

Blackstaff Square area Access Strategy

September 2023

Rationale & Overview

A Linen Quarter wide access study was initiated in Summer 2022 to address concerns from hospitality and entertainment venues located in the District, in relation to lack of designated road infrastructure for delivery services and customer drop-off/pick-up services.

Unfortunately, there has not been a corresponding investment in road infrastructure and public realm to facilitate these new requirements. This report aims to collate information from hospitality and entertainment venues located in the Linen Quarter to create a comprehensive overview of all issues relating to vehicular access to and from these businesses.

For this purpose, Linen Quarter BID have been directly engaging (facility) managers of hotels and large venues to reflect their views. Face-to-face conversations with ten out of thirteen businesses located within the Linen Quarter BID area were held between 13th and 27th June. Findings and recommendations in relation to the Blackstaff Square area – the area between Bedford St, Howard St and Great Victoria Street – that resulted from this first round of consultation have been collated in this document under part A of the suggested interventions (see page 5).

A second round of consultation on the results from the first round of consultation that included in-person briefings and an online survey (see annex A) took place between May and July 2023. Targeted towards all businesses located in the Blackstaff Square area, the feedback was used to reconsider the part A results with the aim of refining the final proposals to the Department for Infrastructure. These final proposals can be found under part B of the suggested interventions.

Linen Quarter Vision

Building upon its Regeneration Vision (published in 2019), the Linen Quarter BID is actively working to establish the Linen Quarter as Northern Ireland's first Sustainable Urban District. These aspirations include building standards, green architecture and the redesign of the public realm. The BID's sustainability agenda puts heavy emphasis on the (re)development of the road infrastructure within the district to facilitate a shift from private car use to more sustainable forms of transport, e.g., zero emission public transport vehicles and cycling/walking. Transport emits 20% of Northern Ireland's total greenhouse gas emissions, with private cars being the biggest contributor¹. Poor air quality is also the biggest environmental risk to public health in the UK and contributes to 800 deaths a year in Northern Ireland².

Proposals for traffic management within the wider Linen Quarter, such as the establishment of low-traffic neighbourhoods (e.g. the SuperBlock model > see [LQ Superblock - Linen Quarter BID](#)), have already been put forward by the BID. These district-wide proposals focus on reducing generic city centre traffic and are predicated on the need to maintain and enhance access for other road users –

¹ Based on Translink Budgetary Document (April 2023)

² Based on Translink Budgetary Document (April 2023)

including business deliveries, waste management, taxis, coaches, public transport, residents and those with mobility issues. This study will help to apply these principles in a specific focus area surrounding Blackstaff Square.

Economic Impact of LQ Hotel sector

In the last five years £180m³ has been invested into Linen Quarter hotels and venues. This includes major refurbishments and/or extensions (including Leonardos (formerly Jurys Inn), Fitzwilliam, Europa, Clayton, Holiday Inn, Ten Square and the Grand Opera House) plus brand new hotels at the Grand Central, Maldron, and Hampton by Hilton.

The Northern Ireland hotel sector has historically been underrated in terms of its contribution to the economy, but the long term growth in tourism has emphasised the importance of the sector to maintaining Northern Ireland’s economic performance.

This is particularly true for the Linen Quarter, where approximately 11% of property NAV (net asset value) can be attributed to the hotel sector, generating an estimated £2.4m in annual rates. The Linen Quarter (including May Street / Donegall Square South / Howard Street) is home to 12 out of 36 Belfast hotels and hosts more than 2300 hotel rooms, which represent more than half of the city’s available stock of hotel rooms and almost 25% of Northern Ireland’s stock⁴.

Figure 1. Linen Quarter BID management area with hotels and large venues highlighted



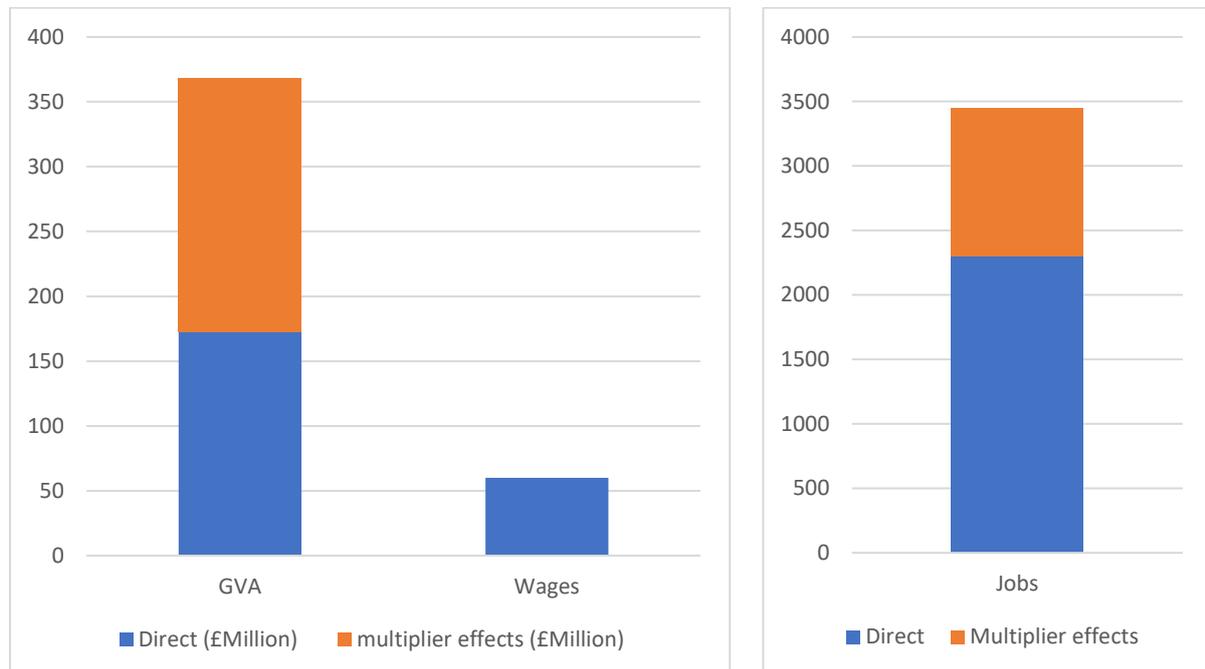
³ Based on figures provided by NIHF

⁴ Based on 2022 figures provided by NIHF

When the Linen Quarter’s share of hotel rooms is extrapolated to the Northern Ireland hotel sector’s GVA, the 12 hotels based in the Linen Quarter would generate around £172.5m direct GVA⁵, while sustaining around 2,300 jobs that generate almost £60m in direct wages⁶. Taking into consideration multiplier effects such as purchase of goods and services as well as wages spent in the local economy, the Linen Quarter hotel sector generates another £196m in GVA⁷ and sustains an additional 1,150 jobs⁸.

When it comes to the economic value of coach tourism to the Belfast hotel sector alone, estimates based on data provided by three hotels in the Linen Quarter suggest that on average 16% of hotel capacity is taken up by coach tourism, representing £25m+ in revenue generated for the Linen Quarter hotel sector.

Figure 2: Economic impact of Linen Quarter Hotel sector



⁵ Based on 2019 figures provided by NIHF

⁶ Based on estimates provided by NIHF

⁷ Based on ‘Hotel Expansion in Northern Ireland’ report (NIHF, 2017)

⁸ Based on estimates provided by NIHF

ACCESS STUDY RESULTS

Please note: the findings and recommendations below relate to the Blackstaff Square area – the area between Bedford St, Howard St and Great Victoria Street.

<i>Issues</i>	<i>Part A: Suggested Interventions based on first round of consultation (Summer 2022)</i>	<i>Part B: Suggested Interventions based on second round of consultation (May-July 2023)</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Difficulties in getting large groups of guests to and from hotels due to lack of dedicated short-term parking space for coaches; 2. There is lack of facilities for long-stay coach parking; 3. Existing James Street South layout does not cope with current two way traffic flow, often leading to traffic deadlock and queues . On-street car parking arrangements contribute to this situation; 4. Existing Franklin Street layout does not cope with current two way traffic flow, regularly leading to traffic deadlock and queues. On-street car parking arrangements contribute to this situation; 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A. Introduction of coach parking bays on north side of Franklin Street to service both Maldron Hotel and Grand Central; B. Relaxation of parking time limits for coaches decanting / picking up hotel guests to allow for a 30 minutes timeframe for on-street parking 2. Erection of a dedicated large-scale parking facility on the edge of city centre that would provide coach operators with a secure overnight parking option for their drivers; 3. Introduction of one-way traffic system southbound through Brunswick Street and eastbound through James Street South AND/OR removal of on street car parking in James Street South. Extended pavement to cover all current on-street parking bays on West side of Brunswick Street. 4. A. Swift reopening of McClintock Street and introduction of one-way loop system westbound through Clarence Street > McClintock Street > and eastbound through Franklin Street; B. Removal of on-street car parking bays on southside of Franklin Street (between Blackstaff Sq and Bedford St) and introduction of westbound cycle lane. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A. Introduction of coach parking bays on north side of Franklin Street to service both Maldron Hotel and Grand Central; B. Relaxation of parking time limits for coaches decanting / picking up hotel guests to allow for a 30 minutes timeframe for on-street parking 2. Erection of a dedicated large-scale parking facility on the edge of city centre that would provide coach operators with a secure overnight parking option for their drivers; 3. Introduction of one-way traffic system southbound through Brunswick Street and eastbound through James Street South AND/OR removal of on street car parking in James Street South. Extended pavement to cover all current on-street parking bays on West side of Brunswick Street. 4. A. Swift reopening of McClintock Street and introduction of one-way loop system westbound through Clarence Street > McClintock Street > and eastbound through Franklin Street; B. Removal of on-street car parking bays on southside of Franklin Street near junction with McClintock St to allow for coaches to turn from McClintock into Franklin Street.

<p>5. Existing Bedford Street layout (e.g. traffic island in front of Grand Central Hotel) can lead to traffic deadlock when coaches are parked in front of the Hotel;</p> <p>6. The narrow profile of Amelia Street makes it difficult for large coaches to access the front of Maldron Hotel;</p> <p>7. Shortage of dedicated loading bays – leading to clogged up streets;</p> <p>8. Lack of dedicated drop-off spaces for blue badge holders;</p>	<p>5. Introduction of a Linen Quarter wide 20mph zone and reconsideration of need for traffic island on Bedford Street;</p> <p>6. Introduction of coach parking bays on north side of Franklin Street to service Maldron Hotel;</p> <p>7. Introduction of one-way traffic system southbound through Brunswick Street and introduction of loading bay alongside extended pavement on West side of Brunswick Street (to replace current northbound lane).</p> <p>8. Introduction of one-way traffic system southbound through Brunswick Street and introduction of disabled parking bays alongside extended pavement on West side of Brunswick Street (to replace current northbound lane).</p>	<p>C. Further removal of on-street car parking bays on southside of Franklin Street (between Blackstaff Sq and Bedford St) and introduction of westbound cycle lane as part of a Hamilton St - Franklin St cycleway.</p> <p>5. Introduction of a Linen Quarter wide 20mph zone and reconsideration of need for traffic island on Bedford Street;</p> <p>6. Introduction of coach parking bays on north side of Franklin Street to service Maldron Hotel;</p> <p>7. A. Introduction of one-way traffic system southbound through Brunswick Street and introduction of loading bay and disabled parking bays alongside extended pavement on West side of Brunswick Street (to replace current northbound lane). B. Introduction of loading bay on west side of McClintock Street.</p> <p>8. Introduction of one-way traffic system southbound through Brunswick Street and introduction of disabled parking bays alongside extended pavement on West side of Brunswick Street (to replace current northbound lane).</p>
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<p>9. Lack of dedicated pick-up and drop-off spaces for taxis;</p> <p>10. Promotion of Blackstaff square as a welcoming public space.</p>	<p>9. Introduction of one-way traffic system southbound through Brunswick Street and introduction of a loading bay alongside extended pavement on West side of Brunswick Street (to replace current northbound lane).</p> <p>10. Introduction of a traffic filtering system in Amelia St to prevent through traffic on Amelia Street. Access to and from Keyland's Place will be maintained through Blackstaff square.</p>	<p>9. Introduction of one-way traffic system southbound through Brunswick Street and introduction of a loading bay and taxi rank alongside extended pavement on West side of Brunswick Street (to replace current northbound lane).</p> <p>10. Introduction of a pedestrian priority space on Amelia Street / Blackstaff Square. Time-restricted access to and from business premises will be maintained across Blackstaff square.</p>
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Linen Quarter wide recommendation:

- Introduction of a 20mph zone across the Linen Quarter BID area.

Edinburgh case study

Between 2016-2018, 20mph limits were implemented in Edinburgh's city centre, main shopping streets and residential areas in a bid to cut accidents, encourage more walking and cycling and create more pleasant neighbourhoods.

As part of the 'Is 20 Plenty for Health' research project, pre- and post-implementation comparisons were conducted on a range of data. The study found that as a result of the implementation of the 20mph speed limits in 66 streets the following outcomes were achieved:

- The mean and median speeds reduced by 1.34 mph; decrease of 134 vehicles per week 3 years post implementation;
- There was a 40% reduction in number of collisions and a 39% drop in casualties;
- There was a significant increase in mean liveability score (based on 9 components e.g. places / transport / pavements).



Figure 1: map showing location of proposed interventions

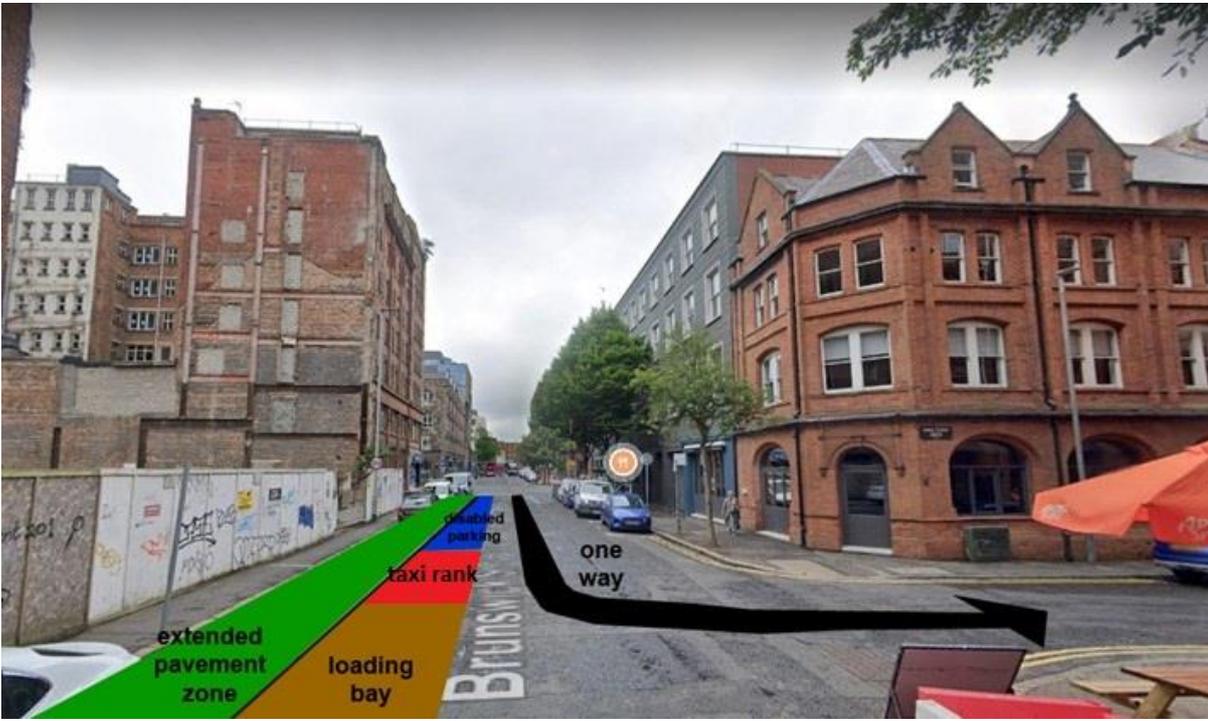


Figure 2: impression of proposed interventions on Brunswick Street (view looking North)

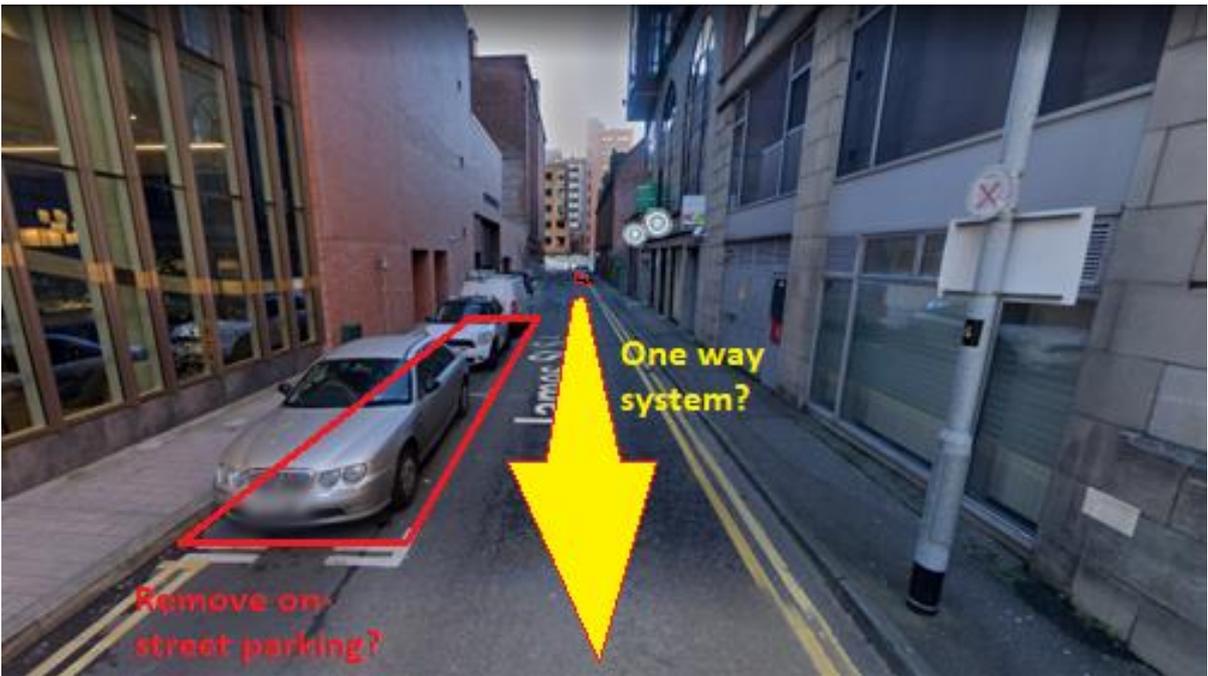


Figure 3: impression of proposed interventions on James Street South (view looking West)

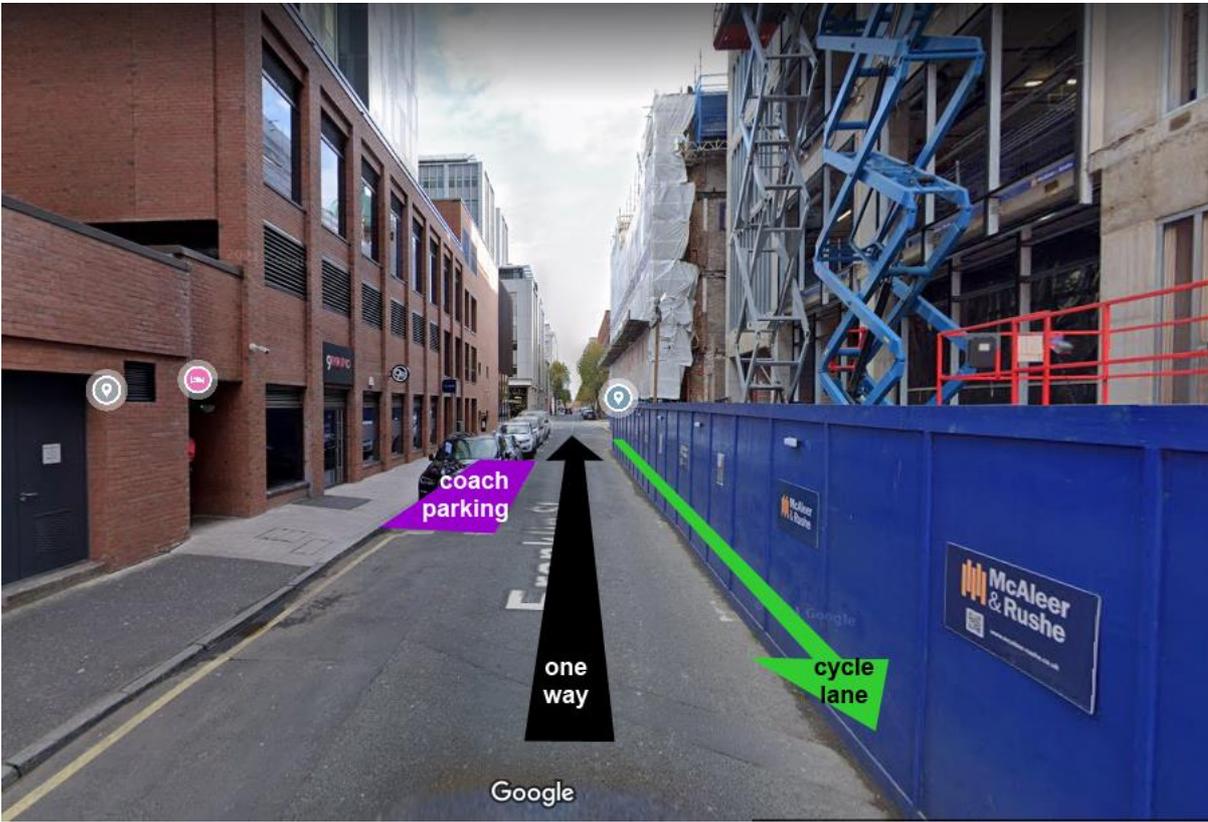


Figure 4: impression of proposed interventions on Franklin Street (view looking East)



Figure 5: impression of proposed interventions on McClintock Street (view looking North)



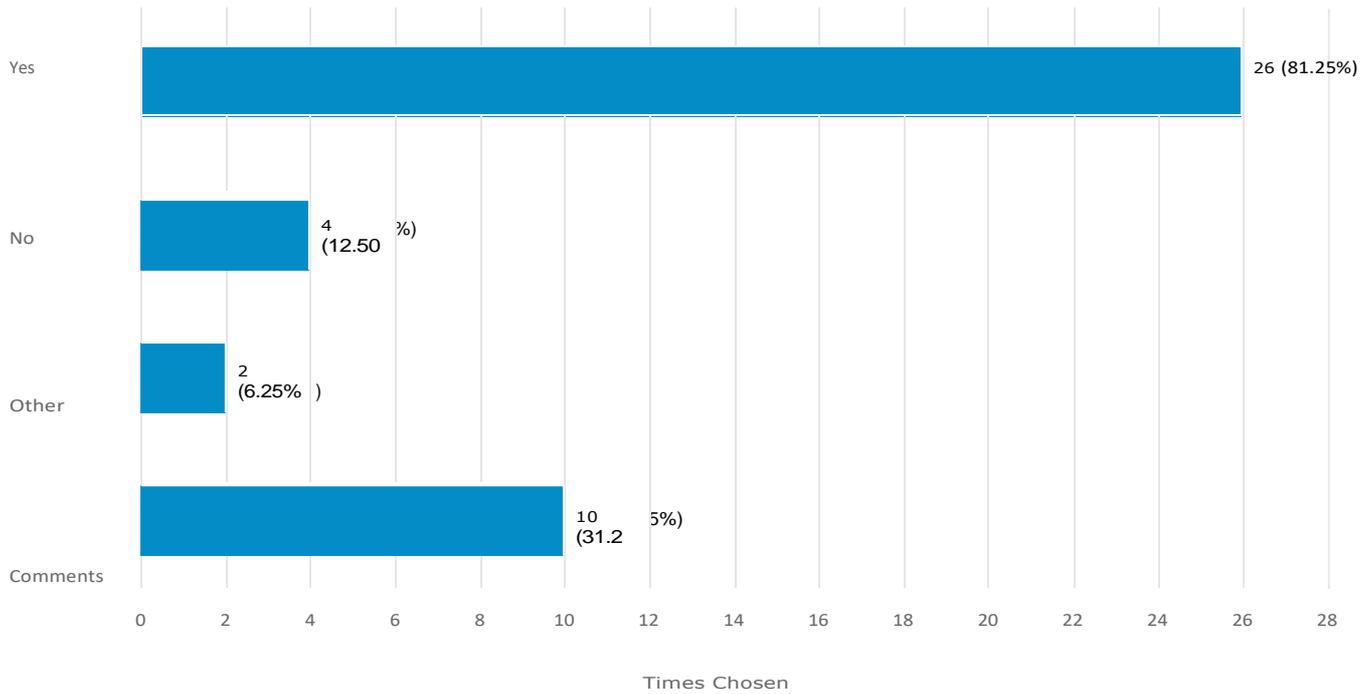
Figure 5: impression of proposed interventions on Amelia Street (view looking West)

Annex A

Public survey results

Introduction of one-way traffic system southbound through Brunswick Street and eastbound through James Street South AND/OR removal of on-street car parking in James Street South

Number of responses: 32



"Comments" text answers:

it seems to provide a better traffic flow and makes the rest of the scheme work

Removal of parking paramount due to heavy goods deliveries particularly am

Both

Far too much space given to parking that should be for pedestrians

The traffic issues are relating to the blocking of Brunswick Street by the Flaxx installation

Traffic already light in Bedford Street area. One way system would only cause more difficulty for local businesses in the area

If traffic is one-way surely there is no need to remove the on-street parking

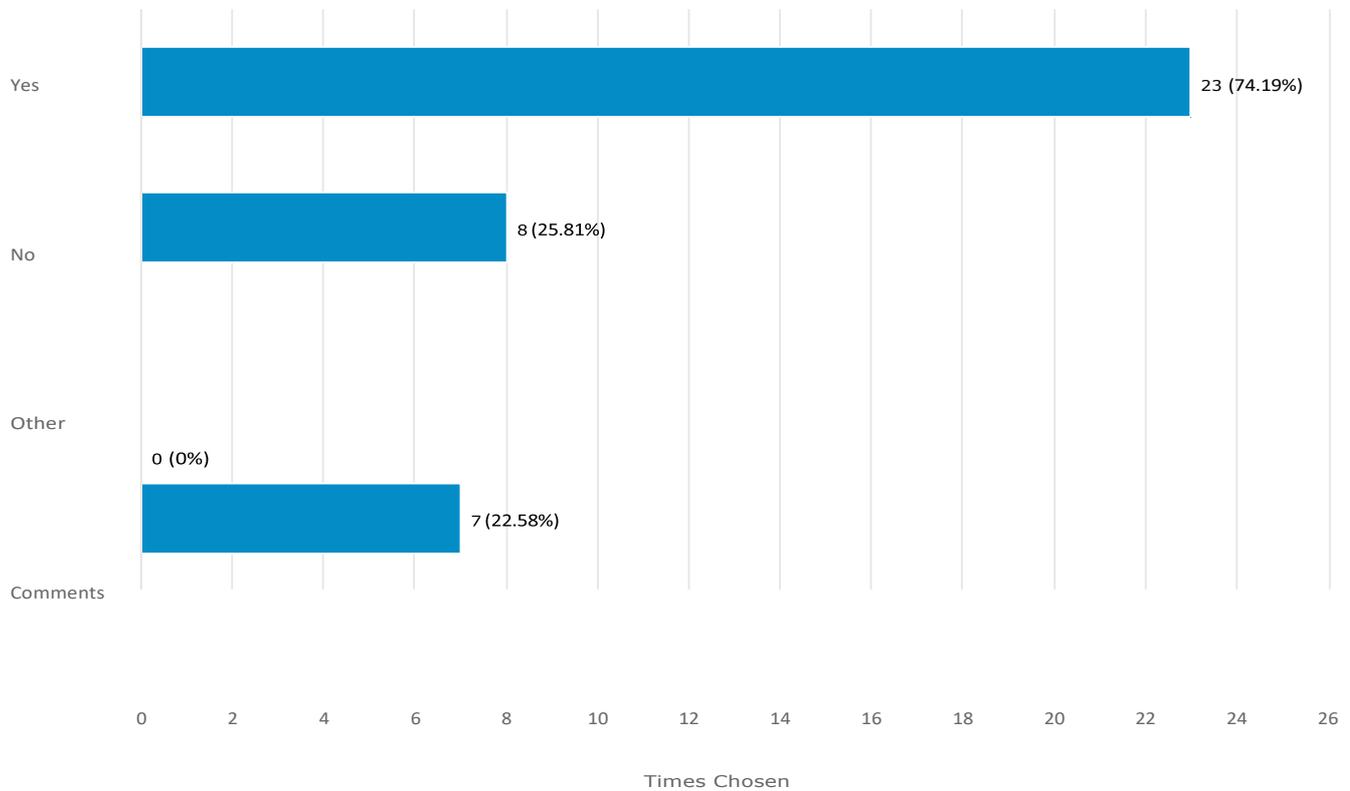
Remove all on street parking in favour of pedestrianised option

Removal of on-street car parking provides the easiest quick-win here.

happy with 1 way system but would prefer some parking maintained

Extended pavement to cover all current on-street parking bays on West side of Brunswick Street

Number of responses: 31



"Comments" text answers:

needed to allow new traffic flow

Area for cycle lane as well as vehicle drop-off and taxi waiting is required

existing hoarding should be pushed back to the original property line

NI is a small mainly rural place. City centre parking at a reasonable price [street parking] is essential. Otherwise you discourage people from coming to Belfast

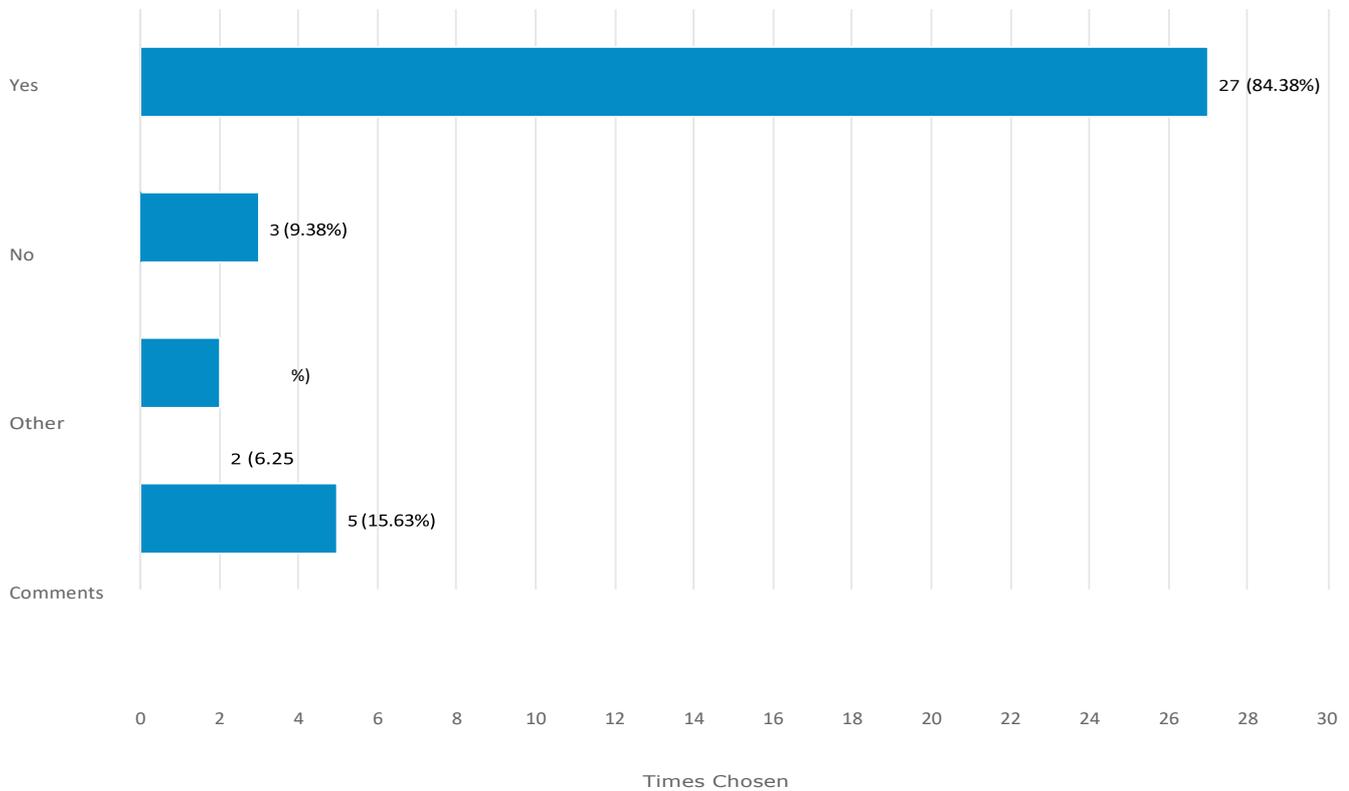
Local businesses require some on-street parking for not just the customers but employees, especially those working late at night

If removing parking bays and access to local businesses, then other parking facilities must be more affordable for those who rely on a car to commute.

would prefer loading bays either side of street

Introduction of loading bay and disabled parking bays alongside extended pavement on West side of Brunswick Street (to replace current northbound lane)

Number of responses: 32



"Comments" text answers:

Cycle infrastructure

Loading bay is a good idea, and a drop-off area and space for waiting taxis is required, as well as a cycle lane on Brunswick Street. But there is not sufficient space to provide these and a widened footpath.

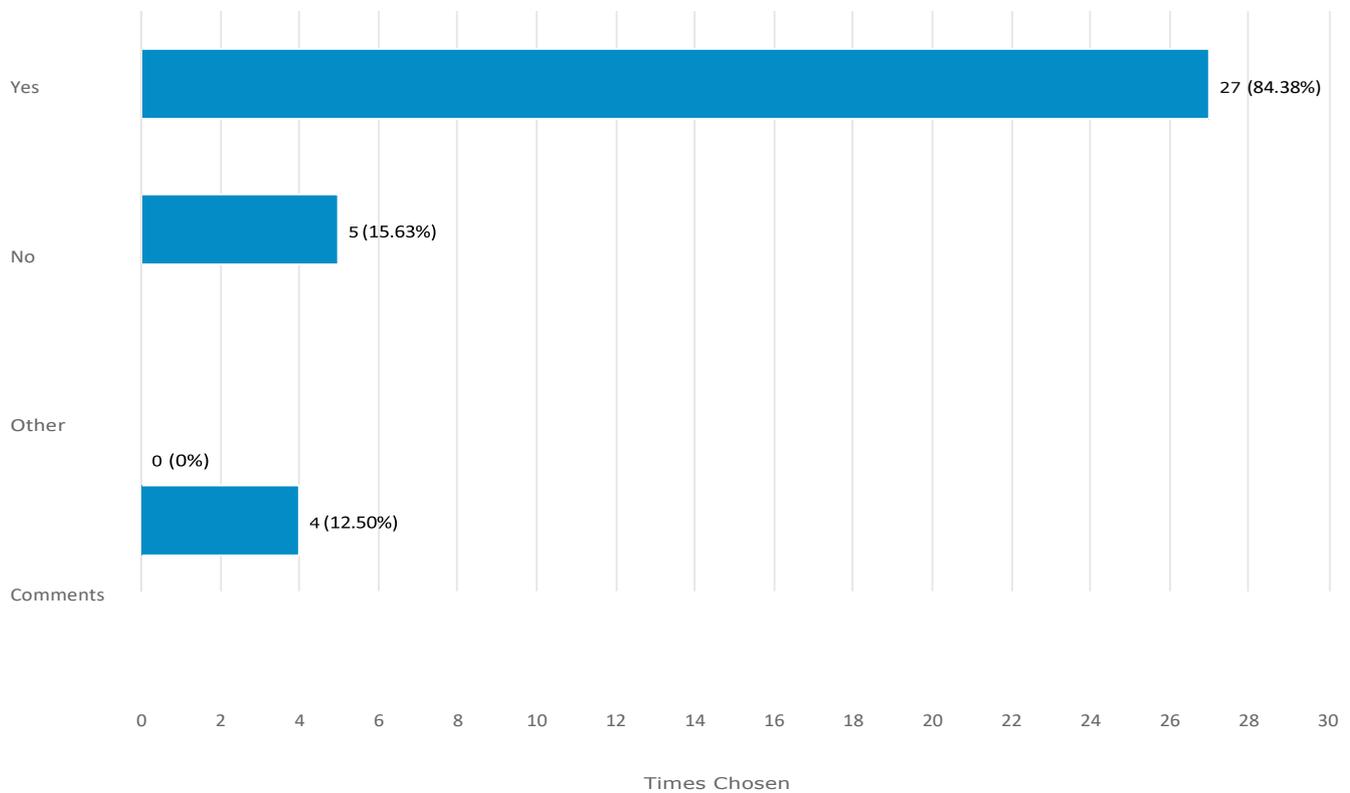
This should have been done prior to the blocking of Brunswick Street

Already disabled parking in the area and problems with deliveries are grossly overstated

Needs adequate signage and enforcement, private enforcement via towing would be the biggest deterrent.

Introduction of one-way loop system westbound through Clarence Street > McClintock Street > and eastbound through Franklin Street

Number of responses: 32



"Comments" text answers:

As long as coaches are not affected and can easily make the turn etc and no deliveries will impede

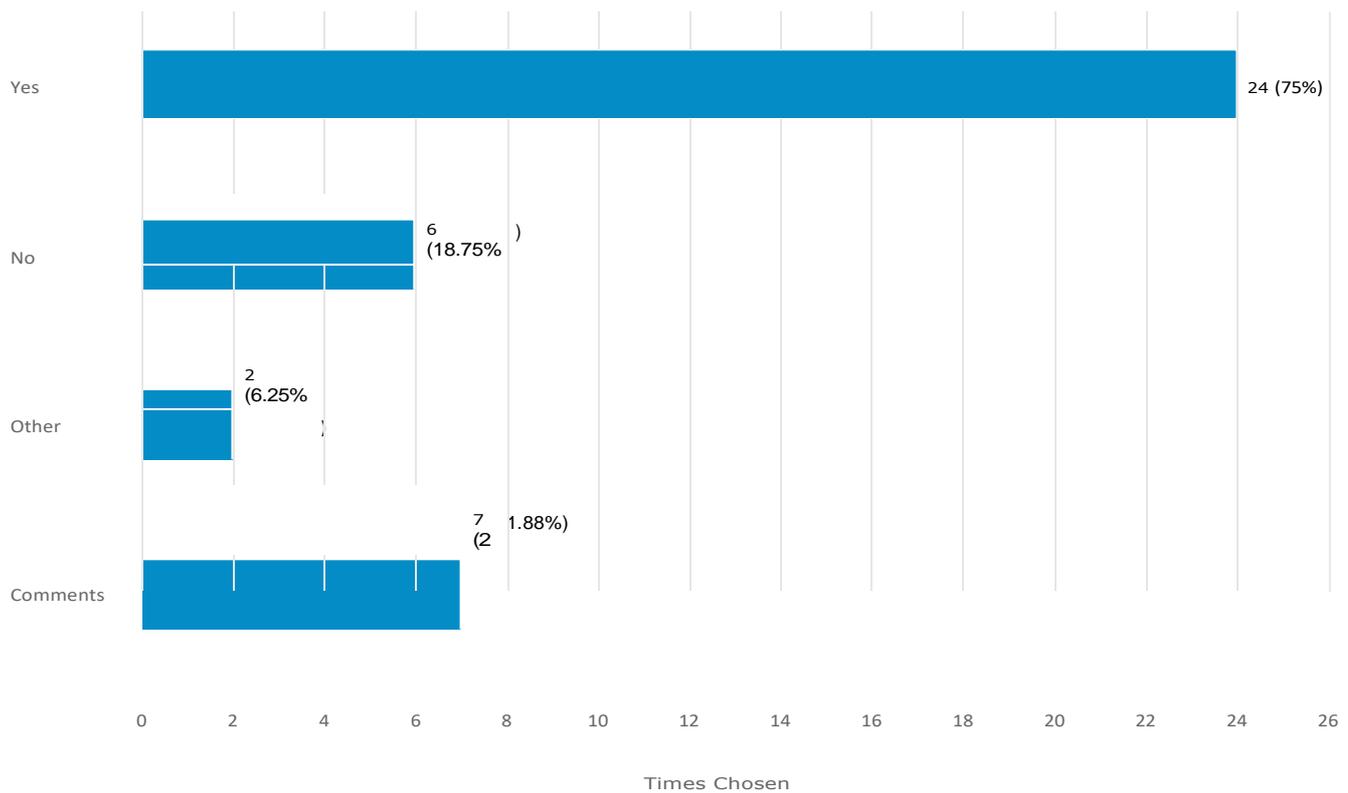
We operate the Queen's Student accommodation in McClintock street and parking on both sides of the street makes it very difficult for delivery vehicles to stop outside to deliver parcels or deliveries. We could have 5 or 6 deliveries of students parcels a day. Please can a loading bay be provided outside the student accommodation at 1 McClintock street for delivery drivers to pull into with a max 10 min waiting time otherwise they create mayhem with a parking on both sides.

Again it says to people who drive "you are not welcome in this area of Belfast"

Clarence Street has regular back ups due to hotel operations and the neighbouring bars. I worry this would be a major bottleneck during deliveries many of which are at peak travel times.

Introduction of 2x coach parking bays on north side of Franklin Street

Number of responses: 32



"Comments" text answers:

very much needed for hotels in the area and overnight coach parking

Essential for large hotel

Franklin St is a gateway to Brunswick square, it needs to be kept free of vehicles/parking. Parking for buses should have been included in plans for the hotel prior to approval. If it absolutely has to be provided, it should go on a quieter, less pedestrian trafficked street like McClintock st

Most hotel guests do not arrive by guest (less than 10%)

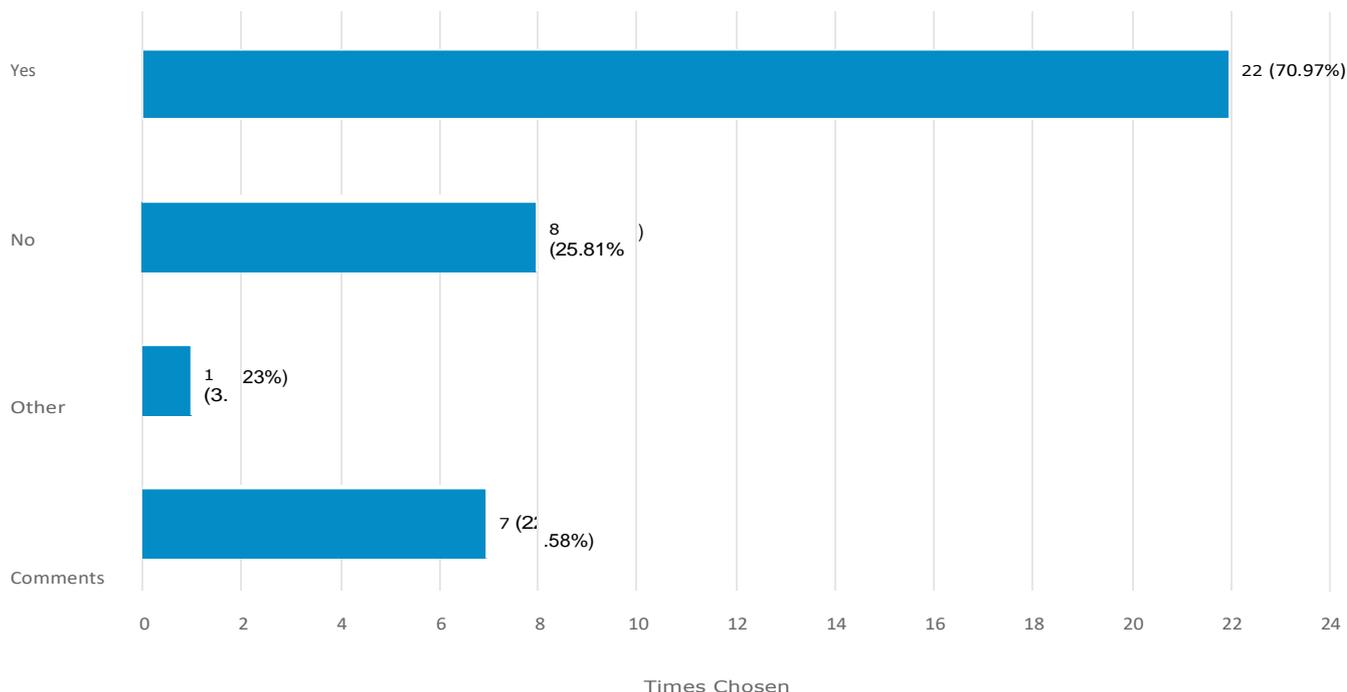
Yes in principle to unloading bays for coaches, but why not create an area for coaches using part of Blackstaff Square

New hotels should include for coach parking in their plan on their own land and not rely on public space

Signage would need to be clear that this is only a drop-off and pick up point for coaches. Also signage to state it will be illegal to park car's. At Maldron Hotel Belfast City we can sometimes have up to 3 coaches leaving in the morning.

Removal of on-street car parking bays on southside of Franklin Street (between Blackstaff Sq and Bedford St) and introduction of westbound cycle lane

Number of responses: 31



"Comments" text answers:

Cycle infrastructure is poorly connected at present.

Parking is already very limited, very difficult for hotel guests to check in

We need more parking in the area not less and very few people use or are likely to use the cycle lanes so that would be a very poor use of the space. Again it says to car users 'you are not welcome in this area' in this area'

Public transport links in Belfast are sub-standard and not reliable so many people rely on a car to commute or to access the city for other reasons. Removing on street parking and forcing people to use the multi-story carparks will only hike the prices up even further, instead of creating a more accessible & affordable city for everyone.

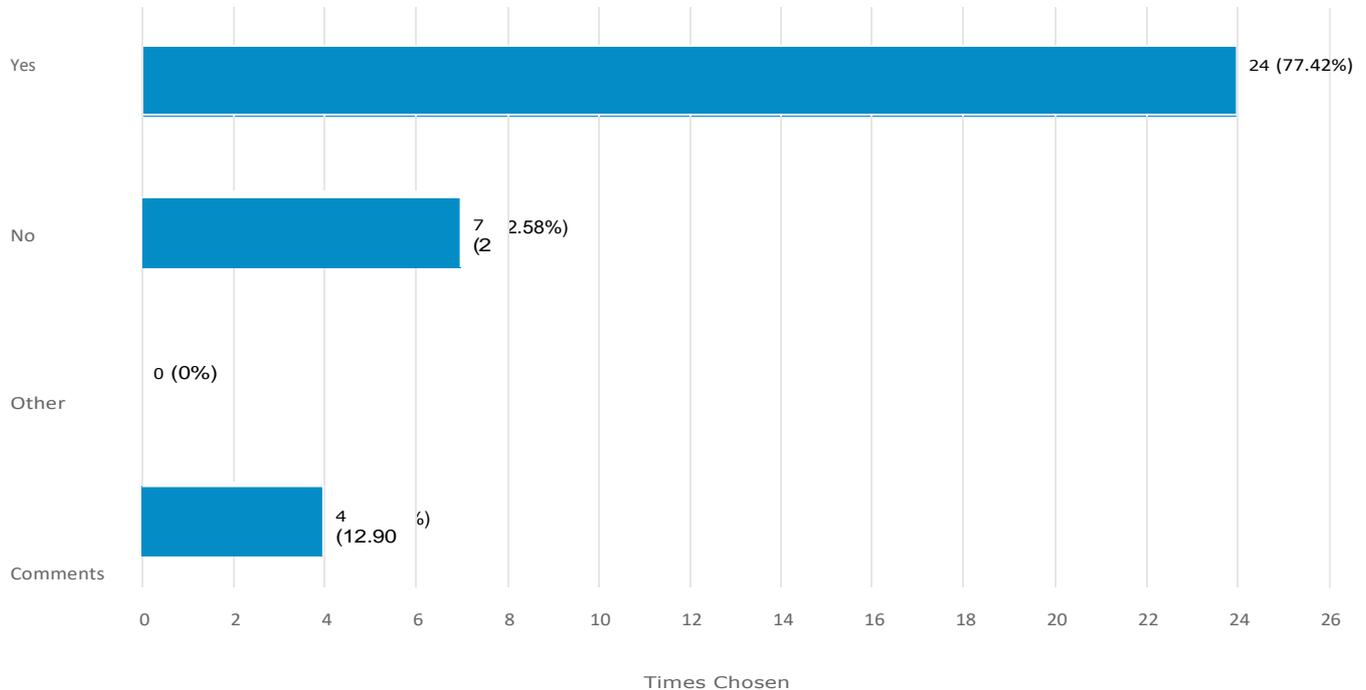
This will greatly improve Franklin St as it currently feels like an alleyway which no pedestrian would like to walk down.

Not sure if a cycle lane is the best option. I don't see many people on bikes around the area.

believe cycle lane will be unsafe if HGV service and refuse vehicles are going to have turn and come back out through Franklin street

Introduction of a traffic filtering system in Amelia St to prevent through traffic on Amelia Street. Access to and from Keyland's Place will be maintained through Blackstaff square

Number of responses: 31



"Comments" text answers:

Proposed aparthotel at Dorchester House will need a drop-off area, which will need to be on Amelia Street as Great Victoria is not suitable due to cycle lanes. Through movement on Amelia Street will be needed for coaches, service vehicles and drop-off. In principle, Blackstaff Square is large enough to provide a creative public realm. In order to provide mixed use development it is necessary to have mixed use public realm with a variety of users and types of access. Through movement is recognised (Responsive Environments, Sue McGlynn et al) as an essential element of urban generation.

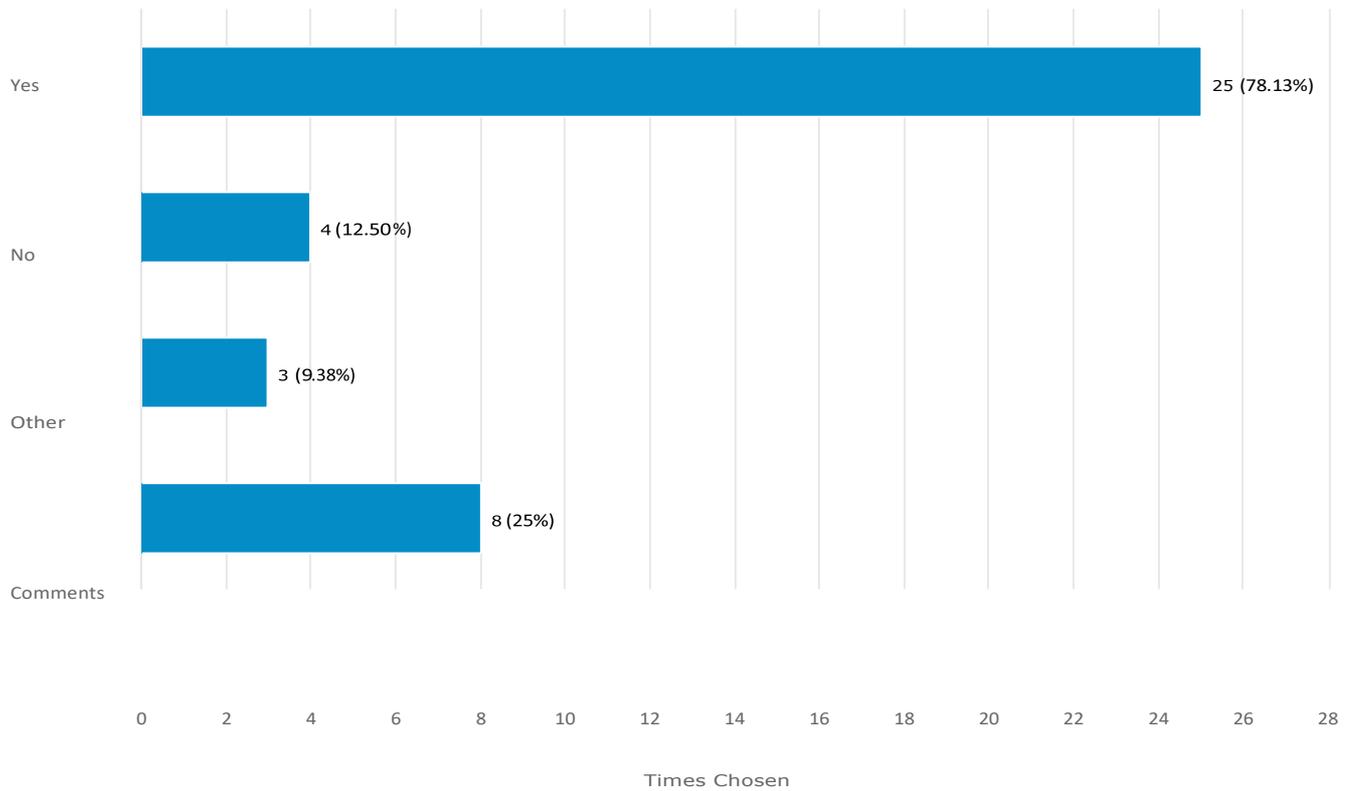
Disastrous idea for some businesses in the area, including mine, who would be cut off from their customers. Also doesn't make sense to bring large delivery lorries and coaches into Blackstaff Square 'turn them around and send them back out the way they came in where they might easily meet other similar vehicles creating chaos. It would be so much easier for everyone to allow them to continue the short distance of Amelia Street out on to Great Victoria Street

Current road layout is not suitable for 2-way traffic especially large loads

Seriously flawed! Not realistic or safe for HGV (both service and refuse) expected to perform 5 point turns to exit back through Franklin street. Even at present BCC refuse to access Keyland's as a result of access problems

Introduction of a Linen Quarter wide 20mph zone and reconsideration of need for traffic island on Bedford Street

Number of responses: 32



"Comments" text answers:

good intervention - and demonstrates it has had positive benefits elsewhere

drop off area in front of grand central for guests - a 300 bedroom hotel with no drop off provision is ridiculous. It's a massive contributor to NI economy

All major cities across the UK are following this approach.

the Traffic island is required for vulnerable people to cross the busy road

I see no need for a traffic island ' once again it makes things a little more difficult for car users for no benefit to anyone. I do not object to a 20mph zone

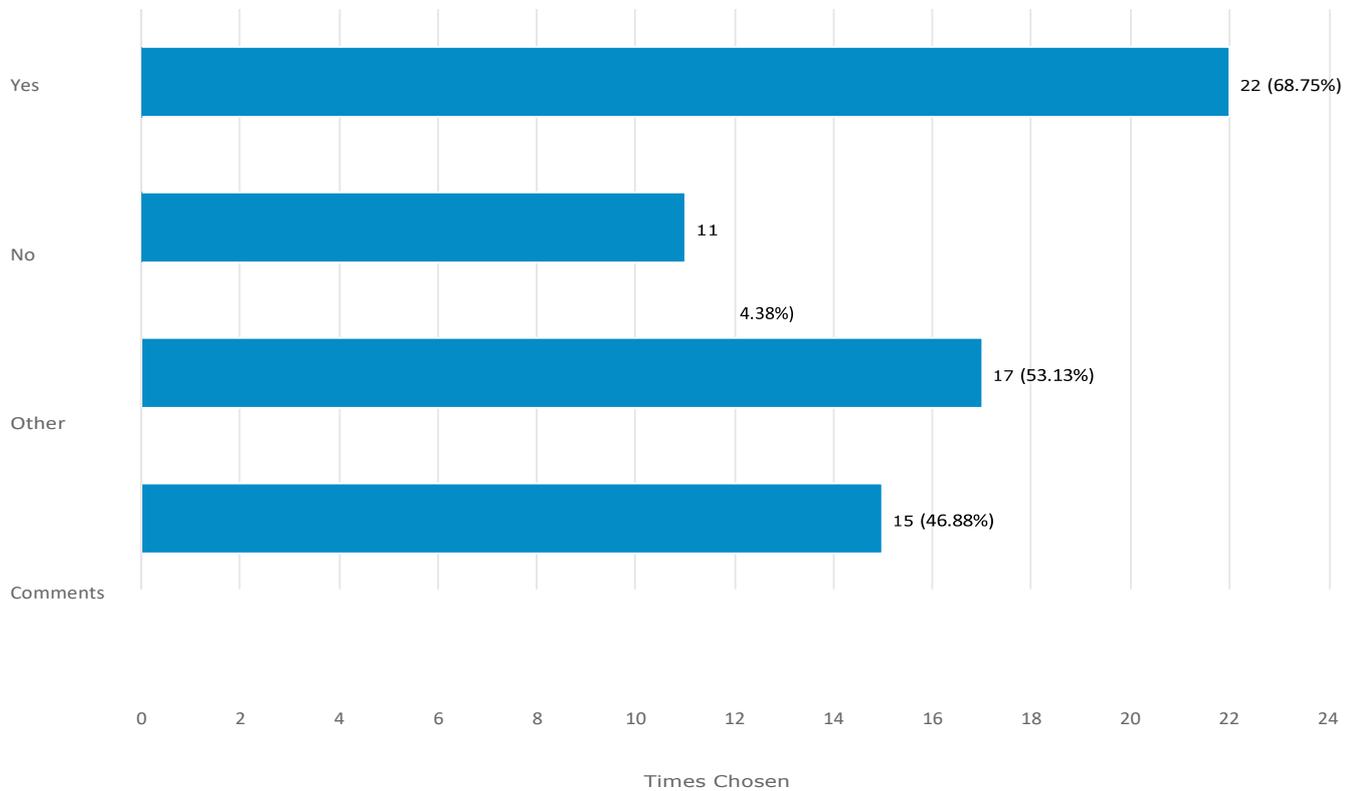
Set down/drop off points outside hotels are essential and will create further issues if we restrict these. Also, many people have mobility issues or hidden disabilities that does not necessarily qualify them for a blue badge so I think it's important to keep this mind when restricting access to the entrance of local businesses, especially if they are having to park much further away & walk.

Removal of car parking on James St South would greatly improve the public realm

happy with 1 way system but would prefer maintaining some parking bays

Relaxation of parking time limits for coaches decanting / picking up hotel guests to allow for a 30 minutes timeframe for on-street parking

Number of responses: 32



"Comments" text answers:

Needs to managed effectively by all users

This would be very beneficial for tourists and coach operators.

This is just privatising public space

agree

Needs to be longer than 30 minutes. More than two coach bays are required.

30 mins is a long time and could cause mayhem when it is very busy, but I do agree there needs to a facility to allow passengers on or o buses outside hotels

My problem with coach parking spaces is that they are used very rarely during the day

See point 5

great idea

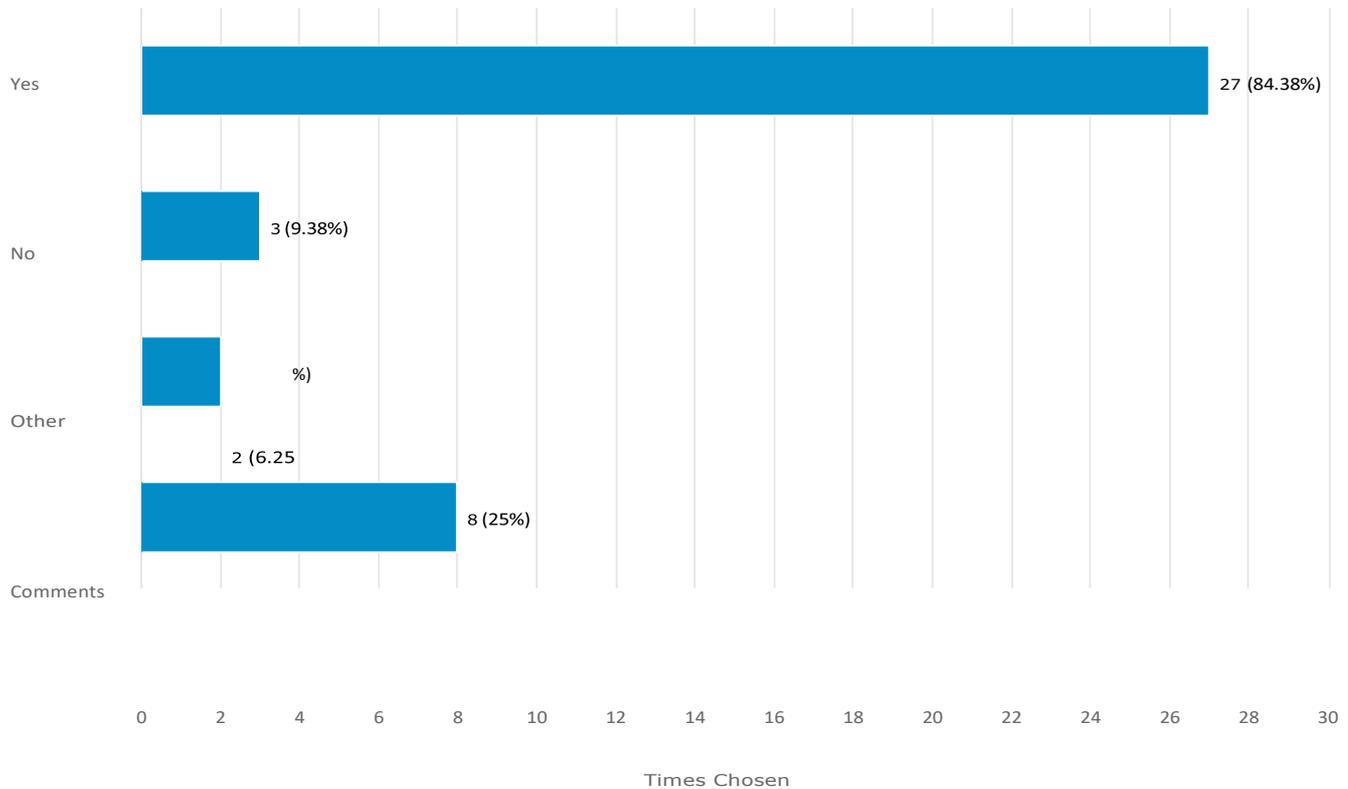
No need for on street parking

A new system here may be ideal to ease traffic as buses stopping close to the crossing island does create a back up when buses are not parked up close to the pavement.

I'm not sure this would realistically ever be enforced. Coaches will stay as long as they please which is not ideal. Having coaches pick up guests a short walk from these hotels is the best option.

Erection of a dedicated large-scale parking facility on the edge of city centre that would provide coach operators with a secure over-night parking option for their drivers

Number of responses: 32



"Comments" text answers:

Visit Belfast have been involved in looking into this requirement for the City for several years in the run up to Covid, happy to provide support in this area, share our learnings - some short term options were put in place at Boucher road, but did not get the expected take up from sector as it was probably too far out of town. At the time City centre locations were very limited. An option was identified in the Titanic Quarter but funding support was not available at the time. It would be a boost to this sector in the market to have a secure facility close to the City now that Tourism business is returning to pre-Covid levels. Businesses are working closely with the Federation of passenger Transport. An option in the Titanic Quarter was available but was unable to attract funding support at the time. A pilot was run for two years of the Boucher Road - supported by BCC, and Crumlin Road Goal stepped in with an overnight coach park facility. Ideally the closer to the City centre as possible to meet the day trip coach market. We are happy to work alongside the BID on this and share the learnings we have to date. With the return of Tourism to pre-Covid levels there will be a need to accommodate coach operators with a commercial overnight facility.

Long overdue issue

Any links with the new transport hub?

This is very much needed in Belfast.

No mention in any of this about access to the student accommodation in McClintock street which houses 490 students. No pick-up or drop o point,; no inloading spaces; like it doesn't exist

Surely coach operators have their own parking facilities, I don't think we need a coach car park in the city centre

100% this is needed for the city

This has been discussed for a number of years

Feedback provided by?

Number of responses: 9

Text answers:

Visit Belfast

Grand Central Hotel

Queen's University Belfast n.

Cleaver Fulton Rankin

Rajesh Rana, Andras Hotels

Queen's University, Belfast

Bachus Group

Travelodge Belfast

Little Italy