

# Traffic



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Belfast is currently in the middle of a project to re-allocate road space in Belfast City Centre from general traffic to buses (and bicycles, taxis and motorbikes). The project is called Streets Ahead Enabling Measures, or STEM for short. It has got public attention over the past week because the opening of the new Oxford Street bus lane coincided with the schools going back. So far, feedback has been a mixture of positive and negative with car drivers reporting either no change or longer journey times, and bus users reporting either no change, or shorter journey times.

As European cities go, Belfast is a relatively car-dependent city. This means that quite a lot of people move about the city by car. This in itself is fine, as cars are convenient, comfortable and allow travel to almost anywhere. Belfast, like most other Western cities, displays evidence of the 50's and 60's road traffic engineering solutions that predominantly focussed on the needs of cars, in places strengthened by the need to contain civil unrest in some parts of the city. Unlike most other Western cities however, Belfast currently experiences low (but growing) congestion problems and still caters well for motorised traffic.

However, problems arise whenever the demand from car drivers exceeds the availability of road space. The result is congestion, when long tailbacks form and journey times go up. In Belfast city centre, this situation occurs twice a day – during the morning rush hour, and during the evening rush hour. During the working day, congestion is limited to certain very popular routes, eg Great Victoria Street or the Lisburn Road. There is no significant congestion in the evenings. Since most people agree that we want Belfast

City Centre to be a lively and prosperous place, we want the City Centre to be accessible to as many people as possible.

With the capacity of the city centre road network fixed, the only way to increase the capacity of the road network is to switch people to a method of travelling that is a more efficient use of road space – which in Belfast means buses, bicycles or walking. If you succeed in shifting a sufficient number of people onto buses, then you can squeeze more capacity out of the existing road network, and make the city centre more prosperous. Plus you get to feel good about lowering carbon emissions.