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Elders Council of Newcastle's Response to Newcastle City Council's Movement Strategy Consultation

Members of the Elders Council welcome the opportunity to provide a written response to the Movement Strategy. In this document, we set out key points relevant to older people in the city for consideration.

Additionally, we have circulated information to our members, worked with the Newcastle City Council Engagement Team to reach out to our members and Elders Council representatives and staff have attended the stakeholder consultation.

We acknowledge the broader concerns regarding the core principles of the Movement Strategy, particularly in relation to 'net zero' and 'sustainable growth,' and their implications for older people. There are several priority issues for older populations, including the unreliability of public transport, risks posed by e-scooters and cyclists, inadequate pedestrian crossing times, and the lack of accessible infrastructure such as bus shelters and information points. Additionally, we recognise the growing urgency of climate-related impacts on older people, including the need for shelter and shade, and we endorse measures such as car-free developments and stricter regulation of SUVs for their potential to create a safer, more sustainable urban environment.

We welcome the positive developments in the city, such as the improved safety at Barras Bridge through lane changes and pedestrian crossing adjustments, as well as the planned pedestrianisation of Blakett Street and the area around the new government building, which promise to enhance the city centre environment. However, we urge the Council to consider additional measures, such as accessible transport options for the less mobile—similar to Ljubljana's electric

vehicle initiative—to ensure these improvements benefit all residents, including older people.

1. Section 2 - Movement in Newcastle

1.1 Iconography Representing Older People (Page 7)

The icon identifying older people is ageist and 'othering.' While some individuals aged 65 to 74 may have mobility challenges requiring a stick or other support, the majority do not. On page 16, the term "the elderly" is used, which is inappropriate in this context. The term "older people" is more suitable and widely accepted. For most people aged 65 and over—who make up 15% of the City's population—mobility issues are comparable to those experienced by the broader population. That said, older people are more likely to experience mobility restrictions, as well as vision and hearing challenges, which can increase their risk compared to younger individuals.

1.2 Newcastle as a Regional Hub

Newcastle is a major hub for entertainment, shopping, and employment, all of which attract a proportion of older visitors from outside the city. Movement within, into, and out of Newcastle is as important for these visitors as it is for residents. The Elders Council (EC) considers their needs as much as those of City residents.

1.3 Essential Requirements for Public Services

The Elders Council recommends that Reliability, Regularity and Rideability are used as the core requirements for provision of these services to the public.

2. Section 3 - Developing the Movement Strategy: Vision and Guiding Principles

2.1 Consultation Process

The EC is concerned about the short consultation period and the limited number of venues and locations. While we appreciate the financial constraints faced by the City Council (NCC), we believe the consultation would benefit from an extended timeline and a broader range of venues across the City.

2.2 Alignment with Regional Strategies

We note that the Mayor of the North East Combined Authority (NECA) recently issued a consultation on updating its Local Transport Plan. While the timing is fortuitous, and the NECA remit seems focused on public transport, it would be helpful to understand how the Movement Strategy aligns with the NECA plan.

2.3 Policy Integration

The EC supports the Vision, and the four Guiding Principles outlined on page 10. It would be helpful to clarify how these principles align with other NCC policies, such as purchasing, contracting, planning, education, and training, as well as with national and regional government strategies. Strong alignment would enhance the practicality and impact of these principles.

3. Section 3 - Developing the Movement Strategy: Proposed Actions

3.1 General Comments

The proposed actions are comprehensive and generally uncontroversial from the EC's perspective. However, some are expressed in jargon that may be inaccessible to many. The absence of cost estimates at this stage is concerning. Many actions are long-term, resource-intensive, and dependent on external stakeholders, such as bus companies and the police. Without financially feasible short-term projects, the Strategy risks becoming an unattainable wish list. The EC recalls previous ambitious projects, such as "Going for Growth" and the Burns Plan, which failed to deliver.

3.2 Net Zero Newcastle

The proposals in this section are sensible and raise no specific concerns for the EC. However, terms such as "Blue and Green infrastructure" should be clarified.

3.3 Sustainable Growth

The proposals in this section are also reasonable but include unclear terminology, such as "place-making destinations" and "roadside space (where parking often occurs)." Most parking occurs at the roadside, so this phrase needs refinement. Additionally, older people rely on personal banking services, which are increasingly concentrated in the City Centre. We urge the Council to address this issue, recognising that banking policies are often decided at a national level.

3.4 Healthier, Active, and Safe

While these proposals are sensible, they do not go far enough. Measures to improve street lighting, limit the use of street furniture, and where it is necessary, provide strictly enforced areas in which it is placed, expand 20 mph speed limits, enhance footpath maintenance, provide regular seating that can be easily used by all, enforce regulations against pavement parking, address abandoned e-scooters, and improve cyclist behaviour (e.g., red-light running and lack of lights) should be included. Improved bus shelter design and better public transport integration are also critical. Improve and link up the connection of traffic crossings to allow pedestrians sufficient time to cross the road throughout the city. Effective enforcement of existing laws and regulations, in coordination with Northumbria Police, is vital to address these safety concerns.

3.5 Inclusive, Connected, and Efficient

These proposals are reasonable, but terms such as "efficient movement of goods" need clarification. If this refers to preventing delivery vehicles from blocking bus lanes or pavements (a persistent issue with brewery deliveries), it will address a genuine problem. Furthermore, while the Blue Badge scheme is helpful, it is restrictive. We suggest introducing a temporary Blue Badge scheme for individuals with short-term mobility challenges, without a lengthy application process.

Revisiting elements of the former Tyne and Wear County Council's Integrated Transport Strategy could benefit public transport users. For older people, abolishing the 9:30 a.m. travel restriction on buses and the metro would be particularly advantageous.

Finally, we welcome the commitment to collaborating with bus and Metro operators and hope this leads to improved reliability, encouraging greater public transport use.

25th November 2024