

Removal of through motor traffic from Regent's Park

*As a backdrop to the Park, Nash's grand townscape still reigns supreme. Nikolaus Pevsner.
But that reign is under threat from traffic!*

Regent's Park provides 166 hectares (410 acres) of open space enjoyed by large numbers of visitors to its gardens and sports facilities. The only permitted cycling route within the park is on the Broad Walk (950m) north of Chester Road, but the Outer Circle, which encloses the park, is used by many cyclists as part of their daily journey as well as by sports cyclists. Terraces on the east, south and west sides of the park house residents as well as some large institutions including the London Business School, the Royal College of Physicians and Regent's University London.

To improve the experience of all users of the park's facilities, we propose to remove through motor traffic from the Outer Circle. This will also make Regent's Park a more appropriate place for people to walk, run, cycle and play organised sport; thus gaining the well-known health benefits of exercise and physical activity.

The problems caused by through motor traffic

The Outer Circle (4.3 km) is connected via eight 'gates'¹ to the surrounding roads (map page 3), allowing drivers of motor vehicles to use the Outer Circle as part of a journey that begins and ends outside the park. We observed motor vehicle flows of over 800 vehicles per hour at two of the gates (Appendix A) – far higher than would be expected for purely local traffic. At times there is severe congestion – with cyclists, joggers and pedestrians having to weave between queueing vehicles. The following issues arise:

- Regent's Park should be a place for people to enjoy – without roads dominated by motor vehicles;
- in the a.m. southbound and p.m. northbound traffic flows, there are as many cyclists as motor vehicles, showing that it is a popular route for cyclists despite the traffic;
- traffic flows and speeds on the Outer Circle are unpleasant for cycling and they prevent pedestrians from crossing the road casually;
- the large volume of motor vehicles produces significant noise and air pollution. The park should provide a haven from the pollutants that are detrimental to human health.

Our proposed solution

We propose to reduce significantly the through motor traffic on the Outer Circle whilst retaining the ability to reach any address on the Outer Circle by private car or taxi. This would have the following advantages:

- the park would have a much pleasanter atmosphere – see for example, the very liveable neighbourhood in the almost-traffic-free De Beauvoir Square area in Hackney;
- the balance between pedestrians, cyclists and motor travel would be redressed;
- the reduction of motor traffic would produce a cycle route that is a pleasant alternative to the outer roads and that would suit all potential cyclists.

How to eliminate through traffic

We suggest two alternative simple strategies – or a hybrid of the two:

- 1 (*cutting the circle*): place a barrier across the Outer Circle at carefully selected points;
- 2 (*closing gates*): place a barrier across the road leading to carefully selected gates.

In both strategies the whole width of the road would be closed to motors, whilst convenient access through the barrier would be provided for cyclists. A row of bollards across the road would create such a barrier. Where there is an actual gate, as for example at Park Square East, just closing the gate looks like a simple solution, but it would need to be bolted in a partially closed position to provide easy access for cyclists.

Motors would often have to turn round and leave by the gate through which they entered the park. Residents of the eastern terraces such as Cumberland Terrace (and their visitors) would turn round by driving through the terrace as usual. Anyone parking on the Outer Circle (permitted only on the Pay and Display spaces) would generally leave by the way they came in.

Motor Cycles

Vehicle counts by Camden and by TfL on the eastern and southern sides of the Outer Circle. (Appendices A2 and A2) indicate all day totals of 700 and 381 motor cycles respectively, far more than is desirable. Since motor cycles may be able to pass barriers, we recommend a 'No entry' sign (with cyclists exemption) at each barrier. This can be backed up by some police presence from time to time.

¹ One of the 'gates' is a bridge with a gate, two of them are squares and not all of them have real 'gates' !

Where are the rat runs?

Our initial traffic counts are illustrated graphically on the map on page 3. They suggest the existence of the following major through routes (or rat runs) which are also shown on the map:

1. on the east side, between Gloucester Gate and Park Square East ((in both directions)
2. on the west between Macclesfield Bridge and Clarence Gate (southbound)
3. past Clarence Gate on the south west corner of the park (in both directions)
4. plus a smaller rat-run through Chester Gate (250 vehicles in PM peak)

Initial criteria for selecting locations for the barriers

The following initial set of criteria will be augmented as user requirements become clearer:

- the Inner Circle must remain accessible by motor vehicle, but care must be taken not to increase the motor traffic on the Inner Circle;
- coaches should still be able travel only between Gloucester Gate and the coach park;
- access from the Outer Circle to the terraces on the edges of the park must not be disrupted;
- maintain access to the Zoo for staff and visitors, supplies and emergency access (Appendix C);
- maintain access to the Open Air Theatre, Regent's University and TRP depot.

Location of barriers – illustrated on the maps on page 4

The following two solutions are not the only ones possible, but show how rat runs could be reduced.

1: (see 1a and 1b on page 4): barriers at the following locations:

- i. just south of the junction with Gloucester Gate;
- ii. just west of the junction with Macclesfield Bridge;
- iii. just south of the junction with Clarence Gate;
- iv. Chester Gate closed to all except residents.

2: (see 2 on page 4): barriers at the following locations:

- i. Park Square east;
- ii. Park Square west;
- iii. York Gate;
- iv. Clarence Gate.

We propose an initial trial period with the an optimum configuration of 3 or 4 barriers. During the trial, planters could be used as barriers, allowing them to be moved as necessary; or the actual gates might be bolted with one side closed so as to allow cyclists through, but prevent motors from passing.

Further barriers could be introduced, for example to improve conditions outside the Zoo; or to reduce other rat-runs identified.

Twenty mph limit

Camden is soon to implement a borough-wide 20 mph limit. The speed limit on all of the roads in Regent's Park should be aligned with this. But our current proposal to reduce through traffic should be considered independently.

Effects on the surrounding roads

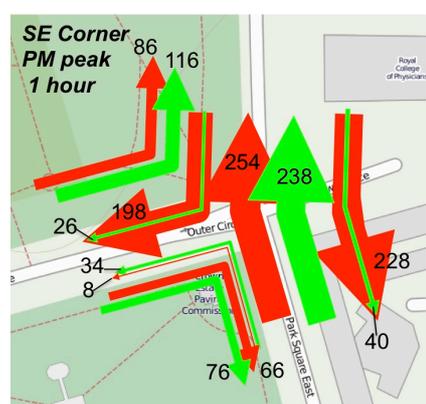
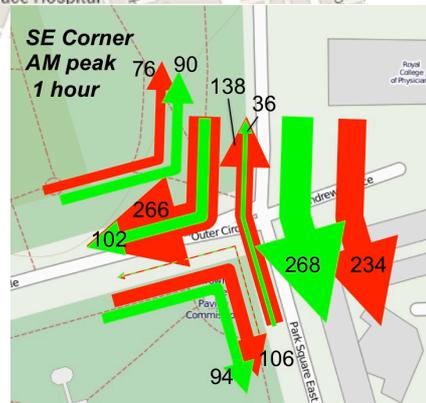
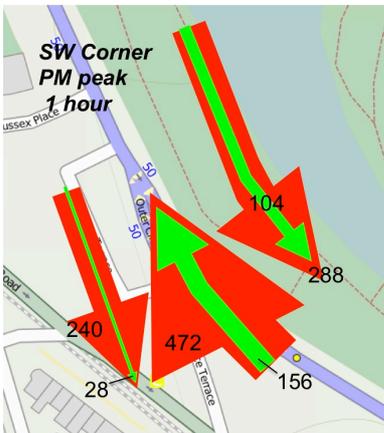
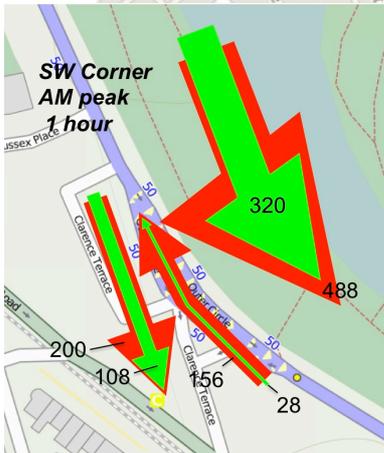
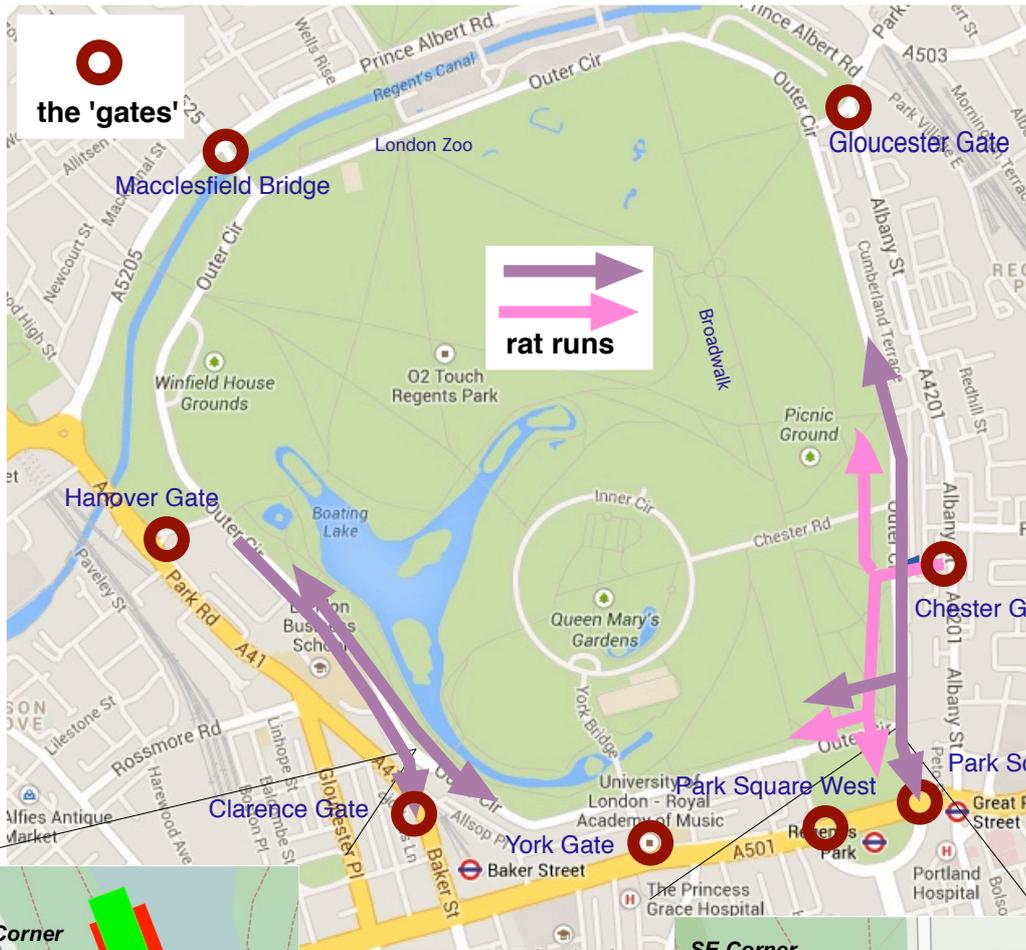
Putting an end to cutting through Regent's Park will result in less traffic being pumped into Central London every morning and hence less traffic on Avenue Road and Parkway. It is at peak times that traffic is heaviest on the Outer Circle when some of the alternative roads operate near capacity. In cases where there is insufficient capacity, there will be a net reduction in traffic. See Appendix B for traffic counts on the outer roads.

At the end of this proposal, we provide references to three TED talks (1) - (3) that make a convincing case that the issue of displaced traffic is irrelevant. Reference (4) links to a report based on case studies by the European Commission that explicitly mentions traffic evaporation, and non-existing displaced traffic.

Video

Please watch our video on YouTube <http://youtu.be/8JzB-5XFD2Q> which shows how the motor vehicles spoil Regent's Park. Then, as a contrast, please watch a video of le Parc de la Tête d'Or in Lyon on YouTube at http://youtu.be/8_et_gos_NRZc which shows the conditions we dream of (Appendix D). Finally, we already have an example in London: Battersea Park which is free of through traffic but does allow access to motors.

Map showing the gates, some rat runs and diagrams of the traffic flows



Traffic flows

cycles →

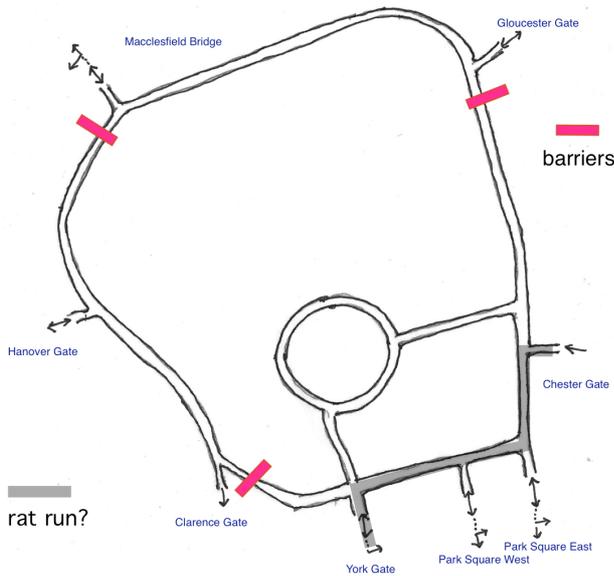
motors →

arrow size proportional to traffic volume

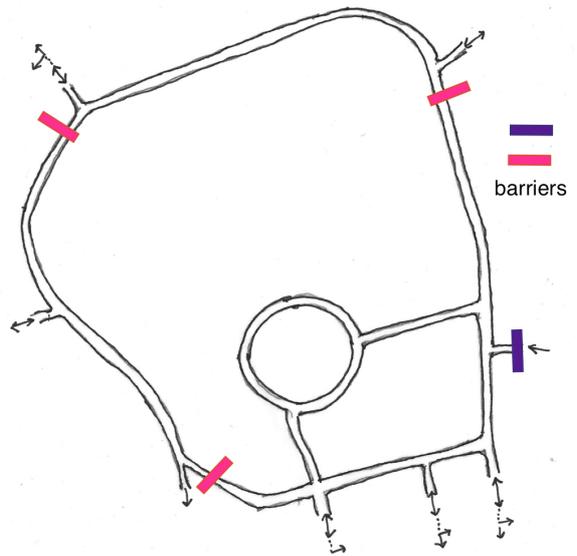
based on counts Appendix A1

Strategies for eliminating through traffic in the Outer Circle

Cutting the circle: 1a deals with the main rat runs on the east and west sides and round the SW corner; 1b is a hybrid solution (with Chester Gate closed to non-residents)

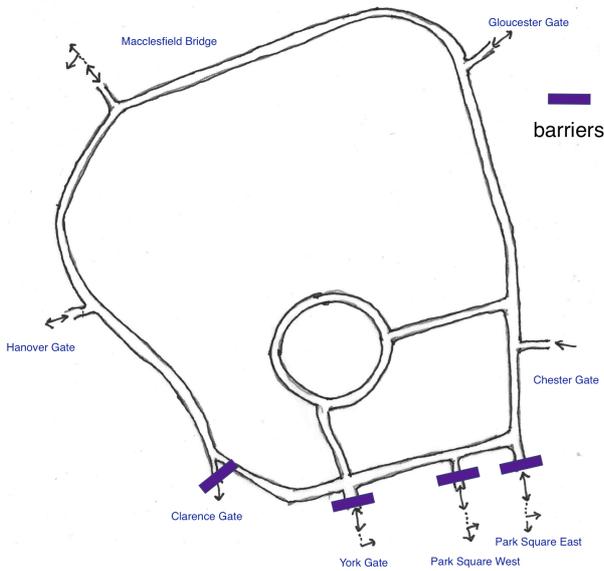


1a: Cutting the circle: place barriers across the Outer Circle



1b: Hybrid: cutting the circle and also closing a gate

Closing gates: Consider closing only the gate at Park Square east: motors would instead use Park Square west. To stop rat runs from Macclesfield Bridge to Clarence Gate, we need to close Clarence Gate. Finally to stop rat runs round the south east corner, we also need to close York Gate.



2: Closing gates: close all four southern gates to block rat runs



Outer Circle Action Group (OCAG)

Camden Cycling Campaign, Camden Friends of the Earth, Canal and River Trust, Westminster Cycling Campaign, Westminster Living Streets.

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November 2013

Appendix

A1: Our traffic counts 10th-16th October 2013. All average hourly rates

Traffic counts were carried out on the Outer Circle in the following time slots:

SE corner motors AM: [08:00-08:15 and 08:30-08:45] and PM: [17:30-17:45 and 18:00-18:15]
cycles AM: [08:15-08:30 and 08:45-09:00] PM: [17:45-18:00 and 18:15-18:30].

SW corner motors AM: [08:15-08:30] and PM: [17:30-17:45]
cycles AM:[08:30-08:45] PM: [18:00-18:15].

These counts were used to produce average hourly results shown in the table below. The counts at the two sites were done on different days, so they can't be compared exactly. However we think they are useful for indicating the volume of motors and the numbers of cyclists.

Abbreviations: OC: Outer Circle, PSE: Park Square East.

SE corner (junction of Outer Circle with Park Square East)

SE corner	AM motors(cycles)	Off peak (motors)	PM motors (cycles)
SB: OC->PSE	234 (268)	352	228(40)
SB: OC->OC	266 (102)	124	198(26)
NB: PSE->OC NB	138 (36)	116	254 (238)
NB: PSE-OC WB	10 (8)	16	8 (34)
EB: OC->OC NB	76 (90)	100	86 (116)
EB: OC->PSE	106 (94)	68	66 (76)
Total	830(598)	776	840 (530)

SW corner (Clarence Gate)

SW corner	AM motors(cycles)	Off peak (motors)	PM motors (cycles)
OC (W) -> OC(S)	488 (320)	264	288 (104)
OC (W) -> Baker St	200 (108)	180	240 (28)
OC (S) -> OC(N)	156 (28)	404	472 (156)
Total	844 (456)	848	980 (288)

Counts at Chester Gate pm peak

Chester Gate	PM peak (motor, cycle)		Taxis NB	Taxis SB	PTW NB	PTW SB
NB	138(36)					
SB	120(6)		72	52	48	16

Counts on East side of Outer Circle pm peak

A2: Screenline Counts from LB Camden. 2013 Outer Circle south of Chester Road

(AM 8:00-9:00, PM 4:30-5:30)

Northbound	Cars	Taxis	Motorbike	Van	Lorry	bus	Cycles	Total
AM peak	175	20	13	13	4	0	50	318
PM peak	314	68	38	18	0	0	149	597
All Day	2534	687	310	195	5	4	1546	5318

Southbound	Cars	Taxis	Motorbike	Van	Lorry	bus	Cycles	Total
AM peak	285	24	87	31	8	1	346	782
PM peak	176	49	20	10	0	0	37	292
All Day	2641	376	390	192	45	5	1117	4766

A3: Traffic Counts by TfL April 2013. Outer Circle between York Gate and Harley St.

(am peak 7-10 am, pm peak)

Eastbound	Cars	Taxis	Motorbike	Van	Lorry	bus	Cycles	Total
AM peak	396	41	57	1	1	1	323	822
PM peak	440	55	39	3	1	0	367	905
All Day	1725	217	150	21	5	4	1156	3278

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Westbound	Cars	Taxis	Motorbike	Van	Lorry	bus	Cycles	Total
AM peak	716	53	47	18	0	1	121	956
PM peak	999	133	94	3	0	1	259	1489
All Day	3537	450	231	43	4	3	592	4860

B: Traffic counts on Outer Roads

Road	Recent count	Highest count	Source
Park Road	25,197 (2012)	37,682 (2006)	www.dft.gov.uk/traffic-counts
Prince Albert Road	19,705 (2012)	30406 (2006)	www.dft.gov.uk/traffic-counts

Camden has provided counts for sites on a screenline running across Albany Street south of Robert Street. Over all Camden's screenlines, there is 35% reduction in total traffic flows between 2006 and 2013. But flows of motors on Albany Street have shown only a small decline over eight years; the following table gives 6 hour total traffic flows (8am-10am, 12 noon-2pm and 4pm-6pm):

2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
5,513	5,329	4,858	5,317	5,269	5,353	5,019	5,083

Closing a rat run will reduce traffic over time. There is capacity in the streets on this screenline

Note the advantage of reduction of traffic through Gloucester Gate: the junction of Gloucester Gate and Albany Street can be simplified by the removal of traffic signals and giving priority to the A4201.

C. ZSL Response to a Proposal to Reduce Traffic along Outer Circle (2008)

During an earlier campaign (2008) when we were looking at reducing vehicle flow in the road in front of the Zoo, the ZSL sent us a letter containing the following requirements.

We don't want to make it any harder for visitors to get to the Zoo than it is already. However, the proportion of zoo visitors coming by car has been dropping in recent years (24% in 2007, 14% in 2008). Requirements:

- Retain access and parking for disabled and less-abled visitors.
- Retain taxi drop-off / pick up area, perhaps within restricted area.
- Retain access for staff parking in Half Moon car park.
- Retain access to the Nuffield and Catering buildings for suppliers' vehicles.
- Ensure restrictions would not inhibit deliveries of urgent supplies to animal sections and vet hospital and therefore affect welfare.
- Ensure restrictions would not unduly inhibit visitor needs.
- Emergency access required at all times.

D. Videos of the Outer Circle and of le Parc de la Tête d'Or

The [Regent's Park film sequences](#) were shot on 15th October between 08:30 and 9:00 am. They show how the large numbers of motor vehicles totally ruin what should be a peaceful journey through the park for cyclists, runners and pedestrians. They also illustrate the hazards to vulnerable road users due to queues of motors and anxious drivers trying to squeeze in. They hint at the extra air pollution emitted by motors and inhaled by the cyclists trying to get past and pedestrians (including joggers) trying to squeeze through.

Let us compare this with the [video of le Parc de la Tête d'Or](#) in Lyon. With 117 ha, the area is very similar to Regent's Park at 166 ha. It also has large iron gates. There is a big lake with boating, a large and posh restaurant, a zoo, a velodrome, a war memorial, a rose garden, greenhouses, etc. [\[wikipedia.org\]](http://wikipedia.org) It's free of motor vehicles, apart from a few police and gardening vans. The most relevant fact for us: coaches and restaurant customers have a single access point.

References

(1) TED - How to solve traffic jams

http://www.ted.com/talks/jonas_eliasson_how_to_solve_traffic_jams.html

(2) TED - New York's Streets

http://www.ted.com/talks/janette_sadik_khan_new_york_s_streets_not_so_mean_any_more.html

(3) TED - The case for a walkable city

http://www.ted.com/talks/jeff_speck_the_walkable_city.html

(4) EC report - Reclaiming city streets for people

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/pubs/pdf/streets_people.pdf