'Camden Cyclist' Newsletter: Apr/May 2000

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

Newsletter editor: Paul Gannon

Traffic displacement or evaporation?

It's rather galling for any cycle campaigner - we've won the arguments about pollution, danger and congestion so you'd expect to see rather more evidence of activity from local authorities and central government to get Britain on its bike.

But instead all too often we find the very arguments we've used for the last 25 years about pollution, danger, and congestion turned round and thrown back at us by those who oppose any change - except more motor vehicles. All too often we find that any measure that is proposed to reduce traffic and improve conditions for cyclists and pedestrians is opposed and rejected on the grounds that it will increase pollution, increase danger or increase congestion!

Regent's Park is a classic example of this cancer at the heart of British governance. The Royal Parks Authority (whose budget is larger than that of all the National Parks added together) recently conducted an incredibly expensive consultation exercise on ways to make Outer Circle more attractive for park users.

CCC, together with Westminster CC, proposed either two-way segregated cycle-tracks or, our preferred option, closing Outer Circle to through motor vehicle traffic. The former idea was rejected even before the consultation began as it would be too 'visually intrusive' and 'not in keeping with the overall feel of the park'. Instead the consultants came up with various options including lots of traffic lights (indeed more traffic lights than Oxford St has Christmas lights!) or lots of brightly coloured tables at each and every junction - none of these ideas was seen as visually intrusive or not in keeping with the original role of Outer Circle (ie physical exercise). But we're used to that level of biased thinking as cyclists.
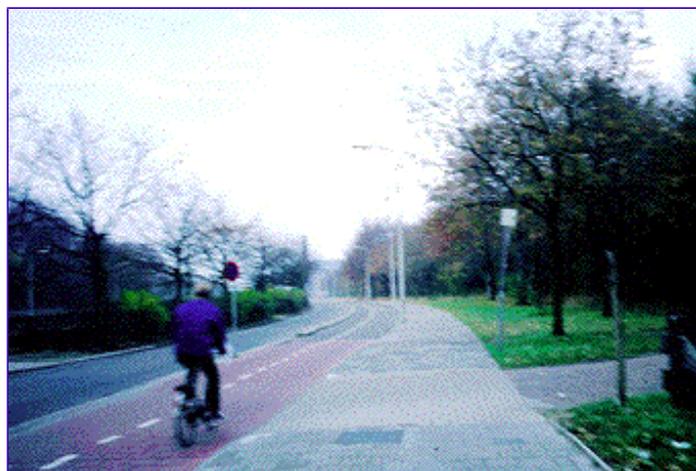
The photo above shows how a road way in the Dutch royal park in the Hague (close to the royal palace) was cut down and half of it given over to a cycleway. But we are different in this country, of course - we can always rely on our governors to drum up a plausible sounding reason for saying 'NO!' to cyclists. That's the difference!

And, instead we can expect the Royal Parks to go ahead, spending lots of money on visually intrusive works that will not make one jot of difference - because they fail to address the problems of speeding, rat-racing traffic.

But, what was more of a shock, was the decision by London Borough of Camden - London's greenest borough according to its own publicity machine - to oppose closure of Outer Circle to through motor vehicle traffic on the grounds that closure would displace traffic onto neighbouring Camden streets!

What Camden has ignored is research that pretty conclusively shows that well-designed traffic reduction measures and road closures lead not to traffic displacement but to traffic reduction or 'traffic evaporation'. Drivers who previously found they could reasonably drive to work decide that the effort becomes too much when forced to use main roads instead of rat runs. The evidence for this is very respectable and comes from the University of London.

Unfortunately, the level of public scrutiny of British government institutions, and thus the level of public debate, is so poor that councils can simply ignore this evidence and continue to reject traffic reduction measures on the grounds of alleged traffic displacement. Plausible excuses for inaction, rather than real arguments, dominate the debate.

We have seen how the pedestrianisation of Camden High Street has been effectively deadlocked by those primary motive is their visceral dislike Camden Lock Market and Camden's pub/club late-night life - but who use the spurious traffic displacement argument.

We've also seen the Traffic Director (of the Red Routes office) reject proposals, for example, for the closure of the left tum into Castle Road because of the alleged traffic displacement effects on Kentish Town Rd (a Phase II Red Route). And progress on the Camden Road/Camden Pk Road cycle crossing has been stymied for past two years because partly of spurious potential traffic displacement 'fears' generated by the Traffic Director and sympathisers in Camden.

This is all the more depressing when you consider how Cllr. John Thane, Chair of the Environment Ctte, oftens points out how years ago traffic displacement was used to argue against the closure of Phoenix St. to through traffic. Yet, as Cllr. Thane says, after closure traffic simply disappeared.

What a pity that Cllr. Thane doesn't have more influence in putting some limits on the abuse of the 'traffic displacement' argument by his fellow councillors and LBC officials in relation to the SSL and Regents Park and many other examples.

This argument about traffic displacement will become critical when the Seven Stations Link consultation takes place. If the anti-cycling lobby is allowed to get away with generating false fears of traffic displacement the whole SSL project could collapse - and with it prospects for a serious attempt to increase cycling levels in London.

It is vital therefore that cyclists and pedestrian campaigners are aware of the way in which the motor vehicle lobby is abusing the case for reducing motor vehicle levels to prevent that very thing from happening - and the way in which councillors and officers often make use of these dubious, but plausible sounding excuses for saying 'NO' to cyclists.

CCC News

- CCC's meeting with candidates for the GLA election received good press coverage in the Ham & High, but in general the candidates were disappointing in their approach to cycling.

- CCC is opposing a plan by LBC to use 'safe routes to schools' tunds on replacing zebra crossings by pelican crossings (see here for more details). We want the funds to be used on pedestrian friendly routes to schools by developing a 'pedestrian network'.
- The Royal College Street two-way cycle track will be officially opened on 18th April. More details will be e-mailed to members and posted on the CCC website when available. We hope the kink at the Pratt St junction will be removed before then!
- Get more involved with CCC's cutting edge lobbying, cycle facility design unit or fun social events organisation - phone Paul on 0207-482-6692

CCC Meetings....

.... are held every 2nd Monday of the month at Castlehaven Community Centre, Hawley Road (under railway arches/bridge), 7.30pm. Secure indoor cycle parking. ALL WELCOME

Traffic Director gets his records in a twist

CCC member Paul Gannon recently wrote to the LCC magazine, London Cyclist, on behalf of CCC, to record our disquiet at the way the LCC is warming towards having the present Traffic Director (the Red Routes Tsar) play a key role in planning London's traffic for the Mayor & GLA.

Paul pointed out our representations on the balls-up of the Kentish Town Rd bus priority network measures (still not flilly implemented!). The Traffic Director replied to London Cyclist, inter alia, that he had no record of our representations.

That may be true - but only if the Traffic Director has lost or discarded his records. CCC has written several times to the Traffic Director and three CCC members even had a meeting with Mr Rod Black of the Traffic Director's staff - as Mr Derek Turner himself was too busy to attend despite numerous invitations to meetings with us!

The Traffic Director's letter also provided statistics about 'new' cycle route and bus lanes on Red Routes. But the figures he provides reflect 'net' gains not 'gross' ones and thus do not represent the real effect of his activities. Perhaps his records only hold favourable statistics and lack details of cycle tracks (eg Hampstead Rd) and bus lanes (eg Euston Road) which he removed?

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