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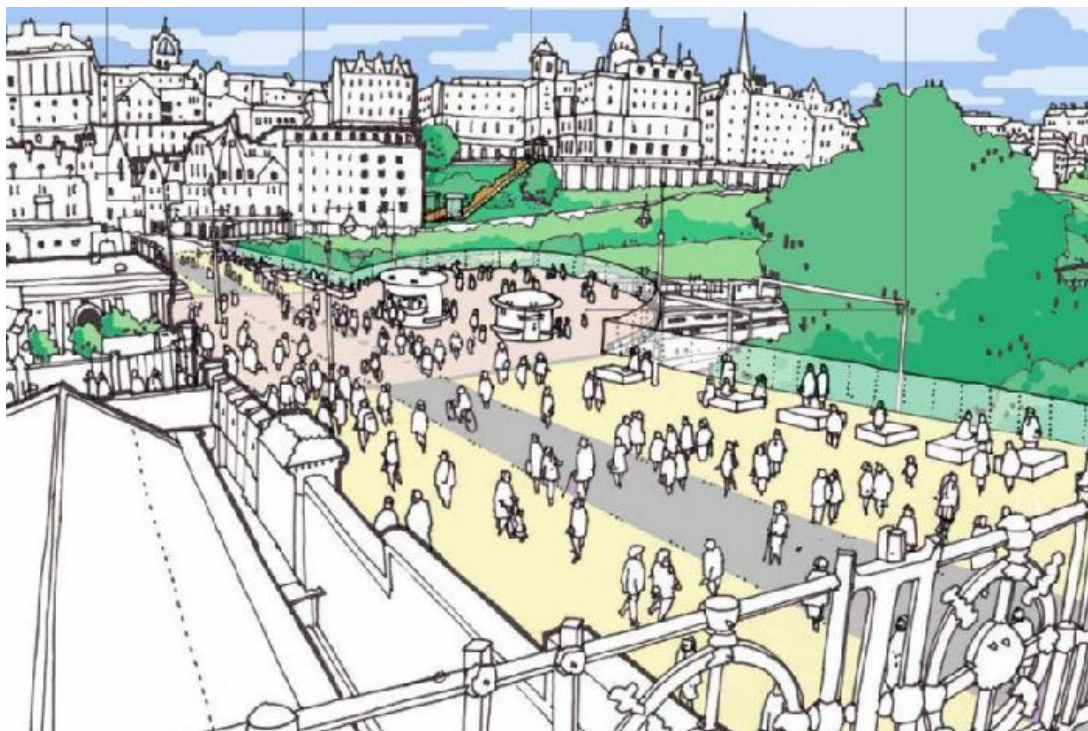
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Edinburgh 2029: 'Tram loop', car ban and pedestrian zones part of 10-year city vision

Transport chiefs have revealed a radical and highly ambitious strategy to “create a city centre that truly puts people first” in the biggest overhaul of how people will move around the Capital in living memory.

The 10-year city centre transformation project includes setting up a free hopper bus which would take people around the city centre with a longer-term ambition to extend the tram route over North Bridge to the Bio Quarter and the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. A city centre tram loop could also be constructed between Haymarket and the university quarter. The council hopes to reduce city centre traffic by up to 30 per cent by treating cars as “guests” in a “pedestrian priority zone”.



Waverley Bridge could be traffic free



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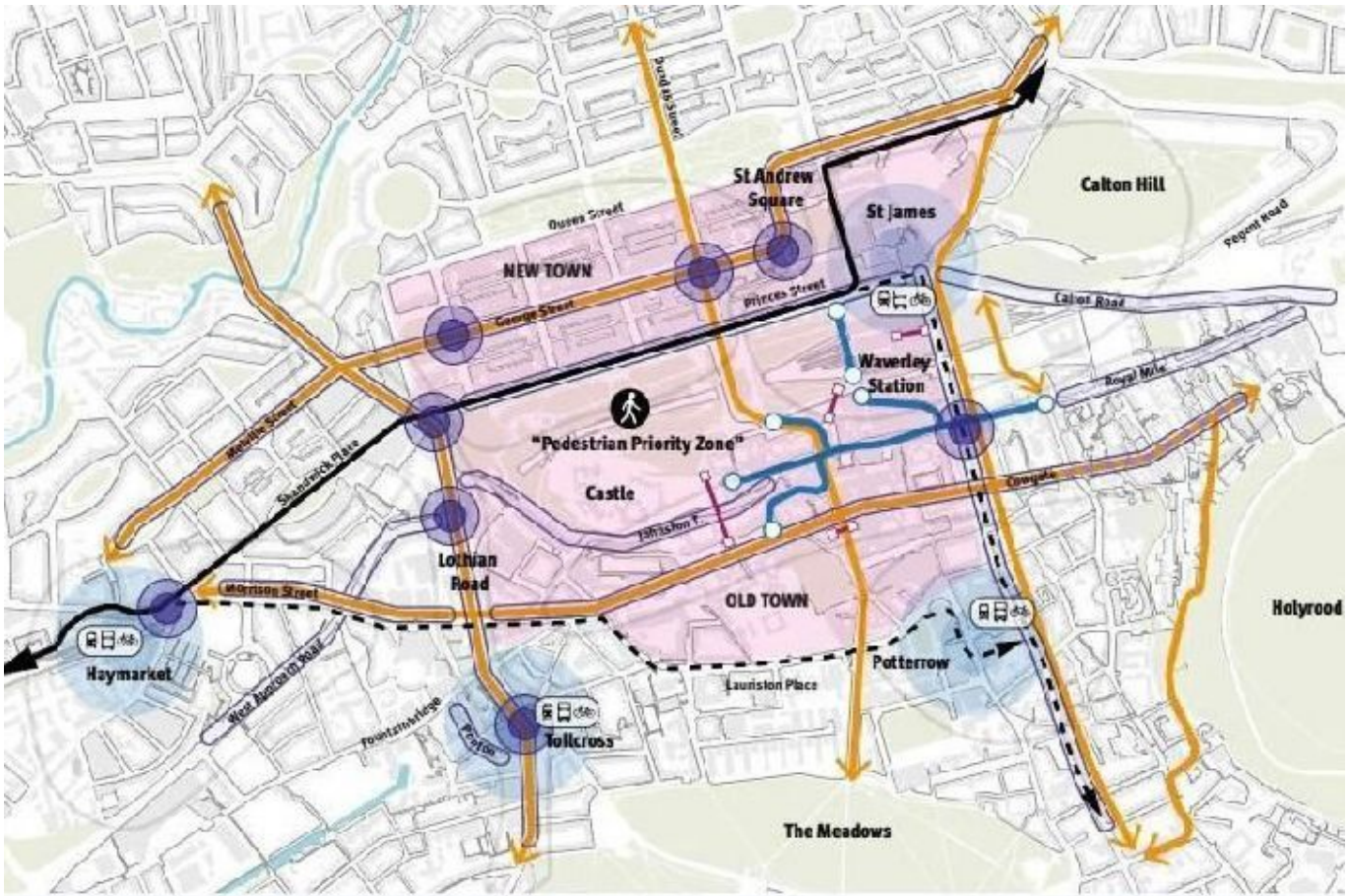
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Prominent parts of the Old Town will be completely closed to traffic, including Victoria Street, Cockburn Street and a longer stretch of the Royal Mile. Waverley Bridge could become a vehicle-free plaza and a “centrepiece” bridge could be built for pedestrians and cyclists, connecting the Old Town and the New Town.

Car parking would be gradually reduced across the city centre, with George Street, Victoria Street and Cockburn Street losing parking space altogether. There are also plans for remaining parking areas to be subject to a trial of a “parking free day” – where existing spaces are used for alternative uses one day per week.



An overhead map of the plans for Edinburgh City Centre

The proposals will go out for a public consultation for approval, subject to the thumbs up by the council’s transport and environment committee next week commencing 20th May 2019.



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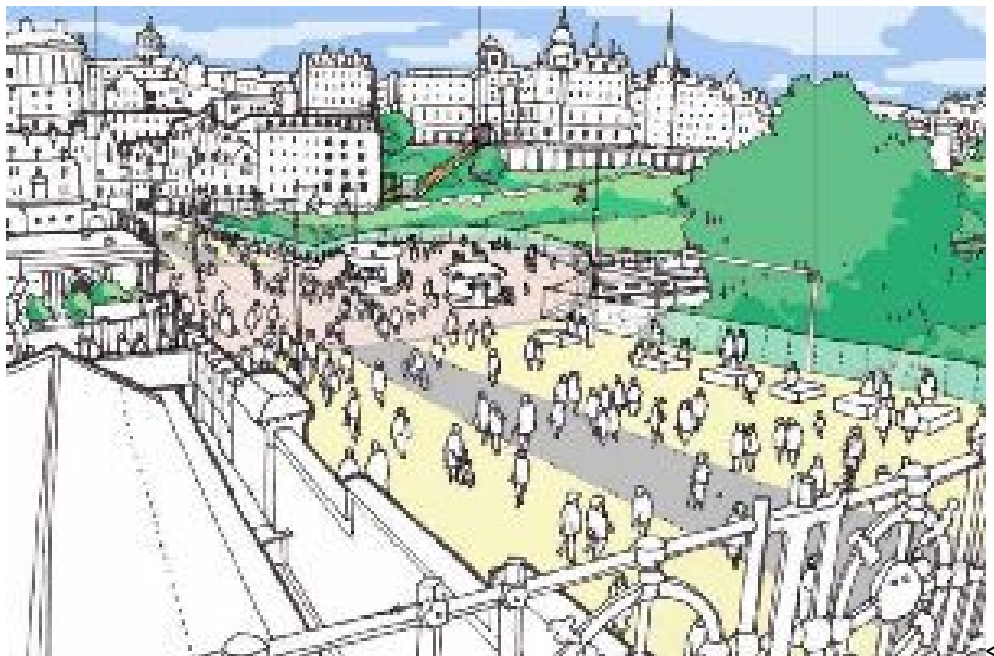
Transport and environment convener, Cllr Lesley Macinnes, said: “This is a serious approach to how we equip the city for the future and how we meet the emerging challenges from the climate change emergency, population growth, changing expectations of our city centre and air quality.

“This is a clear statement of intent about what we want to achieve in the city centre. This is our strategy for a city centre that is truly fit for purpose.”

As part of the blueprint, there are plans to construct four lifts, situated across the city centre, to help people access Edinburgh’s two levels with more ease.

The lifts will be provided from Market Street to the top of The Mound, Waverley Station to North Bridge, Cowgate to George IV Bridge and Grassmarket to Edinburgh Castle and will be used by cyclists and those with wheelchairs.

Cllr Macinnes added: “You will come out the back of Waverley Station and take that lift up to North Bridge.” Instantly, you have got public transport with buses instantly connected with the train. It’s about collapsing the city centre to be able to access both levels.”



Improvements will be made to make key routes more attractive to pedestrians and cyclists, but key bus routes will remain across North Bridge and South Bridge and up and down The Mound.



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Cllr Macinnes said: “This is an exciting and ambitious strategy, one which will deliver transformative benefits across the city and for a whole range of people travelling to and within Edinburgh.

“We want everyone to share in Edinburgh’s success and re-imagining our city centre and its purpose will help make this happen.

“Here we have a blueprint to move the city forward. The proposals are designed to prompt debate – they aren’t finalised designs or ideas. They are examples of what we could do to deliver the city centre that residents are telling us they want.”

Proposals to enhance walking and cycling facilities between the Meadows and George Street will also be considered as part of the document. These will be subject to a six-week consultation beginning on 27 May.

A six-week consultation on the draft city centre transformation strategy will take place between 20 May and 28 June, when bosses will meet local groups at public exhibitions, subject to approval of councillors.

The council’s long-term ambition is to extend the tram line to create a city network.

Following the extension down Leith Walk to Newhaven, due to begin this year, permission would need to be approved from the Scottish Government before proposing to take the tram over North Bridge towards the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary and the Bio Quarter.

Another tram loop is also proposed, which would connect Haymarket with Morrison Street, Lauriston Place, Potterrow and Edinburgh University in a circular route around the city centre.

Project director Daisy Narayanan said: “We are proposing a tram loop at some point.

“If tram line three goes ahead to the Bio Quarter, we would have a true public transport corridor that does exactly that.”

Indicative images show that tram stops could be provided at the university, Newington, the Chalmers Hospital and the EICC.

The strategy document states: “A potential tram loop around the city centre, in association with further expansion of the network, will provide fast, reliable and high capacity access to the city centre on appropriate radial routes.”

The current timeline points to a business case being drawn up for the tram extension between 2024 and 2026.