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**STREETS FOR PEOPLE PRESTON ACTIVITY LINK (JAMES STREET)****Author:** Senior Transport Planner & Urban Designer**Reviewed By:** General Manager City Sustainability and Strategy

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Council recently consulted community in regards to a proposed concept design for the *Preston Activity Link (West) 'Streets for People'*. Feedback from community has been considered and a final concept design is proposed in this report for Council consideration.

This includes the section from Cramer Street to Elizabeth Street, and incorporates a trial pocket park / road closure at James Street. The trial pocket park / road closure is included in a package of *Preston Activity Link* priority street improvements proposed for 2020-21 and has been referred to the Council budget process for consideration. If Council endorses the concept designs proposed in this report and if funding is allocated, construction of the trial is expected to start in early 2021.

The final concept design presented incorporates significant community feedback that was gathered during the third round of engagement.

The concept designs will better manage traffic volume, enable convenient local trips for residents, and, support a better connection across Elizabeth Street.

It is proposed that the James Street pocket park / road closure be trialled for 12 months. This will allow further community feedback to be gathered about how well the new safety treatment is working. An evaluation will be completed to help determine whether the road closure / pocket park should be made permanent. The final design would then be completed if the trial is successful, and if budget is available.

Opportunities for external funding will be explored, with funding for further design stages and construction to be considered in future Council budgets.

<b>Recommendation</b>
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**That Council:**

- (1) Endorses the '*Streets for People*' *Preston Activity Link* (James Street) concept designs, including a trial road closure and pocket park, attached as **Appendix A**.
- (2) Thanks community members for their feedback and participation throughout consultation.
- (3) Notes that the engagement summary for all three rounds of community engagement for '*Streets for People*' *Preston Activity Link (West)* will be made publicly available, attached as **Appendix D**.
- (4) Requests a further report on the effectiveness of the road closure / pocket park after the 12-month trial period is completed.

## BACKGROUND / KEY INFORMATION

### Feasibility Study

In 2018 Council developed a corridor framework plan for 8 cycling corridors across the municipality – the *Streets for People Feasibility Study* (Study). The Study used the State Government's *Movement and Place* approach which gives priority to active transport, maintains streets as destinations and increases greening.

The Study was endorsed by Council in October 2018, along with the Preston Activity Link and Northern Reservoir Corridor as the two Streets for People corridors to be consulted on and designed in 2018-19 and 2019-20.

### Preston Activity Link Development

The first round of consultation focused on the western and eastern ends of the corridor, from Elizabeth Street to St Georges Road, and from Plenty Road to Darebin Creek (outlined in the 11 November 2019 Council briefing).

At the 2 December 2019 Council Meeting, Council endorsed releasing the draft plans for the Preston Activity Link (West) for a second round of community engagement (shown by the red circle in Figure 1, **Appendix A**). During the second round of engagement there was strong support for the proposed concept designs. However, concerns were raised about the road closure / pocket park on James Street reducing accessibility.

After considering community feedback a review was undertaken, and an alternative pocket park with road closure location was identified offering similar benefit with fewer drawbacks. The pocket park and road closure are proposed to be moved south of Cramer Street on James Street (between Hope Street and Cramer Street).

At the 27 April 2020 Council meeting, Council endorsed the concept designs for design and delivery of the Preston Activity Link (West) between St Georges Road and James Street, and endorsed the release of the modified location for the James Street road closure / pocket park for a third round of direct engagement.

### Previous Council Resolution

At its meeting held on 27 April 2020, Council resolved:

*'That Council endorses a third round of direct community engagement for the James Street closure / pocket park and Hope Street.'*

## COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT

### Consultation

#### Consultation Results

A summary of the Round 1 consultation findings was presented to Council on 2 December 2019, and a summary of Round 2 engagement and findings was presented to Council on 27 April 2020.

A summary of the engagement findings from Round 3 is included in the discussion section of this report. An engagement summary report for all three rounds of community consultation is included as **Appendix D** to this report.

### How we engaged the community

The third round of engagement with directly impacted residents was undertaken to receive feedback on the James Street road closure / pocket park, including:

- Letter box drop to approximately 700 households in the area occurring in early May, outlining the draft concept design and reason for changing the treatment location.
- Additional letter to owners of three households directly adjacent to the proposed pocket park, requesting feedback and the opportunity for further discussion about project. A knock on the door would have usually been used to gain direct householder feedback but was not deemed appropriate in the current environment regarding Covid-19 pandemic response and social distancing requirements.

### Engagement participation

The *Your Say* web page received over 130 visits during this round of engagement (almost 20% of directly contacted households), with 34 households providing feedback by email. These represented households in James Street (27%), Grandview Road (21%), Cramer Street (12%), Booth Street (9%), Grange Street (6%), Knapp Street (3%) and Belmont Street (3%). 19% of people that responded did not provide location details with their feedback.

### Reaching diverse communities

The consultation was designed to be accessible for our diverse community including people not proficient in English or with other communication barriers.

In this local area, approximately 90% of residents identify as proficient in English and the main non-English languages spoken are Arabic, Greek and Italian. Consultation sought to make information accessible and create opportunities for all directly contacted residents to take part. This was achieved this by:

- All mailouts including information in 12 languages about how to access translation services, as well as information about how to access the national relay service.
- Diagrams, which were an important part of project communications materials and designed to communicate universally.

### Communications

A detailed communications and engagement approach was developed for the *Streets for People Preston Activity Link (West)* project. Councillors were advised of forthcoming engagement efforts at the Council Meeting on 27 April 2020. The ultimate vision and objectives for this project, described in external communication, are to:

- Prioritise walking and cycling activity in the local area for those moving between homes, train stations, local businesses and schools, by providing safe and attractive streets for all to enjoy.
- Maintain access for local residents to travel to local destinations (via Bruce Street and Bell Street).
- Create a safer walking, wheeling and cycling route to the community's preferred location for a pedestrian crossing on Elizabeth Street near Raymond and Goff Streets (connecting to the Merri Creek trail).

## ANALYSIS

### Alignment to Council Plan / Council policy

Goal 3 - A liveable city

The Streets for People program closely aligns with the expected outcomes of several Council policies/strategies, including the Darebin Transport Strategy, Walking Strategy, Safe Travel Strategy, Darebin Cycling Strategy, Breathing Space: The Darebin Open Space Strategy, and Climate Emergency Plan.

The Council Plan 2017-2021 sets the overarching vision for “a greener, bolder, more connected city.” The Streets for People program clearly aligns with this overarching vision, as well as Council Plan Goals 1, 2, 3 and 5, and many other endorsed Council Strategies.

- Goal 1 - A sustainable city
- Goal 2 - Opportunities to live well
- Goal 3 - A liveable city

Goal 5 - Involving our diverse community

### Environmental Sustainability Considerations

The Streets for People program focuses on vulnerable road users and improving conditions in the street environment to increase active travel, while minimising the use and impact of vehicles. Where possible, passive irrigation and water sensitive urban design principles are applied to road safety treatments, along with landscaping. The Parks and Open Space team have been consulted regarding opportunities to enhance biodiversity.

### Climate Emergency

This program has a clear alignment with Key direction 4 of the Climate Emergency Plan 2017-2022, in particular Objective 1 “Reduce the number of private vehicle kilometres travelled in Darebin by increasing the share of public transport use, walking and cycling” and Key direction 7 to reduce the heat island effect, by increasing tree cover.

### Equity, Inclusion and Wellbeing Considerations

An Equity and Inclusion Assessment was completed for the Streets for People project, through which it was recognised that the project has key outcomes for Darebin’s diverse community including:

- Accessibility compliance through design (*Disability Discrimination Act 1992*)
- Designing facilities for all ages and abilities
- Outcomes that encourage more physical activity, general wellbeing & health through walking and cycling
- Streets becoming safer and less intimidating for local communities to use
- Providing spaces for people to gather and be socially connected to their neighbourhoods.

## Cultural Considerations

During the second and third rounds of engagement we heard from the community that the HP Zwar Park was an opportunity for providing local art and greening that incorporates a response to the cultural aspects of the corridor. Although HP Zwar Park is out the scope of this project, future work in developing the designs for the James Street pocket park will consider themes and culture of the local area in line with this ambition.

## Economic Development Considerations

There are increasing demands on our public space, and in particular roads and parking.

Improving the quality of cycling and walking routes makes it easier for residents and visitors to use any mode of transport to work, shop, and visit local centres. This supports thriving local economies by activating centres with increased pedestrians who are more likely to undertake multiple activities in the one visit. It also reduces road congestion and parking pressure which are expected to increase over time with Melbourne's population growth.

The Streets for People corridors are designed to provide high-quality connections between key destinations within the municipality, increasing their catchment potential by providing easy to use and safe transport solutions.

This project is being considered in the context of the *Future Preston* program and is expected to help contribute to overall improvements in the Preston area.

## Financial and Resource Implications

The consultation and design work of priority locations is provided for within the current year budget.

The trial road closure / pocket park and safety treatment on James Street is included in a package of four Preston Activity Link (West) street improvements proposed for 2020-21 delivery in the draft budget that Council is currently consulting on. This package has been referred to the Council budget process for consideration.

If Council endorses the concept designs proposed in this report and if funding is allocated, construction of the trial is expected to start in early 2021.

Further design work will be planned in preparation for construction priorities along the corridor in future years, subject to available budget.

## Legal and Risk Implications

This project is designed to reduce risk by improving both road safety and by making it easier, safer and more enjoyable for people to walk or cycle. It also reduces the amount of vehicle emissions contributing to the long-term risk associated with climate change. Making it easier for people to walk and cycle contributes to lower community health risks associated with inactivity, isolation and local air pollution.

## DISCUSSION

The concept designs in **Appendix A** identify a range of measures to be implemented over time to improve safety, make the corridor more attractive for walking, wheeling and cycling.

These include:

- A road closure / pocket park on James Street between Cramer Street and Hope Street.
- A raised platform pinch point on James Street between Cramer Street and Eric Street.
- Road markings to highlight the Preston Activity Link as a local bike route.
- A pedestrian crossing on Elizabeth Street between Raymond Street and Goff Street to link the Preston Activity Link with the Merri Creek trail in Moreland.

### **Round 2 engagement found strong support overall**

Feedback from Round 2 engagement was reported at the 27 April 2020 Council meeting and is attached to this report in **Appendix B**. In Round 2 engagement 81% of respondents supported a road closure / pocket park, however some issues were raised regarding the location around local accessibility as a result of existing traffic conditions.

Although a crossing at Elizabeth Street was supported, the location of the crossing at Eric Street was highlighted as 'not the ideal location' for access to destinations west of Elizabeth Street. In 2019 a petition was received by Council from local residents requesting a pedestrian crossing near Raymond Street. Consultation with officers from Moreland City Council confirmed this is also Moreland's preferred location.

This feedback informed the changes and proposed recommendations presented for feedback in Round 3 of engagement.

### **Round 3 engagement – Road closure and pocket park**

Letters were delivered to approximately 700 households in West Preston inviting feedback on the changed location for the road closure / pocket park. Responses were recorded from 34 households in Round 3 of engagement. 27% of responses were from residents who lived on James Street, and a further 21% from residents on Grandview Road. The remainder were from Cramer Street, Booth Street, Grange Street, Knapp Street and Belmont Street. Six of the 34 responses provided no location details.

Attached (confidential) is a map showing visually how feedback relates to the location of a households (**Appendix C**). This appendix is confidential to avoid the potential for specific feedback to be identified, however it generally demonstrates desire for the project to progress from people that live nearest to the proposed location.

#### *Feedback in support of the proposal*

Fifteen of the responses were overwhelmingly positive, with most of the positive feedback coming from residents of James Street and Booth Street, including two properties in the immediate vicinity of the road closure location. The comments received related to improving safety, reducing vehicle speeds and providing more greening to the area.

#### *Feedback objecting to the proposal*

Of the 18 objections received, half were based on concerns that traffic would be displaced to surrounding streets, with associated concerns for safety at intersections with Cramer Street.

Four responses objected on the basis that there were already enough parks in the area, or other parks should be beautified instead.

Three responses expressed concern about increased travel time.

The remaining 2 objections were against money being spent on this project.

Officer response:

Displacement of traffic has been considered throughout the planning and design stages for the whole corridor, and the endorsed concept designs for the remainder of the Preston Activity Link (West) includes traffic calming measures such as pinch points and raised thresholds to deter non-local traffic and improve safety for all road users. The reduction in non-local traffic, combined with the displacement of remaining traffic across several streets, will likely result in very minimal additional traffic on surrounding streets. This will be monitored through traffic surveys before and during the 12-month trial.

Prior to the third round of engagement a traffic analysis was completed to determine the impact on local road users, which showed minimal additional journey times as a result of the road closure using the local road network.

This project also supports the Council Plan and Breathing Space – Darebin’s Open Space Strategy’, to help ensure that all residents live within a 500m walking distance of public open space. There is a lack of open space in this area of Preston. The Preston Activity Link is an opportunity to help achieve both the Open Space Strategy goals and Council’s safety and active transport goals.

**Proposed 12-month trial**

A 12-month trial approach would allow for traffic surveys pre and post installation to monitor changes in travel behaviour and an extended community feedback opportunity, which will help inform whether the pocket park should be retained. If the trial is successful and budget is available, the permanent design will be developed to align with community needs and manage any adverse impacts.

The trial pocket park design is likely to include a way for riders to move through the area and temporary low cost ‘bolt-down’ kerbing and planter boxes, which will be developed in collaboration with the City Design team to ensure it is interesting and engaging as well as safe and functional from a vehicle management perspective.

If the 12-month trial is successful the final design may include landscaping, a way for bike riders to get through and natural play design elements, subject to future Council budgets. The temporary kerbing and planter boxes will be able to remain in place while design work is finalised. The community would be invited to contribute ideas to the design outcome before any decisions are made on the final features.

**OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

**Option 1 (recommended):**

That Council endorses the final concept designs for the Preston Activity Link – James Street to Elizabeth Street.

**Option 2 (not recommended)**

Council could seek further information to make a decision about how to progress with this project. This would delay works to improve safety for all road users in the corridor.

**Option 3 (not recommended)**

Council could resolve to leave the streetscape as it is.

**IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY****Details**

- July 2020 – June 2021 delivery (budget dependant)
  - Completion of functional designs, detailed design and construction of four priority projects for the Preston Activity Link, including the James Street road closure / pocket park trial.

**Communication**

Following Council consideration and endorsement of the final concept plans for the Streets for People Preston Activity Link (West) project, the Engagement Report and Final Concept Designs will be made available via the project page on 'Your Say' and shared with internal and external stakeholders. People that have contributed or expressed interest in the project will be notified.

**Timeline**

Please see Details and Communication Sections above.

**RELATED DOCUMENTS**

- Breathing Space – Darebin Open Space Strategy
- Darebin Council Plan 2017-2021
- Streets for People Feasibility Report 2018

**Attachments**

- Streets for People Preston Activity Link Concept Plan (James Street to Elizabeth Street) (**Appendix A**)
- Streets for People Preston Activity Link Round 2 Engagement Summary (**Appendix B**)
- Streets for People Preston Activity Link (James Street) Round 3 feedback by location and type (**Appendix C**) Enclosed under separate cover Confidential - enclosed under separate cover
- Streets for People Preston Activity Link (West) Final Report and Summary (**Appendix D**)

**DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST**

Section 80C of the *Local Government Act 1989* requires members of Council staff and persons engaged under contract to provide advice to Council to disclose any direct or indirect interest in a matter to which the advice relates.

The Officer reviewing this report, having made enquiries with relevant members of staff, reports that no disclosable interests have been raised in relation to this report.