



'Camden Cyclist' Newsletter: Feb/Mar2000

News for cyclists from the Camden Cycling Campaign (LCC), London.

2000 Campaign Diary & Events Listings

Newsletter editor: Paul Gannon

Royal parks peak hour plan

Culture Secretary, Chris Smith, is clearly a cautious man. After months of lobbying by LCC and MPs led by Ben Bradshaw, he has finally found the courage to instruct the Royal Parks to conduct limited experiments with cycling in the parks. But he has limited the experiments to the morning peak hour. So you may be able to cycle to work or to school via the parks, but not home!

Parallel with this, CCC and Westminster CC are trying to persuade the Royal Parks that it should include cycle facilities in a review of the arrangements for Outer Circle in Regents Park. We have suggested either a segregated cycle track or closure of Outer Circle to 'through motor-traffic'. The Outer Circle was originally intended for physical exercise (such as horse-riding) but has become a rat-run for traffic bound for Central London.

Seven Stations Link - the good and the bad

The good news is that the consultants, JMP, are preparing a comprehensive outline design of a high-quality segregated cycle route across the Camden section of the Seven Stations Link (Paddington to Liverpool St). We hope that consultation on Phase One of the SSL is underway by the time you receive this newsletter.

The bad news is that Islington's consultants, the Project Centre, have come up with a truly awful design for the Islington part of the route. True, it offers a few mandatory cycle lanes, but the main measures are anti-cyclist devices - the pavement build-out. This engineering feature has its place in comprehensive 'home-zone' designs, but makes life more dangerous for cyclists and does nothing to help pedestrians. And the mandatory lanes will be limited to peak hours and will rapidly become parking lanes.

Thousands of cars disappear in Kentish Town

The streets of Kentish Town have been transformed by Camden Council's latest 'controlled parking zone', CPZ. About 50% of the cars that used to be parked alongside every available inch of kerb, and plenty double-parked when there was no more kerbside space, have disappeared. Indeed the Council itself is astonished.

The council provided almost twice as many parking bays as needed in many streets. CCC has asked the council to review the provision of bays in current CPZs so that the number of bays can be matched to the number of permits and the road space freed can be reallocated to cyclists, pedestrians or environmental improvements.

The council deserves congratulations on success of the CPZs and its perseverance in the face of some vicious and unbalanced reporting by some local news media and virulent campaigns by local businesses. It is interesting that the business complaints seem to have dried up now that the CPZ is in operation - leading to speculation that a lot of the noise came from business employees worried about not having somewhere to park when driving to work from elsewhere in London.

The way CPZs clamp down on commuter driving may well be one reason why there are increasing levels of use of rail and the underground as well as walking and cycling in London. So the message to the Government from streets of Camden is that 'micro-measures' such as CPZs can indeed reduce car use despite the 'nay-sayers'.

Royal College Street compromise reached

After some very tough negotiations, which unfortunately bruised our relationship with the Council, we are pleased to say that Camden has agreed that the Royal College Street segregated cycle track should be widened to 2.5 metres. The Council also agreed to use road lane narrowing techniques to try and reduce the risk of accidents at the junction with Plender Street.

However, the Council rejected our view that, either tables should be provided at both the Plender Street and Praff Street junctions, or that the junctions should be closed to traffic entering Royal College Street. Instead the Council has said that it will monitor the situation. The Council also rejected our proposal that these junctions should both have 'Stop' rather than 'Give Way' markings in favour of a new system of triangular markings.

CCC cautions cyclists to use the new facility, when it is introduced early this year, with **GREAT CARE** at the junctions. Although cyclists, in both directions, have legal priority over vehicles turning into or out of Royal College Street across the cycle track, you should be prepared for motor vehicle drivers not to concede priority. Put your own safety first. Please report all near misses and actual collisions to CCC so that the council's 'monitoring' is based on evidence.

Also the council refused to review the design of the bus stop crossings. CCC reminds cyclists that despite the confusing design of the bus stop crossings, pedestrians/bus users have priority when crossing the cycle track. **PLEASE DO NOT CYCLE AGGRESSIVELY TOWARDS PEDESTRIANS AT THE BUS STOP CROSSINGS, BUT SLOW DOWN AND LET THEM BE AWARE THAT THEY MAY CROSS WITHOUT DANGER OF COLLISION WITH A CYCLIST.** This is very, very important as London Buses is trying to prevent cycle tracks which have to be crossed by bus passengers to board or leave a bus. If there are reports of problems for bus users, then their opposition will increase. **DO NOT EXPECT PEDESTRIANS TO LOOK - INSTEAD ALL CYCLISTS SHOULD SLOW DOWN AND GIVE WAY.** Please behave responsibly.

We warmly welcome the Council's review of the design of the facility, but have pressed for better consultation processes over detailed design of cycling facilities in future projects at an earlier stage to avoid a repetition of the mix up over the design for Royal College Street. The details can make or break a cycle project and unfortunately there is insufficient skill at designing cycle facilities in the UK generally. This is not a problem that is unique to Camden - indeed it is one of the better boroughs when it comes intentions. But the problem is the current generation of traffic engineers, not least those who refuse to accept the techniques applied in continental Europe, have insufficient understanding of; or enthusiasm for, cycling (or walking for that matter) projects.

Similarly, Railtrack has had to bring in overseas consultants to help it manage railway improvement projects because of the lack of experienced railway project engineers in the UK after years of no real investment. It's a long, hard struggle first to get councils to take cycling seriously, and then it's just as tough a job to get them to do things properly.

No money for walking

Camden's Walking Plan is attracting national attention as the first such plan developed by a local authority in the UK. Unfortunately, the Government has turned off the funds needed to turn the plan into a reality. Camden informed the last meeting of the Cyclists and Pedestrians Liaison Committee that, despite its laudable plan, there was little it could do in real terms as the Government refuses to allocate any funds for walking projects. The only money that could be used is allocations for local safety improvements and 'Safe Routes to Schools'.

Road safety played down

The last meeting of Camden's Cyclists and Pedestrians Liaison Committee had an extended discussion on road safety with thoughtful contributions from councillors and officers as well as cyclists, pedestrians and local residents. But one attendee at the meeting said nothing - the local police inspector. The police, surprisingly, do not consider that they have anything to contribute to a discussion about the problem that is responsible for more deaths and injuries in London than murder, mugging and assaults, with 115 pedestrians and 12 cyclists killed annually and many, many more injured. When specifically invited to comment, the inspector said that if we wanted the police to put more resources into road safety we needed to lobby at the "highest level". This means the Government.

The next morning BBC Radio Four revealed that the police were reducing their spending on road safety. "We have seen the budget for traffic policing cut from 15% in the mid-80s to 6% now", said Peter Williams of the Police Superintendents Association. 'And traffic policing has been removed from the core duties laid down by the Home Office.'

But the UK, says the BBC, "has one of the worst records for child pedestrian deaths in Europe with 5000 children hurt or killed on our roads every year." And, it was reported that where people were asked about road safety 86% said it should be a priority.

Cycling 'bizarre' says BBC hack

According to a BBC Radio Four news reporter, candidates for London's Mayor at a public meeting were asked such "bizarre" questions as policy for cycling in the Capital. Let's hope the Mayoral candidates don't share this reporter's 'dumbed down' outlook on cycling.

CCC Meetings ...

...are held every 2nd Monday of the month at Castlehaven Community Centre, Hawley Road (under railway arches' bridge), 7.30pm. ALL WELCOME. Next two meetings: Monday 14th February, 7.30pm & Monday 13th March, 7.30pm.



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