



an independent force for a better Bristol

September 2017

## **Nelson Street plans**

### Introduction

This note records comments made by Bristol Civic Society on draft plans for Nelson Street. The plans are for changes funded by the Cycling Ambition Fund programme. These comments follow an on-site visit on 11th September 2017 by 5 of us.

We welcome the opportunity for improvements to Nelson Street that the CAF funding brings. We give comments on the plans for CAF-funded changes, but we do not confine ourselves to that. Our key comments on the imminent CAF-funded changes are:

1. Enhance the route on the north pavement of Nelson Street
2. Stop vehicles parking on pavements
3. Retain and increase the number of trees
4. Add 'landscaping' to enhance visual interest on the pavement
5. Reduce vehicle speeds
6. Restrict motor vehicles on Bridewell Street more than is currently proposed

Bristol Civic Society supports all the [comments made by Bristol Walking Alliance](#) dated August 2017. It repeats some of the BWA comments in order to reinforce them.

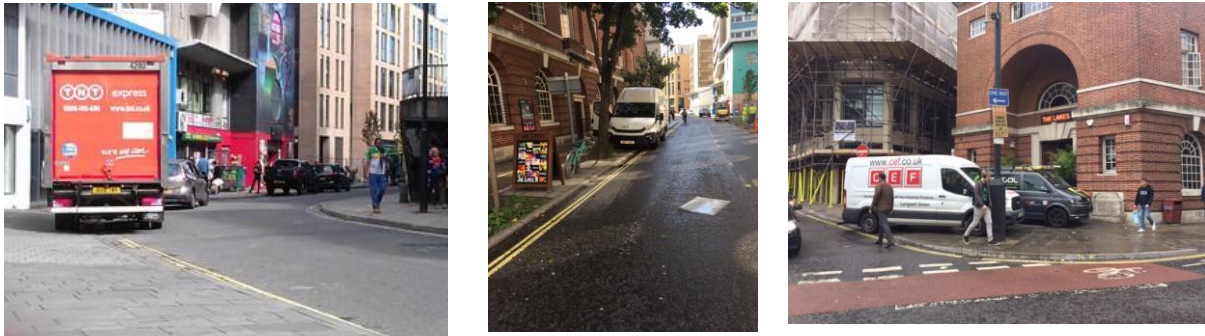
### The pedestrian experience

All 5 of us on the walkabout agreed on the poor pedestrian experience. Comments included: "It's SO noisy ... particularly the buses – what happened to electric buses?" "It is far busier than I thought." It was verified that buses average at more than one a minute, and sometimes come in 2s or 3s. One person said that he would never use Nelson Street, but instead uses Corn Street/Wine Street to go to Broadmead.

Nelson Street feels like a canyon, with tall buildings on both sides, and little relief from ground-floor active frontages. The only exceptions are the two new buildings which provide a comfortable width of pavement.

The experience gets even worse at the Broadmead end, with the high vehicle movement along Nelson Street complicated by vehicle crossing movements from/to Bridewell Street, All Saints' Street, Fairfax Street.

Pavement parking and illegal parking on double yellow lines is rife, thus increasing the feeling of motor traffic domination. See photos below.



All this in a street that is designated a primary walking route in planning policy (Central Area Plan). On a primary walking route, one expects to see design proposals for enhancing and prioritising the pedestrian experience. Instead, it feels in Nelson Street, as in so many other places, that pedestrians get what's left after the needs of other transport modes have been met.

### How to rescue Nelson Street

Faced with this dire experience, we should think as widely as we can how we can rescue this street - here are some possibilities. Some are more deliverable than others, and some have difficulties associated with them. But it's a difficult problem, so let's make sure we have considered everything.

**Change the bus routes.** The current high bus flows follow the decision to route buses via Christmas Street towards Broadmead. The recent Broadmead bus route review could have helped to change this by reversing the flow on the lower half of Union Street (Option B), but apparently the existing routing via Nelson Street provides a useful 'turning block' for some bus services, so Option E was chosen, and the Council has made a firm decision on this.

There is apparently no prospect of reviewing this in the soon-to-be-consulted City Centre Movement Strategy. One thought is to accept that heavy bus use makes Nelson Street unsuitable as a primary pedestrian route. But, regardless of planning policy, Nelson Street is de facto a primary pedestrian route. We should not concede that it is acceptable to have that number of buses going down it, and that is how the Society is likely to respond to the imminent CCMS consultation.

In the draft CCMS, Lewins Mead is proposed to be downgraded and will accommodate a segregated cycle lane, but why not move the buses and other motor vehicles from Nelson Street to Lewins Mead, and thus give room for pedestrians on Nelson Street?

Another alternative would be to reduce the number of routes using Nelson Street. If the number of buses per hour was reduced from 75 to say 15, the pedestrian experience would be very different.

Another alternative would be to direct all the buses via Baldwin Street. The Baldwin Street/High Street route would have the advantage that these roads are less enclosed than Nelson Street and Union Street, which would lessen the impact of noise and diesel exhaust. But this would adversely affect High Street and Wine Street, which also need to be good for pedestrians, with light traffic usage. And bus travel times would be longer.

**Which side of the road for pedestrians?** The north pavement is wider and sunnier between Christmas Street and Bridewell Street, and so should be prioritised for improvements. Unfortunately, the north side of the pavement becomes dire for pedestrians beyond Bridewell Street (narrow pavement, blank wall, bus stops), but crossing Nelson Street to the south side is particularly difficult at this point because of the flows of motor traffic from different directions. We can offer no solution for this other than to remove the traffic.

**A pavement on one side only?** Rather than provide an inadequate pavement on the south side, why not remove it altogether and provide a wider quality pavement on the sunnier north side? The need for access probably rules this out: the exit from The Lanes building at the All Saints Street end, and the access through St John's arch and to St Johns water conduit and crypt at the other end.

A variation on this proposal is to accept that the pavement on the south side is at a minimum width along most of its length, in order to gain width on the north side.

#### Detailed comments on the imminent CAF-funded changes

The following proposals should be more achievable within the current CAF-funded plans

##### 1. Enhance the route on the north pavement of Nelson Street

To encourage pedestrians to use the north side, the desire lines along Quay Street need to facilitate it. There should be a raised crossing (even a continuous pavement) across the mouth of Christmas Street.

The middle section on the south side could be reduced to the minimum width, so that the pavement on the north side at this point could be increased to the same width as outside the two new developments, thus making a continuous wide pavement on the north side.

##### 2. Stop vehicles parking on pavements

There is a need to stop vehicles parking on pavements. Infringements are too widespread to ignore them on this primary pedestrian route.

**Bollards:** The obvious solution is bollards. We suggest bollards along the length of the northern pavement between Christmas Street and Bridewell Street, in order to protect the

pedestrian space from motor vehicles. Bollards do however take up valuable space from the pavement width. The pavement could be widened slightly to accommodate the bollards: the road does not need to be two buses' width throughout its whole length.

**Enforcement of parking violations:** If the pavements are bollarded, then van drivers might choose to park in the road, thus disrupting traffic flow. Therefore Nelson Street needs to be a 'Clearway', and properly signed/lined as such (as red lines like London?). Can Nelson Street be made a priority for parking attendants?

### 3. Retain and increase the number of trees

We should avoid cutting down trees, and add new trees. They improve both the aesthetic AND the atmosphere. The new trees by the two new developments on the north side of the street are welcome. The three trees on the south side that face the chop to accommodate the cycle lane are good specimens, and should be retained if at all possible. Or if not, then replaced elsewhere in the street.

### 4. Add 'landscaping' to enhance visual interest on the pavement

Where the pavement is really wide, like outside the Unite housing where the unattractive concrete 'stools' are, put some proper hard/soft landscaping to provide visual interest.

### 5. Reduce vehicle speeds

We suggest a 5mph or 10mph zone. It is the acceleration of buses etc that causes much of the noise.

### 6. Restrict motor vehicles on Bridewell Street more than is currently proposed

It is proposed to make Bridewell Street one-way towards Nelson Street. From our observations, this will make little difference to traffic volumes, as most of the traffic is in that direction anyway. Indeed the volume of traffic in that direction is quite high, adding to the cross-flows at the junction with Nelson Street. There appears to be compelling evidence of a heavily used short-cut from Rupert Street through Bridewell Street, Broadmead, Fairfax Street to Newgate Street.

The Society suggests that Bridewell Street, which now has a substantial student population, should have further restrictions on motorised vehicle use, in one of the following ways:

- it could be pedestrianised. This option would re-route south-bound buses from Bridewell Street into Christmas Street with an appropriate restriction on other traffic.
- it could become a bus-only street.
- even if the street is left open for motor traffic, it would be made much quieter if it was one-way in the direction towards Rupert Street.

### 7. Other points

**All Saints' Street car park.** The siting of this car park creates unnecessary traffic movements, and it would help to remove it. We understand it is given over to contract

parking, for hotels and nearby employers, not shopper parking, so this perhaps means the traffic is created more at the beginning and end of day.

**The concrete stair.** Does the removal of the concrete stair have to await the redevelopment of the adjacent site? Even if there is a contractual constraint, the owner might agree to remove it? It is not used by anyone, and it makes no sense that it continues to impinge on cycle/foot paths

**Bus stops.** Where the pavement is narrow, do bus stops have to be quite so deep that they completely obstruct the pavement? Could they not be set against the back of the pavement, with an open front ('gallows' support / canopy style), so people just walk in front of those waiting for a bus?