

Response from London Cycling Campaign to proposed changes to Old Street

January 2015

London Cycling Campaign is a charity with more than 40,000 supporters of whom 12,000 are full members. We speak up on behalf of everyone who cycles, or wants to cycle, in Greater London. Our aim is for London to be a world class cycling city. Founded in 1978, our organisation campaigns for every street in the city to be cycle friendly so millions more Londoners, whatever the age or ability, can enjoy the benefits of cycling, helping to create a cleaner, healthier and less congested capital.



We welcome the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes to Old Street roundabout as part of Transport for London's Road Modernisation Plan.

Introduction

Old Street roundabout should be a London landmark with a distinct sense of place, which offers safe and inviting space for cycling and walking. The public realm surrounding the roundabout is currently isolated by the physical barrier of the road network, including the roundabout itself, the inner city ring road and associated motor traffic.

Old Street is currently an inhospitable environment for cycling and walking. There have, unacceptably, been numerous collisions in the vicinity of the roundabout. Between February 2010 and January 2013, there were 44 collisions in the vicinity of the roundabout which resulted in injury to people. More than 80 per cent of these involved a pedestrian or cyclist. Despite the inhospitable environment Old Street junction is one of the busiest for cycling in London, with cyclists making up almost a third of all vehicles at Old Street roundabout in the morning rush hour. We therefore welcome the ambition to make it safer for cycling.

London Cycling Campaign understands that the long term plans allow for large scale building development on former highways land enveloping the peninsular and station entrance area. Such a development would preclude any improvement to the existing, inefficient road layout. It would significantly degrade public realm and pedestrian amenity and would have a negative impact on existing properties and their tenants surrounding the site.

London Cycling Campaign has concerns that the current proposals are not safe enough and will not offer the safe and inviting space for cycling that this location should offer. We are concerned that motor traffic capacity is being prioritised over walking and cycling, and income generation at the cost of pedestrians and cyclists.

We strongly recommend that the roundabout is replaced with crossroads, with more space for cycling reallocated from the road, not the footway. Crossroads would make it a much simpler layout and make it easier to provide protected space and improve the area for pedestrians and cyclists.

Main concerns

Our main concerns are as follows:

High levels of motor traffic

- Current motor traffic flows at this location are unacceptably high, making the location an unpleasant environment for walking and cycling. The Mayor's policy, as described in the London Plan, is to increase cycle use (to at least a 5% modal share by 2026) and to reduce motor car use and car dependency, alongside improving air quality and reducing health inequalities. The current proposals make no attempt to reduce motor traffic on the Inner Ring Road, an area in desperate need of motor traffic reduction. No attempts to make deliveries or services more efficient have been proposed.

Impact on air quality

- Old Street has consistently failed to keep its pollution levels within the Government's Air Quality Strategy Objectives for nitrogen dioxide and, unless current proposals for the Ultra Low Emission Zone change, will fall outside of the regulated area.

Inadequate capacity of cycling provision

- Cycling provision in the proposals will not accommodate the current cycling flows, let alone future. Cyclists currently make up almost a third of all vehicles at Old Street roundabout in the morning rush hour, and this will grow, particularly as the area will link the Central London Grid and Cycle Superhighway 1. Cycle tracks which do not offer sufficient capacity for cycle flows will force cyclists onto the busy carriageway - a daunting prospect for the majority of cyclists.
- Transport for London's Cycling Level of Service assessment matrix requires routes to match predicted usage and has exceedance built into the design. To achieve a 'good' or 'highest' Cycling Level of Service score, provision must at the very least match predicted demand flows and should have spare capacity for large increases in predicted cycle use. These proposals would score a 0, the lowest possible score, as provision would not match the current levels of demand.

Failure to meet Cycling Level of Service on directness

- Transport for London's own Cycling Level of Service assessment matrix recognises the importance of a direct route for cyclists, with the ability for cyclists to maintain their own speed on links, and the avoidance of deviation of route against a straight line. CLoS scoring requires a deviation factor of less than 20% in order to achieve the highest Cycling Level of Service, and between 20-40% to achieve a 'good' Cycling Level of Service.
- The proposed layout would close the junction's north-western arm to traffic other than walking. This means that in order to turn left from Old Street west to City Road north, and vice versa from City Road north to Old Street west, cyclists would have to go around three sides of a square. All cycle movements should be enabled, and cycle access opened up to Cowper Street.
- We understand that in the original proposals a cycle track was planned across the 'closed' side, but this has been scrapped. We have serious concerns that due to the level of deviation required, people would still attempt to cycle across what would be a very busy pedestrian space. Constant conflict would be pre-programmed.

Impact on walking and provision for pedestrians, potentially leading to conflict with cyclists

- The current proposals would result in a reduction of pedestrian space. On the north-east side, the pavement will be 2.6 metres wide, narrower than in many residential streets—in a place where thousands of people will be on foot at most daylight times, and quite a lot during the night. This would lead to many people choosing to walk in the cycle lanes simply because the pavement on that side would be so narrow.
- The absence of pedestrian crossing on the east side of the junction will also drive pedestrians to cross using the cycle lane across the road or make other risky crossing choices, further increasing the likelihood of conflict.
- No information on pedestrian comfort levels has been supplied as part the public consultation.
- The relocation of bus stops will inconvenience the numerous bus users wishing to access Old Street station.

Oppressive environment created by development

- We are concerned that the creation of a large tower block will make the junction extremely oppressive. It will also block views along Old Street and City Rd, which may have a detrimental impact on walking levels: how far people can see dictates their willingness to walk.

Recommendations:

- LCC's recommendation is that the junction is returned to a normal four-way junction between two streets, re-allocating carriageway space to provide sufficient protected space for inclusive cycling both now and in the future.
- All cycle movements should be enabled. The current plans block access from west on Old St to southbound on City Rd. Cycle access should be opened up to Cowper St.
- As per the London Cycling Design Standards guiding principle on adaptability, cycling infrastructure should be designed to accommodate users of all types of cycle, and an increasing number of users over time. All movements must be suitable for people using all types of solo bicycles, but also adapted bicycles, upright and recumbent tricycles, handcycles and tandems, as well as trailers, trailer bikes and cargo bikes. Widths of cycle paths and filtered permeability arrangements, lengths of waiting areas, and areas for the swept paths of these various types of cycle need to cater for this variety and need to allow space for solo bicycles to pass too.
- Connectivity with other cycle routes must be taken into account, including links to Cycle Superhighway 1.
- Any development should be on the corners, not in the middle. Unsightly, oppressively tall buildings which block sight lines should not be part of plans to improve this area.

We would welcome the opportunity to make recommendations on the detail of proposals to return the junction to its original layout.