

# A North-South Swiss Cottage Cycle Bypass by David Arditti , Sept 2000

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## **Introduction**

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On Camden's official cycle route map, the whole of the system is shown as constituting part of the London Cycle Network (LCN). However, no work has yet been done on making these roads safe for cyclists, and they remain extremely dangerous for those who attempt to cycle on them, owing to high vehicle speeds, heavy flows, the design of the signalling systems and the converging and diverging lanes of fast-moving traffic.

The whole environment is also extremely unfriendly to pedestrians, despite being the gateway to important civic facilities such as the Swiss Cottage Sports Centre, the main borough library and a market and theatre, with indirect and tortuous surface crossing facilities (although it is also possible to cross several of the roads using subways). This is also one of the most exhaust-polluted sites in London.

Changes to this junction will be essential to create a properly connected LCN in this part of London. The Camden Cycling Campaign has proposed that a future priority cross-borough cycle route should run from West Hampstead to Covent Garden. This will require a safe route for cyclists negotiating Swiss Cottage north to south.

The giratory system is now entirely a Red Route, for which the Traffic Director for London (TDFL) is responsible. The Red Routes were supposed to include improved facilities for pedestrian and cycle movement, but little change was made to these aspects when the Red Route was implemented here. Such improvements will require the co-operation of the TDFL with Camden Council.

## **Existing facilities**

Some facilities have been put in place to facilitate cycle movements in the Swiss Cottage area in the last 15 years. There is a cycle lane in St. Johns Wood Park, with an entrance on the south side of the giratory, which allows cyclists to travel southwards into St. John's Wood Park (a prohibited move for other vehicles). This connects up with other LCN routes going eastwards via Elsworth Road and King Henry's Road, westwards via Boundary Road, and southwards via Avenue Road. It should, consequently be extremely useful to cyclists; however, it is not, because the giratory system makes it effectively inaccessible from the north (from Finchley Road). There is also the Boundary Road cycle crossing of Finchley Road, which was constructed to create a cycle bypass of the Swiss Cottage giratory; however, it is not much used as it is too far south to provide a useful route between the north-west of the borough and other parts of the borough and Regent's Park, as intended, and it does not provide convenient access to the facilities of the Swiss Cottage area.

More useful currently is the cut-through for cycles between Finchley Road (southbound) and College Crescent south of Harben Parade, next to the cut-through for buses, because this allows cycles to cross at right-angles the traffic to and from Fitzjohn's Avenue, instead of having to merge with it as was the case before, and allows south and east-bound cyclists to get onto the left side of Avenue Road to gain access to the cycle route running through the road closure into Eton Avenue. This facility could be improved with the addition of dedicated signals for the cycle/bus movements, which would improve safety, but this issue will not be discussed further here. This facility currently provides a semi-satisfactory method for cyclists from the north and west to travel eastwards through Swiss Cottage.

The reverse journey has been much facilitated by the construction of the two-stage crossing for cyclists and

pedestrians between the Eton Avenue cycle path, by 100 Avenue Road, and the west side of Finchley Road. This is satisfactorily implemented, with some minor reservations, a great improvement on what existed before, and allows cyclists to negotiate the junction from east to west. The reservations are that the kerb between Eton Avenue and the lane on the pavement is badly constructed with a dip, that the 2-way lane, at a point where it turns through a right-angle, is foolishly obstructed by a pole in its centre bearing a cycle logo roundel, which makes the west and eastbound paths either side of the pole effectively far too narrow, and that the first island crossed in Finchley Road, going west, again has a kerb that is too steep.

Cycling from south to north through the Swiss Cottage junction, along Finchley Road, though not particularly pleasant, is acceptably safe because the cyclist is to the left of the traffic all the time and the Adelaide Road/Hillgrove Road junction works well enough from this point of view. However, the major problem in terms of "desire lines" for cyclists remains the north to south journey, to reach Avenue Road, St. John's Wood Park or the southern part of Finchley Road from the north. Some cyclists can be seen doing this, but attempting to negotiate the lane system in Avenue and Adelaide Roads on a bike can only be described as extremely dangerous. Dismounting and crossing this area as a pedestrian takes, starting from outside Swiss Cottage Library and finishing on the southbound carriageway of Finchley Road, some five stages of crossing with one of the "islands" visited being only 24 inches wide. This is impractical.

The plans given below show how the crossing layout in this area could be modified to create a practical cycle route north to south through Swiss Cottage, connecting the Eaton Avenue cycle route to the St. John's Wood Park route. This scheme would also improve pedestrian crossing facilities. It will be seen that it involves no fundamental alteration to the traffic patterns now existing, it utilises available space better than at present, and it is believed it would not seriously reduce the motor traffic capacity of the junction.

### **Details of the proposed north-south cycle scheme**

This scheme involves extending the cycle lane currently existing on the east side of College Crescent, on the road, by Hampstead Theatre, southwards along Avenue Road, past the 100 Avenue Road office block and the library. Cyclists travelling down Finchley Road, on the shared bus/bike lane, from the north, would continue to use the cut-through into the southern part of College Crescent from Finchley Road, as described above, to get onto the lane on the east side of Avenue Road. This lane currently terminates at the traffic lights where it meets the Eaton Avenue cycle path (on the pavement) at the special bike crossing.

Extending this lane southwards is not possible on the pavement, which is too narrow outside 100 Avenue Road, with the exit from the tube station and the bus stops combining to give heavy pedestrian usage. Hence it will have to be only an advisory lane on the road, going outside the two bus lay-bys, with buses crossing it to get in to the stops. South of the southernmost bus stop, however, the pavement is very wide to the Avenue Road corner, with surplus capacity. Here the cycle lane can be taken onto the pavement (there is already a cycle lane on a pavement in this area, as already noted, at Eton Avenue, which causes few difficulties, and the pedestrian flow there is greater than at this site). At the corner with Avenue Road, where there is currently a pedestrian crossing, the lane will swing to meet the crossing. How to modify this south-eastern corner of the Swiss Cottage junction to enable the cycle lane to get from outside the library over to St John's Wood Park poses a problem. The arrangement of the islands and crossings is already complicated enough, as shown in the diagram below of the area as it currently stands. Currently, from outside the library, it is necessary to cross Adelaide and Avenue Roads in four stages, first to island A, then to B, then C, to the west side of Avenue Road (see diagram). Island C, almost incredibly, is only 24 inches wide at its narrowest: little protection for pedestrians from heavy traffic travelling on both sides within inches at speeds in excess of 30 mph. The arrangement is hardly satisfactory for pedestrians at present, and presents too much delay to be useful for routing a bike lane.



Three options are proposed for a re-arranged bike and pedestrian shared crossing here:

#### **Option 1**

With small adjustments to the railings and kerblines of islands A and B it would be possible to create a straight, single-stage, long crossing of Adelaide and Avenue Roads between the library and the Avenue Road/St John's Wood Park corner. It is recommended that this be divided into parallel pedestrian and cycle tracks (a similar

thing has already been done at the Eton Avenue crossing). Though we have been considering here mainly cycle journeys from north to south, it would be beneficial, though not essential to the scheme, to make the cycle track two-way. Then an additional possible cycle route would be created from the St. Johns Wood Park cycle-lane into Adelaide Road going towards Chalk Farm. It is recommended that the existing cycle-lane in St Johns Wood Park be re-aligned eastwards to meet the new crossing, as shown, so that cycles would not have to join the traffic flow on the southern side of the giratory. Doing so would use space not currently being utilised for anything else. All the signals necessary for this option are already present, though some of them may have to be moved slightly. In the diagram, an additional change to the pedestrian crossings is shown: moving the crossing of the southbound lane of Avenue Road further south to connect the east side of Avenue Road directly with island C would make more sense under this arrangement and further benefit pedestrians crossing the southern arm of Avenue Road. An additional railing is shown on island C to improve pedestrian protection.



The advantages of option 1 are directness, simplicity and convenience for cyclists and pedestrians with relatively little physical re-engineering. The disadvantages are that it is likely to be more difficult to re-design the signal phasing for this option and doing so is more likely to create significant new delays for motor traffic than in the other options.

### **Option 2**

This involves making the cycle/pedestrian crossing two-stage, with a refuge at island B. There would be one straight, single-stage crossing from the library corner to island B, and another via island C, again to meet a re-aligned bike lane from St Johns Wood Park. Again, modest changes to the kerbs and railings of the islands would be required, and positional adjustments to existing signals. Again, a two-way bike lane in parallel with pedestrian crossings would be the ideal.



An advantage of option 2 would be that being two-stage, the necessary re-phasing of the traffic lights would be easier and less likely to introduce new delays than with option 1. These extra delays to traffic should not be significant. Again, the physical re-engineering required is modest. A disadvantage is that the space available on island B is rather restricted for it to act as a refuge and turning point for bikes.

### **Option 3**

This uses island D as the refuge and turning point. With the removal of a railing, the crossing from the library corner to island D could be straightened into a one-stage crossing. A new crossing is then proposed from island D to meet the bike lane in St Johns Wood Park aligned as at present (see diagram of option 3). This would require the stone embankment on the southern side of island D to be removed and new bike/pedestrian signals to be installed on both sides of the new crossing of the southern side of the giratory. Again, the facility could be southbound only for bikes, but it would be desirable and not much more difficult to make it two-way. Also shown in the diagram is an alteration to the junction at island C. This would be better for pedestrians crossing the southern arm of Avenue Road if the island were moved southwards and the crossing of Avenue Road made one-stage. The island should also be widened and protection improved.



The disadvantages of option 3 are the amount of engineering required to adapt island D and the introduction of an additional set of lights. The advantages are that again, additional delays to traffic should be slight, there is ample space on island D, and the existing bike lane in St Johns Wood Park could be left where it is.

### **Summary**

With fairly modest modifications to the engineering at Swiss Cottage junction, considerable mobility and safety enhancements for both cyclists and pedestrians would be possible with only small extra delays to motor traffic, if any at all. These should be acceptable under the revised Red Route guidance which claims to lay greater weight than before on promoting non-motorised means of transport. (The implemented Red Route here was designed using the old guidance.) This scheme would create an important link for London's strategic cycle network as well

as being a local amenity, improving access to the Swiss Cottage facilities, and being consistent with all relevant Camden Council policies and priorities. I would also expect it to be supported by the DETR as consistent with the National Cycling Strategy. © David Arditti 1999