

1/ What strategies and plans does the council have in place to drive footfall to businesses' on Academy Street, and other areas of the city centre during and post construction?

2/Subject to funding is the plan still for there to be a public marketing fund of up to £1million to advertise that the City Centre 'remains open' (and is this a good use of the £'s) –

3/What compensation (if any) does the Highland Council plan to offer to business and property owners detrimentally affected during the construction phase, noted recent increases in overall cost of doing business (various challenging economic factors)?

The Highland Council (THC) will work closely with affected businesses and are currently reviewing a support package that would offer assistance with signage, promotions, and marketing. We will strategically plan works around business needs.

The construction phase will be carefully planned to deliver the planned benefits to businesses such as café and other outdoor seating, and to public spaces, as early in the works as possible. There will be comprehensive communication and regular updates about the works through THC's Academy Street webpages.

Any future funding bid will include a request for a sum of money that will be used to promote the city centre to mitigate possible disruption as a result of construction. This of course is subject to a successful bid, and the exact details of how much could be bid for, and how this could be spent, are matters of detail that will be discussed further in due course. Later in 2024 when funding for construction will be applied for, subject of course to a positive committee decision after the TRO process is complete, the project team would envisage discussing this with business representative organisations and see the best way to collate suggestions from businesses on this element to work together to produce a package which of course would be subject to funding conditions.

4/What consideration has there been to the potential negative environmental impact of re-routing traffic from Academy Street. Considering the traffic displacement, chaos, longer journeys and lack of eco-friendly public transport alternatives?

The Traffic Impact Assessment sets out the likely traffic displacement resulting from the scheme, highlighting where vehicles are expected to re-route. In addition, the Economic Impact Assessment includes consideration of the impacts of the scheme in terms of noise, air quality and greenhouse gases. These impacts have been monetised in the EIA (i.e. impacts have been quantified and then converted into monetary values). Any concerns relating to specific locations can be passed on to THC for consideration.

Possible mitigation, if required, will be considered once the assessments have been fully reviewed by the project team.

5/Various concerns about the proposed use of Post Office Avenue and impact on its residents and businesses. Is the Council confident that this will not be a H & S issue? Why was there no trial? The street is too narrow as it is.

The impact of the proposed scheme has been assessed within the Traffic Impact Assessment, which provides details on the potential change in traffic volumes on links including Post Office Avenue. Existing traffic volumes on Post Office Avenue are 11 Passenger Car Units (PCUs) in the AM peak, and 23 PCUs in the PM peak. Post-scheme, these volumes are expected to increase to 42 PCUs in the AM peak and 107 PCUs in the PM peak. This equates to less than one extra vehicle per minute in the AM peak, and less than two extra vehicles per minute in the PM peak.

The traffic orders that set out how cars can move throughout this part of the city centre will be evaluated to ensure the full scheme can operate successfully. This will be subject to consultation through the statutory process.

A trial of the proposed scheme is not an appropriate option to progress for the following reasons:

- A trial arrangement would rely on temporary road signs, traffic signals and other traffic management equipment, like some of the temporary arrangements installed during the Covid-19 Spaces for People project. Such measures would create a negative impact on the setting of the city centre and its street scene, and could also cause narrowing and obstruction of already-narrow pavements, disproportionately impacting people with certain protected characteristics;
- For such a trial to be effective, it is estimated that a trial period utilising such equipment of between three and six months would be required to properly influence driver routing habits and give a meaningful measure of change;
- Most of the benefits of the proposed design are the significant enhancement of the public realm and pedestrian and cycling environment. This is derived from narrowing of the carriageway, which creates opportunity for pavement widening, trees, planters, café space and a safe corridor for walking and wheeling, complemented by a significant enhancement of materials that will define a high-quality public realm. None of these benefits can be delivered in a trial situation and the trial would therefore not provide a true representation of the proposed design.

At the 24 November 2022 City of Inverness Area Committee, a Motion was rejected to implement a temporary trial version of the proposed scheme.

6/Also response needed re stated inconvenience caused by bollards on Academy Street, difficulty getting hold of anyone in Highland Council to discuss.

Please provide more detail on your specific concern or contact the team at activetravel@highland.gov.uk

7/What plans do the Highland Council have to manage influx of pedestrians and coaches when the castle opens in 2025, and how will the future development of the train station affect circulation in the town centre, considering the potential impact on current initiatives for Academy Street?

The City Centre Development Brief includes the following placemaking guidance for the Inverness Castle area:

3. Access, movement and parking

- a) Existing active travel routes linking Castle Hill with Bridge Street, Culduthel Road, the Raining's Stairs and Castle Road must be retained and enhanced, including appropriate improvements to surfacing, lighting and signage.
- b) Proposals should prioritise and promote access to Castle Hill on foot, cycle or public transport, including associated infrastructure such as cycle parking and wayfinding components.
- c) Proposals for vehicle access should be consistent with protection of the Hill's built and cultural heritage. Parking must have minimal visual impact.

As part of the early work on the Inverness Station Masterplan partners are looking at how access to the station can be optimised for different modes alongside measures to provide new and improved space for businesses.

In addition, the Traffic Management Plan for Inverness Castle is currently being finalised and will be reported on shortly; however it is not expected to have any impact on the current proposals for Academy Street.

8/ What is the overall aim? What is the bigger picture? Is the proposal part of a bigger strategy and if so what?

A: We aspire to make Academy Street a safer, more accessible and more attractive place to spend time in; where businesses and retail thrive, whilst being respectful of the local history and identity of Academy Street within Inverness City. People walking, wheeling and cycling will be our priority over vehicle movements.

Our aims include:

- To ensure people are able to travel safely and sustainably via active travel
- To advance opportunities for walking, wheeling and cycling
- To help tackle climate change
- To have cleaner air
- To boost physical and mental health

The Academy Street scheme is part of significant recent and ongoing change across the city as we look to be ready for future challenges and opportunities. For example, the City Centre Development Brief highlights Academy Street as a priority route for active travel improvements, with the station square and adjacent section of Academy Street identified as an important civic space for improved pedestrian movement. Strong links will be established between this and associated projects that serve to enhance and develop Inverness City Centre.

The Council are preparing to host a public exhibition later this year which will showcase the recent and forthcoming development and investment across Inverness. , The exhibition is about celebrating what's being delivered by businesses, communities and public sector across the City. More than that – it's about a vision for the future of the City and what partners are doing to deliver it. This overall vision will be a way to help communicate what's going on with developments and investment across Inverness, including what they are intended to deliver, who is responsible and when they will happen.

It is also worth noting that the Academy Street scheme is part of a national policy context which focuses on not just decarbonising travel and improving health and wellbeing, but also making great spaces to spend time, enjoy leisure, recreation, and easy access to services. By doing so, we can ensure that the city centre is a great place to live, work and visit, and as evidenced within the Economic Impact Assessment, we can encourage more people to visit and spend time on Academy Street.

9/ M & S is an anchor store in city centre. Trade is currently extremely challenging – concern that increased difficulty in accessing the city centre due to proposed changes will negatively impact business, potentially leading to a decline in customers and causing significant problems for the future of M & S in Inverness City Centre.

Drivers who wish to access the city centre will still be able to, by parking at the existing car parks such as Eastgate and Rose Street which offer over 3000 spaces. The only change will be how they access these destinations – drivers will go around, rather than through, the heart of the city. Parking locations within the city centre will remain as they are currently with car parking being available at Rose Street and the Eastgate. The Economic Impact Assessment includes quantification of the impact of the diversion.

10/ Comments that people will be pushed to shop online or use retail parks more. If this happens what plans do the council have to support city centre businesses or is it a case that businesses are to be collateral damage?

The proposals aim to create a more attractive street environment and high-quality built environment where people want to spend more time, and which creates the conditions for business to prosper.

11/ What examples of other areas do the council have where outcomes have been successful?

A: The Economic Impact Assessment has used case studies from across the UK to understand the likely wider economic impacts of the scheme. This exercise has used 'before' and 'after' data to understand changes to visitor footfall and expenditure amongst other factors. Case studies are contained within section 4.3 of the EIA.

12/ To what extent can business, BID, Community Councils and all other stakeholders including Eastgate, help to agree and define the draft masterplan for the city and city centre? Noted that this approach could provide a comprehensive framework development, potentially allowing the reconsideration of Academy street proposals in a wider context.

An engagement event is being planned for Summer 2024 where stakeholders will have the chance to consider the vision for the City and City Centre, how the projects underway and planned contribute to that vision, and what people think about how future projects and investments might be best for the City and can maintain the City Centre's role as a prime destination.

13/ Concerns raised about the safety implications of allowing powerful e-bikes and scooters to navigate Academy Street, questioning how their use will be regulated and whether they pose risks to pedestrians.

A: Bicycles, e-bicycles and scooters will continue to not be permitted to use the footway. Cyclists will benefit from reduced vehicle traffic on Academy Street, making it safer to cycle on the carriageway. Furthermore, it remains against the law to ride a privately owned e-scooter in any public place in Scotland, and the proposed scheme will not change this.

14/ Concerns about the potential impact on accessibility for hotel guests, including the effect of restricting driving access on tourism and local businesses. Overall, questioning the feasibility and implications of the proposed changes for hospitality businesses on academy street.

The current Traffic Management proposal will not prevent access to any business/hotel within the city centre. What will change is the route to get to some premises. If any business has a specific concern, then this can be considered on a one-to-one basis. Individual businesses should contact activetravel@highland.gov.uk

15/ What plans (if any) are there for the two car parks on Academy Street? (Mangrove/Dominoes Pizza and Royal Highland) What about businesses who have delivery vehicles leaving from Academy Street (up to 100 movements on weekends)

Access to both areas mentioned will be maintained. The routes to and from them may change depending on where a vehicle is coming from. Loading arrangements for businesses on Academy Street will not change.

16/ In respect of the 2k cap, what plans are there to monitor and measure this and should overall vehicle numbers exceed this will there be enforcement and if so what is proposed?

The Traffic Impact Assessment has concluded that total vehicle flows on Academy Street will be less than 2000 vehicles per day post implementation. All proposals will be monitored for the long term – this is a condition of the funding package. If the funding criteria is not met post implementation, then mitigations will need to be considered to achieve the criteria. The traffic management scheme relies on mandatory bus lanes to prevent through traffic. These will be policed by camera enforcement, generating penalty charges to unauthorised vehicles who use the bus lanes.

A Behaviour Change Plan has also been developed for the Academy Street scheme and identifies ways in which existing and new users of Academy Street can be encouraged and supported to choose sustainable transport modes.

17/ Is there a set way to respond to the Traffic Regulation Orders (such as a form) What date in May will the TRO's be published?

The further consultation with statutory consultees with the addition of the five business representative organisations for the TRO, will be issued by the end of May 2024 and will take place over the coming weeks ahead of the public consultation. The public consultation element of this consultation will commence once the statutory element has concluded, full instructions will be provided when each of the elements of the TRO are issued.

The Council also intends to hold an in-person drop-in session during the TRO public consultation period which will allow anyone to ask questions specific to the TRO process that they be unsure of – the date of this will be confirmed and shared in advance of the session.