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Final

## **Bristol Civic Society response to the City Centre Transport scheme consultation**

27 September 2024

### 1 Introduction and summary

Bristol Civic Society is pleased to see a wide-ranging scheme that aims to improve transport infrastructure in a number of places in the city centre. It is a big scheme, in a vital part of Bristol, and such schemes come rarely. It is an opportunity.

Whereas some stakeholder responses will speak for a single transport mode only, the Society has a broader remit. In this response we aim to consider the overall balance between the different transport modes across the whole scheme, just as the Council has to do. Finding the right balance is not easy. This forms the major part of our response. We then go on to comment on specific elements of the scheme. There are differences of view in the Society group that has appraised the scheme; where this is the case the response uses the phrase “Some would argue for ...” or similar.

The new rapid transit route across the city centre has had a major impact on the design choices in the Broadmead area. This response discusses the pros and cons of those changes.

The Council’s adopted transport policy is to change the roads to help support public transport and active travel. It seems clear that in practice road-space tends to get allocated to buses first. Only in Broadmead would road-space be taken away from general motor traffic. As in other schemes, there are some improvements in provision for active travel modes, but in many places the provision for active travel modes would remain compromised. Our biggest concern is the impact of so many more buses on Nelson Street.

This consultation is about transport and movement, but place matters too. The Society’s holistic viewpoint covers place just as much as movement. We are very concerned about Redcliffe Way. The plans would compromise its spatial development as a dramatic link between the station and town of the sort found in many European cities.

Different design choices could have been taken. These plans were conceived during the previous Council administration, and may have been different if the current administration had influenced them. With the severe time pressures on the ‘CRSTS’ schemes, of which this is one, there is probably a heavy constraint on making major changes to the scheme now, but we have not constrained our comments because of that.

### 2 The balance between different transport modes

#### 2.1 The overall aims and methods

The Bristol Transport Strategy and the sub-regional Joint Local Transport Plan both adopt a strategy of supporting improved public transport and active travel, and reducing reliance on the car. In the context of increasing car ownership, the limited road space and the greater road-space

efficiency of non-car modes, and the net zero imperative, this must be the right approach. This scheme and other recent corridor schemes reflect that approach.

Buses need dedicated road-space in order to ensure the service is quick and reliable, thus encouraging an increase in passengers. Cyclists need segregated road-space to make the route feel safe, which encourages more people to cycle. (Whilst national LTN 1/20 guidance allows shared space in some locations, it is not appropriate in city centre locations where numbers of existing and potential cyclists are high.) Pedestrians, including disabled and sight-impaired people, need safe crossings and generous public realm away from the noise and pollution of other traffic.

The Society supports these strategies and road-space aims. (See our [manifesto](#).)

When it comes to deciding the road-space required for motor traffic, there are two approaches. One approach is 'Plan and Provide', where provision is based on the measured/estimated 'demand'. But in a city centre situation, the 'demand' will always exceed the available space. The alternative approach is 'Decide and Provide', in which you decide how the road-space should be allocated and you let private motor traffic find its own level within the space allocated to it. The objective of reducing car-dependence probably implies that such an approach is necessary, but it hits the practical realities of congestion and grid-lock at least in the short-term, and the political realities of a public that does not understand the rationale of the transport strategy and has not bought into it.

## 2.2 Alternative more radical schemes

In a more radical scheme, general motor traffic would be constrained more. The closing of Bristol Bridge to general motor traffic was an important improvement, but further measures could be considered.

Whilst the Council's stated intention, in the Bristol City Centre Public Realm and Movement Framework 2012 – PR&MF, has been to create a 'traffic cell' approach within the inner-loop formed by the A4044, A370 and A38, closing off through-routes so that entry and exit is only possible from the same point on the inner loop, the rat-run from Old Market roundabout to Redcliffe Way and Redcliffe Hill is retained. In the PR&MF, both roads were within the traffic cell area, but this was changed in the 2020 City Centre Framework. There has long been an aspiration to transform Redcliffe Way into a more human scale environment, and yet these proposals retain a dual carriageway on both Redcliffe Way and on Redcliffe Hill, with one lane for buses, and the other for private motor traffic using the route through from Bedminster Bridges. Some would argue for keeping through general motor traffic to the inner loop, ie from Temple Way via the Bath Bridges roundabout to York Road and Clarence Road to Bedminster Bridges roundabout.

Some would like also to route all buses round Broadmead on the inner loop, ie from Haymarket via the St James Barton roundabout and Bond Street to and down Temple Way, and then routing traffic down Temple Way. This would keep both Nelson Street and Penn Street free of buses.

Some would like to see private motor traffic within the inner loop limited to a single lane (each way) and the freed up road-space given over to pedestrians and cyclists. It is being done on Park Row/Upper Maudlin Street. The Coronation Road part of the inner loop is single carriageway. But clearly on Bond Street and on Temple Way the 'Plan and Provide' approach is being defeated by the current volumes of traffic. Maybe any reduction in the number of lanes will have to await downgrading of the M32.

Any of these proposals would have at least a short-term impact on general motor traffic and congestion. The impact could be mitigated by potential greater use of freed-up buses and route-enabled active travel. The Council would need to take account of the views of businesses and residents that use the city centre, and the impacts on the city's social and economic life.

### 2.3 The proposed scheme

When it comes down to the allocation of limited road space in practice, it gets more difficult. In the Council's recent schemes, when the share of road-space on the major roads is reviewed, it is clear that road-space tends to get allocated to buses first. But this can often mean that the space left for active travel modes is insufficient to make improvements.

We now consider the impact of the scheme on different modes:

Examples of speeding up bus routes:

- the new north/south cross-city rapid transit route, using Penn Street, with other bus routes removed from Penn Street to help free up the rapid transit bus
- bus routes 8, 9, 6, 7, 42, 43, 44, 45, which all go from the Centre to Old Market roundabout, would go via Nelson Street, Fairfax Street, Broad Weir etc instead of via the ring road.
- the new west/west rapid transit route, with fewer other buses on Baldwin Street and Victoria Street to help free it up

Examples of slowing down bus routes

- bus service 72 going south would use the ring road via Old Market roundabout instead of the more direct route via Victoria Street.

It is not clear how services which currently use the right turn from Lower Maudlin St into Bridewell St will be affected. If they are forced to turn left and use St James Barton roundabout, this would be a retrograde step.

There are some other bus routes being changed, but it would appear from the consultation route diagram that overall journey times will remain similar to currently. (This assumes that Nelson Street and Fairfax Street can cope with the huge increase in the number of buses.)

Examples in the scheme where general motor traffic would be more constrained than at present are:

- general motor traffic would be banned from Union Street, The Horsefair and Penn Street
- at Bedminster Bridges roundabout, certain turning movements would be constrained.
- (in the City Centre Development and Delivery Plan (CCDDP), Newgate would be pedestrianised between the top of Union Street and the junction with Fairfax Street, but this is not mentioned in the consultation.)

Examples in this scheme where provision for active travel modes is a significant improvement are:

- pedestrianising The Horsefair and Penn Street.
- segregated cycle routes on Penn Street/Lower Castle Street and on Broad Weir
- improving the pedestrian route across Bedminster Bridge, away from general motor traffic
- the segregated cycle route along Temple Way
- the segregated cycle route along Penn Street and Lower Castle Street
- the segregated cycle route on Lewins Mead

Examples in this scheme where provision for active travel modes is compromised are:

- whilst the proposed routing of many more bus routes via Nelson Street and Fairfax Street works well for buses, it is awful on Nelson Street for pedestrians and cyclists. This is even though Nelson Street is designated by the Council as a primary pedestrian route.
- Bond Street has six traffic lanes, yet there is still not enough space for cyclists, who have to take a complicated back-route. And the crossing by McDonalds has to remain two-pass because the six-lane highway is too wide for single-pass.
- no improvement is proposed to the crossing of Temple Way on the route through from Broad Weir towards Champion Square – a significant desire line and a primary pedestrian route, and a cycle route.
- the St James Barton roundabout is not to be reconfigured. There was an unpublished proposal to fill in the sunken Bearpit, remove one side of the roundabout and create new public realm, but it seems that this has not made it into the plans. This would have made the pedestrian and cycle routes that cross the safer and area more pleasant.
- the huge footprint of Redcliffe roundabout would remain, retaining the awkward north/south routes for cyclists and pedestrians from Redcliffe Hill to Redcliffe Street.
- Redcliffe Hill retains its dual carriageway, for buses and motor traffic, whilst the cycle route retains its awkward line away from the carriageway in front of the Mercure Hotel.

### 3 Consideration of place

#### 3.1 Public realm improvements

This consultation is about transport and movement, but place matters too. As the Society's manifesto says: "The street environment matters. They are places where we meet and they provide both backdrop and context for buildings. Given their importance, too many of our streets are unappealing and even alienating. We support initiatives to keep our streets clean, safer to use, and free of unnecessary clutter and unsightly tagging. We want well-cared for streets that are welcoming to everyone."

Presumably in a later consultation we will see public realm improvements. The 2020 City Centre Framework indicates new street trees on Union Street, The Horsefair, Merchant Street, Nelson Street, Rupert Street, Lewins Mead, Penn Street, Broad Weir and Lower Castle Street. In the Broadmead area, the City Centre Framework cites various routes for public realm improvement, including Nelson Street, and the 2023 City Centre Development and Delivery Plan (CCDDP) developed this in more detail.

#### 3.2 Redcliffe Way

It has long been acknowledged that the city centre has 3 foci, each half a mile from the other - the Centre, Broadmead and Temple Meads - all needing to be connected by good routes through high quality places: These proposals compromise one of those routes for people on foot – Nelson Street (already mentioned), and compromise the opportunity to improve another as a place - Redcliffe Way. (The link from Temple Meads to Broadmead is unaffected by this scheme.)

Redcliffe Way is the main axis from the Centre, Harbourside and the West End to Temple Meads, which is becoming an ever more powerful public transport and business centre. Movement along this c10-acre strip of largely undeveloped land is the very successful Brunel Mile foot route and the

remains of the pre-war dual carriageway. This road is now little used by general traffic, except as an alternative through-route from Bedminster Bridges to Temple Way, but has long been protected by the Council as a useful reserve of road space considering the growing transport pressures around Temple Meads.

Dozens of spatial plans have been done for Redcliffe Way and it is included in the Temple Quay Enterprise Zone, but there is as yet no current plan, whilst the surrounding areas have enormous developments under construction now.

These consultation plans would retain existing road space, ignoring all the great possibilities for its spatial development as a dramatic link between the station and town of the sort found in many European cities. And the wide road barrier between north and south Redcliffe would remain. If this plan is built, it will reinforce the fear that the long planned improvements to Redcliffe Way will be lost.

#### 4 Overall assessment

So what is the overall balance sheet for these proposals? The movement analysis shows that the main benefits and disbenefits are:

- two new cross-city rapid transit bus routes
- a further part of Broadmead becomes pedestrianised but one of the main pedestrian routes to it becomes severely compromised
- a few extra constraints on private motor traffic
- some new segregated cycle routes
- cycle routes and walking routes in some places remain compromised.

A more radical scheme would have placed more constraints on private motor traffic and been bolder in tackling the active travel route compromises. It would be a political decision to be bolder. Making a feasibility judgement needs supporting by data on traffic flows for all modes, which we do not have.

Our biggest concerns are the impact of so many more buses on Nelson Street, and the lost opportunity on Redcliffe Way to improve it as a special route between two of the three city centre foci.

#### 5 Assessing particular choices made in these proposals

##### *The Horsefair and Penn Street*

Keeping buses to an inner ring around Broadmead, within 5 minutes' walk, is a good idea. Taking buses out of The Horsefair and Penn Street is necessary to allow for pedestrianisation. We support that.

##### *Union Street*

The proposals remove terminating buses from Union Street: all buses using Penn Street will be on through-routes. We support that. We agree that idling buses should come out of the shopping centre streets.

The routing of buses round Broadmead via Nelson Street, Fairfax Street, Broad Weir (with some continuing round to Bond Street), rather than Baldwin St, High St, Wine St and Union St, benefits Union Street: there will be fewer buses on Union Street, and no private motor traffic. (But this is at the expense of Nelson Street and Broad Weir).

Some however would argue that Union Street is part of Broadmead and should be pedestrianised, in which case the pedestrian link from Nelson Street to Broadmead would not be interrupted by Union Street.

Some would suggest the following alternative bus routing which would allow Union Street to be pedestrianised. Buses would use Fairfax Street in both directions, and buses to/from Wine Street would use Newgate (hence Newgate would not be pedestrianised, as is proposed as part of the Galleries scheme but not mentioned in the consultation). Access to Nelson Street would be via Bridewell Street in one direction and via Christmas Street in the other direction. On the face of it, this would require no major road infrastructure changes. This would however not provide a rapid cross-city route.

## 6 The new north/south rapid transit route across the city centre

The proposals to create a rapid transit route across the city centre dates back to the 2020 City Centre Framework. It is only in this scheme that the implications of that choice emerges.

As has been shown, making space for the new rapid transit route across the city centre has a lot of knock-on effects on other routes and other modes. Some would argue that the new rapid transit route should use the inner loop along with the other buses. This would obviate the need for a new junction where Union Street meets Haymarket.

The lack of detail in the consultation description of the new rapid transit route may have misled people. There is an existing rapid transit Metrobus service m2 that starts at the Long Ashton Park and Ride and circles the inner ring loop before returning. The consultation describes a new rapid transit route which also starts at the Long Ashton Park and Ride, and uses the same route with bus-protected road-space as the existing rapid transit service as far as Redcliffe roundabout, but from there continues northwards through the centre and up the M32. The new service therefore requires bus-protected road-space across the city centre, otherwise it will not be a 'rapid transit' route.

However, the consultation states "There are various options for the destination in the northeast of the city, which might include a new Park & Ride site, the University of the West of England (UWE) and/or Emersons Green." Without any further detail, this reference makes the new route sound aspirational and not certain to be delivered. It has been mooted to reduce the status of the M32, removing its motorway status, and make one lane bus-only and leave only one lane for motor traffic, but this is not yet decided and the timescale is unclear. The consultation does not mention this.

This lack of detail on the new route has made some people question the need for the new route to go through the city centre, necessitating a new junction. "If the scheme doesn't happen there's a lot of redundant infrastructure and lost opportunity to make the city centre a lot more pleasant."

No mention is made of whether the Metrobus route m1, which also currently goes from Redcliffe Hill to the M32, but which goes round the inner loop with other buses, would in future use the cross-

centre route. The City Centre Framework has it going round the inner loop.

## 7 Area by area

### 7.1 Broadmead area, including Bond Street

The consultation route diagram shows that (excluding routes not affected) the number of routes using Nelson Street would increase from 5 to 14, and the number on Fairfax Street would increase from 6 to 16. Can these streets cope with such a number of buses? Will congestion be caused by the sheer number of buses stopping at the stops closest to Broadmead ?

The re-routing of buses along Nelson Street and Fairfax Street, will have a knock-on effect on the pedestrian environment. The large increase in the number of buses will be particularly detrimental to the primary pedestrian route along Nelson Street. Nelson Street is a primary pedestrian route between Broadmead and the Centre. It is designated as primary in the City Centre Development and Delivery Plan (CCDDP), the City Centre Framework, the Nelson Street Public Realm Strategy, and the Public Realm and Movement Framework.

We understand that keeping most local buses off Union Street is partly to allow freer passage for the rapid transit route. It is a choice what balance to go for between bus numbers on Nelson St/Fairfax St and High St/Wine St/Union St, and the balance could be changed. However, maybe there is an alternative to Nelson Street: some would suggest an alternative which would be that buses would instead come down Bridewell Street, not Christmas Street, in order to minimise their impact on Nelson Street. This would involve a reconfiguration of Lewins Mead and Rupert Street, making Rupert Street two-way for buses and Lewins Mead two-way for other traffic.

### 7.2 Bedminster Bridges

The proposal is to use one bridge for general traffic, and the other for buses, bikes and people on foot. This is a radical proposal, which clearly benefits public transport and active travel, which we support. It seems to work for general motor traffic, but there are constraints on certain turning movements, and route-finding may be difficult.

### 7.3 Redcliffe roundabout, Redcliffe Hill and Redcliffe Way

The proposals work for all modes but the north/south routes for pedestrians and cyclists are compromised, as described in section 2 above. Given the radical reconfiguration of Bedminster Bridges, it is ironic that a few yards away the two-lane Redcliffe roundabout is retained as it is. We are told that a wide roundabout is needed to accommodate bus movements, and the roundabout cannot be removed because of the cost impact of disturbing underground services. Retaining the trees on the roundabout is also a consideration.

We support the proposal to remove the central barriers between the dual carriageways on Redcliffe Hill.

### 7.4 Temple Way

We support the segregated cycle route on Temple Way.

Improvement of the crossing of Temple Way on the route through from Broad Weir towards

Champion Square should be considered, as included in the CCDDP. It is a significant desire line and a primary pedestrian route, and a cycle route.

## 8 General comments: evidence and data

Whilst we accept that there is a limit to the information that can be supplied in a public consultation at this stage of the scheme, we look forward to seeing the evidence and data that will eventually appear in the Business Case documents, for instance:

- data for existing and predicted general traffic flows, bus occupancy, cycle and pedestrian flows along affected routes. Some pedestrian flows will be generated to and from bus stops. The predicted flows should allow for the desired modal shifts, particularly to cater for the increased numbers of bus users that these measures are intended to support.
- assessment of displaced traffic and the effect elsewhere in the city (if a 'Predict and provide' approach is being taken).
- assessment of air and noise pollution from these proposals. For instance, air pollution could be considerable in the confined environment of Fairfax Street with increased use by buses, albeit mitigated once they are all electric.