

Hon. Prime Minister Dr Robert Abela
Hon. Deputy Prime Minister Dr Chris Fearne
Hon. Minister Dr Aaron Farrugia
Hon. Minister Dr Ian Borg

28th December 2020

Re: Msida Creek Project

Dear Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Ministers,

In light of the Msida Creek/Msida traffic junction project proposal, we would like to offer our recommendations as a means of building on the government's recent initiatives such as the reform of the Development Planning Fund and the Slow Streets Initiative. We noticed that a call for tenders was published, while the planning application was still at screening stage and are sending our proposals in anticipation of a public consultation.

The Msida Promenade with its surrounding businesses is an important public open space available within walking distance for Msida and Pieta residents. It is a natural valley right in between two of the largest education institutions (University and Junior College), hospitals, startups and some of the busiest business and residential centres. Numerous commuters travelling between these areas are either of a younger/older age or residents/visitors who seek alternatives to private vehicles. There is a considerable flow of pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users on a daily basis.

We believe that the project being proposed can be modified to cater beyond the needs of the private vehicle. Malta is characterised by high population density and limited space so the Msida Creek presents an opportunity for a forward-looking infrastructural solution which facilitates sustainable transport and improves our possibility of meeting ambitious EU targets for reducing emissions.

We would therefore like to propose that this urban landscape is transformed into a new and improved public transport interchange with the potential to provide a major public open space, building on the historic context, strengthening the commercial potential and quality of life while maximising the potential of the mature trees in the existing playing field. This has even been suggested by the Planning Authority's own local plan.

The idea is to better serve the residents, public transport commuters and the numerous students and facilitate the cycling experience as well as walking, often the transportation mode for those most vulnerable. In this sense, we feel it is important to understand the routes/axis which these commuters use and provide the most direct and convenient movement paths to support them and further encourage a shift by others towards the use of sustainable transport modes. We would like to ensure that the needs of everyone are addressed.

Currently we feel that the use of lifts and stairs to cross the bridges above the vehicular traffic will create an added inconvenience and further hinder those choosing to cycle, or persons with reduced mobility (which includes any mother or father with a pushchair or young child), forcing them back to cars as a transportation mode. Our main observations and interests are listed in more detail in the annex below.

We may even look at other local town centre projects which proved successful. In Paola, traffic was redirected to create a public environment for the residents and business community. In Cottonera, through traffic was redirected to prioritise the creation of a quality public realm for Bormla's town centre in probably what is one of the best regeneration projects in recent times.

The residents and business communities surrounding the Msida Creek would benefit from a high-quality urban environment which allows for recreation and physical activity thus supporting public health, which is conducive to spending-time, therefore supporting the retail and leisure services and economic activity in the area. Together, it is possible to devise a solution which rethinks the traffic flow from the local town centre, as advocated in the National Transport Masterplan. This while retaining and improving the existing open space and trees, restoring some of the beauty of a natural valley and connecting it to the waterfront and church so as to create a piazza and quality public space for the community, while still providing kiosk areas which are so popular in the summer months, with the sound of tombola numbers echoing in the summer nights. There is clearly a community here which needs our attention.

We therefore ask that the objectives and design of this project are re-evaluated to consider the existing community, sensitive environmental and historic context and sustainable transport modes. In an era where: European cities are removing vehicular oriented infrastructure from urban areas so as to repair and reconnect their city centres; and continued specialisation of the built environment profession allows for interdisciplinary working, shouldn't we try and adopt a more integrated approach? Isn't it time for our local town centres to prioritise public spaces, pedestrians, families and children? Isn't it time to prioritise our health and environment?

Yours Sincerely,

Rota
Friends of the Earth Malta
Flimkien għal Ambjent Aħjar
Moviment Graffiti
Din L-Art Helwa
The Archaeological Society Malta
Friends of Villa Frere
Malta Chamber of Planners
Project Aegle Foundation
The Ramblers Association of Malta
Perit Sarah Scheiber
Professor Maria Attard
Dr Claire Bonello
Mr Antoine Gatt, Landscape Architect
Suzanne Maas, PhD Candidate Sustainable Mobility
Dr Stefano Moncada
Mr Bjorn Bonello
Professor Keith Sciberras
Dr Reuben Grima
Perit Alberto Miceli-Farrugia
Professor Alexiei Dingli
Dr Mario V. Balzan
Perit Joanna Spiteri Staines
Dr Irina Miadragovic Vella

Dr Shirley Cefai
Ms Jennifer Porter
Dr Chiara Pasian
Ms Roberta De Angelis
Prof. Nicholas Vella

Annex

Our main observations and interests are:

1. **Ensuring that the new infrastructure will deal with the needs of all commuters:** We believe that if the need for safe and convenient infrastructure is being addressed, they will not be required to use a car for travelling. Improving traffic flow is important but as a nation we have carried out enough projects which address one particular 'bottleneck', to know that providing solutions which primarily address the private car are not enough to solve the traffic congestion and emissions problem. As it stands the proposal encourages through traffic to drive through the area (which is not part of the TEN-T network) without interruption and therefore potentially at higher speeds.
2. **Prioritising active mobility and facilitating the cycling experience as well as walking by providing direct and accessible paths:** Using lifts and stairs to cross the bridges above the vehicular traffic will create an added inconvenience and further hinder those choosing to cycle, or persons with reduced mobility, forcing them back to cars as a transportation mode.
3. **Rethinking traffic flow:** The National Transport Master Plan 2025 which was praised at EU level and committed to at a National Level in 2016/2017, includes this section of the road network under Road Transport Objective 2.2.8 which aims to "Improve the Functionality of Strategic Roads, Provide Secondary Connectivity and Improve the Quality of the Urban Area". More specifically, the measure for this area is to "improve provisions for pedestrians, cycling and public transport and change functionality to redirect through traffic onto the TEN-T network". The plan also identifies the potential for a cycling corridor and public transport quality corridor through the area. Such objectives and measures which were developed as a result of holistic analysis and studies at a national level, are part of a strategy and plan to provide a sustainable way forward for transport in Malta.
4. **Improving the well-being of our local communities:** The National Transport Strategy 2050 also states that one of its goals is to support social inclusion and development. More specifically it states that the development of transport infrastructure should aim to reduce severance and adverse impact on specific communities by reducing the impact of traffic in town centres, with the aim of improving the quality of the public realm to support cohesion of communities. The Msida Creek area is identified in the North Harbour Local Plan as the local town centre of Msida. This could also be an opportunity to increase the provision of recreational green space for the wider community.