THE VOICE OF DUBLIN CYCLISTS FOR 20 YEARS 1993-2013

Grafton Street Quarter Draft Public Realm Plan:
Comments by the Dublin Cycling Campaign, 19 November 2013

We welcome this opportunity to comment on the Grafton Street Quarter Draft Plan. The vision of a lively area offering retail, night life and a great walking experience is at one with our own strategic vision of creating 'a vibrant Living City where people can safely enjoy cycling and walking'.

We welcome in particular the recognition of the long term need to balance the movement of cyclists and pedestrians together with the need for commercial activity, as well as the aim of creating a safe environment day and night; the commitment to reduce on-street car parking and the emphasis on preserving architecture and creating new civic spaces.

However if the Plan is to be more than a facelift and truly transform the Grafton Street area into a vibrant, liveable, sustainable *quarter* it needs to include some bold decisions on reducing motorised traffic and some simple steps to encourage greater access and permeability for cyclists. In the long history of the Grafton Street area the use of private motor cars is a very recent addition.


Grafton Street 1961

Motorised traffic doesn't mix well with the growing number of pedestrians on the narrow streets and the balance needs to be corrected in favour of pedestrians and cyclists to ensure the vitality and economic attraction in the area. Given the 25% growth in population in the Dublin in the last 10 years, nothing less than a severe curtailment of traffic in the Grafton Street area will enable the development of new civic spaces, wider footpaths for pedestrians and space for the growing number of cyclists who visit the area and cycling commuters who use it as a transit route.

Throughout the Plan the importance of access for people arriving by car has been overstated and the potential for growth of cyclists and the benefits this would bring have been underestimated or ignored.

A study conducted by DIT [1] in 2009 showed that only 10% of shoppers on Grafton Street have travelled there by car. The largest group came by bus (35%), followed by walking (20%) and nearly as many cycled as drove (9%). And cyclist numbers have **doubled** in the city since 2009.

Grafton Street - perceived versus actual travel behaviour
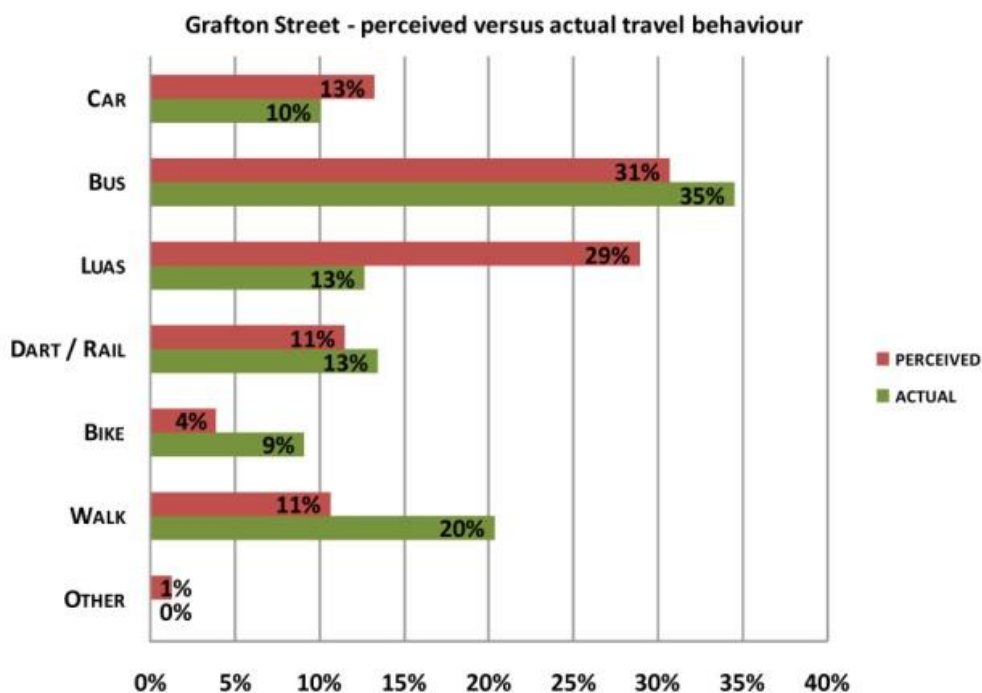
Source: Shopping Travel Behaviour in Dublin City Centre, DIT, 2011

These basic research figures are borne out by practical experience in Holland and Belgium in particular, where large supermarket chains have begun to realise the value of the cyclist-shopper (http://www.ecf.com/news/bike-to-shop-belgiums-push-for-more-bicycle-shoppers/).
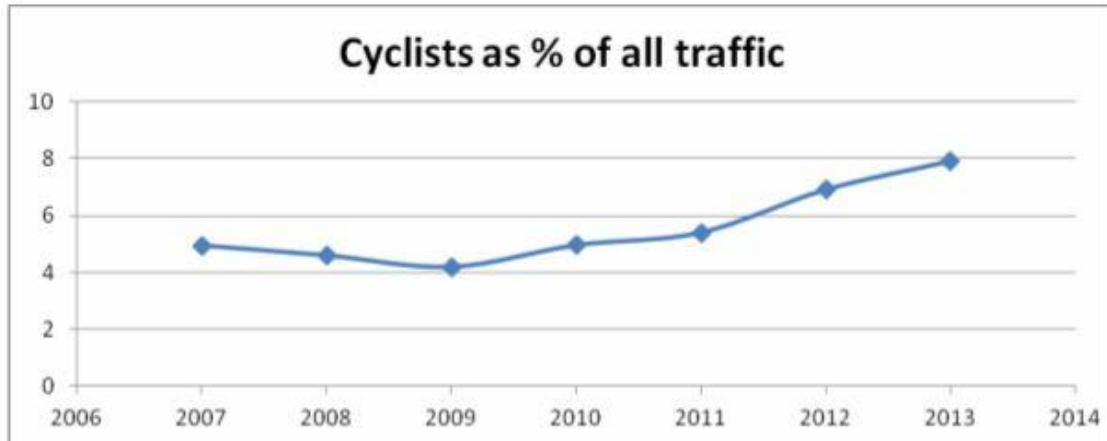
Source: Dublin City Centre Cycle Count – May 2013

The fear of losing business from car drivers means that an opportunity to transform the smaller streets around Grafton Street into shared pedestrian/bicycle streets will be missed. But replacing a single parking space by bicycle parking can bring 10 cyclists to the area, rather than one time-pressed motorist.

The Plan refers briefly to necessary cross city pedestrian links: we suggest it needs to further discuss and emphasise the potential and locations for these links for both pedestrians *and cyclists* in the interests of an overall unified city centre.

We also note that while the Plan identifies a number of legislative restrictions that hamper the development of the area, it fails to clearly call for the required legislative changes.

Detailed Comments

Our detailed comments on the various sections of the plan are below.

Exec Summary:

"Maintaining vehicular access routes to the multi-storey car parks is essential to the economic life of the area. Vehicular access through the street network will remain largely unchanged in the short-term, though removing on-street car parking will reduce the dominance of vehicles".

Vehicular access to car parks in the heart of the Grafton Street Quarter has a significant negative impact on the social quality of narrow streets such as Wicklow Street and South William Street. The assumption that vehicular access to car parks on streets such as South William Street has to be maintained needs to be challenged. Over 90% of shoppers arrive in the area on foot or by bus, bicycle and Luas. Dublin City Council needs to be pro-active in dampening the perceived need to use the car.

Another factor is the growth in vehicle size: there are more and more SUVs and MPVs on our streets which pose a greater risk to pedestrian safety and are inappropriate in the narrow city streets.

The traffic in the area is not just cars accessing car parks: the tenfold growth in taxi numbers since 2000 means that the streets are clogged with cruising taxis, particularly in the evenings. We propose that taxis are only permitted to enter the Grafton Street Quarter when they have a fare.

There is no mention in the executive summary of how better access for bicycles could solve many of the transport challenges in the area, and bring more people in to shop and enjoy the facilities.

Role & Vision, Chapter 1

"The slide of Grafton Street towards a standardised service offering has implications for the strategic role of the retail economy in the inner city, which has been losing market share to the suburban shopping centres. The existing planning laws and instruments make it difficult to control unwanted and inappropriate uses"

There is clearly a need to change the planning laws to enable a better mix of enterprises on Grafton Street in particular. Retail rents should be based on expected profitability of an enterprise and not per sq. m. This would encourage a rich mixed-use retail mix rather than the global-chains that dominate the street.

Chapter 4 Built Environment

P. 29, South William Street:

"The pedestrian experience is also currently compromised by the exceptionally narrow footpaths, general lack of public space and the dominating presence of on-street car parking and loading facilities."

P. 30 Wicklow Street:

"The street is also dominated by traffic, with pedestrians restricted to the two narrow footpaths. Despite the restricted width of the footpaths, there is growing demand for the provision of street furniture licences for the street's cafés and bars. While, it is acknowledged that the provision of outdoor seating generates activity and buzz, some proposals are problematic due to the narrow width of the footpaths. This is an issue that can be tackled in the context of the more detailed design solution for the public realm".

The pedestrian and cyclist experience on both South William Street and Wicklow St is also challenged by traffic entering and exiting car parks, the entries of which have poor visibility for motorists. The street could be transformed by removing all on-street car parking, widening the footpaths and by restricting access to the car parks.

Chapter 7 Transport and Movement

Access for commercial vehicles
Page 50 "Legally, at the moment, a delivery van is the same class of vehicle as a private car for traffic management purposes. So providing for servicing of the Quarter also provides access for private vehicles".
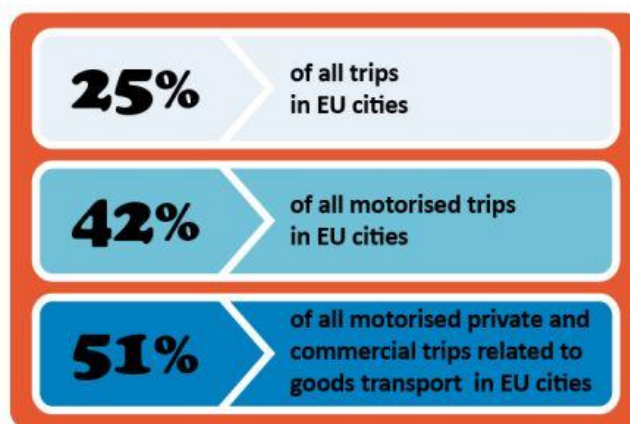The Plan should call for a change in the legislation regarding access for commercial vehicles, rather than accepting the status quo. The technology is available to restrict vehicle access by permits, swipe access, or registration plate readers.

There is much discussion on the need for continued access for commercial deliveries. This is assumed to be relevant only to truck/commercial vehicles, and there is no mention of the potential to develop cycle based deliveries.   As members of the Dublin City Cycle Forum, we are aware that the Roads & Traffic Division of DCC are already seriously considering cycle based deliveries in the City centre. There is also a Europe wide project to encourage this shift -
 http://www.ecf.com/projects/cyclelogistics-2/ - which is coordinated through the European Cyclists federation (ECF). This needs to happen in tandem with these developments to reduce, or at least steady the commercial vehicle imprint overall.
The following table from an ECF study [2] shows the potential for shifting motorised trips of goods to bicycle transport in European cities.

Potential to shift motorised trips related to goods transport to bicycles in European cities

25% of all trips in EU cities

42% of all motorised trips in EU cities

51% of all motorised private and commercial trips related to goods transport in EU cities

Page 51 "Use of large delivery vehicles has implications for the structural safety of older buildings, cellars, water mains, drains and other underground services. However, necessary levels of service and delivery must be maintained".

Large delivery vehicles are also hostile for pedestrians and cyclists. The plan should call for a cap on the size and weight of goods vehicles in the area and for strict enforcement of the time restrictions on delivery vehicles.

Page 52 "Removal of all traffic is not desirable, as vehicles, as well as performing an economic function, also put 'eyes on the street' and thus make it safer for pedestrian activity. This is particularly true in the evening and night time hours"

We would challenge the basis for this statement as a justification for allowing vehicular access. The area is heavily populated by pedestrians at all times of the day and night and the presence of vehicles, with the exception of Garda vehicles, cannot be justified on the grounds of safety. In fact it would be more in keeping with the area to have the low key presence of Gardai on foot.

If vehicular access was removed then the bollards to stop illegal parking and the sign poles with parking times could also be removed. This would have big advantages for the street experience in removing clutter and giving people more room to walk.

Page 52 "One problematic area is South King Street which it not accessible to any vehicles including bicycles outside certain hours. This necessitates a long detour for cyclists. The facility for cyclists to dismount and wheel the bike for the hundred metres or so does not answer the problem."

A simple solution is to allow cyclists to use South King Street in both directions, while giving priority to pedestrians. This solution is adopted in many European cities, and there is no reason it would not work in Dublin.

Bicycle Parking

Page 53: *" While cycle parking is much more space efficient than car parking, it does make significant demands on limited public space. This is a particular issue in pedestrian rich areas such as the Grafton Street Quarter. Dublin City Council operates a successful off-street bicycle parking facility in Drury Street Multi-Storey Car Park and it is recommended that this be upgraded, expanded and actively promoted to enhance off-street cycle parking facilities in the Grafton Street Quarter".*

"However, there will remain a desire to meet the demand for short-term stops on the street. International experience shows that failure to provide for short-term stops on the street leads to an improvised and disorderly response by cyclists. Well planned and designed street parking can enhance the street space for everyone. A balance is required".

We estimate that there are 500 bicycle parking spaces in the area. This is clearly inadequate compared to the number of car parking spaces, especially given the doubling of cycling numbers in the city centre over the past five years.

The bicycle parking in Drury Street car park is a welcome addition and it is well used by cyclists. Sixteen car parking spaces were converted to provide 200 bicycle parking spaces. Each of the car parks in the area should be obliged to convert a number of car parking spaces to a bicycle parking area. The removal of on-street car parking is also an opportunity to provide more on-street bicycle parking. Cyclists tend to make more frequent trips to the area than motorists **[1],** so if businesses are to benefit from cyclists then convenient on-street bicycle parking is required.

Page 53: "There is limited space available so the competing needs of pedestrians, cyclists and car drivers will have to be balanced with the commercial needs of the area. "

The commercial needs of the area are driven by the people who visit, shop and eat in the area. Walking, cycling and bus are the best ways to get more people into the area.

Conclusions

In summary we believe the Plan needs the following additions to support the aims of refocussing on the area's unique proposition and character and developing a sustainable cultural and economic quarter:

- A pro-active policy to encourage the switch from private car to public transport and walking and cycling.
- A strategy and vision to switch a large bulk of commercial deliveries to cycle based deliveries.
- Access to streets:
    o Give permit-only access to delivery vehicles and cap size and weight
    o All motorised traffic, including taxis, severely curtailed on the minor streets around Grafton Street
    o Cyclists permitted to use all minor streets (in all directions) with priority given to pedestrians
    o Cyclists permitted to use Grafton Street in the early morning and late evening
    o A more comprehensive view of links for pedestrians and cyclists from the Grafton Street Quarter to the rest of the city centre.
- Removal of all on street car parking in favour of wider pavement space and provision only for loading access by permit
- A bike parking strategy:
    o Bike parking needs to be multi locational as cyclists are just like pedestrians and pop in to shop / dine. Cyclists have and spend money.
    o Bike parking on side streets off very busy streets is a good choice.
    o Secure parking is also a huge benefit and should be mandatory for any car parking operator to provide.
    o A policy to deal with illegally parked or abandoned bicycles, which will inevitably be required as cyclist numbers continue to grow!
- A call for changes to planning laws to allow a rich mix of enterprises in the area
- A strategy for ongoing maintenance and upgrading of the facilities

References

[1] Shopping Travel Behaviour in Dublin City Centre, David O'Connor, et. al. Dublin Institute of Technology, 2011

http://arrow.dit.ie/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1010&context=comlinkoth

[2] Shift to Cycling: CycleLogistics Baseline Study Reports on Impressive Potential , European Cyclists Federation 2013

http://www.ecf.com/news/shift-to-cycling-cyclelogistics-baseline-study-reports-on-impressive-potential/