seeks to approve measures that support an improved pedestrians and cycle environment and enhances public transport provision for longer journeys into the city centre.</p> |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Regional and City Strategies</p> <p>Regional Strategies</p> <p>City Strategies and Strategic Plans</p> <p>Council Strategies</p> | <p>The report supports the priorities in the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) investment in infrastructure, regenerating our city centre, unlock development potential, improve the deployment of low carbon transport, to enable Aberdeen to realise development opportunities in the City Centre Masterplan.</p> <p>The report supports the National, Regional and Local Transport Strategies, particularly the Sustainable Travel Hierarchy, which prioritises the needs of those walking, wheeling, and cycling above other road users, and the 4 pillars identified in the recent Regional Transport Strategy, Nestrans 2040: Equality, Climate, Prosperity, and Wellbeing.</p> <p>It also supports the Aberdeen Active Travel Plan and Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan, both of which seek to improve conditions for people walking and cycling in Aberdeen, particularly to, from and within the City Centre, through the provision of more and safer infrastructure.</p> <p>Measures to reduce unnecessary vehicle traffic in the City Centre will support the Air Quality Action Plan, Climate Change Plan, Net Zero Action Plan and Low Emission Zone by contributing to emissions reduction.</p> <p>City Centre Masterplan & Delivery Programme – IN06 Bus Priority Infrastructure: Implement bus only streets on key city centre corridors and introduce bus gates on the approach to city centre junctions in order to annul the impact of congestion on journey times.</p> |
|--|--|

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

| Assessment | Outcome |
|--|--|
| Integrated Impact Assessment | New Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed. |
| Data Protection Impact Assessment | Not required. |
| Other | |

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 “City Centre Masterplan Update”, Council, 29 June 2022: -

<https://committees.aberdeencity.gov.uk/documents/s133394/CCMP%20Update%20Report%20to%20Council.pdf>

<https://committees.aberdeencity.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?AllId=90461>

10.2 “The Aberdeen City Council (City Centre, Aberdeen) (Traffic Management) (Experimental) Order 2023 – Statutory Public Consultation” – Aberdeen City Council Consultation Hub: -

<https://consultation.aberdeencity.gov.uk/operations/citycentre-experimental-tro-2023/>

11. APPENDICES

11.1 **Appendix A:** Summary of traffic management measures established by “The Aberdeen City Council (City Centre, Aberdeen) (Traffic Management) (Experimental) Order 2023”

Appendix B: Objections received from individuals

Appendix C: Objections received from businesses

Appendix D: ‘Aberdeen Inspired’ Survey

Appendix E: ‘Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce’ Survey

Appendix F: Aberdeen roads hierarchy plan

Appendix G: Core city centre distributor road plan

Appendix H: Typical traffic flow in Aberdeen city centre at am and pm peak times on a weekday

Appendix I: Typical traffic flow in Aberdeen city centre on Saturday at peak times

Appendix J: Typical traffic flow in Aberdeen city centre on Sunday at peak times

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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