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**STATUTORY CONSULTATION: Bristol Bridge Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO).**

(Reference: CAE/RGW/EP-1181)

January 2021

Bristol Civic Society (BCS) writes in support of the ETRO in respect of the Bristol Bridge and associated streets. The preference accorded to buses over private cars will reduce air pollution, promote active travel and create a more pleasant environment at the western end of Castle Park. The improvement in air quality in Baldwin Street is striking and will contribute to achieving air quality compliance, rectifying breaches sooner than might have been achieved otherwise.

However, we suggest that several issues merit consideration before the ETRO is made permanent, particularly since the pandemic has made assessment of the temporary scheme's impact more difficult. These issues include communicating how the ETRO contributes to Bristol's transport strategy; how air quality and traffic flows will be measured and assessed; how signage could be enhanced and how the public realm could be improved.

**Communication of how Bristol Bridge ETRO fits into Bristol's overall Transport Strategy**

Some people will oppose the ETRO as it constrains their travel options, so it is vital to explain the bigger picture. We would strongly encourage the Council to explain to the public its overall transport strategy and plans, of which these changes are part, particularly in the context of hierarchies of road, prioritising buses, pedestrians and cyclists in order to meet the 2030 aims for zero emissions. We hope that the bus operators will use Baldwin Street and Victoria Street to create additional bus capacity and note the connection between the ETRO and the June 2020, *City Centre Framework*. This document sets out a clear hierarchy of road users (in Section 3) prioritising walking, cycling and public transport over other forms of travel, with use of the private car eighth, and lowest, in the hierarchy.

It would be useful to draw on this accepted strategy when communicating the rationale for the ETRO. Such an explanation is in the ETRO *Statement of Reasons*, which notes the prioritisation of 'Public Transport (Buses and Taxis) and Active travel (Cycling and Walking) at key points on the transport network centred on Bristol Bridge' but it would be useful to set this into context within the city's transport strategy.

The BCS supports this prioritisation and believes that there is much potential in keeping through traffic away from the city centre and on to appropriate distributor routes. This should make the city centre a much more pleasant environment, in keeping with its historic buildings and streets.

The city's transport strategy clearly needs to balance commitments to inhibit climate change emissions as well as improve air quality. Whilst the transport strategy, including measures to ease bus journeys and encourage active travel, is expected to reduce carbon emissions overall, there are some localised increases in emissions. For instance, we calculate that longer journeys of the 9,000 vehicles that used Baldwin Street before its closure could produce over a million miles of additional emissions a year. These balancing exercises should be explicitly recognised and addressed.

Ultimately, citizens and councils alike need a coherent plan to ensure that the 2030 zero emission aims can be reached, which must include climate-friendly travel options both around and within the city. We appreciate that these are difficult and contested questions for the Council but hope that we can have a clear route map to 2030 as soon as practicable. We understand that it is the Council's intention to write up the bigger picture of transport strategy and schemes, and then to promote it publicly. This is good to hear. It needs to be disseminated to a wide audience.

### **Monitoring and assessment**

Given the effect of the pandemic on the level of traffic and the changes in mode of transport and travel peaks, it is important to obtain the best possible data during the temporary scheme, efficiently monitoring and modelling the effects on the wider road and transport network in the city.

Clearly, it is critical that displaced traffic does not cause unacceptable levels of air pollution elsewhere, and this needs to be monitored. It would not be acceptable to simply shift the traffic and its associated air pollution to other parts of the inner-city road network affecting residences. As mentioned in the *Equalities Impact Assessment* (June 2020), some of these are residential areas with existing poor air quality, such as the Lawrence Hill and Ashley wards. There is housing, including student accommodation, on the stretch of main distributor route from Upper Maudlin Street to St James Barton roundabout, while houses on Coronation Road in the secondary area of impact could also potentially be affected. We hope that air quality in residential areas will be closely monitored.

We would also be more generally concerned if air quality were to deteriorate on the stretch of the main distributor route (Perry Road/ Upper Maudlin Street) past the Bristol Royal Infirmary (BRI). This raises the question whether Upper Maudlin should even be considered a distributor road given its gradient, proximity of tall buildings and location next to the BRI, but we recognise the lack of alternative routes.

More broadly, it would be helpful if the Council could make public an assessment of changes in traffic congestion, improvements or delays to bus services and changes in air quality when considering whether to make the ETRO permanent. The draft consultants' report due to be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board on 2 February 2021 calculates

(Fig.3.1, p27) that traffic flows have increased on some roads, including some residential roads, as a result of the Street Space and Fast Track schemes. This report inevitably has to work on assumptions, thereby potentially producing results that either under- or over-estimate displaced traffic. It makes no adjustment for Covid-19 related traffic reductions in its modelling results and shows an air quality compliance year of 2023, yet these shifts have the potential to affect some residents.

We appreciate that it is particularly difficult at the moment to anticipate future traffic flows with any precision. We understand that the City Council proposes to carry out further modelling work to better understand the Covid 19 traffic reductions and recently observed operational conditions (including congestion) on the road network. We hope that the Council will continue to be as transparent as possible providing information on air quality, estimated climate change emissions, traffic safety and congestion for all types of road users and residents.

### **Horsefair and Union Street**

Horsefair is the one street where vehicle access is being relaxed. This is a retrograde step for its impact on pedestrians and the public realm. We understand that it is a knock-on effect of closing the left-hand turn at the bottom of Union Street, which would otherwise be a potential rat-run to circumvent the closure of Baldwin Street. The impact on Horsefair should be monitored, and if excessive, the closure of Union Street to private traffic as well as Horsefair should be considered. Blue Badge holders would be exempted.

### **Redcliffe Bridge**

We note with concern the possible closure of Redcliffe Bridge for repair work, and the consequential re-opening of Bristol Bridge to all traffic. We note that it is possible that the Bristol Bridge TRO will be made permanent before the Redcliffe Bridge closure starts. If the closure takes place during the ETRO period, we would like to see how the Council would propose addressing any additional requirements for monitoring the ETRO following this closure. Whenever the Redcliffe Bridge closure occurs, it will lead to increased traffic over Bristol Bridge and delays to buses in particular, and the work of communicating the Bristol Bridge closure will have to be repeated after Redcliffe Bridge re-opens.

### **Signage**

We are concerned that improvements in signage will not be made until, and unless, the works are made permanent. In the meantime, the temporary signing leaves something to be desired and people are receiving penalty notices through innocent mistakes which inevitably causes a push back. We would urge an urgent look at improving signage for road users. For example, on Victoria St travelling north, the first indication that there is no access to Bristol Bridge is at St Thomas St. The next sign is at Bristol Bridge directing "other traffic" down Redcliffe Street (past

the new residential development). At the south end of Redcliffe Street there is then no signage at all, leaving diverted traffic to guess at which route to take.

Further signage would also be useful when leaving the Galleries car park, since turning right leaves drivers with few driving options. Signage could be installed inside the car park explaining to drivers that both Bridge Street and parts of Baldwin Street are closed indicating that turning left will usually be the quickest way to leave the area.

Before the scheme is made permanent, we would wish to see a comprehensive review of signage in the area with the aim of making it clearer to road users whilst reducing street clutter.

### **Public realm improvements**

We would strongly encourage the City Council to invest in public realm improvements in the area of Bristol Bridge in order to make walking and cycling a more pleasant experience and to enhance the attractiveness of such a historic part of the city. We feel there is considerable potential to do so with the redevelopment of the Mary le Port site and the closure of Bristol Bridge to general traffic. We would support introducing a high-quality upgrade of the public realm around the old High Cross site which would build on the improvements to the Corn Street area.

In particular, in any redesign we would like to see properly segregated cycle ways and greater priority given to pedestrians.

### **Conclusion**

Bristol Civic Society supports the ETRO given its aim to improve the environment of the city centre and encourage walking and cycling. However, before any scheme is made permanent, we would wish to see a robust assessment of the effects on alternative routes and some reassurance that congestion and air pollution are being reduced across the network rather than pushed elsewhere in the city. A strategy to reduce car use in the run up to 2030 is clearly critical. Signage is also a concern, both currently and in the longer term, and we would ask that urgent attention is paid to improvements now. We would urge the City Council in the event of a permanent closure of Bristol Bridge to ensure a significant improvement in the public realm in the area building on the success of the Corn Street area. The Civic Society would be happy to work with the Council on such improvements.