# RNIB Scotland and Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans joint comments by email on City of Edinburgh Council plans for George Street, Edinburgh

Representatives from RNIB Scotland and Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans attended the City of Edinburgh Council Accessibility Forum on 5 September 2023 on plans for George Street. As mentioned in the follow-up email, we would value the opportunity to take part in an on-street trial/in-person meeting to further explore the options being proposed.

RNIB Scotland recently published a report on making streets accessible for people with sight loss called Street Credibility, [attached for information.](https://media.rnib.org.uk/documents/Street_Credibility_2023_Accessible_PDF.pdf) It outlines that people with sight loss have consistently said three key principles are paramount for inclusive and accessible street design:

1. Reducing the hazard of cluttered pavements and street clutter
2. The importance of having kerbs and signalised controlled crossings
3. Avoidance of moving vehicles (including cycles).

In addition, we would like to underline the concerns below which were also raised by participants during the workshop.

## Concern over bus stop design:

Bus stop bypasses (or floating bus stops) were mentioned in the discussion. These designs can make it extremely difficult for blind and partially sighted people as they are often unable to detect where the cycle-lane stops and starts, and/or identify where it is safe to cross to access the bus stop or pavement. In some cases, a mini-zebra crossing is provided for pedestrians to pass over the cycle lane to the bus stop. However, this relies on people being able to see or hear oncoming cyclists, as well as locate the zebra crossing point, which often has no tactile markings. In areas of congestion and high traffic volumes, it becomes increasingly difficult to hear approaching cyclists.

## Street furniture and seating from cafes /restaurants spilling onto the walkways:

We are concerned about the allocation of space from the footway next to building lines for café style furniture, including tables and chairs. Guide dogs often orientate their owners by using building lines as well as detectable kerbs. In the absence of any physical demarcation, it becomes increasingly difficult for blind and partially sighted people to navigate successfully, including those using long canes.

There must be clear guidance so that temporary street furniture does not constitute a hazard, either by taking up too much space on the footway, increasing the risk of falls and stumbles, or creating unfamiliar routes. For those who are unfamiliar with a location this can be potentially dangerous and disorientating.

## Cycle paths and continuous footways

Detectable kerbs and accessible controlled pedestrian crossings are vital to enable blind and partially sighted people to safely cross a road or cycle lane. Zebra crossings and courtesy crossings are much less safe for pedestrians who cannot negotiate with approaching vehicles or cycles they may be unable to see or hear.

Continuous footways pose an unacceptable risk for blind and partially sighted people, due to the increased danger of unknowingly walking out in front of moving vehicles including cycles. When kerbs are flattened and footways expand the pavement over a road or cycle lane, thereby creating a level surface, it becomes increasingly difficult for blind and partially sighted people to know whether they are on the road, cycle lane or pavement.

## Other concerns including blue badge parking and access and taxi services

It would be helpful to get some clarity on the location of blue badge parking spaces on George Street and adjacent side streets. At the Forum meeting it was said that control bollards would be in operation during peak times. It would be helpful to have more information on these measures.

We echo the Edinburgh Access Panel’s concerns about the removal of the taxi-stance for pick up and drop off on George Street.

## Contacts

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