

Residents say New Town traffic diversions are a nuisance



We all know that for some time now the city has been a network of traffic diversions with consequent noise and mess. So what can you do about it? Well this week there are two things you might be able to do.

The first is that there will be a meeting held in the City of Edinburgh Council's Waverley Court offices at Market Street tomorrow evening 9 October 2012 at 7.30pm for any city traders affected by tram works. The meeting is also open to members of community councils who are interested in attending, or who have been invited. Tram staff will be on hand to answer any queries you have. Perhaps you might share any queries you are thinking of asking with us in our comments section below? The meeting is not open to members of the public.

The second is that if you live in certain streets in the New Town you are invited to report sightings of HGVs using the city centre diversion, and these vehicles will now be invited to take another route through the city to try and reduce noise and damage to roads and buildings.

In the New Town the chat on the street today is very much about the traffic diversions put in place to accommodate tram works in York Place. There are now more cars and lorries using the diversion route from Queen Street by way of cobbled New Town streets, and eastwards to the Picardy Place roundabout and Leith Street. Our photo shows a motorbike involved in a traffic collision on Abercromby Place with a small van just

after the diversion came into effect.

At the Dublin Street/Albany Street/Abercromby Place junction the priority has been changed which appears to make it easier for the traffic to speed along the lengthy stretch of city centre streets largely unimpeded. Previously, the traffic had to give way to other vehicles crossing Dublin Street. The two temporary pedestrian crossings at Abercromby Place and Albany Street do little to stop the flow of traffic regularly enough to make any real difference.

The matter of traffic has been discussed by the New Town Community Council at its regular monthly meetings. [At the meeting in August the Transport Convener brought along her staff to explain what the traffic diversions would mean for residents.](#) This included showing off a 'modelling' of the ways that the traffic would move around the city when traffic is rerouted. Some New Town residents who attended the meeting simply did not believe the council's data about the average speed of cars and lorries on this route which was said to be an average of 23 mph.

Ian Mowat is chair of the Community Council. He put an update out to all residents in the area after the community council meeting just last week, part of which we reproduce here:-

A meeting of the Community Council was held on Monday October 1st.

The key items were as follows:

1. On Saturday September 29th a part of Broughton Street was closed to enable the ducting to be installed to enable traffic lights at the junction of Broughton St and Albany St. Now that this work is complete, the installation of the lights should take place by Siemens within the next week or so- it is understood they will be operational on October 11.

2. The pedestrian crossing at Abercromby Place will be investigated by the Tram team to see if the crossing time can be extended.

3. The Council have confirmed that from late November

general traffic will be signed to use North and South St David's Street, the east end of Princes St/Leith Street, as the alternative to York Place. We await confirmation that the new arrangements will be reviewed by the Council after they have been up and running for one month – i.e. in January 2013 – to ascertain whether parking could be reinstated in Albany Street and Dublin Street and the altered junctions returned to their previous configuration.

The next meeting is on Monday 5 November 730pm at the community centre at Broughton St Mary's Church, Bellevue Crescent (entrance by gate on right hand side). Local residents are welcome to attend.

One Albany Street resident explained:-“I totally agree with observations on the danger this traffic presents. This morning I stood and watched a car overtaking a fast moving lorry headed West-East. Unbelievable.

My biggest fear is that some, if not much, of this current situation remains a permanent fixture in the area then perhaps damage to listed buildings is the only thing that will hold power against people (at the council) who refuse to take any other points into consideration. As yet, I've heard no commitment to changing the parking back to end-on and narrowing Albany again nor changing the priority of the Dublin-Abercromby junction.

As city dwellers we know what it is like to work, live and shop in the area. It used to be a real pleasure to go about business in what was a beautiful city. Wherever we turn, we are living in a depressing building site with ugly and untidy work areas and we residents in these traffic affected streets have even more to contend with.”

Anecdotal evidence has brought out many instances of traffic speeding in the area, which is dangerous to all other road users. Alastair Allanach who is Secretary of the Northumberland Street Association said:-” 20 mph signs have been painted on the road in Northumberland Street, and this has served to slow some drivers down from 40mph plus to 35mph.

This is, I suppose, progress.”

Other residents have voiced concerns over the dangers of trying to park in residents’ parking spaces with the traffic approaching behind, as well as difficulties in crossing the streets and getting in and out of cars.

☒ City Centre councillor, Joanna Mowat is trying to assist in redirecting some of the heavier traffic away from the area, and wrote the following to residents this morning:-

“Further to my email last week regarding the installation of the traffic lights, I have spoken with the Council officers dealing with the traffic and asked how HGVs could be encouraged to use the new diversion route which will be Queen Street, South/North St David Street, Princes Street, Leith Street and vice versa and will be signed as the diversion route from the end of November.

I know it is the HGVs which cause most noise and vibration and the officers have agreed that if there are companies regularly using the route they would be happy to contact these companies and advise them to use the South/North St David Street diversion. However, to do this we need to identify the HGVs regularly using the route. We would be most grateful if you could email the names of any companies regularly using the route to trams@edinburgh.gov.uk who will collate the information and contact the HGVs to ask them to use the alternative route.

Unfortunately we don’t have any powers which could prevent HGVs using this route so will have to try and work with the Companies that regularly use it to ask them to use the alternative diversion route, and if we have these companies identified we can do this but will need to know who is using the route.

I hope you will be able to help us with this.”

Work is being carried out in York Place which is now only open to buses from Elder Street going east to Picardy Place roundabout. The noise and pollution from the roadworks is one problem for residents, but the increased traffic on the diversion route is another.

As well as this there is the matter of speed to consider. The 20mph which is now painted on all the affected New Town streets is, it transpires, only an advisory. The imposition of a new speed limit would take a lengthy Traffic Regulation Order process. It seems, according to one reader, that this means all drivers simply ignore the signs. The New Town resident said:-“I’ve been speaking (via mail) to Chris Highcock (a council officer) this week regarding the volume and speed of this traffic. In particular, on the subject of the painted 20mph on the road surfaces, I’ve learned from the police that these 20s are merely advisory and not enforceable in any way. I couldn’t understand why the speed was not one bit different post sign-painting, and why nothing was being done to apprehend ‘speeders’. Our areas are 30 zones and as such the police tell me that there is nothing that can quickly be done now to make any official reduction, other than by this lengthy TRO business.”

Adam Bojelian is a young wheelchair user who lives on Albany Street, and he is very badly disturbed by the increased traffic. His mother Zoe said:-“Adam said the traffic is really continues all night long so it stops him from sleeping.

“This is particularly bad for him as it causes him to have seizures. I did contact Edinburgh but they said they do not have to do a risk assessment despite Adam being a “vulnerable child” as it is a temporary change. I haven’t had the chance to check whether this is correct.

“I would also add that at times there is a constant stream of cars doing U-turns outside our house. Some misjudge the turn and end up on the pavement. I have already seen a couple of

minor crashes, but I am expecting more and much worse, especially when the bad weather starts. It is a cliché, but it really is an accident waiting to happen.”

Broughton Street was closed completely earlier in the summer but was then re-opened on 14 July 2012. Now it is only the lower part of the street between Albany Street and London Street which is currently closed, and a new set of traffic lights is to be installed at the Broughton Street/Albany Street junction by Thursday of this week. It is hoped that this might slow the traffic, even a little.

Another local asked whether the new traffic lights might result in some or all of the heavy traffic being diverted away from Abercromby Place and Albany Street, and asked:-“This week we’ve been having chunks of mortar falling to the basement from parts of our building and are currently investigating. It would seem that the facade has been subject to wind and rain aplenty over the years and so we are highly suspicious that the new and ‘unusual’ vibrations from this heavy fast traffic is the cause.”

The Council have advised another of our readers of the changes which will take place next month:-“The restrictions on South St David Street will remain only until the works at South St Andrew Street are completed in late November. At that point in time the signed diversion route for the New Town will be removed, and diverted traffic will be sent past York Place via Princes Street.

At that point, whilst we would anticipate a large proportion of traffic following the new signed routes, it is likely that some residual traffic will remain on the New Town diversion as this route. We will continue to monitor flows and speed on Albany, Northumberland and on Great King Street until the tram works on York Place are complete.”

Over the last few days a new traffic monitor has appeared on

Abercromby Place which will count traffic numbers at least. But locals are keen for the speeding traffic to be brought to a halt.

We have taken some snippets of video on different dates which we reproduce for you here:-