



Subject:	Department for Infrastructure response to a Council proposal to designate Belfast as 'car free' 20-22 September 2020
Date:	5 th November 2019
Reporting Officer:	Nigel Grimshaw, Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues.
1.1	Members will recall that at the People and Communities Committee meeting of 6 th August 2019, a Member referred to the need to consider commuter travelling and car parking and its impact on Belfast's ambient air quality. The Committee therefore agreed that it would write to the Department for Infrastructure in support of Eco Belfast's Campaign requesting that the Department designate Belfast a 'car free' city from 20 th – 22 nd September 2019.
1.2	This decision of the People and Communities Committee was approved and adopted at the Council meeting of 2 nd September 2019 and a letter was subsequently sent to the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Infrastructure on 3 rd September 2019 requesting that the Department consider designating Belfast a 'car free' city over the period 20 th – 22 nd September 2019. These dates coincided with the 2019 Culture Night Belfast

1.3	<p>event that took place over the evening of Friday 20th and on Saturday 21st September 2019 and with the 2019 Belfast City Half Marathon that took place on Sunday 22nd September 2019.</p> <p>The Department for Infrastructure considered the Council's request and has responded to the Director of City Services in a letter dated 17th September 2019. This report therefore serves to provide an overview of the Department's letter of response to the Committee and likely considerations for a future Council led 'car free' event. A copy of the Department's written response has been attached as Appendix 1 to this report.</p>
2.0	Recommendations.
2.1	<p>The Committee is requested to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • note the contents of this report and of the Department for Infrastructure's response to the Council in respect of designating Belfast as 'car free' over the period of 20th – 22nd September 2019. • Members are requested to consider the anticipated financial and resource implications of the Council leading a project to designate Belfast as 'car free' on a future date.
3.0	Main report.
3.1	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>Members are advised that in terms of ambient air quality, Belfast City Council has designated four Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAS) across the city. These AQMAS have been designated along arterial routes for exceedances of the nitrogen dioxide annual mean air quality objective. The AQMAS have been designated in a ribbon manner for the Ormeau Road, the M1 Motorway / A12 Westlink corridor, Cromac Street to the junction with Short Strand and the Upper Newtownards Road. Source apportionment within these AQMAS has revealed that exceedances of the nitrogen dioxide annual mean objective are principally as a consequence of emissions from road vehicles.</p>
3.2	<p>As part of the Council's local air quality management statutory obligations, the Council is required to develop an Air Quality Action Plan, which draws upon actions that the Council, as well as relevant authority partners, can take within each AQMA in order to achieve the air quality objectives. It should be noted that within Northern Ireland, the Department for Infrastructure has responsibility for roads, road improvement schemes, public transport, transport initiatives and active travel and so the Department is a principal contributor to the</p>

2015-2020 Belfast City Air Quality Action Plan, alongside Translink, the Freight Transport Association and the Road Haulage Association.

- 3.3 In its response to the Council, the Department has stated that in reflecting the focus on 'Improving Wellbeing for All' in the draft Programme for Government, the Department is committed to taking action to increase the proportion of journeys undertaken by sustainable modes. The Department has therefore advised that it is supportive of the Council's focus on reducing private car journeys to the city centre, noting that a reduction in car traffic can make a substantial positive contribution to local air quality and greenhouse gases reductions, in addition to making urban centres much more attractive places in which to work, visit invest and enjoy leisure time.
- 3.4 The Department has highlighted that it previously supported the Ciclovía event, which involved road closures along a designated route between Botanic Gardens and Belfast City Hall and that it has been at the heart of initiatives to encourage the use of Public Transport in place of private car for accessing Belfast City Centre at Christmas.
- 3.5 The Department has advised however, that a successful 'car free' day would involve a number of integrated elements including road closures, alternative traffic management measures, and supplementary public transport offers which would require significant planning and lead-in time, and significant Consultation with all the relevant stakeholders including industry and business who may be affected by traffic impacts around the City.
- 3.6 The Department has highlighted that the proposed road restrictions could have been undertaken by the Council under the Roads (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010, either as part of the Order that had been prepared to facilitate 'Culture Night' or as a separate 'special events' Order. The Department has advised however, that initial consideration of the proposal for 'car free' city days would suggest that more complex arrangements than simply closing roads to motor vehicles generally would be required.
- 3.7 Whilst the Department has advised that there was insufficient time to address these matters ahead of the 2019 Culture Night and Belfast Half Marathon on 20th-22nd September 2019, the Department has nonetheless advised that it would be keen to support the Council in designating Belfast City as 'car free' in future as part of a co-ordinated package of measures and events.

3.8	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is considered that if the Council were to lead a 'car free' initiative for the city, it would initially have to identify a range of potential future 'car free' dates and to then seek the support of relevant city organisations in supporting the development and implementation of a detailed 'car free' project plan. • Organisations that would most likely need to be involved in planning, and support the implementation of a 'car free' initiative, would at least include the Department for Infrastructure, the Department for Education, the Department for Health, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Translink, PSNI, Queens and Ulster University, Belfast City Centre Management, Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce, the Freight Transport Association, Road Haulage Association, taxi operators and the various emergency services. • It is anticipated that a specific marketing and media campaign would have to be developed and implemented, significantly in advance of any future 'car free' initiative. • It is anticipated that significant officer time would have to be devoted to the inception, coordination, implementation and management of a 'car free' campaign. • In relation to consultation and implementation, if BCC were to lead on specific road closures for traffic management arrangements and depending on the size and complexity of any proposal, these could range from £5k-50k which is not planned for in the revenue estimates.
3.9	<p>It is anticipated that a significant financial budget would have to be identified and assigned to support additional staff resources to manage the formal consultation and engagement, the marketing and media campaign aspects of a 'car free' project. No such allowance has been included within 2020-2021 revenue and budget estimates. It may be that the most appropriate approach would be to engage with DFI and enlist their leadership and support for taking on the coordination of this initiative going forward, within the context of their strategy for sustainable transport.</p>
3.10	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications /Rural Needs Assessments</u></p> <p>It is considered that designating Belfast as 'car free' may have implications for Section 75 categories age, disability and dependents. It is therefore anticipated that a full Equality, Good Relations Implications and Rural Needs assessments would have to be undertaken for any 'car free' proposal.</p>

4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached.
	Appendix 1 - Department for Infrastructure letter of response to the 'Proposal for Belfast Car Free Days from 20 th — 22 nd September 2019'.