

WE WANT
FREEDOM
TO RIDE



WOMEN'S FREEDOM AFTER DARK

Are TfL's Cycleways
safe for everyone, 24/7?

A report by the LCC Women's Network



Supported by:





The **LCC Women's Network** has produced LCC Women's Freedom Rides, the **What Stops Women Cycling in London?** report and other vital work alongside LCC staff. It is run by a steering group of volunteers and has hundreds of active members, nearly 2,000 supporters and 13 associate member organisations who want London to be a city where all women, non-binary and gender non-conforming people feel safe to cycle.

London Cycling Campaign (LCC) is a charity with more than 20,000 supporters, of whom more than 11,000 are fully paid-up members. We speak up on behalf of everyone who cycles or wants to cycle in Greater London; and we speak up for a greener, healthier, happier and better-connected capital.

This report is kindly supported by **Forest**, the shared ebike service, and **Madison**, the UK's leading distributor of cycle parts and accessories.

For more information about this report or LCC's Women's Network campaigning, email **women@lcc.org.uk**

SUMMARY

Nearly a quarter of the total length of TfL's cycle network is 'socially unsafe' after dark

Transport for London's (TfL) cycle network¹ now has 353 kilometres of approved, completed Cycleways. All Cycleways have to meet TfL's Cycle Route Quality Criteria, meant to ensure these routes are safe and convenient enough to be part of London's 'high-quality' cycle network, and inclusive enough that a wide range of Londoners feel comfortable using them.

However, the London Cycling Campaign's Women's Network analysis (see map on p5) finds nearly a quarter of the total length of TfL's Cycleway network is 'socially unsafe' after dark – i.e. where there is a risk of harm from other people – such as stretches through unlit parks, industrial estates or alongside canals with no escape routes. For part of the day and year these Cycleways are effectively unusable for most people, with women and girls being disproportionately affected. While many of these routes are valuable for leisure cycling during summer months, and should continue to be enjoyed as cycle routes, they are not inclusive enough to be classified as Cycleways, part of London's core, strategic cycle network. Over half of all TfL Cycleways have at least one socially unsafe section, 11 Cycleways are over 70% unsafe, and 7 are 100% unsafe after dark, according to our analysis.

Lack of safety after dark is a formidable barrier to cycling for women. Our report **What Stops Women Cycling in London?** found one in three women of over 1,000 surveyed stopped cycling altogether after dark or in winter, due to a lack of safe routes. While it's not surprising to find this barrier where good cycle infrastructure is still lacking, such as most of outer London, we should not expect to find it on TfL's official Cycleways.

LCC has two main demands of the Mayor. First, to urgently upgrade or replace sections and routes that are isolated, off-putting and socially unsafe with alternatives that make its Cycleway network inclusive and equitable. Second, to amend its Cycle Route Quality Criteria to include **directness** and **social safety**. Routes that fail to meet these criteria should not be considered part of TfL's 'high-quality' core network of Cycleways. The Mayor's goal of mode shift to 80% of journeys by sustainable transport cannot be achieved without ensuring its cycling transport network makes cycling safe and accessible for everyone, all day and all year round.

¹ The 'TfL cycle network' and 'Cycleways' in this report refer to routes marked with a C on **TfL's cycle map**. We have not included older Q or CS routes, which do not have to meet the same quality criteria.

KEY FINDINGS

How much of TfL's cycle network is socially unsafe after dark?

24% OF THE TFL CYCLE NETWORK IS UNSAFE AFTER DARK

Nearly a quarter of the total length of TfL's Cycleway network is socially unsafe after dark – 85km in total.

58% OF CYCLEWAYS HAVE UNSAFE SECTIONS

Of TfL's 89 Cycleways, 52 have at least one section that is socially unsafe after dark.

7 CYCLEWAYS ARE 100% UNSAFE AFTER DARK

Seven Cycleways are 100% socially unsafe after dark – the longest are the Grand Union Canal Cycleway at 23 km and the Greenway (C22) at 7 km.

11 CYCLEWAYS ARE 70% UNSAFE AFTER DARK

After dark, the 11 worst Cycleways are socially unsafe for 70% or more of their length.

MAJORITY OF UNSAFE SECTIONS IN OR NEXT TO PARKS

Most of the sections that are unsafe after dark, at 65%, are in or next to parks. Other factors are waterways, railways, industrial areas and crossings such as underpasses.

The full methodology and results [can be found here](#).

WHY ARE TFL CYCLEWAYS NOT INCLUSIVE ENOUGH?

TfL's Cycle Route Quality Criteria determine the quality of routes that are formally adopted as part of its Cycleway network. It has minimum standards on, for instance, the level of physical protection for people cycling in relation to motor traffic volumes. The criteria do not currently include any minimum standards for the directness of a route, nor users' experience of social safety.

It is therefore easy for local councils and TfL itself to route Cycleways through parks and along railway lines, often using indirect routes, rather than do the more politically difficult work of reallocating roadspace to, for instance, protected cycle tracks. The result is that many councils, and too often TfL, pick a part-time cycle route – with some or all of it disappearing after dark – over a 'proper' all-day, all-year inclusive one.

This approach does not enable more people to cycle and is especially off-putting for women and girls. Worse, once an unsafe Cycleway is approved by TfL, its own 'Strategic Cycling Analysis' is adjusted to not prioritise the delivery of any other nearby, parallel route. As the case studies below show, this lets councils and TfL off the hook. For instance, the Grand Union Canal Cycleway has delivered 23 kilometres of box-ticking 'cycle route' for TfL and five councils, providing an excuse to not provide inclusive east-west Cycleways across a swathe of west London.

ACTION NEEDED

To make cycling a mass form of sustainable transport in London, we need a city-wide cycle network that is safe all day and all year round.

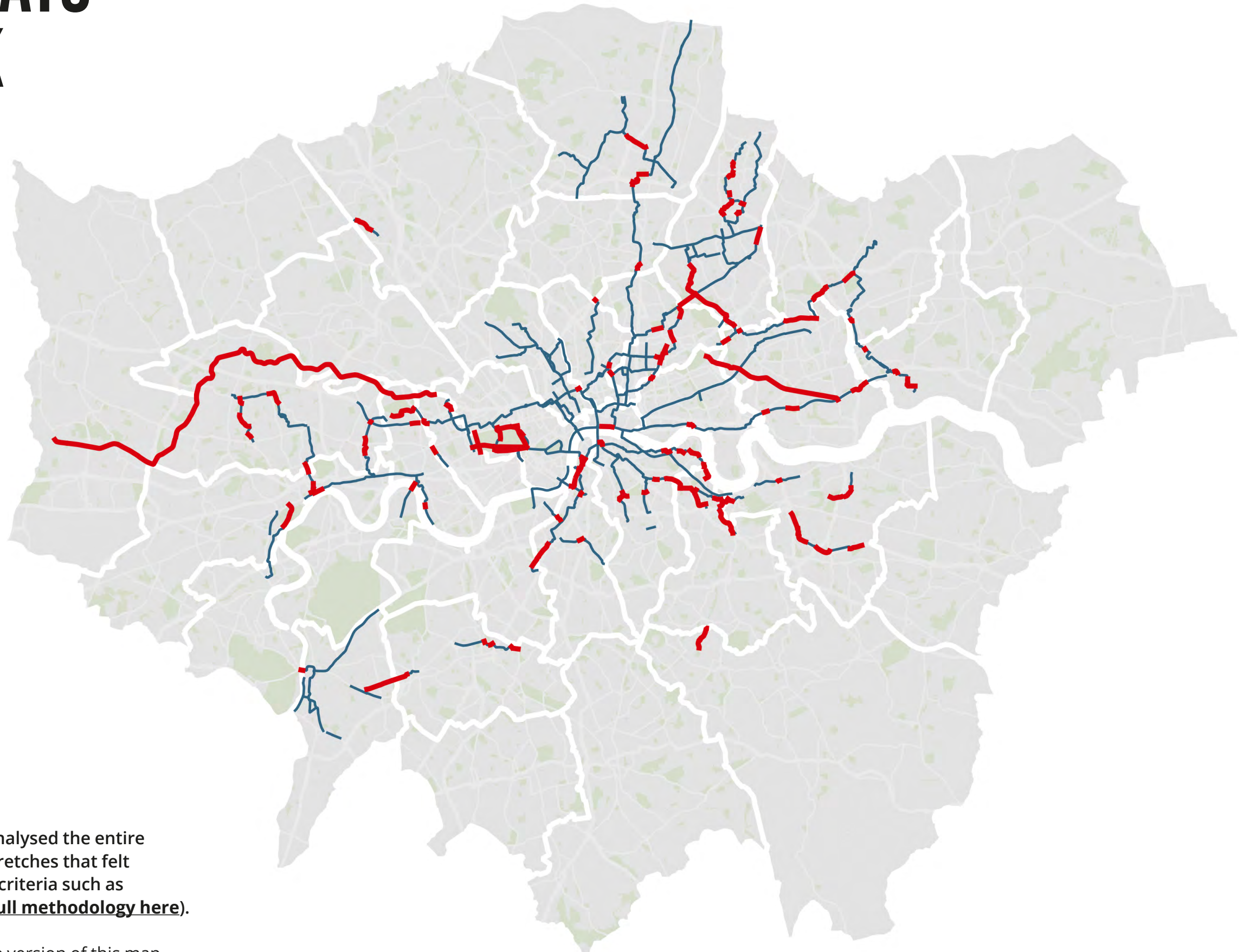
- 1 TfL should add 'social safety' to its Cycle Route Quality Criteria,** ruling out poorly-lit, isolated areas – [see our full criteria here](#), **and 'directness'**, ruling out convoluted, indirect routes that are unsafe after dark.
- 2 TfL should urgently bring all current Cycleways up to the new quality criteria standard.** Sections of existing routes, or entire routes, should be upgraded or rerouted in order to meet the criteria.
- 3 TfL should not approve or fund council delivery of routes that do not meet the updated criteria.** Cycle routes through parks and so on are a valuable resource to be enjoyed – and can be delivered and funded by parks, councils and other bodies – but should not count as part of TfL's core cycle network. Transport funding should be reserved for delivering strategic, inclusive Cycleways.
- 4 TfL, councils and the police should also make leisure routes safer,** with more CCTV and lighting in places like underpasses and routes that are isolated after dark, particularly at crime 'hotspots'.
- 5 TfL (and Active Travel England) should develop new guidance on cycle infrastructure and social safety.** For instance, Dutch designs of bridges and underpasses could be adopted that are far more welcoming than British ones.

TFL CYCLEWAYS AFTER DARK

KEY

 Socially safe after dark

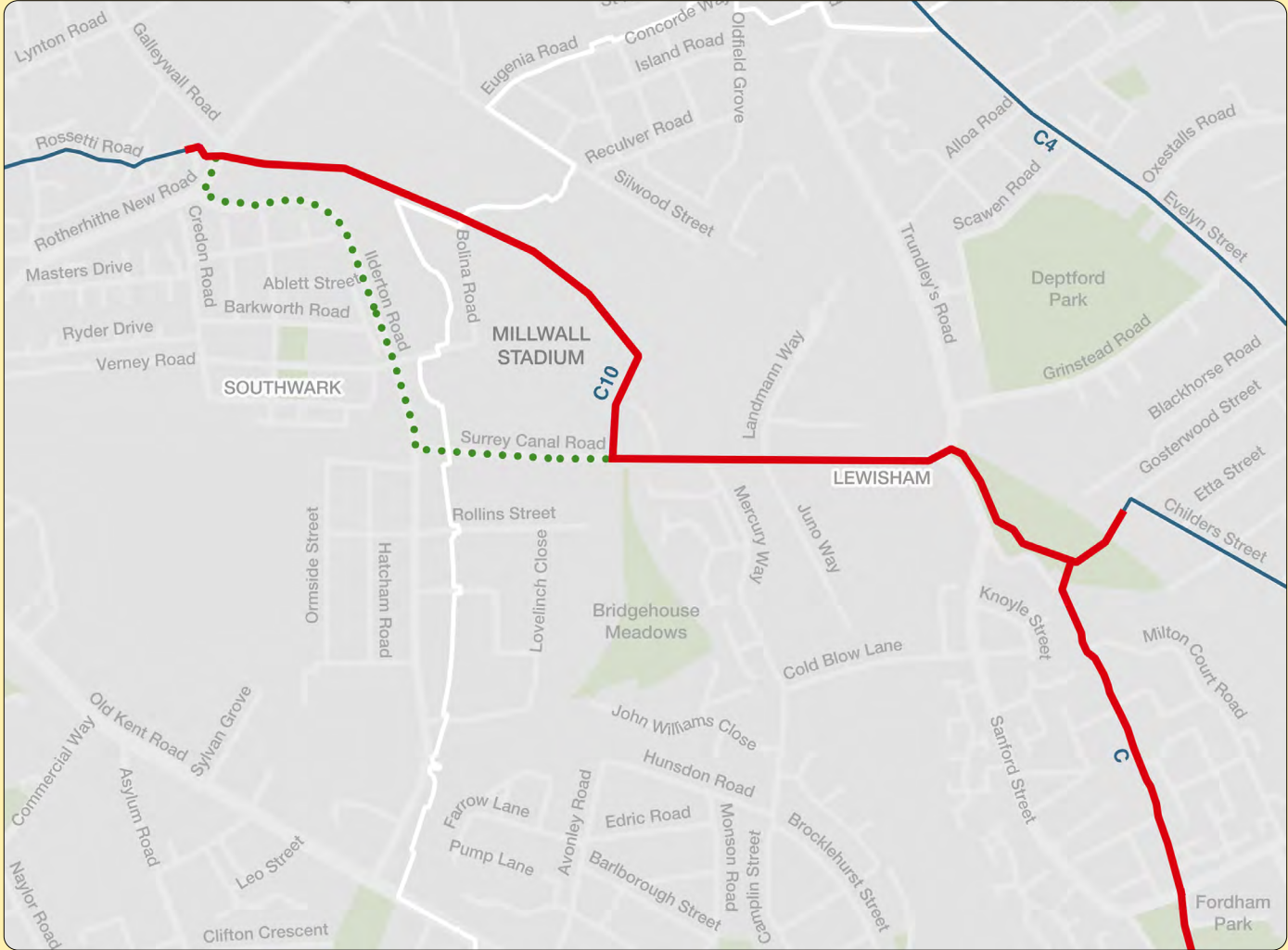
 Socially unsafe after dark



LCC Women's Network volunteers analysed the entire TfL Cycleway network, identifying stretches that felt 'socially unsafe' after dark. We used criteria such as poorly lit, overgrown, isolated (see [full methodology here](#)).

See the [LCC website](#) for an interactive version of this map

CASE STUDY 1 CYCLEWAY 10 NEAR MILLWALL STADIUM



Borough
Lewisham

What's the problem?
This section of Cycleway 10 is an isolated path alongside a railway line, with no escape route and blind corners. It is a known hotspot for crime where muggings and bike jackings have been reported. The nearby main road alternative lacks safe space for cycling and is busy and hostile.

“Two men tried to push me off my bike as I was going past Millwall stadium. I didn’t cycle for months after because I was so scared. I now cycle on the main road alongside cars. I don’t feel safe there but it’s not as traumatic.”

What should TfL and Lewisham council do?
The Millwall path is a useful traffic-free route for daylight hours but it cannot serve as a strategic, full-time cycle corridor through the area. Ilderton Road is the obvious, direct alternative, but lacks protected space and is too hostile currently. The council should work with TfL to make this road safe for cycling via protected space and/or restrictions on motor traffic.

KEY

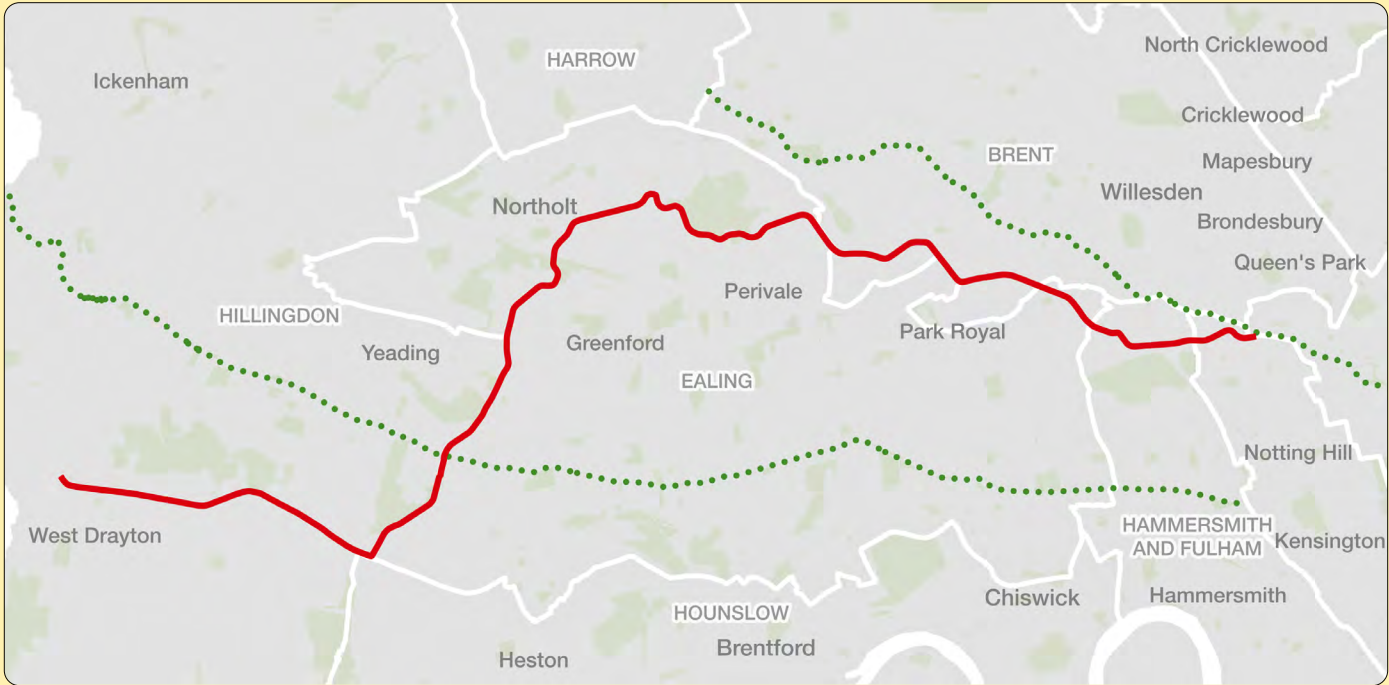
TfL Cycleway

Socially unsafe after dark

.....

Suggested alternative route

CASE STUDY 2 GRAND UNION CANAL CYCLEWAY



Boroughs

Kensington & Chelsea,
Hammersmith & Fulham, Brent,
Ealing, Hillingdon

What's the problem?

This signed TfL Cycleway runs west from central London for 23 km, and provides an excuse for five boroughs to avoid building other east-west cycling routes. Yet most people do not feel safe cycling on the towpath after dark, unsurprisingly as it's poorly lit, overgrown, not overlooked, has few escape routes and some known crime hotspots. Access to and from the canal is often dangerous, including roads such as Scrubs Lane and Old Oak Lane, and access at some points is via steps only, making it inaccessible to anyone unable to carry their cycle to and from the canal path itself.

"I rode this once after dark because I was desperate to get off the dangerous local roads, but I will never do it again. I felt so unsafe. I couldn't see far enough ahead to avoid the dangers women fear in lonely places at night – and there is no way to escape."

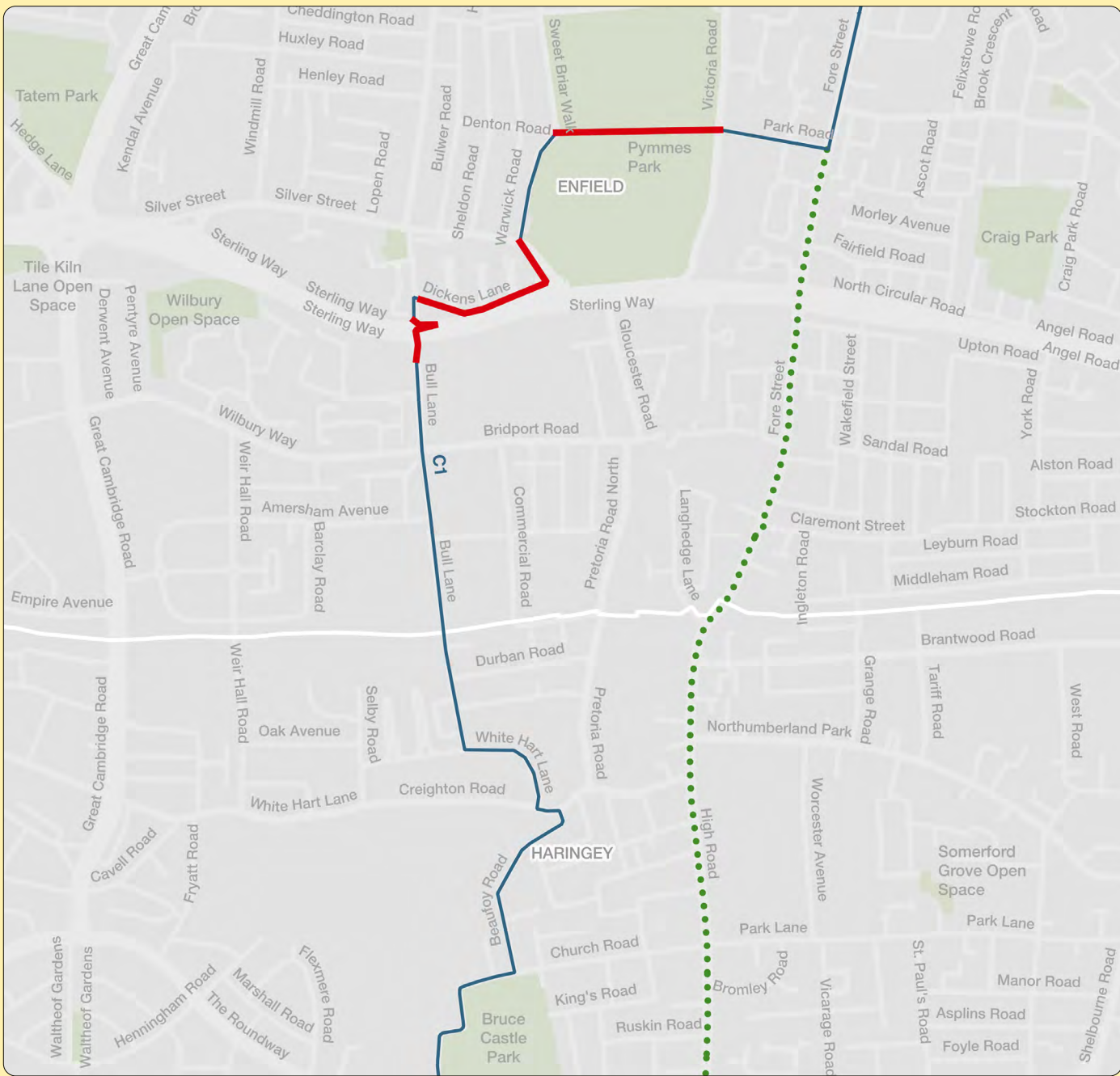
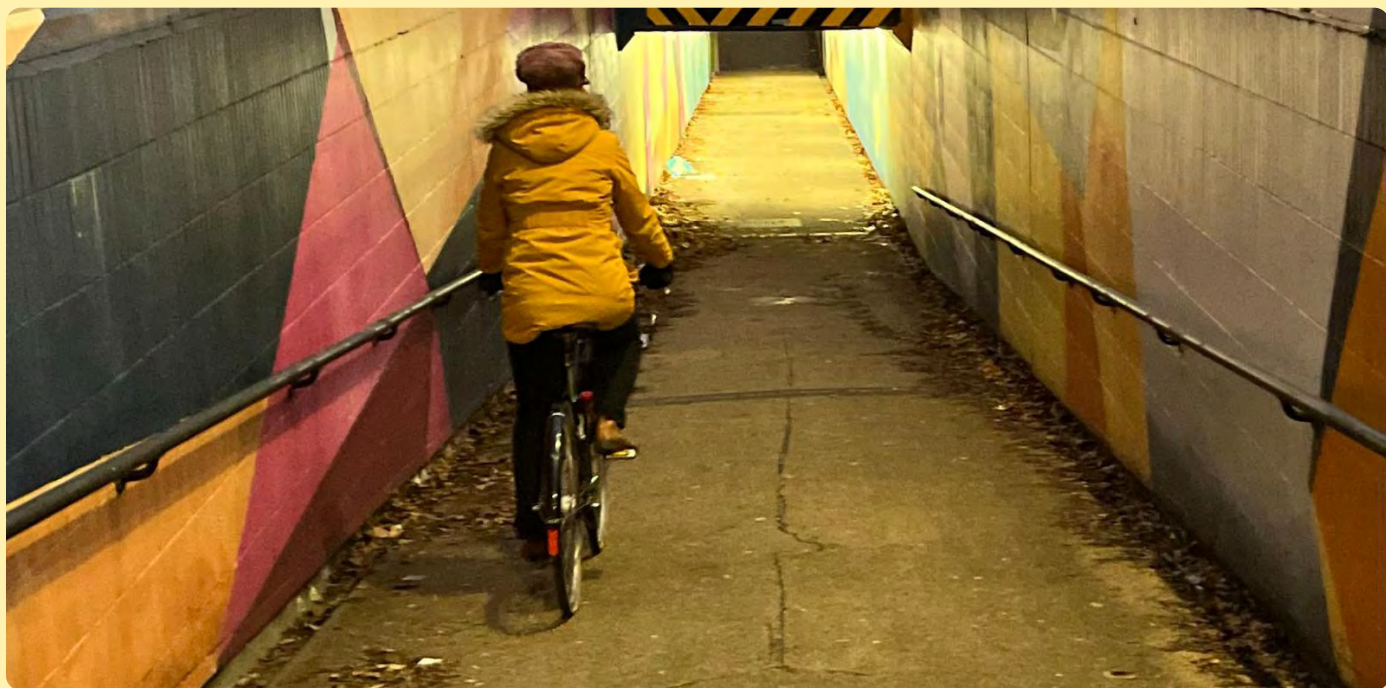
What should TfL and councils do?

They need to consider the Grand Union Canal path as a leisure route only. New, inclusive Cycleways should be built as a priority on the currently hostile and dangerous main roads, where the boroughs and TfL have neglected for too long to provide appropriate space for cycling. TfL's 'Strategic Cycling Analysis' needs to be re-run removing Cycleways such as this, but it already shows several east-west high priority corridors relatively nearby that could provide inclusive alternatives to the canal, if suitably treated. These include the Uxbridge Road and the A404 (see our suggested alternative routes in the map above).

KEY

- Socially unsafe after dark
- Suggested alternative route

CASE STUDY 3 CYCLEWAY 1 IN ENFIELD



Borough
Enfield

What’s the problem?

In Enfield, Cycleway 1 provides miles of direct, protected cycle tracks along the A1010 (Hertford Road) from near the M25 in the north to Edmonton in the south. But as it approaches the North Circular, it veers off into Pymmes Park – a poorly lit park known for drug dealing and antisocial behaviour – and then crosses the North Circular via an underpass. The underpass itself is well lit but has no CCTV, and users can’t see the other end before going in due to its low ceiling. Groups carrying knives and dealing drugs are known to gather there. It sometimes floods in wet weather.

“I saw a group of boys hanging around the underpass and one dropped a machete”

What should TfL and Enfield council do?

Extend protected cycle tracks south on the A1010, and make the North Circular junction safe for walking, wheeling and cycling. A less good alternative would be to re-route C1 along Victoria Road alongside Pymmes Park, filtering out through motor traffic, and build a new crossing of the North Circular which could allow the Cycleway to continue south, while also serving Silver Street station.

“I don’t feel safe going in when I can’t see who’s at the other end”

KEY

TfL Cycleway

Socially unsafe after dark

Suggested alternative route

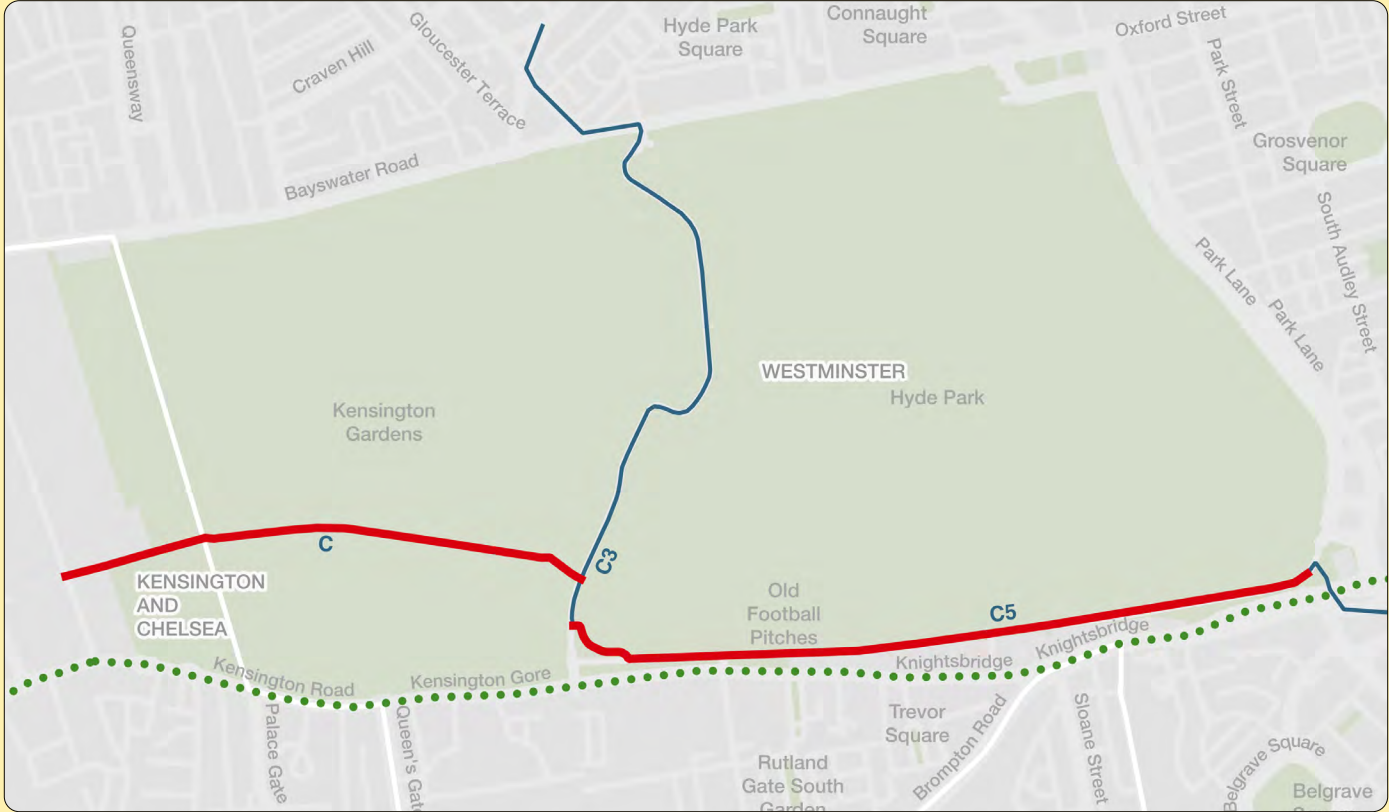
CASE STUDY 4 HYDE PARK & KENSINGTON GARDENS CYCLEWAY



Boroughs
Westminster, Kensington & Chelsea

What's the problem?
This Cycleway runs east-west along Hyde Park's South Carriage Drive (C5) and continues west on a path through Kensington Gardens as an unnamed Cycleway ('C' on the TfL map) to exit the park at Palace Green. South Carriage Drive is wide and well-lit, but it can feel isolated late at night, with large trees on both sides and many buildings set back from the Cycleway and/or behind large hedges/walls. The Kensington Garden section is poorly lit and isolated outside of peak hours, but worse, closes its gates after dark. Users have to exit the park via West Carriage Drive onto the busy Kensington Road (A315), leading to Kensington High Street, a notoriously dangerous road with no protected space for cycling – and Hyde Park gates close at midnight. And this route is frequently closed for events in the parks.

What should TfL and councils do?
This part-time leisure route should not be considered a strategic Cycleway. TfL and both councils need to create a safe east-west cycle route from Hyde Park Corner that runs west along Knightsbridge, Kensington Gore and High Street Kensington, connecting up with C9 to continue west. The most straightforward method would be protected cycle tracks and safer junctions on these roads. Kensington & Chelsea council installed cycle tracks successfully on High Street Kensington during the pandemic – and then removed them after just seven weeks, despite thousands of daily users, because some residents and businesses complained. This rogue borough has zero protected space or appropriate routes for cycling and is maintaining a dangerous gap in London's cycle network.

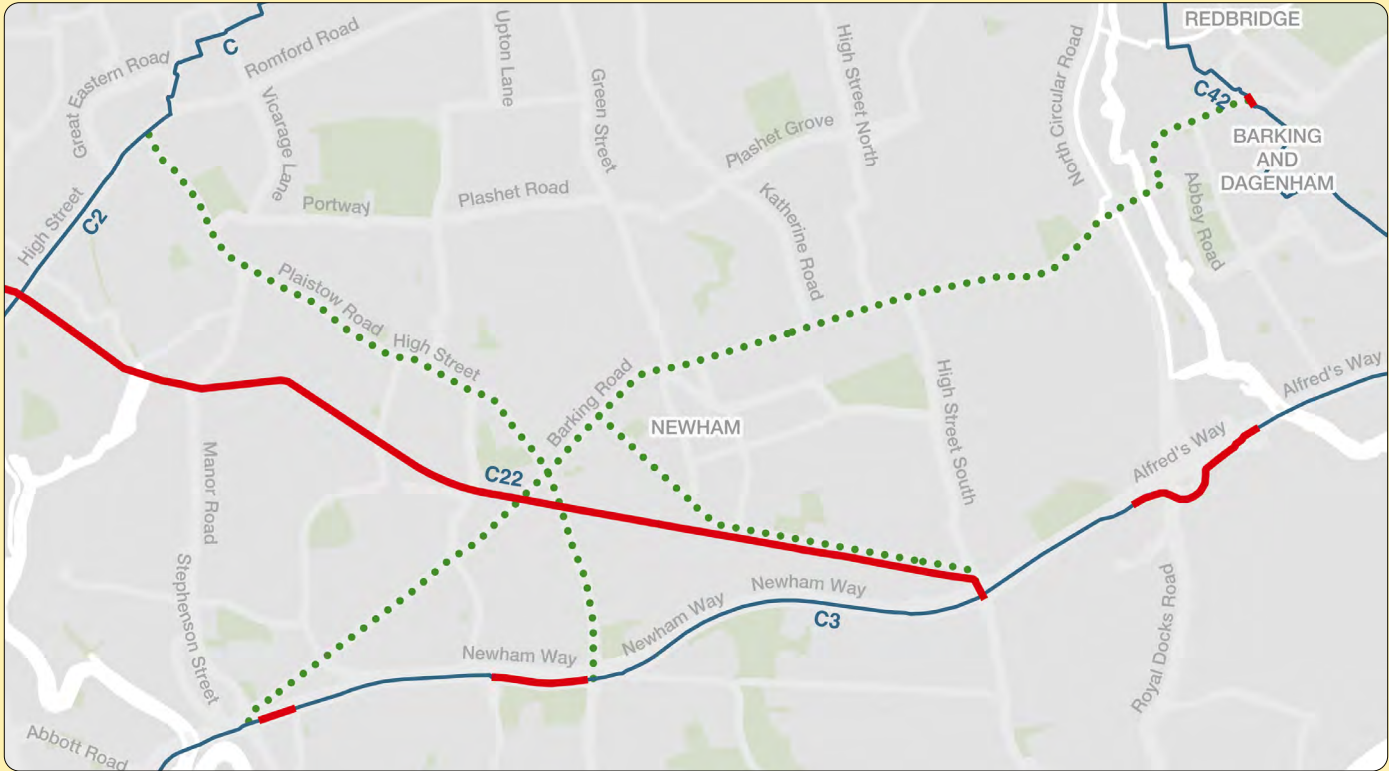


“Most of my female friends around here only cycle in this area in the summer months, when they can use the cycleway inside the park. When it's closed after dark and the only alternative is Kensington Road, they wouldn't dream of travelling that way by bike”

KEY

- TfL Cycleway
- Socially unsafe after dark
- Suggested alternative route

CASE STUDY 5 CYCLEWAY 22, THE GREENWAY



Borough
Newham

What's the problem?
The Greenway is a great traffic-free route for walking and cycling in the daytime across east London from the Olympic Park, but it is isolated and not overlooked by residential properties, while vegetation creates an ambush risk and there are few escape routes. There are no safe, direct alternatives for cycling east-west across the borough, and the Greenway's Cycleway status (C22) provides TfL and Newham Council an excuse not to build any nearby.

“I have given up cycling along the main part of the Greenway after dark unless it's really early when there are plenty of other cyclists around. I take a convoluted longer path instead which adds 15 minutes to my journey but having heard about bike-jackings I feel safer doing this.”

What should TfL and Newham council do?
Re-categorise the Greenway as a part-time leisure route and provide strategic, full-time Cycleways instead, such as protected cycle tracks on both the A112 and A124, linking Stratford with Barking, as well as on Lonsdale Avenue, and/or a series of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) linked by safe crossings over main roads. This would provide the beginnings of a cycle network for Newham.

KEY

- TfL Cycleway
- Socially unsafe after dark
- Suggested alternative route

AFTERWORD

It's clear from our extensive analysis of Transport for London's Cycleways and the case studies in this report that London is still far from enabling not just women and girls, but everyone, to cycle safely all year round. Too many of us face the impossible choice in the winter months of cycling home through dark, isolated places, or on busy roads with no protected space for cycling. Not surprisingly, one in three women simply stop cycling at all when the days get shorter. But our recommendations in this report – making 'social safety' and 'directness' quality criteria for TfL Cycleways – give the Mayor an effective way to solve this, and make London's cycle network genuinely inclusive, all year round. Will a revolution in mass cycling in London, by people of all ages, genders, abilities and backgrounds, be the legacy this Mayor will be remembered for?



Eilidh Murray
LCC Women's Network Coordinator



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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