

George St and First New Town (GNT) – Operational Plan and Project Plan Update

Comments from SPOKES

1. Para 3.3 of the paper explains that the objective of the GNT project is to provide a “people focussed space to encourage greater walking, wheeling and cycling” and that to achieve this the design and operational philosophy should be to restrict all but essential vehicles from George St for a high proportion of the day. We agree with these objectives.
2. We agree that this objective would be largely met by the proposal to have a pedestrian/cycle zone from 10.00. am to 7.00 pm (slightly different times for Sundays) when all vehicle access will be controlled through a prior booking system. However, this does not seem to be consistent with the access window for loading and servicing from 7.00 pm to 10.30 am for deliveries and servicing. Will these vehicles also be subject to the prior booking system and, if not, why not? We understand the need for an access window but we consider that the access window should be restricted to 8.00 am to avoid conflict with cyclists using George St for their daily commute, as well as those walking to work.
3. Our concerns about this are underlined by the proposals in the paper for “Hostile Vehicle Mitigation” to deter unwelcome access by motor traffic during the pedestrian/cycle zone and, in particular, the proposal to make George St a 1-way street for motor traffic and 2 way for cyclists. Why is this needed if the plans already allow for effective control over motor traffic during this zone? If a 1-way street is needed then additional protection may be required for cyclists travelling contra flow. This will require further consideration and liaison with cycling interests.
4. We have noted the proposal for unrestricted access for taxis and PHCs from 7.00pm to 6.00am. We have previously suggested that a taxi rank should be installed on one of the side streets, for example, on Frederick St. However, if both taxis and PHCs are to be allowed along George St, this should be without prejudice to future decisions elsewhere in the city where the demands of the “nighttime economy” may be less relevant.
5. We are content with the proposal to allow disabled persons with a blue card disability pass to get entry during the “pedestrian/cycling” period but there must be control of these arrangements through the prior booking system to ensure that they are not being abused.
6. In relation to the cross streets, we remain extremely concerned that no attempt was made to discuss with us our detailed proposals for cycling measures in these streets submitted in response to the consultation earlier this year. In particular, we think that there is a case to be made for measures in Frederick St which parallel those put forward by the Council in their proposals for Hanover St linked to the Meadows to George St route.

7. The paper also refers to measures to link the existing CCWEL provision from Roseburn to Charlotte Sq and along York Place to St Andrew Sq. Accessing George St from Charlotte Sq is dangerous and difficult at present and we strongly urge and support interim measures that can be put in place in 2024 rather than further delay resulting from providing these links as part and parcel of the cross streets proposals which seemingly do not yet have agreed funding. We also consider that interim measures should be developed to link George St to the CCWEL on York Place which in turn feeds into the cycle paths on Leith Walk

Summary of Key Points

1. We continue to support the overall *objectives* of the project in relation to cycling, although some aspects of the Operational Plan concern us.
2. We support the management of traffic on George St through the use of retractable bollards during the “pedestrian/cycling zone” period which will require bookings to be made by taxis/PHCs and buses to hotels. However, it is not clear if these arrangements will be applied to the control of delivery and supply vehicles since, we understand, that these vehicles will also be given access during this “pedestrian/cycling zone” period.
3. We have noted the proposal that taxis and PHCs should have access to George St after 7.00pm to help provide security for women and to benefit the “nighttime” economy in the area. However, this should not be taken as a precedent for similar measures elsewhere.
4. We would like to have further discussions with officials on the details of the proposed cross streets as it is not apparent that points we made in our response to the earlier consultation have been given adequate consideration.
5. We strongly support the need for interim measures to provide access for cyclists from Charlotte Sq to George St given that cyclists currently arriving in Charlotte Sq using the CCWEL are faced with a very unclear and unsafe access to George St. Similar interim measures are required to link George St to St Andrew Sq to give access to the CCWEL on York Place.

Overall Conclusion and Concern

Spokes is extremely concerned that these proposals have now deviated so far from the originally proposed segregated cycle lane, and even from the subsequent 'cycle street', that they will not deliver a sufficiently safe and attractive space for cycling, and an adequate central section of CCWEL. We had grave misgivings when the proposal was made to move from the earlier segregated cycle lane proposal, fearing that there would be significant dilution and this has happened. We still believe a cycle street could be successful if the traffic proposals and restrictions are right, but if TEC leaves them as they are now proposed we will have to consider withdrawing our endorsement of the project.