

Appendix 3

From the Permanent Secretary
Peter May

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Dear Louise

Thank you for your letter of 3 November noting the Council's concerns regarding traffic congestion in Belfast City Centre. As your correspondence would normally be passed to the Minister, and given the Department does not currently have a Minister in post, I am replying to you on behalf of the Department.

The changes to the traffic management arrangements in Belfast city centre, including the prohibition of vehicles, except buses, permitted taxis and emergency services, travelling from Donegall Square East to Adelaide Street during bus lane operating hours, were introduced as part of the Belfast on the Move works, in anticipation of the public transport priority measures necessary for the introduction of Belfast Rapid Transit. These works were completed in October 2013.

The Department is of the view that the aims of Belfast on the Move support a number of the Council's policies and initiatives including the Belfast Agenda, City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy, Belfast Air Quality Action Plan 2015-2020 and Belfast Bikes.

The Department's Belfast on the Move works were successful. Before and after surveys revealed that following completion of the works in 2013:

- **The city centre is more accessible:** with an increase of over 6% in the number of people entering the city centre in the morning peak, which is equivalent to over 2,200 additional people.
- **There has been a reduction in general traffic levels in the city centre:** with an average reduction of over 1,900 in the number of vehicles entering the city centre core area during the morning peak and an average reduction of around 10,900 in the number of vehicles entering the city centre core area over a 24 hour period.

The measures applied at Donegall Square East/Adelaide Street were introduced primarily to deter traffic using this route as a short cut through the city centre from the northwest to the southeast of the city. In doing so it reduced traffic flow in Wellington Place and Donegall Square North thus allowing the provision of the bus/cycle priority measures. Access to Adelaide Street is still available via May Street or Linenhall Street for those with a destination in the area. To maintain access to Adelaide Street from Wellington Place an alternative route via Chichester Street, Montgomery Street and May Street is available for motorists. The measures are also useful in assisting Translink Park & Ride services, Ulsterbus services and Metro movements at the busy stops on Donegall Square East and Adelaide Street. Since the introduction of the measures the numbers of motorists illegally driving in the bus lane on Donegall Square East, through into Adelaide Street, has dropped from a daily average of 106 in September 2015 to a daily average of 35 in September 2017.

The Department therefore does not propose to remove the restriction as this would adversely affect public transport services and potentially re-introduce a large amount of through traffic into the city centre. However, having carefully considered the Council's request, we will remove the Variable Message Sign.

I have asked Ciarán de Búrca, Director of the Department's Transport Projects & Business Services Division, to attend a future meeting of the Council's City Growth and Regeneration Committee. Ciarán has responsibility for the enforcement of moving traffic offences and the implementation of Belfast Rapid Transit and therefore is best placed to provide the Committee with briefing on city centre bus lanes, enforcement in the city centre and the implementation of Belfast Rapid Transit. Please contact Ciaran directly, telephone 028 9054 0078 or email ciaran.deburca@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk, to make the necessary arrangements.

I trust this is helpful.

Yours sincerely



PETER MAY