

Letter to the Policy and Strategy Committee

The Policy and Strategy Committee of The City of Edinburgh Council met this morning to discuss a variety of matters on their agenda which you can see [here](#). These included some measures to alter Princes Street and Rose Street.

Richard Wood who is a New Town resident and an objector to the tram project felt obliged to put pen to paper and he has shared his letter with us:-

Dear Councillors

The purpose of this letter is to request you to ask your officials some searching questions before approving the recommendations made in Dave Anderson's report. I have read the report carefully and the contents of this letter are based upon that plus additional research I have done. The letter sets out my interpretation of the report, then poses a series of questions I ask you to pursue because their answers may influence your opinion on the appropriateness of many of its proposals for Edinburgh's future.

My Interpretation

If Edinburgh consisted only of the City Centre, this report would have much merit. But it does not. The City Centre has to act as a hub for the 472,000 residents and the thousands who choose to travel daily to work here. Edinburgh is already 'a city of the senses, a place for people' (The creation of the New Town established that.) and it is one of the reasons so many choose to live and work here. However, great care must be taken to retain its good reputation as a place to live and work. Much of the emphasis of this and the 2008 report is on increasing attractiveness for visitors. Certainly ensuring that Edinburgh continues to be a favoured

destination is important but it is highly unlikely that visitors will be deterred if the Council does not 'animate the space and increase pedestrian quality' (whatever that means-it's gobbledegook).

The superficial attractiveness of many of this report's recommendations must be resisted until their implications are investigated before implementation. For example:

Removal of railings bordering Princes Street Gardens. In my view these railings add to the vista of Princes Street. They are an attractive design and contribute to the perspective of the street. Imagine the chaos when Princes Street is full of revelers during night time events such as the Festival Fireworks or Hogmanay Festival. Temporary barriers will be insufficient to prevent them spilling into the Gardens with possible injury and certainly damage to the plants. Imagine the likely claims under Health and Safety.

'Temporarily extend pavement on the north side of George Street to allow use of the additional space for pedestrians. Parking would be relocated.' Why would the Council go to the expense of this on a temporary basis? The use of paint to indicate the extension will be an insufficient barrier to traffic. Many premises already offer the opportunity to sit at tables outside their premises. I use these frequently and have never noticed them causing an obstruction. Any extension of the pavement will constrict traffic flow leading to more tail backs and increased air pollution-not a healthy or attractive environment for the envisaged additional cafe patrons.

On a positive note. Consideration of alternative bus types is sensible. On 10th December 2010 London launched its first permanent hydrogen bus with 7 more planned for introduction by mid 2011. London Transport hope they will contribute to a reduction in the more than 4,300 deaths in London caused by poor air quality every year, costing around £2bn a year. When will they be trialed in Edinburgh?

Key Questions

Here are some key questions that deserve answers:

Who were the '35 representatives from city centre businesses, residents and elected members' that attended the stakeholder meeting on 29th November 2010? Many of the proposed changes will have significant implications. Their introduction by stealth is not appropriate. Much wider consultation and support is necessary before approval. Press comment last week suggested that the Chamber of Commerce, Essential Edinburgh, the George Street Association and the West End Traders have major concerns. Neil Renilson, the former chief executive of Lothian Buses, warned that plans to reduce the number of buses using Princes Street risk damaging city centre business.

Why was the full report of the Stakeholder Review of 29 November 2010 not included in the report or available to the general public? The summary (Appendix 2) is more graphic than content. As many of the action plans relate to this meeting it is crucial that the full report is widely available.

Where will the buses go?

2233 scheduled buses travel along Princes Street every day Monday to Friday between 0900 and 2100. (This excludes Edinburgh city tour buses) If buses are removed from Princes Street and are prevented from travelling along George Street where will they go?

456 scheduled buses travel along George Street every day Monday to Friday from 0900 until 2100. (This excludes Edinburgh city tour buses) If buses are removed from George Street and are prevented from travelling along Princes Street where will they go?

The rerouting of buses is crucial. This needs to be resolved before any action plans affecting pedestrianisation of George Street and Princes Street is agreed.

Why will a city wide review of the bus network/provision, so that long term alternative routes may be considered for buses

that access Princes Street, not be completed until 2015? Surely this was done as a key part of the Tram Project and is available now? The results of this is required before buses are removed from either Princes Street or George Street.

Why should those who will be affected by the consequent environmental factors tolerate them for years whilst the Council 'review and monitor their impact'? Section 5 Environmental Impact says:

'5.1 Changes to the arrangement of public space would improve the public realm and environment of Edinburgh's city centre. It is also likely to improve air quality through changes in motor traffic movements in the city centre.

5.2 Changes to the city centre would have the potential to affect other areas of the city. Environmental impacts would be considered as part of a project review and monitoring process.'

Yes, air quality is likely to improve in the city centre. And yes, air pollution, noise and vibration will increase in those areas forced to take the displaced traffic. To propose that these environmental impacts will be considered as part of a project review and monitoring process is completely unacceptable. CEC already have ample evidence to demonstrate the problems caused by traffic pollution, they do not need a few more years to 'consider' the environmental impacts.

6. What are the financial implications of the Appendix 4 Action Plans? Paras 4.2, 4.3, 4.4 acknowledge that there will be financial implications but propose 'further studies and analysis'. At a time of financial difficulty surely all projects must be accompanied by detailed costings and benefits. Failure to provide 'best value' would mean the Committee failing to meet one of its responsibilities. The public are highly sceptical due to the debacle with previous city centre initiatives and the tram project.

7. At a time of financial constraint how can these action plans, immediate and longer term, be classed as high priorities for the City of Edinburgh?

For hundreds of years Edinburgh has been 'a city of the senses, a place for people.' Yes, it must evolve but its city centre must not be allowed to develop by stealth into a version of a Disney 'Magic Kingdom'.

The front page of Project Edinburgh's report on Public Space Public Life, 2008 summarises the position clearly:

"When you work in a historical city centre, instead of worrying about the lack of freedom you should be grateful for restrictions. Creativity doesn't need freedom, it needs rules"

(Renzo Piano, FT March 22, 2008)

If, as a member of the Policy and Strategy Committee, you really care about the future of Edinburgh, I urge you to ask Officials searching questions and not to approve recommendations A,B and C until you have received satisfactory answers.

I await your response.

Yours sincerely

Richard Wood

They must have listened to this and other objections. The decision of the Council Committee was to have further consultation before taking any decision on the matter.