



Linking the Station to the City - crossing the Loop & more

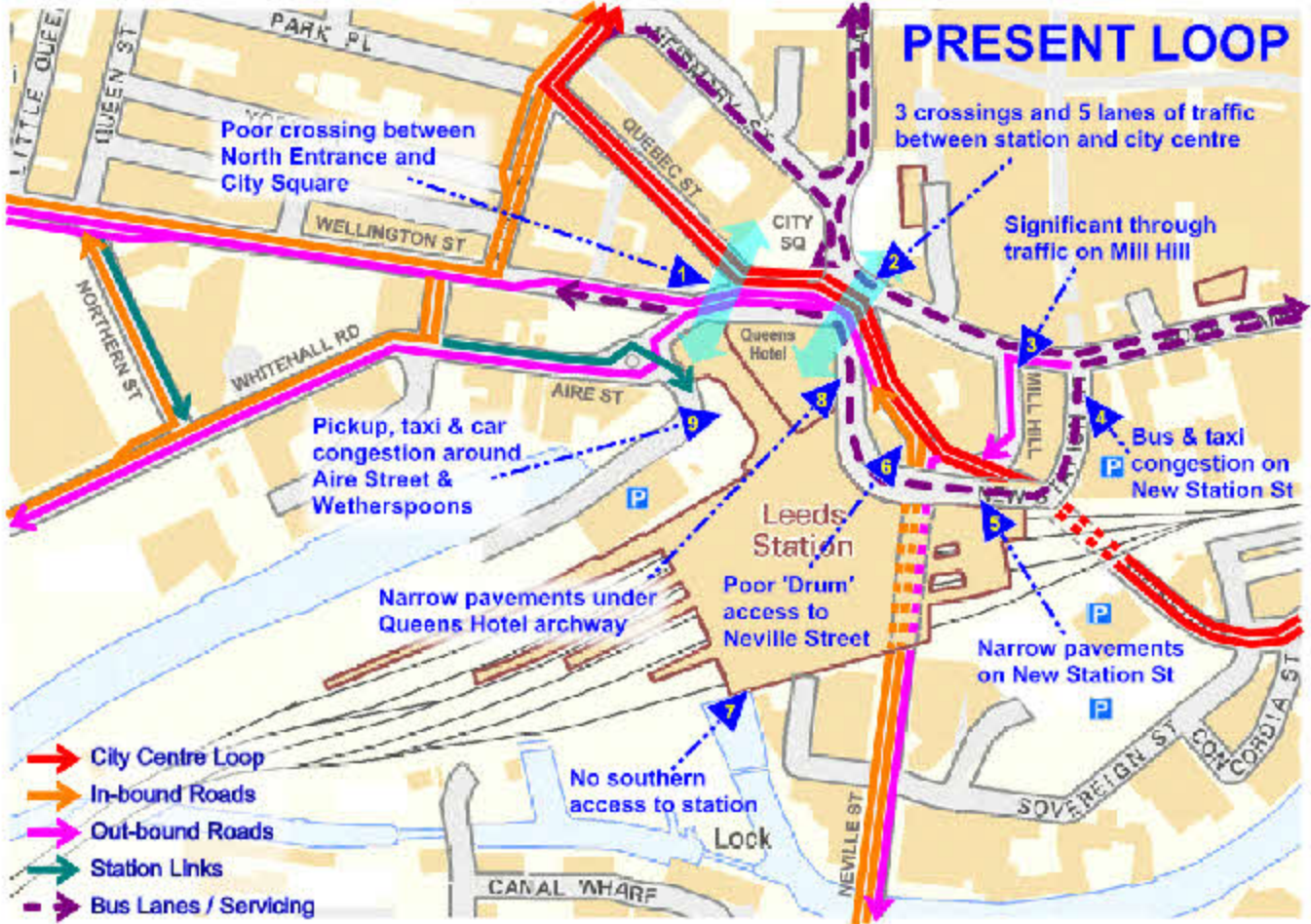


What can we do with the
Loop around the Station
and City Square?

This report has been prepared by the Leeds Civic Trust as a contribution to discussions emerging from the Leeds City Centre Vision Conference (Jan 2008).

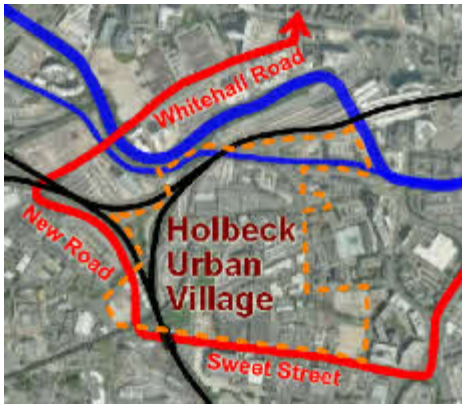
November 2008

Current Problems at City Square & the Rail Station



Arrowheads on plan above show photo numbers





A Proposed New Route for the Loop

A Big Idea at the City Centre Vision conference was to move the Loop out of City Square to provide stronger links between the rail station and the shopping zone.

However, this would require expensive tunnels under the Square or station, bridges west of the station (impacting on Holbeck Urban Village) or a new route west of the railway.

The last (shown on the plan on the left) would duplicate the role of the Inner Ring Road and not perform the function of an inner distributor.

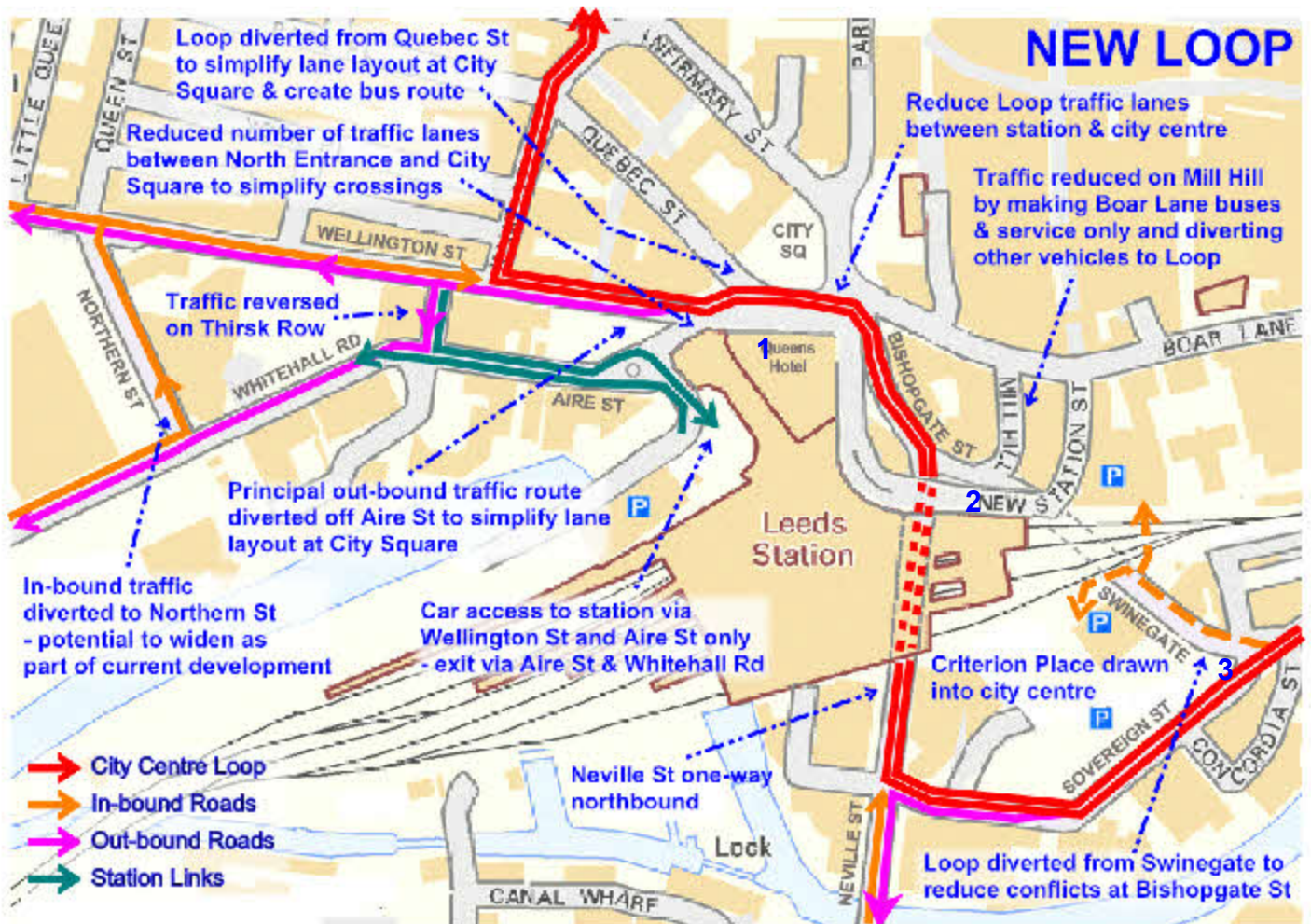
Not advocated: relocated Loop in red

A More Practical Solution?

We have looked at two other questions to generate approaches which are more achievable:

- how can the impact of the Loop on City Square be reduced?
- how can pedestrian links between the station and the city centre be enhanced?

We suggest relocating sections of the Loop in order to create a simpler route through the area, ensuring that motorists have fewer choices as to the way they can go and pedestrian crossings can be shortened.



1 City Square: fewer lanes and turning options



2 Bishopgate St: new traffic-free space by closing short-cut to Neville St



3 Swinegate: Loop diverted to Sovereign St and Neville St

What is the problem?

There has been long-standing concern about the sense of arrival at Leeds City Station.

Where is the city centre? Where are the shops and entertainment facilities? Pavements are narrow and lead to crowded complex multi-leg crossings. There is a barrier of fast-moving traffic and a fleet of buses to negotiate. Surfaces are poor and cluttered with street furniture.

This can be contrasted with the arrival at Sheffield or Newcastle-upon-Tyne where the high quality public realm leads visitors to the heart of the city.



The issue came to the fore at the **Leeds City Centre Vision** conference (January 2008).

Featuring keynote speakers and workshops, the conference identified a series of Big Ideas and specific Project Proposals. These included reviewing the route of the Loop and improving the arrival experience from the station.



City Square is also key to the **Leeds Renaissance** initiative. It is taken to be the fulcrum of the city centre in the many visualisations of the way in which the city is structured and operates. Many residents see it as the heart of Leeds.

City Square should not be blighted by traffic and separated from the station, a key visitor arrival point?

We are told that the City Council is taking the Vision proposals forward through a series of internal working groups but the Leeds Civic Trust feels that much can be gained through opening up the debate to a wider range of interested parties.

This report is the Trust's contribution to the process.

The Leeds Civic Trust proposals

We have sought to be realistic in our plans, bearing in mind the current economic climate but also being confident that this will improve in due course.

The key parameters we have adopted include:

- maximum impact on key areas
- maintaining function of Loop as inner distributor
- cheap to deliver core elements
- achievable in phases
- deliverable by Leeds City Council and partners.

On pages 2 and 3 we have identified the problems and proposed an amended route for part of the Loop. On page 5 opposite we suggest complementary improvements for buses and pedestrians.

We believe that these proposals (summarised on pages 3 and 5) can be delivered largely within the existing highway through new signage, adjusted kerbs and re-paving.

Relocation of the Loop provides scope for the further alterations to the City Square and station areas which are illustrated on subsequent pages.

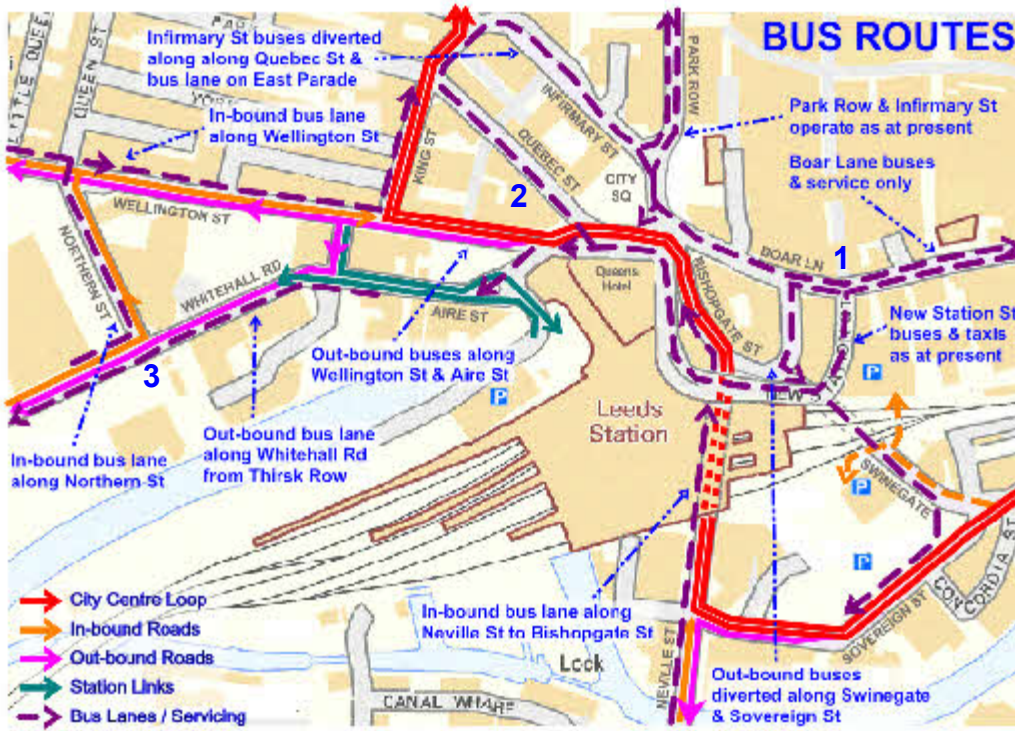
On pages 6 and 7, we suggest ways of improving vehicular access to the station.

On pages 8 and 9, we examine how it could be made easier for pedestrians to cross the Loop.

On pages 10 and 11, we explore the opportunity for a new bus/rail interchange and the benefits of taking the Loop south of the river.



Improvements for Buses & Pedestrians



1 New Station Street: remains a route for buses & taxis



2 Quebec Street: becomes a bus/taxi route only (and bus lay-by)



3 Whitehall Road: new out-bound bus lane from Thirsk Row

Giving buses and bicycles priority

We have sought to give sustainable transport priority around the station. Other traffic is restricted to the Loop or to 'in & back out' routes to key destinations such as car parks or the station itself - an objective has been to limit opportunities for 'rat runs'. The most significant change is to re-route out-bound buses from Neville St to run along Swinegate and Sovereign St, so allowing wider pavements and an inbound bus lane on Neville St.



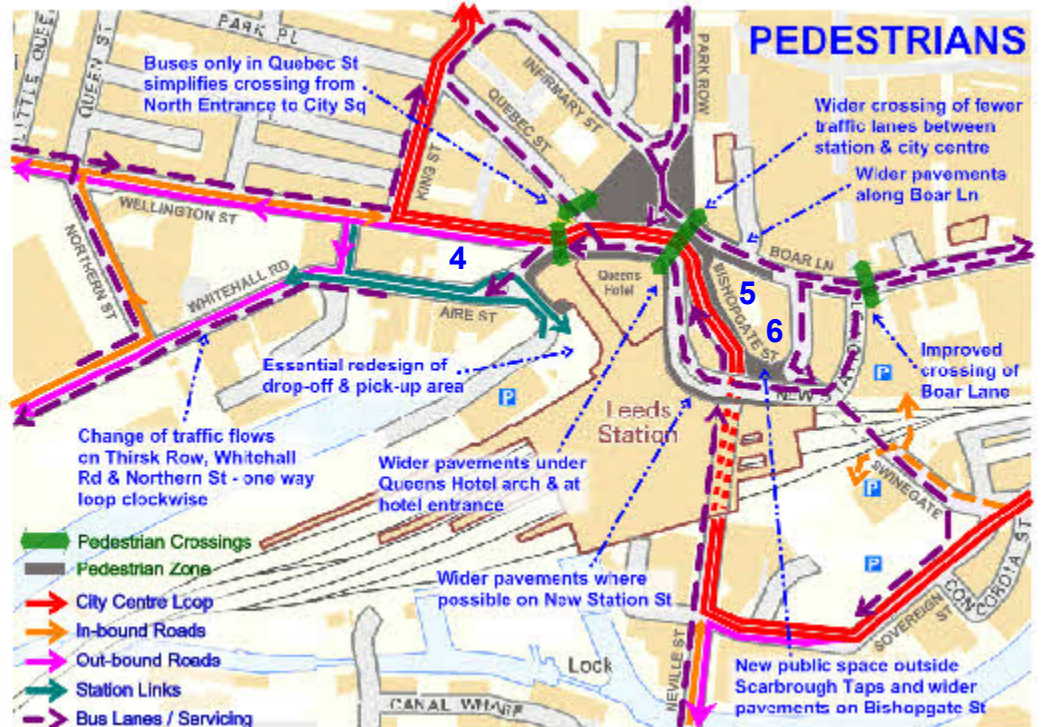
4 Wellington St: this section becomes part of the Loop



5 Bishopgate St: two lane Loop with priority bus lane along Neville St



6 Bishopgate St: diversion of the Loop will create a new public space



More space for pedestrians

Wider pavements can be provided in streets where specific types of vehicles have been restricted or relocated. Key areas around the station are discussed on pages 8 and 9 but these should be part of a wider review of pedestrian spaces on the fringes of the main precincts - eg does Park Row need to be so wide? Can pavements on Boar Lane be widened if there are only buses and service vehicles here?

Improving access to the Railway Station

Transforming the Railway Station

There are two key issues which need to be resolved if Leeds railway station is to operate effectively as a transport hub & gateway to the city:

- 1 it needs a southern entrance
- 2 more efficient handling of buses, taxis & cars is required.

Leeds City Council, Metro & Network Rail are working up options for the station and it is hoped that these suggestions might add to the debate.

A Southern Entrance

It is understood that discussions are taking place about providing a southern entrance via the present passenger footbridge. But hemmed in by water and buildings, is this site the best option? There will be no opportunity for any road access and it is not a particularly attractive place for visitors to arrive.

While Granary Wharf itself will be transformed soon, people will still have to use existing roads to walk east from this point. Such a location could only provide a secondary route for regular users.

There are two ways in which a southern entrance could be improved:

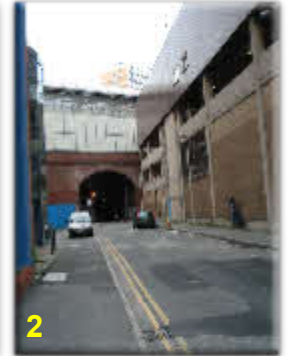
- A a high-level link alongside platform 16 to drop users into the Sovereign Street site at the rear of the present BT building (A on plan below)
- B the long term redevelopment of the present Hilton Hotel to provide a station entrance providing at least basic passenger services (B on plan below).



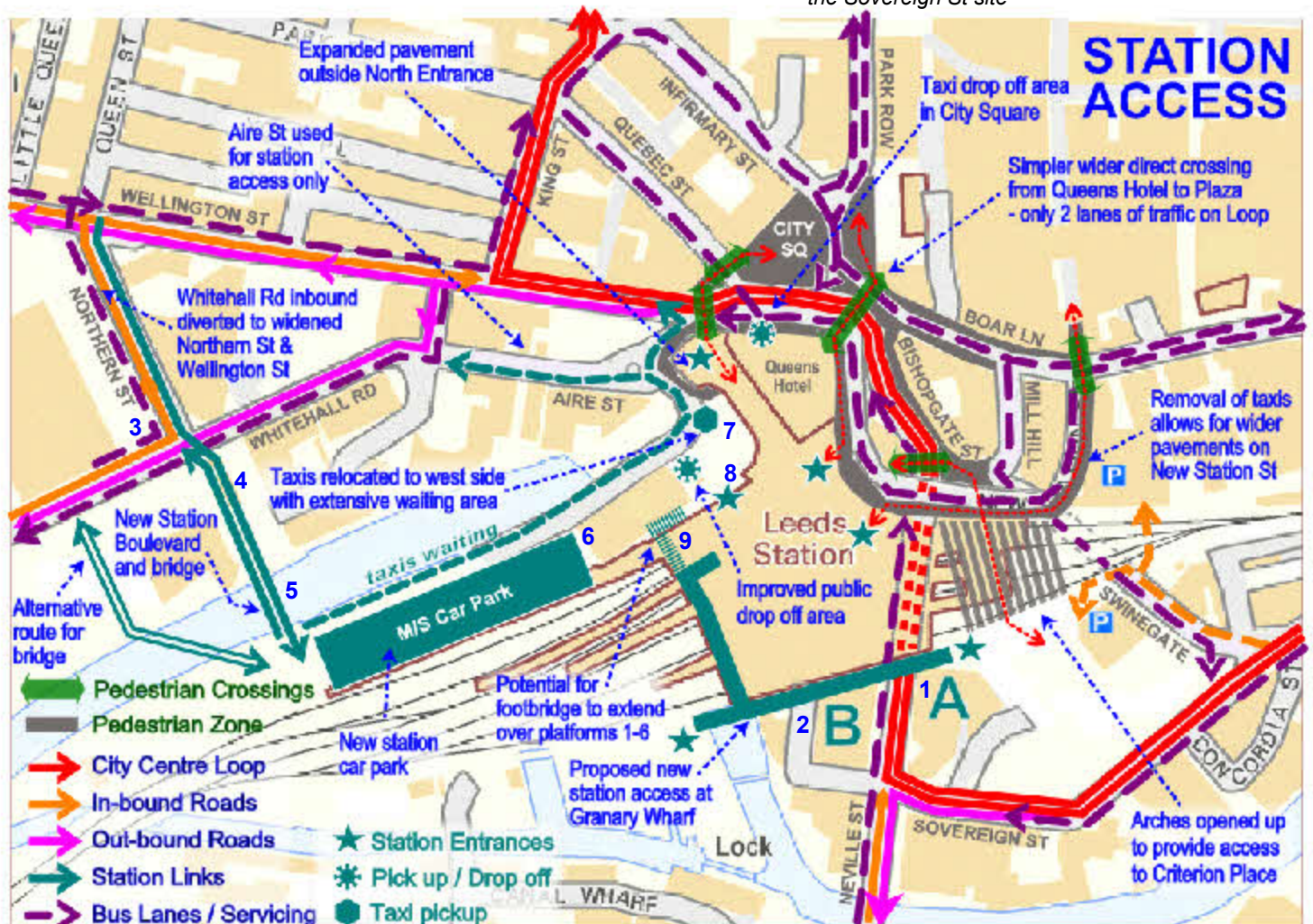
Congested pick up / drop off area off Aire Street



Area where a high level walkway could link the present footbridge to the Sovereign St site



Rear of present Hilton Hotel with station beyond



Numbers on plan show approximate locations of photographs.

Improving access to the Railway Station (continued)

Vehicle Access

The second access problem is the traffic congestion in New Station Street and at the entrance to the North Concourse off Aire Street. These areas do not have the capacity to cope with the traffic which now uses them, delaying all users.

It is suggested that three key flows should be separated.



Northern St. would need to be widened to create a boulevard



Route for Station Boulevard



Site of new Aire Bridge



Location for new multi-storey car park, potentially extending over platform



Site of taxi pick up / drop off area

Car Access

At present, private cars reach the station either via the Loop (which means going through City Square) or the Wellington St, Northern St and Whitehall Rd route. All this traffic arrives at the congested area outside the North Concourse entrance, with frequent queues back onto Aire Street.

The key is to replace this with a new access road to the station from Wellington St via a widened Northern St - there is an opportunity to gain more space here before the Wellington Quarter scheme is fully committed (photo 3).

From Whitehall Road, this 'Station Boulevard' would extend south between existing buildings (a substation will need to be relocated) to a new bridge over the river (photos 4 & 5). If the cost of relocating the substation is prohibitive, an alternative but less direct route is available slightly further west.

The present open station car park would become the access route, with a new expanded multi-storey car park alongside and potentially over Platform 1 (photo 6).

With a pick up / drop off zone in the region of the present multi-storey car park, all public vehicular access to the station would be from the western end.

Taxi Access

At present, taxis pick up from New Station Street and at busy times the queue extends back along Boar Lane, delaying buses and other traffic - the drop off at Aire Street is also very busy.

It is suggested that all taxi traffic should be relocated to the Aire Street entrance to the station. Taxis would arrive from the new Aire Bridge off Whitehall Rd, wait alongside the river where there is plenty of space for queuing cabs (double stacking could be accommodated) and pick up alongside the North Concourse entrance. Taxis would leave via Aire Street and Wellington Street (photo 7).

Taxis would drop off either at the pick up area or at a new taxi zone on City Square adjoining the North Entrance - narrowing the Loop will provide more space here.

Bus Access

Removing taxis from New Station Street will provide more space for buses while enabling pavements to be widened (see page 9).

Extended Footbridge

The plan on page 6 shows a suggested extension to the existing footbridge, taking it over Platforms 1 - 6 and providing a direct access to the pick up area and the car park. It is acknowledged that this may require re-arrangement of the newly installed gates and that passengers would not pass the retail units on the concourse (photos 8 & 9).



Area for new Station exit from footbridge and pick up / drop off area



Is there potential to extend the footbridge?

Helping Pedestrians Cross the Loop - City Square

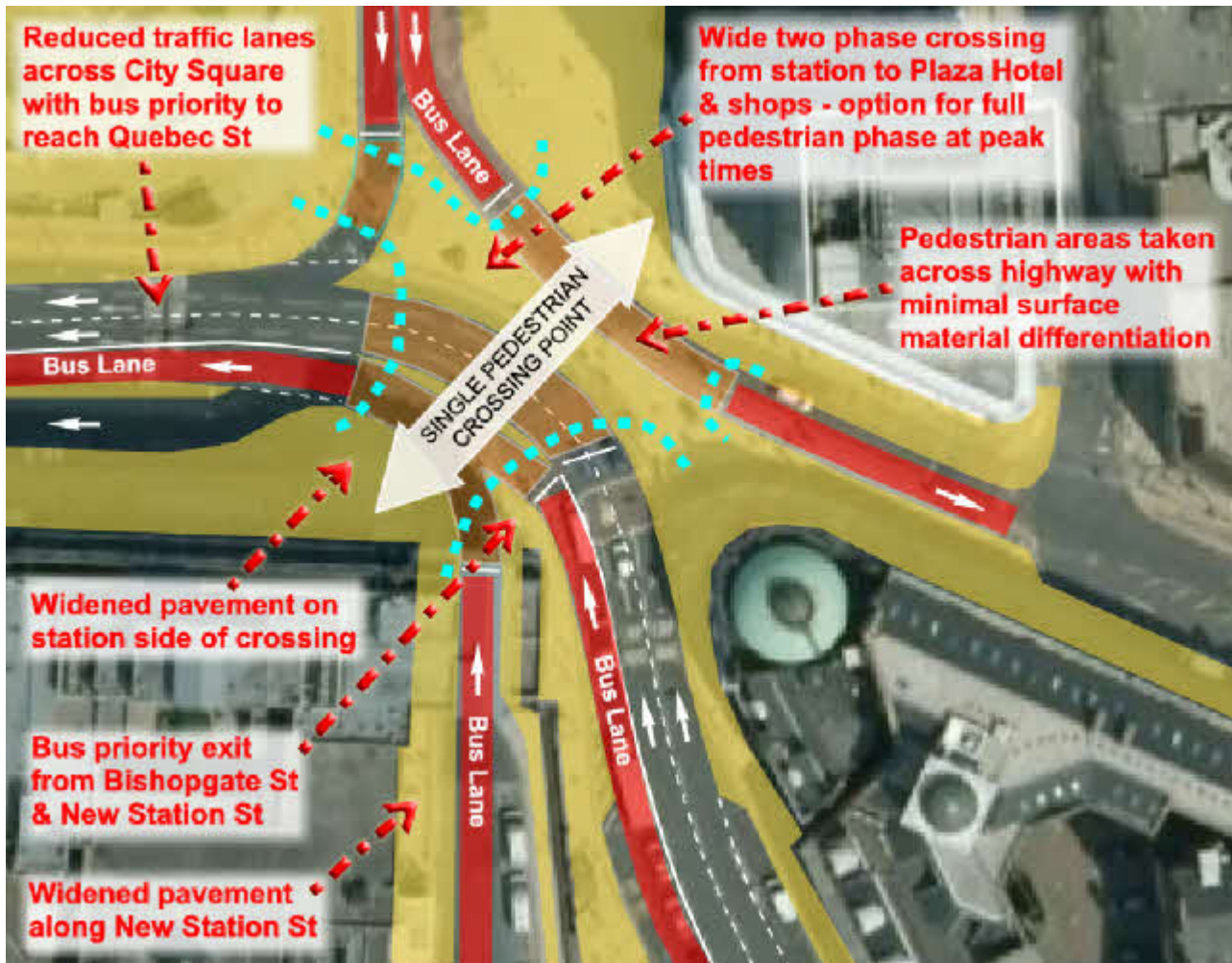
Crossing to City Square

The principal and most natural pedestrian route to the city centre is to go out of the eastern front of the station, left along New Station Street, under the Queens Hotel and across to City Square. However, the present route is narrow and leads across a series of small traffic islands. This is a very unattractive introduction to the city.

A key objective must be to create more space for pedestrians by widening pavements and simplifying the route required to reach the shopping and office areas.

Our suggested narrowing of the Loop across City Square (pages 3 and 5) enables many of the pavements to be widened and creates space for a taxi drop off point. Wider pavements are particularly important under the Queens Hotel archway and at the Bishopgate St corner where, inevitably, large numbers of pedestrians will be waiting at peak times. A wide link would provide easy access between City Square and a narrowed Boar Lane, giving a more attractive foreground to the redeveloped Trinity West Shopping Centre.

Traffic lights can be operated on one phase (all traffic stopped) to release large numbers of pedestrians at peak times or in two phases (Loop and buses), with early release of buses from New Station St and Bishopgate St.



Lille: the Grand Place has perhaps too many bollards?

Leuven: principal road runs through public space

While safety is a priority, use of signage, barriers and signals should be minimised - any textural warnings should bear in mind the needs of all users.

Suitable pedestrian surfaces should be taken across the Loop at pavement level to make crossings easier to use. However, ramps for vehicles should be shallow to avoid causing an obstruction to flows when traffic has priority on what will inevitably remain a key inner distributor.



Such an approach will break down the visual barrier between City Square and the station and has been used successfully around Europe.

A key will be the use of a minimal palette of high quality materials and limited traffic signals/signage to avoid distracting drivers or pedestrians.

Helping Pedestrians Cross the Loop - New Station St

Flying over the Loop

On page 7, we have suggested a way in which taxis can be removed from New Station Street to the North Concourse entrance of the station.

This could allow the space occupied by the taxis on the photo alongside to be converted to a pavement, with broad crossings linking this to the station entrance (see plan below).

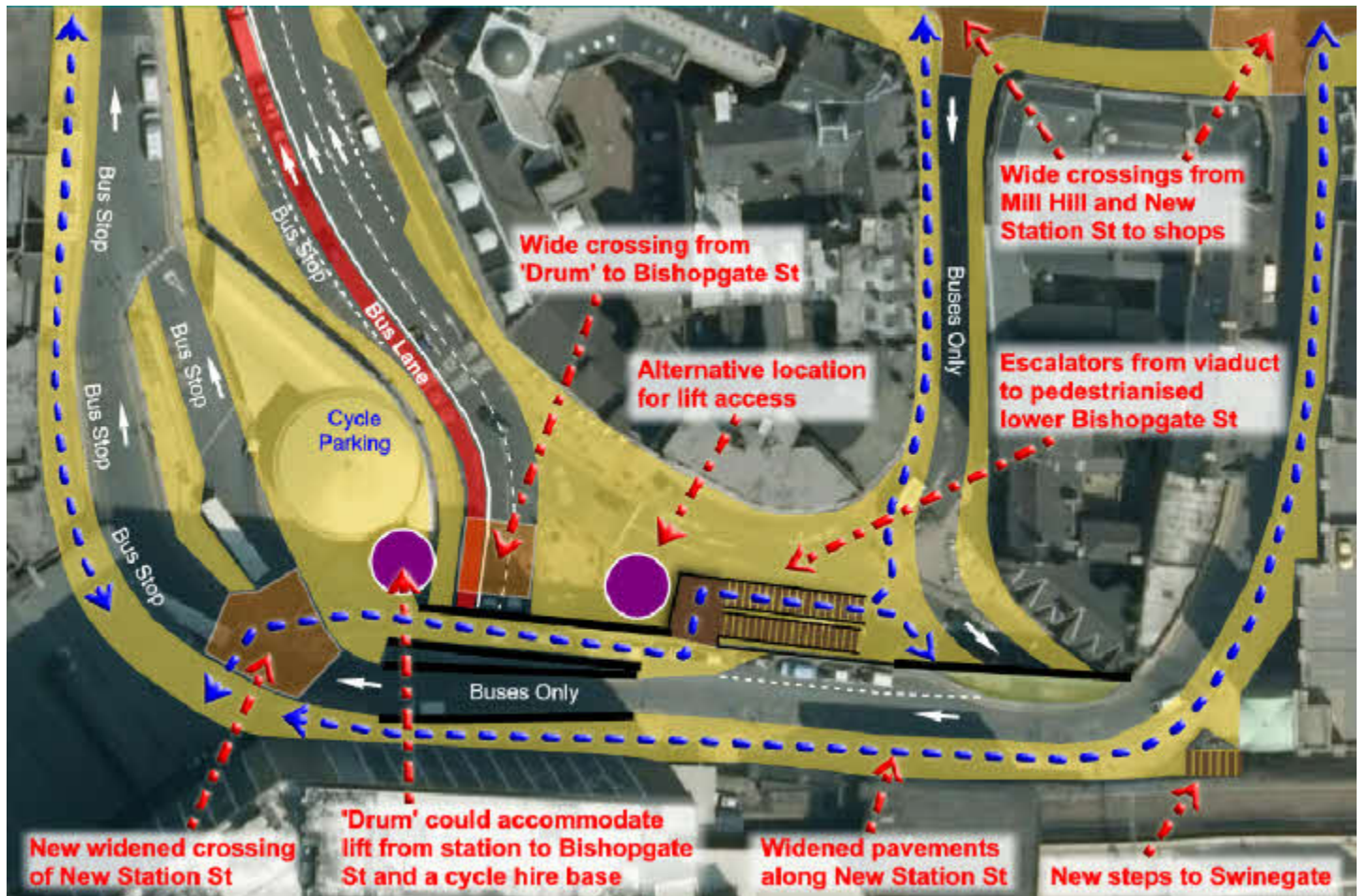
Escalators would be accessed through the stone parapet & drop down in front of the shops



Escalators could be installed in the now pedestrianised lower part of Bishopgate St, situated in front of the present shop units - steps could link back to the east side of Neville Street.

This provides a safe crossing of the Loop, with potential for an easy link to the shopping area via Mill Hill (this would be buses only) and south via Swinegate to the riverside. The escalators could also provide a direct link to a new bus station at Criterion Place (see page 10).

Lift access could either be as part of a rebuilt 'Drum' (which would still require use of a Neville Street crossing), in a new tower alongside the escalators or through breaking down into the present arches.



There are many issues with the New Station Street bus interchange and this scheme provides an opportunity to review all pedestrian and cycle routes.

Widened pavements, potential retail uses in the ground floor of City House and the station staff block, and new shallower steps to Swinegate could make this a more attractive way to reach the shopping area.

The present taxi waiting area could be a base for a bicycle hire initiative.

← -- → Principal pedestrian routes

If Mill Hill were to be closed to buses as part of a comprehensive re-alignment of services, an alternative to the escalators would be a ramp curving into this street, countering the slope of the ground and linking direct to the city centre.

A new Bus/Rail Interchange - a long term option?

The recent cancellation of the Criterion Place development could be an opportunity to do something more adventurous with the site.

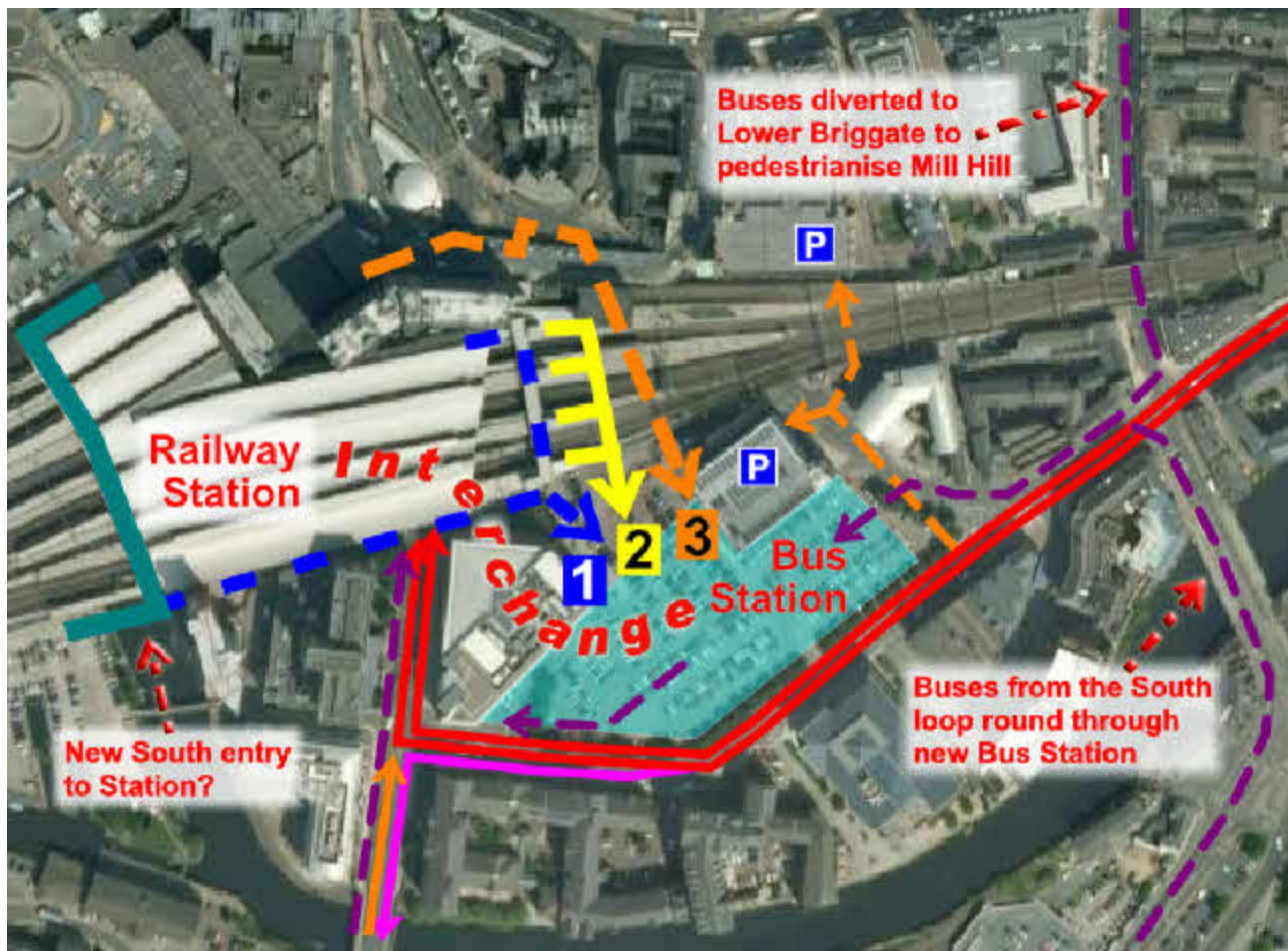
The separation of the bus and railway stations has meant that the city has not benefited from a comprehensive transport hub. A new bus station between Sovereign Street and the viaduct could be linked directly to the rail station.

Three potential routes are shown on the plan:

- 1** an extension of present west footbridge (via a widened platform 16) and east (former parcel) footbridge to new vertical circulation - this is a simple solution, albeit a rather contorted route for passengers, but one which could lead direct to a deck over the bus station
- 2** dropping down through the arches at the east ends of the platforms would be an expensive option but maybe the ideal in the long term
- 3** using the escalators proposed in Bishopgate St (page 9) and coming through the arches or along a pedestrianised Swinegate.



*Is the rail station exit the only Big Issue?
Can we do more?*



Area for new rail station entrance using present footbridges or new routes into arches - these would be used for ticketing, retailing, etc for both bus & train passengers

The new bus station could be part-funded by air rights development but may be better linked to relocation of the Loop south of the river, making Sovereign Street open to buses & access only (page 11). The present Markets bus station could provide space for a park.



Bus station on site of open car park, with loop on Sovereign St to right & turning north under on viaduct

Looping South of the River?



Along The Calls, the Loop has an adverse effect on this historic area and divides the city from its waterfront

Could the Loop be moved south of the river so that the shopping area would be linked to the Waterfront?

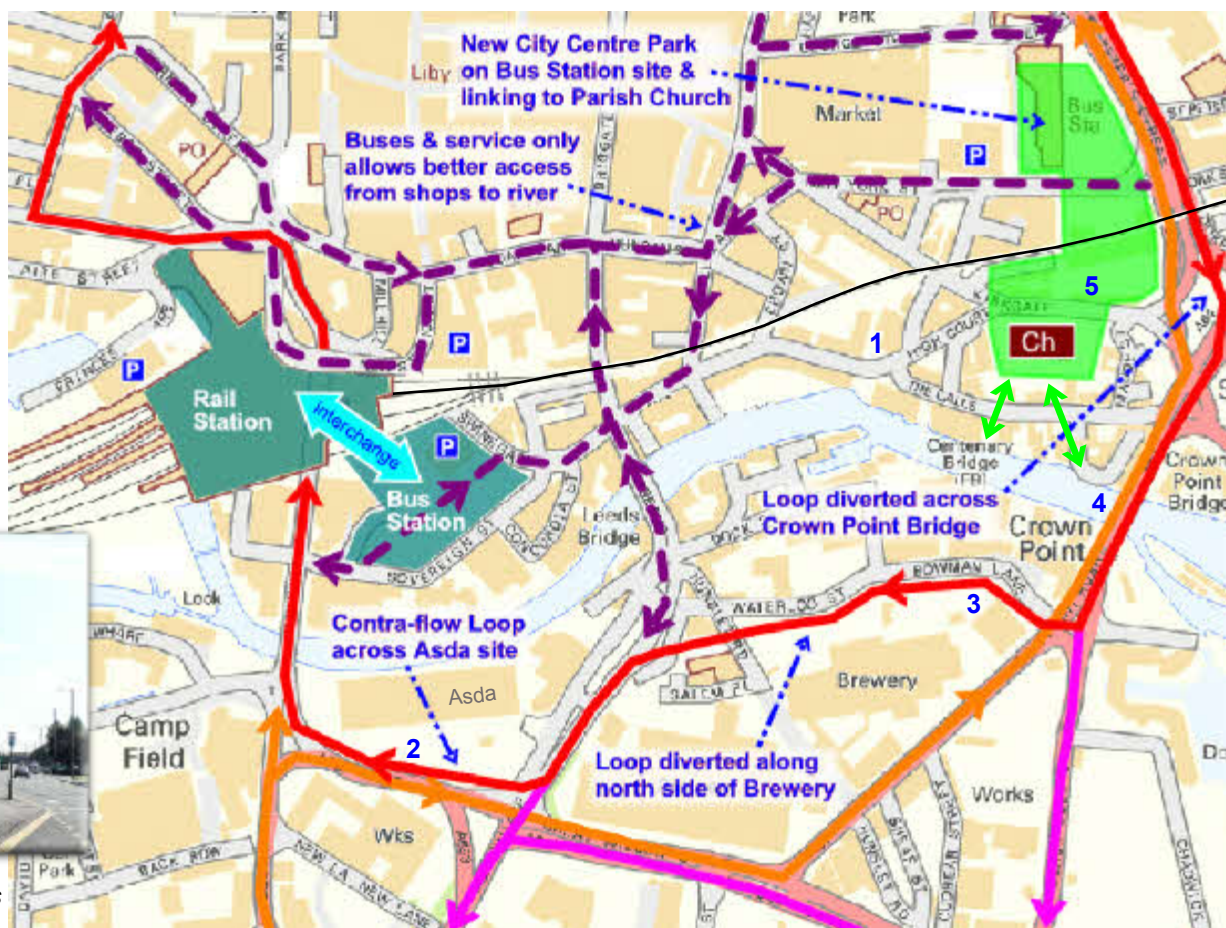
This can only be carried out in association with redevelopment of the Brewery and the Asda offices. A route along Bowman Lane and across the south side of the Asda car park should be protected in any planning briefs for these sites.



City Centre Park

Relocating the bus station (page 10) gives an opportunity to create a large park - this could extend south over a narrowed New York Road, past the railway embankment, over a narrowed/paved-over Kirkgate, around the Parish Church and to the riverside.

Roads within the Loop area would be restricted to buses, taxis and bicycles only - service and other access would be on an 'in & back out' basis to restrict rat-runs. Opportunity should be taken to narrow carriageways and widen pavements, particularly in streets linking the shopping precincts to the waterfront - some roads could be paved over.



Westbound Loop traffic taken across front of Asda site



Loop diverted along north side of Brewery as part of long term planning of the site



Completion of the Hunslet Flyover should reduce flows over Crown Point Bridge and provide space for the diverted Loop



Kirkgate can be narrowed to enhance the setting of St Peter's Church



The City Centre Loop today

Your views

This report has been prepared by the Leeds Civic Trust as a contribution to the Leeds City Centre Vision debate. It does not seek provide all the answers and many of the proposals will need to be tested in detail.

We do not claim this is a perfect solution, with both alternatives and unresolved issues emerging in the preparation of this report.

However, we feel it is a justified response to all six of the Big Ideas agreed at the conference workshops and many of the specific project proposals. The proposals are also informed by the Council's Draft Legibility Strategy and our understanding of current development projects.




The scope of the report has been widened to include a number of other opportunities which have emerged as a result of the present slowdown in the property sector. With the pause in the development rush and in the period before a number of key sites are built upon, there is an opportunity to 'think outside the box', reserving land and investment capital for projects which may only be realisable in the medium to long term.

The projects illustrated here could be implemented in one hit or in a number of phases over several years. The key is to have the Vision to plan ahead.

The Leeds Civic Trust would welcome the views of key stakeholders in the development of a strategy for City Square, access to and around the station and the other wider issues considered.



If you have any views on the ideas included, please send your response to 'Loop Report' at the Leeds Civic Trust:

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