



'Camden Cyclist' Newsletter: Apr/May 2002

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John Franklin speaks at CCC's March meeting

John Franklin, the author of 'Cyclecraft' (the reference bible for on-road cycling techniques), and opponent of segregated cycle facilities, came to our March meeting to put forward his view that Camden's push towards physically segregated cycle tracks is not the right way forward.

Franklin's case goes as follows:

1. segregation is in itself unsafe;
2. cycling becomes safer when there are more cyclists;
3. segregation doesn't make for more cyclists;
4. we have to look to other strategies to enhance safety and encourage cycling.

In support of his first claim, Franklin made much of the problems presented when segregated tracks meet junctions. For example, motor traffic collisions with cycles on tracks usually involve the more violent side impacts, rather than the glancing impacts which tend to characterize road collisions. He also claims there are a lot of head-on collisions on cycle tracks themselves.

Franklin's suggestions for encouraging cycling stressed the need to restrain car use by measures such as reducing parking facilities. Improving safety would also be important, by for example taming car performance. There would be some role for road re-design, such as widening lanes.

It is fair to say that some CCC members do agree with quite a lot of what Franklin says. The other side of the argument, though, goes like this:

The main response to Franklin's skepticism is to point to the statistical evidence of a three-way link between the provision of high-quality, substantially segregated facilities, cycle safety, and cycle use:

Death rates for cyclists per thousand million kilometres cycled:

- UK: 58
- Netherlands: 22
- Denmark: 13

The average number of kilometres cycled per person per year:

- UK: 100
- Netherlands: 870
- Denmark: 1050

(1999 figures, from the Department of Transport.)

The key fact is that the Netherlands and Denmark are countries which do have high-quality, substantially segregated cycle facilities, and also have much more cycling and safer cycling.

As to Franklin's particular points about segregation, some of these relate to sub-standard facilities and some to existing behaviour which segregation aims to modify. There isn't to say there are no problems - clearly there are (see over) - but they are ones we're working to resolve.

Franklin's alternative strategy involves directly taking on the motor lobby, which won't happen under current political circumstances. Cutting back on parking might work well in other towns, but isn't going to make much difference in central London, given that it is already limited and most of the traffic is service related. 20 mph urban speed limits would be great, but would require very considerable enforcement and engineering.

Seven Stations Link

The stretch of the Seven Stations Link two-way segregated route east of Gower Street has been open for two months, completing the western half of the Camden part of the route (from Cleveland Street in the west, the boundary with Westminster, to Gordon Square in the east).

A number of problems have been reported with the route. Two in particular . . .

Gower Street/Torrington Place junction

Cyclists going west waiting at the lights to cross over Gower Street have reported dangerous incidents with motor vehicles cutting the corner as they turn in from Gower St into Torrington Place, often forcing cyclists to leap for their lives. Two factors were responsible: (i) the segregating island did not continue up to the stop line, depriving cyclists of the protection they're meant to have on a segregated route; (ii) motorists heading west positioning themselves to the right of the old line-painted lane on the other side of Torrington Place were causing traffic coming the other way to come in too closely to the new cycle track.

The first problem was resolved some weeks back, when we got the council to get its contractors to extend the segregation island along to the junction. (Apparently, the reason they hadn't done this the first time round was that they had 'run out of materials'!) A bollard was put in at the end of the island, which, however, has already been knocked down by motorists many times. Following a site meeting with council officers and councillors towards the end of March, the council has agreed to redo the road markings to direct motor traffic away from the bollard.

Byng Place/Gordon Square

Cyclists are experiencing lots of difficulties at this junction, as motorists frequently fail to see them when travelling along the route in either direction. The Council has agreed to put up warning signs; we have stressed that the real answer is to close the western side of Gordon Square to through motor-traffic (and divert it via Endsleigh Gardens/Tavistock Square) and hope that this will be achieved at some stage.

As ever, please let us know of your experiences, good as well as bad!

Future Meetings

We meet on the second Monday of every month at the Castlehaven Community Centre, Hawley Road, NW1 (with secure indoor cycle parking). The next meetings will be on Monday 8th April, Monday 13th May and Monday 10th June. We plan to have a speaker at the June meeting (possibly Chief Inspector Ian Brooks from the Metropolitan Police!)