

PEDESTRIANISATION OF OXFORD STREET

RESPONSE FROM Fitzrovia West Neighbourhood Forum

I represent Fitzrovia West Neighbourhood Forum. Our forum is a 200 strong group that represents both residents and businesses in Fitzrovia. Our mailing list covers a further 500 small, medium and large businesses in the area. In our area both residents and businesses are united in wishing to improve the environment, making it a pleasant place to live work and visit.

We have already been in touch with Val Shawcross, officers from TFL and our local councillors to share our concerns for an unbridled pedestrianisation scheme that we feel would put far too much pressure on adjoining streets and communities.

We were gratified to learn that a simplistic approach was unlikely to be pursued and that any scheme that comes forward would consider the whole of the West End and not simply Oxford Street.

We support the careful consultation that TFL/WCC are establishing. Our chairman, Wendy Shillam and treasurer Yoram Blumann have been invited to attend meetings so that the views of local people and local businesses can be included in the work. However we recognise that these meetings are convened by Westminster's PR department and we are concerned that consultation should continue to be just that – dialogue.

CONSULTATION RESPONSE

We have a number of concerns that we wish to raise:

1. Phasing of the work – reducing the range of the modelling system
2. Coordinating with neighbourhood plans and ambitions for the wider West End including:
 - a). Linking Oxford Street improvements to improvements in the Oxford Street hinterland,

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- b). Great Titchfield Street/Mortimer Street local hub and
- c). Closing the Great Portland Street gyratory

3. Impact on congestion and road safety
4. Servicing the West End
5. Impact on local movements (occasioned by reduction/redirection of buses)
6. Pollution

OUR IDEAS

We do not wish to be purely negative about the prospect of improvements to the West End. We would like to work more closely with your engineers and transport planners to achieve a better result. We feel that we have knowledge and ideas that could help. We truly hope that this consultation isn't hiding a foregone conclusion and that genuine dialogue can occur before decisions are made. Thus we also include, at the end of our consultation response some ideas that we believe should be entertained.

CONSULTATION RESPONSE

1. Phasing of works - reducing the range of the modelling system

Since the pedestrianisation was first announced, we now understand that it is to be made in two sections, from Orchard Street to Oxford Circus and then from Oxford Circus to Tottenham Court Road. We think phase 1 will adversely effect Fitzrovia, tending to push all vehicular access to this end of Oxford Street. We are also concerned that phase two might simply happen on the back of phase one, without the careful work that needs to be done to establish an integrated solution.

For example, we understand that no detailed junction traffic modelling for phase 1 will be done east of Portland Place and Regent Street. Thus, there will no way of knowing what the impact of phase 1 will be on major junctions in Fitzrovia or in Soho.

2. Improvement of The Oxford Street Hinterland

One crucial aspect of our neighbourhood plan, triggered by strong public support, is to improve the streets where we live and work. There is no public green space in our area, little sitting-out space and hardly any pedestrian streets. We suffer from some of the worst pollution of any residential area in Europe. Pollution is influenced by traffic, by an intensity of carbon based heating and ventilation systems (we have a lot of development around here) and by the urban heat island effect, which intensifies pollution in the area and works to restrict the dissipation of bad air.

We have just published our draft plan which highlights the potential for certain streets and spaces to be traffic calmed, where we wish to see better pedestrian facilities, more green space and fewer traffic movements.



We support the intention to design for improved pedestrian access to side streets, but we are concerned that new bus routes, taxi routes and delivery routes will break the camel's back. We have heard of no proposals to tackle these important issues:

- Deliveries
- Pedestrian movement
- Parking and Servicing
- Road safety
- Improving pedestrian crossings
- Cycle routes and cycle parking

So far FitzWest public consultation has strongly prioritised the greening of streets, the reduction and calming of traffic and the improvement of arrangements for pedestrians. We see three key areas:

a). The Oxford Street Hinterland – this is the zone of streets and alleyways between Market Place and East Castle Street and Oxford Street itself. Many of these streets have great potential to provide services that Oxford Street itself cannot offer, like cafes, smaller shops, sitting out space and services like banks, stationers and copy shops. But in order for these streets to become attractive they would need improving. We support a grid of pedestrian streets running off Oxford Street and we are prepared to supply the necessary detailed planning policy in order to allow such streets to thrive and take some of the pressure from Oxford Street itself.

b). As we move further north into Fitzrovia West we come to the Great Titchfield Street/Mortimer Street local hub. This is a critically important part of our area offering local shops and services to the businesses and residents around us. This has become a dynamic focus for local and specialist shops, small businesses and provides the area's vitality. But it is already stymied by the fact that Mortimer Street is used as an emergency bus by-pass street for Oxford Street. We are very concerned that current plans for phase 1 will increase traffic in our streets and that a phase 2 would sign the death knell for Fitzrovia.

c). In addition we have identified the area around Great Portland Street Underground Station as one where improvements and traffic calming could be made. A lot of people live in this northern sector and there are two hospitals (Portland Hospital and The Royal Orthopedic Clinic) both of which require good pedestrian access)

We would hope that in deciding on new access streets for public transport and taxis something can be done to close down the Great Portland Street tube gyratory, thereby reducing the conflict between pedestrians and traffic turning south into Fitzrovia.

3. Impact on congestion and road safety

Fitzrovia has a much higher population density than other parts of the West End. There are over 4000 people living in very dense flats in FitzWest alone. We understand this represents approximately half of the population of the West End. Our population is not dominated by *West End Wealthy*, but by ordinary people, many of whom have lived in the area for years, whose children attend the local schools and who work in local businesses. Many people live in social housing, or housing for the elderly. They cannot choose to move out of the area if it becomes even more devastated by traffic and pollution.

This week's announcement that pedestrianisation in Oxford Street shall go ahead leads us to fear the implications for our area, especially Mortimer Street and Newman Street. While the cross rail project has gone ahead we have had several long term bus diversions through our area, along Mortimer and Newman Street. This has resulted in lines of jammed busses belching out exhaust. I enclose a photograph of Newman Street, taken during one of those diversions, to indicate how unpleasant those short term diversions were.



Taken 12.22 09.04.2015

If the pedestrianisation of Oxford Street results in a permanent diversion of taxis, delivery vehicles and bus routes along these streets it would be devastating for the area.

4. Servicing the West End

There is a growing problem in this area associated with deliveries, development vehicles, servicing, rubbish collection and public transport. For example rubbish collections have collapsed, the amount of uncontrolled rubbish bags and dumped rubbish has become embarrassing. If we are also to suffer more service traffic the continual degradation of our pavements will be exacerbated. Despite this our streets are already choked with rubbish collection vehicles, white vans, motorcycle messengers and cycle delivery. This is all completely unmanaged and unplanned. Night time deliveries are not the answer in our area because of the prevalence of residential buildings right down to the boundary of Oxford Street.

5. Impact on local movements (occasioned by reduction/redirection of buses)

Despite many of us who complained about the proposed reduction in bus services, especially the C2, these have gone ahead, unaltered. Further pedestrianisation will further reduce bus services. Cross rail does *NOT* take the place of local cross West End trips. We do not support the reduction of bus services in the West End. People who live and work here use buses to get about the West End. We use the bus to do our food shopping, to take our children to the doctors and to hospital appointments, to go to work and to visit our Council

Offices on Victoria Street. We need hop-on, hop-off services which cannot be supplied by tube or Crossrail. Tourists need this even more than locals.

We have a high proportion of elderly and disabled people living round here and they cannot use the underground so easily (if at all). Local bus services are equally important for visitors to the area. No-one in their right minds would entertain a journey for example from Tottenham Court Road to John Lewis by underground. So we need some form of local bus system along Oxford Street.

We support the hopper fares and we support the intention to electrify (de-carbonise) Central London buses and taxis.

6. Pollution

We think a diffuse public transport system could work very well, as long as buses are smaller and less polluting (which means changing engines *and* wheel formats to reduce both NO² and particulate pollution.) Trams, guided by rails are, we understand less likely to cause accidents – pedestrians know where they are! A light rail system running from one end of Oxford Street to the other – running along Oxford Street is the no-brainer solution. For public transport to work it must be able to deliver passengers closer to the destination than they can travel by private car. By pushing the busses out and by reducing their number the effect would be counterproductive. It would mean that a visit to the West End would become more convenient by private car – not less so! This is especially true as the Congestion Charge (and parking fees) do not apply on late night shopping nights, or throughout the weekends. Thus during late nights and on Sundays there is nothing limiting private car trips into the West End, for shopping or any other function.

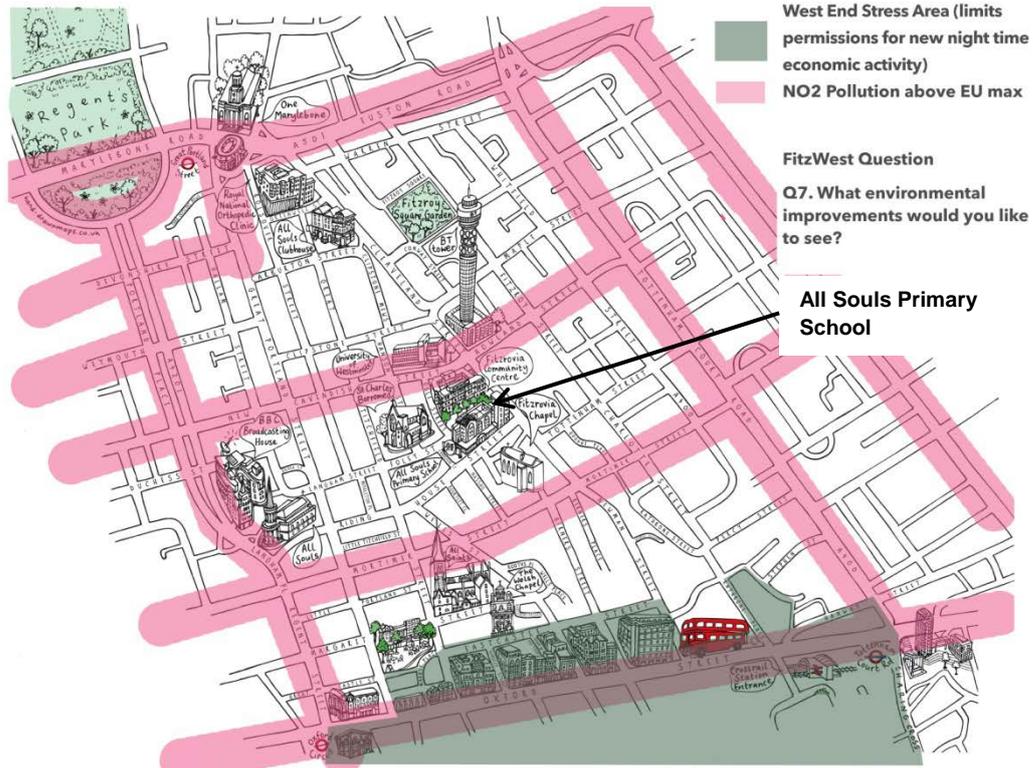
Unfortunately it is not just Oxford Street that subjects the population of Fitzrovia to life threatening pollution. The diagram below (taken from the Kings College Model commissioned, as I understand it, by the GLA) identifies Mortimer Street *and* New Cavendish Street as highly polluted as well. This pollution is exacerbated in the centre of London because of the urban heat island effect, which can trap a bubble of polluted air, stopping it dissipating, as it might do in greener parts of the capital. I am sure that enlightened traffic engineers in the GLA have already considered these limitations and are proposing alternatives. For example a bus hub at Tottenham Court Road and a further hub at Hyde Park Corner would be well supported by our community. (As long as there is some way of getting to them)

We are especially concerned that All Soul's Primary School, our excellent local primary school, which lies only yards from the Mortimer Street/Newman Street junction. The prospect of diverting transport onto a minor road and increasing pollution levels so close to an area where children are taught, is not worthy of the new GLA administration.

FitzWest

Fitzrovia West Neighbourhood Forum

7.



A NOTE ABOUT POLLUTION

We have no pollution testing stations in FitzWest. This map shows the estimated average nitrogen dioxide emissions above $60 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ /year from a model by King College London, that is extrapolated from nearby testing stations. (2010 figures) The EU recommends a maximum annual average of $40 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ /year.

It is estimated that over 10,000 people die in London each year due to pollution. Pollution comes from burning fossil fuels like gas or coal and air conditioning, bus and private vehicle emissions and the lack of green foliage to absorb it.

The *Urban Heat Island Effect* occurs when a city neighbourhood becomes much warmer than the air around. This *temperature inversion* (a trapped bubble of hot, polluted air) stops pollutants from dispersing, leading to fogs, smogs and lung damage, especially amongst the young and the old.

OUR IDEAS

What Should A Calmed Oxford Street Look Like?

We support a reduction of traffic in Oxford Street, and have no objection to pedestrianisation *per se*. In fact, we too wish to look at traffic calming schemes to support improvements to Great Titchfield Street and Mortimer Street, which is the social and economic hub of our area. BUT we think that a pedestrian priority scheme should not see Oxford Street as a merely pedestrian zone. We think such a proposal would tend to dilute the offer of the street at a time when city centre retail is very vulnerable to out of town malls and the internet.

Instead we would like to see TFL/WCC considering soft separation in a zone much wider than Oxford Street itself, encompassing streets like Eastcastle Street and The Market Place. Our local plan identifies this zone as the Oxford Street Hinterland. The strategy might also work for streets in Soho, Mayfair and Marylebone. In fact it might help with traffic calming of Wigmore Street, which we see becoming a black spot in the current scheme.

We cite as an example Bahnhofstrasse in Zurich. This is the main historic high-end shopping street in the City of Zurich. Bahnhofstrasse is today a car free street, but it does have trams running up and down it. The advantage of this is immediately seen if you look at the side streets, which are deliciously comfortable for pedestrians. (Though none actually ban traffic access) This comfort is not only achieved by restricting car access but as a result of three other measures:

1. Soft separation – streets are designed for pedestrians and cyclists. That means much more space for trees, planting, seats and ambling. This has the effect of slowing down and calming traffic.
2. Lack of visitor parking – all the public parking is off-street, mainly in underground garages.
3. Congestion control – similar to the congestion charging we have in London but actually achieved by traffic lights rather than road pricing.



Bahnhofstrasse Zurich – what we like about this image is that Zurich's main shopping street still looks and acts like a street, it hasn't turned into a shopping mall.



Bahnhofstrasse – the main cross roads (similar to Oxford Circus)

Bahnhofstrasse boasts high-end shops like Prada which would not be there unless the footfall and custom were excellent.

Below – images of some of the side streets around Bahnhoffstrasse:



Munzplatz

Augustinegasse

Even allowing for the relative scale of Zurich and London, the viewer will agree that Zurich has managed to solve the congestion problem in the centre of the city.



The effect of the City of Zurich's traffic measures has been nothing short of astounding.

<https://www.zuerich.com/en/visit/shopping/bahnhofstrasse-zurich>

The inclusion of mature trees makes the street delightful and does a good job in reducing pollution and urban heat island effect. We also like the lack of clutter. The grandeur of the original architecture is not compromised.

More Is More

In most other capitals *pedestrian priority* of the main 'high street' has gone hand in hand with *pedestrianisation* of surrounding streets, creating a city centre oasis of calm. (Examples can be found in Edinburgh, Paris and Heidelberg, Montpellier – in fact pretty well *all* progressive capital cities the world over.) We urge this holistic approach in the West End.

In our view this approach would help to support other smaller independent shops and business (that inhabit the side streets), which are the life blood of the area and donate an authenticity the shopping area as a whole, singling it out from the monotony of the chainstores. This is part of the function of city centre retail as opposed to the rather anodyne experience one receives in a shopping mall. If people are to continue to shop in the West End (and there should be no complaisance on this) it must be because the shopping offer includes:

- Large chain stores (larger than you would find in a mall)
- Independent shops in side streets
- Enjoyable cafes and restaurants in quiet side streets
- Green sitting out areas, urban lungs
- Pedestrian and cycling comfort
- Exemplarily public transport access and cross movements
- Quick access to theatre-land and the evening entertainments in south Soho

Wendy Shillam

Chairman Fitzrovia West Neighbourhood Area Forum Executive

A link to this page has been sent to:

Val Shawcross

West End and Marylebone High Street Ward Councillors

Chairmen of the four other West End Neighbourhood Forums

Caroline Pidgeon Chair London Assembly Transport Committee

Tim Steer Head of Transport

Cllr Robert Davis MBE Deputy Leader Westminster CC

Jace Tyrrell, Chief Executive New West End Company

Paul Dimoldenberg Environment Shadow Westminster CC Labour Group