

4.5 PROPOSED ROAD CLOSURE – CHESTER STREET, OAKLEIGH

Responsible Director: Ossie Martinz

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

Council resolved in part at its meeting on 27 April 2021 (Item 6.2) that officers undertake further investigation of the feasibility of closing Chester Street near Eaton Mall, Oakleigh and engage a traffic consultant to provide a traffic impact assessment. This report advises of the outcome of the investigation into the closure of Chester Street

KEY CONSIDERATIONS/ISSUES

The traffic engineering feasibility assessment was undertaken by traffic and road safety consultant, Mr Robert Morgan. The consultant considered five options:

- full road closure with pedestrianisation;
- full time and part time signed 'No Entry' restrictions; and
- full time and part time barrier control with access for delivery vehicles.

Whilst not recommended, the only possible locations to close Chester Street are:

- East Side: ~25 m east of Eaton Mall on the west side of the ROW, and
- West Side: ~33 m west of Eaton Mall On the east side of the ROW

All options would require both sections of Chester Street to become two-way operational and the traffic analysis identifies many constraints and negative impacts that any potential closure of Chester Street at Eaton Mall would bring unless major physical works were undertaken.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

The recommendation of the consultant is to not proceed with a closure of Chester Street. This is due to the interdependency of the local street network and the disruption that an individual, ad hoc change will produce. Any significant changes to traffic movement in the centre would need to be developed and considered as part of a wider review of the centre. There are likely to be a range of small engineering infrastructure interventions possible in the road reserve that would assist in deterring anti-social driver behaviour, without unduly impacting the overall movement network of the centre

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RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. *Notes the traffic engineering feasibility assessment report prepared by traffic and road safety consultant, Mr Robert Morgan and its findings that a road closure in Chester Street at Eaton Mall is not recommended because of safety issues, traffic and movement disruption in the Centre and is not seen to be an appropriate response in addressing anti-social driving behaviour.*
2. *Does not proceed with any road closure*
3. *Seeks to address the problem of anti-social driver behaviour in the precinct by delivering targeted interventions which do not require a road closure, informed by consultation with Oakleigh Village Traders Association and the community in general, and through a joint action plan involving Victoria Police and other stakeholders, as necessary.*
4. *Directs Council officers to proceed with trader engagement and develop an alternative proposal with a series of road humps to modify driver behaviour and reduce vehicle speeds along Chester Street and report back to Oakleigh ward councillors.*

INTRODUCTION

This report provides discussion on the traffic feasibility assessment undertaken in response to anti-social driver behaviour and the likely impacts of a potential road closure of Chester Street at Eaton Mall, Oakleigh as a means of addressing that anti-social behaviour.

The report notes that the closure of Chester Street would be very disruptive to traders and the movement network in the Centre and recommends that Council not proceed with a road closure in Chester Street, and instead engage with Victoria Police, traders and others to find other solutions to the problem of anti-social driving behaviour in the area.

BACKGROUND

At its meeting on 27 April 2021 Council considered a Notice of Motion on the Proposed Road Closure of Chester Street, Oakleigh at Eaton Mall, instigated in this instance to help address community safety concerns expressed by the

Oakleigh Village Traders Association principally caused by anti-social driver behaviour.

In recognising that such a closure could potentially have a number of unknown traffic and safety related impacts, Council directed that officers further investigate the feasibility of closing Chester Street near Eaton Mall and engage a traffic consultant to provide a traffic impact assessment.

A report has been prepared by traffic and road safety consultant, Mr Robert Morgan and is provided at Attachment A.

DISCUSSION

The traffic engineering feasibility assessment by Mr Morgan looked at five options:

- a full road closure with pedestrianisation;
- full time and part time signed No Entry restrictions; and
- full time and part time barrier control with access for delivery vehicles.

A closure location should not require vehicles to be reversed along a public road in order to enter or leave on-street parking or access a property. Such manoeuvres would create a significant safety hazard to pedestrians and other road users.

Whilst not recommended the only possible points to close Chester Street each side of Eaton Mall would be:

- East Side: ~25 m east of Eaton Mall on the west side of the ROW and
- West Side: ~33 m west of Eaton Mall On the east side of the ROW

These locations are shown as points A and B below.



The manner and impacts of the five options assessed are tabulated below.

No.	Time of Operation and Method Used	Traffic Movements	Movement Network Impacts	Other Significant Impacts
1.	A <u>permanent physical road closure</u> to all vehicles	Two way east of closure. Two way west of closure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No safe way to turn general traffic around, west of closure. • Impossible for trucks to access Oakleigh Market and businesses west of closure. • Increased road safety hazards, east of the closure. • Shifts the social problem, does not remove it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of 9 (min) or 34 (max) parking spaces, 5 motorcycle spaces and Loading Zone (2 trucks).
2.	A <u>permanent entry ban (No Entry signs)</u> , with exemptions for delivery vehicles	Two way east of closure. Two way west of closure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No safe way to turn general traffic around, west of closure. • Increased road safety hazards, east of the closure. • Relies on a level of police enforcement not likely to be available. • Shifts the social problem, does not remove it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of 9 (min) or 34 (max) parking spaces and 5 motorcycle spaces. • Disputes about interpretation. • Poor compliance.
3.	A <u>part time (night time) entry ban (No Entry signs)</u> , no exceptions	Two way east of closure. One way west of closure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased road safety hazards, east of the closure. • Relies on a level of police enforcement not likely to be available. • Shifts the social problem, does not remove it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 26 parking spaces underutilised. • Potential claims by businesses to the west about access. • Poor compliance.
4.	A <u>permanent physical barrier</u> (e.g. a boom), with access for delivery vehicles	Two way east of closure. Two way west of closure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No safe way to turn general traffic around, west of closure. • Increased road safety hazards, east of the closure. • Shifts the social problem, does not remove it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of 9 (min) or 34 (max) parking spaces and 5 motorcycle spaces. • High ongoing cost to Council: register of exempt vehicles. • Impractical. • Mechanical failure.
5.	A <u>part time (night time) physical barrier</u> (e.g. a boom), no exceptions	Two way east of closure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased road safety hazards, east of the closure. • Shifts the social problem, does not remove it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 26 parking spaces underutilised. • Potential claims by businesses to the west about access. • Mechanical failure.

		One way west of closure.		
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All of the investigated options require sections of Chester Street on each side of the closure points to become two-way operational and to do this, extensive physical traffic works would need to be undertaken. Delivery vehicles and cars U-turning on the west of the closure cannot physically and safely be accommodated within the current road space available. Given these severe constraints a trial closure is also not possible.

The consultant report has identified a number of negative impacts of a closure of Chester Street at Eaton Mall as outlined in the table above, therefore the proposal to close Chester Street at Eaton Mall is not recommended.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The social implications of the proposed closure would include:

- Safety of pedestrians would be reduced on sections of Chester Street that need to be two way, following decades of one way traffic.
- Safety for pedestrians using the footpaths on the traffic side of the closure points will be compromised as this pedestrian space will be continuously used by vehicles negotiating 3-point turns in order to turn around to exit the street.
- Safety for drivers in the car park on the north side of Chester Street, and the right of way behind it, will worsen as these areas will become circulation routes. Minor traffic incident nuisance will increase.
- The loss of car parking along Chester Street will have a detrimental impact on patrons' accessibility into the Centre
- The anti-social driver behaviour will not be removed or addressed in any effective way; it will likely relocate and create nuisance and hazard to others.

HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS

While the ultimate intent of the closure would be to improve the pedestrian environment and experience, any action must also recognise any implication on and needs of other legitimate uses of the area. Any restriction would need to be negotiated through a consultative process.

CONSULTATION

Potential Road Closure

Should Council resolve in accord with the consultant and officer recommendation not to proceed with the proposed road closure officers will

undertake consultation with Oakleigh Village Traders Association and the community generally about effective ways to tackle the anti-social driving behaviour which occurs in Chester Street, typically on Friday and Saturday nights. Part of the solution is likely to involve community policing and Council officers will need to engage with Victoria Police to develop an effective approach.

Minor physical traffic interventions

One other direction by Council on 27 April 2021 as to direct Council officers to continue discussions with the OVTA, Chester and Portman Street traders and the Department of Transport to further develop the design for road humps on Chester and Portman Streets.

A concept for road humps has been prepared for Chester Street with the intention of distributing a notice to commence trader engagement on a proposal.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

An estimate of the financial cost of a road closure were contained in the report to Council for item 6.2, Council meeting, 27 April 2021 – ranging from \$50,000 to \$200,000.

This did not include all works necessary to provide for two way traffic each side of the closure which, in light of the existing physical constraints is likely to require land acquisition (at least on the west side) to be achievable

Recommended minor traffic calming works can be met within the existing budget.

CONCLUSION

The consultant's traffic analysis identifies many constraints and negative impacts that any closure of Chester Street at Eaton Mall would bring unless major physical works could be undertaken.

Due to the interdependency of the local street network and the disruption that an individual, ad hoc change will produce any significant changes to traffic movement in the centre would need to be developed and considered as part of a wider review of the centre. However this is not recommend in advance of undertaking additional minor infrastructure interventions in Chester Street.

There are likely to be a range of small engineering infrastructure interventions possible in the road reserve that would assist in deterring anti-social driver behaviour, without unduly impacting the overall movement network of the centre.

While it is understood that current events of anti-social driver behaviour has driven discussion around closure as well as other means of influencing traffic speeds along Chester Street at this time, the ultimate desire and focus to reduce vehicle presence and prioritise pedestrian activity within the streets of the shopping centre needs to be investigated as part of a much broader and holistic strategy .

It is recommended that other actions including testing trader interest in speed control measures along Chester Street and engagement with the Victoria Police take precedence.