

CCC's ideas for a Liveable Neighbourhood in Holborn

"The Mayor, through TfL and the boroughs, will improve and manage London's streets to create a high-quality public realm that encourages walking and cycling by ... creating 'Liveable Neighbourhoods' to improve the public's experience of walking, cycling and using public transport and to increase opportunities to use streets as public spaces and for play, and to encourage fewer trips by car. " ([Mayor's Transport Strategy 2018](#) p26, Proposal 1).

Map of the area and some key destinations



Although Holborn is a business centre, it is also a residential area. The following characteristics are gathered from the 2011 census data for the Holborn and Covent Garden ward ¹ which covers the above area but extends further to the east and west:

- There are just over 13,000 residents with 95% living in households;
- The age profile is relatively young with 73% between 16 and 59 compared with 61% Camden wide;
- Almost 75% of households are car free compared with 61% Camden wide.

¹ From <https://opendata.camden.gov.uk> (see people and places – Holborn and Covent Garden ward)

Challenges and opportunities in the Holborn neighbourhood

Although Holborn is buzzing with activity (business, law, hospitals, shopping etc) its streets are far from Healthy Streets.

The **challenges** that a scheme must address include:

- The disaster that is the Holborn gyratory.
- The dangerous and polluted nature of the main roads.
 - very heavy cycling flows on all the main roads despite their supremely unattractive nature; more than 17,000 cycle journeys/day through the area;
 - A lot of pedestrian traffic from people using the transport hubs and accessing all the resources identified in the map.

The **opportunity** is to address these problems with a Liveable Neighbourhood scheme that maintains excellent access to all the local resources while transforming the public domain and most of the roads, making them safe, comfortable and attractive for walking and cycling.

- The 'in between areas where people live, work and play' can become more liveable if through motor traffic is moved onto a small number of main roads;
- space for motor vehicles would be reallocated to space for cycling and walking;
- the many green spaces would be enhanced to make them more accessible for people on foot, linking them into useful walking routes.



A transformed street: part of Waltham Forest Mini Holland²

² wesupportmh.wordpress.com/gallery/

The Gyratory

A large rotating volume of motor traffic is at heart of the Holborn area and is a big problem:

- it's hard for pedestrians to cross roads because of the relentless speed and volume of motor vehicles;
- the heavily-used cycling route on Bloomsbury Way – Theobalds Road is blighted at the western end and it is virtually impossible to improve it with this gyratory in place;
- some bus journeys are longer e.g. eastbound buses to High Holborn must go via Bloomsbury Way and Procter Street;
- junctions are dominated by turning motor traffic e.g. turning from Vernon Place into Procter Street and from Procter Street into High Holborn;
- A bus contraflow lane was installed on Bloomsbury Way in 2006 and finally, in January 2014 cyclists were allowed to use it – it's not ideal but far safer than going round the gyratory.



Map showing the one-way clockwise motor traffic flow

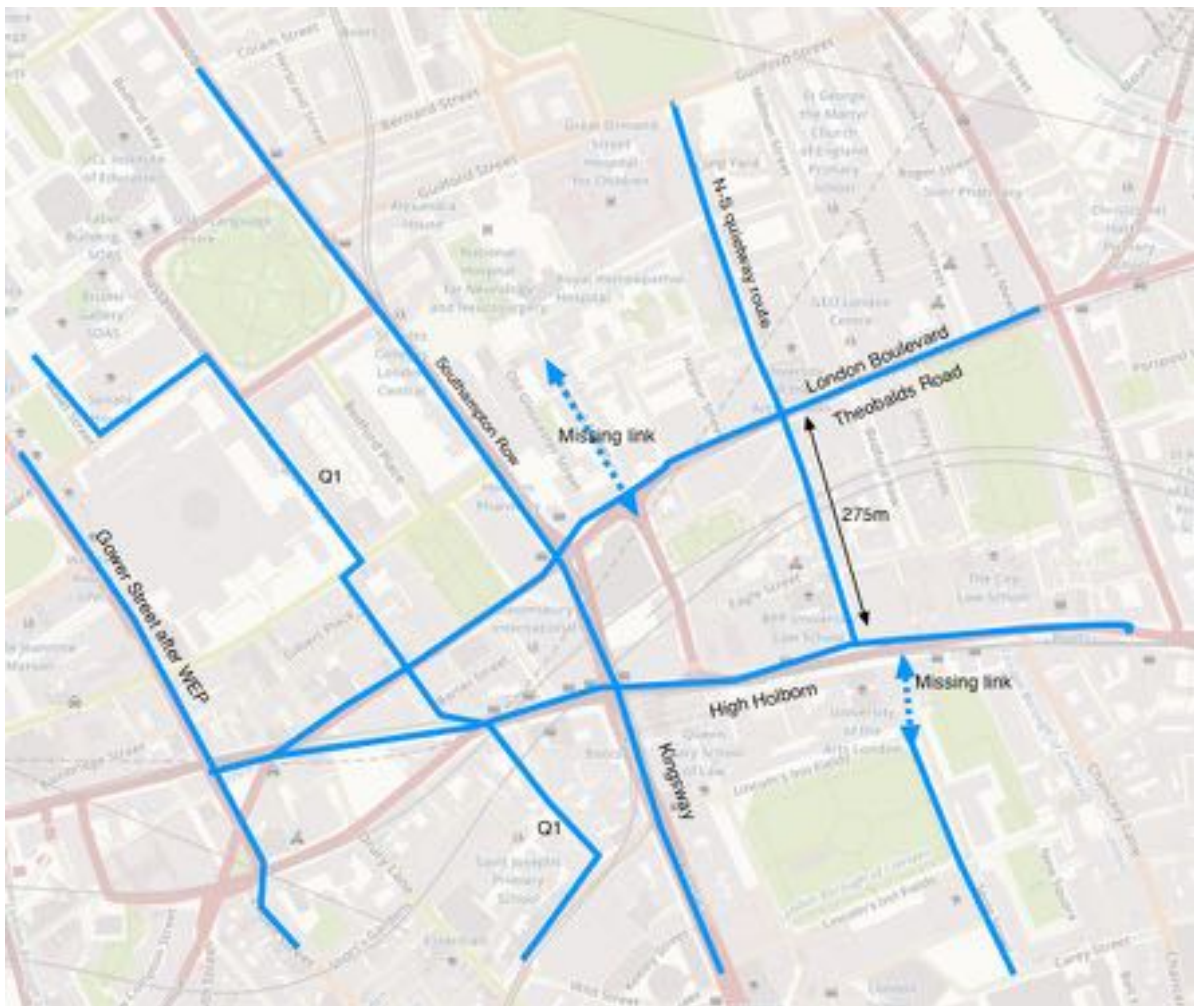
TfL intends to reconstruct Holborn tube station, doubling its size underground and placing a new spacious entrance in Procter Street. <https://consultations.tfl.gov.uk/tube/holborn-station-upgrade/> Work will start in 2021 and take six years. Closure of the southern end of Procter Street to carry out this work implies that the gyratory will need to revert to two-way working within the next 2-3 years.

Our ideas below are based on the assumption that the gyratory is absent and that the roads will revert to two-way working, some roads for general motor traffic, some for buses and all for walking and cycling.

Cycling and the Central London Cycle Grid

All of the cycle routes shown on the map below are currently very far below any currently-accepted safety standards³ (apart from the two quietways).

- A new high-quality protected route called London Boulevard is planned to run along Bloomsbury Way and Theobalds Road, continuing on Clerkenwell Road and Old Street through Islington to Old Street station. Theobalds Road currently has what is probably the heaviest cycle traffic in London at 7,647 journeys/day (DfT 2016 traffic count).
- The recommended density for an urban cycling grid requires additional cycle routes on High Holborn and on Southampton Row – Kingsway, both of which are already heavily used for cycling. DfT's 2016 traffic counts show 4257 cycle journeys/day on High Holborn and 3809 on Southampton Row. These large numbers are also reflected in [this rendering of the Strava data](#)⁴.
- A protected route on Gower Street–Bloomsbury Street – Shaftesbury Avenue – Endell Street is included in the design for Camden's West End project, completion expected by end of 2019.
- A north-south Quietway from Kings Cross runs through Lamb's Conduit and Red Lion Street (the former is already filtered and the latter needs to be closed to motor traffic near to Eagle Street). Cyclists need a safe crossing of Holborn and a link through Great Turnstile to Lincoln's Inn Fields.
- Quietway 1 runs north-south through the western end of the area.



Map showing the main cycle links and some desired permeability

³ Such as the London Cycle Design Standards

⁴ Although Strava's raison d'être is for sport cyclists to record and compare their distances and speeds, many of its users keep it switched on for their commuting rides in order to increase their monthly total.

Walking routes

We have been unable to obtain any data on pedestrian flows. However, Camden's recent consultation on the Holborn junctions stated:

The area is currently congested and dominated by motor traffic, with a high number of traffic collisions, a high number of pedestrians, indirect and inconvenient crossing facilities and inadequate footway space.

While the TfL consultation on Holborn Tube Station renewal stated

- *The station is located at a busy junction with heavy traffic and large numbers of pedestrians;*
- *The strongest flow of people is to destinations east of the existing station;*
- *90 per cent of passengers walked to their final destinations.*

Even those sources gave us little idea as to the pedestrian flows through our area but we have noted the following:

- It's clear that very large numbers of people walk on the same main roads that people cycle on, i.e. on High Holborn, Southampton Row – Kingsway and on the Theobalds Road – Bloomsbury Way alignment;
- They also walk on the Lamb's Conduit – Red Lion alignment e.g. they could be walking between Coram's Fields and Lincoln's Inn Fields;
- As with cycling, the connection to Covent Garden is poor (i.e. Q1 is hard to find and indirect between British Museum and Covent Garden).
- The space for motor traffic on the main roads needs to be reallocated for walking and cycling.

Motor traffic

There would be one N-S and one E-W through route for general motor traffic. We propose:

- A north-south motor route on Southampton Row – Kingsway.
- An east-west motor route on High Holborn.
- Buses, cycles and local access only on Bloomsbury Way and Theobalds Road.
- Each of these motor routes will be redesigned with more space for the footways, protected cycle tracks and bus stop bypasses.
- The local access roads (e.g. Red Lion Street, Bedford Row, Doughty Street) will all be filtered to allow motor vehicles to reach any address while preventing their use as through routes.
- Procter Street will no longer be needed as a through route for motor vehicles or for buses. The southern end could potentially become an attractive public space with walking and cycling through it. There is also opportunity to enhance Red Lion Square.



Map showing the north-south and east-west through motor routes

Simpler Bus Journeys

At the moment, eastbound buses that serve High Holborn use the gyratory (Bloomsbury Way, Vernon Place and Procter Street). After removal of the gyratory we suggest:

- Buses that serve Theobalds Road (38, 55, 199) will continue to use Bloomsbury Way.
- Buses that serve High Holborn (8, 25, 98⁵) will use New Oxford St and High Holborn in both directions, not only shortening the eastbound journey but also making it easier for users to understand the routes.
- Buses that currently turn down Southampton Row from Vernon Place (1,171) will turn into Kingsway at the Holborn tube junction.
- Route 243 which currently uses Procter Street southbound will use Southampton Row in both directions. Other bus routes (e.g. 188,168, 59 on Southampton Row–Kingsway) will be unchanged.



Map showing the bus routes affected by our proposals for simplifying bus journeys after removal of the gyratory

For a map of all the bus routes here and elsewhere in London see [this Open Cycle Map rendering](#).

⁵ Bus 98 terminates in Red Lion Square and we'll leave it to TfL to work this one out

Healthy streets: high quality high streets



Visualisation made by UM in 2014—looking east with Conway Hall on the right. [Larger image](#)

Theobalds Road

- Through buses and cycles only (with local motor traffic access).
- Wide, protected cycle lanes, wider footways.
- Bus stop bypasses on alternate sides of the road.
- Plenty of room for trees, seating, bike parking etc

Bloomsbury Way

- Through buses and cycles only (with local access for motors);
- a central cycle track;
- Bloomsbury Square – Vernon Place, improvements currently out to consultation;
- consider pedestrian links to the British Museum.

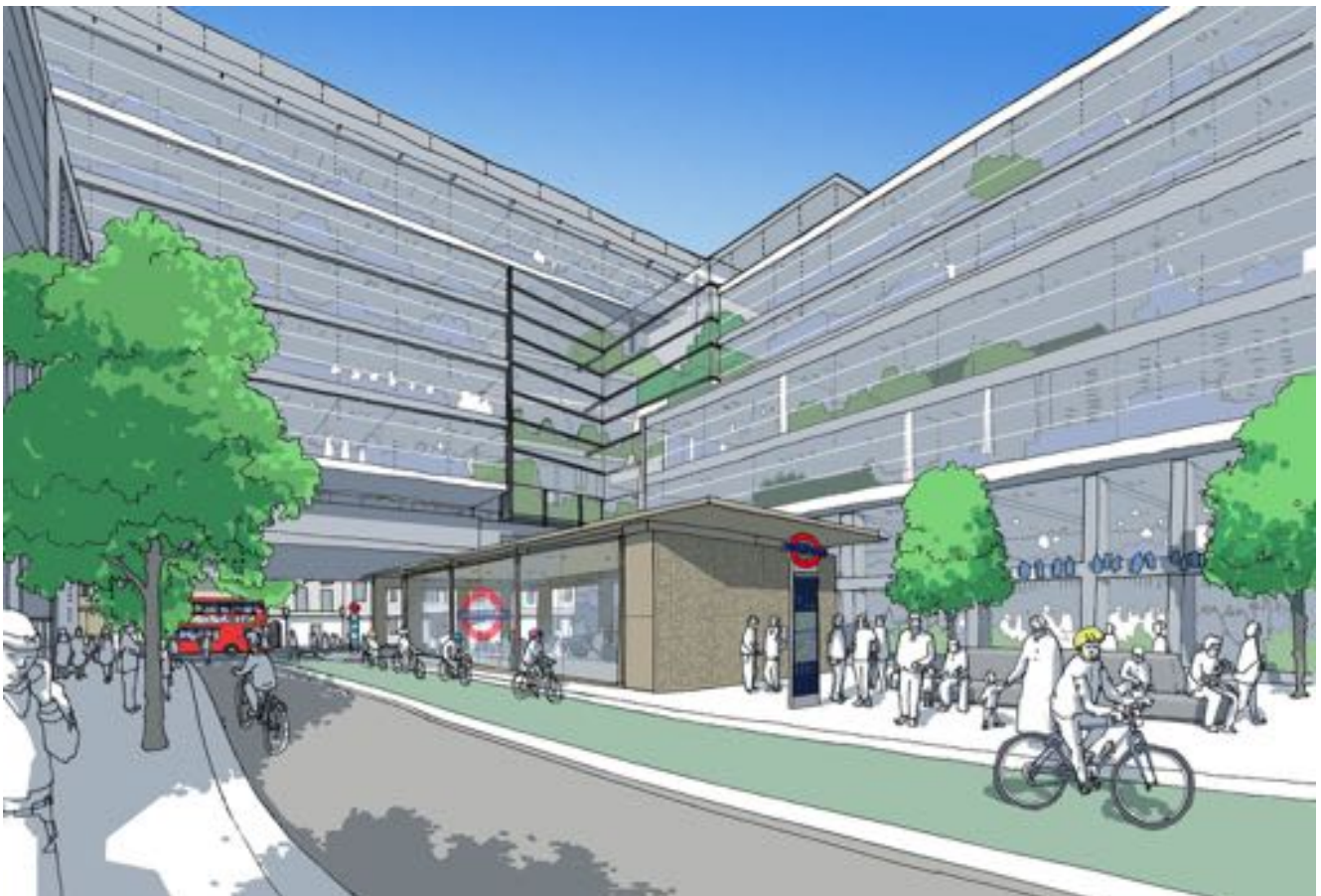
The illustration is from draft LCDS chapter 4. It shows a central two-way cycle track in Nantes with bus only lanes on each side. (The original image has been 'flipped' to put cycles and buses on the right side of the road).



High Holborn

Provide high-quality cycling infrastructure and make more room for pedestrians.

- Camden's current consultation on diagonal crossings at Holborn tube station will be an improvement for pedestrians.
- Consider legible walking and cycling routes to Covent Garden and Lincoln's Inn Fields.
- Make High Holborn two-way between Drury Lane and Procter Street, (The West End Project will make it two way between Shaftesbury Avenue and Drury Lane).
- Make better use of the road width e.g. east of Red Lion Street we currently have a bus lane + motor lane eastbound with two motor lanes westbound.
- Provide wide protected cycle lanes and widen the footways.
- Bus stop bypasses can be fitted in as in our Theobalds Road visualisation.



Visualisation taken from TfL's 2017 Holborn station consultation

Procter Street

- The southern end of Procter Street will be closed to motor vehicles for 6 years while Holborn tube station is reconstructed and a second entrance to it is built. (The [TfL consultation on these Capacity improvements to Holborn station](#) closed in November 2017).
- Following the construction work, Procter Street should remain closed to motor traffic and the space gained should become a public space, as visualised in the above visualisation taken from the TfL consultation.
- Red Lion Square can be much enhanced by integration with a traffic-free Procter Street.

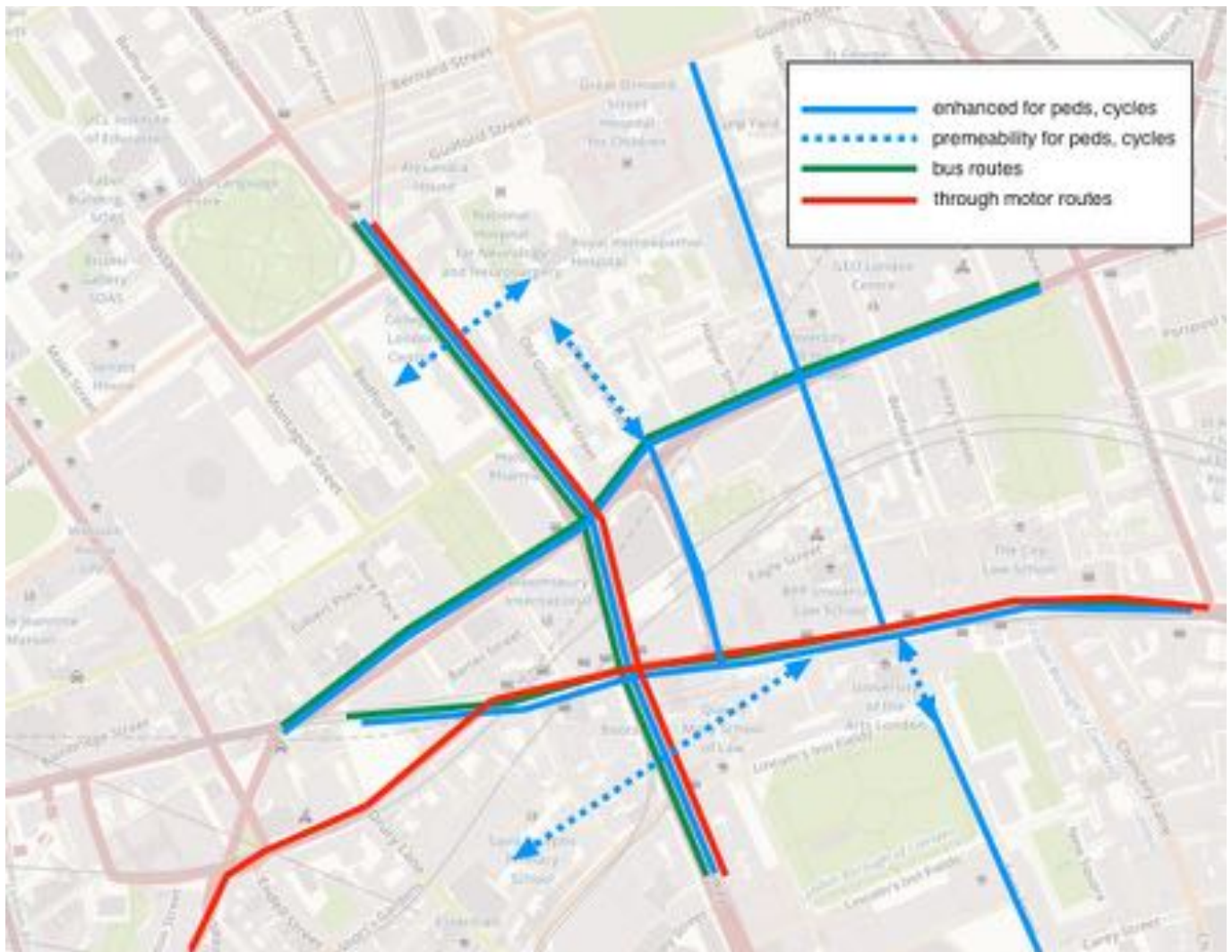


StreetView extract showing the southbound approach to the junction with High Holborn

Southampton Row – Kingsway

- All of the Southampton Row – Kingsway alignment through this area currently provides two or more motor lanes in each direction. The above *StreetView* image shows four motor lanes and a median strip with cycle parking. Although the trees improve the street, they don't leave much space for people to walk on the footway.
- With a single motor lane in each direction there would be plenty of room for high-quality cycle infrastructure, bus stop bypasses and wider footways.
- The junctions at Theobalds Road and High Holborn will need a radical redesign to make them absolutely safe for anyone riding a bike through them on the north-south and on the east-west alignments.
- Permeability across Southampton Row – Kingsway must be improved for both pedestrians and cyclists going to Queen's Square and when crossing from Lincoln's Inn Fields to Great Queens Street.

A Liveable Neighbourhood for Holborn



Map summarising the ideas discussed above

The gyratory will be reorganized to provide two-way working, some roads for private motor vehicles, some for buses and all for walking and cycling as indicated on the map above.

Additional links will make it convenient for people to walk and cycle to and from destinations including Queen's Square, Covent Garden and Lincoln's Inn Fields.

There will be two through routes for general motor vehicles, with a third for buses, leaving all other roads free of through motor traffic.

All of the streets will benefit from the indicators of a Healthy Street as shown on the right.



Source: Lucy Saunders