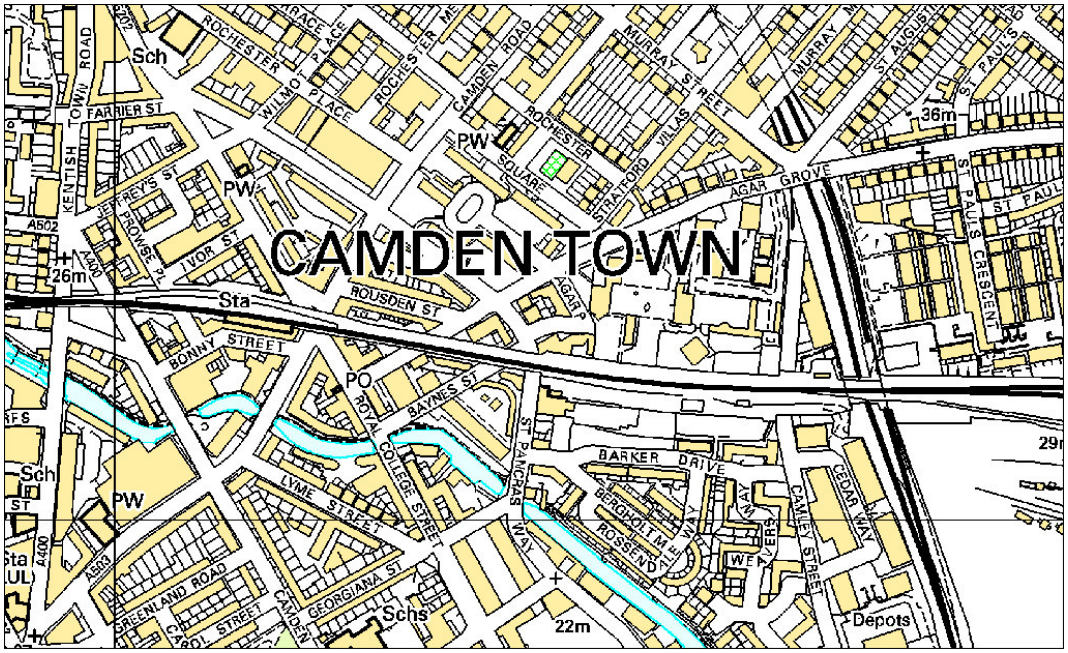
Agar Grove/St. Pancras Way/Baynes Street, Camden

The following is a review of cycle movements in this area of Camden following a request by the Camden Cycling Campaign.

Introduction

The report has been written as a journey along the various cycle routes following the movements of cyclists that pass through the junction of Agar Grove and St. Pancras Way, Camden. Comments on the existing routes and recommendations for improvement are included in each section. There are also sections for pedestrian and vehicle movements as these also need to be considered and improved. Finally there is a recommendation for a longer term solution to rearrange the cycle movements away from the junction.



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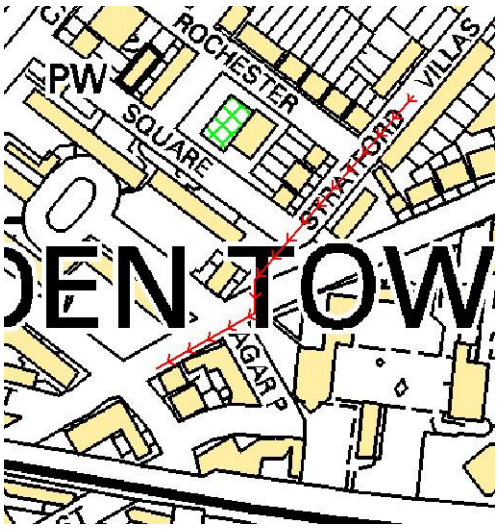
November 2005

Cyclist from Stratford Villas

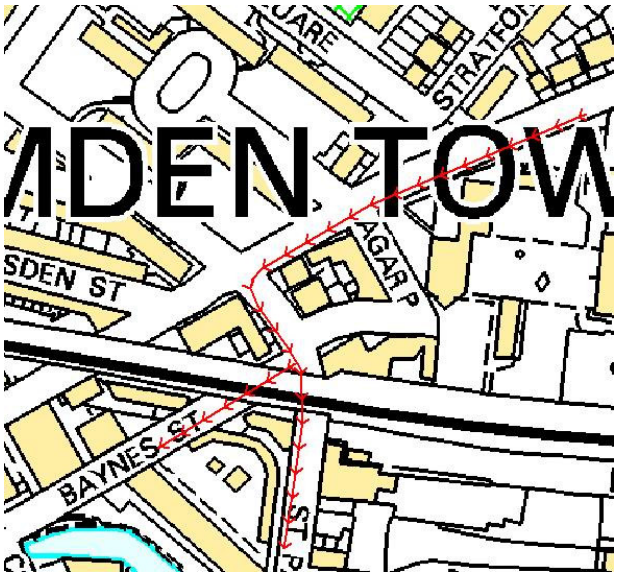


A cyclist has to give way to any pedestrians on the northern footway of Agar Grove before crossing Agar Grove to gain access to a cycle lane leading to traffic signals at junction with St. Pancras Way. A steady queue of traffic makes this manoeuvre very difficult during the morning peak. Some cyclists simply ride outside the traffic queue as seen below. This means they miss the dedicated cycle facilities on the approach to the junction but at least they are on the correct side of the traffic to filter into the cycle lane on St. Pancras Way. However if they travel with the traffic when the lights turn green for vehicles, as many do, they are then in conflict with the traffic from Agar Grove that wishes to turn right into Baynes Street because the cyclists do not have sufficient time to clear this junction.

A cyclist joins Agar Grove from Stratford Villas

Recommendation: introduce a raised cycle zebra[1] at this location to aid crossing for both cyclists and pedestrians.

Cyclist from Agar Grove



A cyclists has to cycle over a series of speed cushions in banks of 3 across the carriageway, drivers try to centre their vehicles on the speed cushions and can and do swerve into the cycle line to do this.

Cyclists then access a mandatory cycle lane, painted green, on the approach to the signal controlled junction with St Pancras Way. The extremely narrow width of this lane (approx 1m) causes long queues of cyclists to build up, especially if the person at the front does not move forward to the stop line after pressing the demand button. Assuming they do push the button and

move forward to the stop line they have a long wait for the green cycle to show on the signal head.

Push button beside the cycle lane

The push button information is incorrect having been ‘lifted’ from a toucan crossing system. There is no red cycle as shown, the sign is ahead not opposite, the signal head is too high for a cyclist waiting at the stop line to watch this and observe the road ahead as they are almost immediately below it.
On a green signal the cyclist can only turn left into St Pancras Way and most access the dedicated cycle lane to continue along St Pancras Way or turn right into Baynes Street. There are no signs to indicate where various routes go, no signs in advance to show there is a cycle lane around the corner on the offside, some cyclists stay on St Pancras Way with vehicles. The concept is good, by giving the cyclists their own phase in the signal sequence most cyclists are then clear of Baynes Street before vehicles are able to proceed. However not all cyclist can clear the junction especially when there is a long queue of cyclists in Agar Grove and this frequently occurs during the morning peak. It is accepted there is insufficient room to widen the cycle lane without reducing the width of the relatively narrow vehicle lanes.

Cyclists have to queue in single file

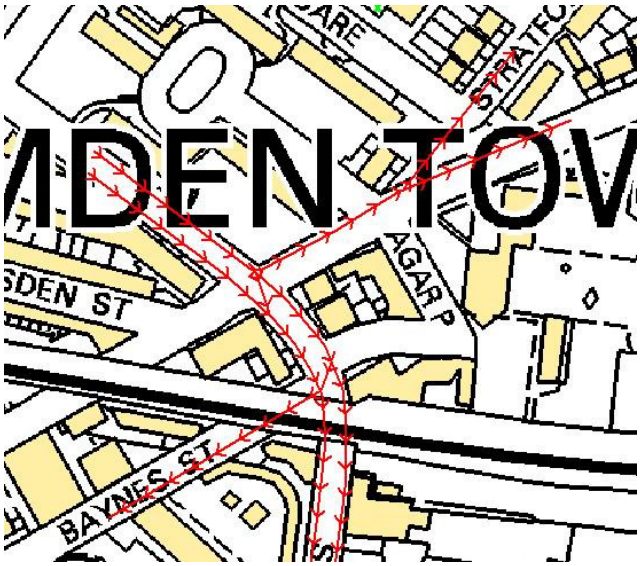
The green time does not always give the back of the queue time to clear the signals but invariably all cyclists in the queue continue through rather than wait. Those who do not clear the Baynes Street junction and are intent on carrying along St Pancras Way now have to look back over their left shoulder to ensure there is no vehicle approaching from behind that intends to turn right across them. At about the same time they hit the excessively steep ramp to the table top crossing to Baynes Street. The gradient is steeper on both of the approaches for cyclists than it is on the one for vehicles.

Steep ramp for cyclists on approach to table top crossing of Baynes Street

Some cyclists choose to turn into Baynes Street at the vehicle right turn facility rather than use the dedicated cycle lane.

Recommendations:
Introduce signs to clearly indicate destinations and the presence of the dedicated two way cycle lane.
Revise the face of the push button mechanisms
Reposition the signal head for cyclists at a lower level or add an additional one
Reduce the gradient on the ramp for cyclists going over the table top junction St Pancras Way/Baynes Street

Cyclist from Camden Road via St Pancras Way



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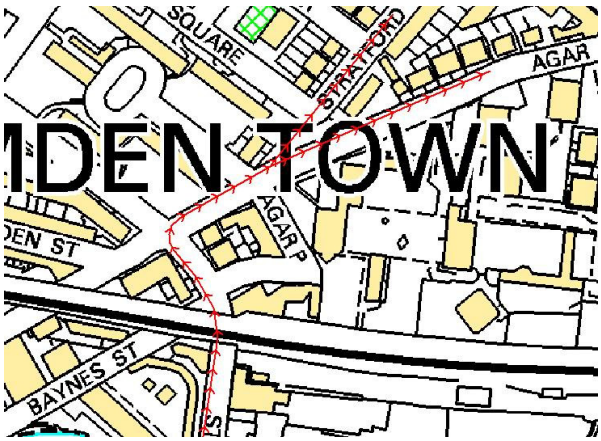
There are cycle lanes on both sides of this one way road on the approach to Agar Grove but there are no direction signs for cyclists to indicate the lane on the northeast is best for the left turn into Agar Grove and southwest side to access the dedicated two way cycle lane beyond the signals.

However this lane is blocked by a relatively new kerb extension on the south west corner of the junction causing cyclists using this lane to move out into the path of vehicles to avoid the obstacle.

Recommendations:
Improve signage for cyclists
Remove the kerb extension, reduce its height to allow cyclists to cycle over it or cut a cycle bypass through the rear of it

Cyclists from St Pancras Way travelling north



There is a dedicated two way cycle lane on the south west side which crosses Baynes Street (and the turning traffic) but visibility is good and cyclists can see and be seen although not all drivers give way to cyclists they can see approaching them. Cyclists also encounter a steep ramp to the table top crossing when travelling north.
Just prior to the Junction with Randolph Street and Agar Grove there is another push button demand required to trigger signals to turn right into Agar Grove. The same issues, as before, relate to the signals and button mechanism. Few cyclists activate this button and simply move towards the centre of the junction and wait until the traffic on St Pancras Way stops and then proceed. This manoeuvre could be achieved more safely and automatically with a cyclists green stage appearing during an all red phase for vehicles with the stop line repositioned nearer the junction.
Observations during the evening peak suggest fewer cyclists use this route northbound preferring to use Randolph Street and to cross the signal junction with the lights.
Once onto Agar Grove a left filter lane gives cyclists access to Stratford Villas on a dedicated two way lane.

Recommendations:
Reduce the gradient on the cycle lane approach to the table junction
Remove the push button facilities and introduce a signal phase that stops all vehicles but permits cyclists to turn from St Pancras Way into Agar Grove. This needs to be combined with a repositioning of the signal head and stop line approximately 5m forward of its current postion.

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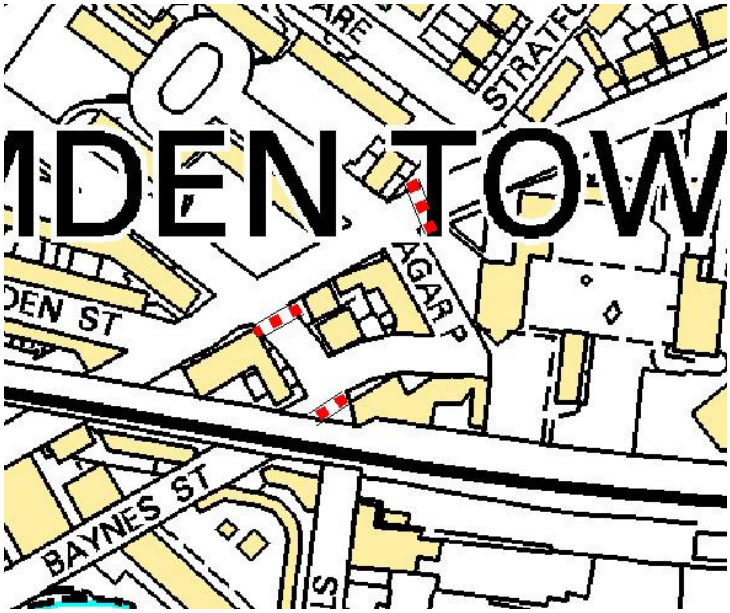
Pedestrians

There is currently no pedestrian facility across:-

- the southern arm of St Pancras Way

- Agar Grove to Agar Place

- St Pancras Way between Wrotham Road and Baynes Street



Recommendations:

- Add a formal pedestrian crossing facility to the signals on the southern arm of St Pancras Way

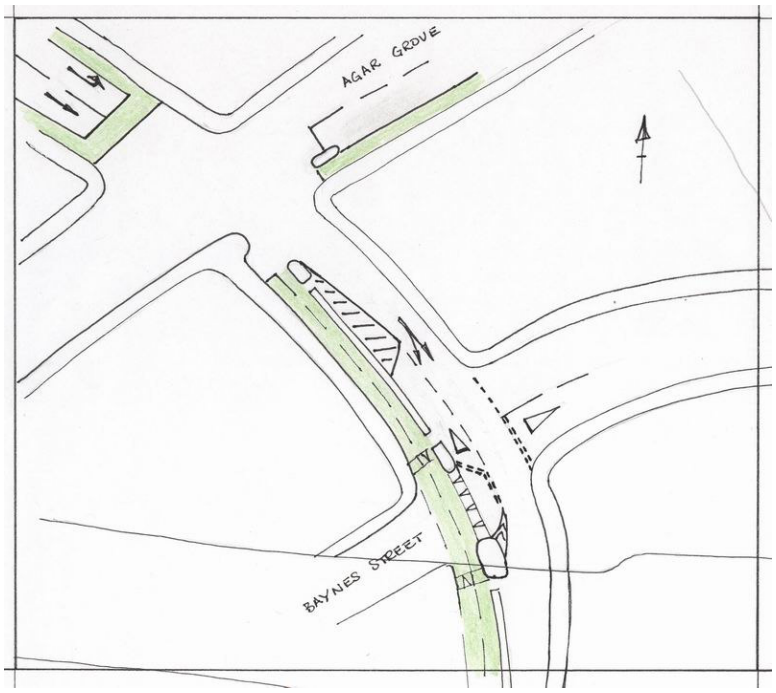
- Introduce a raised cycle zebra[1] across Agar Grove between Stratford Villas and Agar Place
- Drop the kerbs to permit a crossing of St Pancras Way between Wrotham Road and Baynes Street

Vehicle drivers

I my opinion the greatest problem with this site is the poor siting of the give way line on St Pancras Way. It is parallel to the direction of flow and can not be seen clearly by most drivers especially at night and when wet. The carriageway narrows to a single lane immediately after the right turn but this is not clear from the road markings.

Some drivers take this corner at speed

Local drivers are well aware and take the turn very quickly often with little regard for cyclists and pedestrians. The existing give way signs are set very high and lost against the bridge parapet for most drivers and when approaching the driver really only has time to observe the road surface and his mirrors to check for cyclists. A revised lining system would improve the site immeasurably making it much clearer to understand. It is suggested the right turn be made a distinct manoeuvre as shown on the following sketch.



A right turn lane into Baynes Street

There is also conflict with drivers coming from Camden Road using both lanes on St Pancras Way to continue through the junction. Since there is a considerable volume of traffic that turns left into Agar Grove it is suggested the northeast lane be signed and lined for this purpose with the southwest lane marked for the straight ahead movement. Currently both lanes are marked for the straight ahead movement.

Vehicles have to merge as they pass through the junction

The cycle lane is blocked by a build out

Cyclists and vehicles in the southwest lanes are forced to the left to negotiate the islands and into a road which narrows to single lane but with no markings. Whilst the absence of markings could be useful in slowing traffic regrettably it does not achieve this aim since most drivers appear to be familiar with the junction. The forcing together of vehicles and cyclists is potentially dangerous and the island needs to be capable of being ridden over by a cycle even if it remains as a 'shadow build out' on the surface perhaps in different materials.

Recommendations:-
Introduce a new lining system to incorporate a right turn lane from St. Pancras Way to Baynes Street.
Remark the lanes on St. Pancras Way on the approach from Camden Road to indicate the nearside lane as a left turn only and the offside lane for straight ahead.

Longer term

Consideration should be given to a total redesign of the cycle flow through the junction. Since much of the flow starts in Stratford Villas and Agar Grove it is suggested that with a cycle zebra in place as recommended above it would be better to use Agar Place and Wrotham Road as the cycle route. It would be possible to create a two way cycle lane on the northeast side of Agar Place either by moving the footway inside the railings or widening the footway by setting the railings back to create a shared use facility.

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An additional set of signals at the junction of Wrotham Road and St. Pancras Way would ensure the safety of cyclists and pedestrians crossing at this point. The signals would be connected to those at the Agar Grove junction to maximise the flow through the area. This would negate the need for the push button facilities, the cycle lane in Agar Grove and a short length of the two way lane on St. Pancras Way. Wrotham Way is very quiet and with ample room for several cyclists to wait, green times for this leg would be relatively small.

Conclusion

Considerable effort has gone into providing a safe route through the Agar Grove/St. Pancras Way junction. The concept is sound but the execution could be improved with a few relatively minor modifications. That said the scheme does not remove some of the conflict because of constraints in the physical amount of highway available on the routes chosen. In the short term more needs to be done to ensure drivers are aware of the requirement to give way before entering Baynes Street and their vehicle speeds need to be reduced on the approach to this turn. The right turn lane suggested will go some way to achieve this. In the longer term cyclists would be better served by giving them more space on an another route via Agar Place.

1 A cycle zebra is similar to a conventional zebra crossing with a wide raised platform that extends either side of the Zebra so that cyclists can cycle across (ie not on the actual black and white section but very close on either side). Design of the approaches is as for a Toucan. See picture below.

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