



**Submission to An Bord Pleanála
Re further information provided by Dublin City Council
on the proposed Civic Plaza at College Green**

7 December 2017

Dublin Chamber welcomes the opportunity to offer its observations regarding the additional information provided by Dublin City Council in respect of plans for the proposed development of a new civic plaza at College Green. This follows previous submissions made by the Chamber in relation to the College Green project.

Dublin Chamber's view remains that, in principle, the creation of a civic plaza at College Green would be a positive development for Dublin, with the potential to rival some of Europe's most scenic and attractive public plazas. However, it is vital for Dublin that College Green continues to function as a transport artery.

Dublin Chamber welcomed the decision by An Bord Pleanála to require information from Dublin City Council on the impact of the proposed plaza. Below, we offer our responses to a number of points made by Dublin City Council.

Improved Walkability / Increased Cyclist & Pedestrian Safety

Dublin Chamber believes that pedestrians should be prioritised at College Green. The Chamber remains concerned about the absence of properly segregated cycle lanes within the proposed plaza. Proper cycling infrastructure will be needed to maximise the attractiveness of any College Green plaza for pedestrians, and to ensure a high level of safety for all users.

The Council's contention is that the design of the plaza will lead to pedestrians and cyclists mingling safely in College Green, with the environment encouraging slow cycle speeds, particularly through the use of certain paving materials. However, the behaviour of cyclists remains a notable issue in Dublin city centre, particularly in pedestrianised areas.

Dublin Chamber expects the number of cyclists in the city to increase significantly over the coming years. In this context, a failure to provide clearly defined cycling infrastructure has the potential to undermine the success of the project. Dublin Chamber believes that a fully segregated two-way cycle-path should be included in any final proposal for College Green.

Impact on Public Transport

Dublin Chamber regrets the piecemeal way in which changes to the city's transport network and traffic management system are being proposed and implemented. This continues to make it difficult for firms to plan for the future.

Dublin Chamber notes claims by Dublin City Council regarding the impact of recent changes to traffic movements on Bachelor's Walk. Dublin Chamber believes that these figures should be discounted on the basis that they are extremely selective and do not correctly reflect the real impact of the changes on the wider city. The figures are also at odds with business feedback regarding the changes. In mid-September 2017, Dublin Chamber polled over 500 firms operating within the M50. Almost two thirds (63%) reported longer commute times following the introduction of traffic changes on the north and south quays. One-third of respondents (35%) noted no change in their commute, while just 2% noted an improvement.

The figures released by Dublin City Council fail to paint an accurate picture of the effects of the traffic changes. While the figures suggest that travel times between Ormond Quay and D'Olier Street (a distance of less than 1km) have been reduced by several minutes, both the Council and the NTA have thus far failed to publish data which shows how overall journey times have been impacted in the wider city area. Feedback provided to the Chamber by commuters - and also transport operators - indicates that journey times have been affected negatively, off-setting the benefit of any marginal time savings in the Bachelor's Walk area.

Dublin Chamber has called on Dublin City Council to publish figures showing how bus journey times have changed within both the Canal Cordon and the M50 since the changes came into effect in late August.

The Importance of Bus Connects

Dublin Chamber notes the importance placed by Dublin City Council on the introduction of the Bus Connects network in Dublin. Dublin Chamber is a firm supporter of Bus Connects as a short-term solution for Dublin's chronic and worsening congestion problem. However, it remains unclear when, if at all, Bus Connects will be delivered. Therefore, there is a high likelihood that any changes to College Green will be in place for numerous years before the benefits of Bus Connects are felt in the city.

It is worth noting at this juncture, that changes such as the creation of a civic plaza at College Green and alterations to the bus network would be eminently more feasible had the Government built - or at least commenced the construction of - vital public transport projects such as Dart Underground and Metro North.

The Movement of Bus Stops

Dublin Chamber remains concerned about the potential impact that diverting many bus routes away from College Green will have on the number of people coming into Dublin city centre.

The Chamber notes the admission by Dublin City Council that removing bus routes from College Green will mean that people must walk greater distances to get to/from their stops. The Council contends that these increasing walk times will be offset by reduced journey times. However, Dublin Chamber believes that this assertion is highly questionable,

particularly in light of the way the impact of the Bachelor's Walk changes has been measured. The Chamber is not persuaded that any reduced journey times will be delivered in the short-term.

Dublin Chamber strongly supports the aim of encouraging greater use of public transport usage and reducing private car usage where possible. In this context, the Chamber is very concerned the proposed changes to bus routes around College Green will weaken the attractiveness of the bus in the eyes of the commuter.

Dublin Chamber suggests that Dublin City Council should explore the potential for maintaining the movement of buses on a west-to-east direction between Dame Street and Westmoreland Street via a single bus lane. This bus lane could be positioned to the north side of an adjoining but segregated two-way cycle lane, which would branch off to allow cyclists travel north towards Westmoreland Street or south towards Grafton Street, preserving the rest of College Green for exclusive pedestrian use.

Conclusion

Having reviewed the additional information provided by Dublin City Council, and consulted with our 1,300 members, Dublin Chamber remains unconvinced that the proposed plan for a civic plaza on College Green will work as currently designed.

Dublin Chamber accepts that change is required to Dublin's transport network, and supports a modal hierarchy that prioritises pedestrians, cyclists, and public transport over private vehicles. However, important questions remain unanswered about the impact of the proposed College Green plaza. The effect on traffic and public transport usage in the wider city – out to the M50 – remains unclear and is of great concern.

Dublin Chamber contends that the support of Dublin's main public transport providers will be critical to the success of any civic plaza on College Green. The advice of public transport providers should be closely heeded as Dublin City Council makes the necessary adaptations to its design.