

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides Members with an update on the feasibility and impact of amending elements within the Aberdeen City Council (City Centre, Aberdeen) (Traffic Management) (Experimental) Order (ETRO) 2023, and to request approval to make the ETRO a permanent order.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. Note that the Aberdeen City Council (City Centre, Aberdeen) (Traffic Management) (Experimental) Order 2023 was implemented to achieve the safe and efficient movement of active travel and public transport users through the city centre, and that the measures originated from the City Centre Masterplan 2015 Movement Strategy.
- 2.2. Note that at the Council's City Growth and Resources Committee in February 2021, Committee instructed Officers to submit a bid to the Scottish Government's Bus Partnership Fund, and included specific instructions to:-
- ii) instruct the Chief Officer - Strategic Place Planning, that in the context of the corridor options within the bid terminating in the City Centre, and in light of the recommendations from the Economic Policy Panel and ongoing transport projects, to seek to accelerate the City Centre elements of the bid. This should include any necessary enabling works for approved schemes, for example South College Street and Berryden, to help drive recovery, improve the transport system and ensure integration of current transport projects; and
 - iii) instruct the Chief Officer - Strategic Place Planning, to explore options to improve access and integration of the Aberdeen bus station as part of the bid, to help improve the customer experience.

- 2.3. Note that at the Council meeting in June 2022, all Members of Council present either explicitly voted for the inclusion of bus priority measures contained within the Aberdeen City Council (City Centre, Aberdeen) (Traffic Management) (Experimental) Order 2023, or proposed an amendment that would have also resulted in the measures being included.
- 2.4. Note that, as instructed by Council in July 2024, additional work has been undertaken by Officers to investigate the feasibility and impact of reopening Bridge Street to all vehicles in one or both directions; and, the feasibility and impact of removing the ban on right turns from Union Terrace onto Rosemount Viaduct (Appendix 1).
- 2.5. Note that the output of the additional work referenced in Recommendation 2.4 (above) does not provide Officers with sufficient certainty that amending bus priority measures on Bridge Street and Union Terrace would not prejudice the further delivery of key projects within the City Centre & Beach Masterplan 2022.
- 2.6. Note that the output of the additional work referenced in Recommendation 2.4 (above) does not provide Officers with sufficient certainty that amending bus priority measures on Bridge Street and Union Terrace would guarantee there would not be a need in the near future for the measures to be reintroduced as traffic levels begin to rise once more.
- 2.7. Agree that any amendments to the Aberdeen City Council (City Centre, Aberdeen) (Traffic Management) (Experimental) Order 2023 would detrimentally impact on bus journey times and reliability to and through the city centre and would roll back on the improvements to service delivery reported by both bus companies as having been evidenced since the bus priority measures were introduced in August 2023, thus impacting negatively on bus users.
- 2.8. Note that, according to Scotland's 2022 Census Data, 30.7% of households in Aberdeen do not have a car or van in their household.
- 2.9. Agree that any amendments to the Aberdeen City Council (City Centre, Aberdeen) (Traffic Management) (Experimental) Order 2023 would make the city centre a less desirable place for pedestrians and cyclists – the most vulnerable of street users - due to increased levels of traffic in the city centre, resulting in a higher risk of serious or fatal injury, and amplified levels of noise and air pollution.
- 2.10. Note that, in February 2023, Aberdeen City Council added its voice to the growing number of local authorities around the world to have responded to the global climate change and nature loss crises by declaring a climate and nature emergency.
- 2.11. Agree that, in accepting grant funding from Transport Scotland for the South College Street project, there was an expectation from Scottish Ministers that bus priority measures would be installed within the city centre and, should this not be the case, the conditions of the grant award letter explicitly provide for Transport Scotland to recover funding from the Council (Appendix 2).

- 2.12. Note that, should the various bus prioritisation measures implemented following the South College Street improvements change, there is risk that Transport Scotland will seek to recover funding they have provided for the project. The Chief Officer – Finance advises that a contingent liability will have to be recorded in the Council financial performance reports until clarity from Transport Scotland is received, with an expectation that if this is not resolved by 31 March 2025 a provision will have to be included in the Council's 2024/25 draft Annual Accounts for the repayment of grant funding.
- 2.13. Agree that the level of financial risk associated with removal of the bus priority measures contained within the Aberdeen City Council (City Centre, Aberdeen) (Traffic Management) (Experimental) Order 2023 would not be consistent with the Council's risk appetite as set out in the updated Risk Appetite Statement, as approved by the Audit, Risk and Scrutiny Committee in February 2024.
- 2.14. Therefore, agree to approve the making of The Aberdeen City Council (City Centre, Aberdeen) (Traffic Management) Experimental Order 2023 as a permanent Order, with continued monitoring in terms of the ongoing City Centre Masterplan.
- 2.15. Instruct the Chief Officer - Operations to commence the procedure for the Order to be made permanent.
- 2.16. In recognising that the ability sits with Council to use Bus Lane Enforcement surplus to assist city centre businesses so long as doing so also supports the delivery of the Local Transport Strategy, agree to instruct the Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning, following consultation with the Convenors of the Net Zero, Environment & Transport and Finance & Resources Committees, to use Enforcement surplus monies (capped at £200,000) to reinstate a Night Bus service from the city centre to key destinations across the city and into Aberdeenshire.
- 2.17. Instruct the Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning to work with Aberdeen Inspired to determine what, if any, additional city centre focused projects the Bus Lane Enforcement surplus could be used for, and report a list of competent projects to a future Net Zero, Environment and Transport Committee within the next six months.
- 2.18. Instruct the Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning to work with the Chief Officer – Operations to explore opportunities to enhance the accessibility of wayfinding in the city centre for people with disabilities.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

Background

- 3.1. Aberdeen's city centre plays a major role in the commercial, economic, social, civic and cultural life of Aberdeen and the wider North East. It is an important regional centre providing a focus for employment, business and social interaction. The city centre offers access to a wide range of goods and services and is a place where many people meet socially and choose to live and visit.
- 3.2. The principal concentration of retail/service uses across the City Region is within Aberdeen City Centre, and it represents the most important location for retail goods floorspace and turnover within the City Region. Planning policy within Aberdeen has a long established 'town centre first' principle - this means that the city centre is the preferred locations for retail, office, hotel, commercial leisure, community, cultural and other significant footfall generating development serving a city-wide or regional market. This, along with a presumption of refusal for out of centre retail proposals, unless in set circumstances, aims to support the vitality and vibrancy of the city centre.
- 3.3. The adopted Aberdeen City Local Development Plan 2023 recognises that it is vital for the future prosperity of Aberdeen that the city centre is enhanced and promoted as a resilient, safe, attractive, accessible and well-connected place which contributes to an improved quality of life.
- 3.4. The approved vision for the area included within the Aberdeen City Centre & Beach Masterplan 2022 is to create a world-class city centre and beach that puts people at its heart while respecting and enhancing the city's unique qualities.

City Centre Transport Strategy and Improvements: Key Events

- 3.5. The Aberdeen City Centre Masterplan and Delivery Programme was approved unanimously in 2015. Its purpose was to create a regeneration blueprint to transform the city centre while conserving Aberdeen's proud heritage, and to ensure greater economic prosperity and a better quality of life for all.
- 3.6. Under a theme of 'The Connected City', the City Centre Masterplan recognised the need to relocate car movements from the city centre and to prioritise walking, cycling and bus movements, specifically referencing a need for bus priority measures on Union Street, Market Street, Guild Street and Bridge Street. Engagement with the public and stakeholders at the time found that 67% of respondents supported the projects under the 'Connected City' theme, with only 9% not supporting them (with 24% undecided).
- 3.7. In a report to Council in May 2016 on the Transport Implications of City Centre Masterplan Projects, it was noted that: *To deliver the full City Centre Masterplan (key measures), it is anticipated that there would require to be approximately a 20% reduction in the anticipated traffic demand. This traffic would have to relocate out-with the City Centre or change travel mode in order to allow the network to operate satisfactorily.* While some of this traffic reduction was

anticipated to be achieved by delivery of the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR) and Berryden Corridor Improvements, the report identified the further enabling measures required to achieve this reduction, including South College Street Junction Improvements, and public transport priority measures in the central core.

- 3.8. The Council's approved Local Transport Strategy in 2016 also recognised that, in order to facilitate the delivery of the City Centre Masterplan and its projects, the way that people currently move around the city and its centre must change radically with a focus on people, rather than vehicular, movement by ensuring that appropriate and alternative options are made available so that access to the city centre is maintained for all.
- 3.9. In December 2019, the Council's City Growth and Resources Committee approved the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) which looked to complement and further develop the transport principles of, and proposed projects identified in, the City Centre Masterplan. The SUMP re-affirmed the Council's commitment to delivering city centre bus priority on Union Street, Market Street, Guild Street and Bridge Street.
- 3.10. In February 2021, Aberdeen City Council, on behalf of the North East Bus Alliance, submitted a successful bid to the Scottish Government's Bus Partnership Fund for development of a Bus Rapid Transit system for the city, including supporting measures such as the improvements to South College Street and bus priority measures.
- 3.11. In May 2021, the City Growth and Resources Committee instructed a review of the City Centre Masterplan in conjunction with the development of a new Beach Masterplan. The review re-affirmed the commitment to bus priority on Bridge Street, Guild Street, Market Street and Union Terrace, and recommended that a Traffic Management Plan be developed.
- 3.12. A Traffic Management Plan was subsequently reported to the City Growth and Resources Committee in November 2021 and concluded that the bus priority measures on Bridge Street, Guild Street and Market Street and supporting traffic management measures would support the delivery of a more people-friendly city centre, with more space dedicated to people walking, wheeling, cycling and using public transport.
- 3.13. Traffic modelling undertaken at the time suggested that the measures would improve bus journey times and reliability to and through the city centre, by reducing congestion, especially around the bus station, encouraging more people onto public transport and benefitting existing bus users.
- 3.14. In February 2022, Council resolved to:
 - *Reopen Union Street between its junctions with Union Terrace and Market Street to service buses, taxis, private hire vehicles and pedal cycles only, all as soon as is practicably possible;*

- *Remove the existing bus gate on Union Street, just East of Market Street and introduce new bus gates on Union Street between Bridge Street and Market Street;*

Experimental Traffic Regulation Order

- 3.15. In Autumn 2023, the following changes were introduced to allow the above instructions to be carried out:
- Bus priority and local access only restrictions on Market Street, Guild Street and Bridge Street;
 - Pedestrian and cycle priority measures on Schoolhill and Upperkirkgate; and,
 - Introduction of a right-turn ban (except cycles, buses and taxis) from Union Terrace to Rosemount Viaduct.
- 3.16. The measures were introduced via an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) which allows changes to be made swiftly, followed by a period of consultation and monitoring while they are in effect, and prior to making a decision over whether to keep, change or amend the measures. The ETRO process allowed the expeditious execution of the long term plan for bus priority, as expressed through the Connected City theme within the City Centre Masterplan 2015.
- 3.17. 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 is now on the rise.
- 3.18. Since the ETRO was introduced, the Council has been engaging with city centre users and businesses, receiving and considering objections, and gathering data to help inform a thorough consideration of the performance of the measures. This has been through an online Citizen Space consultation, roundtable meetings, and other dedicated business meetings with organisations such as the Federation of Small Businesses, Our Union Street and Aberdeen Inspired.
- 3.19. The objections and feedback received during the statutory ETRO consultation period were summarised in a [report to the Net Zero, Environment and Transport Committee in June 2024](#). In this report officers advised the Committee that the measures were doing what they primarily set out to do, with significant bus journey time and reliability improvements achieved, so far translating into bus passenger growth of +5% for Stagecoach and around +16.5% for First Bus. Members of the Net Zero, Environment and Transport Committee considered the report, however the decision on next steps was referred to Council.
- 3.20. At a requisitioned meeting of Council in July 2024, Members subsequently agreed to instruct the Chief Officer - Strategic Place Planning, using funding from the Bus Lane Enforcement reserve, to report as soon as possible on the

following in order to allow Council to make a decision on the future of the measures:

1. *the feasibility and impact of reopening Bridge Street to all vehicles in one or both directions.*
2. *the feasibility and impact of removing the ban on right turns from Union Terrace onto Rosemount Viaduct.*

3.21. This report to Council presents Members with the outcome of this exercise, and presents further context in order to assist Members in making a decision on the future of these transport improvements.

Impact of Suggested Amendments on Bridge Street and Union Terrace

Transport Modelling

3.22. In response to the instruction from Council in July 2024, officers engaged transport consultants to undertake and analyse a series of traffic model tests using the existing City Centre microsimulation model. These tests considered the impacts on traffic flows and bus journey times and reliability associated with removal of, or changes to, bus, taxi, cycle and service vehicle priority measures on Bridge Street and Union Terrace.

3.23. Tests were undertaken on a near future (end of 2025) scenario to understand the impact of any changes once Union Street Central re-opens fully to buses, taxis, service vehicles and cycles. The outputs to this exercise are presented in Appendix 1. In summary, the following impacts were observed:

- The redesign of Union Street Central, including its junctions with Bridge Street and Market Street, has been progressed to operate with bus priority measures in place and the envisaged reduction in general traffic levels. Modelling which simulates the removal of measures and increases in traffic volumes, sees traffic demand at the Union Street / Bridge Junction exceed its capacity, inducing congestion.
- If general traffic is permitted to route southbound on Bridge Street, traffic increases are observed on Bridge Street, Union Terrace and Union Street West, with significant queueing observed extending from the Bridge Street junction east over Union Bridge and west beyond Bon Accord Street, with congestion also extending up side streets. Model observations show this is due to the higher demand for traffic to turn right from Union Street to Bridge Street. The time available within the traffic signal cycle at Bridge Street / Union Street results in the junction being unable to cater for the volume of traffic seeking to turn right, hence large queues develop through the model period as the junction is over capacity. This has a significant impact on bus journey times and reliability for those buses routing along Union Street eastbound (with delays of 8-14 minutes observed within the model tests). Traffic signal constraints mean that there is no capacity to provide Union Street West with more signal green time to facilitate this manoeuvre.

- When allowing general traffic to route northbound only on Bridge Street, there appears to be low impact to the operation of the bus network, however the overall volume of traffic on Bridge Street is observed to more than double in the model, and traffic increases are also observed on Union Terrace and Union Street West.
- Similarly, allowing traffic on Union Terrace to turn right onto Rosemount Viaduct has limited impact on bus journey times and reliability, but results in traffic increases on Union Street West and Union Terrace.
- While the impacts of the removal of the northbound restrictions on Bridge Street and the right-turn ban from Union Terrace to Rosemount Viaduct appear to be manageable in the short term, in the medium to long term it is likely that traffic growth will be encouraged with a risk of congestion and delays to buses returning to the city centre, undermining the improvements that have been experienced since the introduction of the ETRO. Furthermore, re-introducing through-traffic to these streets conflicts with the North East Scotland Roads Hierarchy and risks reversing the benefits experienced by people walking, wheeling and cycling on these streets since the ETRO was introduced, particularly in terms of improved road safety, and development of a more attractive environment for active travel.

3.24. Caution should be applied when interpreting the traffic model data. The short-term model scenarios simulated current suppressed traffic demand (relative to 2019), which is associated with adjusted travel patterns tied to hybrid working etc following the Covid-19 public health emergency. When considering medium and long term performance, which has not been assessed, the prediction of future demand currently spans two future outcomes:

- the more optimistic where Scottish Government Net Zero and City Centre Masterplan Connected City targets are achieved, reducing general traffic demand; and,
- a second where decisions to limit or slow modernisation of the network, such as public transport prioritisation, result in a failure to hit these targets due to growth in general traffic demand.

3.25. These two future outcome predictions create an uncertainty in the future generalise traffic demand of 12% at 2030 and 20% at 2040. Failure to achieve the more optimistic outlook will result in increased traffic along city centre streets and consequently an increased risk of congestion, slower journey times and reduced reliability of the bus network.

3.26. The model also assumes all vehicles comply with traffic laws and surrounding traffic management measures, so the model does not reflect instances where this is not the case and rules are abused, such as drivers blocking junctions or forcing their way into queueing traffic, which was often observed and caused problems prior to the introduction of restrictions at Union Terrace / Rosemount Viaduct and College Street / Guild Street. The impacts of such abuses, which traditionally have caused problems, are not reflected in the model.

3.27. Other key points to note are that:

- The traffic measures delivered through the ETRO have allowed a high degree of futureproofing and resilience against future traffic growth. If any of these measures are removed in the short term, there is a significant risk that any future traffic growth will impact on the envisioned operation of the city centre in terms of air quality, active and sustainable transport operation, safety and placemaking. There is therefore a risk that any measures removed in the short-term will ultimately have to be reintroduced in order to enable the next phases, resulting in driver confusion and frustration.
- The current traffic measures also allow futureproofing for further City Centre Masterplan streetscape projects to take place in the future – for example the Union Street East and Union Street West improvements. A Business Case for these projects was reported to Council in February 2024, with Council agreeing to refer the projects to the capital planning and budget process for future years' delivery. Removal of any of the measures would threaten the viability of these planned improvements.
- The modelling exercise is focused only on weekday periods and only on short term impacts. Traffic demand through Union Street, Bridge Street and Union Terrace may be higher at the weekend due to a higher volume of traffic looking to access city centre car parking, therefore any negative impacts observed in the model could be exacerbated at the weekend.

3.28. In summarising the above, it is the professional view of officers that the removal of the Bridge Street southbound bus priority measures would immediately be highly detrimental to the operation of the road network and public transport services. The removal of northbound bus priority measure on Bridge Street and allowing traffic from Union Terrace to turn right onto Rosemount Viaduct would have more limited impacts in the short term, but likely endanger future aspirations for city centre transformation.

3.29. Amending these measures will likely preclude the future delivery of key projects within the City Centre & Beach Masterplan 2022 that Council has already publicly agreed to, but may also result in the ETRO measures having to be reinstated in the future due to the reintroduction of through traffic causing additional congestion to the detriment of those vehicles who do have an origin or destination in the city centre, hence making the city centre less attractive for people to visit. Additional congestion would also result in a detrimental impact on bus journey times and reliability to and through the city centre by public and active transport. As will be discussed further in paras 3.47 – 3.53 (below) these detrimental impacts to public transport would also put future Aberdeen Rapid Transit (ART) proposals at risk.

3.30. Reintroduction of additional through traffic would also reintroduce negative impacts on pedestrians and cyclists - the most vulnerable street users.

The “Common Sense Compromise”

3.31. In June 2024, supported by local media, a consortium of city centre businesses and business representatives encouraged the Council to adopt what they termed a “Common Sense Compromise”, comprising the following:

- Retention of Guild Street bus gates, and restrictions on Schoolhill and Upperkirkgate;
- Removal of the bus gates at the Adelphi and Market Street, allowing access in both directions through Market Street;
- Removal of the bus gates on Bridge Street, allowing full access in both directions;
- Removal of the right turn ban on Union Terrace;
- Issuing of a warning rather than a fine to first time offenders; and
- Using fines to help city centre businesses via transport initiatives.

3.32. As shall be discussed further below, to supplement the modelling work discussed in paragraphs 3.22 to 3.30 and in the context of the “Common Sense Compromise” proposals outlined above, an additional assessment of various options for the future of the bus priority measures has also been undertaken by officers against a range of local, regional and national policy aims and objectives. This is presented in Appendix 3.

3.33. The policy context at Appendix 3 wholly supports the conclusions that officers have reached following the additional modelling exercise that any amendments to the bus priority measures on Bridget Street or Union Terrace would fundamentally undermine the purpose of the measures and are, therefore, not recommended.

3.34. Taking each point of the “Common Sense Compromise” in turn:

- *Retention of Guild Street bus gates, and restrictions on Schoolhill and Upperkirkgate;*

As noted in the Policy Assessment (Appendix 3), officers strongly agree that these measures should be retained. Retaining bus priority measures on Guild Street assist with public transport access to and from the bus station, and also assist with pedestrian movements, making it easier to cross and move around, and helping accessibility between Union Square and Union Street.

Retaining the measures on Schoolhill and Upperkirkgate ensure that “to not through” principles for city centre access are retained within this area. These measures would also maintain pedestrian priority in these spaces, making it easier to cross and move around.

- *Removal of the bus gates at the Adelphi and Market Street, allowing access in both directions through Market Street;*

In the context of the ongoing construction works on Union Street and around the new Market development, in July 2024 Council instructed the

Chief Officer - Operations to introduce a Temporary Traffic Regulation Order (TTRO) to suspend Bus Gates on Union Street (westbound only) / Market Street (southbound only), between its junctions with Adelphi and Hadden Street.

This Order will allow all classes of vehicle to turn left from Union Street onto Market Street, thereafter restricting general traffic to a left only turn at the bottom of Market Street onto Trinity Quay (Virginia Street). This measure will provide an additional option for access and servicing of the businesses on Market Street and Shiprow throughout the remaining period of construction of the New Market building.

No further interventions in the area are recommended by officers at this time.

- *Removal of the bus gates on Bridge Street, allowing full access in both directions;*

Discussed in paragraphs 3.22 to 3.30, above. In summary, changes to the measures on Bridge Street would not be recommended by officers. Removing the measures on Bridge Street (particularly southbound) is anticipated to result in increased traffic volumes on key city centre streets and additional congestion, to the detriment of public and active transport modes, even if restrictions on Guild Street are retained. Changes to the measures could prejudice the future delivery of key projects within the City Centre and Beach Masterplan 2022. Allowing private car access on to Bridge Street would re-introduce the ability for private vehicles to route *through* the city centre, in conflict with the North East Scotland Roads Hierarchy.

In relation to Bridge Street, the parallel route through the Denburn Road corridor provides an alternative higher quality function for general traffic with fewer conflict points arising with people walking, wheeling and cycling as the route passes under the core area of the city centre. The Denburn Road corridor has shown that it can easily cater for traffic volumes displaced from Bridge Street.

- *Removal of the right turn ban on Union Terrace;*

Discussed in paragraphs 3.22 to 3.30, above. In the case of the restricted turn from Union Terrace into Rosemount Viaduct, this was introduced to:

- Reduce traffic demand on Union Terrace to improve the sense of place around Union Terrace Gardens;
- Protect Schoolhill and Upperkirkgate (an area of high pedestrian activity) from the impacts of re-routing traffic. While additional traffic management measures have been introduced on these streets to protect pedestrians and cyclists, these are routinely abused by drivers, and this situation may worsen if more traffic is able to route through Rosemount Viaduct; and,

- Reduce traffic demand on Union Street West, in anticipation of future streetscape improvements agreed by the Council which will restrict road capacity.

Changes to the priority measures on Union Terrace would not be recommended by officers. Changes to the measures could prejudice the future delivery of key projects within the City Centre and Beach Masterplan 2022 by increasing traffic volumes on Union Street West and Union Terrace. Furthermore, this could have safety disbenefits for active travel users and potentially negative impacts on bus journey times and reliability in the future.

- *Issuing of a warning rather than a fine to first time offenders; and*

The Council ran a three month grace period when the measures were first introduced, and frequent and consistent communications were released by the Council's Communication Team in advance of (and after) the measures going live to advise people of the implementation date and to highlight alternative routes to allow people to reach key destinations. The grace period was introduced to allow people to become familiar with the bus priority measures before enforcement commenced. During the grace period anyone who drove into the bus priority areas was issued with a warning letter, not a fixed penalty notice.

There is no stipulation in Scottish legislation, or associated guidance, that a driver should be issued with an initial warning for their first instance of contravening a Bus Lane or Bus Gate.

No change to the enforcement process is recommended by officers at this time. The enforcement process in place is consistent with that of other Scottish cities, and introducing a second round of warning letters would raise a risk of legal challenge from those who have previously received and paid a charge notice.

Using fines to help city centre businesses via transport initiatives.

The legislation governing bus lane enforcement is clear that any surplus income can only be used to support the delivery of the Council's Local Transport Strategy, which primarily seeks to support and encourage more active and sustainable travel.

At the time of launching the "Common Sense Compromise" no specific transport initiatives were listed under this heading. One opportunity that has since been raised by partners such as Aberdeen Inspired has been to use a proportion of Bus Lane Enforcement surplus to reinstate a Night Bus service from the city centre to key destinations across the city and into Aberdeenshire. This option is recommended to Members at Recommendation 2.16 as an opportunity to allocate surplus to a city centre measure which would also help support the delivery of the Local Transport Strategy.

A report on Bus Lane Enforcement is due to be presented to the Council's Net Zero, Environment and Transport Committee later this year. Members will be asked at that meeting to consider how additional surplus income be best spent.

Additional Considerations - Blue Badge Exemption

- 3.35. At Council's Requisitioned meeting on 16 July 2024, Council Co-Leader Cllr Yuill asked officers an additional question about whether Blue Badge access to bus priority areas in the city centre could be permitted.
- 3.36. Regarding this question, the regulatory sign type that provides for a Bus Gate is specified by Statutory Instrument. Beyond buses, only certain classes of vehicle are available for inclusion on the sign. Vehicles associated with a disabled 'Blue Badge' is not an included exemption. Although it would be possible for the Council's Roads Authority to request a variation on a regulatory sign via a non-prescribed authorisation from the Scottish Ministers, it is considered that this would be unsuccessful in the national context of how the 'Bus Gate' sign is deployed.
- 3.37. There are also significant risk in relation to the confusion likely to be caused by allowing Blue Badge holders to access the city centre bus priority areas but still be penalised for using bus lanes elsewhere in the city, or in other parts of the region or country. Similarly the risk of other road users following Blue Badge holders into bus priority areas is heightened, as cars carrying Blue Badge holders are not identifiable to other road users unlike taxis and busses.
- 3.38. If a change is to be made in this regard it should be at a national level to ensure consistence and reduce complexity for road users.

Additional Considerations - Car Park Access

- 3.39. To provide further context to perceived issues associated with accessing city centre car parks, traffic modelling has been analysed to understand changes in predicted car journey times to city centre car parks with Bridge Street open to northbound traffic and the right-turn from Union Terrace to Rosemount Viaduct enabled (compared to a 2025 Reference Case scenario with all the ETRO measures in place). The results can be seen in Table 1, below.

Table 1: Changes in Car Journey Times to City Centre Car Parks

Route No.	From	at	To	Direction across City Centre	Average Journey Times (mm:ss)		
					2025 Ref Case	Bridge St & Union Terrace Open	Difference
1	Wellington Rd	Approach to QEII Bridge	Harriet St Car Park	Northbound	08:03	08:31	+ 00:28
2	Wellington Rd	Approach to QEII Bridge	Loch St Car Park	Northbound	07:55	07:47	- 00:08
3	A92	Approach to Bridge of Dee	Harriet St Car Park	Northbound	10:43	11:53	+ 01:11
4	A92	Approach to Bridge of Dee	Loch St Car Park	Northbound	18:46	18:43	- 00:03
5	A92 Elton Road	Esplanade	College St Car Park	Southbound	11:37	11:46	+ 00:08
6	A92 Elton Road	Esplanade	Union Square Car Park	Southbound	09:24	09:29	+ 00:05
7	A96 Auchmill Road	Bucksburn	College St Car Park	South/Eastbound	15:16	15:25	+ 00:08
8	A96 Auchmill Road	Bucksburn	Union Square Car Park	South/Eastbound	18:01	17:59	- 00:02
9	A944 Lang Stracht	Anderson Dr	College St Car Park	South/Eastbound	08:34	08:32	- 00:02
10	A944 Lang Stracht	Anderson Dr	Union Square Car Park	South/Eastbound	12:24	12:28	+ 00:04

3.40. In most cases, journey times see a negligible change in the model when Bridge Street and Union Terrace restrictions are removed, as most corridors that provide access to car parks (particularly Denburn Road and Virginia Street) are unaffected by restrictions, and drivers are observed to favour these routes within the model as they are generally more efficient. Aside from movements to the northern car parks from the south, most journeys did not use Bridge Street to access car parks within the model.

3.41. Differences are observed, however, for traffic coming from the south looking to access a car park to the north of the city centre, with Harriet Street and Loch Street used as examples in the model. In the test model, vehicles are generally observed to route via Bridge Street to access these car parks but journey times are shown to *increase*, primarily as a result of the aforementioned capacity constraints at the Bridge Street / Union Street junction. This further highlights that there are alternative and more appropriate routes than Bridge Street that enable quicker journeys to key destinations in the city centre, particularly Denburn Road.

Recommendations and Justification

Policy Analysis

3.42. As noted above, to supplement the modelling work discussed in paragraphs 3.22 to 3.30, and in the context of the “Common Sense Compromise” proposals also outlined above, an additional assessment of various options for the future of the bus priority measures has been undertaken, looking at the contribution of each of the options (which range from keeping the current measures as they

are to removing them in their entirety) to a range of local, regional and national policies, strategies and aspirations pertaining to transport, climate change, the economy, etc.

3.43. This assessment is presented in Appendix 3 and supports the conclusions that officers have reached that amendments to the bus priority measures would fundamentally undermine the purpose of the measures and are, therefore, not recommended.

3.44. Options considered as part of the assessment were:

- Option 1 – Maintain current (i.e. present day) traffic management measures;
- Option 2 – Re-open Bridge Street to all vehicles in one direction (assumed to be northbound, based on the traffic modelling outputs) and remove the ban on right turns from Union Terrace onto Rosemount Viaduct;
- Option 3 – Re-open Bridge Street to all vehicles in both directions and remove the ban on right turns from Union Terrace onto Rosemount Viaduct;
- Option 4 – Remove all restrictions other than Guild Street bus gates (the ‘Common Sense Compromise’); and,
- Option 5 – Remove all of the above measures (reverting to a pre-autumn 2023 scenario).

3.45. A table summarising the outcome of the assessment is provided below (Table 2), with the full policy assessment report provided as Appendix 3.

Table 2: Policy Assessment Summary

NATIONAL						
		Opt. 1	Opt. 2	Opt. 3	Opt. 4	Opt. 5
National Transport Strategy Priorities	Reducing Inequalities	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	×	×	xxx
	Taking Climate Action	✓✓✓	✓✓	×	×	xxx
	Helping to Deliver Inclusive Economic Growth	-	-	-	-	-
	Improving Health and Wellbeing	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	×	xxx
	Sustainable Travel and Investment Hierarchy	✓	✓	✓	-	xx
Climate Change Plan 2018-2032 Update Categories	20% Car km Reduction	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	×	xxx
	Reducing the Need to Travel	-	-	-	-	-
	Living Well Locally	-	-	-	-	-
	Switching Modes	✓✓✓	✓✓	-	xx	xxx
	Combining or Sharing Car Trips	✓	✓	✓	xxx	xxx
Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 / National Planning Framework 4 (Aberdeen Rapid Transit)		✓✓✓	✓✓	✓	xxx	xxx
REGIONAL						
		Opt. 1	Opt. 2	Opt. 3	Opt. 4	Opt. 5
Regional Transport Strategy Priorities	Improved journey efficiencies to enhance connectivity	-	-	×	×	×
	Zero fatalities on the road network	-	-	-	-	-
	Air quality that is cleaner than World Health Organisation standards for emissions from transport	✓	✓	×	×	xxx
	Significantly reduced carbon emissions from transport to support net-zero by 2045	✓✓✓	✓✓	×	×	xxx
	Accessibility for all	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	×	×
	A step change in public transport and active travel enabling a 50:50 mode split between car driver and sustainable modes	✓✓✓	✓✓	-	xx	xxx
Regional Economic Strategy		-	-	-	-	-
Regional Active Travel Network		✓✓✓	✓✓✓	×	×	xx

North East Bus Alliance Objectives	Arrest the decline in bus patronage in the North East of Scotland by 2022	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	-	×	xxx
	Achieve year on year growth in bus patronage to 2025	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	-	×	xxx
LOCAL						
		Opt. 1	Opt. 2	Opt. 3	Opt. 4	Opt. 5
Local Outcome Improvement Plan – Place Stretch Outcomes	Addressing climate change by reducing Aberdeen's carbon emissions by at least 61% by 2026 and adapting to the impacts of our changing climate	✓✓✓	✓✓	×	×	xxx
	Increase sustainable travel: 38% of people walking; 5% of people cycling and wheeling as main mode of travel and a 5% reduction in car miles by 2026.	✓✓✓	✓✓	-	xx	xxx
	26% of Aberdeen's area will be protected and/or managed for nature and 60% of people report they feel that spaces and buildings are well cared for by 2026.	-	-	-	-	-
Central Locality Plan Priorities	Maximise the spaces in communities to create opportunities for people and nature to connect and increase physical activity.	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	×	xx
City Centre Masterplan Objectives	Maximise Pedestrian Space	-	-	-	×	×
	Ensure Access for All	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	×	×
	Encourage Active Travel	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	×	xx
	Improve Air Quality	✓	✓	×	×	×
	Incorporate Public Transport	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓	xxx
	Accommodate Events, Parades, Marches etc.	-	-	-	-	-
	Include Appropriate Urban Greenery	-	-	-	-	-
	Maximise the Potential of Commercial Units	-	-	-	-	-
	Create Permanent Space for on Street Activities	-	-	-	-	-
	Include Space that Facilitates Appropriately Controlled Servicing	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Allow emergency service access to all areas	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	

Local Transport Strategy Aims	A transport system that enables the efficient movement of people and goods.	-	-	×	×	×
	A safe and more secure transport system.	-	-	-	-	-
	A cleaner, greener transport system.	✓✓✓	✓✓	×	×	xxx
	An integrated, accessible and socially inclusive transport system.	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	×	×
	A transport system that facilitates healthy and sustainable living.	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	-	×	xxx
North East Roads Hierarchy		✓✓✓	✓✓	×	xxx	xxx
Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan Objectives	Support delivery of the roads hierarchy strategy by implementing measures to discourage, and reduce the number of, through-trips undertaken by private vehicles in the city centre.	✓✓✓	✓✓	×	xxx	xxx
	Support delivery of the City Centre Masterplan, contributing to the regeneration of the city centre and enhancing the sense of place by developing a network of streets that prioritise the movement of people over the movement of vehicles, whilst maintaining necessary and efficient access for business and industry.	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓	xx	xxx
	Minimise the adverse environmental impacts of transport in the city centre, incorporating green infrastructure into new transport schemes wherever practicable, and ensure the city centre is resilient to the effects of climate change.	✓✓✓	✓✓	×	×	xxx
	Ensure that the city centre is accessible to, and safe for, all, especially the most vulnerable members of society	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	×	×
	Encourage and enable more walking and cycling in the city centre, particularly through the provision of better and safer infrastructure.	✓	✓	✓	xx	xx
	Develop a network of safe and attractive cycle routes across the city centre, through the provision of low speed, low flow streets and segregated infrastructure,	✓	✓	✓	xx	xx

	so that an unaccompanied 12-year-old child can safely cycle through the city centre					
	Improve the public transport experience to, from and within the city centre, particularly in terms of achieving shorter and more reliable journey times.	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	×	×	xxx
	Improve connectivity between key destinations in and around the city centre by sustainable modes of transport.	✓	✓	✓	-	xxx
	Improve opportunities for multimodal journeys to, from and within the city centre.	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	xxx
	For vehicles undertaking essential journeys within the city centre, enable as many of these as possible to be undertaken by low emission vehicles.	-	-	-	-	-
Aberdeen Net Zero Mobility Strategy Strategic Objectives	Reduce the demand for travel	-	-	-	-	-
	Improved travel planning and better integration of transport networks, to enable modal shift	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	xxx
	Low carbon transport decisions to support 20% car traffic reduction, mode shift and emission reductions	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	×	xxx
	Increase public transport options to encourage low carbon travel	-	-	-	-	-
	Extend and improve active travel networks for healthy, safer, and sustainable choices	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	×	xx
	Decarbonise transport and increase uptake of low and zero carbon technology	-	-	-	-	-

- 3.46. As can be seen from Table 2, above, and the detail in Appendix 3, the options which retain all or most of the measures (Options 1 - 3) align best to the current policy environment, particularly with transport, climate change and place-based policies and strategies and aspirations to deliver Aberdeen Rapid Transit (discussed further below), albeit to a greater or lesser extent depending on the scale of interventions retained. Those options which remove all or most of the measures are seen to conflict with the majority of relevant national, regional and local policies and strategies.

Aberdeen Rapid Transit (ART)

- 3.47. The [Vision for Aberdeen Rapid Transit](#) (ART) was first identified in the 2021 approved Nestrans Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) as an ambition to develop a high quality, high frequency mass transit network across the city on key corridors and linking key destinations, supported by Park & Ride facilities. ART has the potential to support long-term sustainable growth for the city and wider city region and support local priorities including city centre regeneration, reducing carbon emissions, improving air quality, improving accessibility and connectivity, increasing active travel and supporting healthy lifestyles. ART also has national recognition in Transport Scotland's Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 (STPR2) and in the revised National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), demonstrating it is a key national priority for the Scottish Government.
- 3.48. The Vision for ART is for a high quality bus rapid transit system delivering a cross-city network connecting key regionally important destinations across the city and connected to park and ride sites. A tram-like solution, it aims to deliver fast, frequent and reliable public transport services through high segregation from general traffic, high frequency and high capacity vehicles, off-board fare collection and efficient boarding and alighting. The aim is to deliver significantly faster and more reliable public transport journey times, enhanced connectivity, accessibility and quality.
- 3.49. The City Centre bus priority measures are an important enabler of Aberdeen Rapid Transit, an aspiration shared by regional partners to deliver a step-change in public transport provision, helping us achieve the Council's net zero and air quality targets. Cities like Belfast and Bristol with similar rapid transit programmes have seen substantial economic and environmental benefits. For example, Belfast's "Glider" system increased public transport use by 25% within six months, significantly reducing car usage and contributing to decarbonisation efforts.
- 3.50. Two cross-city ART routes were agreed by the Net Zero, Environment and Transport Committee on [11th June 2024](#) and connect Blackdog to Westhill via Bridge Street, Guild Street and Market Street and Craibstone to Portlethen via Union Street (a map of the agreed network can be found [here](#)). The agreed ART network will provide cross-city connections and therefore enhanced accessibility from across the region to key destinations including Foresterhill Health Campus, Aberdeen Airport, Aberdeen University, North East Scotland College, Union Square and the bus and rail stations.

- 3.51. Key to the success of ART will be the delivery of bus priority that can enable the delivery of fast, frequent, reliable and attractive public transport services along the length of these routes. As the city centre is the key interchange point between the two ART routes, bus journey reliability through the city centre is critical to ensuring that effective connections between the two ART routes (as well as with the wider bus network) can be made.
- 3.52. The bus priority that has been implemented on Bridge Street, Guild Street and Market Street, therefore plays an essential role in securing fast and reliable journey times through the city centre and therefore enhancing connectivity and accessibility to key employment, residential, health and leisure destinations across the city and wider city region. Amending bus priority measures in these areas would risk the ability for ART to deliver these opportunities.
- 3.53. Work is currently progressing on the development of the Business Case for ART, which is being funded through the Aberdeen City Region Deal. Beyond this, the expectation is that ART could be in place by 2030.

Wider Analysis

- 3.54. If Aberdeen is to tackle an unsustainable growth in traffic and not store up greater problems for the future, decisions must be taken which work towards a sustainable future now. Reducing traffic while ensuring our city centre is still accessible, through better public transport, is at the heart of the City Centre Masterplan ambition to make Aberdeen's city centre a more attractive place in which to live, work and spend leisure time.
- 3.55. The following paragraphs provide further commentary on the wide-ranging benefits that City Centre bus priority measures bring.

Environment and Climate Change

- 3.56. In February 2023, Aberdeen City Council added its voice to the growing number of local authorities around the world to have responded to the global climate change and nature loss crises by declaring a climate and nature emergency.
- 3.57. This followed the Council, in October 2021, becoming a formal signatory to both the [United Nations Race To Zero Campaign](#), pledging to recognise the global climate emergency and commit to inclusive climate action, and the [Paris Agreement](#), symbolising support to substantially reduce global greenhouse gas emissions, to limit the global temperature increase in this century to 1.5 degrees Celsius.
- 3.58. In February 2022, the [Net Zero Aberdeen Routemap](#) was approved following development by a range of public, private and community organisations. This sets the strategic approach to reduce city greenhouse gas emissions and a pathway towards Aberdeen becoming net zero by 2045, aligning with the [legislative target year](#) for net zero greenhouse gas emissions in Scotland. The Routemap is supported by 6 enabling strategies, including a [Net Zero Mobility Strategy](#) which includes objectives for a transition to sustainable, low and zero carbon transport.

- 3.59. Bus journey times and reliability to and through the city centre have improved as a result of the ETRO measures, likely resulting in modal shift from the car to the bus for some trips. Restricting general traffic on key city centre streets makes these streets safer and more welcoming for people walking, wheeling and cycling, increasing the attractiveness of these modes of travel and encouraging greater usage. If modal shift is sustained with fewer people driving through the city centre, there would be a consequent reduction in climate changing emissions and air pollution. These benefits would be greatest under Option 1 considered in the Policy Assessment (Appendix 3), and would decrease as the scale of measures, and their consequent impacts, are reduced.
- 3.60. At the September 2024 meeting of the Net Zero, Environment and Transport Committee, Members were presented with the [2024 Air Quality Progress Report](#), which recognised in its conclusions (page 29) that: *“The recently established vehicle access restrictions have resulted in a significant improvement in air quality at city centre locations (...).”*

Access to the City Centre

- 3.61. It is recognised that shoppers can be deterred from going into city centres by traffic congestion and parking stress. Making it easier to access the city by bus and reducing overall traffic will make it a better experience for everyone, including car users. The bus priority measures have resulted in more efficient journey times for bus passengers to and through the city centre. If the measures were to be amended or removed then it is likely that car and bus journey times would increase further in the future, as largely unrestricted traffic in the city centre results in further congestion.
- 3.62. As illustrated by Tables 3, below, access to key off-street car parking locations within the city centre has also not significantly changed since the bus priority measures were introduced. Table 3 shows a comparison of journey distances between three origins (one in the west of the city, one in the south, and one in the north) and four main city centre car parks, in the north, south and west of the city centre. Current (post-ETRO) routes have been extracted from Google Maps, which provide the optimum route (in terms of distance) based on current conditions. Pre-ETRO routes have been estimated using a judgement on the most ‘logical’ routes for vehicles to take with no bus gate restrictions in place (other than on Union Street Central).
- 3.63. As Table 3 demonstrates, the distances to be travelled have not changed (as in many cases the ETRO measures do not impact on routeing) or have a negligible difference (less than half a mile increase in journey distance).

Table 3: Access to City Centre Car Parks

Origin	Destination	Distance Pre-ETRO	Distance Post-ETRO
Woodhill House, AB16 5GJ	Bon Accord (Harriet Street)	2.2 miles (via Westburn Road, South Mount Street, Rosemount Viaduct, Schoolhill)	No change
	Chapel Street	1.9 miles (via Westburn Road, Watson Street, Esslemont Avenue, Rose Street)	No change
	Trinity Mall	2.3 miles (Via Westburn Road, Skene Square, Denburn Road)	No change
	Union Square	3.0 miles (via Westburn Road, Craigie Loanings, Union Street, Bridge Street, Market Street)	3.2 miles (via Westburn Road, Skene Square, Denburn Road, South College Street, Palmerston Road)
Wellington Road, AB12 3FU	Bon Accord (Harriet Street)	3.6 miles (via Wellington Road, South College Street, Bridge Street, Rosemount Viaduct, Schoolhill)	3.9 miles (via Wellington Road, South College Street, Denburn Road, Woolmanhill, Schoolhill)
	Chapel Street	3.5 miles (via Wellington Road, South College Street, Bridge Street, Union Street, Huntly Street)	3.5 miles (via Wellington Road, South College Street, Crown Street, Huntly Street)

Origin	Destination	Distance Pre-ETRO	Distance Post-ETRO
	Trinity Mall	3.2 miles (via Wellington Road, South College Street, Wapping Street)	No change
	Union Square	3.2 miles (via Wellington Road, North Esplanade West, Market Street)	No change
Bridge of Don, AB23 8DX	Bon Accord (Harriet Street)	2.9 miles (via Mounthooly Way, Spring Garden, Maberly Street, Skene Square, Schoolhill)	No change
	Chapel Street	2.9 miles (via Mounthooly Way, Spring Garden, Woolmanhill, Summer Street)	No change
	Trinity Mall	2.7 miles (via King Street, Union Street, Market Street, Guild Street)	2.8 miles (via King Street, Mounthooly Way, Spring Garden, Skene Square, Denburn Road)
	Union Square	2.7 miles (via King Street, Castle Street, Union Street, Bridge Street, Market Street)	2.7 miles (via King Street, Marischal Street, Regent Quay, Market Street)

3.64. It should also be noted that evidence from the traffic model suggests drivers tend to favour more strategic routes (such as Denburn Road and Virginia Street) to access city centre car parks in any case, and such journeys are largely unaffected by any of the ETRO restrictions.

Wider Economic Considerations

- 3.65. A recent report [by KPMG for the Confederation of Passenger Transport](#) highlights that bus passengers across Scotland contribute significantly to local economies through their spending, which is estimated at £2,960 million per year. The report also identifies that every £1 of government spend on better bus services and bus priority schemes can secure economic benefits between £4.55¹ and £7².
- 3.66. A 10% improvement in local bus service connectivity has also been associated with a 3.6% reduction in deprivation³. A paper recently published by the Place and Wellbeing Collaborative, Public Health Scotland and the Improvement Service on Transport Poverty notes that not everyone has access to the same transport options, and defines transport poverty as: *“the lack of transport options that are available, reliable, affordable, accessible or safe that allow people to meet their daily needs and achieve a reasonable quality of life.”* Improving accessibility and safety of active travel and public transport options can be one means of eradicating transport poverty, opening up opportunities for people who do not have access to a private car, and preventing ‘forced’ car ownership (and associated financial hardship) arising from a lack of alternative transport options⁴. According to Scotland’s 2022 Census Data, 30.7% of households in Aberdeen do not have a car or van in their household.
- 3.67. Questions have been raised publicly about whether the introduction of the bus priority measures in August 2023 has resulted in people choosing not to visit the city centre, and whether footfall figures have declined as a direct result of the measures. Although analysis of Springboard footfall data does indicate a 3.7% decline in city centre footfall between the periods of January 2023 - August 2023 and January 2024 - August 2024, this is indicative of a longer-term trend that extends across the whole country, not just in Aberdeen. For instance, over the same period across Scotland there was a 5.3% decline.
- 3.68. Much of this longer-term trend can be attributed to an increase in online consumption and home working. Between January 2019 and September 2023 online payment spend rose by 4% in Scotland⁵. In the North East in June 2022, around two-thirds of employees were working in their designated workplaces, with one in seven using a hybrid model, and one in seven working from home. This represents an increase in home working compared with pre-pandemic levels, when levels of home-working were at only 6%⁶.
- 3.69. Face-to-face retail spend in the North East has also remained stable between 2019 and 2023 rather than increasing⁷. At a UK level, there is evidence that the

¹ [Economic Impacts of Bus | CPT \(cpt-uk.org\)](#)

² [Greener Journeys: The Value of the Bus to Society - Community Transport Association](#) [Community Transport Association \(ctauk.org\)](#)

³ [Greener Journeys: The Value of the Bus to Society - Community Transport Association](#) [Community Transport Association \(ctauk.org\)](#)

⁴ [Place and Wellbeing: Movement Theme – Place and Wellbeing Collaborative, Public Health Scotland and the Improvement Service](#)

⁵ ONS: [Link](#) Consumer Card Spending Flow March 2024

⁶ Felstead, A and Reuschke, D (2020) ‘Homeworking in the UK: before and during the 2020 lockdown’

⁷ Source: (UK VISA Card Payments 2023)

volume of face-to-face sales has been falling, but their value has been rising. This is consistent with anecdotal evidence from the Economic Policy Panel, which suggests that people are making fewer visits to city centres but spending more when they do⁸.

- 3.70. Average dwell time has risen by at least 5% in the city centre over the weekends since the introduction of the bus priority measures. Dwell time is also currently higher at the weekend than 2019 pre-pandemic levels⁹.

Changing Nature of City Centres

- 3.71. Generally across the country strong trends already in place over a significant period of time have changed the character and composition of city, town and other centres. These factors underpin the changes to retail in the long term and include an ageing population; lifestyle changes including internet shopping, technological advances in online retail and economic growth post Brexit.
- 3.72. Office for National Statistics data for internet sales identifies that 26.7% of all retail expenditure is undertaken online (as at July 2024). During the pandemic this figure reached a peak of 37.8% (January 2021). Whilst the data suggests that the high levels of online retail experienced during periods of lockdown have not been sustained, it is not yet clear whether the cumulative forced changes during the Covid-19 public health emergency will have longer term impacts on consumer behaviour and in particular on online retailing.
- 3.73. Over the last few years traditional high streets and off prime pitches in major centres across the country have also been experiencing a higher turnover of occupiers, higher vacancies and a shift from retail goods to a mix of retail and leisure services. Shopping centres, who have been hardest hit by changes in retailing with continuing increase in vacancies and departure of multiple occupiers, are also likely to adopt more flexible approaches, i.e. hosting a broader mixture of tenants, in the near future. The Council's Union Street Empty Shops Action Plan identifies interventions that will support a changing high street, and has implemented measures that have enabled reoccupation and new uses for vacant units on the street
- 3.74. Local shopping provision has also been revitalised as a result of home-working and continued local customer base – although a positive for local businesses in these areas, this shift is likely to have resulted in a loss of trade in town and city centres due to higher levels of home-working.
- 3.75. Aligned with these trends, it is predicted that demand for commercial leisure space will grow significantly across Aberdeen City in the years to come and that this growth has the potential to offset decline in comparison goods retailing. There is also significant potential for additional leisure space to serve tourism.
- 3.76. On that basis, there is an opportunity to better support leisure, entertainment, tourism and cultural activities to complement the retail offer in the city centre.

⁸ Monthly Business Survey, Retail Sales Inquiry, ONS.

⁹ Huq Industries Limited

This could be by encouraging new uses throughout the city centre which support its vitality and viability, including the “heart” of the city centre along Union Street, or by actively supporting existing facilities that are already located in the area. Key to this will be ensuring a city centre which is enjoyable to spend time in and, in this context, it is useful to note that the annual number of visitors and audience members attending Aberdeen Performing Arts (APA) facilities has *increased* over the last 12 months. This is highlighted within the Annual ALEO Report elsewhere on the Agenda for this Council meeting.

- 3.77. This change to a more diverse offering is also reflected in changes to planning policies in the Local Development Plans over the last decade. Both the 2012 and 2023 Local Development Plans designated a Retail Core within the city centre – recognising the area containing most of the city centre’s shopping floorspace and where new retail development should be directed. In the 2012 Local Development Plan, the Retail Core of the city centre stretched the entire length of Union Street and down Holburn Street to the Great Western Road junction, whereas within the 2023 Local Development Plan, the Retail Core has contracted to the section of Union Street from just east of Broad Street towards Bon Accord Street.
- 3.78. This reduction in the Retail Core designation over time, informed by technical evidence and studies, has resulted in more flexibility in the types of uses supported on Union Street, allowing more entertainment, office and leisure uses to enter into the area. The growth in restaurants, particular on the east and west ends of Union Street, and developments such as the Silver Fin and the Capital, are a testament to that change in patterns.
- 3.79. This echoes the change in shopping patterns as highlighted above, with online shopping only accounting for 9.4% of sales in 2012, to more than 26% over the space of two Local Development Plans periods.

Health, Safety and Wellbeing

- 3.80. The determinants of health are the social, economic, environmental and cultural factors that indirectly influence the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. Some determinants of health may be difficult to change (age, family history of illness etc), whereas others can be influenced by the social, economic and physical environments in which we live, and therefore can be changed, positively or negatively, by policy interventions or decisions made by Council.
- 3.81. Public transport accessibility allows car free access to services, amenities and employment which increase health benefits and reduces the impact of financial poverty. Evidence has been provided by both First Bus and Stagecoach around the bus priority measures in the city centre improving reliability and improving journey times for public transport. This greater reliability offers greater security to those who travel by public transport, proportionally more women than men, that they will be able to access their destination and personal commitments on time.

- 3.82. Less traffic in the city centre also results in safer conditions for people walking, wheeling and cycling, as well as less noise and fewer emissions, contributing to a healthier and less stressful city centre environment in which to live, work and visit.
- 3.83. During the five-year period between 2015 - 2019, prior to the Covid-19 public health emergency, there was an average of 4.2 pedestrian casualties per year recorded in the core city centre area (Union Street / Market Street / Bridge Street / Guild Street), while during the four-year period from 2020 - 2023 the average was 0.5 pedestrian casualties per year. This fall in pedestrian casualties is likely to be linked to the volume of road users in the latter period being significantly lessened. Nonetheless, it would be usual to expect the interventions, to date, by reducing general traffic volume, and prioritising vulnerable road users, will continue to have a positive long-term effect on road safety.
- 3.84. Increasing the attractiveness of walking, wheeling and cycling in the city centre will also encourage and enable more active travel, bringing physical and mental health benefits for those switching from sedentary forms of transport. More people out and about in the city centre could also have a positive impact on personal safety and security due to increased natural surveillance, while also enabling good social connections which strengthens mental health.

SUMMARY

- 3.85. Officers have set out in this section a number of matters relevant for Members to consider in making a final decision on the future of the current city centre bus priority measures. As noted in the Recommendations in Section 2, it is officers' professional view that the measures put in place should be retained, and that approval is given to make the Aberdeen City Council (City Centre, Aberdeen) (Traffic Management) Experimental Order 2023 a permanent Order.
- 3.86. By way of summary, officers have come to this view for the following reasons:
- The principles of city centre bus priority measures are long-established, stretching back to the original City Centre Masterplan approved unanimously by Council in 2015.
 - The traffic modelling undertaken does not give sufficient confidence that removal of any of the ETRO measures will not simply lead to further congestion and problems in the future. Indeed, the removal of southbound restrictions on Bridge Street is seen to lead to significant problems once Union Street Central streetscape works are completed in 2025.
 - The measures provide a degree of resilience and future-proofing for additional planned City Centre Masterplan measures – it is difficult to imagine, for example, how the approved streetscape improvements on Union Street West could be delivered if significant traffic is re-introduced into that space.

- Retention of the measures is fully in accordance with current national, regional and local policy and strategy, particularly in terms of climate change, health and wellbeing, and sustainable transport.
- The measures have already benefitted bus passengers through improved bus journey times and journey time reliability, and users of active modes of transport by reducing traffic levels and contributing to a safer and more welcoming city centre for pedestrians and cyclists. Almost one-third of households in Aberdeen do not a car or van and therefore benefit from interventions to make other modes of transport safer, quicker and easier to use.
- For those continuing to use a car to access the city centre, accessibility has remained at similar levels. While distances to access city centre car parks may have increased marginally in some instances, information extracted from the traffic model suggests that drivers tend to favour strategic routes such as Denburn Road and Virginia Street anyway, which are unaffected by the restrictions.

3.87. In addition to the points above, it is also important to highlight the financial risk that the Council would be subject to should the Scottish Ministers consider that any change or departure from the purposes for which the Bus Partnership Fund Grant was awarded warrants an alteration in the amount of the Grant, or that the future of the project is in jeopardy. This is discussed further in Section 4, below

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Grant Funding

4.1. As noted in Report Recommendation 2.2 (above), at the Council's City Growth and Resources Committee on 03 February 2021, Committee instructed Officers to submit a bid to the Scottish Government's Bus Partnership Fund. As part of the approval of the bid, Committee moved two additional instructions - those being:-

- ii) to instruct the Chief Officer - Strategic Place Planning, that in the context of the corridor options within the bid terminating in the City Centre, and in light of the recommendations from the Economic Policy Panel and ongoing transport projects, to seek to accelerate the City Centre elements of the bid. This should include any necessary enabling works for approved schemes, for example South College Street and Berryden, to help drive recovery, improve the transport system and ensure integration of current transport projects; and*
- iii) to instruct the Chief Officer - Strategic Place Planning, to explore options to improve access and integration of the Aberdeen bus station as part of the bid, to help improve the customer experience.*

- 4.2. £10,000,000 from the Bus Partnership Fund was awarded to the Council for the South College Street Junction Improvement Project Phase 1. South College Street had previously been identified as an enabler of the City Centre Masterplan, with the improvements providing alternative capacity for general traffic displaced by the public realm improvements on Union Street Central and surrounding streets. Within the award letter (Appendix 2), Transport Scotland made it clear that this award was contingent on the South College Street improvements facilitating and preceding the delivery of bus priority measures on nearby streets:

“On South College Street, you will be required to evidence clearly that this project enables bus priority measures on other roads in the city centre, given that the plans do not currently include bus priority measures on the street itself.”

- 4.3. The outcome of the funding application, including the award letter with the above condition, was reported to the City Growth and Resources Committee in August 2021, where the Committee noted the award and instructed officers to continue to work with partners to deliver the projects in accordance with the grant conditions.
- 4.4. The award letter included provision for Transport Scotland to recover funding from the Council:

“9.1 The Scottish Ministers may re-assess, vary, make a deduction from, withhold, or require immediate repayment of the Grant or any part of it in the event that:

9.1.1 ...

9.1.2 the Scottish Ministers consider that any change or departure from the purposes for which the Grant was awarded warrants an alteration in the amount of the Grant;

9.1.3 ...”

- 4.5. Prior to the requisitioned meeting of Council held on 16 July 2024, officers sought legal opinion which noted the risk of the Council being required to repay some or all of the grant funding if the agreed bus priority measures were to be removed or significantly amended, and/or Transport Scotland considered the future of the project to be in jeopardy
- 4.6. The Chief Officer – Finance is of the view that the increasing financial constraint across the Scottish public sector, the reductions that have been applied to funding streams in 2024/25, such as the Affordable Housing Supply Programme and Free School Meals, as well as delays to funding announcements this year e.g. Employability Services, means there will be a heightened level of scrutiny and consideration given to any changes made, and therefore increased risk over the recovery of funding that no longer achieves the intended objectives, either in part or whole.
- 4.7. The Chief Officer – Finance expects the Council to seek to secure certainty from Transport Scotland on what they would intend to do if the decisions taken made changes to the bus prioritisation measures. In the meantime the Council

Financial Performance Reports would reflect the decisions taken by including a Contingent Liability, however if the matter remained outstanding at 31 March 2025 then a Provision would have to be included in the Council's draft 2024/25 Annual Accounts to recognise the potential for financial loss.

- 4.8. Following the Council meeting of 16 July 2024, officers sought the view of our external auditors, Audit Scotland, on the retention of grant funding for the purpose of facilitating bus prioritisation, should the measures be changed.
- 4.9. The response from the external auditor acknowledges that there is a risk that Scottish Government could seek recovery of some funding if the bus priority measures were removed.
- 4.10. That risk is not absolute however, and in the absence of certainty, both from the extent of any potential changes and the determination on the matter by Transport Scotland, the expectation of Audit Scotland would be for a contingent liability to be recorded in the Council performance reports for Quarters 2 and 3, while the actual implications are worked through with Transport Scotland and they make a decision.
- 4.11. Audit Scotland would however expect to see a provision in the Quarter 4 financial performance report and the draft 2024/25 Annual Accounts if the priority measures are removed and there has been no final determination by Transport Scotland or if no suitable discussions have taken place and the situation remains uncertain. The change in recommended accounting treatment between Q3 and Q4 is due to 31 March 2025 being the date by which the Council is required to have made a decision about the permanency of its Experimental Order (ETRO).

Cost of Works

- 4.12. 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. With the addition of £20m grant funding from the Levelling Up Fund, projects amounting to approximately £170m are now individual project budgets in the approved Capital Programme.
- 4.13. To date, £7,944,077 has been spent and claimed from the Bus Partnership Fund for the cost of the South College Street Improvements, with a final claim still to be submitted. The cost of the supporting bus prioritisation measures on other roads was approximately £285,000, fully funded by the Bus Partnership Fund and Nestrans
- 4.14. Therefore the bus priority measures reported here have already been installed on site and the major outgoings have been made. There is currently no remaining external funding available for amendment or removal of the measures and the Council does not have a capital or revenue budget to fund changes. So if changes to the measures are agreed, any costs of

implementing those changes would require to have a source of funding identified.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Experimental Traffic Regulation Order

- 5.1. Aberdeen City Council made the Experimental Traffic Regulation 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.
- 5.2. The Experimental Traffic Regulation Order was brought into effect on 1 August 2023 and, in terms of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, should not continue in force for longer than 18 months. The Council must, therefore, reach a conclusion ahead of 1 March 2025 on whether the Order will be made permanent in its entirety, made in part or abandoned.

Recent Judgements of Note

- 5.3. The *Cains Trustees (Jersey) Limited and Cains Fiduciaries (Jersey) Limited as Trustees for the Eastgate Unit Trust v Highland Council* [2024] CSOH 80 case ("the Highland Council case") differs significantly from the current Aberdeen City Council (City Centre, Aberdeen) (Traffic Management) (Experimental) Order (ETRO) 2023 situation.
- 5.4. The ETRO subject of this report to Council involved a period of consultation and monitoring, allowing the public and decision-makers to observe the impacts before deciding on its permanence. The ETRO underwent statutory consultation, with comments and objections from individuals and businesses considered by officers and presented to Members as part of the decision-making process.
- 5.5. Conversely, the Highland Council case involved a non-statutory consultation to generate a single option for a formal TRO consultation, which was deemed procedurally unfair. If Council decides not to approve the making of the ETRO as a permanent Order and decides to proceed with another option instead (e.g. add a new element which would require a completely new Traffic Regulation Order) then the points raised in the Highland Council case regarding consultation on options and ensuring that any consultation is procedurally fair will be considered when conducting future consultation exercises.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. The City Centre and Beach Masterplan has been screened through the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process and the consultation

authorities have confirmed that no Environmental Report specific to this overarching Masterplan is required.

- 6.2. Additional Environmental considerations related to this report are discussed further in Section 3, above. In summary, the City Centre bus priority improvements promote improved walking, cycling and public transport priority within the city centre and reduce vehicles within the main pedestrian spaces. This reduces people’s exposure to poor air quality whilst enjoying the city centre environment. The reduction in “through traffic” is a desired outcome that also contributes to the Council Net Zero commitments and the Scottish Government target of reducing vehicle km by 20% by 2030.

7. RISK

- 7.1 The assessment of risk contained within the table below is considered to be consistent with the Council’s Risk Appetite Statement.

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	Removal of any of the bus priority measures risks undermining efforts to support and enable more public transport use and active travel in the city centre, contrary to current local and national transport policy. This may also put at risk the Council’s ability to deliver future City Centre Masterplan projects and longer-term aspirations such as Aberdeen Rapid Transit.	The report recommends that the measures are retained.	L	Yes

Compliance	Removal of the bus priority measures could constitute a breach of Bus Partnership Fund grant conditions.	The report recommends that the measures are retained.	M	Yes
Operational	The bus priority measures are in place and operational. Should any be removed, resources would have to be identified to undertake this work.	The report recommends that the measures are retained.	L	Yes
Financial	<p>Removal of the bus priority measures may have implications for Scottish Government Bus Partnership Funding provided for the bus priority measures and the South College Street works. Some or all of this money may have to be returned, with the implications of this addressed within the report.</p> <p>Removal of the measures could put at risk the Council's ability to attract national funding for future transport projects, especially projects that rely on these measures for their success, such as Aberdeen Rapid Transit.</p> <p>There is currently no external funding available for amendment or removal of the measures and the</p>	The report recommends that the measures are retained.	M	Yes

	<p>Council does not have a capital or revenue budget to fund changes. If changes to the measures are agreed, any costs of implementing those changes would require to have a source of funding identified.</p>			
Reputational	<p>Retaining the measures in their entirety could see the Council being accused of not listening to the views of businesses and members of the public.</p> <p>Conversely, changes to the measures could result in confusion amongst drivers, with the Council accused of deliberately causing confusion. The Council could also be accused of a lack of resolve under pressure and therefore not fully committed to sustainable transport improvements and measures to address the climate emergency.</p> <p>Should the measures be amended or removed, there is a risk that the Council is seen as inconsistent in the eyes of funding partners who have</p>	<p>The report recommends that the measures are retained.</p> <p>The Council will continue to communicate the benefits of the bus priority measures and how they support the wider transport and City Centre Masterplan vision.</p> <p>The Council will continue to raise awareness of the changes and address concerns about legibility of the restrictions.</p> <p>The Council will work with local businesses to identify future city centre transport projects that assist businesses, where this is possible.</p>	M	Yes

	invested significantly in this project, which may put at risk the Council's ability to attract further external funding in the future.			
Environment / Climate	The city centre traffic management measures seek to improve conditions for people using active travel and public transport and encourage a greater uptake of these modes of transport. Mode shift from private car to sustainable transport will bring air quality improvements and carbon reduction benefits.	The report recommends that the measures are retained.	L	Yes

8. OUTCOMES

<u>Council Delivery Plan 2024</u>	
	Impact of Report
<p>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</p> <p><u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u></p>	<p>The recommendations within this report support the delivery of the following aspects of the policy statement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with the Scottish Government and NESTRANS to improve the city's bus network, including considering options for an Aberdeen Rapid Transit network, with the support of the Scottish Bus Fund, and consider options for council-run services in the city. • 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.

[Local Outcome Improvement Plan](#)

<p>Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes</p>	<p>The recommendations support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcome 13 - Addressing climate change by reducing Aberdeen's carbon emissions by 42.5% by 2026 and adapting to the impacts of our changing climate; and • Outcome 14 38% of people walking and 5% of people cycling as main mode of travel by 2026.
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Regional and City Strategies</i></p> <p><i>Regional Strategies: (i.e. Regional Economic Strategy, Regional Transport Strategy; Regional Skills Strategy)</i></p> <p><i>City Strategies and Strategic Plans (i.e. Local Development Plan; Local Housing Strategy; Children's Services Plan; Net Zero Routemap for the City)</i></p> <p><i>Council Strategies (i.e. Medium Term Financial Strategy; Estates and Assets Strategy)</i></p>	<p>The report supports the priorities in the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) around investment in infrastructure, regenerating our city centre, unlocking development potential, improving the deployment of low carbon transport, and enabling 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 and using public transport 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 and travelling by bus 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>The recommendations support the City Centre Masterplan by contributing to the development of a safer and more welcoming city centre environment for people, and improving accessibility of the area for non-car modes of transport.</p>

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	Previous Integrated Impact Assessment relating to the City Centre Bus Priority Measures (ETRO) has been reviewed and changes made.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required
Other	N/A

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 Report CR&E/24/169 to Net Zero, Environment and Transport Committee: The Aberdeen City Council (City Centre, Aberdeen) (Traffic Management) (Experimental) Order (ETRO) 2023 – Statutory Public Consultation https://committees.aberdeencity.gov.uk/documents/s158378/ETRO2_BusPriorityMeasures_Report_CRE_21_1_69_Final.pdf

11. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Traffic Model Testing Report

Appendix 2 – Transport Scotland Grant Letter – Bus Partnership Fund

Appendix 3 – Policy Assessment

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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