

Open Streets – the possible routes revealed

The council has revealed the draft route for the first three Open Street events it is planning– as health campaigners have backed the project that will give people “much-needed breathing space” in the Capital.



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Streets will be handed over to pedestrians and cyclists once a month in an 18-month trial of the council’s Open Streets project. By the end of the trial, the council hopes to close an “aspirational loop” of the Old Town, taking in the Royal Mile, Holyrood Road, Cowgate and Johnston Terrace.

The first three events, on Sunday 5 May, Sunday 2 June and Sunday 7 July will run from 12pm until 5.30pm after the original 10am start time was revised due to “concerns about potentially restricting access to places of worship”. The introduction of parking charges on a Sunday has met with similar opposition by churches seeking to retain free parking for their parishioners.

The council confirmed “further discussions with key groups will take place to inform timing decisions for later phases”.

Subject to traffic regulation orders and discussions with emergency services, the Royal Mile will be barricaded to traffic from the Lawnmarket all the way down to the Holyrood roundabout outside the Scottish Parliament. St Giles Street, Cockburn Street, Cranston Street, Niddry Street and part of New Street and Blackfriars Street will also be open to pedestrians.



Victoria Street will be included in the pilot project
In a separate closure, Victoria Street and the north side of the Grassmarket will also be included in the first three events.

The Open Streets event will not take place in August and will then be reviewed by councillors, before plans are drawn up for further events later in the year.

Transport and environment convener, Cllr Lesley Macinnes, said: “The introduction of Open Streets events is part of our overall aim to make the city centre a more relaxing, healthy

and liveable place.

“I have no doubt that actions to reduce the volume of polluting vehicles on our streets will have a positive impact on air quality, along with people’s enjoyment – there’s a reason Paris’ equivalent event translates to ‘Paris Breathes’.

“We’re now working towards the first Open Streets Sunday in the Capital, and have been talking with residents, community groups, businesses and universities to find out what local people want to see animating these newly-open spaces – and there are lots of interesting ideas coming to the fore.”

During the first three events, “a programme of demonstrator days” will take place in order to “showcase what can be done with the space when it’s not dominated by traffic”. Ideas that could be brought forward in the demonstrator days include exploratory walks, bike trials, outdoor lessons, quiet spaces, picnics, pop-up gardens, performances, slow cycle races and games events.

The programme has been backed by the British Lung Foundation, which is also calling for low emission zone proposals, set to be tabled by the council in May, to be bold.

Joseph Carter, head of British Lung Foundation Scotland, said: “Temporary closure of city centre streets will help to reduce harmful vehicle emissions and give Edinburgh residents and visitors much-needed breathing space. This is an important opportunity to place a greater priority on the health benefits of clean air.

“We hope to see ambitious proposals for Edinburgh’s low emission zone in the coming months – proposals which should tackle pollution hotspots across the city by restricting the most polluting vehicles in these areas.

“Taking bold action now will give future generations the opportunity to breathe clean air with healthy lungs.”