

Dr Wood submission of 15 June 2022

PE1906/C: Investigate options for removing and reducing the impact of the central Glasgow section of the M8

Please find below my response to “PE1906: Investigate options for removing and reducing the impact of the central Glasgow section of the M8”, submitted as a university academic and independent sustainability researcher.

Commissioning an independent feasibility study on the city centre sections of the M8 creates opportunities to fundamentally improve outcomes for the Glasgow City Region. The novel and political aspect of the study would be to expand beyond a tight focus on maintenance vs demolition costs, to take in economic redevelopment, community and health benefits. Institutionally, this would link to whether the study focuses on the powers and responsibilities of Transport Scotland and Glasgow City Council, or expands to the Glasgow City Region, Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, and Public Health or NHS Scotland.

Looking to the potential removal or reduced impact of the M8, there are successful precedents for reducing traffic volumes and physically reducing the size and cost of road transport infrastructure. The petition focuses on US examples, but examples can be found across the UK, including Birmingham’s Paradise Forum, London’s Elephant and Castle, Liverpool’s Strand, and Newcastle’s Gateshead flyover. Across Europe, newspaper reports indicate that experiences of lockdown have increased support for permanent measures to reduce air pollution.¹ Perhaps most comparably, over the last decade Paris has entirely closed motorways along both banks of the River Seine to such positive effect that the Parisian government recently announced further plans to reduce the size and traffic-volumes of the city’s main ring road.

In my opinion, a study should establish both how far the M8 is a physical barrier to Glasgow’s redevelopment, but also how its removal or

¹ <https://www.politico.eu/article/life-after-covid-europeans-want-to-keep-their-cities-car-free/>

significant-alteration could be used to build Scotland's economic development and public institutions. This would occur in the particular context of Glasgow and Clydeside's having no shortage of vacant or derelict land, as detailed in the Glasgow City Region (GCR) Economic Strategy.

Turning to barriers, the M8 may be blocking the current and future redevelopment of the Glasgow City Region. The GCR Economic Strategy highlights research from the Connected Cities Catapult and Centre for Cities on the potential for growth through nurturing agglomeration economies and economic clusters. Urban redevelopment of this type improves productivity through creating a virtuous cycle of better public transport connections (at mass transit intensities) and higher residential population densities, creating more efficient labour markets, more informal information sharing or knowledge networks, and more intensive business land uses (supporting greater demand for mass transit and high density residential population, etc). The benefits are also non-linear, so that one large cluster is more productive than two clusters of half the size. This is relevant in the context that large and busy roads do not only tend to mean reduced residential and land use density, but they cause 'community severance' by reducing the number and quality of social or economic links across such roads. In Glasgow, the M8 cuts in half an area that would otherwise be the central part of the city, the hub best served by train and subways, and a meeting point for innovation.

The potential effects of the M8 upon Glasgow's potential agglomeration economy are large. Research by the Centre for Cities has shown that, for example, when comparing the similar sized populations of Glasgow and Lyon only 53% of Glasgow's population can reach the city centre by public transport in 30 minutes or less, compared to 74% in Lyon.² The premium on housing sited close to public transport links in Glasgow is rapidly increasing, even during COVID and social distancing.³ A study of the potential agglomeration economy could also establish whether strategic redevelopment should include developing a particular set of

² Centre for Cities (2021) 'Mapping the 30-minute city' <https://www.centreforcities.org/story/mapping-the-30-minute-city/>

³ Nationwide Building Society (2021) 'London sees biggest house price premium as households still attach significant value to transport links despite the pandemic' <https://www.nationwidehousepriceindex.co.uk/reports/london-sees-biggest-house-price-premium-as-households-still-attach-significant-value-to-transport-links-despite-the-pandemic>

anchor institutions, land-use types or facilities on any released land, and why this cannot be achieved elsewhere.

Finally, if significant spend on maintenance and redevelopment is mandatory as the M8 reaches the end of its initial working life, this could be an opportunity for institutional reforms. Motorways are the responsibility of Transport Scotland, but transforming the M8 to a surface level trunk road with urban and economic redevelopment aims may justify the devolution of funding and powers to regional bodies. The study could review the feasibility of reforming links between, or combining, the local highways and economic authority, as with Transport for London and the Mayor of London. More radical and holistic reform could even include health and Community Wealth Building, as in Manchester where NHS devolution to the Mayoral level was designed to combine with economic development and transport change, to increase wellbeing and health outcomes.⁴ Proactive planning is likely to secure significant gains here, as the city centre's low residential and business density has previously limited the negative effects of traffic pollution. If redevelopment leads to land use intensification without traffic pollution reduction, health negatives will offset much of the economic positives.⁵

Faithfully,

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<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/profiles/prhw3>

⁴ Lorne, C et al (2020) 'Assembling the Healthopolis: Competitive city-regionalism and policy boosterism pushing Greater Manchester further, faster' <https://rgs-ibg.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/tran.12421>

⁵ Lee, D. Et al (2019) Estimating the health impact of air pollution in Scotland, and the resulting benefits of reducing concentrations in city centres.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877584518300716>

Reis, S. et al (2018) The influence of residential and workday population mobility on exposure to air pollution in the UK

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S016041201830864X>