

Transport and Environment Committee

10.00am, Tuesday 14 January 2014

George Street Trial - Festival Layout

Item number	7.12
Report number	
Wards	11 – City Centre

Links

Coalition pledges	P24 , P28 and P31
Council outcomes	CO19 and CO20
Single Outcome Agreement	SO1 and SO4

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Executive summary

George Street Trial - Festival Layout

Summary

On 29 October 2013, the Transport and Environment Committee approved a 12 month trial which includes the introduction of a one way traffic system in George Street. It is proposed that the new layout is implemented in spring 2014.

Throughout the 12 month trial period Edinburgh will play host to summer and winter festivals, which in recent years have focused increasing amounts of activity on the George Street area.

A report to the Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee on 5 November 2013, presented findings from the review of Events Governance. A further report is due in February 2014 which will propose a revised application and approval process for all events held in the city.

This report sets out a number of options for the layout of George Street during the August festival period in 2014. The options are intended to take into account the balance of activities and users of the street during this period, the festival experience of recent years and the introduction of tram passenger services to the City Centre area. These have created competing objectives for the area and it is important that these are balanced as far as possible.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Transport and Environment Committee:

- 1 delegates authority to the Director of Services for Communities, in consultation with the Director of Corporate Governance, relevant Convenors, Vice Convenors, the Festival and Events Champion, opposition spokespeople and local ward members, to take the decision on the layout of George Street during the August festival in 2014; and
- 2 notes that the future use of George Street for festival activities will be reviewed at the end of 2014 following the summer festival, the running of tram passenger services as well as the introduction of the Council's revised approach to governance and approval of events.

Measures of success

Maintaining support for world-famous festivals and events held in the City Centre.

A more attractive City Centre environment for those travelling to, living in, working and visiting the area delivered in line with a long term strategic vision.

Financial Impact

The cost for implementing the layout and infrastructure for the festival activities will be met by the event promoters.

Equalities impact

An Equalities and Rights Impact Assessment (ERIA) has been carried out and is ongoing for the duration of the project and throughout the implementation of the trial.

Sustainability impact

The delivery of improvements in the City Centre will help improve pedestrian and cycling activity in the area. Sustainability impacts, including traffic movement will be assessed as part of the evaluation of the trial project including the impact of festival activities.

Consultation and engagement

Stakeholder engagement will continue during the development of the detailed design for the 12 month trial including the festival proposal. This will include Essential Edinburgh, Lothian Buses and event promoters as well as the Council's Events team.

Background reading/external references

[Building a Vision for the City Centre, Transport and Environment Committee, 19 March 2013](#)

[Building a Vision for the City Centre- Consultation Outcome, Transport and Environment Committee, 29 October 2013](#)

[Festivals and Events Core Programme for 2013/14, Culture and Sport Committee, 12 March 2013](#)

[Review of Events Governance, Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee, 5 November 2013](#)

George Street Trial - Festival Layout

1. Background

- 1.1 Consultation on proposed changes to Princes Street and George Street took place during March and April 2013. The outcome of the consultation was reported to this Committee on the 29 October 2013, resulting in the following trial changes being agreed for George Street:
- Introduce a one way traffic system on George Street to allow the footway to be extended. The location of the extended footway and direction of traffic will be agreed in consultation with key stakeholders;
 - Work with Essential Edinburgh to organise and promote additional activity on the street;
 - Encourage retailers to open later and maximise the benefits of increased activity and footfall; and
 - Create a two way cycle route to connect the National Cycle network at the east and west end of the City Centre.

2. Main Report

Design development

- 2.1 The detailed design for the trial is under development and will adhere to the design principles outlined above. In order to assist with planning, implementation and traffic management arrangements for the street, it is proposed that a layout is agreed for the summer festival period. It is also recognised that using the additional space in George Street will require a comprehensive management plan which puts in place different activities, possibly on a seasonal basis.
- 2.2 The design for the 12 month trial will be similar to the one way arrangement that was in place during the month of August 2013. This involved the operation of George Street west bound only between Frederick Street and Charlotte Square and east bound only between Hanover Street and St Andrew Square. This allowed the pavement areas to be extended on the opposite sides of the road to where the one way traffic system was in operation.

- 2.3 Discussions are ongoing with the main bus operators, including Lothian Buses as well as representatives from pedestrian and cycle groups to agree the most appropriate design and monitoring approach for the duration of the trial.

The George Street Festival

- 2.4 The 2013 summer festival provided an opportunity for Essential Edinburgh, in partnership with the City of Edinburgh Council, the Festival, and George Street businesses, to test different uses and partial pedestrianisation of the street. This allowed the extension of food and drink offerings and created a café culture complemented by art and other entertainment. This was also the second year that the street played host to the Famous Spiegeltent. During this period the block between Hanover Street and Frederick Street was closed to all traffic to accommodate this iconic festival venue. This was in addition to the one way system that was adopted for the remainder of the street.
- 2.5 An evaluation of the George Street festival was carried out by Essential Edinburgh and the Council, in order to assess the view of businesses and visitors to the street. In summary, the evaluation found a strong preference from the businesses in the area to adopt a similar set up in future years ie three partially pedestrianised blocks and a one fully pedestrianised block housing the “festival hub/Famous Spiegeltent”. Many noted the improved atmosphere along the length of the street. A number of improvements were also suggested including:
- Improved sightlines and pedestrian access across the street;
 - More retailer involvement with on street activities;
 - Improved signs, waste removal and better quality barriers; and
 - Provision of additional cycle parking facilities along George Street.
- 2.6 There is an opportunity to address all of these issues in future years and in general, there is an appetite to continue to grow the role of George Street during the August festival. This should also be considered in the context of the Events Governance Review which is due to report back to Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee in February 2014. This report will set out a revised application and approval process for all events held in the city to improve transparency and consistency in decision making for events in key public spaces.

Buses on George Street

- 2.7 Following service amendments in September 2013, there are now a number of Lothian Bus services that travel along George Street. These changes have been made to reduce traffic congestion on Princes Street. There is however a risk that the congestion on Princes Street continues to worsen and the introduction of tram passenger services to the City Centre area will need to be monitored in this respect. If the block between Hanover Street and Frederick Street was closed for the month of August in 2014, a number of services would have to be diverted back on to Princes Street which would create additional congestion and potential disruption for passengers at this time.
- 2.8 The Council has committed to reduce the overall traffic congestion on Princes Street and will work with Lothian Buses as well as other local and national bus operators to reduce the number of services using Princes Street, particularly where services are not stopping.

Introduction of tram passenger services

- 2.9 The introduction of tram passenger services is planned for May 2014. Whilst the traffic modelling indicates that this should not be problematic for Princes Street, there is a risk of congestion, which will only be measurable following the running of the service. The recent switch of a number of services by Lothian Buses from Princes Street to George Street is intended to reduce this risk.

Cyclists

- 2.10 Improving provision for cyclists into and through the City Centre is a priority for the Council. As part of the Active Travel Action Plan a number of improvements are being progressed. These seek to fill in key gaps in the Family Network/National Cycle Network routes and link the network to key destinations, by April 2014. This will include east to west and north to south links across the City Centre. The Council will continue to work with cycle groups, during the duration of the trial and the festival period, to test solutions and inform longer term improvement and investment.

Options

- 2.11 A number of options for the festival layout of George Street and their main advantages and disadvantages are outlined below:

Option 1

- 2.12 Keep George Street open one way at the Assembly Room block during the August festival period. Half of the street will still be available for the box office and other festival activities and the Speigeltent could be relocated elsewhere, possibly to St Andrew Square.
- 2.13 **Advantages:** This would allow buses, general traffic and cycles to continue to run in an east bound direction and reduce the potential for additional congestion on Princes Street and the City Centre area.

- 2.14 **Disadvantages:** The Famous Speigeltent would have to be relocated away from George Street and there would be a loss of part of this well supported festival hub within this area of the city.

Option 2

- 2.15 The layout for George Street during the August festival remains the same as the previous two years, which would involve closing the Assembly Room block (between Hanover Street and Frederick Street) to all traffic and allowing the Spiegelterrace to locate there.
- 2.16 **Advantages:** This would build on the success of previous years and allow a key festival venue to remain in the centre of George Street, providing a well supported range of entertainment, a marked increase in footfall to the area and a boost for local traders.
- 2.17 **Disadvantages:** Buses would require to be diverted back on to Princes Street, which may lead to increased congestion for this period. There would be no continuous cycle route along George Street.

Option 3

- 2.18 Close George Street between Castle Street and Frederick Street to allow some festival activities to locate there.
- 2.19 **Advantages:** There would be no requirement to divert bus services from the street.
- 2.20 **Disadvantages:** The Famous Spiegelterrace would require to be relocated from outside the Assembly Rooms. This would reduce the ability to run the Assembly Rooms and the Spiegelterrace as a joint operation. There would be no continuous cycle route along George Street.

Conclusion

- 2.21 The introduction of tram passenger services is of paramount importance to the city and this needs to be balanced with opportunities to retain proven, successful events. Further discussion with stakeholders is required in order to come to the most appropriate view on these competing objectives.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Transport and Environment Committee:
- 3.1.1 delegates authority to the Director of Services for Communities, in consultation with the Director of Corporate Governance, relevant Convenors, Vice Convenors, the Festival and Events Champion, opposition spokespeople and local ward members, to take the decision on the layout of George Street during the August festival in 2014; and
 - 3.1.2 notes that the future use of George Street for festival activities will be reviewed at the end of 2014 following the summer festival, the running of tram passenger services as well as the introduction of the Council's revised approach to governance and approval of events.

Mark Turley

Director of Services for Communities

Links

Coalition pledges	<p>P24 – Maintain and embrace support for our world-famous festivals and events.</p> <p>P28 - Further strengthen our links with the business community by developing and implementing strategies to promote and protect the economic well being of the city.</p> <p>P31 - Maintain our City’s reputation as the cultural capital of the world by continuing to support and invest in our cultural infrastructure.</p>
Council outcomes	<p>CO19 – Attractive Places and Well Maintained – Edinburgh remains an attractive city through the development of high quality buildings and places and the delivery of high standards and maintenance of infrastructure and public realm.</p> <p>CO20 – Culture, sport and major events – Edinburgh continues to be a leading cultural city where culture and sport play a central part in the lives and futures of citizens.</p>
Single Outcome Agreement	<p>SO1 – Edinburgh’s economy delivers increased investment, jobs and opportunities for all.</p> <p>SO4 – Edinburgh’s communities are safer and have improved physical and social fabric.</p>