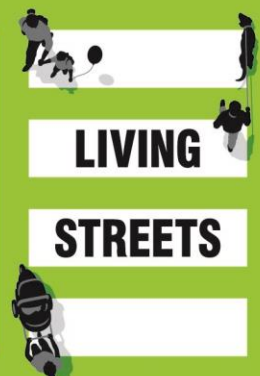


# Miles Better

## Securing Better Access to the Scottish Parliament



We are Living Streets Scotland, part of the UK charity for everyday walking. We want to create a nation where walking is the natural choice for everyday, local journeys.



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# Executive Summary

This report examines the walk between the Scottish Parliament and Waverley Station in Edinburgh, as a case study on the challenges of improving streets for walking. It presents options to make access to the Scottish Parliament 'miles better' for pedestrians.

Our audit found that walking is the predominant mode of travel over most of this route, but that it is afforded little space or priority.

Issues include:

- Wide junctions that are problematic to cross
- Narrow and crowded pavements
- Traffic dominance
- Obstructions and pinch points
- Lack of space for wider use of streets
- Mismatch between pedestrian presence, speed limits, and carriageway design.

We conclude that these streets are not worthy of their functions as pedestrian routes to important destinations, or as key destinations in themselves. We found that they continue to be managed as traffic corridors, more in line with 1960s visions for Edinburgh, involving an inner ring road and associated major distributor roads, rather than following modern ideas about the promotion of 'active travel'. Previous efforts to transform the street have failed, most recently in 2011, when there was an extensive community consultation exercise.

We suggest two broad options for improving Canongate. We suggest that the first option would be to change the character of the carriageway design, while continuing to allow current access to vehicles, and that the second would be to reduce carriageway capacity to allow a more significant re-design in order to prioritise walking and active travel. This is vital if the street is to be useable and pleasant for people with disabilities.

This could and should be one of the most significant and attractive historic streets in Europe with careful design and management. We would suggest that transformation is both necessary and possible, via two projects: one looking at Market Street and Jeffrey Street, and one looking at Canongate to the Scottish Parliament. In each case, a significant reduction or near elimination of most vehicle movement is needed to allow the street to be reclaimed for pedestrian use. Edinburgh's City Centre Transformation will influence the shape of these streets, but there is scope to go further and faster if there is the political ambition to do so.

Critically, change will involve identifying funding at a national level and engaging a wide range of local stakeholders to agree the scope and ambition of the project. Living Streets believes transforming this area can not only create an example of national best practice, but help MSPs better understand the challenges and opportunities associated with ambitious active travel projects. Political action could end sixty wasted years of planning for cars not people.

# 1. Introduction

In late 2017, Living Streets Scotland made a presentation concerning the complexities of street management to the Cross-Party Group on Walking, Cycling and Buses. This recommended to the group that the walk between the Scottish Parliament and Waverley Station offered a good case study of the challenges of improving streets for walking. The group agreed it would be useful for Living Streets to undertake a street audit of this locally and nationally important route in the Scottish capital.

This report presents Living Streets' findings, setting out options to make access to the Scottish Parliament 'miles better' for pedestrians.

## 2. Project details

### Aim

To review the primary walking route to the Scottish Parliament and how it could be improved for pedestrians of all abilities (including those using a wheelchair or other mobility aid) and to identify wider lessons for street management in Scotland.

### Objectives

To deliver a technical review of access from Waverley Station to the Scottish Parliament in relation to the experience for all users.

To make recommendations on how the street could be improved, including on a process that might deliver change.

To demonstrate the opportunities and complexities associated with delivering changes to streets which would benefit walking.

### Method

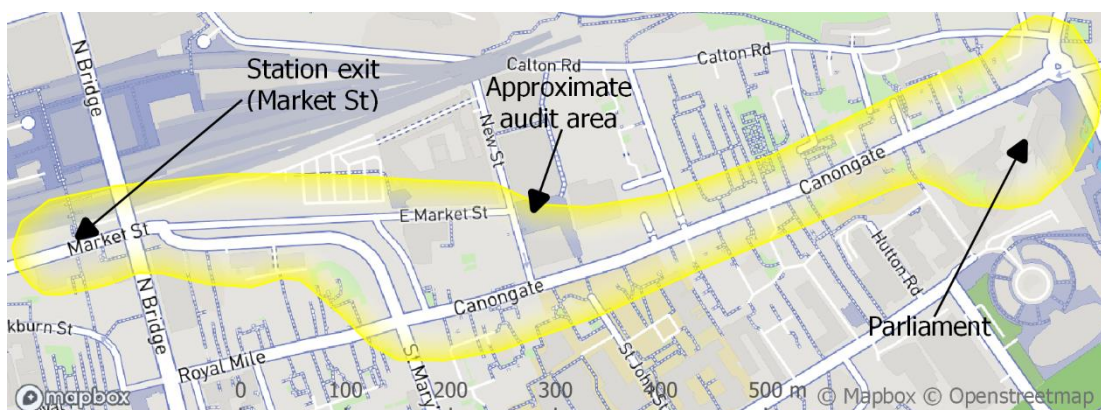
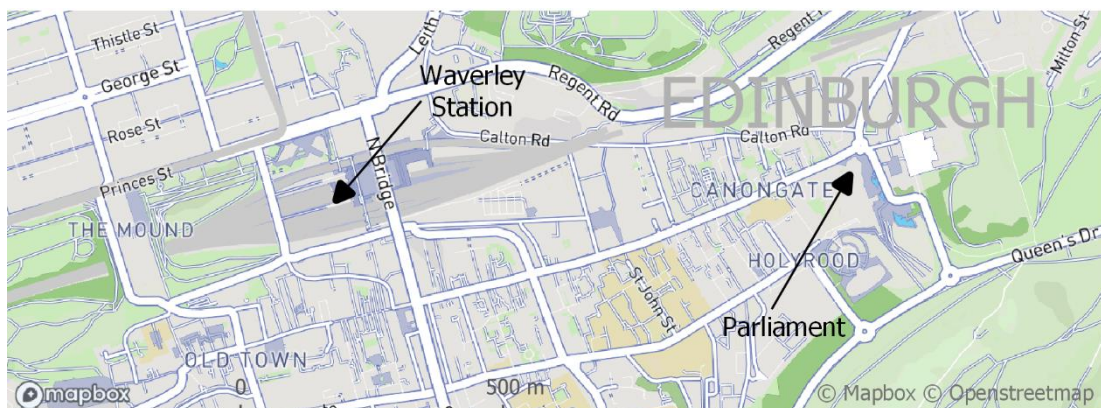
1. Living Streets deployed its established street audit methodology to assess the street over several months in spring and summer 2018.
2. Efforts were made to identify different uses and users of the street and their complementary and competing needs.
3. Efforts to engage the community were reviewed and documented. A formal community street audit process (working with community members) was not carried out owing to the level of prior consultation and outstanding actions in plans and policies for streets. Further consultation without the prospect of action was deemed unhelpful.

4. The potential of existing plans and policies to manage and improve the street was considered in relation to the technical audit findings.
5. Options which could improve conditions for pedestrians were identified, focused on accessibility, safety, and improved environmental considerations.
6. Recommendations were pulled together offering the views of Living Streets Scotland as a catalyst for a future improvement project.

The report has been prepared independently by Living Streets Scotland for the Cross-Party Group. City of Edinburgh Council where informed of the approach when they were planning their city centre transformation. Ultimately this report seeks to prompt a more focused and constructive dialogue on the future of one of Scotland’s most iconic streets. We have therefore made a series of recommendations to stakeholders to initiate a process of change.

## Route

The audit focused on the area between the Market Street exit of Waverley Station and the Scottish Parliament - via East Market Street, Jeffrey Street, the Canongate and Horse Wynd. Local routes from the North, Abbeyhill, and Leith, and the South, via Holyrood Road, were beyond the scope of the study.



# 3. Route context

## History

Edinburgh's Old Town is part of a world heritage area based on its street pattern, architecture, and historic character. However, it is also a working part of Edinburgh as a modern European capital city, housing one of the busiest railway stations in Scotland and the nation's legislature.

The Royal Mile (at this point 'Canongate') has a fishbone street pattern, with a wider straight spine and narrower side streets and closes. This dates from medieval times and is largely intact. Substantial changes occurred in the 1950s to 1960s to clear and replace overcrowded tenements, thus reducing the area's population and the diversity of local businesses. Plans to pedestrianise the high street were brought forward in the 1970s but failed to materialise (alongside proposals for inner city distributor roads). Overall, it would seem challenging, if not impossible, to alter the overall street layout.

The biggest changes to the area more recently occurred in the late 1990s. A short section of High Street west of Cockburn Street was pedestrianised, preventing through traffic to and from George IV Bridge. At the lower end of Canongate, the Scottish Parliament building had a substantial impact on the road layout.

Beyond some pavement widening at John Knox House, changes to Canongate east of the small pedestrianised area have largely been modest, with primarily cosmetic improvements to footways. Despite the building of a plaza at the Scottish Parliament's entrance, this does not extend across to Holyrood Palace, and is bisected by Abbeyhill and Horse Wynd. This encourages traffic to travel via Holyrood Park to bypass the Old Town. Traffic on Canongate is at its worst during commuting times and on Sunday when the park is closed.

The renewal of the general area continued from the 1990s, with the creation of new housing association developments, hotels, offices (the Tun and Scotsman) and major visitor attractions such as Dynamic Earth nearby. Access by car is largely restricted by the availability of public and private parking in both older and new developments. Aside from tour buses, options to arrive by bus are limited to a few services. Cycle parking is generally limited, aside from some spaces at the Scottish Parliament plaza.

The biggest attempt to change the space more recently was when City of Edinburgh Council piloted a number of car-free days, closing the lower half of the Royal Mile.

## Demographics

The nature of the local population is a critical factor in how streets are used and managed. The Royal Mile area is quite distinct in Scotland. Edinburgh's Old Town has a large student population, with 51% of residents classed as full-time students at the time of the last census. A comparatively high percentage of residents live in single person households (53.6%). Although only 8.4% of the resident population is over 65, two sheltered housing facilities have been identified within the survey area. The area has low car dependency, with just over

50% of residents having access to a car. This demographic makes community engagement challenging, in terms of groups with long-term and short-term association with the area.

It can be assumed that visitors to the Parliament and local offices are make up a high proportion of users of this route. As well as students, visitors to tourist accommodation and attractions will also be a significant proportion of street users, particularly at certain times of year. The growth in visitors and students is source of tension for longer-term residents.

## Previous consultations and plans for improvements

Whilst the upper half of the Royal Mile was transformed in the 1990s, little of a similar scale (beyond repaving) has occurred in the vicinity of the Canongate. In 2011, the Council commissioned a charrette consultation on improving the spaces. Reporting in 2012 this found:

- No space for children to play.
- Roundabout at Parliament a problem.
- Traffic moves too fast.
- Traffic corridor/route detrimental to character of street.
- Pavements too narrow.
- Not pedestrian friendly.
- Poor quality of road surface compared to rest of street.
- Poor signage.
- Volume of buses.
- Delivery issues for local businesses.
- Inadequate street lighting – unwelcoming during winter months.

The recommendations to address community concerns	Observed progress in 2020
1. Introduce traffic calming measure at the Canongate Kirk and museums by creation of a single level shared surface.	No evidence of pedestrian priority or plans at consultation stage.
2. Investigate potential for traffic calming/pedestrian priority at Holyrood/Parliament junction.	No evidence of pedestrian priority or plans at consultation stage.
3. Investigate the possibility of changing the 35 bus from double deck to single deck, increasing frequency of service	Public transport continues to be provided by large double-decker buses.
4. Investigate possibility of making the area a low emissions zone.	Area is part of the city centre zone.
5. Investigate potential to re-route one of the tourist buses from the Royal Mile to Holyrood Road.	Tourist buses remain on the Royal Mile and remain a source of tension with residents.
6. Reduce traffic speeds and vehicle/pedestrian conflict.	Now part of the city wide 20mph area.
7. Review on-street parking (except residents parking).	Limited on street parking for permit holders and loading, and small number of pay and display bays.

In 2016, Living Streets Scotland completed a Community Street Audit of the nearby Cowgate and found similar issues concerning traffic, public transport options, pollution, and lack of pavement space. In 2017, the Old Town Community Council, produced a report covering similar themes entitled “*Our Streets: How unpleasant they have become – and what to do about it.*” Recent routine maintenance to the carriageway in the Cowgate failed to address the significant issues identified by Living Streets and residents in 2016, which include narrow pavements and accessibility problems.

However, the street has benefitted significantly from some wider policies promoted by the City of Edinburgh Council. These included:

- A policy of 20mph for residential and shopping streets.
- A ban on mobile advertising structures.
- Efforts to rationalise the management of trade waste. This has been successful in some sections of the route (Canongate) but not all (Market Street).
- Weekend street closures piloted in summer 2020.

This current report was commissioned in the context of the above, and therefore naturally highlights a general lack of progress on these issues. It particularly highlights a need for a shared and coherent vision for the streets we have studied here.

Whilst Living Streets cannot explain the lack of progress, we do note the City of Edinburgh Council has been subject to over a decade of austerity measures which have hit non-protected areas such as transport engagement particularly hard.

## The Future

The prospects for this route are unclear and subject to wider programmes. It safe to assume that significant immediate improvements are not on the cards. Change is likely to arise from two obvious causes. The first is the redevelopment of Waverley Station, which may include major changes to East Market Street, including better access and drop off areas. Vertical connections via lifts to North Bridge may also offer new accessible options to reach the high street – although on a less direct route to the Scottish Parliament and Holyrood.

The second is the council’s City Centre Transformation programme, which includes bold plans for Edinburgh over the next 10 years. This includes the areas outside Waverley Station and potentially new links to Leith Street and vertical connections to the North Bridge. It also may result in removing traffic from the section of the High Street between South Bridge and St Mary’s Street. This will indirectly benefit part of the route we studied by simplifying the junction where St Mary Street and Jeffrey Street meet the High Street/Canongate, and by reducing some through traffic. Promisingly, there is a suggestion that the lower half of Canongate may become a street with ‘managed access’, but we know of no plans to make changes at the roundabout beside the Parliament.

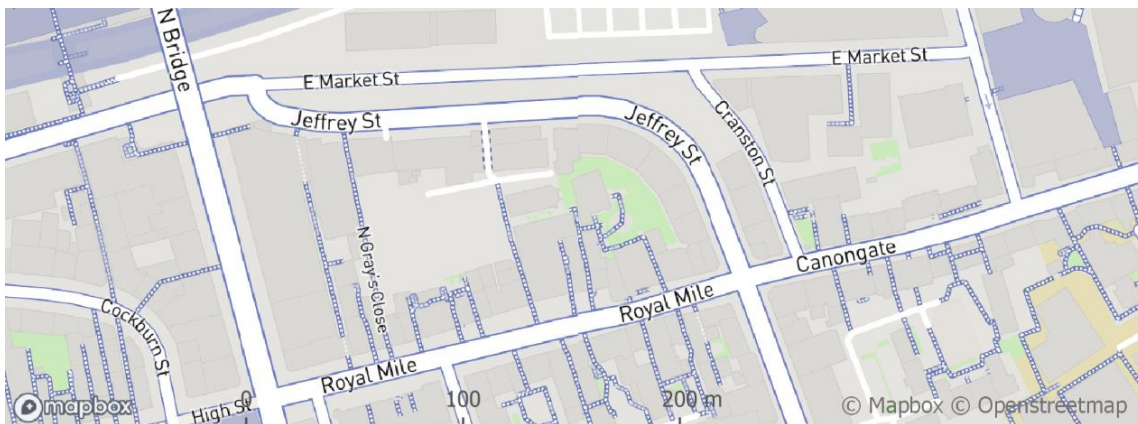
COVID-19 is a significant issue. The majority of the route has large sections of pavement that are 2 metres wide or less. Social distancing is not possible in places, and people are walking on the carriageway. Businesses might also need more outdoor space in order to remain viable. Significant changes to the streets are required to meet these challenges.



# 4. Audit Findings

A full technical audit is available as an annex to this report. A summary of key findings, focused on addressing the study objectives, is provided below.

## Route Part 1 Findings: Waverley Station to Jeffrey Street



Waverley Station is one of Scotland's busiest railway stations. At the Market Street exit there are no wayfinding signs to direct people to the High Street, or other Old Town destinations. Furthermore, the area is congested with little space for visitors to pause, take stock and orientate themselves. It is common for there to be congestion on the pavement, whilst people wait to cross the road.

Whilst there is a signalised crossing outside the station, this most obviously serves the Fleshmarket Close route to the High Street, a route not suitable for many people because it involves negotiating a substantial flight of steps. We assessed the alternate and most direct route to Canongate for anybody travelling to the Parliament, via Jeffrey Street.

The first issue with this route to the parliament is that it is relatively unobvious without the support of signage.



Jeffrey St / Market Street junction

The gently swept kerb lines and wide expanse of carriageway space at the junction of Market Street and Jeffrey Street allow vehicles to maintain speed where ideally they should be reduced. The Jeffrey Street carriageway end has a very wide mouth, with many different vehicle movements possible. There is even a 'right turning lane' marked on Market Street, an intervention designed to allow for continuing traffic flow rather than slowing traffic and aiding pedestrian priority. Such a design may be appropriate for distributor roads with large amounts of fast-moving traffic, but it seems incongruous in a city centre location busy with pedestrians. We also note that within a few metres both (East) Market Street and Jeffrey Street narrow significantly, so that it is unlikely that much advantage will be gained from the wider section of road.

For pedestrians to cross safely around this area they are likely to need to remain alert, and to judge timing carefully. It is likely that many people would find some crossings of carriageway space in this area to be challenging or impossible, particularly if slowed by a disability, if accompanying children, or if too young to judge traffic movements accurately.

Dropped kerbs and tactile markings around this junction are not in intuitive places, with the safest crossing point sitting to the east of the junction. Here newer footway buildouts (added since our original audit) do mean that pedestrians need only cross two carriageway lanes. However, the more natural crossing point to the south side of Market Street lacks dropped kerbs, and pedestrians are faced with crossing three live carriageway lanes and dealing with traffic exiting Jeffrey Street with little to slow it.



Jeffrey Street at Market Street

Jeffrey Street itself has a confused carriageway design, with large areas of carriageway effectively unused – not normally driven on, yet feeling to pedestrians to be live-carriageway space where they are at risk. This is a common problem on UK streets, and improved street designs can make a significant difference to the pedestrian experience.

At the time of our audit, mobile street clutter was a substantial problem, presenting numerous obstructions in the form of 'A board' advertising, on-street sale of goods, and waste bins. The good news is the A board situation has been largely been addressed through a city-wide ban and proactive education and enforcement. Trade waste and road works signs remain a recurring hindrance to safe pedestrian movement.



Mobile street clutter on Jeffrey Street



Mobile street clutter on Jeffrey Street

#### Key Issues: Waverley Station to the High Street

- Poor crossing design and positioning
- Wide junctions that are problematic to cross, especially for disabled people
- Narrow and crowded pavements
- Traffic dominance, speed volume noise and air pollution
- Lack of signs and interpretation to orientate and direct visitors
- The area is hostile to anyone with sight impairments
- Obstructions and pinch points as a result of mobile street clutter

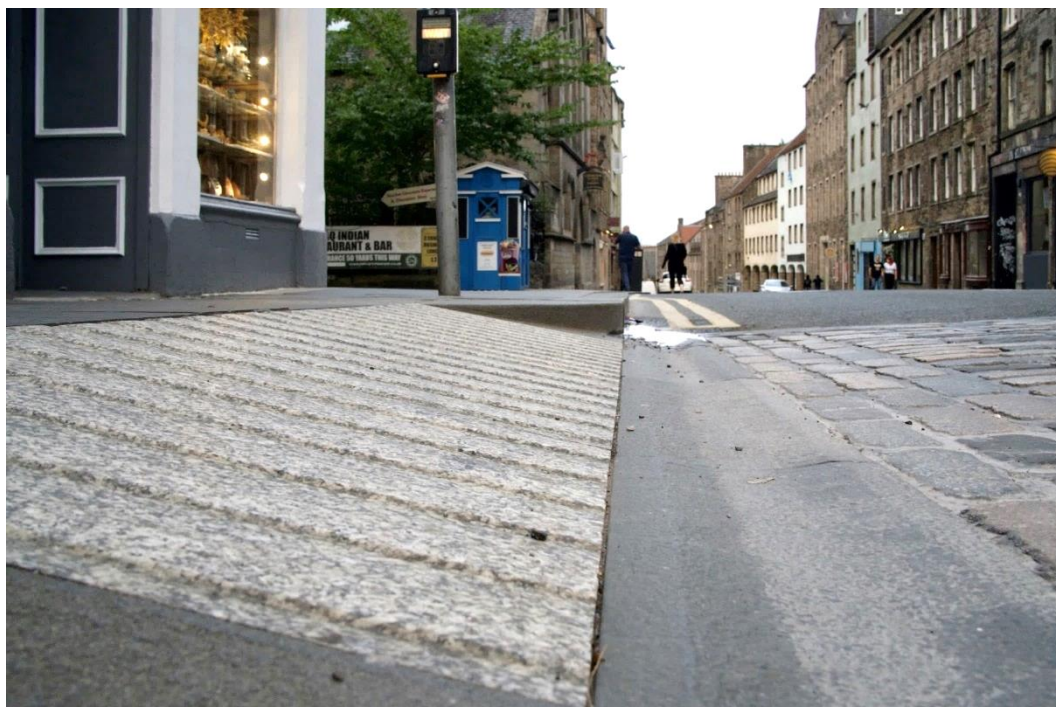


Trade waste cluttering pavements

## Route Part 2 Findings: Jeffrey Street Junction to the Canongate



The Jeffrey Street/St Mary's Street and Royal Mile crossing is signal controlled, with steep inclines on ramped kerbs to access the carriageway from the footways. This presents an obstacle for people using mobility aids or with sight impairments. Users of some electric wheelchairs may struggle to complete the crossing without assistance. The ramped kerbs are not positioned on the obvious pedestrian desire lines and crossing controls are poorly positioned. It is common for there to be congestion whilst pedestrians wait to cross the junction and not all waiting pedestrians can be accommodated in the green phase. Overall this a very negative experience for all pedestrians and may be particularly problematic for many people with disabilities.



Steep ramps at junction

Generally, on the section of Canongate east of the junction pavements are narrow and inadequate to accommodate the number of pedestrians using the street. It is common for

people to walk on the carriageway because of a lack of space. Although there is a 20mph speed limit, actual speeds vary by time of day – with traffic levels and parked vehicles being the main deterrent to faster driving. Overall compliance with the 20mph limit requires monitoring. Higher speeds also mean pedestrians must judge more carefully whether they can safely assert their legal authority at zebra crossings rather than assuming that crossing will be safe. Overall we observe poorer driving behaviour here than on nearby zebra crossings at Waverley Bridge, where people must drive more slowly as they approach a mini roundabout.

In 2017, during a study visit, renowned Canadian urbanist and transport planner Brent Toderian remarked on Twitter that:

*The lower part of #Edinburgh's iconic #RoyalMile is designed for cars, with a dangerous #designspeed MUCH higher than the new posted limit<sup>1</sup>*

At all points most of the available space is given over to the movement of motor vehicles. The road has a clear centre line, using a 'warning line' design (with longer lines and shorter spaces) rather than a more standard 'centre line' design. Such warning lines are used to indicate an increased level of risk, generally where traffic is travelling fast. Chapter 5 of the Traffic Signs Manual says:

*"Only hazards that are unusual for the road environment or not immediately obvious should be marked by warning lines. Overuse of the marking should be avoided. Its use where it is not justified will devalue its effect. Particular care should be taken in urban areas where there might be a temptation to use it extensively."*



Similar 'warning line' markings used both on Canongate and a fast rural road

This road marking can be seen to be similar to that used on the section of rural road pictured above. If anything, the carriageway width on this rural road is narrower than on Canongate, yet vehicles are often driven on this section of road (in East Lothian) at speeds closer to the national (60mph) speed limit.

Space for tables and chairs and the sale of goods is very limited. The area seems to be designed to be somewhere visitors will pass through, rather than linger. Space for walking tours is at a premium. Dead frontage adds to the diminished sense of place and reinforces the streets function as a traffic corridor.

<sup>1</sup>@BrentToderian <https://twitter.com/BrentToderian/status/922946729716207618>



Narrow footways with  
redundant street clutter

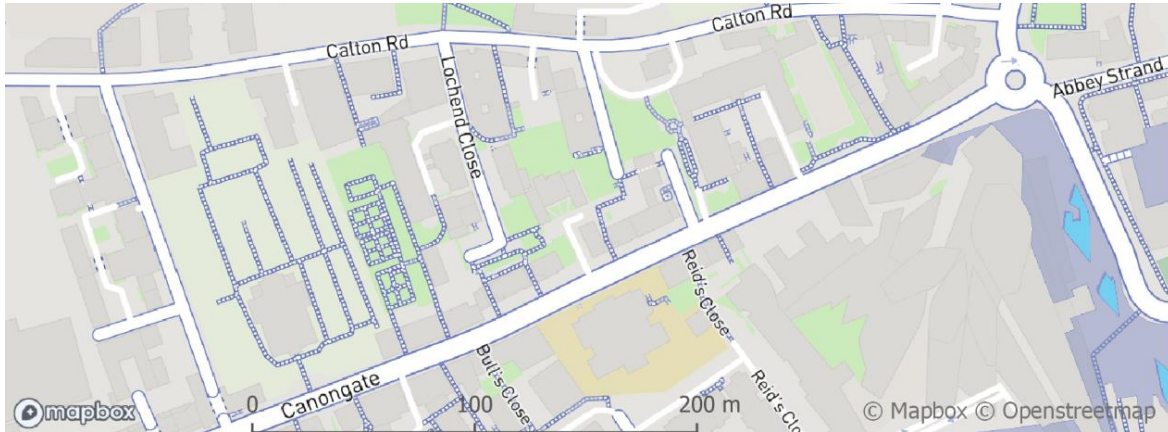


Narrow footway obstructed  
(deviation from desire lines)

### Key issues: Jeffrey Street Junction to the Canongate

- Narrow pavements, prone to overcrowding, making it necessary for pedestrians to use the carriageway, combined with a carriageway designed to try to create a steady flow of relatively fast-moving traffic
- Variable pedestrian priority on side roads
- A mismatch between the speed limit and the design speed
- High kerbs with steep ramps present challenges to people with mobility issues
- General traffic dominance
- A lack of interest at points with “dead frontage” on buildings
- Short crossing times at the busy St Mary’s junction
- A lack of space to stop and linger or sit on public benches
- Diversions from the obvious pedestrian desire line where loading/parking bays have been designated at the expense of footway space
- Crowding on narrow pavements near zebra crossings
- Pedestrian guardrail near the school makes the space unpleasant and adds to crowding around the zebra crossing
- Examples of very narrow footways (under 1.5m) where pedestrians cannot pass comfortably or must step on the carriageway
- Redundant street poles and badly out of date wayfaring totem
- Since our first site visits there has been progress on eliminating A-boards. We have, however, retained reference to this problem in the technical annex.

## Route Part 3 Findings: Holyrood and the Scottish Parliament



This area encompasses the lower half of the Canongate, the western elevation of the Parliament building, and the Scottish Veteran's housing association building. This area was last redesigned in the early 2000s to coincide with the opening of the Scottish Parliament. To an extent it retains some features consistent with Abbeyhill and Holyrood Road being urban distributor roads, which in plans in the 1960s and 70s would have connected to a major gyratory junction at Tollcross - as part of what was then a proposed inner ring road.

Generally, the area around the roundabout here is congested, car dominated and is relatively hostile to anyone on foot or on a bike. A very large area is given over to carriageway space. Although the central roundabout feature itself is small, the design of the footway does not correspond to this working as a mini-roundabout – but rather as a more major junction. Although 'Abbey Strand' effectively works as a pedestrianised street it joins the carriageway area in almost the same way that it would if it were a full arm of the roundabout. Although both Canongate and Abbeyhill are single carriageway roads, at the roundabout their carriageways widen to at least the width of four carriageway lanes. Meanwhile gentle swept kerb lines allow most vehicle movements to take place without any need to slow down. Roundabouts can be designed intentionally to slow vehicles, or to intentionally to try to maintain speed and flow, and this design clearly seeks the latter outcome.

Because of the presence of this roundabout, and the large expanse of carriageway, pedestrian passage here has to be negotiated around the extreme edges of the available space, well away from any desire line.





### Very large area given over to carriageway space, east end of Canongate

Aside from a crossing around 40 metres along Horse Wynd, there are no controlled crossings associated with this roundabout, which presents a particular problem for many people with disabilities. There are dropped kerbs on the Canongate footway, and a central pedestrian refuge, but this design does little to allow pedestrians to assert authority and spaces to cross are often blocked by queuing traffic. Worse, a security bollard on an area of tactile paving and dropped kerb poses an obstacle to anyone using a wheelchair or with a visual impairment. Nor does the central refuge offer sufficient space for more than one person to wait in safety and comfort. A crossing to the north on Abbeyhill is worse as the siting of a lamp post ('lighting column') within the pedestrian refuge may make this unusable for anyone using a wheelchair. There is no tactile paving at the dropped kerb here.

Many crossings in this area will require pedestrians to make careful judgements about vehicle speed and movements, and significant diversions from their desired path.

Whilst the Parliament has an extensive plaza area around the ponds, this contrasts starkly with the lack of pedestrian space on approaches from the north (Abbeyhill) and west (Canongate). The section of footway to the south side of Canongate here was particularly problematic in terms of obvious pinch points. At the worst point an already narrow pavement is further eroded by the presence of bollards.



Bollard obstructing tactile paving and dropped kerb

Whilst the area is accessible by public transport, the areas around bus stops are a pinch point and are particularly crowded at busy times. The bays for the buses also disrupt natural pedestrian desire lines.



Pinch point at bus stop

Aside from the mural on the side of the parliament building (which juts into the pavement) many of the frontages lack interest and generally this is an area people would pass through, rather than linger in. Orientation information, and way-finding signage to points of interest, are absent.

**Key issues include:**

- A roundabout designed for flow and speed at a location where there is significant pedestrian presence and movement
- A lack of convenient and direct controlled carriageway crossings
- Poorly designed uncontrolled crossing space positioned at greatly widened stretches of carriageway
- Very narrow pavements with pinch points
- General traffic dominance and an unattractive environment
- Poor integration of public transport stops which disrupt pedestrian desire lines and create pinch points
- Inactive frontages.

# 5. Summary of issues around walkability

An audit conducted over an extended period reveals that streets along the route between Waverley Station and the Scottish Parliament are designed to prioritise vehicle movement over all other uses. It confirms that the design of Scotland's most iconic street does not in any way align with its use or established modern transport policy concepts.

Although walking is the predominant mode of travel over most of this route, it is afforded little space or any priority. This means narrow crowded pavements, particularly on Canongate, and carriageways and junctions which are difficult to cross.

Arguably people arrive in these spaces not because of the quality of the local infrastructure, but in spite of its low quality. The draw of tourist attractions or a wish to access the Scottish Parliament mean that many people are prepared to cope with the poor conditions, although we note again that some people will not physically be able to do so. In terms of the barriers faced by people with disabilities on these streets access to the Scottish Parliament is at best an embarrassment. Some of these issues affect everyone, but problems like narrow pavements prove particularly challenging for someone with a guide dog or using a wheelchair.

Edinburgh's Royal Mile is not unique in the issues it faces, but it is especially high profile given its location and historic status. Many of our cities are slowly exploring how to re-balance their central areas for walking, after a long hiatus since the last wave of pedestrianisation between the 1970-1990s. In many places it feels as if the old vision of multi-lane inner ring roads and gyratory systems is still influential, with most carriageways - even on streets with an extremely heavy pedestrian presence - being designed to maximise vehicle flow. The proposed inner ring roads for Edinburgh were never built, but neither were the corresponding pedestrianised areas created. In most northern European countries historic cores of old town areas were pedestrianised in the 1960s and continue to exclude traffic to this day. The current situation ignores the negative consequences for pedestrians, and the degraded local environment which results. It also fails to reflect both the detail and principles of established Scottish Government transport and placemaking policies.

The city centre looks set to be transformed and the streets near Waverley Station regenerated. As part of this process the needs of communities living in the Canongate, and of visitors, both need to be considered. Residents have been waiting to see issues addressed that were identified in a major community consultation exercise nine years ago. Action is urgently needed to trigger substantive change focused on better conditions for walking. Without action the current situation could persist well beyond 2030.

There are many realistic options for improvement.

# 6. Delivering Improvements

## Canongate

There are three key options available for Canongate.

### **Option A: Live with the status quo**

Clearly, if there is no consensus or leadership the design of Canongate will remain as it is. At best this means tiny incremental improvements, often driven by external forces (e.g. development pressures). Overall, this would mean the street and access to the Parliament in 2030 being largely as it is found today.

Some very limited pavement widening, and additional support for crossing carriageway space, might be possible. This could also assist in reducing traffic speeds, but the general character of the street and the dominance of motor vehicles would remain.

We do not believe that this option is acceptable.

### **Option B: Changes in carriageway character**

There may be methods by which the character of this street can be changed, even if access and carriageway space remains unchanged.

We would most strongly emphasise that even if kerb lines and carriageway space both remain as they are, it may be possible to slow speeds with a carriageway properly designed for the location. Much stronger visual signals are needed to alter driver behaviour and make driving at greater speed feel uncomfortable. Options to visually narrow the carriageway need to be explored. Such treatment focuses on creating an environment where driving slowly feels natural.

As a minimum, removing the central white line could encourage slower driving. This could be done at little or no cost and would also benefit the aesthetic of the street.

There are many designs intended to make slower speeds feel natural, and we would look first to those which provide a physical change in surface, so that the smooth area of the carriageway is much reduced - to not much more than is required for a single private car. The result should be two (opposing) narrow sections of carriageway, intended to move vehicles away from the kerb and to keep them separate, to create the feeling of a very narrow space for driving in, yet with a surface which will allow overrun by larger vehicles.

The photograph immediately below is of Cowgate in Kirkintilloch. Even when the traffic signals here are on green people driving sometimes stop to allow pedestrians to cross. The lower photograph shows one of the zebra crossings on Canongate, from a similar perspective – highlighting how differently the Cowgate carriageway has been designed. The actual carriageway width here is very similar to the Kirkintilloch street, yet the street feels radically different. To create a similar environment in Edinburgh a very different palette of materials would need to be applied – for example using a ‘cobbled’ (setted) central divider.



Cowgate, Kirkintilloch – including adaptations to create visual narrowing



Canongate – showing carriageway designed for traffic flow and speed

A few major elements in the Kirkintilloch design (particularly changes at a junction) have been controversial, and we have been critical of some other specific details, but the design has been effective in significantly improving the way that people drive on the section we picture. This offers evidence that driving behaviours can be changed on Canongate, even if the carriageway space remains fundamentally unchanged.

However a key drawback to this approach is that the chronic problems faced by people with disabilities on the very narrow pavements would remain unaddressed.

### **Option C: Reduce vehicle access or capacity**

In recent decades an increasing proportion of cities have recognised that there is more benefit in reducing through traffic around their city centres than in trying to enable it. There are relatively few cities now lacking at least some significant pedestrianised areas.

Edinburgh's Royal Mile is an iconic street, with very significant pedestrian use levels. It seems vital that the city looks at methods to:

1. Provide safer and accessible surfaces, supporting all users but especially those who cannot currently access this area at all.
2. Enhance pedestrian movement to the Parliament and other destinations on this part of the Royal Mile.
3. Create more on-street activity for example with benches, active frontage, art and interpretation.
4. Increase scope for public events.
5. Maintain mechanisms to allow servicing of businesses and/or time restricted loading.

Full pedestrianisation is the most beneficial option in terms of creating space for new uses of the street, but this requires the biggest break with the status quo. Given no tangible progress has been made in modern times (since mass motorisation in the 1950s-60s) this would be radical.

Rather than seeking full pedestrianisation it may be possible to retain access for very specific vehicles, including public transport. This would reduce many of the benefits of unhindered and safe pedestrian movement, but might be more palatable to many, and it is the option that is suggested in material related to the City Centre Transformation project.

Some consideration should clearly be given, no matter what vehicle access arrangements are, to the historic character of Canongate – and in particular to the presence of raised footway or footway-like structures. A further key consideration is whether, with the removal of traffic, it would be feasible to restore cobbles (setts) to the carriageway, as befits a historic street.

Hybrid solutions might reduce the carriageway space on Canongate to a single one-way lane (with additional space in places for loading). This could maintain some access for deliveries, whilst freeing up more space for footways to be extended. The frequency of vehicle movement will have a big bearing on the resulting character of the street, and this in turn will be determined by whether driving through the area remains possible or whether through-routes are removed.

Critical issues include ensuring enough access for deliveries to local businesses and also parking for people with disabilities at strategic points on or near the Canongate. There have been powerful examples in Edinburgh of failures to regulate vehicle access to supposedly pedestrianised areas, and it is notable that Rose Street in particular can become actively hazardous to pedestrians at times – with both the speed and size of vehicles accessing the street being significant, and at particularly busy times it becoming quite difficult to walk there at all. A workable system would need to be put in place based on learning from experiences around Rose Street, Castle Street and the Grassmarket.

Living Streets Scotland would strongly recommend against the use of the shared surfaces, suggested in the Royal Mile Action plan. Our advice would be that such a treatment only

achieves its aims where traffic levels are extremely low, as would only be the case if used as one element of a pedestrianisation scheme.

## Wider area improvements

Options for improving conditions for pedestrians along the route we studied should not only suggest changes to Canongate itself.

Given the level of pedestrian traffic on Canongate it is difficult to know why vehicle access is maintained to and from the street at the junctions with Cranston Street and New Street. Even if access is to be maintained here more could be done to prioritise pedestrian movement across the street ends.

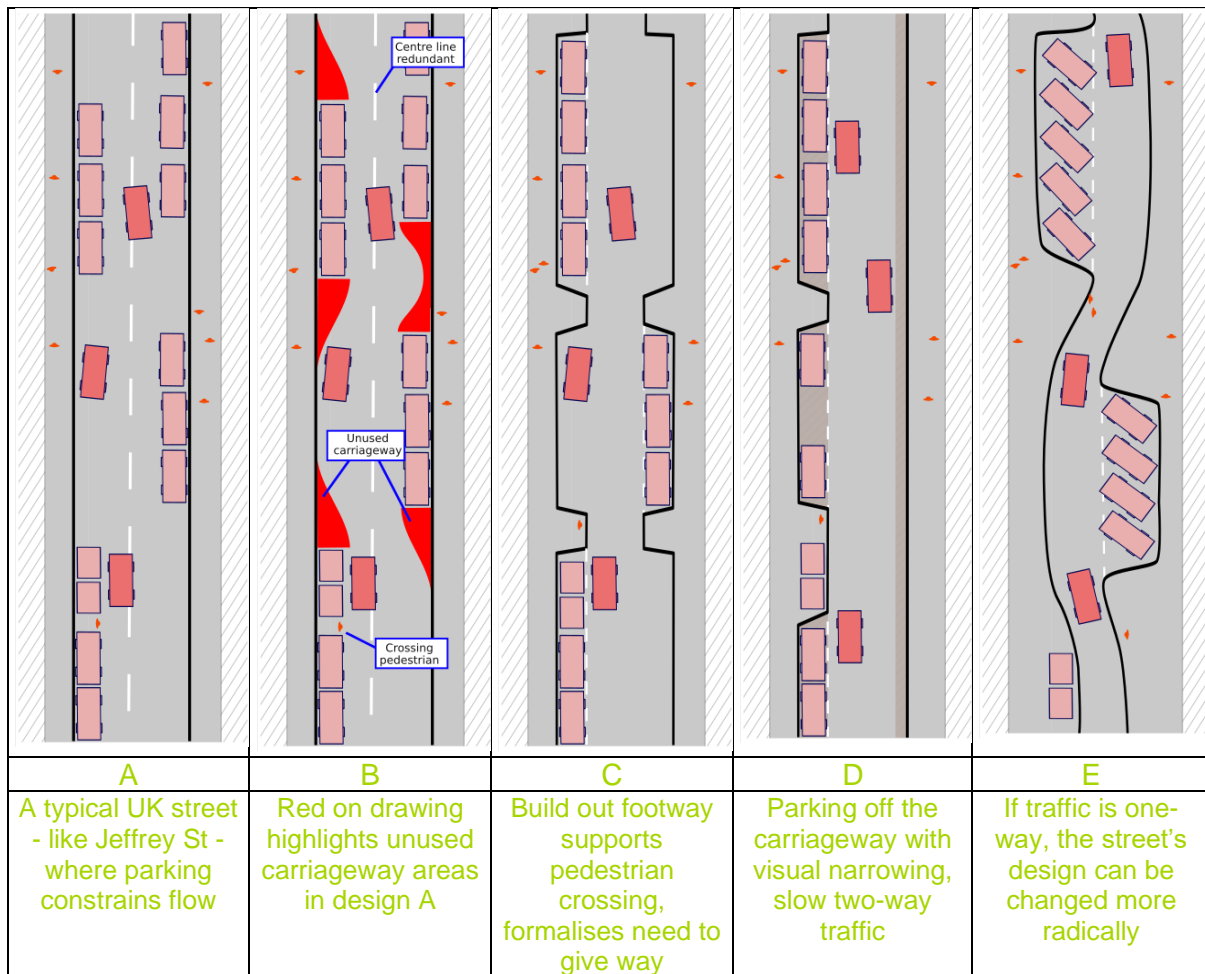
There is little justification for the current design of the junction of the Royal Mile with Jeffrey Street/St Mary's Street, other than the prioritising of motor vehicle movement over other considerations. We have commented above on the vehicle-focused design of Cowgate. The individual smooth sections of surface shown in the image of Kirkintilloch above, are around 2-3 metres wide and we note that much of the Canongate carriageway space is around 7-8 metres wide. The carriageway of Jeffrey Street and St Mary's Street at the junction is around 9-10 metres wide. This is unnecessary, not least because nearby both streets are typically narrowed by parked vehicles on one or both sides of the carriageway. We would expect that this design is used because it provides for faster speeds for small vehicles, and easier turning movements by very large vehicles. In many other cities a choice has been made on central urban streets to instead prioritise pedestrian safety, urban vitality, and general quality of life.

Improvements to Jeffrey Street would also be possible closer to the station. We believe that there will normally be parked vehicles on at least one side of all stretches of Jeffrey Street, narrowing the carriageway by 2-3 metres. The opportunity therefore exists to also provide narrowed crossing points for pedestrians without having any effect on traffic movement. Such arrangements mean that pedestrians need not walk (or wheel) on the carriageway to see properly around parked vehicles.

The simple generalised diagrams below show how this problem often presents itself, and a few broad options for improvement. The first image (A) represents a street which is narrow enough so that on-carriageway parking can only be allowed at the expense of free vehicle movement. This is very much the situation on Jeffrey Street. Streets like this often include features that imply that the aim is for steady two-way flow, without such flow ever being possible. Unlike in the diagram most of Jeffrey Street does not have a centreline, but the right turning lane on Market Street and the wide junction imply that speed and flow are being sought. The second image (B) shows the same design, but the diagram has red marks added to show where there are sections of carriageway which are rarely driven on. In general, on streets like this, it is possible to make significant differences to the environment for pedestrians without radically reducing the capacity of the street for vehicle movement – although of course, a reduction in capacity might also be sought.

In the third image (C) there are simple footway build-out areas designed to make crossing easy, and the redundant centreline is removed. There is no pretence that steady vehicle flow is possible, with the carriageway design now more consistent with the existing need for caution and slow speeds. The narrow sections of carriageway formalise the existing need for vehicle drivers to give way to one another. In the fourth image (D) the carriageway remains straight and allows two-way movement, but the centreline is removed, and changes in

materials create a visual-narrowing effect - making the remaining carriageway space appear much narrower than it actually is. This slows speeds. It is important here that the parking areas feel to be off the carriageway so that empty parking spaces do not appear as if they are part of the carriageway. In the fifth image (E) a more radical change has been made, this time reducing the capacity of the street to carry motor vehicles. The much-narrowed one-way lane bends to slow driving speed. Such a design significantly re-balances the street in favour of pedestrians. In all these designs a significant proportion of the existing parking is maintained. In some situations parking and/or loading capacity can be increased with such designs.



It seems very likely that the huge space dedicated to carriageway at the junction of Jeffrey Street and Market Street only serves to maintain traffic speeds. Altering the geometry of the junction might make some movements by the largest vehicles slightly more challenging, but occasional inconvenience - whilst large vehicles manoeuvre slowly - seems an acceptable price to pay for safer and more pleasant streets in areas with high footfall. Given that both Jeffrey Street and East Market Street narrow significantly, and support parking, the additional issues created would not be likely to be significant. In any case there are good reasons to see to discourage the largest vehicles from regularly accessing historic streets.

For similar reasons there seems nothing that can justify the huge area dedicated to traffic movement at the roundabout at the eastern end of Canongate. Significant changes are needed here, with properly controlled options for crossing the carriageway as the minimum intervention.



## Prerequisites: Funding for radical change

If the status quo is not an option, then more radical changes will come at considerable cost. Sources of funding and understanding the criteria supporting them is critical. Embarking on consultation and design work without a clear path delivery will repeat previous mistakes.

Funding options might include:

1. City Deal money, as per the business case established for Glasgow Avenues improvements
2. Places for Everyone funding, managed by Sustrans, for upgrading pedestrian routes and better provision for cycling
3. Smarter Choices Smarter Places funding, to engage businesses and promote behaviour change
4. A Workplace Parking Levy
5. The Transient Visitor Levy
6. Heritage funding for streetscapes
7. Funding for town centres and high streets
8. Planning gain from new developments, benefiting from an improved public realm

Aligning the available funding streams will be a challenge in itself. Revenue funding to support the development of the scheme also needs to be in place, supporting dedicated staff to support the project. Phase 2 delivery of the Edinburgh Trams project offers a good starting point in terms of developing a business case.

### Build and support a team to deliver change

An experienced multi-disciplinary team will be needed to deliver a successful project, given the complexities and sensitivities of altering a street of this importance

The limited progress on the existing Royal Mile Action Plan demonstrates significant capacity issues within the City of Edinburgh Council. These need to be addressed and a team put in place to drive the project forward. Phase 2 of the Edinburgh Trams project demonstrates the value of this approach.

#### Indicative process for change

- Set an objective to transform the street within a decade – by 2030 – through the following steps:
- Start baseline monitoring for economic assessment - 2020
- Project steering group including funding partners - early 2021
- CEC to Appoint Project Director - mid 2021
- Project planning complete - end of 2021
- Establish Initial Proposals and identify Funding Package - early 2022
- Consultation and revision of plans - 2022-2023
- Revise proposals based on feedback - late 2023 - 2024
- Commissioning works - 2025
- Implementation and completion - 2026 – 2029
- Opening and snagging - 2030

# 7. Advice to key stakeholders

Living Streets wishes to trigger a renewed debate on an important, much loved, but dysfunctional street, and the areas nearby. We therefore offer the following advice to stakeholders critical in its future.

## **For the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government**

Recognise the Royal Mile as a strategically important place and support via funding mechanisms such as the City Deal.

Recognise the lack of resources within local authorities to manage streets, illustrated by the difficulties in achieving change on Scotland's most iconic streets on the doorstep of the Scottish Parliament.

Take responsibility for ensuring the Scottish Parliament is accessible to everyone and this means bring surrounding streets up to standard. A starting point is a formal accessibility audit of this and other routes.

Establish a vision for how people arrive at the Scottish Parliament and work with local communities to push City of Edinburgh Council to help deliver this vision – e.g. a working group in the Scottish Parliament to monitor progress.

Use this work to create a high-profile case study showing profound changes to streets can be done in a way which both engages local communities, and which provides for a significantly improved environment.

## **For City of Edinburgh Council**

Accept the issues concerning this street are known and need to be addressed and the focus must move developing and consulting onto developing workable solutions and projects.

Appoint a senior project manager and delivery team charged with transforming the street.

Begin baseline monitoring on air quality, footfall, rental levels, views of local people, views of visitors.

Consult on a realistic set of proposals for rebalancing the street, linked to an identified budget and funding sources.

Set work on Canongate and the surrounding area in the context of the City Centre Transformation project, including traffic management and public transport access arrangements.

Set equalities objectives for the project, making clear that this work is about the provision of a basic level of access for many people. Within the limitations of the historical context, the highest level of accessibility should be provided.

Ensure that plans are in place to address the wider concerns of the community regarding the impacts of tourism which are weakening local community cohesion and resilience.

Reconsider public transport options in the Old Town including access to the Scottish Parliament.

## **For heritage organisations**

Recognise the challenges and conflicts between achieving accessibility objectives and traditional street design e.g. non-historic pavement widths, cobbled surfaces, contrasting materials etc. Work with accessibility organisations to agree a common vision.

Recognise that the current situation, which sees a street entirely dominated by modern motorised traffic, is utterly inconsistent with the historic functioning of the street. Consider which changes or features to reduce or remove vehicle dominance are an acceptable trade-off with simpler historic layouts.

Undertake research into how other European cities manage similar streets in terms of delivering a better visitor experience, and a good quality of life for residents and those working in the area.

To work with communities to inspire change showing how best practice could be adopted and delivered in the Old Town.

## **For the community**

Embrace the fact that this is a nationally important space but demand appropriate levels of resource that manage this challenge and provide enhanced levels of management.

Debate appropriate levels of car access and acceptable levels of restriction, and alternatives to owning cars in the Old Town, noting that a reduction in vehicle access is unavoidable if an improved street environment is to be provided.

Engage with the council and bus companies over new routes and stops, which would provide better options for local people and visitors.

## **For cycling organisations**

Recognise the limited amount of space and high demand from pedestrians, makes it unlikely that segregated cycling could be provided here, but that reduced traffic domination would make the street significantly more friendly for cycling.

Consider how a transformed Royal Mile / Canongate area could be part of wider plans to improve permeability and safety for cycling through the new town and through the area around Parliament.

Undertake a similar audit (to our work on walking) of conditions for cycling between the station and other local routes to the Parliament building.

# 8. Final thoughts

Edinburgh's Royal Mile is a street of European importance. It provides the main access to the Scottish Parliament and a Royal Palace.

As it stands the street is not worthy of these functions and is instead managed as a traffic corridor, which provides a congested, polluted and at times unsafe environment.

The opportunity should be taken to make this an exemplar project on how streets can be transformed for the benefit of the community, the nation, and visitors. Action will need to be taken now to avoid further lost decades as transforming a street of this nature is expensive, complex and requires multiple stakeholders to work together. This work must start immediately because the last failed attempt to improve the street was now nine years ago. With a common vision it is still possible to make access to the Scottish Parliament miles better by 2030.