

Transport Committee to look at proposals for City Centre



The council's Transport Committee will meet next week and one of the reports on their agenda will ask them to turn their attention to building a vision for the city centre

Councillors are to be asked to approve the start of a public consultation exploring a proposed scheme aimed at making Edinburgh's City Centre more accessible and attractive, particularly for pedestrians.

The need to enhance pedestrian space in the City Centre was a particular finding of a report commissioned by the the Council in 2010 by Gehl Architects, entitled "Edinburgh Revisited: Public Space, Public Life".

Now, with the tram project progressing well in line with its revised schedule and revised budget, the Council is seeking to maximise the opportunities this creates to improve the pedestrian environment and space in the City Centre so that it can be made more attractive as a place in which to live, work, shop and socialise.

Trams are due to begin passenger services by summer 2014 at the latest. The Council has identified a number of benefits to the movement of traffic which this change could realise, including:

- improved quality of pedestrian experience in the core City Centre area
- improved access to the City Centre;
- increased space for pedestrian and other uses;
- opportunity for dedicated cycle provision in the area; and
- reduced detrimental impact of vehicles on the City Centre environment.

A proposed scheme has been developed for public consultation, aimed at achieving the Gehl Architects report's call for the City Centre to become "a place more accessible for all".

The scheme focus on managing traffic movements differently and creating more space for pedestrians and cyclists.

The proposed scheme:

- splitting bus services so they run eastbound on George Street and westbound on Princes Street;
- buses, cycles and taxis on Princes Street in a westbound direction only, on the south carriageway;
- general traffic, including taxis, on George Street in an eastbound direction only;
- creating dedicated two-way cycle lanes on George Street, the National Cycle Route;

A report on the proposed scheme will be considered by the Transport and Environment Committee on Tuesday 19 March 2013.

If approved, a public consultation will be conducted over a six week period and the outcome will be reported back to the above Committee with recommendations on the further development and implementation of a preferred scheme and the preferred scheme would then be implemented on a trial basis.

The proposed scheme has been shaped by a working group chaired by Planning Convener Councillor Ian Perry.

Councillor Perry said : "We want to encourage more people to come into the City Centre, whether it's to shop, relax, work or socialise. It's about making sure the City Centre continues to thrive both as a leisure, business and tourism destination and as an attractive place for people to live in. One of the key things I'm interested in is creating a more 'mixed use' Princes Street, with more residential properties and a variety of restaurant, cafe and bar spaces at ground level, so that the street is bustling at night as well as by day.

“The proposed scheme is just a starter for ten – we’ll make the final plans for the trial once the consultation feedback has been reviewed.”

Councillor Lesley Hinds, Transport and Environment Convener, said:- “Edinburgh has a real ‘living city centre’, with people living cheek by jowl with a mixture of retail, bars, restaurants and so on. The challenge is to make sure we cater to everyone’s needs and encourage people to come into the heart of the city by enabling them to choose a variety of ways of travelling there, whether it’s on foot, by bike, in their car or by using public transport like trams, taxis and buses. We’re doing this consultation now so that any changes can be brought in in a joined up way so that they’re in place ready for the start of tram passenger services.”

Andy Neal, Chief Executive of Essential Edinburgh, said: “Working together, the public and private sectors can create a much more vibrant and exciting future for our city centre. We will be working hard with all interested parties in ensuring that our levy-payers – around 600 businesses in the city centre – have a strong voice in shaping that future, in this case through improving access and the pedestrian spaces and enhancing the experience of walking around our city centre. Everything that is being discussed, in particular around mixed use on Princes Street as opposed to its present state of being hugely focused on retail, and bringing the street to life at night and in the evenings, is very much in line with our Vision document.”

David Birrell, Chief Executive of Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce, said:- “The city is on the cusp of a new era. Change in the city centre is inevitable. Trams are, in effect, a catalyst for that change. There is a clear opportunity to enhance how Edinburgh City Centre works for all those who use it – businesses, residents, shoppers and visitors. We’d urge our members to have their say in a consultation. Let’s make the most of this opportunity.”

Key Points

- Tram project completion represents a unique opportunity to improve traffic movement and enhance accessibility in Edinburgh's City Centre
- Focus on making the City Centre "a place accessible for all"
- Proposals for consultation include reconfiguring traffic movements, eg have buses running eastbound only on George Street and westbound only on Princes Street; and the development of George Steet as preferred location for the primary cycle route