

August 25, 2006

Our ref: C 06 020

Your ref:

Andrew Wallace, Signals Team
Environment & Community Services
Cambridgeshire County Council
Castle Court, Shire Hall
Castle Hill
Cambridge CB3 0AP

Cc: Graham Hughes, Richard Preston,
Terry Bedding, Patrick Joyce, Clare
Rankin, Andy Fisher, Ward Councillors,
AJC Chair & Vice Chair



Cambridge Cycling Campaign

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Dear Andrew,

Gresham Road / Gonville Place Toucan crossing

Cambridge Cycling Campaign has received much correspondence from members and cyclists across Cambridge about this new crossing. We share their concerns and feel the situation raises a number of strategic issues.

This letter forms a summary of our concerns about this crossing and the way associated works have proceeded in recent months. I would be grateful if you could pass this on to the relevant people in the County Council.

We would like to try to resolve some of the problems and to use these works as an example of where we could achieve a more satisfactory outcome in future. To this end we request (i) an on-site meeting with the designer and relevant colleagues to discuss the problems with the crossing, (ii) urgent resolution on the ground of the problems with the crossing, and (iii) a meeting in due course to discuss the strategic matters which this raises.

Below we review, as a means of documentation, the problems with this crossing and the process.

1. Problems with consultation

The Report sent to Members of the Area Joint Committee to approve the crossing¹ contained the following statement:

County and City officers have developed the layout in consultation with the Cambridge Cycling Campaign.

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<http://www2.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/db/council2.nsf/c3cf865e3cc1131380256a6b0037e439/598981f142ad54f28025714f0040b9dc?OpenDocument>

This is entirely erroneous, and we formally request an official retraction of this statement and an explicit correction in the next set of AJC agenda papers.

Although we understand that some of our members did, as individuals, raise problems during the TRO consultation process, no formal comments on the crossing were sent by any member of our Committee on behalf of the Campaign. This we regret, but, as always for a voluntary organisation, we lacked the resources of time and it slipped through our processes. However, it really should not be necessary for the Council to consult with a voluntary body in order to build a satisfactory crossing and to avoid all the problems which have occurred in this instance. We did not see the plans, even though they were requested by local resident and Campaign member, Martyn Smith (by e-mail on 31st March and 4th May 2006).

The concerns raised by Martyn Smith were not reported to members of the AJC when the issue was considered as Agenda Item 8c on 24th April, so these were not given the consideration that they should have received. Had these concerns been reported, the decision of the AJC might well have been different. All the AJC were told was "One objection has been received. The objector considers the proposals will be detrimental to cyclists and a danger to pedestrians". The failure to list the points that he raised contrasts with the much fuller and more adequate review of the responses to consultation provided for Agenda Item 6a (Core Stage 4) at the same AJC meeting. Moreover, no plan of the proposed layout of the crossing was included with the AJC papers even though Clause 2.1 stated that it was.

2. Summary of problems with the new crossing

In general, the Campaign is in favour of upgrading of existing relevant crossings to toucans, in line with government policy. The excellent crossing on Queen's Road, leading towards the University Library, is an example of best practice in this regard. That crossing segregates pedestrians and cyclists, is wide and is unencumbered by obstructions. It detects cyclists automatically without the need to press a button, has a smooth crossing, avoids banned turns, and is direct. Such design principles would equally apply when designing a road for motorists.

The new Gonville crossing fails on all these points. The full list of problems is as follows:

1. There was no need for extensive physical changes. The existing crossing worked well as it was. The only problem was the ban on turning towards East Road.
2. The crossing is more cramped than before, with cyclists and pedestrians sharing the same space that was previously occupied by cyclists alone. Indeed, the effective width of the crossing is now half of what it was before. We see no reason why the full space occupied by the crossing before the work began has not been used with segregation of pedestrians and cyclists encouraged as at Queen's Road.
3. Loss of segregation has made the crossing unsatisfactory for both pedestrians and cyclists. Pedestrians come along and stand in front of cyclists who are waiting to cross. On the Parker's Piece side, the arrangement encourages pedestrians to walk down the cycle lane instead of the footway, while the number of posts, kerbs and cobbles mean that cyclists going either way cannot easily pass them.
4. Loss of automatic detection of approaching cyclists. Automatic detection has been a very positive feature on many of Cambridge's crossings, reducing the gratuitous waiting period and improving convenience. At this crossing such detection has worked well over many years and its loss is a serious erosion of the quality of the crossing. No motorist

would expect to have to press a button to indicate their presence at a major road junction in order to trigger a light phase change.

5. The pedestrian/cycleway segregation on the Parker's Piece side remains the wrong way round. The opportunity should have been taken to reverse these, so that pedestrians would have a more direct route and cyclists would take the slightly longer way round but then have a more direct crossing and an easier turn. This segregation would also be more logical as many pedestrians go towards Regent Street on the pavement on the outside of the public toilets.
6. The number of posts on the Gresham Road side is simply unacceptable. They are an obstruction for users with prams, pushchairs, wheelchairs and ordinary pedestrians. They must surely be a hazard for partially-sighted people. They are far from an "accessible, barrier-free environment"². There are some twelve posts/bollards, with two obstructing the pedestrian footways, one of which is even placed directly next to a fence. See photos: <http://www.camcycle.org.uk/map/location/8778/> and <http://www.camcycle.org.uk/map/location/8779/> .

None of these bollards are really needed. Careful placing of the signal posts would stop drivers entering: The proliferation of posts and bollards reduces the width available to users, space where people should be able to walk or cycle.

7. On the Parker's Piece side, again the sheer number and arrangement of unnecessary posts makes the crossing awkward for cyclists to negotiate, and a hazard for blind and partially sighted pedestrians. The position of the request button and indicator lights here encourage people to wait on the wrong side of the track, further complicating the manoeuvre, adding to the amount of conflict, and increasing the time needed to clear the crossing. The new button on the Parker's Piece side at the point where the cycle track merges to the waiting point is not in the position that cyclists are expected to stop, nor is it in a position where cyclists can see the crossing lights (so would not use it). It makes the width of the track even more difficult for those with trailers.
8. The signal head post on the Parker's Piece side is particularly bad. The pole is an obstruction in exactly the place where cyclists would expect to turn. We understand this pole was moved inwards (towards where people are waiting) because of a BT chamber beneath the surface. We request that a best practice solution is found instead, even if moving the BT chamber is expensive.
9. There is no visual crossing indicator on the opposite side of where people are waiting to cross. There is a general look of bewilderment by users of the crossing as a result, and people are thus slow to realise when they are able to cross. The only signal heads are small, are low on their posts and can be largely obscured by pedestrians and other cyclists. They face inwards rather than facing approaching cyclists. Like drivers of motor vehicles, cyclists need to be able to see crossing signals well ahead and signal heads the same size as those used for road traffic placed at the same height as those used for road traffic and facing approaching cyclists are needed in addition to the small inward-facing lights. Motor vehicles approaching a crossing are expected to cross at normal speed without slowing down when the signals are in their 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. The type of signal head and their locations make this impossible at Gonville Place. It is possible at the Burrell's Walk

² http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_localtrans/documents/page/dft_localtrans_028706-03.hcsp

crossing of Queen's Road and at the various pedestrian/cycle crossings at Mitcham's Corner.

10. Lack of consideration for cyclists on the road itself. Cyclists travelling along the road itself have no easy way to get onto the crossing (to enable them to cross over).
11. We understand that a much-needed audible signal has now finally been added. The delay in adding an audible signal is unacceptable.
12. As noted below, the work itself seems badly managed, causing considerable disruption for months, without any explanation or instruction for users.

We understand that a safety audit is being arranged. However this is the wrong vehicle to address many of the above problems.

3. Management of the physical work

The same report to Councillors states that the "disruption from construction" would be "minimal" and that the work was expected to last for "3 weeks".

All in all, the short link at the end of Gresham Road seems to have been disrupted almost continuously since the latter end of last year. Users have endured obstruction by Contractors' vehicles associated with the adjacent 'Greshams' development, holes being dug and left open for the same. Most recently the crossing itself has been dug up for around two months for the conversion to a toucan.

For much of the time the crossing has been closed completely, forcing cyclists to dismount, squeeze along the very narrow remaining footway (past pedestrians and cyclists coming the other way) and then join the busy inner ring road in order to continue their journey.

It is difficult to believe that a busy road junction would have been treated in this manner, or that motorists would tolerate such chronic disruption. We ask why the works were not coordinated to minimise the time that this busy link was disrupted, and why the work was not organised to maintain access throughout?

4. Suggested immediate remedial action

- a) The automatic detection loops should be reinstated.³
- b) All bollards, including the bollard holding the advance button, which would be made obsolete by reinstatement of the automatic detection loops, should be removed.
- c) Signal heads facing oncoming pedestrians and cyclists at high level are needed on the opposite side with both a pedestrian and cycle light shown.⁴
- d) The pedestrian/cycle paths on the Parker's Piece side should be swapped over and remodelled so as to avoid conflict and difficult >90° turns. Alternatively, the previous parallel pedestrian crossing immediately to the east should be reinstated.

³ 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.

⁴ The posting to cam.transport newsgroup on 18th July by City Cllr Colin Rosenstiel also states this will be put right.

- e) The advance button post and the post holding the blue sign on the Parker's Piece side needs to be removed from the cycle path and the automatic detector loops reinstated.
- f) The addition of flush kerbs from the main road is needed so that cyclists can enter the crossing smoothly.

These measures would not remedy all of the problems created by the poor design of this crossing, but they would restore a reasonable quality of service for the thousands of daily users of this crossing.

5. Strategic issues raised

The design quality of this crossing raises several strategic issues:

- The current crossing seems to indicate a lack of recognition of the high levels of cycling which the City enjoys and the scale of cycle usage of the crossing.
- The lack of cycle audit procedures, as promised in the Local Transport Plan since 2001⁵, a matter picked up by the Government's (English) Regional Cycling Development Team⁶, remains unaddressed. The numerous basic design errors of this new crossing, which any audit looking at pedestrian/cycle-friendly infrastructure (as distinct from a safety audit, which is totally different) ought to pick up.
- The need for better coordination of the design of toucan crossings to take account of the very distinctive problems of the Cambridge environment where so many people cycle. Because of inadequate coordination there still remain a number of problems with the new Burleigh Street / Norfolk crossing on which we have sought amendments⁷.
- The need for designers to take on board criticisms raised during the TRO consultation process before seeking Member approval. Virtually all the problems above were raised in e-mails copied to the Campaign, but no amendments to the plans seem to have been made. Yet the problems now manifestly happening on the ground were entirely predictable.
- The need for a constructive dialogue between designers and users. There appears to have been little attempt to engage with the public on either the design or the construction of the crossing. Members who have followed up the TRO tell us that they found it difficult to obtain the necessary information, and when queries have been raised the responses have been evasive and unsatisfactory.
- The need for co-ordination of works. Pedestrians and cyclists have suffered two sets of disruption due to both the crossing remodelling and the housing works nearby.
- The need to ensure that infrastructure being upgraded primarily for cyclists also meets the needs of pedestrians. The numbers of totally unnecessary bollards in this new crossing fail this requirement, as do the many recent cases where cyclists are essentially being forced onto pavement cycleways when an on-road solution would

⁵ <http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/8B36D473-F5C0-43E2-BCF2-05C734F31774/0/walkcyc.pdf> (2001-6) and <http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/F579FECB-1E97-4449-B1C5-84C4DB5022B0/0/LTP06A5.pdf> (2006-2011)

⁶ <http://www.camcycle.org.uk/newsletters/52/article3.html>

⁷ Meeting on-site with Brian Stinton, December 2005, and subsequent e-mails from Richard Taylor

have been the obvious solution (e.g. the southern approach to the otherwise excellent new Jane Coston Bridge).

Next steps

We request a copy of the Stage 3 Safety Audit being carried out. We understand that this was “to be carried out once the works have been completed”⁸.

We request an on-site meeting with the designers, the cycling officers from the City and County Councils, and local Councillors. We would like to see the above remedial steps discussed with a view to the corrections being undertaken.

As a final point we would like to be assured that this is now a Toucan crossing rather than a Puffin crossing. If it is, in fact, now a Puffin crossing, can it be said to have been done according to the decision of the AJC?

We would also like to discuss the strategic issues raised as listed above with Graham Hughes or another senior officer.

Yours sincerely,
on behalf of Cambridge Cycling Campaign,

Martin Lucas-Smith
Co-ordinator

⁸ E-mail from Terry Bedding to Martyn Smith, 6th July 2006.