

Oxford Street Transformation Project
Transport for London & Westminster City Council

Consultation Response

Submitted by

Baker Street Quarter Partnership

June 2017

1.0 Introduction

Baker Street Quarter Partnership (BakerStreetQ), the Business Improvement District (BID) serving Baker Street and Marylebone, was established in 2013 by a core group of businesses to bring a newfound purpose and focus to the area¹. Representing over 200 business organisations, its vision is that the area is:

- The commercial district of choice;
- Welcoming and first class that supports business operations and promotes staff wellbeing; and
- A place people want to work, are keen to visit, eager to explore and happy to live.

The Partnership has a particular focus on providing quality streets and spaces, improving air quality and reducing the dominance of traffic.

We work closely with a range of key stakeholders such as The Portman Estate, New West End Company, Marble Arch Business Improvement District, the Howard deWalden Estate, the West End Partnership, the Marylebone Association and the Marylebone Forum, as well as Transport for London and Westminster City Council.

2.0 Context for Oxford Street Transformation

Oxford Street is one of the world's leading retail destinations. It is an integral part of the West End and its state of health influences the overall performance of the wider West End district around it.

Oxford Street is already very busy and experiences problems of severe pedestrian crowding and congestion. The pedestrian experience of using the street is one that has significant detrimental impacts from too much traffic and air pollution. Its spatial infrastructure, as currently configured, used and managed has great difficulty coping.

This current situation of physical and experiential stress will only become more exaggerated as London's population continues to grow and as the new Elizabeth Line introduces more visitors on a daily basis.

Transport infrastructure is an important catalyst for rejuvenation in London. Crossrail (now called the Elizabeth Line) will transform travel and it will be operational in the West End in 2018. Its arrival, with major new stations at Bond Street and Tottenham Court Road, presents a rare and generational catalyst opportunity to implement the transformational change at the scale that Oxford Street requires.

The key challenge is ensuring that transformational change does not displace adverse issues to other neighbouring areas and communities next to Oxford Street.

3.0 Issues for Consideration

BakerStreetQ has clear commitments to improving the quality of life and helping facilitate the wellbeing of our members' businesses in the Marylebone area. With an accompanying aspiration to become a more integral part of the West End, we welcome transformational improvements to Oxford Street, as that will bring benefits and opportunities to the businesses in our area. Our positive support is however tempered by some key concerns

¹ The area we have responsibility lies between Marylebone Road to the North and Wigmore Street/Portman Square to the south, Chiltern Street/ Manchester Square to the east and Gloucester Place to the west.

that need to be comprehensively considered and addressed in order for our support to have longevity and we have set these out below.

The transformation would turn Oxford Street into a positive amenity facility for the many people who work in the Baker Street area, rather than its current context of a street many tend to avoid because of the issues of traffic dominance, poor air quality and poor pedestrian environment. Concomitant with proximity to the new Elizabeth Line, associated high quality pedestrian links with Oxford Street through the transformation initiative will help promote and strengthen the Baker Street area as a commercial district of choice.

We recognise that much detailed technical study will be required in order to inform the eventual degree to which current access arrangements for transport modes could be reviewed and appropriately adjusted in order to achieve the project's ambitions.

Subject to further information regarding the outcomes of such studies, we would submit that an approach that seeks to maximise the opportunity to achieve a bold vision for Oxford Street consistent with the ambition presented by TfL/WCC, and yet is cognisant of the practical needs of businesses on the street to be satisfactorily accessed and serviced be explored. This includes exploring the technical potential for some transport modes to be excluded from Oxford Street if practicable, whilst servicing traffic for businesses could avail of managed access from the street at appropriate times in the evening and/ or morning.

We would also submit that opportunities for north-south traffic movement across the street to be retained are explored, though this would call for sensitive design solutions at junctions with Oxford Street to ensure the principles of pedestrian priority are not lost. Measures to reduce traffic volumes should accompany this approach to ensure north south routes such as Orchard Street and Portman Street do not become dominated by traffic.

While we welcome and support the principle of transformational change on Oxford Street, and radical reductions in bus, taxi and freight traffic volumes, we do have some concerns regarding the potential means of accomplishing this in respect of possible changes to access arrangements across several transport modes, which we discuss below. Our support for the principle of the project is subject to these being addressed comprehensively. We would welcome assurances in relation to the following areas both for the interim stage improvements mentioned, as well as the longer term permanent proposals:

Integration with the Transformation Project

- The Baker Street/ Marylebone area is seen by TfL/WCC as an integral part of the transformation project and not just a neighbouring 'recipient' area to absorb displacement impacts from the future scheme proposals;
- The project builds upon the anticipated success of the Baker Street Two Way project (funded by TfL, WCC, the Portman Estate and BakerStreetQ), due to commence construction on 24th July 2017, and does not displace more traffic onto the Two Way scheme routes to the point of potentially compromising the benefits the Two Way project is bringing to the area;
- The scope of the project would benefit from inclusion of the area from Orchard Street to Marble Arch to ensure consistency and the development of a comprehensive approach;
- Opportunities to better integrate and connect key London Squares, such as Manchester Square, and other key spaces with Oxford Street's transformation should be included in the project as they are key to its success;

Displacement of Traffic

- Neighbouring streets, eg Wigmore Street, Portman Street, Orchard Street, Duke Street, do not become thoroughfares for displaced traffic, including domination by buses, with consequent impacts upon environmental quality and the pedestrian experience;
- These streets, especially Wigmore Street and north-south routes, should not become dominated by the supporting infrastructure that comes with such traffic, in particular by buses and their infrastructure;
- Existing public realm issues on surrounding streets within the BID area should be comprehensively addressed as part of the Oxford Street Transformation project, including new green phase pedestrian crossings at junctions along Wigmore Street;
- Streets in the BID area affected by the Oxford Street transformation should also receive significant investment in public realm and green infrastructure improvements and that complementary schemes for improvement should be developed for them. This is particularly important in respect of Wigmore Street and other streets such as Duke Street, Portman Street, Orchard Street and Manchester Square;
- As well as the London Taxi Association, we would expect that local businesses, BIDs and the wider community would also be closely consulted on any proposals for taxi traffic reorganisation, particularly the potential development of new taxi ranks in streets near Oxford Street to ensure streets (such as Orchard Street) do not become dominated by taxis;
- Additional provision for cyclists in areas north of Oxford Street will need to be carefully considered to ensure sensitive incorporation into the streetscape, particularly given the heritage nature of the street grain and its dimensions in this area;
- In addition, we would welcome more clarity as to how transformational change can be progressed at this stage whilst the proposals currently exclude Marble Arch from the process, even though the proposals may need a bus terminus or turn around points at Marble Arch. Marble Arch becoming further dominated by buses would be of concern particularly given the present significant investment in improving the area and its status as a gateway to the Baker Street Quarter BID area;

Traffic Reduction and Movement

- Further appropriate reductions in bus numbers to those already achieved by TfL are sought, in order to minimise any impacts of potential bus traffic displacement from Oxford Street;
- Significant reductions in freight traffic volumes should be secured to ease present and future congestion and assist in air pollution reduction in the area;
- Opportunities for north-south traffic movement across the Oxford Street corridor should be retained to maintain wider traffic circulation but also to ensure that accessibility from the south to the Baker Street Quarter continues. This should be allied with the concerted supporting measures to radically reduce traffic volumes that the project seeks to achieve, particularly to ensure that streets such as Duke Street, Portman Street and Orchard Street do not absorb further traffic volumes.

Air Quality

- The Baker Street area should not be the recipient of displaced air quality issues associated with Oxford Street and its traffic; and
- Motor vehicle traffic (buses, taxis, freight) that is displaced, should utilise much cleaner means of propulsion than at present in order to reduce air pollution, and should only be allowed into the area if engines are 'green' and zero emissions capable.

Wider Transformation and Vision

The project clearly faces challenges in terms of resolving the competing needs of the range of highway space users, the times of their use, the supporting infrastructure needed for each user, each user's relationship to the economic wellbeing of the street and the overall ambition to transform Oxford Street into a world class public space. In this respect we welcome TfL and WCC's approach of putting pedestrian priority at the heart of its ambition for the street.

In taking forward the development of proposals, we would also submit that the project:

- Recognises the important role that streets and spaces to the north and south of Oxford Street play in contributing to its success. Such streets and spaces, including those within our BID area, should be considered as an integral part of the project;
- Recognises the fundamental visual and amenity roles that London Squares just off Oxford Street play. The provision of high quality pedestrian links to these squares is an important factor that should be included as a central theme in future proposals, as is progressing opportunities to improve the Squares themselves; and
- Promotes improved pedestrian links to institutions like the Wallace Collection, which has the potential to play a strong cultural role in the mix of activity and opportunity that Oxford Street could offer.

We would also like to see the proposals accompanied by a practicable, costed maintenance plan. Though TfL and WCC will be aware of the risks to scheme quality and longevity that insufficient cognisance of maintenance regimes in the early stages can bring further down the line, the costs of maintenance should not overly drive the tenor of the design ambition. Innovative approaches to future maintenance funding could form part of the overall project process in order to ensure certainty of scheme success in the long term.

4.0 Conclusions

Baker Street Quarter Partnership would like to thank both Transport for London and Westminster City Council for the opportunity to make representations to the first round of consultation on the Oxford Street Transformation project. We hope that our submission is useful and we look forward to working closely with TfL, WCC and other key stakeholders to help make the project an inspiring success.