

Bristol Walking Alliance (BWA) has reservations about proposed improvements to the A4 Portway corridor. We point out what else we would like to see along the route from the point of view of pedestrian safety and opportunity.

Summary

Since the early engagement in 2022, the focus for the proposed improvements seems to have shifted. Whereas previously attention was given equally to walking, cycling and public transport, now the focus is primarily on making space for 24-hour inbound and outbound bus lanes.

We are not convinced that the need for an outbound bus lane outweighs the value of a segregated cycleway. A segregated cycleway would benefit both cyclists and pedestrians. For pedestrians, it would move most of the traffic away from the pedestrian route beside the river, and significantly improve the pedestrian experience. It would give more separation between the pedestrians and the noise and pollution of the motor traffic, giving back a greater sense of the beauty of the gorge as a place.

Given the need to shift more journeys towards active travel (as set out, for example, in the Bristol One City Plan) as well as onto public transport, we will expect to see the reason for the outbound bus lane justified in the business case for these proposals. In particular, we would expect to see estimates for future desirable **mode change** not just current usage.

While we support the desire to make bus services reliable and welcome the introduction of lower speed limits, there are other specific issues that affect the **safety** of and the requirements for **accessibility** for pedestrians that we believe must also be addressed using the available funding.

In addition, we believe the opportunity should be taken to consider the Portway not only as a transport route but also as a **recreational destination** within easy reach of the city which deserves to be made **more accessible**.

Specific Issues with the Proposals

In the following sections we highlight issues that remain unresolved and proposals we welcome, grouped under the headings used in the consultation.

Key changes along the whole route

- 0.1 We remain to be convinced that an outbound bus lane is justified along the whole route.
- 0.2 We have been told that the widened shared use path that is now proposed will have a **minimum width of 3.5m**. This should be the absolute minimum for shared use, and we would like to see justification of the width based on predicted future usage by pedestrians and cyclists. Shared use is not appropriate at the more heavily used locations.
- 0.3 It is not clear, in some sections, how the existing path can be widened sufficiently for shared use without losing a significant number of roadside or hedgerow trees which provide shade and reduce pollution.
- 0.4 Where **raised tables** have been proposed at side junctions, we would expect there to be advanced give way markings on the exiting side road to ensure exiting traffic gives way to pedestrians crossing the junction (see the Bristol Transport Development Management Guide, Figure 1 in [Section 3.3.3 Crossing facilities](#)). We also ask that the surfaces of the raised tables be in contrasting appearance to the roadway for the same reason.
- 0.5 Reduced speed limits along the route are welcome as they increase safety and reduce noise pollution for those living and walking along the route.
- 0.6 The business case for the improvements should emphasise the need to reduce traffic along the route through greater use of public transport and active travel. This is necessary to decarbonise the transport system and also to reduce levels of air pollution.

Area 1 - Portway Roundabout to the west of Park Road

- 1.1 The existing pedestrian footbridge that crosses the Portway between Marsh Street and Akeman Way has steps on the ramps and so is **not accessible** to those using wheeled mobility aids. There needs to be a road-level crossing to link to the bus stops on either side of the Portway at this location. This would also encourage more use of the buses.
- 1.2 The existing pedestrian footbridge that crosses the Portway at Station Road, Shirehampton also has steps on the ramps and so is **not accessible** to those using wheeled mobility aids. There should be a road-level crossing to allow pedestrians to access Shirehampton Station (and encourage more use of the train) and to cross the road to get to the bus stops at this location.

Area 2 – West of Park Road to northwest of Riverleaze

- 2.1 Public rights of way join the Portway, on opposite sides of the road, from Shirehampton golf course and from Shirehampton Park, but there is no means of crossing here. At the minimum there needs to be a **central refuge** to allow pedestrians to cross the A4 in two separate moves. This is necessary for **safety** and would support the better **recreational use** of these public paths. A central refuge would also help keep speeds in check along this section of road.

Area 3 – Northwest of Riverleaze to just south of Roman Way

- 3.1 We support the proposed toucan crossing at Riverleaze and the conversion of the crossing near Roman Way to be single stage.

Area 4 – South of Roman Way to the north of Bridge Valley Road

- 4.1 We welcome the reduction in speed limit from 50mph to 40mph along this stretch of road, but it should apply in both directions not just inbound.
- 4.1 There is a public right of way that runs from Sea Mills alongside the Avon River and emerges onto the south-west side of the Portway before it reaches Sea Walls. This recreational route should be better signposted and access to it from the Portway made easier.
- 4.2 Another recreational path along Bramble Lane, within the Avon Wildlife Trust land at Bennett's Patch & White's Paddock, emerges onto the Portway near the point where the median strip commences. This also should be better signposted and related to the riverside route, allowing a circular off-road recreational walk. For pedestrian safety in crossing the Portway, there should be a central refuge at the point where this path emerges directly into the bus lane.
- 4.3 We welcome the proposed toucan crossing giving access to Sea Walls car park.
- 4.4 A public footpath down the Gulley emerges at a pull-in on the Portway a short distance beyond the Sea Walls car park. Crossing the A4 at this point is **unsafe** and there are no pedestrian footways at all on this side of the road. We suggest a path should be made on the cliffs side of the road to connect the Gulley pull-in to the proposed crossing at the car park. This would provide a link to enable better recreational walking in the area.

Area 5 – North of Bridge Valley Road to Hotwell Road (before Cabot Way / Bennet Way)

- 5.1 We welcome the speed limit reductions, but suggest the 30mph limit should apply from the junction with Bridge Valley Road. It does not make sense that traffic coming down Bridge Valley Road (30mph limit) is allowed to speed up to 40mph for the short stretch between the junction with the Portway and the Suspension Bridge underpass.
- 5.2 The pedestrian traffic in this area is boosted through **recreational use** by those walking from the Harbour to view the Clifton Suspension Bridge and its surroundings in the Gorge. This is acknowledged by the possibility of incorporating a viewing area for the Suspension Bridge in the current proposals. The pedestrian facilities along this section, including widths of footways, need to be increased accordingly.
- 5.3 Because of recreational use, where pedestrians may be moving slowly or standing in groups to take in the scenery, it is **not appropriate that there should be shared use** with cyclists between Hotwells and Bridge Valley Road.

- 5.4 The width of the footway where it leaves the roadside on the city side of the Suspension Bridge underpass is far too narrow for shared use.
- 5.5 There is no mention in the proposals of the measures that will have to be taken to mitigate future flooding from the river along this section. With climate change, average sea levels are predicted to rise by 1m or more in the coming decades. Flood walls will be required alongside the river to prevent flooding onto the Portway at high tides. Such walls could incorporate a **segregated pedestrian footway along the riverside**.
- 5.6 The Zigzag path, a public right of way, provides a pedestrian link between the Portway and Sion Hill. Though it is not listed in the consultation, we understand that widening the footway on the eastern side of the Portway is proposed along this section. This would provide a safer route for pedestrians between the Zigzag path and Hotwells. It would also benefit any future proposal to improve the visitor experience of the Clifton Rocks Railway which emerges onto the same footway.
- 5.7 However, we also believe there will be a desire for pedestrians to cross the Portway to the river side without having to go all the way into Hotwells to do so. For **safety**, we suggest a **central refuge** either near the point at which the Zigzag path emerges (and currently central chevron marking begins on the roadway towards the bridge underpass) or adjacent to the steps up to the raised footway outside 412 Hotwell Road (where the footway on the river side widens).

Area 6 – Hotwell Road to Jacobs Wells Road Roundabout

- 6.1 We welcome the pedestrian improvements on the Hotwell Road and the proposed parallel crossing on Merchants Road.
- 6.2 The pedestrian footbridge that crosses the A4 between Granby Hill and Cumberland Basin Road is **not accessible** to those using wheeled mobility aids because of steps on the ramps. This may come within the scope of any future Western Harbour proposals rather than these proposals, but should be noted in any business plan for future attention.

Additional Issues

- 7.1 There are no bus stops for a 4.3km section of the Portway between Roman Way and Hotwells. To support increased recreational use of the Portway at the city end, at least one further pair of stops is needed. Given the limited road width nearer the city, they might best be located just beyond the new Sea Wall car park crossing, at the start of the new proposed outbound bus lane.
- 7.2 Though some additional tree planting is mentioned for Areas 4 and 5, every opportunity should be taken for additional greening to provide shade for the footway and to mitigate heat absorption by the roadway.

7.3 Where the footway is sufficiently wide, benches overlooking the river would increase the recreational value of the route, particularly at the Hotwells end.

In summary, we believe the improvements being planned for the A4 Portway must be based on better extrapolations of use based around the need to respond to the environmental and climate crises. This includes a shift from private to public transport and the need to better support active travel.

It must also take into account the recreational use of the Gorge and the public rights of way that are currently made unsafe by lack of suitable crossings of the A4.

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