

**The Camden (Torrington Place to Tavistock Square) (Prescribed Routes, Waiting and Loading Restrictions and Loading Places) Traffic Order [2017]**

**PLANNING INSPECTORATE REFERENCE: DPI/X5210/17/8**

**Proof of Evidence - Camden Cycling Campaign**

**Witness: Richenda Walford,**

**Title: Video made in 2013 to demonstrate the many inadequacies of the old scheme**

**Introduction**

At the centre of this proof of evidence is a video made by the Camden Cycling Campaign (CCC) in August 2013. Our objective in creating this video was to demonstrate that the existing cycle track was inadequate for the number of people using it and to provide evidence to support the case for greatly improved facilities for people on bicycles and also to improve the safety of pedestrians.

**Introduction - the author's experience**

Living in north-east Bloomsbury since 2006 I use the Tavistock Place cycle track frequently for all sorts of journeys at different times during the day. In particular I have used it daily, westbound from Marchmont Street, on my commute to an early morning session at the Energybase gym and swimming pool in Malet Street: westbound at 07:00 – 07:30, and returning eastbound 08:30 – 09:00. Initially this was fine, but 3 failures of nerve caused me to reassess the suitability of the track.

Over the years the two-way track became noticeably more crowded, particularly on my return journey, to such an extent that, for the return, I found it too dangerous and changed to an alternative, longer route, via Russell Square and Bernard Street (This was failure 1).

Also, I repeatedly heard that the Gordon Square junctions were dangerous (collisions were occurring), due to the westbound cyclists being on the “wrong” side of the road, so for my westbound journey I often chose to ride on the motor section of the road, which I could do because at 7am this carried little traffic. (failure 2).

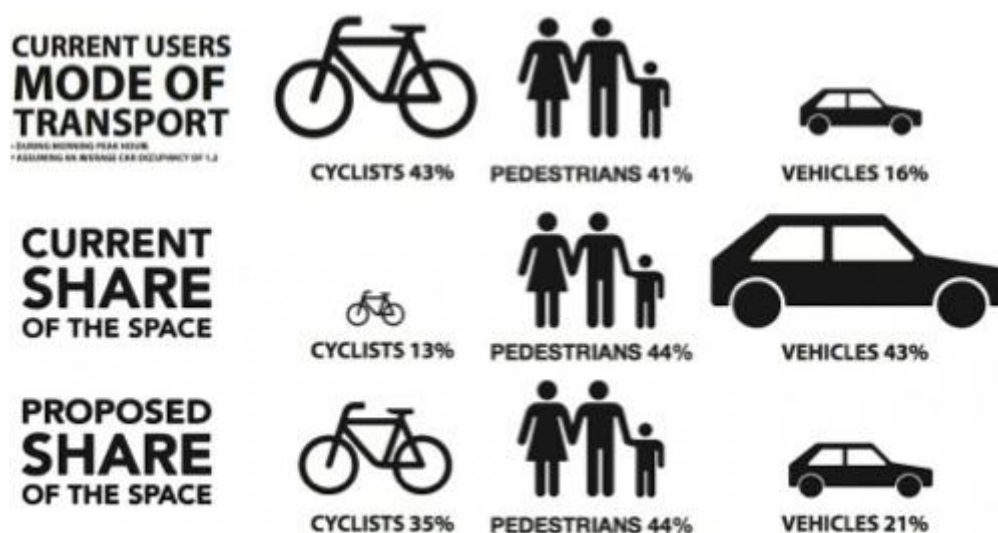
Also, I attended some monthly events at RIBA in Portland Place, starting at 18.00 – 18.30. For these I used the track all the way to Tottenham Court Road. At that time of night, the track was very congested, and in the winter it was dark. One rainy night I found the experience so frightening that I ceased attending the events (failure 3).

These three failures prompted me to examine what was wrong with the track, so I filmed some sections and shared the footage with CCC. At about the same time CCC heard from Anthony Hynes concerning his collision on the cycle track (quoted in the video). These two contacts prompted the idea of the video.

The video is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dwo6oqbWSx0> . Duration 4 minutes 13 seconds. The transcript is provided in Appendix 1.

In addition to the points made explicitly in the video, one can also see:

1. There were long lines of cyclists caused by the traffic lights, or slow riders. Being single-file, opportunities to overtake were rare so everyone ended up travelling at the pace of the slowest, or dangerous overtaking was attempted.
2. Particularly in the rush hour these long lines could extend an entire block. With the track so narrow these lines were single file and often people were stuck in the line through three traffic light cycles before they got across.
3. This over-crowding meant that many people were riding too close to the person in front and any need to stop suddenly could result in a pile up – as described on the video.
4. The track was too narrow to be used easily by cargo bikes, or any bikes wider than usual, especially in the peak hours. This meant that the track was seldom used to take children to school in wide, stable child-carriers, or by those riders who need the stability of a wider tricycle.
5. The video also illustrates a point made in Camden's Information Leaflet, October 2015, page 3 (available in Camden's Statement of Case, Appendix 11 and reproduced here). That infographic puts numbers on an unfairness which can be plainly seen in the video: in peak hours pedestrians and cyclists together make up 84% of the users but are allocated only 57% of the available width.



6. Westbound cyclists were on the wrong side of the road which meant that, should they need to turn south, they had to carry out strange, potentially dangerous, manoeuvres, as illustrated by one cyclist at 3.28.
7. Similarly cyclists travelling eastbound, should they wish to turn to the south, they could not just move out to the right since they were blocked in by the westbound lane. This could explain the cyclist in the westbound motor lane at 0.30.
8. The awkward cross-over (shown in the video in the top right window at 0.55) to the west of the Judd Street junction; an unfortunate consequence of having a two-way track on one side of the road.

## **Conclusion**

Now that the improved facilities exist, albeit in experimental form, the video is a historical document enabling a comparison: before and after. To our minds the video conclusively proves that the previous two-way track was inadequate and a comparison shows that the new scheme solves, or greatly ameliorates, almost all the problems of the old track. Like all new schemes it has brought with it some unintended consequences but the way forward is to solve those problems, not return to the previous arrangement. Indeed in the peak hours there are now so many people using the track (an increase of up to 52% - Camden's Statement of Case, section 7.8). Such a big increase makes a return to the old scheme impossible. If it were imposed people currently using the track would choose other routes, like I did, and many would take the parallel road, Euston Road, which would greatly reduce their safety and probably also slow the traffic there.

## Appendix 1 TAVISTOCK PLACE VIDEO - transcript

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dwo6oqbWSx0>

### ***The Tavistock Place cycle track – A victim of its own success?***

Tavistock Place cycle track is part of the main east-west artery through the heart of London. The route is hugely popular but...

It's confusing for pedestrians.

And it's dangerous at junctions with side roads.

Since it was built in 2002 cycling in London has doubled and the two-way track is heavily overcrowded. It needs updating to carry thousands of cyclists and make crossings safer for pedestrians.

### ***There are interactions between:***

- ***Cyclists & Cyclists***
- ***Cyclists & Pedestrians***
- ***Cyclists & Motor Vehicles.***

### ***Interactions between Cyclists & Cyclists***

"I was cycling at 6 pm on a weekday towards the end of June, when I hit a cyclist in front of me who was taking action to avoid a cyclist in front of him, who had stopped suddenly without warning. We both went flying, although riding very slowly. I fell on my ribs, cracking one, and was bruised and badly cut." *Anthony Hynes, June 2013.*

We estimate that at peak times, up to a thousand cyclists ride these tracks every hour.

Wider tracks are urgently needed to increase the capacity, avoid the risks of serial collision and reduce long lines of stopped cyclists waiting at traffic lights.

Cyclists passing two ways need more space to avoid handlebars touching on bends and when they enter the route at junctions.

### ***Interactions between Cyclists & Pedestrians***

Pedestrians are confused by four streams of traffic moving in opposite directions on two separate carriageways - one for the cars and one for the cyclists.

See the frightened pedestrian running across the road. He's not in a hurry because he walks before and after crossing. Taking refuge on the traffic-lights island, he runs the risk of being clipped by wing mirrors of cars on one side and by cycle handlebars in the cramped bike track on the other.

Some pedestrians seem to assume the cycle track is one-way ...probably because most of them in London are one-way.

Where Tavistock Place narrows pavements are constricted, making walking unpleasant for people crossing the area on foot.

### ***Interactions between Cyclists & Motor Vehicles***

Both motor and cycle traffic are controlled by lights signals at the major junctions. The cycle track has priority across side roads but there are serious safety issues at Gordon Square where vehicles turn across the cycle track in both directions.

The worst problem is caused by many motor vehicles turning right from Tavistock Place across the cycle track.

Most drivers do look but some tend to bully cyclists into giving way. Sometimes motorists fail to see cyclists on what they perceive as the 'wrong side of the road'.

Drivers aren't used to giving way to cyclists, disregard the road signs and they often block the eastbound cycle track at Gordon Square.

### **Conclusion**

We've shown that this highly popular route has become overcrowded and unsafe for rush-hour cyclists and pedestrians.

Inevitably collisions are recorded, mostly minor but some involving serious injuries.

At the Gordon Square junctions safety is threatened by motorists who don't expect to see cyclists crossing in both directions.

What's the solution?

### ***The Solution?***

A victim of its own success, the scheme is overdue for new traffic plans to meet the needs of today's cyclists and pedestrians.

*"Nearly Car-free Streets" David Hembrow – caption on illustrations of 4 possible solutions.*

Cyclists using the crowded route show they prefer to ride separately from motor traffic. Now they need a bigger share of the road.

Pedestrians need wider pavements and simpler, less confusing crossings to walk safely.

**End credits:**

Produced by Camden Cycling Campaign, [www.camdencyclists.org.uk](http://www.camdencyclists.org.uk)

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