

Traffic Movement Survey

Fishpool Street/Romeland Hill/Welclose Street

05 October to 08 October 2023

Traffic movements were observed during a four day period in October 2023 during Phase 2 of the High Street Recovery trials. This followed comments raised suggesting excess traffic was being diverted down side roads as a result of the trial measures. The survey covers two weekdays (Thursday and Friday) and two weekend days (Saturday and Sunday). Under the trial measures, George Street was closed to vehicular traffic on all four days apart from a window between 7am and 11am, when access was one way from west to east from Verulam Road to Romeland. High Street was closed on the weekends.

The aim of the study is to see the extent of traffic turning into Welclose Street and determine the extent of traffic through the junction. Traffic is divided up into cars, vans, HGVs (trucks), coaches, motorcycles and cycles. A one hour section was used to crudely assess pedestrian traffic as a proportion of other motorised and non-motorised traffic.

Fishpool Street transitions to Romeland Hill at the junction with Welclose Street. This is a two-way street. Welclose Street is one way in at the junction. One motor vehicle was observed exiting the street against the flow of traffic during the four day period.

No pre-trial data was available for comparison.

The camera used for the counts was installed at 12pm on Wednesday 4 October and was removed again on Wednesday 11 October at 9:05am. The camera was operational from 7am to 7pm each day. Each video segment viewed was approximately 68 minutes long.

Area Overview

The streets in this area have a P2/M1 classification under Hertfordshire County Council's Place & Movement Design Guide. This means place should be prioritised over movement. It was observed that in most cases people were comfortable walking in the road and crossing in diagonals. St Albans School is located at Abbey Gateway and this is a drop off and pick up point for school coaches and school minibuses. These, with the addition of parents dropping off and picking up from cars, make this a more traffic focused space around school pick up and drop off times during the school week.

Data Summary

Over the course of the four days, 4,891 vehicle movements of different types were observed through the junction between 7am and 7pm, an average of 1,222.75. Friday had the highest traffic movements, with 1,356; Sunday had the lowest with 1,079. Overall, traffic movements were quite consistent, but there are different patterns through the days when looking in detail.

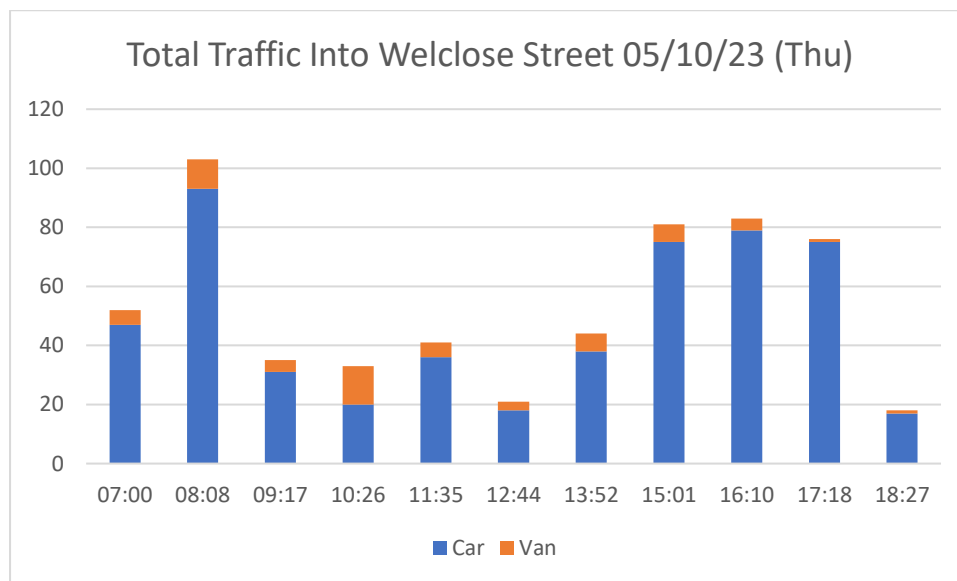
When a one-hour period was studied in more depth, 66% of movements through the junction was on foot. (This was a lunchtime period outside of school start and finish times). This potentially extrapolates to 3,000 movements through the junction on a typical day (7am to 7pm) with around 2,000 of these being pedestrian (and over 8,000 pedestrian movements over the four day period).

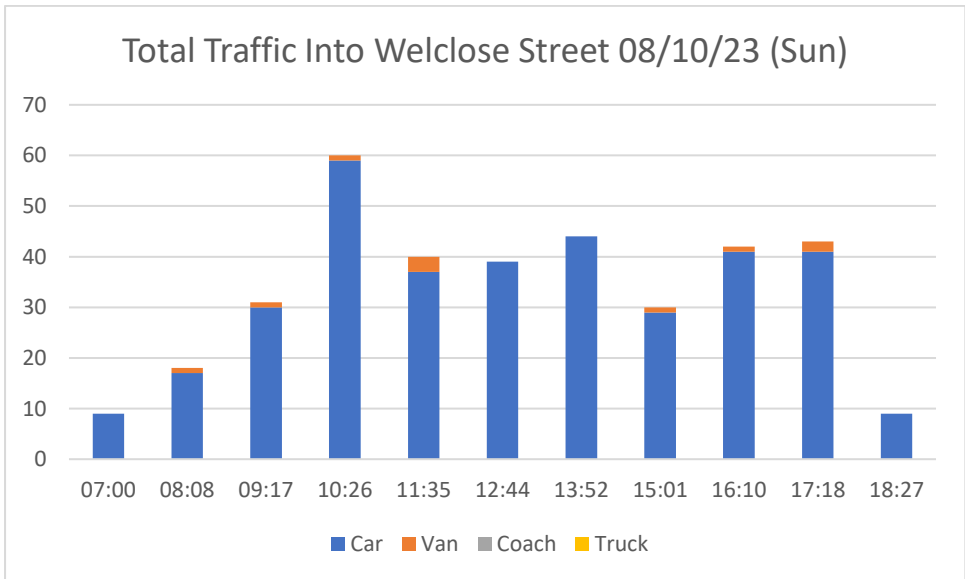
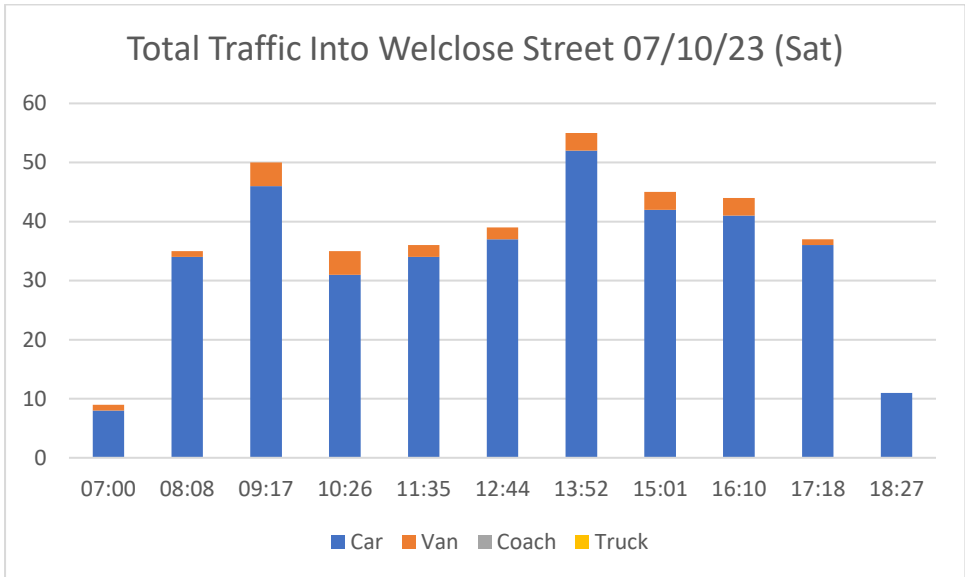
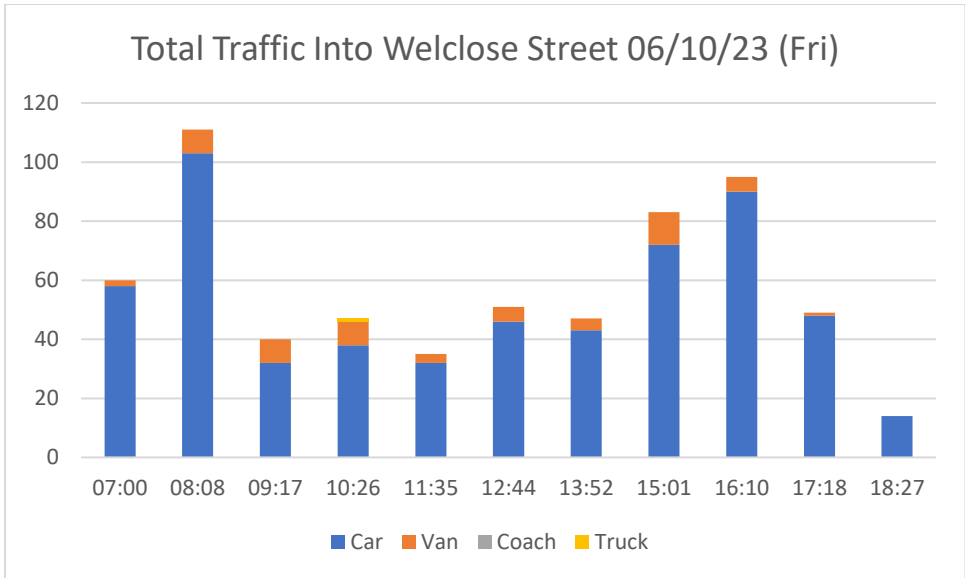
Traffic Into Welclose Street

Traffic was counted entering Welclose Street turning left from Fishpool Street and right from Romeland Hill (see Figures 1-4). Over the course of the four days, 2,104 traffic movement were observed into Welclose Street. One vehicle was observed exiting the street against the one-way arrangement. This is an average of 526 vehicles per day. However, the weekday average is 636.5 and the weekend average is 415.5, so weekday traffic is over 50% greater than weekend traffic entering Welclose Street. The main reasons for the uplift between the weekday and weekend traffic counts into Welclose Street appears to be commuter and school traffic.

The peak period from 8:08am on Friday saw 111 motorised vehicles enter Welclose Street. While on the face of it, this appears low (at less than two per minute), the flow throughout the 68-minute segment is not consistent, focused around the school start time, and sometimes several parent cars are 'released' at one time due to the movement of buses.

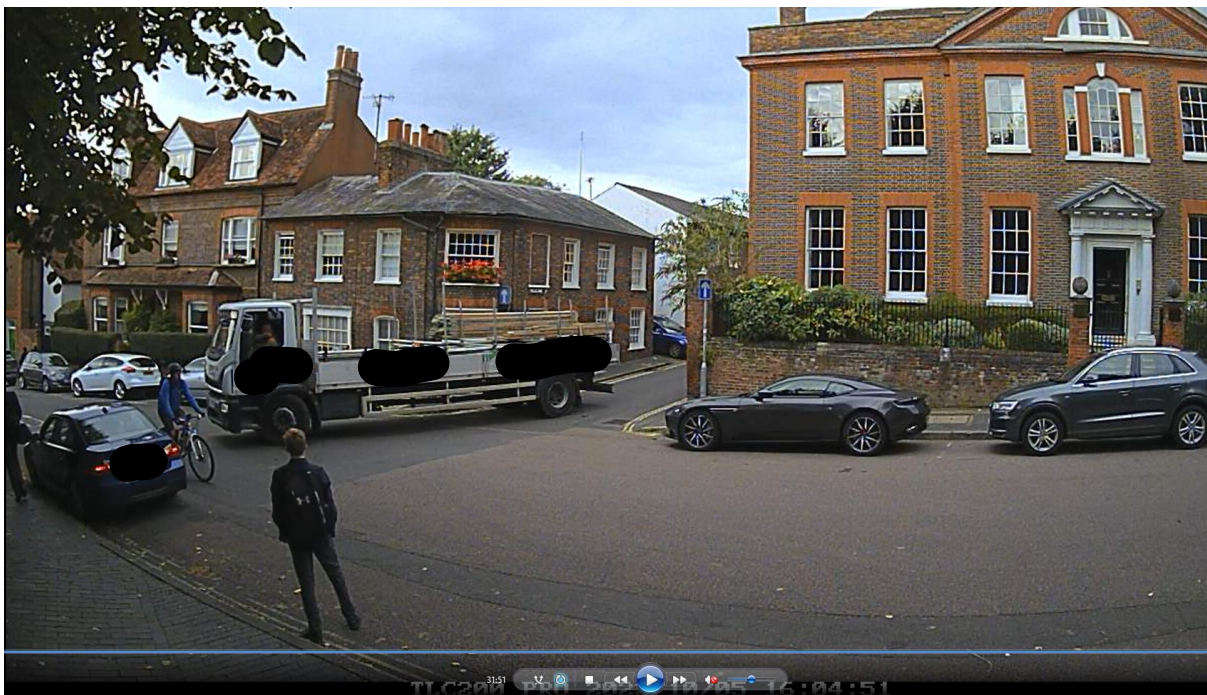
There does not appear to be an increase in the number of large (van sized) vehicles using Welclose Street associated with school and commuter traffic on Thursday and Friday. School minibuses were observed continuing down Fishpool Street in the same direction as the coaches. Ten or more vans were observed entering Welclose Street (within a 68-minute segment) on three occasions, at 8:08am Thursday, 10:26am Thursday and 15:01pm Friday. There are fewer van movements into Welclose Street on Saturday and fewer still on Sunday.





Figures 1-4: Vehicle Traffic Movements into George Street

Only one HGV sized vehicle was observed entering Welclose Street. This was a refuse truck on Friday. One scaffold truck also reversed into Welclose Street in order to perform a three-point turn (see Figures 5-6). This was executed without a banksman, even though there were two people in the cab. This took place on 5th October at 16:04 when pupils were exiting the school and as a cyclist was coming past. It is not thought that the decision to perform this manoeuvre was related to the lack of access to George Street.



Figures 5-6: Scaffold Truck Reversing into Welclose Street After School

There is a good argument that if the truck had been able to access George Street (even if that was the driver's intention) that this would have caused significant problems with coaches coming in the opposite direction.

The majority of traffic movements into Welclose Street are from Romeland Hill, so would have originated from Spicer Street, Abbey Mill Lane or George Street (between 7 and 11am). Only 17.5% of the traffic entering Welclose Street comes from Fishpool Street. 39% less traffic entered Welclose Street at the weekend in comparison with Thursday and Friday (see Table 1).

	From Fishpool Street	From Romeland
05/10/2023	101	514
06/10/2023	94	564
07/10/2023	59	364
08/10/2023	62	346

Table 1: Source of Traffic Entering Welclose Street

Fishpool Street towards George Street

It has been commented that traffic is still coming up Fishpool Street (perhaps following satellite navigation systems) and not expecting George Street to be no entry from this direction, turning in the road, sometimes going the wrong way down Spicer Street (and George Street when open) rather than turning into Romeland.

While traffic movements in this direction only represent 12.5% of all traffic through the junction, there is a larger proportion of traffic moving in this direction at the weekend (a 63% increase in the proportion of traffic). This could represent people being dropped off for shopping at the bottom of George Street and could also represent drivers following satnavs and hoping to get to the city centre.

	Fishpool Street to Romeland Hill	Total Junction Movements	
05/10/2023	113	1275	8.9%
06/10/2023	147	1356	10.8%
07/10/2023	178	1181	15.1%
08/10/2023	174	1079	16.1%
	612	4891	12.5%

Table 2: Traffic travelling straight on from Fishpool Street to Romeland Hill and comparison with total junction movements

Early in Phase 2 of the trials, advanced warning signage was located in St Michael's Street. It was requested that this was removed as it was deemed unsightly by residents. Following the sealing of the PTRO, it is now possible for satnav companies to be advised that George Street is one way. A right turn arrow is also to be painted on the carriageway approaching George Street to encourage traffic around Romeland Garden.

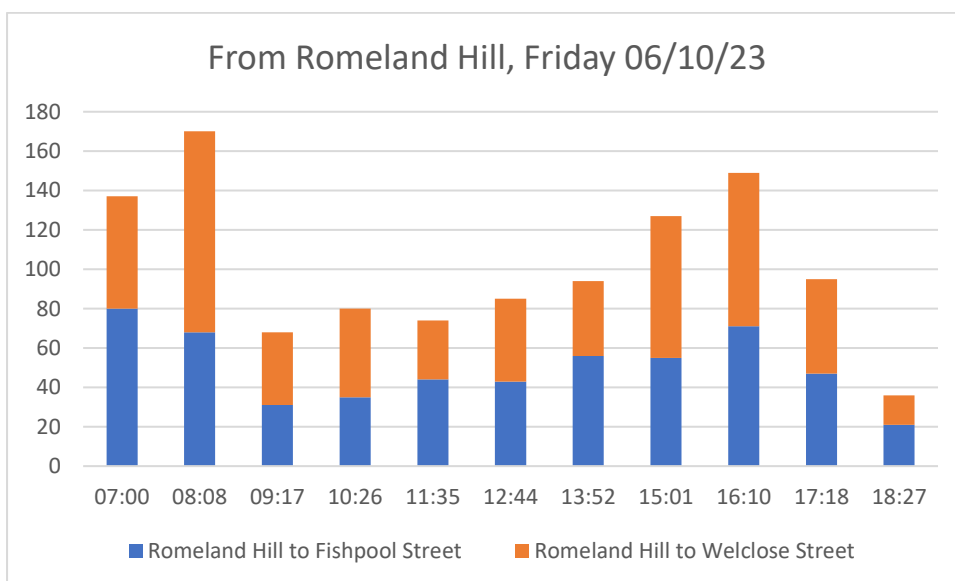
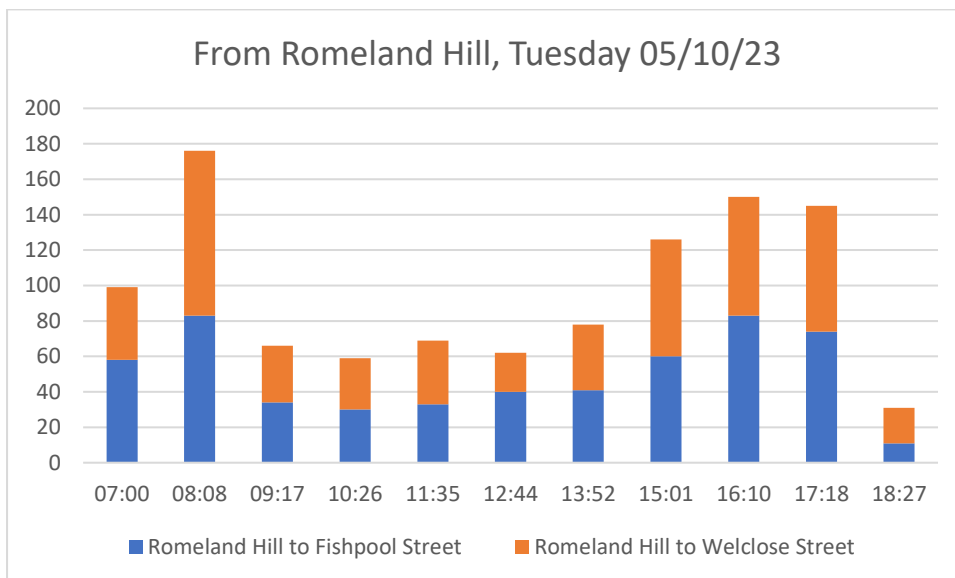
A small proportion of traffic may be expecting to travel up George Street but rediverting along Welclose Street.

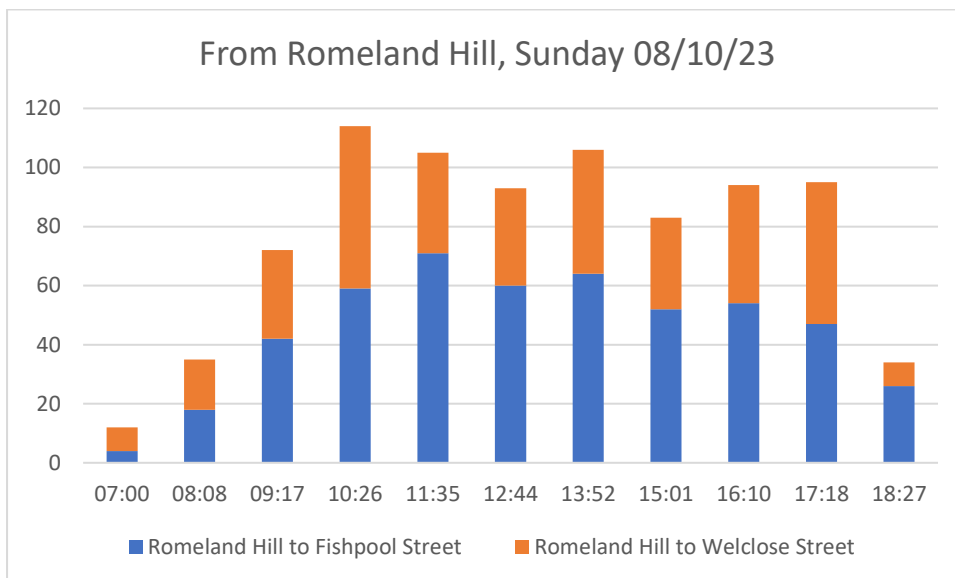
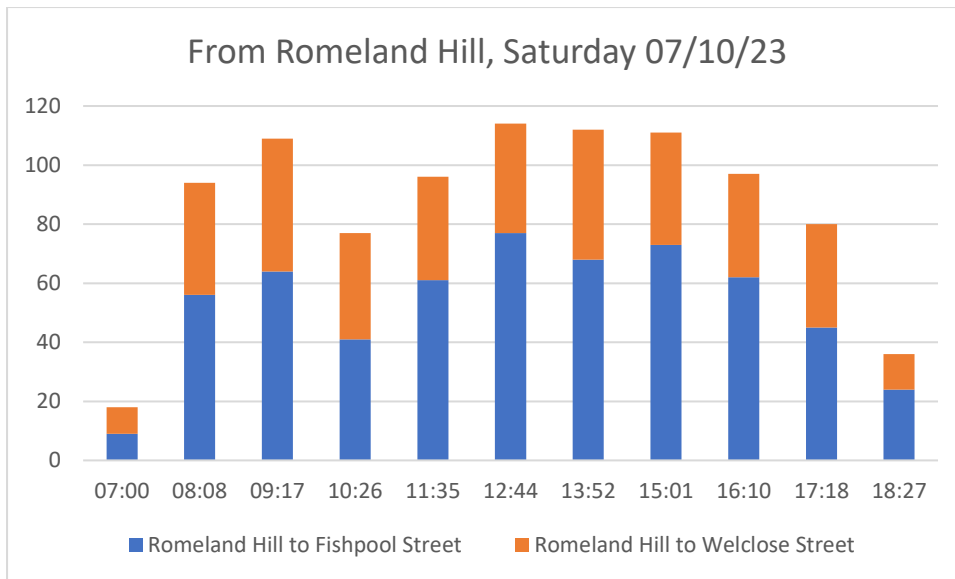
From Romeland Hill

81% of traffic at the junction is travelling westbound (nominally away from the city centre, from Spicer Street, Abbey Mill Lane or George Street (between 7 and 11am). 55% of the traffic travelling westbound continues down Fishpool Street and 45% enters Welclose Street. Some traffic may divert back towards the city centre via Welclose Street and Lower Dagnall Street.

On Thursday and Friday, almost equally 50% of traffic either continues along Fishpool Street and turns into Welclose Street. At the weekend, 60% continues down Fishpool Street and 40% enters Welclose Street.

As the charts below show (Figures 7-10), there is a clear difference in traffic from Romeland Hill on Thursday/Friday and the weekend. On Thursday and Friday, there are peaks around commuting hours and school times, with a maximum of 176 vehicles in the 68 minutes from 8:08am, which included 93 (or 53%) then turning down Welclose Street. Weekend traffic is spread more evenly through the day with peaks mid-morning or lunchtime. 114 traffic movements from this direction occurred from 12:44pm on the Saturday and from 10:26am on the Sunday. School and commuter traffic on Thursday and Friday do seem to prominently impact Welclose Street with right turns from Romeland Hill. There was some traffic movements associated with the school on Saturday, though these were less focussed around normal school hours. These seemed to relate to sports events and an exchange visit pickup in the afternoon. (Please note, the charts below represent all traffic movements, including motorbikes and cycles; whereas the previous charts show just car and van traffic for simplicity.)



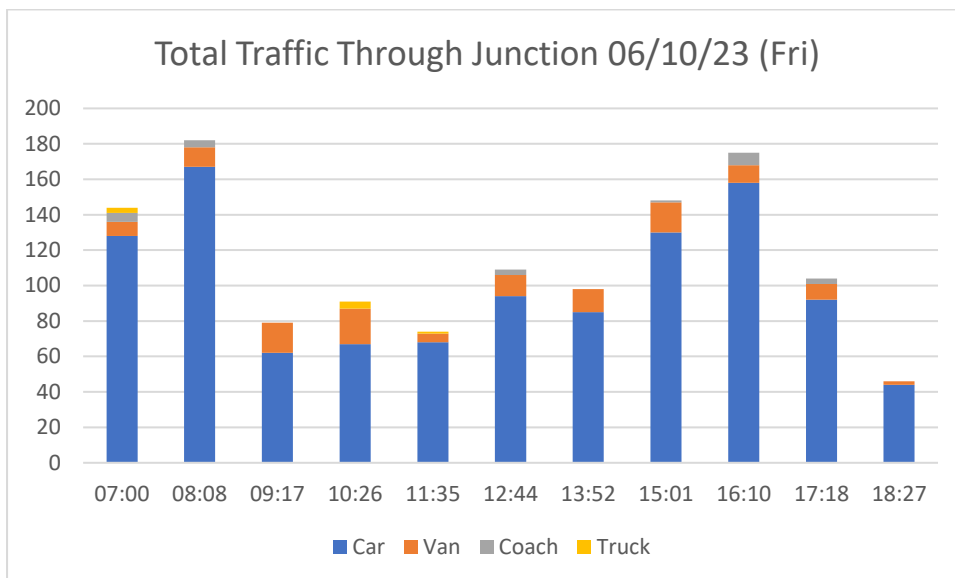
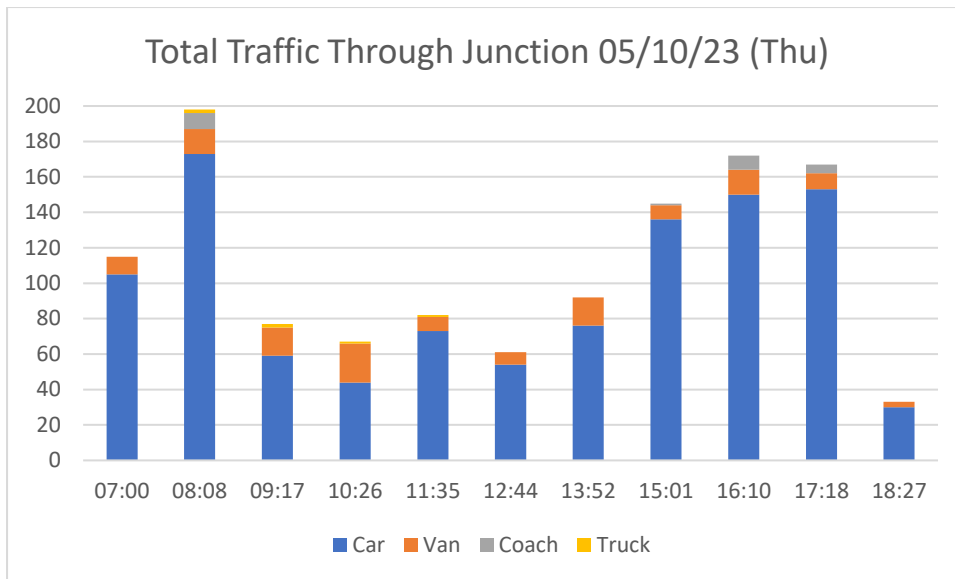


Figures 7-10: Westbound Traffic and Destination

Large Vehicle Movements and other School Associated Traffic

This area of St Albans is characterised by historic narrow streets that are not always particularly suitable for large vehicles. However, St Albans School is located here and this was observed to be served by 9 coaches in the morning and 14 in the afternoon during the week and 4 on Saturday. A number of minibus sized vehicles also attend at the same time. The coaches were observed to be well drilled, efficiently dropping off and picking up pupils.

While the school has not shared travel surveys with Hertfordshire County Council, it can be assumed that around two-thirds of the school's 900 pupils arrive via coaches or minibuses. Many of the remainder are likely to arrive by public car, meaning an uplift in traffic at peak times to over 200 motorised vehicles through the junction area (Figures 11-12). Drivers do not always park in the most appropriate places and were observed waiting at corners of the junction and in the coach bays. Enforcement officers were observed to arrive shortly before the end of the school day. If the coach provision was withdrawn, it is thought that the area would struggle to cope with the private vehicles that would then be dropping pupils off at the school.



Figures 11-12: Vehicle Traffic Movements Through Junction (Thu and Fri)

Aside from the coaches, 16 HGV sized vehicles passed through the junction. This included refuse trucks. Two travelled through on Saturday and none on Sunday. It is thought these would have been serving the area and not through traffic.

127 van sized vehicles passed through the junction on the Thursday and 124 passed through on the Friday. These included some minibuses serving the school. The number of vans dropped to 69 on Saturday and 34 on Sunday. Some were delivering to houses around the junction and these did not always park appropriately, sometimes waiting obstructively on the corners of the junction.

Cycle Traffic

Over the course of the four days, 296 cyclists were observed travelling through the junction. This included commuter cyclists, leisure cyclists, functional cyclists, sport cyclists, children (including Bikeability courses), e-bikes (and sometimes delivery cyclists) and a small handful of e-scooter riders. This is 74 per day. Friday saw the most cycle traffic, with 90 bikes. 112 (38%) were travelling eastbound up Fishpool Street and Romeland Hill, presumably many of

which continue through George Street to the city centre. (For comparison, 12.5% of all vehicle traffic movements were eastbound up Fishpool Street and Romeland Hill.)

70 motorcycles were observed travelling through the junction. 94% were at the weekend.

Comparison With Historic Data

Speed and volume survey data is available for a nearby point on Romeland Hill for the week from 11/05/2010 (Figure 13).

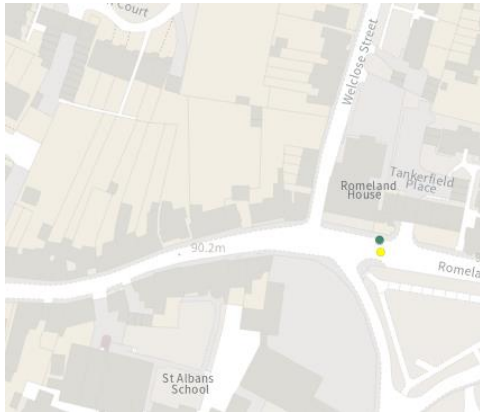


Figure 13: Location of 2010 Speed & Volume Survey

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Looking specifically at the data between 7am and 7pm between Thursday 13/05/2010 and Sunday 16/05/2010, there were a total number of 5,496 movements eastbound and westbound.

In comparing with the junction movements measured between 05/10/2023 and 18/10/2023, it should be noted that the location of the 2020 counts would miss anyone rejoining Fishpool Street from Romeland Garden, the school and Abbey Mill Lane. The best comparison is that (excluding 2023 junction traffic entering Welclose Street from Fishpool Street) 4,575 vehicles passed the equivalent 2010 survey location. This is a reduction of 17% overall since 2010.

However, direction flows are different. Westbound volumes averaged 688 vehicles during the 12-hour period in 2010 and 990.75 in 2023, an increase of 44%. It should be reinforced that traffic joining from Romeland Gardens would reduce this increase to a certain degree. Eastbound volumes have decreased from a 12-hour average of 686 vehicles in 2010 to 153 in 2023. This is a reduction of 78% in traffic towards the city centre.

Because of the one-way system and street closure of George Street under Phase 2 of the High Street Recovery trials that was in place in September 2023, it is likely that more vehicles are entering the area via (predominantly) Spicer Street and exiting along Welclose Street, when previously they may have exited via George Street. The weekday reopening of George Street to traffic under Phase 3 may encourage more traffic along Welclose Street.

Conclusions

The streets at the Welclose Street junction with Fishpool Street and Romeland Hill have a P2/M1 classification under Hertfordshire County Council's Place & Movement Design Guide. It is estimated that people movements dominate the space by a factor that is greater than two to one in comparison with vehicle movements. Hertfordshire County Council policy, including the Local Transport Plan (LTP4), gives priority consideration to the movement of

more vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and cyclists over the needs of motor vehicle users. In most cases, people walking through the junction are comfortable using the space as evidenced by seeing people walk in the road, waiting and chatting in the road and crossing diagonally through the space. The road environment becomes more chaotic around school drop-off and pick-up time, where parent driver behaviour could be better, especially when waiting in obstructive locations where pedestrian sight lines may be reduced.

A combination of school and commuter traffic could be responsible for an increase in traffic entering Welclose Street. Some traffic may have previously exited via George Street instead. Because of the narrowness of the street, George Street is not suited to two-way traffic. The present one-way arrangement moves traffic away from the city centre. It is estimated that this arrangement has reduced traffic travelling eastbound past the junction to less than one-fifth of its previous level. Westbound traffic has increased by up to 44%, though direct comparisons are difficult. The pedestrian environment at the junction is likely to have improved, however anecdotal feedback indicates that traffic along Welclose Street has become worse. The data appears to back this up, but traffic movements are not excessive, especially considering the city centre location. However, the evidence suggests the number of vehicles travelling eastbound towards the city centre from Fishpool Street and instead diverting through Welclose Street is small. Instead, it is likely that increased traffic is coming from Spicer Street and circling back via Welclose Street. The exit of Welclose Street into Mount Pleasant and Upper Dagnall Street has also been raised as an area of concern due to poor visibility (see Figures 14-15) and it has been reported that traffic backs up at the junction of Lower Dagnall Street and Verulam Road.





Figures 14-15: Obstructed Sight Lines Exiting Welclose Street

In spite of the large reduction in traffic travelling eastbound towards George Street, reports have been received of traffic u-turning at the George Street No Entry signs as well as travelling the wrong way down Spicer Street and George Street. These traffic movements are illegal and the police have been advised. An arrow indicating a right only turn into Romeland will be painted on the road surface here. No Entry signs at the lower junction into George Street are compliant with The Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2016. These do not have to be illuminated given the 20mph environment and Hertfordshire County Council would not want to illuminate these signs because of the impact on the conservation area and local residents. It is also the authority's preference to minimise the amount of signage in George Street to that required for enforcement, so are not considering 'Share With Care' signage at this stage.

There is no evidence that excessively sized vehicles are being diverted along Welclose Street. The most significant large vehicle users at the junction are the coaches that pick up and drop off pupils at St Albans School. The coaches appeared to carry this out efficiently.

6% of traffic movements through the junction were by cycle. This is three times higher than might be expected on general roads, which reflects the quiet nature of the junction and onward connectivity into and out from the city centre via George Street.

Next Steps

A repeat survey in October would produce like-for-like analysis and establish whether the reopening of George Street to traffic has precipitated more traffic movements into Welclose Street.

Traffic modelling could establish potential impacts of changes to the one-way arrangements in the area. This could include reversing the one way along Spicer Street and Welclose Street. A one-way section of Fishpool Street could also be modelled. This would need to be discussed with the county member to see whether he is willing to use some highways locality budget to fund such an exercise.

There will be further consultation on George Street in the future. Residents, businesses and visitors will have an opportunity to indicate whether they feel George Street should be closed to traffic during the week, whether it should be reopened to traffic all days, whether it should remain one way or whether the one-way system should be reversed.