**The intermediate Alternative: Written by Peter Elvidge.**

This proposal is based on the bus user group’s March Minimum/minimal Alternative, which remains the group’s most likely outcome. This adds a few ideas based on the group’s earlier proposal, to solve the third major issue with the council’s current proposal. Such are the deficiencies with the current design, if this goes ahead as planned, it would be unsurprising if major changes were called for, after its completion. This Intermediate Alternative aims to alleviate much of that pressure for that change. In addition, not only does it maintain the positive cycling/ pedestrian measures of the current scheme, but offers further positive ideas for cycling/pedestrian facilities.

Starting with the reasons for Minimal Alternative.

The current plan will remove the existing very successful bus lanes between St. Peter’s Church and near Edward Street, and replace it with a ‘low usage’ route.

It has been suggested that this would be enforced using number plate recognition cameras. However, the first big question is, what it is enforcing.

Starting northbound: While the idea that general traffic would not be allowed to transverse more than one section- sounds fine. That is until it is further analysed. It is suggested that ‘bus lane’ signs will be used, but without there being formal bus lanes to enforce, there is question mark over whether this would be enforceable through the courts. It could be argued- there is limited value in introducing a scheme based on wishful thinking.

Even if the scheme was enforceable, the problems do not stop there.

(1) It ignores likely problems with the St. Peter’s bus stops.

(2) Traffic is still likely to flow down North Road, turn left, then cause long delays to buses, when traffic (including buses) reaches the London Road/St. Peter’s Place junction.

(3) There are a number of other ways for unwanted through traffic to gain access to the North Road route, should delays to northbound A23 traffic, be as great as expected. Adding more delays to buses.

(4) If traffic enforcement at the Trafalgar Street junction was enacted, this would divert large quantities of traffic (from both directions) up the narrow, and totally unsuitable -Trafalgar Street. How long would this last?

(5) Even with enforcement, it would probably still be worthwhile for northbound traffic to use Marlborough Place, even if it still needs to turn right at the North Road junction. This would also soon bring northbound buses to a near standstill.

Southbound: Unless southbound general traffic is forced up unsuitable Trafalgar Street, then traffic would be free to cause long delays to southbound buses, especially as it approaches the right turn exit, towards the Edward Street junction.

These problems for buses, will be created by a flawed design.

More details of the proposed (Do minimum) Alternative

The bus user group has proposed the reintroduction of real bus lanes, operating in one direction, strategically placed along the ‘low usage road’. This would retain effective bus priority, yet still permit full essential access/deliveries to properties. The design would maintain current cycling/ pedestrian/linear Garden proposals; and avoids causing additional problems in Trafalgar Street.

Yes it has been necessary to reopen an east-west-route, south of St. Peter’s Church, but this will have little impact on pedestrians and cyclists. They will still see it as a continuous open space.

Firstly it would be mixed priority, similar to New Road (where pedestrians and cyclists have priority). Second with perhaps only one bus every three minutes- eastbound, and westbound local access should be even lighter, because the road doubles back on itself, preventing through traffic. This means east-west traffic should be negligible.

There are other benefits to the proposal, such as:- avoiding problems at the St. Peter’s bus stops, and avoids buses needing to turning right into St. Peter’s Place (which is considerably longer and other potential problems). Also two (plus) new useful sections of bus lanes would be created. For more details on the group’s ‘Do minimum (March)’ proposal, see the Brighton Area Buswatch website.

Traffic model: The problems outline under the ‘do minimum proposal’ will be compounded by what are believed to be three major flaws, in the current traffic model. Will this model be used for stage 3 of the proposal?

The first assumed flaw, is the year-around congestion problem, for northbound traffic queuing from the London Road/ Oxford Street junction, tailing back through the St. Peter’s Place junction, and beyond.

If this had been modelled, it would not have shown the St. Peter’s Place junction to be freeflowing. So has failed to identify the long northbound delays on the A23, that will exist towards the junction. This in turn fails to show the pressure on motorists to use the former bus lanes. Which in turn fails to show the long delays to buses.

This failure is compounded by the second ‘flaw’ in the traffic model. While it is ‘normal’ to complete traffic counts at a time such as an October mid-weekday, Brighton’s traffic patterns are not normal. For example, mid-day traffic on a weekend, and during many school holidays (including summer), is often far greater, than an October weekday ‘peak’. This means that even if traffic flowed freely on an October weekday, there is nothing to suggest traffic would be freeflowing under normal busier traffic conditions. And this does not even include exceptionally busy traffic condition.

The traffic restrictions proposed within the design are such, that it is likely that congestion problems throughout the city would be far worse than at present. This in turn is likely to have a considerable adverse effect on bus reliability throughout the city- not just on a few days a year (as at present), but over a prolonged period, which is quite likely to undermine bus usage.

Also it was previously suggested that a new traffic light system/VMS would sort out any additional problems. Such is the degree of traffic reduction planned, it is unlikely such a system would have worked anyway, but the council did not obtain a grant to cover this system, so it cannot help at all. This makes it even more imperative changes are made to the current design- preferably those covered under the Intermediate alternative.

**The intermediate Alternative- basic design:** This starts by employing ‘minimum alternative’ design. Retaining the same positive cycling/walking/linear park facilities.

However this alternative sorts out what is believed to be the third major flaw in the traffic model/current design- that of the Grand Parade/Church Street junction right-turn.

It is believed the traffic model does not properly take into consideration, traffic turning right from Grand Parade, into Church Street/Marlborough Place. This traffic is likely to be stationary, quickly bringing the outside lane to a standstill. Leaving only one through southbound traffic lane, this could half traffic flow.

To reinforce the problem, traffic counts were made at normal busy times; and these showed the junction to be at its maximum traffic flow, even before traffic flow is halved.

In practice this is unlikely to be regarded as acceptable, even at quieter times of year; and the council has all but admitted there could be a problem. So it is likely changes will need to be made to the proposed junction.

**The intermediate proposal**:

The suggested alternative is for traffic wanting to turn right into Church Street, to instead turn right at the North Road junction; thereby retaining two southbound traffic lanes through the problematic Grand Parade/Church Street junction.

The alterative would mean a fairly small amount of traffic would need to head south, on the west side of the valley. However, given the high level of self-enforcement from the Alternative, this is likely to much less traffic (overall), than under the current proposal. Better for everyone.

Secondly, if the great new toucan crossing from the Pavilion grounds to the Valley Gardens Park is created, the design diverts this traffic away from the crossing.

A second change will also need to be made:

A new 4.2 metre (northbound) single lane road would need to be created for the short distance between the North Road junction and Morley Street. This is to provide space for the right turn lane- towards Church Street, and is also beneficial for reducing any capacity issues for southbound traffic at the North Road junction (earlier designs included two southbound traffic lanes).

The trees I here you cry. The latest design angles this short road away from the tree roots of the important Elm Trees, the new road re-joining the existing carriageway near Morley Street, where there is a large gap in the trees.

It does mean there remains a substantial section of single lane road remains, in each direction; but it is assumed the Alternative, will avoid almost all the problems caused by the current proposal. So offers a substantial improvement.

The area most likely to still cause problems, are pedestrian crossings on the east side of the valley (particularly Richmond Parade, southbound). But if two lanes in each direction are to be avoided, this may be the best compromise.

The design of the North Road junction is clever, in that it all the non- north-south moments occur during the same fairly short signal phase, leaving a long continuous Toucan phase for pedestrians and cyclists (and traffic) heading north-south through the valley.

Flexibility in the proposal:

The design can allow the current design to be incorporated. Alternatively, it could take into consideration the existing road layout, only changing the kerb-line when it is absolutely necessary (and usually only changing it on one side of the road, when necessary at all).

With a few notable exceptions, the current design changes almost every kerb line within the area between St. Peter’s church and Edward Street. This is also quite likely to require largescale (and expensive) changes to the drainage system, possible including relocated/new road mains. The council order of construction works- appears to ignore a number of unresolved issues for buses- so is likely to prove more damaging to bus services than has previously been indicated.

If, on the other hand, the Alternative minimises changes to the kerbline. This should substantially reduce overall costs. Part of which would be used to install the short new section of road north of North Road. With fewer changes to the existing road layout, it should also reduce the risk of cost overruns- remember Shelter Hall (West Street/seafront).

Perhaps more importantly, the Alternative could dramatically reduce disruption, during the construction phase (including to buses). First by greatly reducing the changes to the road layout. Second with less to change, critical roadworks could be better scheduled when traffic is lighter (such as January to April, October-November etc.). The council does not even admit that there are quieter times of year, let alone schedule roadworks at these times. This change would have a positive effect on the economy, as well as easing transport issues.

**Walking and cycling:**

As is mentioned elsewhere: As well as maintaining the linear park concept, the design aims to maintain (or replace) all current proposed cycling and pedestrian facilities. The park’s internal layout is expected to be unchanged.

However to show the bus user group does not just think about bus issues, several (optional) improvements are suggested.

The first suggestion, is a new Toucan crossing, directly linking the Pavilion Gardens (and the south side of Church Street), with the main Valley Gardens linear park. A great improvement over the currently proposed dog-leg, two stage crossing.

The second suggestion is a greatly improved cycle crossing. By totally separating A23 northbound traffic, from A270 traffic, and improving the crossing; it would be possible at off-peak times for cyclist (and pedestrians) to cross St. Peter’s Place/Lewes Road junction, in a single movement. Something cycling groups have been keen to achieve.

New cycle lanes are also suggested for St. Peter’s Place, and between near the Edward Street junction, to Church Street. Other minor improvements are suggested.

While recommended, they remain optional, rather than essential to the proposal.

***Conclusion*:**

The first principle objective of the Intermediate Alternative is to reverse the current negative aspects towards bus services. The fact the proposal would actually be beneficial to bus services, is a bonus. It would also reverse the worse congestion inducing aspects of the current proposal, especially at busier times of the week/year. This would mean motorists are less likely to seek alternative traffic routes, which risk being so detriment to bus services.

It would however maintain the positives of the current linear park scheme, especially for cyclists and pedestrians; with options to actually improve pedestrian and cycling facilities.

And there is the potential to greatly reduce delays, during the construction period.

**It may be suggested it is too late to make changes, but can the council justify not making these changes.** This is especially pertinent, when the problems with current poor design become more apparent, this could result in significant changes to the design, after the scheme is competed (at significant extra cost and further disruption to transport). It is still possible to act on hindsight, before it happens.

Peter Elvidge- June 2018