



Registered Charity No: 1168619

## **Response by The Belgravia Society to proposed Road Safety Improvements at Grosvenor Place and Duke of Wellington Place Gyratory**

### **Introduction**

1. The Belgravia Society ("the Society") is an Amenity Society with charitable status (Charity No. 1168619) set up in 2009 to represent the interests of residents in the area of London known as Belgravia. It currently has some 1,300 members and is extremely active in monitoring all planning developments and environmental and road traffic matters in and adjacent to Belgravia and in making appropriate representations to Westminster City Council ("WCC"), Transport for London ("TfL") and other appropriate bodies. The Belgravia Society therefore feels that it is of high importance for it to make a submission to this consultation by TfL regarding its proposals relating to Grosvenor Place and adjoining streets since this is an issue of great concern to the residents of Belgravia affected by these proposals.

### **Executive Summary**

2. The Society is deeply concerned about, and therefore objects strongly to, that part of TfL's current proposals which proposes changes to permitted vehicle movements by vehicles turning right out of Grosvenor Place. There are three principal reasons for this:-
  - a. These proposals would destroy what is currently a fairly reasonable and equitable distribution of traffic between three streets leading off Grosvenor Place, namely Chapel Street, Chester Street and Wilton Street and would instead impose a much greater weight of traffic on a single street, Wilton Street, which is currently a quiet residential street occupied by families with children. The Society understands that it has been a long-established principle of road traffic management in this area that these three streets should be treated fairly and equally.
  - b. The proposals would not provide a proper solution to the safety issue they aim to address because they would still allow a right turn from Grosvenor Place into Wilton Street in circumstances which, for the reasons set out in more detail below, are likely to increase driver frustration and therefore lead to greater risk-taking by drivers than at present and therefore more, not less, risk of collisions with vehicles travelling northwards up Grosvenor Place. These proposals would also still permit a right turn (or so it seems) out of Chapel Street into Grosvenor Place which could also lead to collisions.
  - c. The Society believes that, for the reasons set out in more detail below, Wilton Street is in fact the least suitable of the three streets mentioned to bear a greatly increased weight of traffic.

In summary, the Society believes that the current proposals violate the long-established principle of treating the three relevant side streets equally and fairly and do not in fact solve the problem they seek to address.

## Detailed Examination of the Proposals

3. In the view of the Society, Wilton Street is not suitable to act as a conduit for traffic to pass into and through Belgravia for the following reasons:-
  - a. While there is a general perception that Wilton Street is a relatively wide street this is not really the case. Wide-bodied vehicles (from SUVs to trucks) cannot pass a vehicle coming in the opposite direction. This is evidenced by the extensive damage done to cars parked in Wilton Street, with some cars written off and a few months ago a car having its entire side caved in.
  - b. At the intersection of Grosvenor Place and Wilton Street (where construction work on the Cleveland Clinic is currently ongoing) two cars have difficulty passing. Cars waiting to turn left out of Wilton Street will block any commercial vehicles entering from Grosvenor Place.
  - c. This problem of Wilton Street being blocked already arises regularly because Wilton Street, at its eastern end, is already frequently used by commercial traffic. The loading bay for Noura, Eaton Square Restaurant, the Mango Tree and a substantial number of commercial tenants at 40 Grosvenor Place is at the Grosvenor Place end of Wilton Street. This means that 80-90 commercial vehicles per day already use the intersection between Grosvenor Place and Wilton Street. It will be appreciated that every time a commercial vehicle goes into the loading bay (usually at peak times) it waits in the road for 20-30 seconds until the large steel doors open. Please see below various photographs which illustrate very clearly the extent to which the eastern end of Wilton Street is already subject to blockages. Clearly adding a further weight of traffic to this entrance would severely exacerbate an already significant problem.
  - d. The only western exit from Wilton Street is Upper Belgrave Street whereas vehicles exiting the western end of Chapel Street can drive straight across the southern side of Belgrave Square and travel on to Pont Street, Knightsbridge etc. and vehicles exiting the western end of Chester Street have the option, having entered Upper Belgrave Street, of turning right into Eaton Place and travelling further westwards by that route.

In the case of vehicles exiting the western end of Wilton Street, particularly since Hobart Place has been narrowed, there are very often queues of waiting traffic up Upper Belgrave Street past Wilton Street. Accordingly, adding 450 cars a day to this existing situation (TfL estimate) will have the result of causing stationary traffic to queue in Wilton Street as it waits to turn into Upper Belgrave Street. As is now well known, stationary traffic is a major cause of air pollution which has a particularly detrimental effect on children and, as already pointed out, Wilton Street is home to many families with children.

4. Banning right turns from Grosvenor Place into Chapel Street and Chester Street but permitting a right turn into Wilton Street clearly does not represent a complete solution to the alleged road safety issues since traffic will still be attempting to turn right into Wilton Street across northbound traffic travelling up Grosvenor Place. Indeed, the road safety risk is likely to be significantly increased because, as explained in 3 above, the eastern entrance to Wilton Street will often be blocked by commercial traffic using the loading bay and the difficulty of large vehicles passing each other in Wilton Street. This will lead to the formation of a very long queue of traffic in Grosvenor Place waiting to make what will be the only remaining permitted right turn off Grosvenor Place. If drivers have had to wait for a lengthy period of time before finally being able to turn right into Wilton Street, they are likely to take more risks in crossing northbound traffic.

There is an additional problem in that there is a bus stop on the eastern side of Grosvenor Place and just north of the entrance to Wilton Street precisely at the point

where vehicles will be queuing to turn right. If a bus is waiting at this bus stop there is too little space for larger vehicles (e.g. buses, coaches or commercial vehicles) travelling south along Grosvenor Place to pass through between the bus and the traffic queuing to turn right. This will obviously lead to potential traffic jams on the southbound side of Grosvenor Place. If the pocket designed to accommodate right-turning traffic into Wilton Street becomes full, there is a risk of southbound traffic in Grosvenor Place becoming confused and slowing, leading to more congestion in Grosvenor Place.

As noted above, the current proposal appears to envisage permitting a right turn from Chapel Street into Grosvenor Place which also creates the potential for collisions with vehicles travelling north up Grosvenor Place.

5. In contrast to the unsuitability of Wilton Street to be the sole right turn from Grosvenor Place, either Chapel Street or Chester Street would demonstrably be much better candidates.
  - a. In the case of Chapel Street, as already noted, vehicles exiting the western end have the opportunity to drive straight through Belgrave Square.
  - b. In the case of Chester Street, the pedestrian traffic lights just south of the eastern entrance to Chester Street provide a natural break in northbound traffic and thus create a safe opportunity for traffic to turn right into Chester Street. In addition, there is a physical barrier in the form of the pedestrian crossing traffic island which protects queuing traffic from oncoming northbound traffic. Also, as noted above, traffic exiting the western end of Chester Street has the option of travelling further west by turning into Eaton Place.
  - c. Traffic exiting the western end of Wilton Street has no option but to turn left into Upper Belgrave Street and a driver wishing to travel towards Knightsbridge would have to turn right into Eaton Square and then right again to head back into Belgrave Square as his only means of reaching Knightsbridge.

## Conclusions

6. The South Westminster Traffic Management System Study 2012 concluded that right turns into Grosvenor Place should be reviewed but did not consider banning right turns out of Grosvenor Place. This was because the traffic flows better through the three roads (Chapel, Chester and Wilton) rather than, as TfL's proposals envisage, concentrating all the traffic down one road, Wilton Street. One alternative therefore is to leave the right turns from Grosvenor Place as they currently are.

Another possibility, which would completely address the road safety problems that concern TfL, would be to ban all right turns from Grosvenor Place, leaving Grosvenor Crescent as the main conduit for traffic wishing to cross Belgravia in a westerly direction. Grosvenor Crescent is a major thoroughfare and not a family-oriented street (as Wilton Street is) and therefore would be better-suited to be such a conduit.

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