



Submission on the Pedestrianisation in the Grafton Street area.

December 2020

Dublin Chamber welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Dublin City Council's proposed pedestrianisation of a number of streets in the Grafton Street area. 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 welcomed Dublin City Council's trial pedestrianisation of five streets during the Summer. The weekend trials, over a period of six weeks starting from the 26th/27th of July, were a welcome move in allowing business and the general public to envision what pedestrianisation in the area would look like. The Chamber supports the Council's ambitions for enhanced public realm and pedestrianisation in the city centre but stresses the need for continuous engagement with the businesses in these areas. We also make several general observations and recommendations on future pedestrianisation projects and public realm improvements.

Pedestrian First Approach

In response to the current consultation, Dublin Chamber recently carried out a social media poll, asking 'Do you support Dublin City Council's proposal to pedestrianize 4 streets in the Grafton Street area?' and of the 288 respondents, 94% were in favour.¹ This echoes the findings of the surveys from Dublin City Council's trial runs during the summer, with significant support from the general public for enhanced pedestrianisation.

The Chamber welcomes the plans outlined by DCC in the consultation as an application of pedestrian-first policy and an investment in public realm in this key area for retail business in the city. The proposals have a clear focus on the need to reduce the levels of traffic in the area while maintaining access. The plans outlined strive to balance the demands from the public for increased pedestrianisation with the needs of businesses to maintain access for deliveries and the need for access to the significant city-centre car parking facilities.

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 on and need to facilitate the car in the city centre. The Chamber encourages the Council to continue to invest in active travel infrastructure and further encourage modal shift to public transport, working with relevant

¹ <https://twitter.com/DubCham/status/1329110103258243072>

stakeholders to progress key projects such as the DART and Luas expansion plans, BusConnects, Metrolink and the roll-out of the Greater Dublin Area Cycle Network Plan.

Collaboration with Businesses.

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 important in the years ahead. 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.

Collaboration with businesses is vital to ensuring the success of many improvements to the public realm. Now more than ever there is a need for a renewed focus on assisting businesses and increasing footfall in the city centre. Grafton Street, and the surrounding streets of South Anne Street, Duke Street, South William Street, Drury Street and Dame Court, are at the heart of retail in the city and have suffered significant reductions in footfall during the various lockdown periods, particularly midweek.

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 results of the report carried out by Dublin City Council on the success of the trial pedestrianisations on these streets during the summer strongly underpin the current consultation. The current proposals reflect the general public's desire for increased pedestrianisation, but also address the learnings from the trial runs, the concerns of businesses, and need to maintain access to the local parking facilities.

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 involved, particularly in dynamic and vibrant parts of the city.

Safety and Public Realm

Research including Dublin Chamber's award-winning Global Reputation Project and Vision for Dublin 2050 demonstrates how important safety is in enhancing Dublin's reputation. The Global Reputation Report found that fewer than a third of respondents would describe Dublin as a safe city, while one in seven believe it is not safe.² This should be considered as a factor in all future public realm improvements to ensure that the city's streets look and feel safe for all. Improvements to the public realm can play a significant role in how safe people perceive an area to be: open and pedestrian-focused spaces with excellent street lighting enhance the city's overall look and feel, as well as its safety. Specific investment and co-ordination in terms of greater street policing and CCTV should also be examined.

² Dublin Chamber, *Dublin's Global Reputation Report*, <https://www.dublinchamber.ie/getattachment/Business-Agenda/Dublin-s-Global-Reputation/Dublin-s-Global-Reputation-Report.pdf?lang=en-IE>

Creating a Walkable 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.³ 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.⁴ 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.

Recommendations

This consultation comes at a critical time for the city centre and the businesses and sectors in these spaces. The Covid-19 crisis has had a devastating impact on Dublin's city centre and particularly on the hospitality and retail businesses located there. As the restrictions are lifted and the economy opens up, it is important to ensure an attractive, accessible, and vibrant city centre so that businesses can bounce back and thrive.

The proposals represent a welcome step in greater pedestrianisation, and the use of the trial runs has been helpful in establishing how they would work in practice. There is significant demand and ambition for increased pedestrianisation from the public, but this must continue to be integrated with the needs and concerns of business that are directly impacted in these areas.

Dublin Chamber recommends:

- Continued engagement with businesses in the area, particularly those located on the impacted streets, to understand their particular needs and to work through any specific issues that arise.
- Recognition of the role that the public realm plays in ensuring safe open spaces and ensuring that services, such as street policing and CCTV are considered and coordinated to improve safety in the city.
- 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 the Grafton Street Area.

³ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-08-07/inside-a-barcelona-superblock-pedestrians-rule>

⁴ <https://www.itdp.org/2018/02/07/pedestrians-first-walkability-tool/>