

York Street Interchange - Placemaking and Active Travel Review

1 Background

The York Street Interchange (YSI) Scheme

The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) has developed proposals to provide a grade-separated junction at York Street that would provide direct links between the Westlink and the M2 and M3 motorways.

The DfI scheme objectives are:

- To remove a bottleneck on the strategic road network;
- To deliver an affordable solution to assist in reducing congestion on the strategic road network;
- To improve reliability of strategic journey times for the travelling public;
- To improve access to the regional gateways from the Eastern Seaboard Key Transport Corridor;
- To maintain access to existing properties, community facilities and commercial interests;
- To maintain access for pedestrians and cyclists; and
- To improve separation between strategic and local traffic.

The scheme awaits progression to procurement and construction, subject to the availability of funding and the completion of the remaining statutory procedures.

The Placemaking and Active Travel Review

In 2020, the Infrastructure Minister commissioned a Placemaking and Active Travel Review (PATR) of the scheme, to:

- Undertake further analysis around placemaking to identify opportunities to deliver benefits for communities, particularly in terms of connectivity and the wider living places agenda; and
- Consider how DfI can maximise the social, economic and environmental benefits of the project and its contribution to the future development of Belfast.

The study area for the PATR is illustrated in **Figure 1**. The road layout for the scheme leading up to the PATR review is illustrated in **Figure 2**, with a number of already planned placemaking interventions highlighted and illustrated below.

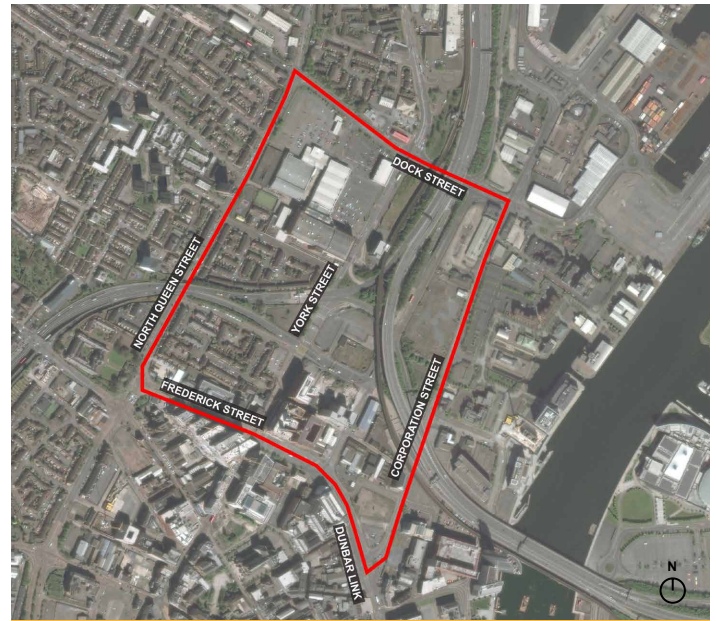


Figure 1. Placemaking and Active Travel Review study area

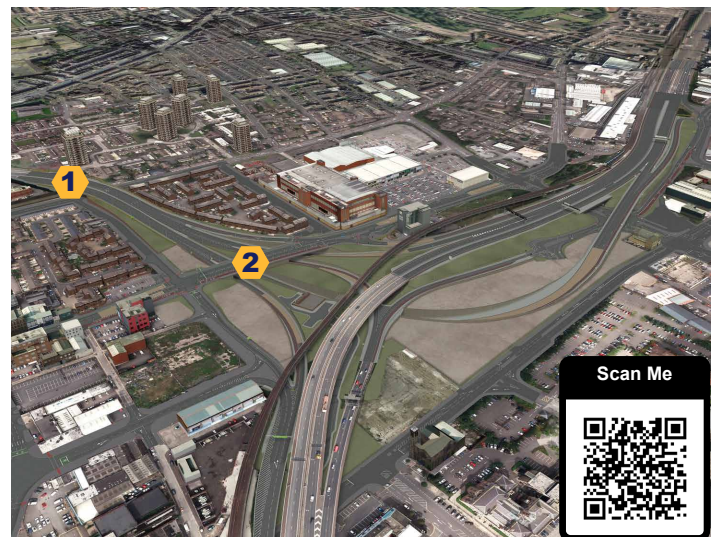


Figure 2: Current York Street Interchange road layout and placemaking interventions



Brick cladding and feature lighting proposals for North Queen Street bridge



Linenopolis design theme for York Street bridge parapets and paving

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2 Active Travel Review

Active travel is a key component of good placemaking design and a sustainable transport network.

As part of the review, AECOM completed an assessment of existing provision for active travel in the study area and devised a potential active travel network. Parts of this active travel network would be delivered by the future York Street Interchange scheme with the remainder potentially delivered as separate schemes by DfI or other government agencies, for example, the Department for Communities (DfC).

Proposed changes to introduce segregated cycling facilities along routes and at junctions are fully aligned with DfI's Belfast Bicycle Network Plan.

The proposed network is illustrated in **Figure 3**, with a number of visuals included below to illustrate what these proposals may look like.

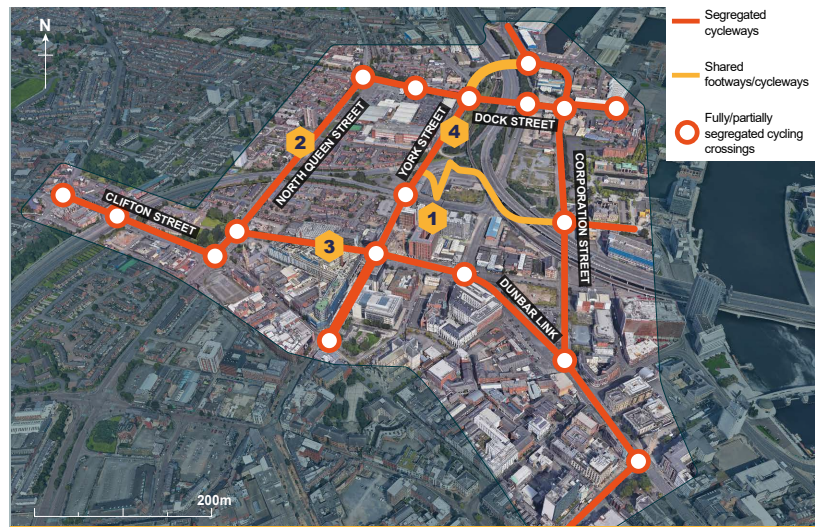


Figure 3. Proposed active travel network extents



Active travel improvements to York Street / Great Georges Street junction



Active travel improvements to North Queen Street



Active travel improvements York Street / Frederick Street junction



Before



After

Proposed changes to York Street cross-section for improved cycling and pedestrian facilities

3 Placemaking Review Process

The project's principles and aspirations were established from a review of existing policies and plans, engagement meetings with a range of stakeholders, an international review of best practice and the project team's analysis of the area. The PATR process is shown in **Figure 4** below:



According to the Project for Public Spaces (PPS), Placemaking is 'more than just better urban design; it facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution.'

The PATR has drawn on the Place Diagram to identify 4 Guiding Themes, 11 Guiding Principles, and 31 Desired Outcomes for the study area as illustrated in **Figure 6**. These reflect the main policy objectives in the City and the study area as shown in **Figure 7** below.

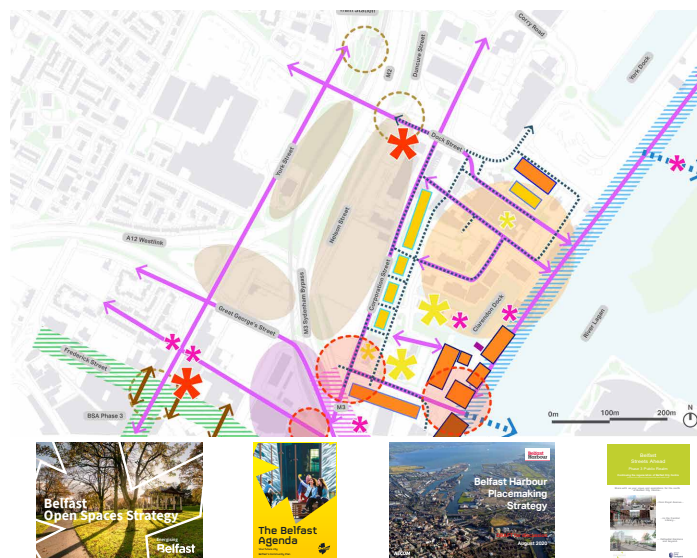
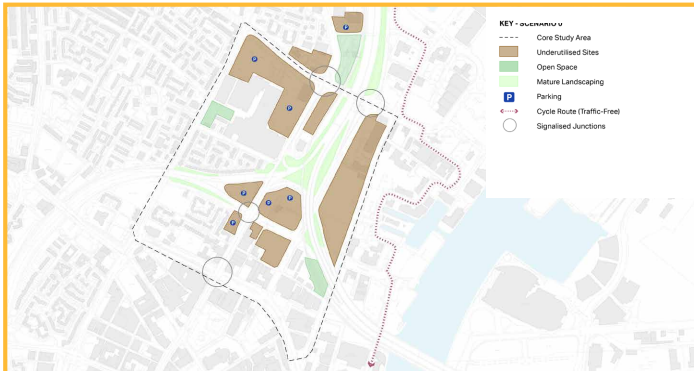


Figure 7. The PATR reviewed existing plans and strategies to identify key objectives and opportunities for better placemaking and connectivity

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4 Placemaking Scenarios and Assessment

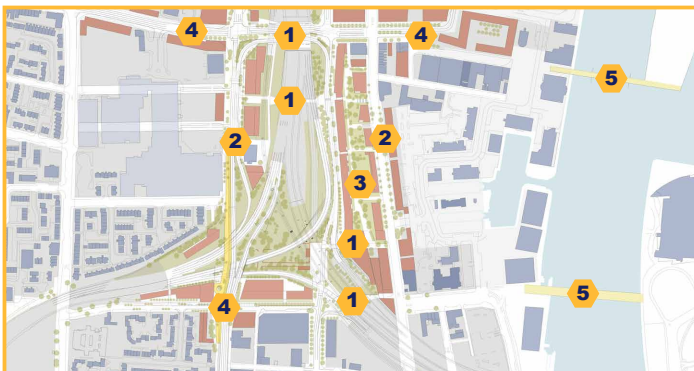
A series of potential placemaking proposals have been developed including a number that could be delivered by DfI as part of the YSI project and others that could be delivered by different public agencies and the private sector. These proposals have been grouped into 6 placemaking Scenarios and evaluated against the PATR Guiding Principles and Desired Outcomes shown on Board 3.



Scenario 0: Existing condition

Scenario 0 reflects the existing conditions without the YSI scheme or PATR proposals.

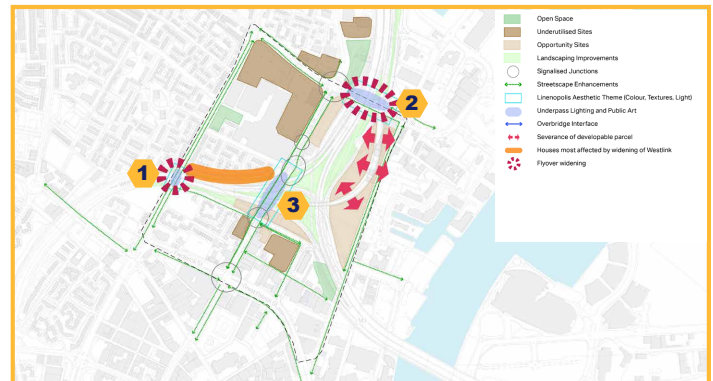
Evaluation: Evaluated against the PATR Desired Outcomes, the area today was considered to exemplify a very low level of placemaking with some of the most challenging attributes of urban living but with the potential to achieve many of the best.



Scenario 2: Alternative proposal developed by the Ashton Community Trust

Scenario 2 is the alternative proposal. It includes proposals for new and improved east-west **1** and north-south **2** pedestrian connections, a new urban village at Sailortown **3**, redevelopment of vacant and underutilised sites across the area **4** for housing, employment and community uses, and new pedestrian and cycle bridges across the River Lagan **5**.

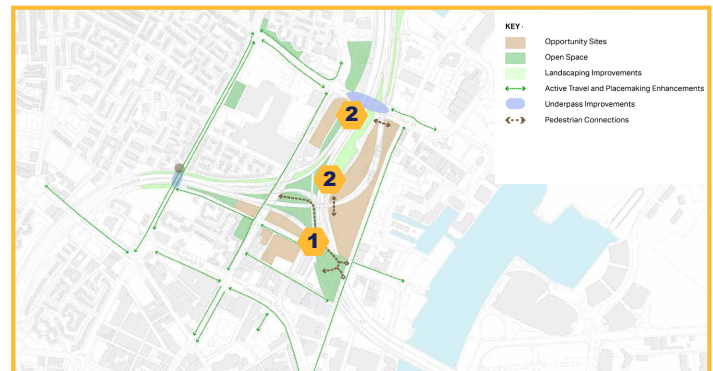
Evaluation: A scheme that delivers significantly greater placemaking benefits compared to the current YSI design and which highlights a number of important placemaking opportunities. However, it does not meet the DfI scheme objectives (see Board 1) and includes several areas that could be improved upon.



Scenario 1: Current YSI Scheme

Scenario 1 reflects the current YSI design, with the inclusion of feature lighting at the North Queen Street **1** and Dock Street bridges **2** and the Linenopolis design theme **3** (see Board 1). However, the proposed Active Travel Network (see Board 2) and wider placemaking proposals are excluded.

Evaluation: A scheme which includes well considered placemaking proposals for landscape, public realm, and public art, which deliver improvements as compared to Scenario 0. However, it does not maximise the opportunities to deliver benefits for communities in terms of connectivity and the wider Living Places agenda (DfI's Urban Stewardship and Design Guide) or satisfy the DfI objectives for active travel.



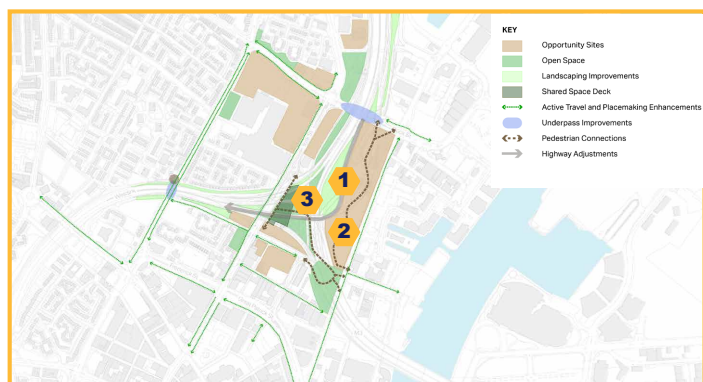
Scenario 3: Refined YSI Scheme with active travel and placemaking enhancements

Scenario 3 includes the existing YSI scheme design (as in Scenario 1) but with the addition of the active travel network across the area (as shown on Board 2) and focused placemaking improvements to the existing scheme design. These include a new pedestrian and cycle link between Corporation Street and York Street **1** and better connections across the interchange link to the land between it and the M2 **2**.

Evaluation: A substantial improvement in placemaking benefits compared to Scenario 1 and slightly better than Scenario 2. The active travel and related placemaking elements are a key enabler of this up-lift in placemaking benefits. Retaining the existing YSI design means that this scenario also meets the DfI scheme objectives.

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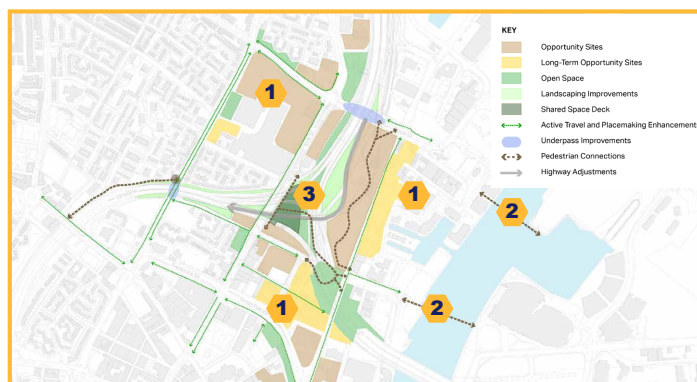
5 Placemaking Scenarios and Assessment



Scenario 3A: Substantial refinements to the YSI Scheme

Scenario 3A includes more substantial refinements to the existing YSI scheme and the active travel network. The refinements include a realignment of the interchange link between the M2 and the Westlink **1**, creating a larger development parcel to the west of Corporation Street **2** and the creation of a green deck over the interchange to the east of York Street enabling the creation of a new public space **3**.

Evaluation: This scenario has the potential to deliver a higher level of placemaking benefits compared to Scenarios 2 and 3. Subject to further road design, technical approval and cost assessment it is considered that this would also continue to meet the DfI scheme objectives.



Scenario 4: Substantial refinements to the YSI scheme with wider area opportunities

Scenario 4 includes all the elements of Scenario 3A but also introduces a wider set of placemaking interventions across the study area. These include the redevelopment of land owned by other public bodies and the private sector **1** and the pedestrian and cycle bridges across the Lagan **2** as proposed in Scenario 2. In addition, Scenario 4 includes a larger green deck over the interchange to the east of York Street **3**, creating the potential for a significant new open space.

Evaluation: This is the most ambitious scenario showing substantial potential to improve placemaking across the wider area. These wider opportunities are important in delivering the more strategic, city scale connectivity improvements and enhancing the liveability and attractiveness of the area. These benefits are subject to the same road design, technical and cost assessments as Scenario 3A, but would also require investment from other public bodies and the private sector.

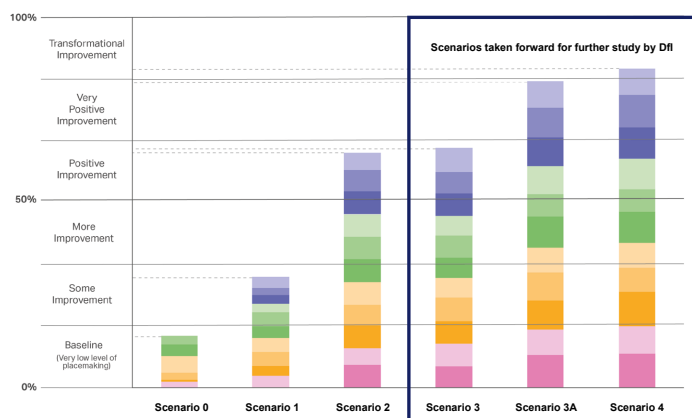


Figure 8. Evaluation of the placemaking benefits of the six Scenarios

Conclusions and Recommendations

Figure 8 opposite shows the relative performance of the six placemaking Scenarios against the PATR Development Principles and Desired Outcomes. It highlights the potential for a significant up-lift in placemaking outcomes compared to the current scheme with Scenarios 2 and 3 showing positive improvement overall, Scenario 3A very positive improvement and Scenario 4 transformational improvement.

A key consideration in evaluating the placemaking Scenarios is that Scenario 2 does not meet the DfI scheme objectives in terms of removing a bottleneck on the strategic road network. However, many of the placemaking and connectivity opportunities identified in Scenario 2 have been included into Scenarios 3, 3A and 4 which, subject to further technical analysis and assessment, do meet the DfI scheme objectives.

On this basis the PATR report recommended, that from a Placemaking and Active Travel perspective, DfI continue to develop and refine Scenarios 3, 3A and 4.

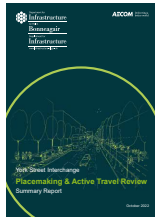
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6 Next Steps and Community Information Event

Publication of Placemaking and Active Travel Review Report

The Infrastructure Minister in October 2022 accepted the recommendations of the AECOM review, with Scenarios 3, 3A and 4 shortlisted for further development and assessment. AECOM's summary report has been published on the scheme's website at: www.yorkstreetinterchange.com

You can access the report by using your smartphone camera to scan the QR barcode.



Community Information Event

Following the publication of the Placemaking and Active Travel Review report in October 2022, the Department and its consultants AECOM will deliver a presentation to interested members of the public on the completed process and next steps for the scheme.

The presentation will be delivered at the Ulster University in Belfast (see venue map below) on the following dates:

Thursday 22nd June 2023 at 7pm

Ulster University Block BC

Friday 23rd June 2023 at 7pm

Ulster University Block BC

Spaces are limited and interest may be high, so please register your attendance by scanning the QR barcode with your smartphone camera or by visiting:

www.yorkstreetinterchange.com

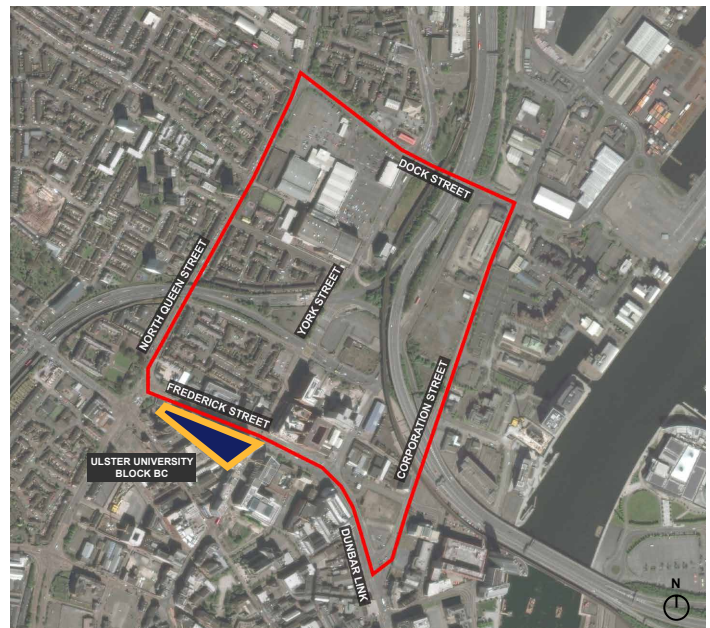


Next Steps

Department officials and AECOM are now working in more detail to develop the shortlisted Scenarios and assess their respective advantages and disadvantages, to enable a future Infrastructure Minister to make an informed decision on the scheme going forward. This will include issues such as cost, engineering feasibility, environmental impact and impact on already completed statutory procedures.

Further Information

All published information in relation to the scheme is available on the scheme website at www.yorkstreetinterchange.com or by using your smartphone's camera to scan the QR barcode.



Map showing the locations of Ulster University Block BC

