



Submission on the Capel St Consultation

May 2021

Dublin Chamber welcomes the opportunity to respond to Dublin City Council's proposal to reduce vehicular traffic, enhance public realm and further pedestrianise Capel Street. This proposal comes at a critical time for the city centre and the businesses that are located there, particularly those in the hospitality sector. The Covid-19 crisis has had a devastating impact on Dublin's city centre, particularly the north side of the city, and the businesses located there. As the restrictions are lifted and the economy reopens, it is important to ensure an attractive, accessible, and vibrant city centre so that businesses can bounce back and thrive as the economy reopens.

Dublin Chamber is the representative body for businesses in the Greater Dublin Area, with a cross-sectoral membership spanning the spectrum from small start-ups to major multinationals. The Chamber is committed to improving the city's business environment and quality of life in tandem, and strongly supports a vision of Dublin with sustainability, urban density, and liveability at its core. Dublin Chamber supports intelligent pedestrianisation in the city centre, as seen by our strong support of the pedestrian trials last summer, our support for the College Green Plaza project and our recent submission in support of the enhanced pedestrianisation trial of Merrion Row.

Dublin Chamber fully supports Dublin City Council for bringing forward innovative proposals that will increase pedestrian space and enable businesses to reopen with outdoor dining.

Creating pedestrian spaces in the City

The Chamber supports pedestrian-first policies, but also recognises the challenges with modal change. Until Dublin's public transport capacity and service levels are significantly improved there will continue to be a reliance upon and need to facilitate the car in the city centre.

The proposal focuses on increasing the pedestrian space on Capel Street by 1,300m² in order to enable hospitality businesses on the street to reopen with outdoor dining. Capel Street boasts a broad range of businesses, including hospitality retail, offices, and services. Many of the businesses on the street are small independent retailers that breathe life into the north side of the city centre and give Capel Street its authentic Dublin feel. The plans outlined strive to balance the varying demands from the businesses in the area while also meeting the demands for enhanced space for outdoor dining from the hospitality sector and from the public for increased pedestrianisation.

The Chamber recognises the ambition from the hospitality businesses located on Capel Street for an even more ambitious approach to pedestrianisation of the street. While the current proposal represents a compromise on all sides and should be supported, the Chamber would also encourage Dublin City Council to actively work with business in the area, to survey businesses on the positive and negative impact of the changes and work with them to find solutions where there are issues and advance new proposals where appropriate.

In changing the current road layout and introducing temporary footpath buildouts the Chamber would stress the need for the Council to consider integrating how active transport will be facilitated. With enhanced pedestrianisation, Capel Street has an opportunity to become a central hub for people coming into the city centre. The Council must consider how they will travel there and investment in additional pike parking in the area would provide more opportunities to facilitate those using active transport. The Chamber encourages the Council to continue to invest in active travel infrastructure, and to further encourage modal shift to public transport, working with relevant stakeholders to progress key projects such as BusConnects, the DART and Luas expansion plans, Metrolink and the roll-out of the Greater Dublin Area Cycle Network Plan.

Dublin: The 15 Minute City

In Dublin Chamber's recent *Dublin: The 15-Minute City* report we outlined how a 15 Minute City vision could work in Dublin. Our document highlights the role that active travel plays in achieving this vision: every journey starts first with a walk, whether that is the full journey or a short walk to access a bike, car, or public transport. Having a high-quality public realm and facilities that promote active travel will be necessary to effect modal change on a large scale. The combination of pedestrian-first policies and green infrastructure has been very successful in Barcelona's superblock redesign and has significantly enhanced the walkability of the city.¹ Pedestrian-first policy focuses on improving the walkability of a city and recognises the role that active transport plays in improving both public accessibility and the health of citizens. Safe walkways, crossroads, shade and shelter, permeability, and access are all key features of a walkable space.² By investing in the public realm, focusing on access for all, lighting and safety, and maintaining safe distances between cars and pedestrians, Dublin can create communities that are walkable and support the vision of a 15 Minute City. Creating connected and walkable places in which people can live, work, and play also encourages social interaction, thereby building stronger communities. This proposal has the potential to be a flagship project for hospitality and businesses on the north side of the city centre.

Collaboration with businesses

Collaboration with businesses is vital to ensuring the success of many improvements to the public realm. The Covid-19 pandemic has led to a renewed focus on the need for collaboration between businesses and the Local Authorities across the city. The ability and desire to work together to come up with innovative solutions to enable businesses to trade will be increasingly

¹ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-08-07/inside-a-barcelona-superblock-pedestrians-rule>

² <https://www.itdp.org/2018/02/07/pedestrians-first-walkability-tool/>

important. The swiftness with which Local Authorities have responded to the need for changes to the public realm to facilitate walking and cycling in the context of social distancing has been very welcome and is eye-opening to the possibilities post Covid-19.

Trial runs and pilot programmes are an excellent and engaging way of establishing the positive potential of a new policy initiative, as well as its potential problems. The Chamber has previously supported calls for pedestrian trials and strongly welcomed Dublin City Council's trial pedestrianisation of College Green in the summer of 2019, which largely produced positive results.³ The trialling of the concept helped both citizens and businesses to get a sense of the benefits and potential challenges of the project. In future pedestrianisation projects and public realm improvements, pilot programmes and trials should continue to be embraced as a way to learn what works and what does not, allowing for flexibility and creativity in relation to all sectors and stakeholders involved, particularly in dynamic and vibrant parts of the city.

Recommendations

The proposal represents a welcome step in greater pedestrianisation on the north side of the city centre and the potential to establish Capel Street as a key location for Dublin's vibrant hospitality scene and diverse business community. Covid-19 has had a devastating impact on the businesses located in the city centre and in particular the many restaurants, pubs and cafes located there. In what had normally been a vibrant hub of business activity, many evenings the area is now empty and desolate. We welcome the consultation put forward by Dublin City Council and note the use of temporary structures and observes that the use of trial runs in previous projects has proved to be a helpful in establishing how such structures would work in practice. Pedestrianisation and public realm projects must continue to be integrated with the needs and concerns of business that are directly impacted in these areas.

Dublin Chamber recommends:

The proposal as outlined by Dublin City Council should progress to increase pedestrian space on Capel Street in order to enable hospitality businesses on the street to reopen with outdoor dining. To achieve this vision, Dublin Chamber recommends;

- To work with the businesses located in the area and other related stakeholders to understand both the positive and potential negative impacts of the proposal and to work with them to find solutions where there are issues and advance new proposals where appropriate.
- Integrating active travel and segregated cycle lanes into any proposed road traffic changes.
- Installation of increased bike parking to encourage travel to the location by active transport.
- Continued engagement with businesses in the area, particularly those located on the impacted streets, to understand their needs and to work through any specific issues that arise.

³ <https://www.dublinchamber.ie/media/news/december-2018/chamber-calls-for-trial-of-college-green-plaza>

- The continued use of pilot programmes and trials in other parts of the city to establish learnings, based on the success of the programme in both the College Green area and the Grafton Street Area.