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The Society's response to planning application 14/01187/FB - Construction of North Fringe to Hengrove Package (NFHP) MetroBus: A rapid bus route between Bristol North and East Fringes to South Bristol via Bristol City Centre Promenade

1st May 2014

1 Introduction and summary of the response

The Society commented on the consultation documents of July 2012, confining itself to the Central Bristol zone 5 of the scheme, and met with representatives of the project team for BRT3 (as it was then called) in October 2012. The Society supports the scheme. In relation to the Centre Promenade, the Society limits its response to the refinement of aspects of the scheme. The Society's has substantial objections to the route through East Street and Bedminster Parade, which lies in the Bedminster Conservation Area. If the Council accepts the Society's suggestions there need be no delay in the planning process. The committee could accommodate the changes in some form of condition.

The Council has a once in a lifetime opportunity to fund a **place-making** development in a social and economically important part of the city. East Street/Bedminster Parade is as important to south Bristol as the Centre Promenade is to the city. A more imaginative approach is required. Both the visual and functional aspects of the proposed scheme would fall short of the standards that the Council has achieved in Whiteladies Road and will achieve in the Centre Promenade. The changes that the Society proposes to the enabling work in East Street/Bedminster Parade are relatively small when compared to the scheme as a whole.

The Society's main concern all along has been to ensure that enhancement of the city's heritage assets, place-making, and the needs of pedestrians and cyclists, are given proper consideration, and that the scheme is not solely bus-led. We support the Urban Design team's designs for the public realm of the Centre Promenade. We do not believe however think that the same thought has yet been put into the design of East Street/Bedminster Parade to ensure that the right balance has been made between the needs of buses, cyclist and pedestrians. The proposals are bus led.

The Society comments under the following headings

- Centre Promenade
- Baldwin Street
- Christmas Street
- East Street/Bedminster Parade

2 Centre Promenade

The Society supports the new public spaces (Magpie Park, Cenotaph area, Quay Head) at the north end of the Centre Promenade. It is not clear how much the new spaces will be used, but maybe their existence will over time generate activity.

The Society has consistently argued for **clearer segregation between pedestrians and cyclists** in the busy south section, and both cyclist's and walkers' organisations are arguing for it too. The current arrangement, which is not changed by the planning application, is not in line with Bristol Council's cycling policy, which is for segregated cycle lanes to encourage cycling by people of all levels of cycling confidence. Moreover, the levels of cycling and pedestrian traffic are both high, which reinforces the need to provide a segregated cycle route.

This is admittedly not easy to achieve, but should be attempted. The existing arrangement is that there is a cycling route along the west edge opposite the Hippodrome, but it is marked only by small pavement setts with a bicycle symbol. The Society supports the avoidance of signage clutter, but clearer delineation is required.

3 Baldwin Street

The Society supports the approach to the junction with Baldwin Street, both its simplifying alignment and the one-way turn to/from St Augustine's Parade, making the pedestrian approach to Corn Street safer and much more pleasant.

The complete closure to motor traffic of Baldwin Street where it meets the Centre Promenade would benefit the pedestrian experience of the public realm even more, and would be a huge place-making gain. In principle, the Society would welcome this, and in the longer term the Society may support this if it can be demonstrated that this could work as part of a city centre route network scheme.

4 Christmas Street

The Society welcomes the slight improvement in the pedestrian route from Christmas Steps to Christmas Street, through the "provision of a new signalised pedestrian crossing just to the north of the Christmas Steps junction, allowing people to cross more

directly to Christmas Steps via Froomsgate Park and St Bartholomew's Court". But more could be achieved. The Joint Local Transport Plan gives priority to pedestrians in the transport hierarchy, and so the route should follow more closely the natural pedestrian desire line. This could be done by moving the traffic lights a short distance.

5 East Street/Bedminster Parade

The route along East Street Bedminster affects the Bedminster Conservation Area and the setting of the nearby Grade II listed buildings and other unlisted buildings of merit. The Society supports government policy; proper road design is essential to the circulation of the city to promote a prosperous society. In this area the majority of road users will not be in private cars, and the design must balance the needs of all users including pedestrians.

5.1 Planning policy context - The Society makes its comments in the context of

National Planning Policy Framework – 35 – requires that: *"Plans should protect and exploit opportunities for the use of sustainable transport modes for the movement of goods or people. Therefore, developments should be located and designed where practical to*

-;
- *give priority to pedestrian and cycle movements, and have access to high quality public transport facilities;*
- *create safe and secure layouts which minimise conflicts between traffic and cyclists or pedestrians, avoiding street clutter and where appropriate establishing home zones;*
-"

Policy BCS10 - Development Principles – which requires development proposals to create places and streets where traffic and other activities are integrated and where buildings, spaces and the needs of people shape the area.

Policy BCS21 – Quality urban design – requires development (among other matters) *"to contribute positively*

- *to an area's character and identity, creating or reinforcing local distinctiveness,*
- *promotes accessibility and permeability by creating places that connect with each other and are easy to move through and*
- *delivers a safe, healthy, attractive, usable, durable and well-managed built environment."*

Policy BCS22 – conservation and the historic environment –requires *"development to safeguard or enhance heritage assets and the character of conservation areas and historic buildings."*

The analysis of the Centre Promenade in the Design and Access Statement (D&A) impressed the Society. Subject to the Society's suggested improvements, the scheme

strikes a balance between the competing interests for pedestrians and cyclists. Operationally and visually, the proposals apply the Council's planning policies.

5.2 The importance of East Street

Policy BCS1 makes economic and social regeneration of south Bristol a development priority. East Street is a primary character area within the Bedminster Conservation Area. East Street has survived the recent economic depression better than some other retail areas. Consistent with government policy, **BCS7** - 'Centres and Retailing', seeks to promote the vitality of this town centre. BCS7 classifies East Street as a 'Town Centre' retail area. The Bristol Citywide Retail Study (2006) indicated that the Council has an option to consolidate the town centre around East Street. East Street is one of Bristol's most important historic areas. Bedminster and south Bristol deserve the same level of attention that the Council has given to the Centre Promenade. The Society regrets that the spatial analysis and traffic redevelopment proposals for East Street fall short of the standard that the Council has set for itself in the Centre Promenade.

The Metrobus scheme brings a budget that gives the opportunity to make the same level of environmental and traffic management improvements to East Street as the Council proposes for the Centre Promenade. The budget gives the Council the opportunity to develop an imaginative road scheme in East Street to allow for the greater number of pedestrians that a successful placing making scheme will attract and the increasing number of cyclists that the Council's pro-cycling policies encourage. Traditional traffic engineering principles appear to lie behind the current proposals. This is the occasion for Bristol to promote itself as a leader in the adoption of the, no longer radical, principles of shared road space successfully introduced by many continental traffic authorities. The promotion of the new approach to city traffic management is inseparable from the image of Bristol as a 'Green Capital'. The Society makes the following criticisms of the current proposals.

5.3 Road widening and straightening

The traditional approach of traffic engineers to widen and straighten a road to increase capacity without introducing traffic calming measures is no longer acceptable in an area with a high density of cyclists and pedestrians. It has become conventional thinking that removing obstacles to increase traffic speed increases drivers' sense of 'possession of the carriageway' to the detriment and risk of other road users. The critical measure of road efficiency is the number of vehicles that the junctions can accommodate, not the width of the road. It should be the aim to widen pavements for pedestrians, not narrow them. Making pavements more attractive to pedestrians encourages people to choose to walk rather than use motor transport and supports increased footfall for traders.

It is unacceptable to remove the pavement from outside the Imperial Arcade. This pavement should be a feature in any new East Street road development. To remove the pavement would increase the probability of road accidents. Pedestrians who stepped through the arcade into the road would be concealed from vehicle drivers' view.

(See figure – 5 year accident locations sites below)

The pavement provides an alternative to pedestrians who find walking through the arcade after dark, when the shops are closed, threatening. The Society reminds the Council that it has closed various underpasses for that reason.

There is insufficient provision made for pedestrians to cross East Street. There is no crossing close to the Metrobus southbound bus stop. The accident record is already unacceptable. The Society urges the Council to produce a design to reduce the road space to two lanes to provide for protected bus stop pull-ins. The recent Whiteladies Road improvements provide extensive pedestrian havens and is an example of what the Council can achieve.

5.4 Bus shelters

The southbound bus shelter blocks five continuous shop fronts, of which two are Grade II listed, and harms their setting. A repositioning of the bus shelter should be considered in order to avoid this. Without other road improvements, the bus shelter would leave insufficient pavement space for pedestrians. The scheme should reconstruct the northbound bus pull-in, which should take greater account of the loss of pavement outside ASDA. For example, it is unrealistic to assess the pavement width with the picture of empty bike racks shown in the D&A illustration.

5.5 ASDA traffic management redesign

Since 1988, the current arrangements appear to have worked well-enough. The introduction of the Metrobus will not add significantly to the traffic in Bedminster Parade. The purpose of the proposed revised traffic flow is unclear. Is it to reduce the total number of vehicles that use East Street? Is it to remove the flow of vehicles leaving ASDA from crossing Bedminster Parade to travel south? If it is the second option, vehicles waiting to turn right into Boot Lane will probably increase Bedminster Parade traffic. The Society would accept the proposal if the intention is to reduce traffic volume in Bedminster Parade as part of an overall East Street shared space scheme. The Society is unaware whether there is a traffic study to show how ASDA exiting traffic, excluded from turning right into East Street, would behave.

(See figures – current and proposed ASDA exit strategy diagrammes below)



