

Transport Committee – 15 June 2016

Transcript of Agenda Item 9 - Pedestrianisation of Oxford Street

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): We now move to our main item today, which is on the pedestrianisation of Oxford Street.

I am delighted we have a really fantastic panel of guests before us this morning. We have Alex Williams, who is Managing Director of Planning, Transport for London (TfL). We have Ruth Thompson, Deputy Chair of London TravelWatch, and Tom Platt, who is Head of Policy and Communications at Living Streets. Sir Peter Rogers, who is the Chair of the New West End Company, has been here at City Hall in different roles over many years. Councillor Robert Davis, who is the Deputy Leader of Westminster City Council, is representing the West End Partnership today as well. Councillor Heather Acton, who is the Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking at Westminster City Council. We have Richard Massett, who is Chairman of the London Taxi Drivers Association, another very important group linked to Oxford Street.

Our investigation is looking at the transport-related issues facing Oxford Street and the surrounding area, including pedestrian safety and road congestion; to consider what recent interventions have gone on there and how the Mayor can fulfil his manifesto commitment, which was to pedestrianise Oxford Street; and how quickly that can happen and looking at various options. We have a wide range of questions today.

I am going to kick off the questions, to understand what you think are the benefits, if there are benefits, of pedestrianising Oxford Street and whether it is effectively now unavoidable due to the volumes of people using the street and predicted to use the street and to reduce road collisions.

Councillor Robert Davis (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for the Built Environment, City of Westminster): Can I just start by saying of course there are lots of benefits, but one has to think it through a little more carefully because it is not good producing lots of benefits for Oxford Street and then having great disadvantages for the surrounding streets. North of Oxford Street is Marylebone, a heavy residential area, and south of it is also Mayfair, a residential area, and between Oxford Street and Grosvenor Square, a large amount of social housing; Peabody has a massive estate there. When we look at solutions for Oxford Street and try to improve Oxford Street, one has to bear in mind the fact that you do not want to have a detrimental impact on the people who are living north and south of the route or at each end.

That is why the West End Partnership has been formed, to look at the whole future of Oxford Street and how we can improve it. Just for people who do not know, the West End Partnership comprises Westminster Council, Camden Council, TfL, the Mayor's Office – [Sir] Edward Lister [former Chief of Staff and Deputy Mayor, Planning] was on it and Valerie Shawcross [CBE, Deputy Mayor for Transport] is now the new member on it - the major landowners, New West End Company in particular and local residents. So it is the real stakeholder of everyone who is interested in the area. We are already looking at a variety of different options to try to improve Oxford Street. There are a lot of benefits for doing it, for making it much better for pedestrians, for reducing the amount of traffic.

Of course at the moment after Orchard Street there is no normal traffic, it is only buses and taxis that are allowed down Oxford Street. A lot of people talk about pedestrianising it, thinking they are going to get rid of private vehicles. There aren't any, and the only bit you can have a private vehicle is between Orchard Street

and Marble Arch. Substantially the major problem is the buses and we have been working with TfL over a long period of time to substantially reduce the number of buses. It is 168 buses an hour in the mid part of the day and most of them are empty - OK, they are busy during rush hours in the morning and evening - and it is as soon as we can address that. For the first time when West End Partnership was created, there was an acceptance by TfL - and we can hear it ourselves - that Crossrail is going to be a game-changer and is going to allow them to look at the whole bus network to reduce substantially the number of buses. As soon as you can do that and not just push the buses, 168 an hour, into say, Wigmore Street, which would just create a massive problem there, you cannot begin to start solving the problem of Oxford Street.

But we are working and we will be working with the Mayor's Office to work out all the different options for trying to find a solution to make it better, because of course there are advantages, but one must also remember that the stores and shops - and Peter [Rogers] can talk about that - want their shoppers to come to their door, to be dropped off outside John Lewis, for example, when they are finished shopping with all their heavy bags to be able to get a bus or taxi outside; the last thing they want to do is have to walk three streets away to get a taxi or a bus laden with bags, otherwise they will go off to Westfield and say it will be much easier, you can get a cab outside the door there. So that is why there are pros and cons. Although there are many advantages, we have to produce those advantages by minimising the cost elsewhere.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): We will be getting into the detail of the buses and taxis later on to make sure we address all of those issues. Councillor Acton, do you want to pick up anything else from Westminster Council's views? Do you see it as a huge benefit, pedestrianising Oxford Street, or part of it?

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): As Councillor Davis has said, there are pros and cons. Actually, I happen to live just north of Marble Arch and I have lived there for 30 years. I use Oxford Street on a daily basis in some way, walking, cycling, buses, occasional taxis, although the taxis tend to avoid it because it is blocked by buses. Westminster has talked for a long time to TfL about bus reduction and you will hear from TfL that we will be achieving a 40% reduction in buses and looking for further reduction. When Oxford Street is closed or when it was closed for VIP days, it has a serious knock-on effect around the rest of the area and that is to the detriment of residents and businesses. I have anecdotal evidence that trade falls dramatically on Marylebone High Street, for example, and in the Portman Estate area because there is gridlock. So anything looking at Oxford Street has to look at a very wide area. Because of the way the bus network operates, when Regent Street has its Sunday closures there is still some impact, but it is less serious than the impact when Oxford Street is closed.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): What both of you are saying is really this is not a simple, "We can just pedestrianise and everything else will find its way", it has got to be a bigger, comprehensive package of measures to make it work?

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): It has to look over a pretty wide area to be at all successful. Full pedestrianisation is absolutely not possible because there are north-south access routes over Oxford Street.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Thank you for that. Let us come on to Sir Peter Rogers now in terms of representing the shops up in the New West End Company area.

Sir Peter Rogers (Chairman, New West End Company): We have a very simple view: the current state of Oxford Street is unacceptable, so that is our starting position. Everything we argue is measured against a long-term aim, which is we want to see the West End maintain and improve its world status as a retail district.

There are three basic problems with it now, which interrelate: traffic, air quality and public realm. Whilst pedestrianisation is extremely difficult, and I do not think anybody should underestimate how difficult it is - and you have heard some of the issues already - businesses do want traffic-free zones and they do want them in certain areas at certain times of the day. How we get there is going to be complex and difficult, but there are things that can be done immediately.

There are three things that immediately would leap to mind in terms of our policy positions: a 20% year-on-year reduction in buses now to take out excess capacity. If you have a look at the loadings that are currently going on on Oxford Street, a lot of them are running with fresh air rather than people. We could start immediately making buses operate in a zero-emissions mode, rather than just being capable of it, and we could accelerate the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) to 2018 rather than leaving it to 2020. Those things can be done before we start the more difficult issues of actually looking at pedestrianisation, because reduction on a 20% per year basis is not displacement, it is straight reduction. Displacement and congestion fall into the much harder category, which is pedestrianisation.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): So you are saying that some of your businesses, some of your shops, would be keen for sort of time-limited pedestrianisation, where that means allowing some vehicles access, perhaps early in the morning and so on, and then for the bulk of the day, no vehicles, or for part of it?

Sir Peter Rogers (Chairman, New West End Company): Everything we do needs to be balanced against accessibility for people who use the street, whether it is workers, whether it is visitors, whether it is indeed people who just want to come and wander through the streets, but we cannot damage accessibility. It is an £8 billion retail environment and it would be crazy to lurch into an experiment which destroys that contribution to the economy simply by accident. We would favour a series of progressive steps which are pre-determined on the basis of an economic impact assessment going in and an economic evaluation going out before we proceed, rather than moving from A to Z, move through a series of steps, and where it stops because there is no benefit, it is based on evidence rather than on manifesto or dogma.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): You are looking at trying different things, seeing how they work, assessing them, evaluating, before potentially ultimately going to a full pedestrianisation, but you have got to see the impact and how it would work?

Sir Peter Rogers (Chairman, New West End Company): I think so. In our view, as we start, our stores certainly do not think full pedestrianisation along Oxford Street will work.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Yes, and of course the north-south routes that we heard from Westminster. Thank you for that. Let us go to the Taxi Drivers Association. Obviously it is a major east-west route for taxi drivers, but it is virtually gridlocked at the moment. What is the view from your members?

Richard Massett (Chairman, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): It is not so much of a route; it is used primarily for taking people to and from. It is so congested you cannot drive through it and use it as part of a route. Every day we take thousands of people both to and from Oxford Street. Many of these are less able people, people that naturally require a door-to-door service, and if it was pedestrianised, they will be denied getting to the shops in Oxford Street. Even the stations that are in Oxford Street are non-accessible and you have to use stairs for all those stations and so I find myself agreeing very much with what the two councillors have said. If you simply pedestrianise Oxford Street, all you would do is move the traffic and make life hell for the residents of Marylebone and Mayfair. Crossrail would open up an opportunity to perhaps curtail bus routes at each end of Oxford Street and have some kind of staged service running through it, but that is for the

future. Immediately it is supposedly only open to taxis and buses, but what we find is that anybody is driving through it at the moment, and that is because Westminster's cameras are no longer working. They have plans to replace them, but even the signs have fallen into disrepair and there should be urgent steps taken to renew those and reduce the traffic levels to what they should be.

Councillor Robert Davis (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for the Built Environment, City of Westminster): Can I interject and just say we are conscious that we have not been properly enforcing non-buses and taxis and we have now taken a decision to start enforcing, but it is not to do with closed-circuit television (CCTV), it was never used for that. But we certainly are going to enforce the few usually out of Londoners, people who are not from London. People who know London well will not use Oxford Street, but people coming in will not realise they are banned, so we are going to start enforcing it seriously.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): I have noticed a lot as well when I go up to Oxford Street that there are all these random cars coming along it, which makes no sense to me.

Richard Massett (Chairman, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): I will also add that air quality is mentioned a lot by those that want to pedestrianise, and as taxis are major users, I have no doubt the Committee are well aware, but come next year the new zero emission capable taxis will come on-stream - ZECs, as we call them - and they will be mandatory for new vehicles from 2018. We would like to see or we hope to see something like 10,000 of these vehicles come on-stream within the first two years, but it remains to be seen how successful that will be because of the affordability of them and perhaps the Committee can sometime look at that issue and perhaps help us along the way.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Yes, some of us have made comments on that. Thank you for that. Why don't we go to TfL next? Alex, obviously I realise it is a borough road, but it is a really important key street for London. What work have you been doing on this and do you think it is inevitable now that we are going to end up moving to some form of pedestrianisation?

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): It is probably worth me starting by answering your first question, which is what are the benefits and then I can expand about some of the work we have been doing. Certainly we recognise it is a really complex issue and it has been looked at several times before and no one has really cracked it. But in terms of the benefits of pedestrianisation, it does give you an opportunity to address the public realm. It is a world-class retail trading environment, but the street is not and I know that Westminster certainly has an aspiration to make it the best outdoor retail street in the world. We all know it is not now, and it does give you that opportunity to deliver a step-change improvement in the public realm.

It also gives you the opportunity to look at how we deal with road safety. We have 100 personal injury accidents a year on the road, which is unacceptably high, and we need to see how we can reduce that. Part of that is related to the complement of buses and pedestrians, but there are other users as well. The other issue it gives you an opportunity to look at is air quality, which we are addressing through ULEZ proposals, and there are issues, as Peter [Rogers] alluded to, about accelerating the delivery of some of that.

So going back to your first question, there are benefits there but we have also heard that it is a really complex scheme and it is inappropriate to just look at the street in isolation. The knock-on effect on the immediate streets, of Brook Street and Wigmore Street and also either end of Tottenham Court Road and Marble Arch, raise a lot of complex, difficult, thorny issues. The way to address that and the way we are looking at it now is if you do start that on Oxford Street, it has implications for the whole of central London, in our view, and you need to reconfigure and look at the bus network on a broader network, rather than just saying, "Every bus that

uses Oxford Street is just going to stop at Tottenham Court Road or Marble Arch". We need to look at a much broader assessment of how the bus network works.

In terms of some of the work going on now, Councillor Acton referred to the buses. We did decrease buses a few years ago, a 20% reduction, which was welcomed at the time. There was a slight increase in taxi use as a result of that, kind of filling that space, because it was less congested so it attracted more taxi drivers. We have got plans to look at a 20% to 40% reduction and we are looking at consulting on that later this year for phased implementation from next year. This is all leading up to Crossrail, which is the end of 2018, and I have been talking to Crossrail for so long that you think it is a long way away. Actually, it is less than two-and-a-half years away now.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Sixty million more people or something, is it, that Crossrail predicts? That is phenomenal.

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): Yes, it is phenomenal. That is the other thing we need to look at, the kind of onward dispersal from those stations; what we do at Bond Street and Tottenham Court Road. We need to look at that issue about whether the public realm and the space we have got there is fit for purpose, because one of the other issues with the whole road is what we call the pedestrian comfort levels. It is not comfortable as a pedestrian in many cases and we need to look at that balance between the space on the footway and the space on the carriageway. There is a lot going on. The new Mayor has clearly an aspiration for full pedestrianisation but has also recognised that you are not going to do that overnight. It needs to be a phased delivery of that and, as Peter alluded to, every step of the way we need to understand the full implications before we go to the next step.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Thank you for that, Alex. Let us come to Ruth next, Deputy Chair of TravelWatch. You get a huge caseload coming through. What are your views on the benefits or otherwise of pedestrianising Oxford Street?

Ruth Thompson (Deputy Chair, London TravelWatch): Yes, in a sense, I have not an awful lot to add to what has been said. TravelWatch is very supportive of the ambition of clearing up the local environment in Oxford Street in all manner of ways and we are very keen to work with the Mayor and TfL on assuring that the best possible proposals are developed. But they need to take a wide view of the transport we need in central London, not just Oxford Street, and they also need to look very carefully at the impact on all kinds of users, particularly bus passengers perhaps, but also pedestrians, cyclists and people with access and disability needs that we already touched upon. I would very much support those who have already said you cannot look at this in isolation, you need to look at a sort of area-wide traffic management proposition to make any progress. But we are very keen to support that and to support the process of bringing the users in and trying to manage what will necessarily be conflicting interests and conflicting demands.

Just one thing to pick up on, the recent point about the pedestrian space in Oxford Street and the signage, this is an area where TravelWatch has been able to add value in the past and we would like to add value, assuming that there is some kind of phased progress towards pedestrianisation, by trying to help those in charge of putting the signs up, whether they be TfL, the council or whatever, to make them intelligible for the user, because it is quite disorientating at the moment at some of these stations as it already exists, let alone what will happen when Crossrail arrives in a couple of years.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Absolutely, the wayfinding around it is really important. Thank you for that. You mentioned cyclists as well because it is also an important route for cyclists. Tom, do you want to just finish in terms of pedestrianising? It is what Living Streets is about, but what are your views on this?

Tom Platt (Head of Policy and Communications, Living Streets): Sir Peter Rogers had it bang on when he said the status quo is not acceptable. We know we need to change something and there is general agreement across the board on that. It is highly polluted, the casualty record is pretty awful and, tragically, two people have died just very recently on Oxford Street. Crossrail on the horizon, as we have mentioned, is a real game-changer and so we cannot sit still. We cannot tinker around the edges. It cannot be about small reductions here and there and slight increases in footway capacity here and there. Alex [Williams] is absolutely right that it is a really complicated issue and no one has cracked it yet, but that is because there has not been the political will and drive and energy of TfL to crack it.

We really need to move on - and I hope this is what is happening now - moving from "if" to "how" we do it. Clearly that solution has to think about access and needs to mean that the shops are accessible. We can solve that problem. It needs to think about how it works for people on parallel roads, and we certainly would not support any solution which simply dumps those vehicles and people on bikes and buses on to side roads. No one would propose that and I am pleased to see that, again, there seems to be a general consensus that there needs to be a wider look at the area to solve this problem. We would say very clearly that TfL needs to look at the wider bus network reconfiguration, which needs to happen anyway. There is a huge increase in bus use and so they need to look at that comprehensively. There is no use having all the suburban buses queueing up in Oxford Street and then going out the other side, so that is going to be obviously a big part of the solution, but if we can move from the "if" to the "how".

I have just a slight difference in opinion perhaps on Sir Peter Rogers' position is that we do not think this can be done or it should not be done piecemeal or it should not be delayed further, small changes for a couple of years, then trying this out and trying that out. We have had really good public realm improvements in some instances already in Oxford Street, but we have still got an awful air pollution record and tragically people being hit and killed on Oxford Street, so we need to be bold. We have a political will now to do that and we need to actually solve the problem, come up with solutions and we can do that if we get beyond this question of "if".

Sir Peter Rogers (Chairman, New West End Company): There are two distinct issues here. The first is the efficiency of the current bus network and that must be advantageous to deal with. If you apply it arithmetically, 20% is removing half of the buses which are excess capacity. That will make looking at the network and displacing the other half at least a lot easier than if you start from the status quo. In my view, that could be done very quickly and would improve the environment and the air quality issues now; 20% a year does not need to wait for big impact assessments. It could be started, because it is dealing with excess capacity and buses that simply do not need to run along Oxford Street now. That would mean one strand could be done very quickly. The other could start concurrently and start towards a longer-term solution. In my view, it would make it much easier dealing with half of the problem than all of the problem.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): It is clear just from hearing from everyone that this is not just about Oxford Street and actually the streets either side, which is very easy; this has to be a much bigger look at the impact of small businesses and how they have access around the sides of Oxford Street as well and then all the issues we have picked up.

We are going to get into some more detail now and so our next section is going to be on pedestrian safety.

Navin Shah AM: Amongst other major issues of concern that we have, can we pick up first of all pedestrian safety, to which we attach paramount importance. If we can start with Alex on the issue about accidents, what do you think are the current reasons for the relatively high number of pedestrian collisions and accidents, please?

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): As I said, the number of collisions is 284 over three years; in terms of casualties, 318. Pedestrians account for 52% of casualties, cyclists account for 22%. In terms of killed and seriously injured, pedestrians are 65% and cyclists are 18%.

If you look at some of the work that has happened, in particular the diagonal crossing at Oxford Circus, that was very good at addressing some of the pedestrian safety issues there and dealt with those really confined pinch-points on the corners there for pedestrians. The other thing that has helped is the central reservation on Oxford Street East, which has helped in terms of reducing accidents, but you have still a base number that is just far too high. I have a breakdown of percentages of all of them in much more detail with a kind of bar chart with all of that, which I can supply the Committee if you want rather than reading it through now.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): That would be helpful.

Navin Shah AM: How do these figures compare to previous years? Are we on a steady decline or is there still a major challenge to drive on safety?

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): I do not have those periods but, as I say, those two interventions I have mentioned have helped, but we have still a baseline that is unacceptably high and we need to see how we can reduce that. When you look at the sheer volume of people, 600,000 people a day going to the street, you are inevitably going to have lots of conflict and potentially quite a few accidents, but the issue for us is it too high and we want to get it down. As I say, the two measures that were put in have helped. We need to have a discussion with Westminster and the Highway Authority about what more we can do to address that. That is why pedestrianisation is an option that helps, but clearly you do not want a reduction of accidents in Oxford Street to be replicated by a significant increase in other streets elsewhere and so that is the difficult balance we have to strike.

Tom Platt (Head of Policy and Communications, Living Streets): Just a point I would like to make. I do not actually think the word "accident" is particularly useful in this instance because "accident" suggests that none of this is predictable and can be solved. Unfortunately, what we have found in Oxford Street is these casualties that happen in Oxford Street are all but surprising to us. We know they are going to happen because the footways are just too overcrowded for the volume of people that go down them. People will spill out and walk out in the carriageway and that is when they get hit by buses primarily or taxis. What we are dealing with is an issue that we know is going to happen, and we know it is going to happen next week and continue to happen, we are having one collision every seven days or so with a pedestrian, and we need to tackle the source of that road danger and deal with it now to prevent those pedestrian casualties happening in the future.

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): I have just looked at the table that I have got. It is probably worth me telling you the top three causes of accidents really rather than the whole thing. In terms of 300 injury events, just under 30% were pedestrian/coach or bus/coach incidents, where a pedestrian was hurt by a collision with a bus or coach. Probably 13% is an accident on a bus or coach, where someone has been

hurt there, and around 11% is a pedestrian/taxi conflict. In terms of top three, those top three causes are dealing with over 50% of the accidents.

Navin Shah AM: Do you have similar data about cyclists?

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): Yes, I have all the causal factors, but the cyclist levels are lower because, as you would expect, the flows of cyclists are much lower. The main cause of a cycling accident is actually ped/cycle conflict, which is just over 10% of accidents.

Navin Shah AM: Thank you. Alex, it will be very helpful for the Committee Members if you can circulate that information.

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): Yes, definitely. Yes, we can give that today.

Tom Platt (Head of Policy and Communications, Living Streets): Just to add that one of the things is also looking at severity of casualties. I do not have the data in front of me, but if you looked at the severity, the ones with the buses are probably the ones where people are more likely to be killed or seriously injured, so that is an important point. The other thing of course is most of these casualties that are happening are because there is not the room and people are stepping out of the footway to get past someone. As we have said a few times here, Crossrail is happening and very soon we are going to have another 150,000 people walking down Oxford Street. Naturally, we can predict what is going to happen. That is going to mean more people being squeezed on the footway and stepping out into the carriageway, so that is why absolutely we need to take action now, with Crossrail on the horizon, to make sure these things do not happen in the future.

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): As Alex said, the diagonal crossing made a huge difference in pedestrian safety and one of the factors there is there is less frustration for pedestrians, that they know that they can go anywhere at that point. There is also less frustration for bus drivers and taxi drivers, because they know they have to stop at that point and people can cross anywhere. That has been really successful and that is something that we can look at and we are in fact looking at it at another junction and so that is really important.

I would take issue with Tom's assertion that it is people being pushed off the pavement. Certainly the fatalities have been people rushing across the road trying to get another bus or a taxi, not being pushed off. I do not have all the data - maybe Alex [Williams] does - but I have certainly never heard of people being pushed off the pavement into traffic.

Tom Platt (Head of Policy and Communications, Living Streets): I did not say "pushed".

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): The cyclist/pedestrian conflict is also an issue. When I cycle along Oxford Street, dealing with the buses is extremely difficult and dealing with pedestrians is very difficult, they are very unpredictable. We want to improve it for pedestrians, we want to improve it for cyclists, but everybody has to play a part in being considerate to other users of the space.

Navin Shah AM: Tom's comments and your comments kind of neatly lead me to a couple of questions I have on public realm, which obviously does have to address the safety issues etc. I am aware that Westminster Council has been for some years implementing your Oxford Street, Regent Street and Bond Street action plan,

which I believe is ongoing. Can you tell us what impact public realm improvements through the action plan have had in terms of public safety?

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): I cannot give you any statistics on public safety, but the pedestrian comfort levels in some areas have certainly improved and the New West End Company would say that satisfaction in the area is also improving. When we put oases, as they were called, on the Oxford, Regent and Bond (ORB) [streets], this action plan, it has really helped. Generally we found that people did not know where they could go from Oxford Street and there are some great squares and small oases of calm. If you want to walk from one bit of Oxford Street to another, it quite often is easier to go north or south to travel along. Some of the public realm improvements and the estates have been helping with those public realm investments and investing quite heavily both north and south of Oxford Street. They have been very helpful.

Navin Shah AM: Do you think that initiatives like the diagonal crossing on Oxford Street and public realm improvements and changes on Oxford Street East side have helped considerably to drive safety?

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): I do not know. At the moment, with the Crossrail works going on there, it is really difficult to assess that. I am sure when everything is finished there it is going to be fantastic.

Sir Peter Rogers (Chairman, New West End Company): The thing about Crossrail is that none of the stations in Oxford Street actually open into Oxford Street, and they were deliberately designed not to add to the problems of Oxford Street. The two main stations, the two entrances to them both come out in the streets behind, so you have Bond Street, you have Hanover Square, you have Dean Street and you have Charing Cross Road. We are implementing some very, very good public realm schemes around the entrances, hoping that not everybody who comes out of those stations is going to go to Oxford Street, they are going to go into a wider area. At Bond Street, we have a massive scheme that the Greater London Authority (GLA) is helping support financially of widening the pavements and making it a much better public realm. We are pedestrianising the west side of Hanover Square and doing a whole realm scheme around Hanover Square, where the station comes out there, and again around Dean Street and around Tottenham Court Road and Charing Cross junction. You are going to get some very good public realm where the stations are to help people not necessarily to head to Oxford Street, but to head and span out through other parts of Westminster.

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): Navin, in answer to your specific questions about the effectiveness of the Oxford Street diagonal crossing, that achieved a 19% reduction in casualties in the three-year period compared to the three-year post period. If you look at Oxford Street East, the central reservation works, that is looking at a 25% reduction in casualties, although we do not have the full three years post-implementation that we have got with Oxford Circus. Both are delivering impressive returns and reductions there, but we have a base position that is too high.

Ruth Thompson (Deputy Chair, London TravelWatch): Just listening to the discussion that we have just been having, it really does underline if we are going to expect improvements in the public realm to disperse people in different directions, they must know where they are going. Can we have the wayfinding, please?

Tom Platt (Head of Policy and Communications, Living Streets): Just to get beyond this, no one will dispute - and certainly we would not dispute - that public realm improvements are not welcome in terms of the quality of the pedestrian experience in any place, but we need to grasp the scale of this issue: 150,000 more people, whether they come out just around the corner from Oxford Street or not, are going to be on Oxford

Street, so these small-scale improvements to the public realm are not going to deal with the issue. Councillor Acton is absolutely right, pedestrians are unpredictable and that means that you have to design now and look at road danger and dealing with the source of danger at source, and that means dealing with the buses and the taxis and the vehicles going down Oxford Street, not simply just improving the public realm there.

Sir Peter Rogers (Chairman, New West End Company): I echo that point, and I will come on to the short run between now and Crossrail opening. One million people a week will be coming out on top of the current numbers and the more people that are there - and if the buses do not reduce - you will see more accidents. That is why it is important to operate on the short-run basis of taking excess capacity out now and rebalancing the mode to pedestrian from buses. That should start now to alleviate some of these more difficult issues which will flow later. That is a very good point.

Navin Shah AM: Tom has pretty much answered my next question and probably anticipated it, but generally do panel members have views whether this sort of incremental approach to public realm improvements is really an answer to pedestrian safety or do we need to look at the bigger picture, so to say?

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): It contributes to pedestrian safety, but we do need to look at a bigger picture. Westminster has just brought out in draft its revised walking strategy, and we have already been talking with TfL about wayfinding. That is really important, that within the stations people know how to get where they are going so that you do not have pedestrian conflict on Oxford Street, with some people knowing where they are going and wanting to go fast and people blocking the way. The walking strategy, as produced in draft, provides a skeleton framework of where we want to go to improve the pedestrian offer across Westminster. We have already worked with stakeholders, including Living Streets, to try to make it an optimum solution. But over the summer we will be working again with stakeholders and I would appreciate any further comment on what more we can do to improve pedestrian accessibility across Westminster and including in this West End area.

Navin Shah AM: Can I ask you, as the local authority and particularly given your role on the executive, are the neighbouring residents concerned or fairly easy about the pedestrian safety? Are they concerned as local residents and users of services on Oxford Street?

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): To be honest, because there are not many day-to-day shops on Oxford Street, residents perhaps do not really use it as their day-to-day shopping street. They are more likely to use in the Marylebone area, the Marylebone High Street and Edgware Road, where there are more functional shops. It is more a visitor experience and residents are more likely to use the back entrance to the shops as well.

Navin Shah AM: We have heard about the massive additional movement and footfall once Crossrail materialises. Do you think that you are geared up to deal with the current situation, geared up to improving pedestrian safety - this applies to TfL as well - with the sort of improvements that you are making to public realm?

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): That is certainly one of the issues that we are trying to address, looking at our walking strategy. We have put in a bid to GLA and TfL for a low-emission neighbourhood in Marylebone and that proposes various measures to address air quality specifically, but also deal with traffic movement. With that, and also elsewhere, we are working with a number of freight operators to reduce the freight delivery, and where it has to be by vehicle,

then converting those to electric vehicles. We have a number of projects underway with that and certainly the New West End Company is doing a lot of work on freight reduction. But within this low-emission neighbourhood we would be promoting walking, cycling and electric vehicle movement across that area.

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): The other thing to remember on the road safety issue is that if you look at where the accidents are, over two-thirds are in Oxford Street West, between Oxford Circus and Marble Arch. Oxford Circus has been a tremendous success. The road layout for the rest of Oxford Street West has not been touched for probably over ten years in any radical shape or form, probably longer than that, and everyone --

Sir Peter Rogers (Chairman, New West End Company): 1993 was the last time we did anything to it.

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): 1993, yes. That clearly is due for another look and there we need to look at the issue about the balance of road space versus footway space and rationalise that in an effective way. Clearly what you do in terms of long-term pedestrianisation has to be factored into that but clearly, in my view, that section of the street needs to be revisited and rebalanced in terms of how you allocate the space. It is accepted with Westminster that we will look at that.

Navin Shah AM: If any of the other panel members feel that there are measures which will help improve pedestrian safety, if you can write into us, that would be very much appreciated.

Richard Massett (Chairman, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): Just one thing before we leave this part of the meeting, I am surprised that TfL did not give us some more information about the cause of the accidents. Is it because people are spilling off the pavements? Is it because people are running across the road without looking? Are they looking the wrong way when they step into the road? Do you have that information? Perhaps you might need to do some more research into it.

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): I have a detailed analysis of collisions on Oxford Street and it is based on the data from the police and so this is as much data as I can get, but I am more than happy to circulate that.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): That would be great, thank you.

Caroline Russell AM: Councillor Acton talked about people rushing across the road to get a bus and this is an absolute inevitability in Oxford Street. There is a huge number of people and they all want to go to the other side of the road and they are unpredictable. Tom Platt talked about the fact that we know these collisions are going to happen and so what we have got to do is tackle the source of that danger. I have heard from Alex Williams from TfL the real benefits to improving the public realm, so we saw a 25% reduction in collisions in the eastern bit of Oxford Street, where there is that informal crossing with a central reservation, which certainly I make use of all the time, it is really convenient, and it allows you to take responsibility for your safety, but it allows you to perch safety in the middle of the road and cross. But I just want to take us back to this bus issue because presumably TfL and the contracted bus companies have a duty of care to the people using Oxford Street, to the people shopping there, to the people who are working there, and also to the local residents who live in the local roads. I would hope also that TfL has a duty of care to the people who are driving those buses. The conditions on Oxford Street - sorry, I do not have the numbers in front of me - are that there are huge numbers of bus movements, about 20 different routes using it, 20 different bus stops and huge numbers of pedestrians. These bus drivers are working in conditions that are really stressful and difficult.

What I am wondering is whether TfL will consider saying any more about what the bus drivers think about how to make things better on Oxford Street. Those are the people who are navigating this street every day, driving huge and very dangerous vehicles. Bus/pedestrian collisions seem to be the ones that are most frequent and sadly have caused the most fatalities. Could we have a little bit more on what can be done and what the bus drivers think about reducing these collisions?

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): The short answer is I do not know.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Focus on just the bus drivers because we have a big section on buses coming up.

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): The short answer is I do not know the views of individual bus drivers but we could certainly receive their views. We do clearly have a duty of care for those employees. One of the other things we are doing is we have just instigated a comprehensive, pan-London training programme for all of our bus drivers. A lot of it is about customer care and also safety because one of the things I was surprised at was that the second highest accident level is within a bus. On the bus is 13% of all casualties, which strikes me as surprisingly high. I am afraid I do not know the detail about their views about these changes, but we could certainly seek their views as part of the consultation.

Caroline Russell AM: That would be really helpful. Thank you.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Let us move on to traffic-free days and how we could look at potentially implementing this.

Joanne McCartney AM: Obviously your VIP [Very Important Pedestrians] days ran for about six or seven years but they stopped in 2012, although I note that Regent Street will have a number of traffic-free days this year. Perhaps I could start with Sir Peter. Is there a case for bringing back traffic-free days to Oxford Street? If we do, could we test out some of these proposals during those?

Sir Peter Rogers (Chairman, New West End Company): Our members are generally supportive of traffic-free days, to some extent. What they are not necessarily supportive of is traffic-free days associated with events because events bring people in but they do not necessarily add wealth to the stores. It introduces huge footfall, great inconvenience because they are ad hoc - they are not planned, they are not routed - and it causes major disturbances in the surrounding streets because of the way that they are activated.

A regular programme of traffic-free days is worth experimenting with. In my view, that is one of the things that would be a sensible step towards looking at pedestrian areas and looking for traffic-free zones as part of a move from where we are to where we will end up. There is support. We had a series of debates with our members last year and there was large-scale support from the people there. Although it is by no means a proper consultation, there was large-scale support for traffic-free days but not for event traffic-free days. We are happy to work along that basis.

Regent Street has a very different agenda. If you talk to the Crown Estate, a lot of their promotion was about marketing an international awareness of Regent Street. It is single ownership and it is a very different model to Oxford Street, which is a mix of small stores and big stores in multiple ownership, and some of them are struggling.

One of the issues that clearly is at the back of their mind - it is a separate issue - is that they are currently facing a huge hike in business rates, which is going to damage their bottom line. What they do not particularly want is to see initiatives that further damage their revenue line. It needs to be carefully thought out, which is why our economic impact assessments are vital in every way that we go forward with proper evaluation on the way out.

Joanne McCartney AM: Councillor Davis, I understand the West End Commission did say they would support traffic-free days but the planning for them had not been good enough and it was quite ad hoc. Is that still the position?

Councillor Robert Davis (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for the Built Environment, City of Westminster): Westminster has always supported these VIP days but they have been led, organised and funded by the New West End Company. It was the New West End Company which decided two years ago that their members did not want them. We have always supported them. Obviously they are moving now towards bringing them back and we will be very supportive and help them to do that.

We have to work with TfL carefully because of the rerouting of the buses. We have to take on board and work with people like the businesses in Marylebone High Street, who do tend to suffer on a VIP day because if you remove all the traffic there, it congests it. The problem is that a lot of the businesses will tell you - and Selfridges is a good example - that they are not necessarily in favour of it because their regular customers get put off. They think it is going to be a mass fun day with crowds of people. The people who come and spend regularly will often say, "I will not go that Saturday. I will go a different day, or not at all and go somewhere else". The people who tend to go on these VIP days tend not to necessarily have money in their pocket to spend.

We have to work with the businesses and make sure that they buy in. I am not sure I should mention his name today, but Sir Philip Green was always very much against it with his stores around Oxford Street. I am not sure whether that is a good or a bad thing to mention. The point that I am making is there is a very different view. Bond Street does badly on Oxford Street traffic-free days because, again, people who go to Bond Street will be put off by thinking that the West End has been brought to a standstill. However, we are very supportive and if we can work with the New West End Company, we will certainly make them happen again.

Joanne McCartney AM: Not to be joined up with big events?

Councillor Robert Davis (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for the Built Environment, City of Westminster): The issue is not to have an event on the street. That is what Regent Street has stopped doing. Regent Street started doing a lot of these events in the street on their Sundays and what they found was that people were not spending in the shops. They go and do all the activities in the street, watch these wonderful Spanish horses entertaining people, but they do not spend. What we have to do is make it a nice environment for them to go and spend in the shops, so the businesses get something out of it.

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): The other thing to look at is Marylebone High Street and the other areas. We have to look at a holistic solution for this and so another idea that we have talked about with Howard de Walden Estates Ltd is to have everywhere traffic-free. For example, the congestion zone. You maybe have a traffic-free congestion zone. Than that takes the pressure away from individual streets and movement.

Joanne McCartney AM: Presumably traffic-free days have logistical issues with the bus network, for example, and so forth. There would be difficulties but presumably there would be opportunities to test out some future planning.

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): They do take a long time to plan. There is quite a long lead-in for us to do because you have to reconfigure the bus network over a longer area. We have not in the past used these as an opportunity to test pedestrianisation or anything like that. They would have limited value if you were just going to do a day, a Saturday or a Sunday or anything like that. We would certainly collect data and monitor it, but in terms of using that as a proxy for what pedestrianisation would be, I am not sure that it is of great value in that regard. We would certainly work with Westminster if they brought back VIP days. We are more than happy to work with them on that.

Joanne McCartney AM: We have heard different views about whether, if you were to pedestrianise, you would go full-hog and do it straight away in one sweep or whether you could do some incremental testing of different things. Even if you did not coordinate full traffic-free days, would you, Alex, be in favour of TfL testing out some ideas for increasing pedestrianisation on a smaller scale?

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): We would have to clearly work closely with Westminster and then work on that. In regards to full or partial pedestrianisation, there are two issues with partial. One is whether it is 24 hours a day or just shopping hours, for example, in which we give respite to residents in adjacent streets overnight. The other issue about full or partial is length. Is it just Oxford Street West or is it the whole of Oxford Street? Certainly if you wanted to do something more quickly, you would probably start with an easier stepping stone of a segment of Oxford Street West for part of the day but that is something we would need to talk through with Westminster and then work to understand the appetite for that. There are a whole variety of issues with all of those, really.

The other thing to remember with this is that a majority of businesses service from the road itself so if you do pedestrianise, you would still need access for those services. It happens in pedestrianised streets. It happens in Leicester Square. That has front servicing and it is a pedestrianised, so it is not insurmountable but it is something we need to be mindful of when we look at the design.

Joanne McCartney AM: We heard earlier that TfL and Westminster Council are undertaking an assessment of different options along the street. Is part pedestrianisation part of those options?

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): Yes.

Joanne McCartney AM: You are looking at that at the moment?

Councillor Robert Davis (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for the Built Environment, City of Westminster): Yes, very much so. The GLA are involved as well. It is not just TfL. The Westminster partnership has a whole series of different options, including full pedestrianisation because we do want to consider that before we rule it out. You have to consider all the options. We are considering everything, using our joint resources to try to find the solutions.

Joanne McCartney AM: Will that assessment be available?

Councillor Robert Davis (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for the Built Environment, City of Westminster): Very much so, yes.

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): At the end of this year. It might be useful to come back to you with those.

Joanne McCartney AM: That would be helpful. That is looking at the whole range of schemes?

Councillor Robert Davis (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for the Built Environment, City of Westminster): Absolutely.

Joanne McCartney AM: One of the things that has been put to us - Alex mentioned it - is that you could perhaps pedestrianise Oxford Street West first. Is that likely to be the easiest bit to do?

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): No.

Joanne McCartney AM: No?

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, Transport for London): I am not sure I would use the word "easy".

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Easy is not really an option.

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): Easier, probably, than the full pedestrianisation. Certainly that was the one that we thought we should focus on as a first stage, looking in a bit more detail at the section between Selfridges and Oxford Circus and clearly still allowing north-south crossing of that. It would be segments of pedestrianisation as well. That raises a number of complex issues, particularly about bus displacement. I know the concerns of Wigmore Street particularly on that issue. What we need to take away is to think about what we do for the bus network in the whole of central London. Rather than just saying, "If it is on there now it needs to stay in the vicinity", it might be that we have a more radical assessment of the bus network for central London.

Councillor Robert Davis (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for the Built Environment, City of Westminster): You must not stop the north-south routes because if you do that complete pedestrianisation from, say, Selfridges to Oxford Circus and there are no routes going north and south, it just pushes all that north-south traffic into the Marble Arch or to Regent Street or beyond.

Sir Peter Rogers (Chairman, New West End Company): I am sorry to sound like a broken record but while we are dealing all of these longer-term issues on Oxford Street, the situation today is unacceptable. We must take out excess capacity of buses starting now. From now until Christmas is a very long time and we should certainly be starting to take out the first tranche of excess capacity very quickly. That is 20% by this time next year, followed by very quick plans to take out the next 20%. That will help us to resolve some of the issues about 1 million more people every week coming through in 2018 and alleviate some of the pressures by taking out at least half of the buses. That will make some of the work around looking at the traffic modelling and displacement an awful lot easier than trying to deal with the existing traffic volumes.

Tom Platt (Head of Policy and Communications, Living Streets): I would certainly echo the need to get on with this. One of the things that we should be very clearly calling for now we have the manifesto pledge is a clear timetable and delivery plan of how pedestrianisation is going to happen. Going back to the traffic-free

summer streets, open street days or whatever you call them, we are certainly very supportive of them. We think they, in their own right, can be very positive events, very popular, and can have an immediate impact on things like air pollution. Also, in terms of the Mayor and an emblematic example, you see in cities around the world that where they open up those streets to people, their central streets, there is a real symbolism there about how you prioritise people in your city.

I have a slight hesitation about this idea of it being a test. We have all talked about how complicated this issue is and unless you are going to deal with those other issues all at once to test pedestrianisation, what might happen is that you just test it for the day, all the buses and things do move on to the side streets and then everyone says, "This is awful and pedestrianisation is going to have all these negative impacts" because you have not done all the other things we said have to happen, for example the reconfiguration of the bus network in central London. I just think as a test, we should be careful.

Ruth Thompson (Deputy Chair, London TravelWatch): Two things. First, being careful about tests. London TravelWatch is very keen that there should be good evidence-based processes behind the policies that drive towards the changes that need to happen in Oxford Street. Yes, I probably share some of the misgivings about whether a one-off traffic-free day is the right mechanism. I am not an expert in the way to test how transport policies should and should not be implemented; I just think testing is very important. At the same time, getting testing that delivers meaningful rather than skewed results is just as important, if not more so.

The second thing. I know we are going to come on to talk about buses in a minute but Sir Peter [Rogers] is driving very hard to say you must take bus capacity out. Well maybe. I am sure that there is excess bus capacity at certain times in Oxford Street and I am sure that is a big part of the problem but I just want to put a little word out for the user of the bus to say the user of the bus is not heard very well. The user of the bus does not complain. The user of the bus is somehow submerged under louder voices very often. We need to test what we are doing and make sure that what we do, if we take bus capacity out, is acceptable from a passenger perspective. People do use the buses to go all along Oxford Street. Whether that is sensible or not is a separate question.

Sir Peter Rogers (Chairman, New West End Company): The basic premise on which bus networks are designed is supply and demand.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): We are going to get on to buses in great detail next.

Sir Peter Rogers (Chairman, New West End Company): Can I just make the point that responds to this? There is a very simple efficiency measure for loadings of buses, which is passenger kilometres over vehicle kilometres. If you look at that by time of day along Oxford Street, you will see huge excess capacity.

Ruth Thompson (Deputy Chair, London TravelWatch): At times.

Sir Peter Rogers (Chairman, New West End Company): At times. I did say at times.

Richard Massett (Chairman, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): Traffic-free days, you will not be surprised to hear, have not worked very well for our members or our passengers. We cannot take people who require a door to door service where they want to go. If people come out of the stores and they are looking for a taxi to get home or wherever they are going to, they do not have a clue where to go and find one. If there are going to be any further traffic-free days, we need to make sure they are properly planned. We need some taxi routes around the area and we need ranks where people can get to them and where they know they

are. It really needs to be organised properly if we are going to do any more. I am not quite sure whether they will work because of the additional congestion that is created in the surrounding area.

Joanne McCartney AM: Perhaps I could just ask Sir Peter as well. Is there any push from the other streets you represent, such as Regent Street or Bond Street, for pedestrianisation or other measures there?

Sir Peter Rogers (Chairman, New West End Company): We are just about to work through the West End Partnership on major public realm improvement and we have applied to the Mayor for a loan to finish that. There is a huge amount of private sector funding that is going in to improve Bond Street significantly so that the outside matches the inside of the stores. Part of that is increasing the footway widths, rebalancing the thing to pedestrians. That has the full support of the retailers down there, who are contributing something like £5 million towards a £10 million scheme. Bond Street is very much at the heart of the agenda that we have operated and it is a West End Partnership priority.

Regent Street has done an awful lot to rebalance their area already. What they have done is introduce traffic-free days as part of major marketing push. The Crown Estates are currently reviewing how they would again. Again, Councillor Davis has said that there is a move away from event-led things to consumer-led traffic-free days.

Councillor Robert Davis (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for the Built Environment, City of Westminster): We are widening the pavements in Regent Street over a period of time and the last bit is happening now. If you go today to the bottom end where Austin Reed was, you will see roadworks there that is the last bit, finishing off the widening of the pavement.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Thank you very much. We now move on to buses, which everything has ended up pointing at this morning.

Keith Prince AM (Deputy Chairman): My first question is to TfL and that is around what you feel might be viable options if we were to change the bus network. Would we perhaps think of terminating at either end of Oxford Street? Can we shorten routes?

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): It is probably worth me setting out what we are doing now and then some of the issues we need to look at longer-term as well. To answer Sir Peter's [Rogers] point about taking them out now, it is a bit more complicated than that. We do need to go through a statutory consultation process, consulting groups such as TravelWatch and other users to get an understanding of changes to individual routes.

We have a package of measures that we are likely to go out to consultation on this autumn that will see a significant reduction in bus flows on Oxford Street, probably 20% to 40% but it ought to be more like 40%. One is to get a much better understanding about people's views of changes to those routes and whether they would support those changes. Once we have an understanding of those views, we would either amend the scheme or take into account those comments in our phased delivery from next year. That is all a suite of changes that we hope to introduce before the opening of Crossrail, by the end of 2018.

It is important to understand that while I fully understand the view that there is an oversupply in Oxford Street, and there clearly is at certain times of the day, those routes are serving large swathes of London. We need to understand the views of people who use those routes all over London. In terms of a radical change in how it

uses Oxford Street, we need to understand the views of users well away from Oxford Street as to whether they would support that or not.

There will be consultation this autumn and phased delivery beyond that. Following on from what Peter was saying, that more needs to be done beyond that. We recognise the need to review the bus network for central London. We are looking at changes, as we were just talking about, in relation to Crossrail, but we recognise we need to go beyond that and look at the bus network serves people in central London and the balance of supply that we put in central London versus the supply that is in outer London, feeding some of the key stations in outer London. It may be, with the financial challenges we have, there is a redistribution of mileage for buses with less in central London and more protection for some of those services in outer London where they do not have the density of the rail network that central London benefits from.

There is a phased delivery in terms of an identified consultation on specific route changes this autumn. We need to agree the specific dates with Westminster on that. Then there is also a recognition that we need to do a comprehensive review for the network and how it functions in central London versus inner London versus outer London. I think you understand that that is not a quick piece of work. That is a very fundamental review of how the bus network operates in London.

Keith Prince AM (Deputy Chairman): In no way is this meant in any derogatory way but it was mentioned earlier that when the bus flow is reduced, ie when there were fewer buses, a lot of the slack was taken up by taxis now entering Oxford Street. I am just wondering, even if we were to reduce the number of buses in Oxford Street and if that were to increase the flow, would that invite or make it more attractive for taxis to take up that slack?

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): It would. It did. When there was a 20% reduction in buses, there was an increase in taxis. We heard from Richard [Masset] earlier that taxi drivers choose not to use it because it is congested. If you reduce that bus congestion, it makes it more attractive for them to use and so there is clearly an issue we need to think about around the balance of space and who uses that space. If you do take out buses, what do you do with the space that that frees up? That is where we need to have a discussion with Westminster about the design of Oxford Street West in particular, really, which dates from 20-plus years ago and does need to be reassessed.

Richard Massett (Chairman, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): We recognise that that could be an issue. We have had some initial discussions with Westminster as to how we might manage that. We are committed to doing what we can to assist in that direction. It would be pretty pointless if we were just to replace buses with taxis. We are happy to work with Westminster to try to find a way to ensure that does not happen.

Councillor Robert Davis (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for the Built Environment, City of Westminster): One of the solutions is to make it much more attractive for taxis to have their pick-up on the side streets. Going back to what I said before, north-south is very important and if all the important stores on all the important north-south streets had taxi ranks just north or just south of Oxford Street, it would encourage them therefore to use the north-south rather than the east-west. That is why we have to work with the taxis, with TfL and everybody to come up with a formula that encourages them to use north-south and not east-west.

Richard Massett (Chairman, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): We do have a programme of work at the moment with Westminster looking at routes all around the area and the routes across. We are working on that as we speak.

Keith Prince AM (Deputy Chairman): That is helpful. With the introduction of the Hopper fare, where you can now use two buses within an hour without having to pay anything extra - and possibly that may roll out to having unlimited bus use within the hour - would it be a possibility that instead of buses running the length of Oxford Street, if there was full pedestrianisation, the routes did not go beyond either Marble Arch or Oxford Street? Say the 15, for instance, would terminate at Marble Arch, or not necessarily terminate but the route would go back along Edgware Road - it goes up Edgware Road from Marble Arch, from memory - and then another bus - it might be called the 115 - that comes from the east, instead of going the other side of Oxford Street to Marble Arch, would just turn around and go back? It is a thinking-outside-the-box solution so that you then would not have buses crossing that length and upsetting the residents of Marylebone and that area.

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): We need to think through the implications of the bus Hopper ticket on Oxford Street. My initial reaction is that the bus Hopper ticket could increase bus usage on Oxford Street because you can just get on and off without paying an extra fare. Having said that, it is so congested that it is probably quicker to walk than to get on and off the bus. My initial reaction is that it might increase.

In terms of how it enables us to redesign the network, you are dead right: it does give us more opportunity or more flexibility to redesign the network in the way that you have just mentioned, not as specific routes but how we design the network for that part of London. The other thing to bear in mind is we start in September 2016 and it is going to be one extra bus trip but when the technology is there by the end of 2018, it is unlimited. That element, particularly in the Oxford Street context, you could see that getting on and off an unlimited number within an hour is something that potentially quite a lot of people would do.

Initially, it will increase the usage. In terms of how it will affect our design of the network, you are dead right: we will need to look at that. I do not have any specific answers about specific routes now.

Councillor Robert Davis (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for the Built Environment, City of Westminster): Whatever the options - and that is an option - what we want to avoid is turning Marble Arch and St Giles Circus into bus stations. That is crucial. If you are going to stop there, a bus would have to turn around immediately. We already get that a bit in Cavendish Square, which has become a little bit of a bus station. They are supposed to turn round there. They all end up idling there. If you go behind John Lewis, there are umpteen buses all idling there. It would just push the problem and create another at Marble Arch.

Keith Prince AM (Deputy Chairman): I do agree with you, Councillor Davis. My vision would be that, because it is a much shorter route, the bus just went round and went back up where it came from. Not terminating there, no. That would cause a major problem.

Tom Platt (Head of Policy and Communications, Living Streets): I would just add that there is agreement that the current system is terribly inefficient and something needs to be done. It is positive that TfL are talking about looking at this in a comprehensive manner because that is what needs to happen. We need to look at, comprehensively, how all these historical routes need to work. What happens at the moment is that each route is assessed individually every seven or so years and that means you are not looking at them as a whole. That needs to happen before solutions can be found.

What happens historically when you debate these kinds of things is that you start talking about the 115 bus and whether it stops at Marble Arch or whatever, and then someone says, "No, you cannot do any of this because the 115 bus needs to turn around here," and so on. You get into these details without saying, "Absolutely. You are right. We need to look at the bigger picture and think how we can change the way buses go through central London."

The Hopper ticket makes a big difference because it means you have greater flexibility, not just at the end of Oxford Street but in wider inner London, to ask where the series of interchanges, depots or gates are - whatever you want to call them - where suburban bus routes terminate or turn around and people could hop onto a different network for central London.

Keith Prince AM (Deputy Chairman): If we perhaps consider full pedestrianisation, what do the people on the panel think about having full pedestrianisation but perhaps had some kind of push-me, pull-you shuttle that just went up and down a single lane in Oxford Street? What would your views on that be? Which do you think would be better?

Councillor Robert Davis (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for the Built Environment, City of Westminster): Again, it is an issue we have looked at before. The whole concept of having some form of shuttle. Bryan Avery, the famous architect, designed an overhead shuttle. It creates a problem at each end. You might solve the problem in the middle but then you have to have some form of bus station at each end. That is where the issues arise. The only solution, in my view, is TfL looking, as we have just been saying, at the whole of central London and how you do buses with the Hopper. You have to start from scratch rather than necessarily trying to introduce a new element of transportation that then starts conflicting and causing new problems.

Keith Prince AM (Deputy Chairman): Has anyone considered travellers, like they have in airports?

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): Yes, that has been looked at by a couple of people. They have also looked at driverless vehicles, as you are now getting in airports. It is possible but you still have the problem at each end of that integrated transport system not working. If we were designing a new bus system now, it would not operate the way that it is currently operating. Under the very first Mayor, a study was done looking at the buses on Oxford Street. That must have been nearly 20 years ago - 16 years ago - and it did show that there was potential to take out some of the buses. Some of the buses have been taken out but I would agree with Ruth [Thompson] that people do also need the buses. They need to use them.

Sir Peter Rogers (Chairman, New West End Company): It is probably just worth saying that everybody has come up with good ideas for illuminating this and a lot of them have been looked at and discounted by TfL as part of the West End Partnership priorities. The current proposals from the West End Partnership go a long way towards taking out vehicles. The 40% by Crossrail is nearly as good as my 50%. It is not as good but it is nearly as good. Full-scale pedestrianisation is a major issue that needs major evaluation and major discussion because the consequences of getting it wrong to the economy of the West End are dramatic in terms of gross value added (GVA), in terms of employment and in terms of the international reputation of the UK.

Keith Prince AM (Deputy Chairman): Just finally then, clearly there may be as a result of this buses that are diverted to the surrounding streets, which is the biggest worry. What do we think about zero-emission buses? Do we think that might mitigate the problem a bit?

Sir Peter Rogers (Chairman, New West End Company): Taking half the buses out deals with this a lot better but if you could leave the other half with zero emissions, it is better still. It is part of our starting position. I did say at the start we want 20% each year for the next three years, we want all buses to be operating in a zero-emissions mode now - not just being capable of it but driving that way - and we would like to see the ULEZ advanced to 2018. Those issues would dramatically improve the reputation of the West End.

Tom Platt (Head of Policy and Communications, Living Streets): I would just add that clearly we very much support zero-emission buses in the whole of central London. We know this is a massive issue, air pollution in central London, which needs to be tackled. The other thing that needs to be mentioned in this debate is the Mayor's strategy, hopefully, going forward, about a general reduction in the number of motor vehicles in central London. That needs to be looked at in the whole as well: how, with a huge increase in population and all those other things, we can drastically reduce the volume of vehicles in central London all together.

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): We want zero-emission buses as soon as possible across Westminster but that would not solve the issues of diversion of buses along Wigmore Street and Mortimer Street. That is an issue of congestion and pedestrian safety. They have been diverted along there with Crossrail. It increased congestion and there were difficulties in finding places for bus stops as well.

Florence Eshalomi AM: Sir Peter, essentially a number of people do use buses to Oxford Street, including a number of staff members in the many different shops. I remember when I used to work at Marks & Spencer, living in Brixton, I had two options of the 159 or the 2. A number of those staff members are on low income. Again, I know there is a big push to make sure a number of the businesses are looking at paying the London Living Wage. I just wanted to know if there have been any discussions, if there was the removal of some of the buses, about the impact, or discussions you are having with some of those businesses around changes that staff would have to make.

Sir Peter Rogers (Chairman, New West End Company): It is one of the things that we would need to address, quite clearly. We started off by saying businesses favour some traffic-free zones but everything has to be subject to the accessibility for various groups and one of those is workers. Clearly we need to be more to make sure that our workers are unaffected. That is why we are against total pedestrianisation of the entire street for 24/7 by 365. It simply creates problems in terms of accessibility for all groups and it not something we would support.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): That is a very good point. We were focusing in our minds on shoppers and people going out but there are huge numbers of workers.

Joanne McCartney AM: When you are doing your work, TfL and Westminster, about the various options, you mentioned the cost you are looking at as well. Are you factoring in the costs that accidents take up in terms of National Health Service (NHS) costs and also, I am assuming, traffic congestion costs as well?

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): That would be factored in.

Councillor Robert Davis (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for the Built Environment, City of Westminster): Absolutely.

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, Transport for London): Yes, that would be factored in. In the business case analysis, we try to monetise all of those issues. We would be assessing how the interventions could reduce casualties. That is monetised in the business case work. Yes, it is certainly factored in.

Joanne McCartney AM: Is that report going to be publically available when you have done it?

Councillor Robert Davis (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for the Built Environment, City of Westminster): It is finished, yes.

Joanne McCartney AM: Good. Thank you.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): It is very reassuring to hear the detailed work on buses, which is long overdue, going on. I am glad to see we have a one-hour bus ticket, as I wanted, coming in because it does free up, as this Committee with the previous members has said, so many opportunities to start shaking up the bus service.

Let us move on the next section, which is on taxis and private hire.

Florence Eshalomi AM: We have heard concerns in terms of taxi drivers and Councillor Acton touched on taxi drivers sometimes avoiding Oxford Street because it is a traffic jam. Equally, a number of people do rely on it and none of the stations along that route are accessible. It is about how we get people who do want to go out and enjoy the shops who are in wheelchairs and do not have the ability. They all use Dial-a-Ride and the taxi drivers. Has there been, in terms of looking at rerouting the bus drivers and maybe rerouting taxi drivers, any full-scale discussion of the implications if all taxi drivers were to abandon Oxford Street?

Richard Massett (Chairman, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): No, we have not. It is something that we are very keen to raise because a great number of our passengers are disabled. I am not just talking about people in wheelchairs. We are the only fully accessible service for wheelchair-users and guide dog users but there is an enormous amount of people out there who have difficulties getting around. There are elderly people and people with injuries. These people require a door-to-door service. If we are prevented from going into Oxford Street, they will not be able to go to those places. There is no other way to get there. As you said, the stations are not accessible to them so it is their only option, really. We certainly do need to be looking to keep taxis being able to serve these people and these stores.

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): I recognise that is an issue. The only thing I would add to that is that Crossrail stations will be accessible. There is a double-ended station at Bond Street. These huge stations at Bond Street and Tottenham Court Road will have lift access to the surface, from the platform to the street. That is a big improvement in accessibility to Oxford Street but we also recognise, as Richard mentioned, that taxis do have a role in providing access for people with disabilities to Oxford Street as well.

Richard Massett (Chairman, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): It is worth mentioning that at the Crossrail stations that will be accessible, there is going to be a taxi rank to service the new Bond Street station but so far we have not been able to agree on a site for the Tottenham Court Road station. The other thing we need to remember is that not all the entrances are going to be accessible. There is only one at each station. We need to make sure that the taxi rank is provided where there is an accessible entrance and exit. That just has not been thought of up until now.

Ruth Thompson (Deputy Chair, London TravelWatch): I mentioned the question of people with limited mobility at the beginning, other people with disabilities and, for that matter, people who are encumbered. We have people here representing the economic case for looking after the West End's interests.

From the TravelWatch perspective, the problem is an obvious one, is it not? If taxis are cruising in Oxford Street -- they could not cruise at the moment because they cannot move but let us say that measures have been taken, there is much less traffic and that slack is taken up by the taxis, as seems to have occurred last time. That is less desirable than there being some kind of mechanism whereby a person who is needing a door-to-door service for whatever reason can remotely hail a cab. I do not know whether the technology is going to be possible to do that or whether that is the sort of area we ought to be looking at.

You would not want taxis cruising and you perhaps would want to say that taxis should not cruise because they are, relatively speaking, inefficient in terms of moving passengers in bulk. It is a question. I know I am here to answer questions but it is a question that maybe needs to be asked in this process, whether there is something that could be done to enable people to hail a taxi in a different way, rather than standing on the pavement with their bags or their wheelchair.

Richard Massett (Chairman, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): There are apps that people can use to remotely hail a taxi but lots of people do not have the apps. These people ought to still be able to hail a taxi.

Ruth Thompson (Deputy Chair, London TravelWatch): I am thinking beyond that.

Richard Massett (Chairman, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): Taxis do cruise through the street looking for hires because there is only a very limited amount of ranking space. There are ranks at each of the main stores but that is only about five ranks along the West End section. For the rest of it, as taxis drive through there quite slowly people come and hail them all the way along the street. That needs to be taken into account as well.

Tom Platt (Head of Policy and Communications, Living Streets): There are a few questions here. One is: do taxis need to be travelling down Oxford Street? I would suggest no, because there are plenty of side roads where we could provide good facilities and good-quality taxi ranks.

Secondly, there is a very legitimate question about whether it would mean that all these taxis are on the residential roads. That is something that has come up a lot with the buses. That is something that really needs to be looked at. Whether that would involve some sort of limiting of cruising or licensing for taxis who are allowed in those roads, it would need to be looked at.

Thirdly, there is an issue we are talking about of accessibility. Again, clearly that needs to be addressed. We should not expect everyone to be able to walk the 1.2 miles down the length of Oxford Street. I am not sure if that many people do that. From what we are seen before, people go to their destinations. That is, again, a question that needs to be asked, whether the solution is a shuttle bus or whatever it might be.

The first thing that needs to happen is that the stations are fully accessible. That is the thing that can be done most immediately. Also, let us not kid ourselves that the current Oxford Street works for older people and disabled people. The quality of the public realm there, the overcrowding and all those things mean that it is a poor experience and environment for those people already. To justify not pedestrianising it on that argument would be a bit of a fallacy.

Florence Eshalomi AM: Just on the discussions around rerouting some of the taxi ranks to residential roads, Councillor Davis and Councillor Acton, it would be much easier to redirect the taxis and cars instead of buses. I am keen to know of the concerns of residents. I am sure there will be some.

Richard Massett (Chairman, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): There are probably several hundred taxis in Oxford Street at any one time. If you confine them to the side streets, they would swamp the residential areas that serve Marylebone and Mayfair. I am sure the residents would not like that very much.

Also putting ranks into the side roads, we have ranks at some of the larger stores off of Oxford Street but that is because there is a demand there now. It would be very difficult to establish ranks in other places. The number of spaces you would need to provide to cater for the taxis that currently drive along Oxford Street would be virtually impossible.

Florence Eshalomi AM: I am assuming, where any additional new ranks would go, it could be a loss of residential parking for residents.

Councillor Robert Davis (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for the Built Environment, City of Westminster): Not necessarily but, yes, sometimes it may do. If we would do that, we would normally find alternative residential bays somewhere else. But yes, this is all a trade-off at the end of the day. There is no magic wand and we are taking Oxford Street seriously and that is why we have to look at these other options to see if we can find a solution. No solution will be perfect.

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): Car ownership is declining in central London and we are doing a lot with our car club in Westminster. We have just converted that to one-third electric vehicle/hybrid, with an aim to making it fully electric vehicle/hybrid. Each one of those car clubs is estimated to take 17 private cars off the road but our residents parking is oversubscribed. We have many more residents wanting to park on our streets than there are spaces, particularly in the congested central area. Limited kerbside space is a major issue; finding ways of balancing the use of that space is really difficult.

We have not talked much about private hire vehicles but we have seen a huge explosion in private hire vehicles. That is another major cause of congestion within Westminster. They are doing far more circling around than black cabs and waiting to be called on an app and that is a real issue which we all need to address. There are 100,000 private hire vehicles now, licensed, in central London and that is a major issue.

Florence Eshalomi AM: I have the figures from TfL from January 2016 when private hire vehicles increased from 59,000 in 2009/10 to just under 95,000. Those are recent figures. Again, when we are talking about congestion, additional traffic and just road blockage, is it right to say some of the licences that are being issued by TfL are adding on to this congestion?

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, Transport for London): It is publicly known that the previous Mayor wanted the Government to cap the amount of private hire licences and it does need legislation to do that. I am not sure of the current Mayor's position on that, to be perfectly honest, but all the issues are the same really in terms of recognising that the explosion in private hire is not sustainable and it does create congestion, particularly in certain hotspots in the West End.

Another point probably worth making is, in terms of this issue about taxis or private hires using the road as a through-route, Camden will shortly introduce a scheme on Tottenham Court Road where taxis will not be

allowed to use it as a through-route. They will be able to cross it in a dog-leg fashion in certain locations but they will not be able to use it as a through-route. That is going to be a very interesting scheme to understand how that works, how you deal with the needs of disabled people and what are the effects on adjacent side streets? That is a scheme that goes in 2018 but certainly they have approval for that as a radical step about how they manage the taxi trade in their borough.

Florence Eshalomi AM: That is interesting.

Richard Massett (Chairman, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): I do not know where you obtained your private hire figures from and I guess it was not very long ago but there are now well over 100,000 private hire vehicles.

Florence Eshalomi AM: Probably as we sit here, and rising.

Richard Massett (Chairman, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): They are increasing all the time and certainly something does need to be done about that. Tottenham Court Road; we have not accepted the Tottenham Court Road scheme. We have the same issues there as we have in Oxford Street if it be pedestrianised; it is getting our disabled people to the places they want to go to.

Florence Eshalomi AM: The last thing I wanted to touch on, and Tom [Platt] mentioned it and you as well, Richard, in terms of it is not just people in wheelchairs but people with probably a range of disabilities who, on a busy street like Oxford Street, it can be quite daunting. I, for the life of me, would not even dare to take my little girl in her pushchair and when I do see people with their pushchairs, I think, "I salute you", because navigating there as an adult is quite challenging. Imagine if you have additional needs, trying to navigate on Oxford Street.

In terms of looking at how we can help those residents enjoy that full shopping experience, is it a case of, would you say, maybe, "OK, yes. We do need some taxis there". Would something like a limited amount of them having permits, how would they be issued? Peter, in terms of maybe some of the shops having a dedicated app that we could call those taxis or a telephone service, again I am just thinking of new ways we could address some of those concerns.

Sir Peter Rogers (Chairman, New West End Company): I have to say I am not sure a permit system for cabs is workable. I am not aware of how that has worked elsewhere in the country and in an effective way. The risk is a bit of a bureaucratic nightmare to try to identify who is allowed in and who is not. Encouraging taxi drivers not to use it as a through-route and to provide those ranks on the side streets, meaning they can choose them, is an important first step. There is a more difficult issue in the consultation that will probably have to be raised about whether there are certain sections where taxis cannot use it and you stop it being a through-route. That is probably something that will have to be looked at through the consultation. I am not saying how people will respond but it probably is an issue that has to be flagged up.

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): Technology will enable us to do something like that. We have a pilot project at the moment where you have a radio frequency, identify a tag-in in your vehicle. We have given those to some disabled parkers, people who want to park their vehicles, and we have sensors. Across the West End, we have parking sensors and that identifies that the correct vehicle is in the right place and that has helped eliminate misuse of the disabled bays on that pilot scheme. That is one way and we are about to work with the Licensed Taxi Drivers Association (LTDA) on that for taxi ranks if we get this Low Emission Neighbourhood project.

With electric vehicles, you have the crossover point to stop the buses that they have to go electric at that point. You would be able to use that technology perhaps to eliminate certain taxis going on Oxford Street. I am sure technology will enable that and perhaps it is something we should be adding to our analysis.

Sir Peter Rogers (Chairman, New West End Company): Technology is brilliant except it does stimulate the sort of behaviour you see from Uber and all the rest. What I have seen is a solution is also a problem and it is a bit like wayfinding. A lot of people walk into the street because they are looking at Google on their phone to find a place to go. Technology is a great asset but it is also a problem unless it is put in sensibly and it is controlled. That requires thought from experts and part of a whole area solution. TfL has made that clear. Our position at the start is very simple. We support traffic free zones but we do require access and accessibility for all people including disabled, shoppers, visitors, you name it. We want to make sure it is accessible and it is sensible. What we do not want to see is the creation of less traffic from TfL which is filled by people cruising just to fill the road space.

Florence Eshalomi AM: Thank you.

Kemi Badenoch AM: I am not necessarily sure how you differentiate between cruising and say perhaps a taxi that has been called with an app. How would you know the difference to be able to police them? If I think about the times when I have needed to use a taxi on Oxford Street, it is when I have made lots of purchases or been pregnant, not been able to carry it, almost out away from the shop door -- so a taxi rank not necessarily very helpful because I cannot even get there. Would we be penalising people who perhaps have been summoned by an app? I do not understand the mechanics of how it works.

Richard Massett (Chairman, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association): You are a typical passenger of taxis in Oxford Street. You come out of the store. You are loaded with luggage, you are tired and you just want to hail a taxi. The easiest way to do that is to call the taxi that is passing by. You do not want to go walking miles to try to find a rank. You do not particularly want to use an app because you are going to wait there for the taxi to come in. The taxi is going to have to go there to find you, therefore, the taxis in Oxford Street that are not on ranks are, in effect, a moving rank and for people like you, you can come out and the simplest thing in the world, put your hand out and one of them will stop for you.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Great, thank you. Thank you, Councillor Davis, for your contribution today. I know you have to go. It has been very helpful. Let us start looking at safety concerns.

Caroline Russell AM: We have heard a lot about the need to reduce danger, to reduce traffic and to cut the number of bus trips. These questions are more looking at the specifics of Oxford Street itself in the event of there being much less traffic there either of full or partial pedestrianisation situation.

One of the groups of users who have not really been considered very much so far are the people who ride bikes. They are part of the solution in London. They are not using public transport, therefore, increasing capacity there and they are not using vehicles and creating more air pollution. At the moment, there is a real lack of an east-west route for cycling through London. There is the potential for Oxford Street to connect up with the Clerkenwell Boulevard further to the east and provide a real solution for people to get to work and also to get to the shops in Oxford Street.

The first question would be could there be a version of pedestrianisation which would allow cyclists to continue to use all of Oxford Street or some of Oxford Street?

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): The short answer to that is yes. It clearly has to be something you put out to the consultation to see what the appetite is for that. It is worth noting the flows in Oxford Street. In the cyclist flows in the peak, it is 200 per hour. In the inter-peak, it is 50 per hour. Those numbers are surprisingly low if you think about the scale of the current cycling revolution in central London in particular and also the scale of usage on say, for example, the East-West Cycle Superhighway, which is much higher than that where you have full segregation and it is proving to be a magnet for cyclists.

It may be worth us thinking about why that is low. Is that partly because of the existing conflict with pedestrians and buses and, as a cyclist, would you choose to use another route? I suspect many would. In terms of the point, the principle about needing a good quality east-west cycle route through Central London, yes, we recognise there is a need for that. The Embankment one is great but there is a need to do more. It would have to be part of a consultation as to, if it is pedestrianised, is it a pedestrian only space, is it for cyclists to go through there as some pedestrianised spaces have? We are probably a long way from determining how that is supposed to function. Certainly we need to understand whether cyclists are in that pedestrianised area or not.

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): As a personal perspective, as I said, I do cycle along Oxford Street but Alex is right. I would generally choose to use a quieter route and Westminster is investing with TfL in some east-west Quietways through Marylebone. There will be some improvements for cyclists there but when I want to go somewhere on Oxford Street, I do use Oxford Street. There is this conflict with pedestrians and there is conflict with buses.

I have just been to Copenhagen which is a much more cycle-friendly city. They have many of the same issues we do. They try to avoid shared space and I do not think shared space would be a solution for Oxford Street. I do not think that is something Westminster would look at but we would certainly want to include cyclists as one method of transport we examine.

Caroline Russell AM: Everyone has their misgivings about shared space and the definition of shared space is, to some people, means different things by shared space. Certainly disabled people or people who are visually impaired find shared space very worrying. I would hope there is a solution that would allow both cycling and walking to happen on Oxford Street.

The vision the Mayor put out in the manifesto of trees and a much more people friendly place for this core running through the central business district of the West End. If one could have cycling and walking happening together seems to be a really positive outcome.

Tom Platt (Head of Policy and Communications, Living Streets): To first things, I absolutely agree that cycling is part of these wider issues we are inevitably talking about, about reducing the amount of vehicles in central London. Absolutely, that is part of the solution.

On Oxford Street, primarily it should be about a destination. This is where people go to spend time and shop and all those things. Considering around cyclists, it needs to have really good links to the other cycle networks and the central London grid Quietways; really good facilities such as a much better improved cycle parking and so on.

In terms of a through route through Oxford Street, and there is clearly a real need for a good east-west cycle route through London, my concern would be how that works with the huge volumes of people walking here

and whether it works for people walking and indeed people cycling. My natural inclination would be to say that a preferable option would be to have really good segregated facilities for the east-west route and parallel in some way to Oxford Street, rather than to having the main cycle through route through Oxford Street. It would just compromise both users.

Caroline Russell AM: Is that something TfL will be consulting on, a fully segregated east-west route parallel to Oxford Street?

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): We haven't got any room!

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): No. It is far too soon for us to answer that question. Good try but I am afraid I cannot give you an --

Caroline Russell AM: Is that something you would see as desirable?

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): You need to have adequate and good quality provision for cyclists in Oxford Street or in the surrounding streets. It is recognised as an issue we have to address but in terms of a predetermined product, that is what we will deliver, we are quite a way off resolving that issue. The issue is we need to work out the whole range of other issues on Oxford Street but provision for cyclists is clearly one of them.

Caroline Russell AM: OK, that is helpful. The other thing is obviously if there is less traffic around, particularly at night. Do you have views about any potential risks in terms of anti-social behaviour or crime?

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): Maybe it is more of an issue for Westminster but one of the options, as I said earlier, is to have a debate probably through the consultation as to whether this is a daytime or shopping hours pedestrianisation or closure, or whether it is overnight. I can see the attraction of a shopping hours one because you give some respite to the residents on adjacent streets who are concerned about noise and pollution on those roads.

The other thing is, linking into the point from Florence [Eshalomi AM] earlier on this, there is a lot of people who work on Oxford Street, a lot of people work there at night as well, servicing the shops, things like that, and having bus connectivity for those employees along the heart of Oxford Street might be useful. I am not an expert on antisocial behaviour, but I personally would have thought full 24-hour pedestrianisation might have some unintended consequences.

Sir Peter Rogers (Chairman, New West End Company): You need to understand the rhythm of Oxford Street. The stores are open until 10.00pm. Servicing the city starts at 5.00am. There is an awful lot of activity that goes on and a very short window in between. If you start looking at that, a period of rest and recovery is not necessarily a bad thing in that area for residents and for stores and early morning deliveries. There is not a huge sort of 12-hour window that everybody is worried about where it would be ghost city with tumbleweeds. It is an animated part of town. If you look just behind the streets, at the restaurants and the other offers of the West End, it is animated far beyond 10.00pm. It is not a worry about the change. If it is a worry about crime, it is a worry about the level of placing and that exists now.

Caroline Russell AM: Finally, in terms of emergency services and access to Oxford Street, has anyone been doing any thinking about that in terms of if one is cutting vehicle access?

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): In any pedestrianisation scheme, that is the first thing you ensure is that they get proper and appropriate access. I do not think anyone would countenance a scheme that would impede that in any way.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): This is turning to be a real educational morning, knowing the shops are open until 10.00pm at night. Goodness me; this is all news to me. We are moving on to the final few questions just around the consultation and the next steps.

Tom Copley AM: We will start with Councillor Acton. What plans do you have for consultation? Who will you be consulting? What will be included and how will you consult?

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): That is really through the West End Partnership and it is as a result of all the work we have been talking about. It will not be happening until that work has been presented which is towards the end of the year. It will go to a full stakeholder consultation.

Tom Copley AM: Businesses, the wards they have in the area.

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): Businesses, residents, and as your own notes have pointed out, residents are very concerned about any displacement of traffic into the residential zones. As Sir Peter [Rogers] has referred to, they would also be concerned at the extension of hours. They want some respite from traffic. They would be important consultees during the process. They are involved; they are represented on the West End Partnership already.

Tom Copley AM: Will you be conducting the consultation with TfL or will you be doing separate consultations?

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): No, we are working together under the West End Partnership.

Tom Copley AM: It is through the West End Partnership.

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): Yes.

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): That involves the GLA as well.

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): And GLA is on that partnership. We have full representation on that West End Partnership. We will be undertaking the work together and when we have a result and take a decision on what option seems preferable, it will go out to wider consultation.

Tom Copley AM: Thinking about it, presumably you will be consulting more widely as well on issues like bus users and things like that if you are going to be altering any of the routes.

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): I mentioned earlier, the incremental reduction in buses on Oxford Street would be a separate consultation that we would lead because it goes to a statutory process. It would not be part of this wider strategy.

Tom Copley AM: That is separate.

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): That is separate and earlier as a result and, therefore, we are probably looking at that in the autumn. We have the West End Partnership; we need to develop a comprehensive consultation exercise. Oxford Street is not just about the residents, the businesses in the local area. It is a street of importance for all of London. We need to get a comprehensive consultation exercise designed and make sure we get everyone's views about it.

Tom Copley AM: Will you be doing an economic assessment as well alongside the standard planning process?

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): That is part of the whole process.

Steve O'Connell AM: You talked about the partnership will reach a decision towards the end of the year on recommendation. Did I hear that?

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): No. The work, we will get results at the end of the year.

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): I thought it was to design a consultation.

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): There are two --

Steve O'Connell AM: I did not understand that point. What are your timescales?

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): My understanding, and I may be wrong on this, is through the West End Partnership we define the package of measures to consult on this calendar year and then go to consultation after that. Is that right, Heather?

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): Yes, that is right.

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): Then the bus stuff, what we are saying, we will do that sooner.

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): Yes.

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): Some of it. The first stages of the bus work.

Steve O'Connell AM: Yes, because clearly, as we have heard today, it is a question of what the outcomes could be because clearly the businesses may look at not a full pedestrianisation. You are likely to come with a

range of options, I assume, at the end. All councillors around this have scars on their backs about consultation and where that can kind of be taken. This is a mega consultation piece because of the partners involved. You would know far better than I. There are some very serious business associations in the area that will be really worried. I had a conversation with one the other day, an individual who was really worried about the displacement of this. It is going to be quite interesting. I know Tom [Platt] wants to comment on where your consultations are going to take you, Councillor.

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster):

Yes. At the moment, the West End Partnership does have some resident representation on it. The timescale is that we will be working for the rest of the year together but the approval for final options, for full public consultation would be early next year. The decision, the preferred option approval is scheduled for August 2017.

Steve O'Connell AM: It would be interesting to see whether the approved options, and the final option is contrary to what the Mayor's manifesto pledge is and how that dynamic plays out, but that is manifesto pledges for you.

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster):

Absolutely.

Tom Platt (Head of Policy and Communications, Living Streets): Clearly there needs to be a body with overall responsibility for driving this project forward because it is, as we have found out, a very complicated project. There needs to be some debate about whether the West End Partnership is the right organisation as it stands just simply because we have a new mandate with this plan. We have a West End Partnership whose plans, previously up to this point, are not to pedestrianise Oxford Street. How does that work with the new mandate and put it all in the hands of an organisation that is established, that is not planning to pedestrianise Oxford Street, how does that play out and how does that work? That needs to be debated too.

Sir Peter Rogers (Chairman, New West End Company): It is important to differentiate between a political statement in manifesto and what is sensible. Let us just get back to basics about this. Political manifestos give a direction. Beyond that, there is a practical implementation and the West End Partnership has spent two-and-a-half years looking at what works and what does not work. I come back to it. There are 60,000 employees' livelihoods, a huge tax take for the Government through the retail offer and that is ignoring the office workers and the rest. The last thing I would like to see is a lurch into pedestrianisation because it is somebody's ambition of what is right without a properly thought through and evidence-based approach. That really sums up our position.

Keith Prince AM (Deputy Chairman): I see an interesting several months going forward for this Committee. Finally, Ruth, you wanted to speak.

Ruth Thompson (Deputy Chair, London TravelWatch): Yes. Just quickly to say, London TravelWatch will, of course, be involved in the statutory process on the bus routes consultation. I would hope we would not solely be involved at that level. We do have expertise on such matters as interchange with other modes. We are the people who understand about interchange and intermodal travel. We have a lot to say about accessibility as well. I hope there will be early and informal contact with London TravelWatch from the West End Partnership - or however it transmogrifies itself - in the future on this as well as on the statutory front.

Steve O'Connell AM: We have not even talked about budgets, Chair, but I will leave it at that.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): We are coming on to that one.

Kemi Badenoch AM: This is a question for Heather. I do not envy you because it does not seem like there is any option so far that would make the residents of Westminster happy. Everything we have talked about seems to be something they would be opposed to which will present a challenge for you in any consultation you have. I do not know if I have missed anything but is there any feeling on the ground from residents about what they would want; something positive or are they always going to be on the opposite side of the non-residents who use Westminster frequently?

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): They want a reduction of congestion. They want improved air quality and they want ready accessibility and they do not want noise at night.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): The challenges of being a local councillor! Many of us are or have been and so we have been there.

Kemi Badenoch AM: In that case, because it will be a tough fight to get anything across, it is almost like you will have to pick from the least worst option. Is there any strategy you do have in terms of how the consultation will be managed to sell any of these ideas, whether it is pedestrianisation or something else? Even when they say they want these things, when the proposals do come out, they may not like the impact or how the implementation will go.

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): If we begin our Low Emission Neighbourhood, which is in Marylebone, which adjoins Oxford Street, there are some pilot projects there including working with residents and businesses, looking at temporary closures of Marylebone High Street. We definitely have to take residents and businesses with us on whatever decision we take on Oxford Street but that will help. There is a huge conflict. If we want better air quality and we want less congested streets, we have to get rid of some traffic. Full pedestrianisation is a very draconian step on any street and particularly on Oxford Street, as we have heard today. I do not have a magic solution and I am sure it is going to be interesting.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Finally, I just wanted to understand from you how quickly the changes could be put in place. If you are looking at August 2017 for a decision on the option to go forward, how quickly are you then anticipating that part pedestrianisation or whatever options you come up with, full pedestrianisation, whatever you come up with, could be implemented? What is the timescale for that and what is the likely cost estimate of some of this?

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): We do not have any cost estimates at the moment.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Will that be part of the consultation, saying roughly what sort of cost?

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): It may be but in terms of dates, we are looking at transformational schemes coming in as Crossrail opens in 2018/19.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): You are looking at some changes by 2018/19 subject to funding.

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): Major changes by then.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Brilliant.

Councillor Heather Acton (Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking, City of Westminster): As Alex has said, incremental changes now and Sir Peter wants to see those incremental changes as soon as possible.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): TfL, in terms of your bus changes, if you are going to do something radical, you consult in the New Year if not earlier, they will then start coming in pretty quickly.

Alex Williams (Managing Director, Planning, TfL): They would start coming into effect in 2017 in a kind of phased delivery programme to take out 40% and that is all ahead of Crossrail opening by the end of 2018.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Thank you so much for your evidence today. We have a really, really helpful discussion. It has also made us realise some of the challenges. I do not envy our colleagues in Westminster. We will also be meeting with residents and doing a site visit in two weeks' time, which the New West End Company are hosting, to look at these issues in further detail.