

September 26, 2006

Our ref: C 06 029

Your ref:

Russell de Ville
Environment & Community Services
Cambridgeshire County Council
Castle Court, Shire Hall
Castle Hill
Cambridge CB3 0AP



Cambridge Cycling Campaign

P.O. Box 204, Cambridge CB4 3FN
01223 690718 (phone & fax)
contact@camcycle.org.uk
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Dear Mr de Ville,

Gonville Place Crossing

Thank you for your letter (which I append) and for taking the time to respond in detail to the points which we made, which is much appreciated¹.

However, we regard the content of the responses you have made as wholly unsatisfactory. In summary, these amount to the specification and installation of what seems to be a DfT standard crossing without proper regard for the vastly higher levels of cycling in Cambridge.

What was once a good quality crossing, forming part of a major cycle route in Cambridge, is now highly problematic and increases conflict between cyclists and pedestrians due to the the loss of automatic detection and amount of clutter:



Before



After

We continue to hear of complaints about the problems with this crossing, in particular about the safety difficulties experienced by cyclists turning into the crossing from the road, as well as the general decline in usability of the crossing. Whilst I appreciate that you propose to make limited changes to the poles (point 7) our concerns remain as per our original letter.

¹ I must note that we never received this directly but only via a member of the public who had obtained it from a Councillor. Our e-mail address is as above in case there has been some difficulty.

We have just returned from a study visit to the Netherlands. Provision there for cyclists and pedestrians is done according to the three principles of convenience, directness and speed. Safety comes automatically as a result. By contrast, your response seems entirely to ignore the need for convenience, and focus solely on safety as an outcome. This is no way to increase levels of cycling nor to cater sensibly for people walking.



Lindsey Rushmore, Travel for Work Officer, using a smooth, direct, and uncluttered crossing in the Netherlands

However, your own safety report clearly stated that the crossing did not have any notable safety problem before it was changed. Given the number of reports of problems we have received, our conclusion is that the crossing is now perceived to be far less safe. Perceptions really matter if cycling is to be encouraged.

Four requests for information

Rather than responding point-by-point to your letter at this stage, we wish to pick up on a few key points. These amount to four requests on which we would welcome a formal reply.

Firstly, you wrote:

"the design has been subject to our internal safety and cycle audit procedures."

This seems to suggest that you have carried out a Safety Audit (which we have seen) and a Cycle Audit. We wish to obtain a copy of the Cycle Audit. Please treat this as a formal Freedom of Information request if necessary. If we have misunderstood your claim, please could you confirm what exactly was meant by "cycle audit procedures".

Secondly, your response to point 4, that detection loops will not be reinstated, is in direct contradiction to the assurances by Councillors that we have received. We quote:

"We understand from confirmation in person with Richard Preston on April 24th, from e-mails from Cllr Alan Baker on May 29th and from Cllr Sian Reid on June 12th, and from a posting to cam.transport newsgroup on 18th July by City Cllr Colin Rosenstiel that this will be done."

Could you confirm why all these assurances seem not to be being met? We feel detection loops are essential at this crossing given the very high numbers of cyclists who use it.

Thirdly, please could you tell us the cost of lowering or moving the BT chamber referred to in point 2 of your letter. This chamber lies directly on the cycling desire line and we believe that it is important that cyclists should be able to cycle over it.

Fourthly, I understand that an on-site meeting of officers took place following our letter. Please would you confirm whether the Cycling Officer at the County Council was amongst those who attended. We would expect and hope this to be the case.

We look forward to hearing from you in the very near future on the above four points, and look forward to meeting you at the on-site meeting, which we hope will involve senior officers and not just the scheme designers.

Cambridge Cycling Campaign

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Yours sincerely,
on behalf of Cambridge Cycling Campaign,

Martin Lucas-Smith
Co-ordinator

Your ref:
My ref: G479/0155//TB/008
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Dear Mr Lucas-Smith

RE: G479/155 GONVILLE PLACE NR GRESHAM RD, TOUCAN CROSSING

Thank you for your letter dated the 25 August 2006 with regards to the afore mentioned scheme. May I take this opportunity to apologise for the time taken to undertake the works at the site. I know this has caused some degree of frustration for cyclists and pedestrians.

1. Problems with consultation

I regret the error in the Area Joint Committee (AJC) report that stated that the Cambridge Cycling Campaign had been consulted. This was not the case. This error is the result of poor communication between officers for which we must also apologise. The Cycling Officers at both the City Council and County Council were consulted.

I will ensure that in the future consultation for similar schemes is sent to the Cambridge Cycling Campaign (P.O. Box 204) so that a co-ordinated response can be organised from yourselves.

The report to AJC did state there had been an objection and that the objection letter was available as a source document. This approach is similar to that adopted when reporting on other schemes of a similar nature and size.

I understand a plan was produced and circulated at the meeting although not originally issued with the agenda.

2. Summary of problems with the new crossing

It is encouraging to hear that the Cycling Campaign is "in favour of upgrading existing relevant crossings to Toucans, in line with government policy". It is a bit of an anomaly, however, to quote Queen's Road as an example of best practice as nowhere in government guidance or best practice that I am aware of, does it suggest that a Toucan crossing should be segregated or that cyclists should be detected automatically or early.

Whilst, as you suggest, these design principles are applied equally when designing a road for motorists (or cyclists), one has to remember that this site is not a road but in essence, is a pedestrian crossing that can be used by cyclists riding.

The following numbers refer to your paragraph numbers.

1. Old crossing. The crossing layout has been changed to current Department for Transport guidelines and practice for a combined Toucan crossing. The segregation was removed to allow cyclists from Gresham Road and Parkers Piece to perform the appropriate manoeuvre towards East Rd. This segregation from pedestrians allowed cyclists to be treated as vehicular road users for this type of crossing which is no longer the current accepted practice. At this old type of crossing audible signals for partially sighted were not allowed.
2. Width of crossing. Unfortunately due to site constraints the current crossing area could not be increased. This is due to the 'tunnel' effect caused by the high walls on the Gresham Road side of the crossing and of the existing mast arm and BT chamber located on the Parkers Piece side of the crossing. The crossing at Queens Road has many different site attributes including a much more open area for cyclists and pedestrians to interact. Segregation on the crossing under current Department for Transport guidelines is not recommended or suggested as good practice.
3. Loss of segregation. The lack of segregation on a Toucan crossing is one of the main principles of a modern Toucan crossing. The principles of this have been discussed and agreed at national level. This is to encourage mutual interaction and increase awareness of and by pedestrians and cyclists.
4. Loss of automatic detection. The advanced cycle detection by loops at this crossing has been removed to ensure that the crossing operates in the safest possible manner for all users. A stage 2 road safety audit has been carried out on the possible provision of these loops which is considered inappropriate with the use of nearside pedestrian signals. My comments above also relate to this issue.
5. Parker's Piece segregation. The segregation has remained as per the previous crossing arrangement. There has been no correspondence with regard to the reversal of the current arrangement. Any such change, which would be required along the entire length of the footway to Regent Terrace, would result in less room for cyclists riding at the back of the footway.
6. Number of posts (Gresham Road). The posts on the Gresham Road side of the crossing were erected to manage the speed of cyclists heading towards the crossing and to maximise the visibility splay provided. Careful placing of the signal posts to stop drivers entering the side road is not always possible without undermining other important considerations that determine their position. Having said this we will be reviewing the situation with a view to removing the two central bollards to make the site more permeable for cyclists and pedestrians.
7. Number of posts (Parker's Piece) The posts on the Parkers Piece side of the crossing have been reviewed and the pole and sign with the white cycle on blue background will be removed.

8. Parker's Piece pole. The Primary signal head pole position is located in accordance with DfT guidance and good practice. It has been positioned to allow it to carry the primary traffic signal and a push button facility that partially sighted people would expect to find at the 'leg' of the tactile paving. Its position is further constrained by a BT chamber. From on-site observations by members of staff the turning manoeuvres by cyclists can be carried out at an appropriate speed.
9. Far side signal. The current Department for Transport guidance recommends the provision of nearside pedestrian display units. On each right hand push button post at this site an over height display unit has been provided (at approximately 2m in height) to ensure that all users can see at least one of the display units. The nearside units have been installed on the right hand side so that pedestrians & cyclists also look towards oncoming traffic. The operation of the new form of crossing with nearside signals enables the removal of the flashing amber / blackout signal at crossings with far sided pedestrian signal heads which has led to ambiguity and intimidation of those using the crossing. Vehicles are now held on a red until the crossing is clear.

The approach speed of motor vehicles is much greater than that of cyclists and this dictates the stopping distances required by each vehicle category and the size of signal aspect required. I have some difficulty with your comment that

"Motor vehicles approaching a crossing are expected to cross at normal speed without slowing down when the signals are in favour. In the same way cyclists using a crossing should be able to cross at normal safe cycling speed without having to slow down when the signals are in their favour".

Drivers and cyclists alike should always take all necessary care on the approach to a crossing and be prepared to stop if the lights change. However, of the side approaches to the crossing cyclists co-exist with pedestrians and their speed should reflect this. Due to the nature of the site and in accordance with DfT guidance nearside signals have been provided. A Windows Media File advising pedestrians and cyclists on the use of a Toucan / Puffin crossing may be found on the Department for Transport website.

10. Cyclists on the road. The arrangements for cyclists riding on Gresham Road have not changed as a result of the scheme and funding is not available for any changes to be considered.
11. Audible signals. An audible signal was not provided as part of the previous installation as cyclists were treated as vehicular traffic. Guidelines advise that an audible signal for pedestrians should not be used on a site where vehicular traffic is moving at the same time as pedestrians. However, now that the crossing has been converted to a Toucan, with cyclists and pedestrians sharing the same crossing point, an audible signal has now been provided. The delay in its installation was regrettable but was due to difficulties experienced by our supplier that has now been resolved.

12. Again I apologise for the delay in completing the works. Although appropriate traffic management was provided indicating that all users should use the pedestrian part of the crossing located north of the area under construction, I appreciate that this did cause considerable inconvenience for users.

In designing the crossing we have taken into account DfT guidance and standards and the design has been subject to our internal safety and cycle audit procedures. Notwithstanding this, Councillors have requested a site meeting to review the site and I am sure that they will want to give your organisation an opportunity to attend. We will keep you informed on this matter.

Yours sincerely

Russell de Ville
Traffic Manager and
Head of Road Safety Services