

# TRANSform Scotland

*the campaign for sustainable transport*

## Aberdeen City Council 'Union Street Project' consultation response

2nd July 2004

### 1. General comments

- 1.1 We are unable to support the proposals set out in this consultation.
- 1.2 We take the view that action must be taken to reduce traffic levels in Aberdeen city centre, in order to meet the statutory requirements set out in the National Air Quality Strategy, and provide additional road space for the sustainable modes of transport. However we have no confidence that the 'Union Street Project' proposals will allow these objectives to be met.
- 1.3 Firstly, it is extremely strange that the consultation materials for proposals reputedly about pedestrianisation contain no reference to walking as a mode of transport.
- 1.4 Secondly, we are disturbed at the failure to guarantee that public transport use will not be reduced as a result of these proposals. Such an impact would run contrary to local and national policy objectives towards encouraging modal shift to public transport.
- 1.5 Thirdly, it is perverse that a project that is reputed to be about pedestrianisation requires the level of new inner-urban road-building set out in the proposals. We are unclear how road-building proposals of the scale envisaged here can do anything but further worsen the environmental conditions in the city and reduce the chances of the City Council meeting its own road traffic reduction targets.
- 1.6 Lastly, the proposals focus on infrastructure measures and contain no proposals for road traffic demand management measures such as congestion charging (as successfully implemented in London and due for implementation in Edinburgh). Any genuinely sustainable scheme to improve Aberdeen's urban environment would seek to manage road traffic levels through implementation of such measures.

### 2. Impacts on walking

- 2.1 Firstly, we find it entirely puzzling that a project that is reputedly based on providing additional space for pedestrians fails to mention walking as a mode of transport! We would remind you that walking remains the second most common mode of transport in Scotland and we would guess (based on evidence from other Scottish cities) that walking will currently be the predominant mode of transport on Union Street.

- 2.2 We endorse the need (highlighted in the 'Economic assessment' section of the consultation leaflet) for high quality design in any new pedestrianised areas. However, consideration must be taken not just of the technical and infrastructural aspects of pedestrianisation schemes but also the ambience of such spaces. Aberdeen City Council has, at best, a mixed record at delivering pedestrianisation projects.
- 2.3 We note also that the consultation leaflet fails to mention projected impacts on cycle use, re-routeing of existing cycle routes and impacts of new inner-urban dual-carriageway construction on the attractiveness of cycle use.

### **3. Impacts on public transport use**

- 3.1 We are disturbed that the only reassurance that the consultation leaflet can give regarding public transport services is that: "*Timetable and routing changes may lead to increased usage of [public transport] services*". This statement gives no guarantee that utilisation of public transport services will be at least maintained as a result of these proposals; indeed, the vagueness of this statement gives rise to the concern that public transport use might fall as a result of the Union Street Project proposals.
- 3.2 We find it bizarre and perverse that the consultation can guarantee that road traffic will increase as a result of the proposals but that public transport use may not. From the text of the consultation leaflet, it appears that the City Council is concluding that there will be road traffic growth in the City - and that extra road capacity will be provided in order to meet that increase - yet there is no expectation that public transport usage will rise as a result of the Union Street Project.
- 3.3 Union Street operates as the principal bus interchange in the city: it is in effect Aberdeen's bus station. We find it strange that the consultation does not present an option for maintaining bus access along Union Street, accompanied by pavement widening and a ban on general traffic use. This in essence summarises the proposals due for implementation by The City of Edinburgh Council for Princes Street in its Central Edinburgh Traffic Management (CETM) project. Edinburgh's Princes Street operates in a like manner to Aberdeen's Union Street as regards bus service patterns and interchange.

### **4. Traffic generation impacts**

- 4.1 We note the following statement (from the 'Traffic modelling' section of consultation leaflet):

"The aim [of the traffic modelling] was to achieve a traffic system which can cope with the vehicles displaced from Union Street *and the traffic generated by the new developments.*" [our emphasis]

In light of Aberdeen City Council's own policies towards road traffic reduction, we find it disturbing that this project - and in particular one that has been billed principally as a pedestrianisation project - should be

being specifically designed to cater for new traffic-generating developments. We regard this as perverse and entirely unsustainable.

- 4.2 The Berryden Road dual-carriageway proposal can be expected to be especially damaging in this respect. If delivered in tandem with the proposed Third Don Crossing, it can be expected that this part of the proposals will lead to further generation of road trips into an already congested city centre road network.
- 4.3 Secondly, it is unclear how the provision of new north-south road capacity will assist with handling vehicles displaced from the (east-west) Union Street.
- 4.4 Lastly, we would note that the proposed new South College Street dual-carriageway and proposed new Berryden Road dual-carriageway run broadly parallel to the mainline rail line through the city. We find it curious that priority is to be given to road-building along these corridors given the long-standing failure of Aberdeen City Council to deliver cross-city 'Aberdeen Crossrail' local rail services.

## **5. Recommendations**

- 5.1 Present robust information on the volume, and modal share, of walking trips that would result from these proposals.
- 5.2 Present robust information on the volume, and modal share, of public transport trips that would result from these proposals.
- 5.3 Bring forward, and consult on, alternative proposals including an option for maintaining bus access along Union Street, accompanied by pavement widening and a ban on general traffic use.
- 5.4 Delete the Berryden Road dual-carriageway proposal from this project – or rename the 'Union Street Project' as 'Aberdeen Inner-Urban Road-Building Project' or something more suitable.
- 5.5 Implement the perpetually-delayed 'Aberdeen Crossrail' project as a priority alternative to the above road project.
- 5.6 Bring forward, and consult on, alternative proposals including road traffic demand management measures such as congestion charging for the Aberdeen city centre area.

## **TRANSform Scotland**

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