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Aberdeen City Council – online consultation:

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 will enhance 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. In this regard, the order also maintains the 'Pedestrian and Cycle Zone' that has been established on Schoolhill / Upperkirkgate between its junctions with Back Wynd and Flourmill Lane.

In support of the changes there have been recently completed improvements to South College Street that will take account of re-routed general traffic and corresponds with the local roads hierarchy which was updated in 2019. 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>

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) will provide alternative routes for general traffic that previously used the roads where bus priority measures will be established.

Why your views matter

In due course, the Council will consider whether or not the provisions of the Experimental Order should be continued in force indefinitely. Within a period of six months beginning with the day on which the Order came into force, or if any or all of the Order provisions are varied or modified by the Council, beginning with the day the latest variation or modification came into force, any person may object to the making of an Order for the purpose of such indefinite continuation. Any such objection must be sent in writing to trafficmanagement@aberdeencity.gov.uk, or to the address at the end, stating the grounds on which the objection is being made.

Any person who submits an objection to a traffic regulation order should be aware that any objection made will be available to members of the Committee, available for inspection by members of the public, distributed to the press, and will form part of the agenda pack which is available on the Council's website. To that extent, however, they are redacted, with names, addresses, telephone numbers and signatures removed from this correspondence. For information on why and how we use your data please see the Traffic Regulation Order privacy notice on our website <https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/your-data/why-and-how-we-use-your-data>.

Overview of research:

- In October 2023, as the enforcement of city centre road network changes in Aberdeen were being implemented, Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce (AGCC) undertook an initial online survey into the current and anticipated travel habits of people in and around Aberdeen City centre.
- The survey received a good response rate, with 206 taking part.
- The anticipated impact of the road network changes to Aberdeen City centre was 85% negative with respondents expecting, across the board, to visit Aberdeen City centre less often for; Business deliveries; Business meetings; Business other; Commuting; Leisure/Shopping; Education or Accessing Services (legal, professional, council).
- In January 2024, in order to gather information for AGCC to submit insight on the 6-month consultation of the city centre road network changes a repeated and extended survey was conducted over 5 days, achieving an extraordinary 1,091 responses.
- This was promoted via Morning Bulletin (daily subscribers 17,000) and a wide range of social channels
- The survey consists of quantitative and qualitative questions around respondents travel habits in and around Aberdeen City centre.
- It provided a fully objective question set that enabled those taking part to demonstrate positive or negative impacts from the changes
- It asks for common travel methods and frequencies, including in the January survey a follow-up question for those who use the bus or train less or more often and what might encourage them to use these travel methods more.
- It explores the impact of these changes to the respondent on a scale of positivity/negativity with an explorative question listing both pros and cons of particular impacts as options.
- Themes from October were further explored as routed questions so only those who said they would visit less often were asked which other consequences they felt held true based on this – these additional options were all taken from original survey response patterns.
- In order to best inform the consultation questions also explored signage; accessibility; asked for specifics on routes taken pre-and-post changes and some additional thoughts of respondents on the Low Emission Zone and its upcoming enforcement date.

Headlines:

- 61% of people are unaware of the ACC consultation with a further 19% knowing of the consultation but unaware of how to respond.
- 94% of respondents (1,022) usually travel by private car when they visit Aberdeen City Centre. (Note there were no barriers to those using public transport completing the survey)
- 90% of respondents say that the changes to the road network have had a negative impact on their usual activities within Aberdeen City centre. (65% substantially negative, 25% slight negative).
- 74% of respondents (805) say that they are still unclear about where and when they can drive around Aberdeen City centre.
- 66% (720) think that the signage still needs improvement and 57% (622) believe that the road markings still need improvement.
- Due to the road network changes:
 - o 79% say they visit less often
 - o 53% have had a change of preferred route
 - o 51% have longer travel times
 - o 38% spend more on fuel
- Of those who said they would visit the city centre less often (864):
 - o 95% (825) said they would also spend less money in the city centre
 - o 73% (634) said they would spend more money online instead of city centre businesses
 - o 59% (509) said they would travel to towns in Aberdeenshire more frequently for shopping or leisure
- When asked about parking in the city centre since the changes came into effect; when comparing the average weekly parking figure from October 2023 (£30 per week), respondents in January 2024 reported a drop in weekly parking spend of around 60% (Jan 2024 average parking charge estimates ~£12.30 per week).

Themes from Qualitative / Open responses:

- Puts me off going to town / I avoid going to the city centre / only go in if I have to
- Not clear where I can drive / unsure where I can drive
- I now have longer journey times / more complicated route / more traffic
- Using more fuel / costing me more on fuel
- Shopping more on the outskirts of Aberdeen / in towns in Aberdeenshire instead of Aberdeen City centre
- Remove the bus gates (specifically the restrictions on Guild Street)
- Better signage / information / communication – signage still needs improved
- No viable alternative / improve public transport
- Causes stress / anxiety / makes me more anxious

Public Transport:

Since the road network changes were introduced, with regards to public transport / active travel options (1,091):

- Around 19-25% of respondents have used the bus, train or cycled less often.
- Between 67% - 78% have used the bus, train or cycled about the same amount.
- Almost a fifth of respondents (19%) have walked more.

Transport	More	Less	About the same
Bus	9%	24%	67%
Train	5%	22%	74%
Walk	19%	14%	67%
Cycle	2%	19%	78%
Other	4%	16%	80%

Of those who have used the bus less often or about the same amount since the changes came into effect (989), 55% said that better reliability/dependability would encourage them to use the bus more and 48% said lower bus ticket prices would.

Of those who used the train less often, or about the same amount since the changes came into effect (1,041), 39% said that better reliability / dependability would encourage them to use the train more. Concerns were also expressed about access to Aberdeen Rail station.

City centre business owners:

4% of respondents, (47) were city business owners – this is a low base but high enough to be indicative of trends that may require further investigation.

- 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.

Positive themes:

Although the volume of positive comments is dramatically lower than other types there are some themes around:

- *Greater feeling of safety walking / cycling in the city centre*
- *Bus travel running more smoothly / on time / better*
- *More pleasant moving around the city centre*

There are a number of contractor statements to the above, unknown if the volume of occurrence would dictate a 'theme' – but mentions of:

- *Gangs of kids along union street making people feel unsafe*
- *Parking further and walk in and out of the city (particularly for lone women) making them feel less safe*
- *Antisocial behaviour on buses has been mentioned*
- *Comments that some buses aren't actually running on time any better*

A range of responses received:

– full comment sets available in questions 12, 17, 25....:

“I’ll go anywhere but Aberdeen City centre if possible”

“Currently evaluating other cities to base business in”

“I conduct business meetings online instead of travelling to the city centre for in person meetings”

“I do not volunteer as much as I did, supporting a refugee family”

“The road network changes are only part of the problem. Currently, and there are many positive actions being taken to address this, there is little to draw anyone into the City. As we know Union street is a mess. Previously we would always visit John Lewis so there as a walk between Union Square and JL, with potential to see and visit other points of interest, stop for a coffee or drink etc. Now it’s a visit to Union square and then back out the road to Aboyne.”

“I will park at the Queens Terrace gardens instead, pay a large parking fee and walk in. Not ideal in the evenings when it is dark and I am walking on my own as a female.”

“I was not aware of these changes and took my usual route - I used to have a city centre office and managed to get 2 fines 2 minutes apart just before Christmas. This has been very upsetting not to mention expensive and I will think twice about going into town again. I also feel that these changes should have been more widely advertised and were not clearly sign posted... It feels like a scam by the council to make money. I am not someone who would deliberately go into a bus lane!!”

“Inconvenience of restricted access times to area where my business is located. But most significantly is a 20% drop in footfall compared to prior to the bus gate implementation. Meaning less customers in my shop. An increase in online sale has offset but this comes with its own additional costs.”

“Also this means that I can see less clients, therefore earn less. I now have to do more than one thing when I travel to Aberdeen to avoid coming again. This means my trips are very stressful and, instead of stopping at cafes for teas or lunches, I always rush to finish tasks. It’s very unpleasant to go to Aberdeen on business these days”

“As I’m self-employed the more time spent on non-billable hours has a direct impact on earning capacity and ultimately income. When you need to travel to multiple business meetings using the bus or walking is not time efficient or effective”

“More time away from family”

“The introduction of Bus Gates by Aberdeen City Council has had several specific impacts on my daily routine. The longer journey times resulting from these changes have necessitated adjustments to my working pattern and childcare arrangements. The longer commute has required me to either leave home earlier in the morning or return later in the evening, affecting my overall work-life balance. Additionally, the altered route due to the Bus Gates has impacted my ability to car-share effectively. The restrictions and changes in traffic flow make coordinating with fellow commuters more complex, leading to a less efficient car-sharing arrangement.”

“The recent changes in regulations have significantly impacted my daily life The extended journey times to the city centre, coupled with the risk of fines, have forced my family and me to reconsider our regular visits. This has not only disrupted our leisure activities but also affected our social interactions and shopping habits.”

“The longer journey times have necessitated adjustments in my working patterns, as commuting to the city has become more time-consuming. Moreover, the heightened restrictions have prompted many of my family members, who reside outside Aberdeen, to refrain from meeting or shopping in the city altogether. This has not only altered our family dynamics but also contributed to a shift in our consumer behaviour.”

“The impact extends beyond personal inconveniences; I've witnessed the closure of businesses owned by friends in the city. It's disheartening to see entrepreneurs, like a close friend who runs a butcher shop, facing the grim reality of shutting down despite significant investments in their ventures. The economic repercussions of these changes are palpable and are leaving a lasting impact on the community.”

“The ripple effect on working patterns, social interactions, and the local economy underscores the far-reaching implications of these changes.”

“The entire city centre should be easy to access - the bus gates are a major hinderance.”

“I am unaware of the major drivers for the bus gates, but I assume chief amongst them to be air cleanliness. Should this be the case, I have no idea why, ...private electric cars users should be penalized or inconvenienced by bus gates. In addition, private electric cars users typically have higher levels of disposable income - should these not be the people ...targeted by city centre initiatives?”

“I would very much like to see statistics as to the overall benefit to the city as a whole, i.e. city centre shops/commuters/city centre businesses/visitors to the city/traffic reduction on targeted streets/traffic increases in surrounding streets/changes to air quality in city streets/changes to air quality in surrounding streets.”

“My elderly parents who are able enough to be driving but no to walk the distance to catch the bus are resigned to never visiting the city centre again. they have the change banks, opticians etc”

Related coverage:

[Aberdeen bus gates 'confusing' and concerning city shop owners - BBC News](#)

[Aberdeen bistro Olive Alexanders permanently shuts \(pressandjournal.co.uk\)](http://pressandjournal.co.uk)

“We surveyed our customers in the latter half of 2023 and in their words, they have reduced the amount of times they were coming into the city centre due to the increased parking fees and the ease of which the council issues parking fines, those awful bus gates and road closures and worst of all – never knowing if they could get a taxi home due to the lack of taxis and no ride share in Aberdeen.”

[M&S Aberdeen closure confirmed in major city centre blow \(pressandjournal.co.uk\)](http://pressandjournal.co.uk)

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[olivealexanders](#) To all of you beautiful people past and present our hearts are absolutely broken ❤️ with what we have to tell you... we have had to take the decision to permanently close our doors at Olive Alexander's and BarBelow.

As a very small family run and funded business, the last year has been tremendously difficult with decreased footfall to the city centre, council decisions with bus gates, a distinct lack of investment for Union Street, increased costs of goods, essential items and energy. We couldn't put up our prices to match the demand of all of this and consequently without a major injection of cash, we couldn't keep this going.

We surveyed our customers in the latter half of 2023 and in their words, they have reduced the amount of times they were coming into the city centre due to the increased parking fees and the ease of which the council issues parking fines, those awful bus gates and road closures and worst of all - never knowing if they could get a taxi home due to the lack of taxis and no ride share in Aberdeen.

As gutted as we are sitting here writing this, we are also so very grateful to all of our wonderful staff, loyal customers and all of the people who believed in us and supported our wild journey - we can't thank you enough.

Please for all of you who love cocktails and tapas and want to continue to support local, independent businesses, our neighbour - [@bartenders_lounge](#) round the corner on North Silver Street serves great cocktails and great tapas style food! Independent businesses need the support, it's a tough industry and Aberdeen has a good few independents who need all of our support.

With Love from the OA & Barbelow Team xx

View all 80 comments

Initial insights in reference to Traffic Order specifics:

Traffic Order – ACC with analysis narrative points.

Aberdeen City Council has made the above-named order 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 will be experimental to allow the Council to modify or vary the scheme at short notice once in force, should circumstances require. The effect of the order, which will come into operation on 1 August 2023, is to impose the following traffic management measures on certain roads in Aberdeen: -

- 'Bus Gates / Lanes' will be established: -

- ♣ on the southbound carriageway of Bridge Street, between its junctions with Bath Street and Wapping Street.

- **Referenced in qualitative comments**

- ♣ on the inside northbound lane of Bridge Street, between its junctions with College Street and Bath Street.

- ♣ on the eastbound carriageway of Guild Street, between its junctions with Stirling Street and Market Street.

- **Referenced in qualitative comments (but perhaps not as much as westbound, see below).**

- ♣ on the westbound carriageway of Guild Street, between its junctions with Exchange Street and Market Street.

- **Frequently referenced in qualitative comments.**

- ♣ on the inside northbound lane of Market Street, between its junction with Guild Street and a point 63 metres or thereby south of its junction with Guild Street.

- **Frequently mentioned in qualitative comments.**

- ♣ on the northbound carriageway of Market Street, between its junctions with Hadden Street and Union Street.

- ♣ on the westbound carriageway of Union Street, between its junctions with Market Street and the Adelphi.

- ♣ on the outside westbound lane of Trinity Quay, from its junction with Market Street and a point 72 metres or thereby east of its junction with Market Street.

- **The lanes on trinity quay aren't necessarily referenced – but access onto guild street comes up frequently.**

The classes of vehicles permitted to use the sections of road specified above will be buses (a vehicle manufactured or adapted to carry 9 or more passengers, exclusive of the driver), pedal cycles, taxis, private hire vehicles and goods vehicles. As usual, vehicles associated with the Police Scotland, Scottish Ambulance and Scottish Fire & Rescue services will also be permitted access in accordance with performing statutory duties. To complement the 'Bus Gates' there will be a prohibition on left

turns from Adelphi to Union Street, Exchange Street to Guild Street, Hadden Street to Market Street, and Market Street to Guild Street, while similarly there will be a prohibition on right turns from Bath Street to Bridge Street, and St Catherine's Wynd to Union Street, albeit these prohibition on turns will not apply to the vehicle classes exempt from the Bus Gates / Lanes.

- The existing Bus Gates on Union Street, section of eastbound carriageway east of its junction with Bridge Street / Union Terrace, and section of westbound carriageway west of its junction with Market Street, currently restricted to buses and pedal cycles only, will be amended to provide exemptions for taxis, private hire vehicles and goods vehicles.

- *There is a desire to let traffic 'flow' in the city centre.*
- *Along union street / around the area.*
- *There is a theme of support for areas of pedestrianisation but only if fully pedestrianised – i.e. no vehicles at all (buses, taxis, delivery vehicles).*
- *Feel that people are probably used to not being able to drive down Union Street now but by putting the restrictions in the surrounding area it's caused major disruption for people ...*
 - *What viable contingencies does it leave for roadworks / traffic blockages (accidents, breakdowns) if displaced traffic is focused to particular streets?*

- Motor vehicles, unless for the purpose of taking access, will be prohibited from all or certain lengths of Bath Street, Bridge Place, Bridge Street, Broad Street, Carmelite Lane, Carmelite Street, Castle Street, Concert Court, Guild Street, Exchange Lane, Exchange Street, Exchequer Row, Green, Hadden Street, Imperial Place, King Street, Lodge Walk, Marischal Street, Market Street, Queen Street, Union Street, Shiprow, Shoe Lane, Shore Brae, Stirling Street, Trinity Lane and Trinity Street.

- *People are confused about this access – when they can, where they can, if they can....*
- *Signage still comes up as not adequate.*
- *Information from Council throughout is referenced repeatedly as not adequate – both in terms of communicating the changes to adhere to, but also in terms of the justification and objectives of the changes.*
- *Simplifying the information / rules / scheme would likely help.*

- Vehicles on Union Terrace will be prohibited from turning right onto Rosemount Viaduct, with the exception this restriction will not apply to buses, pedal cycles, taxis, and private hire vehicles.

- *Has been commented on quite regularly. Also, given the other access roads to allow traffic to this area the justification for this restriction is unclear to people.*

- There will be a prohibition on motor vehicles at any time (a 'Pedestrian & Cycle Zone'), except for loading from midnight to 11.00am, and from 4.30pm until midnight, on Upperkirkgate, between its junctions with Schoolhill and Flourmill Lane; and on Schoolhill, between its junctions with Back Wynd and Upperkirkgate.

- *Business deliveries / moving of goods etc. has come up as an issue with knock on consequences – such as businesses having to put up costs for delivery or not doing deliveries or not working in these areas...etc.*
- *People are also generally unclear about the different zones for local access / delivery and the times at which they can / cannot drive there without penalty.*

- There will be a 'one way' restriction on Schoolhill, between its junctions with Belmont Street and Upperkirkgate, whereby vehicles, with the exception of pedal cycles, will only be permitted to travel in an easterly direction.

- *When referenced – this change is often commented on along with the restriction from Union Terrace to Schoolhill and the lack of full pedestrianisation.*

- There will be a 'one way' restriction on Upperkirkgate, between its junctions with Schoolhill and Flourmill Lane, whereby vehicles, with the exception of pedal cycles, will only be permitted to travel in an easterly direction.

- *Isn't an issue with regard road network access etc – but people do prefer for pedestrianised areas to be fully so – and there are so many deliveries and access for delivery vehicles in this area that people don't find it idea...*
- *This is also the access area for the parking under Marischal Square.... It appears that 'local access' rules are different on different streets / in different areas? and this further adds to public confusion on what restrictions apply when.*

- The layby area on the south side of Schoolhill, located on a section of the road between its junctions with Belmont Street and Back Wynd, will function on any day, between the hours of 7 and 11am, as a bay for the exclusive use of goods vehicles actively loading goods or burden. At all other times the bay will function for the exclusive purpose of disabled parking.

- There will be a 'one way' restriction established on Trinity Street, between its junctions with Carmelite Street and Stirling Street, whereby vehicles will only be permitted to travel in an easterly direction.

- *Doesn't seem to be a referenced area, but on analysis of this change, there is a query on the local access and if people could use this to 'rat run' West to East? The consensus is that 'local access' definition is unclear, but equally - how is local access monitored?*

- There will be disabled parking bays established on Carmelite Lane (1), Exchange Street (1), Flourmill Lane (2) and Stirling Street (1) – The number in brackets following the road names indicates the number of standard 6.6m length bays to be established on each of the stated roads.

- *The additional disabled parking spaces are not referenced (based on analysis to date) – not sure who is aware of these really as they were not indicated on the map and the public would have to read the full traffic order to find out.*
- *Question the accessibility of these spaces - the ones on Carmelite and Exchange Street are on cobbled streets / streets with uneven pavements?*
- *Also assumption that these are blue badge only?*
- *It comes up often that access to places is an issue – either because someone is elderly / mobility restricted or to drop / off, pick-up large shopping purchases etc... - again confusion likely on the 'local access' meanings...I suspect 'drop-off and pick-up' zones would have welcomed. If present – need better communication / signage.*

- A mandatory 20mph speed limit will be established on certain lengths of Bridge Street, Carmelite Street, College Street, Guild Street and Wapping Street.

- There will be a prohibition on vehicles loading goods and burden on the south side of Guild Street, between its junctions with the accesses that serve the Bus Station and the Railway Station.

• There will be certain revocations with respect to traffic management measures provided by previous orders relating to the roads specified above. A copy of the Order, the relevant plans, and a statement of the Council's reasons for making the Order has been deposited at the address specified at the end of this notice, while additionally these documents may be examined online via the internet link specified below: - <https://consultation.aberdeencity.gov.uk/operations/citycentre-experimental-tro-2023>

- *One of the largest qualitative responses given across the board is in reference to people are avoiding / not going into the city as often.*
- *There's evidence to argue this 'avoidance' is to a lesser extent than predicted or perceived, however, cumulative data points do still support an impactful drop in 'footfall' to Aberdeen City centre.*
- *One conclusion here, with qualitative notes considered, is that people are coming in only when they must (no alternative) and only staying as long as they have to / doing what they need to and then leaving.*
- *In turn, there seems to be a notable reduction in 'browsing / leisurely trips with extra spending'— which could have huge consequences culturally and economically both in terms of those who live here and with regards to tourism or attracting people to the area.*
 - *Q4 – perceptions and reality / Q12 –impact points that come out largest...*

Closing thoughts:

Cities are a finely balanced eco-system of retail, culture, hospitality, residential and offices with people at their heart. If any of them are out of balance, then the others are likely to fail.

Even before the crippling impact of COVID-19, UK high streets and town centres were already being hit hard by the perfect storm of out-of-town retailing and workplaces, the rise in online shopping and other changes in consumer behaviour.

The High Streets & Town Centres in 2030 report by Sir John Timpson in 2018 concluded: *Unless urgent action is taken, we fear that further deterioration, loss of visitors and dereliction may lead to some high streets and town centres disappearing altogether.* Some forecasts at the time warned that we would lose 30% of bricks and mortar retail in the next ten years. And this was all before the pandemic with experts now suggesting that this timeline could be accelerated fivefold.

And the challenges are being exacerbated by many organisations retaining remote workplace policy when this was in fact an emergency public health measure, keeping people at home and out of the city-based support businesses there to serve them.

This has been reinforced in Aberdeen by the closure of Debenhams and John Lewis leaving the people of the North of Scotland with not a single department store. And the forthcoming shift to Union Square of M&S, although positive news, is a further blow to the heart of Aberdeen.

Successful cities have been responding to these issues with strategies to create exciting, cool, attractive multifunctional places that people choose to live, work and spend their leisure time and the Masterplan projects in Aberdeen have all been excellent additions to our civic realm. But the overall narrative is massively negative and this needs to change.

To enable our economic vision to be realised, we need people and organisations to bring investment, innovation, skills and jobs here. And to retain those we already have. Current barriers to this include the recently introduced traffic measures and continuing challenges around confrontational (rather than collegiate) planning and building control practices.